

# Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism: Party Attitudes and Soviet Educational Practice, 1917-1931

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SOVIET EDUCATION of the 1920s has attracted much attention from both historians and educators. (1) Until 1931 Soviet educational authorities sponsored a flurry of measures many of which were initially advanced in the writings of such western educators as John Dewey, Helen Parkhurst, and Maria Montessori. Study of this "romantic and experimental period" (2) in the history of Soviet education is therefore understandable.

No complete and penetrating examination, however, of the communist party's attitude toward the reforms of the 1920s exists. (3) Too frequently, authors have analyzed Soviet educational policies apart from the context of political and economic necessity. This has led to an underestimation of the importance of political and economic considerations in the party's thinking on education and, consequently, to an exaggeration of the progressive or idealist aspects of Soviet educational reform. Several Americans, for example, who observed first-hand Soviet schools during the 1920s came away thoroughly impressed by the apparent progressivism of Soviet education and the party's attitude toward it. They even dared hope for the creation of a generation of youth sufficiently independent to challenge the dogmatic sectarianism of Soviet political ideology. (4) After a brief tour in 1928, John Dewey, greatly pleased with much of what he saw, ventured the opinion that the "experimental spirit" of Soviet education and its "awakening of initiative and independent judgment would militate against a servile acceptance of dogma as dogma." (5) Unfortunately, Dewey's prediction proved overly optimistic. He like so many others failed to understand the extent to which political and economic expediency permeated the party's thinking.

The present study, based primarily on an analysis of party decrees and

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resolutions, examines the extent and significance of utilitarianism in the party's approach toward pedagogy. As contemporary Russian and American educators demonstrate curiosity in some of the policies of the 1920s, historians and educators alike must determine whether the Bolshevik party condoned and sponsored these policies irrespective of the prerequisites of Bolshevik totalitarianism.

From 1917 to 1931 Russian education experienced a spectacular metamorphosis of its organization, content, and methods. In 1928 the American educator George S. Counts captured the essentials of the post-1917 period when he wrote:

Within the brief space of ten years the entire educational program has been reconstructed, the administrative organization has been made to assume a new form, the system of schools has been profoundly modified, many new educational institutions have been created, the materials of instruction have been overhauled, and the methods of teaching have been reformulated. . . . What of good or ill it may hold for either the Russian people or the world at large, only the passing years can reveal. But it is an event of such magnitude that it can be neither ignored nor forgotten. (6)

Organizationally, almost all educational institutions soon became part of a centralized system controlled by the Commissariat of Education. The Commissariat's power extended not only to schools founded prior to the October revolution but also to three types of new facilities—institutions for adult, party, and vocational education. Adult education encompassed thousands of liquidation of illiteracy centers, clubs, special libraries, reading huts, agitation points, and evening and correspondence courses providing the rudiments of literacy and what was called "political literacy." Much the same sort of instruction, although at a more sophisticated level, prevailed in newly-formed party schools. Thousands of Bolshevik schools of political literacy and Soviet party schools trained party members as agitators and propagandists while communist universities which numbered nineteen by 1928 prepared students for more specialized government and party service. An Institute of Red Professors founded in 1921 prepared highly select student-communists for teaching positions in the established universities and communist universities. (7) Specialized professional instruction was offered in a significant number of new vocational institutions ranging from elementary Schools of Factory-Mill Studies to institutes for higher technical training.

Established institutions underwent important organizational changes. By a 1918 government directive, the new basis for primary and secondary education became a secular, co-educational, nine-year Unified Labor School. As originally envisaged, these schools would provide free instruction to

anyone interested. The same goal applied to university education in 1918 prompted the Soviet state to abolish, if only briefly, all university fees and entrance examinations. Anyone aged sixteen, even if he lacked a high school diploma, could now gain admission. (8) To encourage enrollment of the "working masses" in institutions of higher learning, beginning in 1919 the government established a number of workers faculties (*rabfaky*). A workers faculty attached to the university prepared workers for future study at the university level. Imposition of firm state control over universities quickly followed these reforms. In 1920 and 1921, the Commissariat assumed the right to appoint a university's governing body and its faculty. Prior to that time, in some cases, political commissars and revolutionary committees with plenipotentiary powers were assigned to institutions of higher learning.

Bolshevik initiative in the field of education extended as well to a transformation of the content and methods of instruction especially at the primary and secondary level. The Unified Labor Schools placed a premium on labor training and polytechnical education. Polytechnical education, it was hoped, acquainted the student not with a single skill or vocation but with the basic processes and tools of agriculture and industry. Courses in religion, ancient languages (Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic), and ancient and medieval history disappeared from the curriculum. Activity methods such as class discussions, excursions, drawing, painting, modeling, singing, and dancing replaced lectures and textbook assignments. The Commissariat of Education banned corporal punishment and homework and discouraged the use of periodic examinations. Until the early 1920s, pupils assumed certain administrative functions. They selected representatives to work with the administration and faculty in the determination of institutional and classroom policies.

Perhaps the complex and project methods represented best Soviet attempts to overhaul traditional curricula. From 1923 to 1927, in some cases to 1931, much of the teaching in the first seven years of instruction pivoted about the use of the complex method. It replaced subject-matter teaching with the study of selected themes under the rubrics of nature, labor, and society. The proponents of the complex assumed that in the process the student would learn reading, writing, arithmetic and all that was necessary to know about history, geography, literature, chemistry, and other subject-areas. Somewhat similarly, the project method pivoted about the study of special projects within subjects taught in the secondary schools. Students individually or in groups, with the assistance of their teachers, selected project assignments to be completed in subject-rooms at the pupils' own discretion and pace. Lectures and detailed directions were discouraged. It was hoped that instructors would think of themselves as consultants anxious

to help the student develop his own work patterns. Many schools employed this method of instruction from 1928 to 1931. (9)

Many of these changes merited the progressive label. Organizational reforms expanded educational opportunity for adults, women, and the children of workers and peasants. Changes in the content and methods of instruction especially in the primary and secondary schools derived in part from an effort to overcome the type of instruction which depended upon fear, regimentation, and rote learning. Many Soviet educators including Lenin's wife, N. K. Krupskaya, and the Commissar of Education until 1929, A. V. Lunacharsky, hoped through student self-government and activity methods to kindle student interest and self-reliance. Activity, complex, and project methods won support as attempts to overcome artificial barriers between academic subjects and between an individual's mental and physical development. Education in the 1920s, therefore, undoubtedly had its progressive aspects and stemmed at least in part from Marxist humanism. Additionally, these changes emanated from a praiseworthy effort to provide the individual student with the basic skills necessary for a rewarding life in a modernizing society. It does not necessarily follow, however, that these multi-faceted reforms stemmed only from idealistic efforts tacitly sanctioned if not supported by the communist party. Rigid standards of political and economic utilitarianism, oriented more to the requirements of a one-party state than to the needs of the individual student, played a significantly dominant role in the upheaval and subsequent practice of education in Soviet Russia.

The party hierarchy officially showed little interest in pedagogy as a means for the development of creative and independent minds. It regarded education institutions almost solely as instruments to serve the political and economic needs of the fledgling Bolshevik regime. The 1919 VIII Party Congress declared that schools should become vehicles for the transmission of the "principles of communism" and that teachers should "conceive of themselves as agents not only of general but also of communist education." (10) During the same year, the party required teachers to make instruction compatible with the work of the party's agitation and propaganda apparatus. (11) When in 1921 the party introduced the New Economic Policy, a limited retreat from nationalization of industry and collectivization of agriculture, it clearly rejected a similar retreat from its objective to communize education. Thus, on November 16, 1921 the Central Committee declared that "the basic task of the communist party in the field of education during the New Economic Policy is the preservation of communist ideological influence in all educational work." (12) "In the struggle at the cultural front," the Central Committee resolved one year

later, "instruction must be permeated with the scientific Marxist world view." (13) In 1925 the XIV Party Congress stressed both the economic and political value of education. It called upon educational institutions to produce, as if they were factories of some sort, "new human material, new people" suitable to the party's economic and political designs. (14) On July 25, 1930 the Central Committee accentuated this utilitarian attitude.

The development of socialist construction . . . and communist education of the masses requires the most rapid implementation of general compulsory primary education as the most important prerequisite for the future development of the cultural revolution. (15)

It ordered party organizations to consider the introduction of general primary education as a "most important political campaign." (16) Even N. K. Krupskaya, an influential member of the Commissariat of Education and sponsor of many of the progressive reforms, frequently considered education as a medium for political agitation and anti-religious propaganda. She called for a channeling of the pupil's thoughts in the right ideological direction. (17) Likewise the Commissar of Education from 1917 to 1929, A. V. Lunacharsky, adhered to a curious amalgam of views. His educational philosophy stemmed not only from visionary and idealistic considerations but also from a consideration of the school as a political and economic functionary in a socialist society. Organized instruction, in his opinion, should convey political propaganda, teach proletarian class consciousness, and train the personnel necessary for Soviet industrialization and defense. (18)

Other prominent Bolsheviks similarly regarded education primarily as a partisan engine for political and economic progress. In their 1919 *ABC of Communism*, N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky demanded that education in a proletarian dictatorship "impose upon bourgeois and petty bourgeois children a proletarian mentality" and "make the minds of men ready for new social relationships." (19) Most importantly, the founder of the Bolshevik party, V. I. Lenin, viewed educational institutions primarily as instruments for the attainment of economic and political objectives. Under the firm leadership of the communist party, he insisted on numerous occasions, education must exude the spirit of proletarian class struggle and become a weapon for the dictatorship of the proletariat. In order that instruction convey political propaganda and the technical skills requisite for the construction of socialism, Lenin demanded that teachers conceive of themselves as part of a "teachers army" thrown into the battle for socialism. (20)

Driven by this authoritarian and instrumentalist mentality, the party compelled orchestration of education with its own utilitarian requirements.

Bolsheviks and their propaganda dominated the new institutions for adult and party-member education. In cooperation with the Commissariat's Chief Administration for Political Education, the Central Committee's Section for Agitation and Propaganda manipulated the work of reading huts, Red Corners, special libraries, museums, and study circles. (21) Naturally, party schools were subjected to the same control and propaganda-oriented curriculum. (22) The 1923 Constitution of the United Labor School obediently affirmed the partisan objectives of Soviet education. It demanded the teaching of "class and proletarian self-consciousness" and preparation of students for "useful productive and social-political activity." (23)

As early as the beginning of the 1920s, Bolshevik organs explicitly demanded of educational institutions conformity with party loyalty (*partiinost'*) and submission to a "single party line." (24) What this meant to higher education was made clear in 1923 and 1924. At that time party congresses and conferences resolved that as vehicles for the liquidation of "political illiteracy," universities should combat Leon Trotsky's alleged efforts to violate party discipline. In addition, they demanded from the university community a more decisive rebuff of assumed attempts by bourgeois and revisionist professors to spawn a "petty bourgeois rebirth" amongst the students. (25)

Strict control over the Commissariat of Education, administrators, teachers, and students provided the most convenient means for guaranteeing the kind of instruction officially desired. Accordingly, from 1917 the party supervised the activity of the Commissariat of Education and its entire apparatus. In 1921 the Bolshevik organization reinforced its powers. The Central Committee ordered party organizations at all levels to examine closely the activity of local and regional departments of education. (26) To insure further Bolshevik hegemony over education generally, state and party functionaries dismissed those teachers and administrators flagrantly hostile to the new Soviet state. For other educators the party organized and closely supervised a ubiquitous "repreparation" network of politicized courses, study circles, and conferences. Here instruction focused on the so-called "fundamentals of political literacy." (27) Additionally, the party extended its control and influence through its youth organizations. It required that members of the Pioneers (ages 10 to 14), Young Communist League (ages 15 to 27) and university party cells agitate among fellow students, teachers, and the general population. (28) The value of such activity depended, from the official point of view, upon unquestioning obedience by student operatives. Special decrees, therefore, informed Young Communists and Party members in the universities to submit to party discipline by explicit com-

pliance with all party directives. (29) The 1924 XIII Party Congress threatened to purge from university cells anyone critical of official policies. (30)

Efforts to imbue instruction with the proper ideological spirit and political direction were not limited only to direct control over the educational system, teacher "repreparation," and student organizations. Many of the reforms of the 1920s supported in varying degrees the official campaign for a communist education. Much of the inspiration for the apparently progressive legislation on admissions, student government, teaching methods, and instructional materials emanated from political and ideological considerations. Admissions policies, for example, had a thoroughgoing politicized character. During the early years of Bolshevik power, most educational institutions admitted anyone regardless of his academic background and financial status. But political expediency as well as egalitarianism motivated this reform. Party functionaries assumed that those students previously denied an education would now create an atmosphere favorable to the regime. But this same objective soon stimulated a shift from unrestricted entry especially at the university level. In 1920 authorities imposed upon the universities discriminatory admissions and student aid policies. Those students recommended by party and state organizations, graduates of the workers faculties, party members, and those with a proletarian or peasant background found it easier than others to gain admission into institutions of higher learning and to receive stipends. Enforcement of these measures meant that by 1922 35 percent of the freshman class at Moscow University were communists and an additional 8.3 percent were members of the Young Communist League; in 1924 70 percent of the incoming class were classified as workers and peasants. (31) Purges consumed many of those already enrolled but judged politically untrustworthy. In 1924 about 20,000 or 15 percent of the students in higher education were expelled, many for political rather than academic reasons. At the same time, two resolutions, one by the highest state body, the Council of Peoples Commissars, and another by the Central Committee, both published in the August 22, 1924 issue of *Pravda*, indicated that political considerations dominated official policy toward university students. These two state and party organs declared that many students suffered from "political illiteracy and social backwardness." They urged party organizations to ensure that not only the best prepared but also the most valuable "in class selection" should enroll in institutions of higher learning. (32) This attitude prompted additional purges especially in 1929. Thoroughly disgusted by such rough tactics, the contemporary Swedish critic of Soviet education, Anton Karlgren, observed that the party aimed at nothing short of a complete communization of the universities.

The university policy, as we have followed it so far, appears indeed complete folly—a meddling experiment with delicate and sensitive educational machinery. And yet a certain method is to be found in its madness, when university education, which, for a moment, we believe might escape unscathed, is the object of various rough attacks. . . . When enormous numbers of university students are cleared out, it is to get rid of elements that are not reliable in respect of Communism. Thus the whole movement is an outcome of the tendency that aims at the formation of a homogeneous communistic system of education; . . . (33)

The objective to permeate learning with communist influence originally reinforced granting certain administrative powers to students in schools and universities. In 1918 students as well as teachers selected voting representatives for the governing councils of most educational institutions. In the universities, students even participated in the election of professors. Doubtlessly, some functionaries in the Commissariat of Education endorsed these measures as progressive devices. Others, however, regarded them more cynically as a means to intimidate and remove hostile elements. They presumed that students more than teachers and administrators sympathized with the Bolshevik regime. But students proved more troublesome than expected; rowdiness and, more importantly, the election of anti-communists often resulted. (34) This as well as the escalating number of loyal teachers and administrators soon compelled restrictions on student power. The school Statute of 1921 and especially the 1923 Education Act limited student initiative in the primary and secondary schools to general social and political activity. Pupils were encouraged to organize sanitation and cultural commissions, celebrations, processions, anti-illiteracy drives, and anti-religion campaigns but they were told not to interfere in the school's management. They were, it was frequently decreed, "liberated" from their former administrative functions. Simultaneously, the Commissariat of Education expanded its power over the school's chief administrative official, the Headmaster. (35) Similar retrenchment of student power occurred in the institutions of higher learning. In 1921 the Commissariat of Education assumed the legal right to confirm, that is overturn if it desired, election of administrators. At the same time it pre-empted the right to appoint university professors. (36) By the late 1920s, administrators of the universities and higher technical institutes possessed near-dictatorial powers. In July, 1928, for example, the Central Committee resolved that student and even party organizations not interfere with the administration of the higher technical institutes. (37)

Other apparently progressive devices of the early 1920s had their partisan usefulness. The tendency to identify education with propaganda helped prompt adoption of new teaching methods, instructional materials, and



courses. Unified Labor Schools, for example, discouraged the use of texts partly because of the unavailability of “Marxist” texts and the difficulty of writing texts which would correspond to the zigs and zags of the party line. As late as 1930 many textbooks then in use amounted to nothing more than loose-leaf workbooks, the pages of which could be easily replaced if they failed to correspond to the latest switch in dogma. Even innovations such as the complex and project method had a politicized purpose. By the study of specified themes rather than subjects, the attention of both teachers and students was more easily shifted to an examination of topics of political utility. Thus, the complex and projects embraced not only themes relating to hygiene, family living, winter life, and nature, but also themes pertaining to imperialism, atheism, Lenin, the October revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, “bourgeois” nationalism, the First Five Year Plan, and the “counterrevolutionary activity” of the well-to-do peasantry (kulaks). In 1930 two former Russian educators, Nicholas Hans and Sergius Hessen, appropriately observed that the complex thinly disguised propaganda.

... The “complex” method could but degenerate into a passive learning of an orthodox creed. The abolition of subjects involved in it the best means to substitute the traditional “bourgeois” system of knowledge by the new Marxist system and to mask it by the radical slogans of the new educational theory. (38)

One year earlier, the American critic, Samuel Northrup Harper, reached an identical conclusion about the potential of projects. “The project method of instruction,” he wrote, “will make it possible to put into every lesson, and even into every informal discussion with pupils, the Marxian theory of life.” (39)

Expediency also dictated official attitudes and approach toward the teaching of the social sciences. At a Party Conference on Problems of Education (December, 1920 to January, 1921), a Central Committee session of December 14, 1922, and at the 1924 XIII Party Congress, the communist party dictated basic principles for instruction in the social sciences. First, it demanded that all educational institutions including vocational schools offer and require courses in the so-called “social-political disciplines.” (40) Second, it required that such courses be taught from a definite political and ideological point of view. In December, 1922, for example, the Central Committee equated a study of the social disciplines with the “struggle at the fighting cultural front against bourgeois ideology and for a Marxist world view.” (41) Third, the party called for specific measures guaranteeing such propagandized instruction. It demanded publication of “soviet” texts and the replacement of “old bourgeois professors and professors of the old type” with communists or those with training in special courses of “red professor-

ship.” (42) The Conference on Education best typified this arrogant attitude toward the qualifications of teachers. It rationalized that in the social sciences a teacher's political bias transcended in importance his academic knowledge or teaching skill because “general intellectual development in this case has greater significance than formal knowledge.” (43) One month later, the Central Committee required that communists determine the content of courses in philosophy, social sciences, and communism when such subjects were taught by non-Bolsheviks. (44) Throughout the remainder of the 1920s, the party persistently urged that as a general rule communists teach the social sciences and that party departments of agitation and propaganda carefully regulate this field of instruction. (45)

The sensitive nature and propaganda potential of the social sciences also resulted in special treatment of any university's Faculty of Social Sciences. The Central Committee took it upon itself to insure that a high percentage of students loyal to the communist cause enrolled in such faculties. After 1921 at Moscow University, for example, the Central Committee appointed approximately one-half of the faculty's students. By 1922 60 percent of the students enrolled were members either of the party or Young Communist League. (46) Similar efforts resulted in the appointment of many communists to the teaching staff of the Faculty of Social Sciences. (47)

Of all the social sciences, the party expressed its greatest interest in the content and interpretation of those aspects of history with the greatest ideological and political significance. In the primary and secondary schools the history curriculum centered on the history of labor, proletariat, class struggle, Marxism, Leninism, revolution, and the Bolsheviks. (48) Such a situation prompted Anton Karlgren to remark appropriately: “The small portion served to the young folk under the name of history is nothing but a Communist stew.” (49) Roughly the same topics occupied a prominent place in the curricula of the party schools, centers of adult education, teacher “repreparation” courses, and universities. (50) The important 1924 XIII Party Conference and the subsequent XIII Party Congress, for example, required study of party history and Leninism in party schools and universities. (51) Indeed, delegates attending these two party meetings went even further by stipulating that the teaching of such topics conform to dictated interpretations. They decreed that instruction in party history and Leninism condemn so-called opportunism and deviationism and lionize the principle of “bolshevik iron discipline.” Responding to the envenomed atmosphere of Soviet politics, both the conference and congress demanded specifically that the study of party history discredit Trotsky's reputed intellectual anarchism and revision of Bolshevism. (52) In short, the party compelled teachers to orchestrate instruction of these required topics with

narrowly partisan interpretations. By 1924, therefore, an official line existed for the teaching of the all-important Bolshevik past.

Not all party members reacted favorably to the manner in which history was taught in the primary and especially in the secondary schools. But their objections also revealed the extent to which political considerations dominated thinking on education in the social sciences. From 1926 to 1931 many Bolshevik historians contributed articles on the teaching of history to the journal *The Marxist Historian (Istoriik-Marksist)* in which they maintained that the use of complex themes made instruction in history unnecessarily sketchy. They urged a more systematic treatment of the past and suggested separate courses devoted to history alone. These historians, however, did not recommend a less schematic study of history simply for its own sake. As party members they agreed that the primary purpose of instruction in the social sciences was political and therefore justified their proposals on political grounds. With considerable vigor, they maintained that a more thorough study of the past could generate an understanding of the contemporary class struggle and a "correct Marxist-Leninist world view." (53) More persistently than any other historian, A. Ioannisiani insisted that historical training deserved more attention because the "fetish for the complex" in the secondary schools produced students who suffered from historical illiteracy and who, therefore, in his opinion, were beset with "social shortsightedness and political night-blindness." (54) But until the party felt reasonably confident about the political reliability of teachers and texts, and until ancient and medieval history seemed relevant, the complex and project methods would continue to dominate instruction of such a politically sensitive subject as history. Despite "historical illiteracy," at least through the continued imposition of the complex, both teacher and student were forced to study historical themes of readily apparent benefit.

From the foregoing, it seems clear that political partisanship affected to a considerable degree the development and evolution of new educational institutions, administrative policies, methods, materials, and subject-matter. The economic objectives of the fledgling Soviet state also profoundly affected official attitudes and policies toward education. Demands for the preparation of highly skilled technical personnel first threatened and then consumed any hopes for an educational system founded upon idealistic rather than utilitarian premises. Even those innovative measures which facilitated the injection of propaganda eventually gave way to a more traditional approach more congenial with the economy's needs.

Some party officials, possibly Lenin himself and certainly Krupskaya, originally hoped to create a uniform system largely devoid of vocational schools. They assumed that nine years of non-specialized polytechnical education

in the Unified Labor School adequately familiarized the student with the fundamentals of industrial and agricultural activity. After graduation, the student could engage in productive labor or enter the universities for specialized training. Long before the gigantomania of the First Five Year Plan, however, such notions seemed quixotic if not heretical. During the early and mid 1920s a shortage of skilled personnel compelled the creation of an expanding number of vocational schools including Schools of Factory Mill-Studies, Schools for Urban Youth, Schools for Peasant Youth, technicums, and institutes of higher technical training. These institutions came under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat's increasingly important Main Committee for Professional Education (*Glavprofobr*) created in 1921. As economic demands multiplied, specialized training acquired more significance. State and party organs demanded that vocational schools as well as party schools, workers faculties, and universities prepare the requisite number of semi-skilled workers, engineers, technicians, and economists according to a pre-determined plan. To insure that the educational system met specific economic requirements, after 1928 the Supreme Council of the National Economy (*Vesenkha*) rather than the Commissariat of Education assumed direct control over many workers faculties, technicums, and institutes of higher technical training. (55)

Economic considerations also forced a re-evaluation of the purposes and curriculum of secondary education. Many Soviet officials, especially those preoccupied with the nation's survival and growth, objected to nine years of non-specialized education in the Unified Labor Schools. They insisted that professional training commence at least in the eighth and ninth grades. (56) With pained reluctance, in late 1920 Lenin agreed because of the "extremely difficult economic situation." (57) Subsequently, on February 5, 1921 the Central Committee required professional training in industrial and agrarian skills during the last two years of secondary schooling. (58)

The burgeoning need for trained specialists provoked as well an undercurrent of official dissatisfaction with inventive curricula and instructional methods. Not only the confusion created by the sudden onslaught of innovation but, more significantly, the apparent infringement upon systematic instruction evoked escalating concern. Throughout the 1920s mounting pressure was exerted for a more fact-oriented and disciplined approach believed necessary for Russia's economic survival. The pivotal February 5, 1921 Central Committee directive, for example, required the Commissariat of Education to hire experienced non-party teachers and to devise systematic curricula and lesson plans. (59) Two months later, an impatient Lenin obviously irked by the haphazard nature of educational practice, forcefully repeated to the Commissariat demands identical to those made by the Central Commit-

tee. (60) When Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, spoke directly on education, he displayed an even more pronounced concern for disciplined specialized training. He bluntly identified learning with the persevering mastery of science in the preparation of a technical intelligentsia. Too many communist students, Stalin observed, dissipated their energies on "high politics." (61)

In the mid 1920s economic factors goaded the party to insist increasingly upon content-oriented learning including the use of informative textbooks and precise lesson plans as a replacement for allegedly helter-skelter methods and curricula. It demanded especially that instruction in the secondary schools concentrate more on the transmission of a structured body of technical knowledge. Armed with such knowledge, it was hoped, graduates might then cope with industrial tasks or with the specialized training offered by universities and technical institutes. In order to realign education with economic priorities, administrators, teachers, and students at all levels were told to "create normal conditions for scientific thought, seek a normalization of their activity, and strengthen labor and academic discipline." (62) Students received special instructions. They were to spend less time in political and socially-useful activity, cease harassment of administrators and teachers, and improve their own academic performance. (63) In response to this growing tendency to think of schools as factories for factories, from 1923 to 1928 the Commissariat of Education reintroduced in the Unified Labor School examinations, grading, and subject-teaching in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and language. At the same time, universities imposed tougher entrance examinations and accentuated the importance of grades.

From 1928 to 1930 the defenders of polytechnicism and the project method launched one last campaign. Momentarily benefiting from a resurgence of political propaganda and revolutionary ardor unleashed by the holy drive for socialism in one country, they gained the upper hand. The polytechnical principle and projects reacquired considerable popularity in the primary and secondary schools. Their victory, however, proved incomplete and ephemeral. Official demands for a rather traditional, disciplined, and fact-oriented curriculum continued. (64) The Central Committee remained dissatisfied with the inability of secondary school graduates to cope with the type of specialized instruction offered in the universities and technical institutes. It suggested that schools initiate a systematic study of academic subjects as part of a thorough reexamination of their curricula and methods. (65) Finally, by 1931 the mania for industrialization compelled the party to specify and enforce its definition of systematic instruction.

From September, 1931 to February, 1933 by four separate decrees, three issued by the Central Committee, Soviet authorities quashed experimentalist, albeit highly politicized, initiative. These decrees required that instruc-

tion at all educational levels focus on a body of knowledge arranged according to subjects and conveyed systematically by obligatory texts, grading of individuals not groups, study plans, lessons, and assignments including homework. Authorities also demanded that the “social-political” disciplines including history be taught more systematically and of course, under the strict supervision of party organizations. (66) The Central Committee condemned what it labelled the “thoughtless search for methods” and, more to the point, denounced the project method as the brainchild of “anti-Leninist and left-opportunist” thinking. (67) As before 1931, the party commanded teachers, students, and student organizations to overcome past indiscipline and to avoid interference in the administration of educational institutions. (68)

The Central Committee clearly intended to create a regimented educational system based on traditional curricula and teaching methods. By so doing, it endeavored to shape education in the image of Stalin’s totalitarian and industry-oriented society. Political and economic functions assigned to education now obviously gripped Soviet educational policy and practice. It should not be assumed, however, that in spirit these decisions based on political and economic expediency were inconsistent with official assumptions and developments characteristic of Soviet education in the 1920s.

At no time during the 1920s did the party officially sponsor or condone a free and unhampered pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. The school, in the party’s opinion, had to serve as a microcosm of and instrument for the construction of a socialist society. Pedagogy, therefore, could not stand apart from mundane political and economic requirements. Even before the imposition of the First Five Year Plan, utilitarianism had emerged as a force at least as significant in the party’s attitude toward and formulation of educational practice as revolutionary enthusiasm, unbridled idealism, and emotional repugnance at “semi-feudal and bourgeois” pedagogy.

Certainly, Soviet education of the 1920s exuded attractive features with a magnetic appeal to many even today. Its prominent traits included a bold, innovative, and transformationist approach toward learning, expanded educational opportunities for many, activity, project, and complex methods, and attempts for a relevant and value-oriented curricula. To some extent this effort to transform Russian education was impeded by the sudden paroxysm of novelty, teachers unprepared and hostile to change, a ubiquitous indifference from bureaucrats, teachers, parents, and students and financial stringencies. But, in addition, the political instrumentalism which dominated educational thinking and practice obstructed and finally smashed any illusions held for a truly idealistic and unfettered education.

From the inception of their regime, Bolsheviks sought to establish control over education and to use that control to imbue instruction with political di-

dacticism. Preoccupation with teaching political literacy, the exercise of class and political discrimination in admissions, hiring, purges, and financial aid, and permeation of the complex and project methods with a political catechism derived from a focus on creating loyal disciples not intellectual pioneers. By the late 1920s, however, economic utilitarianism took precedence over the effort to ensconce education in political propaganda. An increasing need for a large technical discipline, more systematic study, and fact-oriented texts, methods, and curricula resulted in a return by the early 1930s of traditional approaches toward the learning process.

All societies, of course, accommodate educational methods and curricula to some extent with utilitarian considerations. Soviet education of the 1920s and the party's attitude toward it, however, provide an example of narrow expediency geared to meet the political and economic demands of Bolshevik totalitarianism. It also illustrates how apparently progressive and idealistic admissions policies, methods, and curricula can serve well the purposes of narrow political partisanship. And finally, it demonstrates how utilitarianism generally can hamper and even preclude a reasonably flexible and well-rounded pursuit of knowledge.

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### Notes

1. There are available in the English language a number of informative studies. These include: Samuel Northrup Harper, *Civic Training in Soviet Russia* (Chicago, 1929), pp. 242–298; Nicholas Hans and Sergius Hessen, *Educational Policy in Soviet Russia* (London, 1930); George S. Counts, "Education in Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia in the Second Decade*, ed. Stuart Chase, Robert Dunn, and Rexford Guy Tugwell (New York, 1928), pp. 268–303 (also printed in an abbreviated version under the title "The Educational Program of Soviet Russia," *National Education Association of the United States, Addresses and Procedures. 1928.*, pp. 593–602); George S. Counts, *The Soviet Challenge to America* (New York, 1931); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Education: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917–1921* (Cambridge, 1970); Ruth Widmayer, "The Communist Party and the Soviet Schools—1917–1937," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University 1952; Daniel Dorotich, "History in the Soviet School, 1917–1937," Diss. McGill University 1964. Important Soviet studies include: N. A. Konstantinov and E. N. Medynskii, *Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly RSFSR za 30 let* (Moscow, 1948); *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta* (Moscow, 1955), II; V. V. Ukraintsev, *KPSS—organizator revoliutsionnogo preobrazovaniia vysshei shkoly* (Moscow, 1963); F. F. Korolev,

- Ocherki po istorii sovetskoï shkoly i pedagogiki, 1917–1920* (Moscow, 1958); F. F. Korolev, T. D. Korneichik, and Z. I. Rabkin, *Ocherki po istorii sovetskoï shkoly i pedagogiki, 1921–1931* (Moscow, 1961); L. P. Bushchik, *Ocherk razvitiia shkol'nogo istoricheskogo obrazovaniia v SSSR* (Moscow, 1961).
2. George S. Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education* (New York, 1957), pp. 60–61.
  3. Although Wasyl Shimoniak in his *Communist Education: Its History, Philosophy and Politics* (New York, 1970) stresses the party's efforts to politicize education generally, he neglects to discuss party attitudes and educational practice in the 1920s.
  4. See John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (New York, 1929); Anna Louise Strong, "Education in Modern Russia," *Progressive Education*, I (1924):157–159; Scott Nearing, *Education of Soviet Russia* (New York, 1926); Lucy L. W. Wilson, *The New Schools of New Russia* (New York, 1928).
  5. Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia*, pp. 128–129.
  6. George S. Counts, "Education in Soviet Russia," *Soviet Russia in the Second Decade*, ed. Stuart Chase, Robert Dunn, and Rexford Guy Tugwell (New York, 1928), p. 268.
  7. Excellent studies of institutions for political education and of party schools are available in the English language: Zev Katz, "Party-Political Education in Soviet Russia," *Soviet Studies*, VII (1956):237–247; Samuel Northrup Harper, *Civic Training in Soviet Russia* (Chicago, 1929), pp. 271–298. In the Russian language, see essays by L. V. Ivanova in *Ocherki istorii istoricheskoi nauki v SSSR*, ed. M. V. Nechkina (Moscow, 1966), IV, pp. 117–145, 226–232 and Ivanova's *U istokov sovetskoï istoricheskoi nauki (Podgotovka kadrov istorikov-marksistov 1917–1929)* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 50–82, 122–146.
  8. These policies were soon revised. By 1920 some entrance examinations were required and admission quotas set. A well-researched study of party objectives for university education from 1917 to 1921 is James C. McClelland, "Bolshevik Approaches to Higher Education," *Slavic Review*, 30 (December, 1971):818–831.
  9. Valuable discussions of the intriguing complex and project methods are contained in John T. Zepper, "N. K. Krupskaya on Complex Themes in Soviet Education," *Comparative Education Review*, 9 (February, 1965) 33–37; Scott Nearing, *Education of Soviet Russia* (New York, 1926), pp. 40–42, 98–105; L. P. Bushchik, *Ocherk razvitiia shkol'nogo istoricheskogo obrazovaniia v SSSR* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 191–208, 226–228; F. F. Korolev and others, *Ocherki po istorii sovetskoï shkoly i pedagogiki, 1921–1931* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 69–100, 450–461.
  10. *Kommunisticheskaia partiia sovetskogo soiuza v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK* (Henceforth KPSS v rez.), 8th ed. (Moscow, 1970), II, pp. 48–49, 81.
  11. V. I. Lenin, "Proekt programmy RKP (b)," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1958–1965) 38, 117.



12. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1930), p. 120.
13. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva o narodnom obrazovanii; sbornik dokumentov za 1917–1947gg.* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1947), II, p. 9.
14. *KPSS v rez.*, III, p. 287.
15. *KPSS v rez.*, IV, p. 473.
16. *KPSS v rez.*, IV, p. 475.
17. Robert H. McNeal, *Bride of the Revolution: Krupskaya and Lenin* (Ann Arbor, 1972), pp. 200–202. Many of Krupskaya's comments on education to this effect are available in English: N. K. Krupskaya, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches* (Moscow, 1957).
18. Sylvia Russell, "The Philosophy of Anatoli Vasil'evich Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education, 1917–1929," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University 1970, pp. 69–144.
19. N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism* (Ann Arbor, 1967), p. 233.
20. For these statements by Lenin on education, see his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 36, pp. 420–421; 37, pp. 76–77, 420–421, 431–432; 41, pp. 298–318, 336. See also *Lenin o narodnom obrazovanii: Stat'i i rechi* (Moscow, 1957) and Frederic Lilge, "Lenin and the Politics of Education," *Slavic Review*, 27 (June, 1968):230–257.
21. For decrees on these institutions of political education, see *Direktivy VKP po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 179–236.
22. For official resolutions on party schools, see *Direktivy VKP po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 198–209; see also syllabi for courses of study at party schools in *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika* (Moscow, 1921).
23. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, p. 134.
24. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, II, p. 10; *KPSS v rez.*, III, pp. 104, 111.
25. *KPSS v rez.*, II, pp. 456, 509–511, 513; III, p. 461.
26. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 116–117, 120.
27. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 284–285, 304–305, 333–334.
28. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 131–143, 146–147, 209–218, 342–344.
29. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 146, 148, 343–345.
30. *KPSS v rez.*, III, p. 64.
31. *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta* (Moscow, 1955), II, pp. 81, 102.
32. "Sovnarkom RSFSR ob akademicheskoi proverke," *Pravda*, 22 August 1924, p. 4; "TsK RKP o vysshei shkole," *Pravda*, 22 August 1924, p. 5.
33. Anton Karlgren, *Bolshevist Russia*, trans. by Anna Barwell (New York, 1927), p. 291.
34. *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta*, II, p. 43; V. V. Ukraintsev, *KPSS - organizator revoliutsionnogo preobrazovaniia vysshei shkoly* (Moscow, 1963), p. 55.

35. A discussion of these changes in school management may be found in Korolev, *Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki, 1921–1931*, pp. 327–330, 336–341; Nicholas Hans and Sergius Hessen, *Educational Policy in Soviet Russia* (London, 1930), pp. 116–117, 123.
36. *Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiashchenii*, 1921, no. 65, st. 486.
37. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, II, pp. 70–71, 70–71.
38. Hans and Hessen, *Educational Policy*, p. 107.
39. Harper, *Civic Training*, p. 267.
40. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, p. 320; *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, II, p. 10. In 1920 and 1921, the Council of Peoples Commissars reached identical conclusions on the universities: *Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiashchenii*, 1920, no. 93, st. 503 and 1921, no. 19, st. 119.
41. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, II, pp. 9–10.
42. *KPSS v rez.*, III, pp. 95, 106, 119; *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, II, p. 10; *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, p. 321.
43. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, p. 321.
44. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, p. 27.
45. See *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, p. 138; *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 283–285, 330, 344.
46. *Moskovskii universitet za piat' desiat let sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1967), p. 61; *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta*, II, p. 92.
47. *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta*, II, pp. 87–88.
48. See the discussion of the application of the complex in Bushchik's *Ocherk*, pp. 196–200. For an example of a highly politicized treatment of the complex theme “October revolution,” see B. Zhavoronkov, *Kak rabotat' po obshchestvovedeniiu (na I stupeni)* (Moscow, 1925), pp. 100–101.
49. Karlgren, *Bolshevist Russia*, p. 282.
50. See syllabi for historical projects in the soviet party schools, *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika* (Moscow, 1921), pp. 59–63.
51. *KPSS v rez.*, II, p. 513; III, pp. 57, 104, 109, 114.
52. *KPSS v rez.*, II, pp. 509–511, 513; III, pp. 52, 57, 94.
53. See, for example, S. S. Krivtsov, “Mesto istorii v programmakh obshchestvenno-ekonomicheskikh vuzov,” *Istoriik-Marksist*, 2 (1926):231; L. P. Mamet, “Programmo-metodicheskie voprosy prepodavaniia istorii na rabochikh fakultetakh,” *Istoriik-Marksist*, 4 (1927):188; “Vsesoiuznaia konferentsiia istorikov-marksistov,” *Istoriik-Marksist*, 12 (1929):316.
54. Ioannisiani's opinions may be found in the following of his contributions to *Istoriik-Marksist*: rev. of *Bor'ba za obshchestvovedenie i shkol'naia praktika poslednikh let*, ed. by S. I. Dziubinskii and B. Zhavoronkov; 2 (1926):288; “Istoriia v shkole II stupeni,” 3 (1927):154, 165; “Rabochie knigi po obshchestvovedeniiu,” 7 (1928):207–208.

55. For important party and state directives issued from 1924 to 1930 on professional education, see *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, pp. 38, 50–51, 55, 57 and II, pp. 32, 55–60; *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 153–157, 239, 244. The two most important decrees, both of which were issued by the Central Committee, one on July 12, 1928 and the other on November 17, 1929, may be found in complete form in *KPSS v rez.*, IV, pp. 111–118, 334–345.
56. The dispute over vocational training in the secondary schools is best discussed in Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Education*, pp. 59–68, 210–220; Ronald Hideo Hayashida, “Lenin and the Third Front,” *Slavic Review*, 28 (June, 1969):314–324.
57. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie*, 52, pp. 87, 228–230.
58. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, pp. 26–27.
59. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, pp. 27–28.
60. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 4th ed. (Moscow, 1950), 35, p. 411.
61. J. V. Stalin, *Works* (Moscow, 1946–1949) 7, pp. 77–89; 11, pp. 79–82.
62. *KPSS v rez.*, III, p. 293; *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, p. 136; *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, p. 51.
63. “Sovnarkom RSFSR ob akademicheskoi proverke,” *Pravda*, 22 August 1924, p. 4; “TsK RKPo vysshei shkole,” *Pravda*, 22 August 1924, p. 5. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 132, 136, 149, 344; *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, p. 38.
64. *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 218, 245, 333; *KPSS v rez.*, IV, pp. 111–118, 334–341.
65. *KPSS v rez.* IV pp. 117, 341; *Direktivy VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, p. 140.
66. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, pp. 152–155, 161–164; II, p. 84.
67. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, pp. 153, 159; II p. 85.
68. *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva*, I, pp. 153–155, 158–159; II, pp. 87–88.