

secret police has not diminished with the advent of Khrushchev's "liberal" regime. The author is at his best in his analysis of the attitudes of Soviet citizens towards the outside world: here he successfully demolishes the hopes of those Western optimists who prefer to believe that the Soviet society is undergoing a process of mellowing and that at some future point it will converge with the Western way of life. On the whole, the book is not what it claims to be, but it is a very interesting book nevertheless.

Zenaide Bashkirov's *Nights Are Longest There* is a very different book. It is a narrative of a girl (written much later but with the typically feminine capacity for remembering details) of aristocratic background who lived through the years of the Revolution and Civil War in a remote Russian province. Miss Bashkirov offers few generalizations. A proud descendant of Genghis Khan and a cousin of Prince Yousouppoff, Rasputin's murderer, she spent years following the upheaval watching how everything that had been dear to her was falling apart, without making an effort to understand the causes of the events. Crammed into a corner of her grandmother's manor, the members of the family and a few trusted servants attempted to weather the storm, with children continuing to study French and watching their manners even when only a few rotten potatoes were left for their meals and when the days had to be spent in milking cows, haying, mending and sewing, and performing other unseemly work. Their half-hearted attempt to adjust to the new ways of Russia was a distinct failure. There was no bridge to assure historical continuity of social and cultural development; there could be no reconciliation. Those who represented the past had either to escape or be destroyed. The future belonged to others who swore to build something entirely new on the ruins of the old.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I wish to comment on an article entitled "The Soviet Boarding School," by Effie Ambler, which appeared in the April issue of the *American Slavic and East European Review* and which contains a number of errors or misleading statements.

On page 241 Miss Ambler states that the Soviet school reform law, passed in December, 1958, calls for all children to start actual work in production at the age of fifteen, except for a few who are "unusually gifted in art, music, or the physical sciences." However, schools for the gifted exist only for art, music, or ballet students. The proposal of establishing schools for pupils gifted in mathematics and the natural sciences was debated and ultimately rejected, and the law does not contain any mention of them. Neither is there any provision for special treatment for such children in admitting them to the last three years of secondary schooling on a full-time basis. The "secondary labor polytechnic schools with production training" admit any

pupil who has completed the previous eight grades, without entrance examinations, although it is true that marks received in the eighth grade may decide admission, if there are more applicants than vacancies.

In describing the new educational system, Miss Ambler states: "The former seven-year or incomplete, and ten-year schools are both to become eight-year institutions, which may be terminal." This is a misleading statement. It is the former seven-year school (incomplete secondary) which is to be transformed into an eight-year school (again incomplete secondary), by adding a year to accommodate the polytechnical subjects. The former ten-year school (complete secondary) becomes the eleven-year school (complete secondary) by virtue of the fact that one year has been added on the lower level. The course of the complete secondary school (classes 9-11) does not take "three or four years" as Miss Ambler asserts, but three years only.

Miss Ambler mentions a "combination of part-time work and part-time study under another newly established program" as a third alternative for graduates of eight-year schools who wish to complete their education. The only program mentioned in the law is the *technikum* course, which combines professional training, productive labor, and a complete secondary school curriculum. *Technikums* have been in existence for many years and cannot be defined as a "newly established program" in any real sense of the term, although they have undergone some curriculum reform under the new system.

Boarding schools were not intended as laboratories for the feasibility of polytechnical education, as Miss Ambler asserts. The Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, RSFSR, tried out the polytechnic program in 500 general-education schools, beginning in the 1956-57 school year, and it was these experimental (*bazovye*) schools that served as laboratories for the new program, whereas the boarding schools served rather to accommodate difficult or neglected children. Further, boarding schools are not the only educational institutions which have agricultural or industrial patrons. Every school in the Soviet Union is supposed to have such a sponsor, who is responsible for vocational training, supplies the workshops and allotments, and even sometimes furnishes instructors for vocational courses.

Miss Ambler gives as one of the reasons for the passage of the school reform "the restoration of Leninism and Lenin's party." It is difficult to see what is meant by this statement. Lenin's party seems in no need of restoration; what is meant by "Leninism" is unclear, unless it is the polytechnic principle in education. It should be pointed out that this *principle* was never abandoned, although it had not been applied in practice since the beginning of the thirties.

There is no basis whatsoever for saying "In the boarding schools *more than in the regular schools* the leading role among the student bodies has been assigned to the Young Pioneers and Young Communist League organizations" (p. 249; italics added). Nor is it correct to say, "It is the party and the YCL to whom Khrushchev wishes to assign the task of determining who is worthy and ready for university study." Implying, as it does, that boarding school graduates automatically go on to universities, this statement, as well as an earlier one, that the law provides that "boarding schools . . . be

expanded to eleven years" (p. 242), ignores the fact that Article 5 of the law states that boarding schools will be organized as eight-year or eleven-year schools. Further, Soviet educators freely admit that academic standards in boarding schools are *lower* than in the regular schools. It should also be pointed out that YCL and party organizations share with trade union, plant administration, and education officials the duty of recommending students for admission to higher education. In point of fact, the *school* party and YCL organizations will have relatively little to do with this, as 80 per cent of new university admissions are to come from workers in plants, factories, and farms in the future.

Although it is true, that boarding schools are seen as providing ideal conditions for collective education, it is to go against the very fundamentals of Marxist doctrine to assert that "by the gradual extension of the feeling of collectivism will be achieved the classless society." In the Marxist view, the classless society will be achieved only when economic conditions are ripe for it and the basis for the existence of classes has disappeared; no social change can be accomplished by the extension of a feeling.

Special tutors in boarding schools do not have higher education in guidance, as Miss Ambler asserts on page 251. If she means the *vospitateli*, these educators often do not have any higher education at all. There is much talk that special courses for educators will be established in pedagogical institutes, but little has been done as yet. Educators are often merely supervisors of the children's leisure time and play the part of nursemaids. When they do get special training, it will certainly not be in "guidance," the very concept being unknown to Soviet pedagogical practice.

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MISS AMBLER REPLIES:

The believing Marxist easily reconciles many ideas which seem, to a non-believer, alien or contradictory to generally understood Marxist fundamentals. A good example is the continuous emphasis in the USSR on the value of education in the gradual transition to communism—itself a doctrine alien to the original teaching of the Master. A Soviet theorist, pressed, could explain with facility the position of education in a dialectic process in which, somehow, "the communist transformation of society is indivisibly linked with the rearing of the new man." ("On Strengthening Ties between School and Life and on Further Developing the Country's System of Public Education." Theses of the Party Central Committee and USSR Council of Ministers. *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, November 16, 1958.) In theory, base must determine superstructure; in practice, education has been considered a "weapon" (Lenin's word) in the construction of the new society since the Bolsheviks gained state power. To the convinced, the logic of this situation is evidently overwhelming; I, an outsider, cannot comprehend the dialectic and am left to state what is seen in practice. The recent reorganization of the school system is intended to increase the effectiveness of the weapon; the