
Soviet Education: Reading, Writing, and Revisionism

by Leona Krasny

While education doesn't tell the whole story of any given system and its social relations, it nonetheless "is an extremely important part of the superstructure and plays a very crucial role in maintaining and reinforcing one kind of class relations or another."¹ The content of the curriculum, the relationship between the schools and the division of labor in society at large, the sorts of social relations and the kind of outlook permeating and guiding the classroom itself – all these both flow from and reciprocally affect a society's overall class relations.

The education system of the Soviet Union is decidedly capitalist: reflecting, maintaining, and reinforcing bourgeois, reactionary class relations. From the "socialist" tracking system to the revisionist content of textbooks, from the promotion of self-seeking competition through the pursuit of grades to the maintenance of the absolute authority of the teacher and administration, the entire school system is set up to make a principle of the division between mental and manual labor; to train the students in the peculiar revisionist ideology of "me first (for the benefit of all) with everyone in their specialized place"; to divorce (Marxist) theory from practice and the masses from the running of society; and to politically indoctrinate Soviet youth in narrow Russian chauvinism and the "justice" of class society revisionist-style.

The Soviet social-imperialists and their apologists argue that the big gains in literacy since 1917, including the fact that many children of workers get a university education and that nearly all youth receive a secondary education, would be impossible under capitalism. These developments, they say, demonstrate the superiority of the socialist system. In fact, these phenomena typify all modern imperialist societies, and their existence in the Soviet Union – as elsewhere in the imperialist world – flows from the specific needs and serves the interests of social-imperialism, as does the like-minded emphasis on the worship of various achievements in science and technology. These are

necessary to the expansion of capital in the era of imperialism; and, like all good capitalists, the Soviets do what the needs of capital dictate.

Revisionists may reply that, yes, there are problems and weaknesses, but that these are part of the legacy left from capitalism and are being gradually overcome. In fact these "flaws" are not left over from the capitalism of prerevolutionary Russia, but are part of a conscious policy on education reflecting the overall relations of an imperialist system with a socialist veneer. Indeed, the aspects of the Soviet system of education that reflect the legacy of 40 years of socialism – for example, the attempts under Lenin and Stalin to upgrade education for the oppressed nationalities and narrow the gap between the (formerly) oppressor and oppressed nations – have been steadily dismantled.

The Soviet line on education is concentrated, for instance, in a statement on the function of education taken from a book done by Soviet sociologists on the cultural life of workers in the Ural region:

"Education is a means by which each new generation can assimilate the knowledge accumulated by humanity. The knowledge and skills obtained make it possible for the individual to adapt to the social environment around him. In the process of education, the individual assimilates cultural values, making them his own spiritual resource. Man does not simply obtain systematized knowledge of the world, he also prepares himself for the performance of specific labor."²

This is essentially the same view of education found in any U.S. sociology textbook, with the added twist that "socialist" education prepares young people for a specific job (a point now also getting some emphasis in the U.S.). This is extolled in their propaganda aimed at the West: unlike capitalism, where youth often have no skills and no job, the Soviet system prepares students so that they come out of school trained and ready to do the same job for life. "Job training" becomes the revisionists' vulgarized version of the Marxist principle of integrating theory and practice.

The revisionist line on education cited above views the students' role of "assimilating knowledge" as a passive one. Lenin, it is true, spoke of the need for communist youth to "assimilate the wealth of knowledge amassed by mankind" but, unlike the social-imperialists of today, he stressed that "you should not merely assimilate this knowledge, but assimilate it critically."³ The revisionists view the student as a blank slate on which society – through the educational system – draws the proper image. He or she is little more than an empty head to be filled with supposedly classless "knowledge accumulated by humanity."

This is more than a "bad formulation" on education; it reflects a bourgeois class viewpoint on the role of the masses and on education. It is diametrically opposed to the genuinely communist view that the masses are the makers of history and that they must be unleashed through consciously grasping the

laws of nature and the class struggle, a process entailing participation in struggle and a direct involvement in theory and practice at all levels and in all spheres – not a passive spoon-feeding by experts and authorities.

A basic principle of Marxist materialism – understanding the world in the course of changing it, and in order to change it – is negated on both sides. On understanding the world, the basic educational system is not intended to train the masses in knowing the world through learning to critically and analytically examine *all* phenomena in their contradictory motion and development, nor is it designed to foster the challenge of all traditional ideas and traditional relations between people. Instead, traditional capitalist relations and methods prevail: the teachers and books put forward the "right" answers while the students learn to regurgitate them on cue, the teachers keep order while the students "assimilate knowledge" and "adapt to the social environment." One learns about the world, in this conservative system, through mastering a closed body of knowledge with new facts and theories added by the higher authorities for proper digestion by students.

As for changing the world, the role of the masses is reduced to learning what they need to know to fulfill a specific and extremely limited function in society – their trade or profession. Doing a good job, being conscientious – this is extolled as "socialist consciousness"!

Certainly in a genuinely socialist system the youth, and the masses in general, have to work at jobs, doing specific kinds of labor demanding certain knowledge specific to that work. The division of labor inherited from capitalism does not disappear overnight. But neither does it "disappear" at all without a conscious and fierce struggle to limit and transform the inherited division of labor as much as possible. This is a crucial task of the transition from socialism to communism, and as the experience of the Cultural Revolution in China showed, it is one that entails both ongoing struggle at every level of society and truly profound upheaval. While the Cultural Revolution itself is outside the scope of this article, it's worth noting that that struggle began in the universities and was marked by perhaps the most thoroughgoing and wide-ranging rethinking on and reform of the educational system ever witnessed in any society.⁴ Through all the struggle over education ran the basic theme of transforming the educational system inherited from capitalism into one that served the development of true successors to revolution, true inheritors of the Communards' spirit of daring to storm the heavens. The transformations were carried out with the aim of serving the revolution worldwide, unleashing the leadership of the proletariat in every sphere (including, but not limited to, production) and utilizing the educational system to break down the great differences inherited from capitalism (between town and country, agriculture and industry, and – very important for education – mental and manual labor).

By contrast, Soviet theory and practice is aimed at producing an efficient elite to run the society, and a docile mass to obey them. Their theory, which basically identifies much of education with job preparation, has exactly the aim of maintaining and

reinforcing the division of labor, especially the most fundamental division between who rules and who is ruled. If the essential thing a person needs to know is the knowledge required for their job, then how is society's division of labor to be transformed? Then how are the great majority of masses going to play the kind of political role necessary to push society forward and liberate all of mankind? They aren't, except for perhaps the sham role of endorsing this or that revisionist proposal or candidate. It is okay and necessary, from the revisionist point of view, for the masses to develop knowledge of certain objective "laws" on the job (whether this be on the factory floor or in the science lab), but social-imperialism cannot promote genuine dialectical materialism as a guiding philosophy for the masses because to do so would be to arm them with a weapon against their own imperialist class rule. So having a trade, "knowing how to do something," is extolled as the goal of the proletarians in the Soviet Union today. But even this limited role takes many years of training, according to Soviet experts:

"Before entering the system of social production and social life, every individual undergoes many years of preparation in the education system. . . . Thus, the education system has two basic social functions: socialization and professionalization of the younger generation. At its first stages (primary and secondary general education) the former predominate. Acquisition of general academic knowledge can be viewed as fundamental training for work in any job. In secondary special and higher education, on the contrary, professionalization moves to the fore. The young person there completes his schooling and begins an independent life."⁵

Thus, Soviet youth, like those in other imperialist nations, spend a long, long time in society's "womb" being constantly bombarded with society's reactionary values, being "assimilated" and "adapted," contorted and distorted before they are trusted to be part of social life and have their own "independent" life. Their supposedly empty heads are to be filled with bourgeois knowledge and minutely-specialized technical job training before they are considered to be "an educated citizen conscious of his civic duty," i.e., for the broad masses, cannonfodder or a wage-slave.⁶

Training the Youth in Revisionism

As mentioned above, the revisionists view children as apprentice human beings with empty heads to be filled up. School is for "assimilating knowledge and cultural values." In line with the particular needs of social-imperialism, they desire to encourage what they call a "collectivist" approach — which boils down to placing a high premium on conformity

and peer pressure to conform. Blatant individualism and "me first" is veiled under the idea that high individual achievement, coupled with social and political conformity and "service," is the best thing for yourself *and* the nation and is therefore noble and should be rewarded. There is definitely more attention paid by the state and society in general to the upbringing of the youth than in the U.S., although the individual family (i.e., the mother) is still mainly responsible. The lever of persuasion to conform to standards is exerted mainly by withdrawal of approval by adults and other children, not by physical punishment. Striking a child is forbidden in practice as well as by official regulations. But this is not outside the scope of liberal bourgeois ideology and in fact is part of the ideological requirements of being a "socialist" imperialism — "people working for the greater good, caring for your fellow man, etc.," is not so dissimilar from the attractions of a liberal church community in the U.S., and it can be and is used to actually enforce the status quo.

"Standard Rules of Pupils and Uniform Requirements," issued centrally in the Soviet Union, are a good indication of how the revisionists view youth and their role. "The 'Rules for Pupils' indicate an endorsement of the idea that discipline is a primary condition for the normal life of a society, and for a free development of all its members," states the text. "The restoration of discipline also indicates acceptance of the authority of the parents, teachers and elders. The restored discipline differs from the traditional in many respects. It is based not on religion but on social motivation and is free from all the harsh aspects of coercion characteristic of the tsarist schools."⁷

Tsarist religion, no; state religion, yes. Rules and regulations themselves have a class character, and the Soviet rules cited below bear the mark of and serve bourgeois rule. Read these rules for grades 1-3 and then ask what their attitude is towards the creativity, energy, and natural questioning and daring of children entering school. Do such rules foster and temper the rebelliousness of students, or do they stupefy them with a so-called "collectivism" of blind obedience? Is knowledge viewed as something to gain and share with others, or as personal capital for one's own advancement?

During the Lesson

1. When the teacher or any adult person enters the class, get up silently and sit down only on a given signal.
2. When the teacher records attendance and calls your name, get up silently. . . .
5. Sit straight, do not slouch and do not turn around.
6. Do not correct your classmate's answer without the teacher's permit. Do not prompt. [One has to learn that knowledge is private capital after all.]
7. If you are called, get up, stand straight and answer precisely, not hurrying. . . .
9. When you want to ask the teacher a question, raise your right hand, keep the elbow on the desk. On receiving the teacher's permit, get up, ask the question, sit down. . . .

15. If the teacher has punished you by ordering you to stand, go to the door, and stand turned to the blackboard. Do not start any arguments because of your punishment.

During Recesses and After Classes

1. On the premises of the school do not scream, do not run, keep order. . . .
3. When you meet an adult, stop, make way and greet. If you are sitting when an adult passes, get up and greet.

At Home

1. Strictly observe your schedule of daily activities – train your willpower.
2. Begin your homework beginning with the most difficult subjects [homework for grades 1-3 is recommended to be from 1 to 4 hours per day]. . . .
10. Behave in a cultured way at the table.
11. Be polite and courteous not only to your relatives but also to your neighbors in your apartment; do not make noise.

Outward Appearance

1. Come to school in a clean, neatly ironed uniform with polished buttons and shined shoes.
2. Do not keep in your pockets unnecessary things. Do not keep your hands in your pockets.

Speech

1. Watch your speech. Do not use "parasitic" words.
2. Do not use rude expressions and nicknames.
3. Behave modestly and decently; do not embarrass people who surround you. Do not push, do not yell, do not speak too loudly, do not sing where it is not accepted.⁸

This should give an indication of the type of youth that the revisionists would like to see emerging "socialized" from the school system. At this point one is tempted to mutter a few "parasitic words." Any U.S. military academy would be proud of students who would adhere to such a regimen.

It is no wonder why Mao Tsetung was considered a complete heretic and troublemaker by the Soviet social-imperialists for comments like the following on the Chinese schools before the Cultural Revolution:

"At examinations whispering into each other's ears and taking other people's places ought to be allowed. If your answer is good and I copy it, then mine should be counted as good. Whispering in other people's ears and taking examinations in other people's names used to be done secretly. Let it now be done openly. . . . We must do things in a lively fashion, not in a lifeless fashion. There are teachers who ramble on and on when they lecture; they should let their students doze off. If your lecture is no good, why insist on others

listening to you? Rather than keeping your eyes open and listening to boring lectures, it is better to get some refreshing sleep. You don't have to listen to nonsense, you can rest your brain instead."⁹

Mao's principal orientation on education was to call on the youth to boldly participate in society, challenging the old, overthrowing the reactionary, and bringing forward socialist new things. In line with this, he consistently fought for the integration of theory and practice at every grade level, both in politics and production. As part of the latter, schools carried out manual labor and were often linked to production units. To carry out this orientation, Mao opposed the piling on of bookwork to the detriment not only of politics and production but plays, sports, and social activities as well, and he upheld the all-around development of children and youth, including their physical and social development.

There was great struggle during the Cultural Revolution that particularly focused on such questions as blind obedience to authority and the role of students in society. The Chinese revolutionaries fought for applying the mass line in teaching methods in opposition to the revisionist garbage of "teacher talks, you listen" seen in the Soviet rules and requirements.

"In practicing this new teaching method, it is essential to adhere to the mass line of 'from the masses, to the masses' in teaching. The teacher should serve the students. His role is to help raise the ability of the students to think for themselves, to study problems and to practice. Therefore, he should learn from the students and make investigations among them."¹⁰

"Teaching methods are definitely not only a question of specific methods, but, what is more important, are a question of principle, a question of organizing teaching according to which class' theory of knowledge and methodology. The bourgeois teaching methods center on books and teachers and divorces theory from practice. 'The teacher crams the students with his lecture throughout the class while the students follow him mechanically.' These methods completely violate the law of knowing the truth and they can only bring up bookworms who divorce themselves from proletarian politics, from the worker and peasant masses and from practice."¹¹

To try and get the children to obey the rules and authorities, Soviet teachers are instructed to use something they call "socialist competition." This might be known in the U.S. as "using peer-group pressure to get the desired results." Except that in the Soviet Union, achieving conformity is projected as acquiring communist consciousness. One of the most important elements in this discipline is a continuous attempt to develop a child's identification with the group or as the Soviets put it, the "children's collective." If a child skips class, fails to do his homework properly, performs poorly on a test, he is chastised more for letting the group down than

for his individual errors. Soviet schools make extensive use of public criticism by other students as well as teachers to produce conforming children.

American author Urie Bronfenbrenner, who did research in the Soviet Union on their methods of child upbringing, relates the following observation of collective discipline (and humiliation) in a first-grade classroom where each child was to recite a memorized poem:

"It is now Larissa's turn. She walks primly to the front of the room, starts off bravely and finished two stanzas. Suddenly, silence. Larissa has forgotten. There is no prompting either from teacher or from friends. The silence continues.

"Then the teacher speaks, softly but firmly, 'Larissa, you have disappointed your mother, you have disappointed your father and above all, you have disappointed your comrades who are sitting before you. Go back to your place. They do not wish to hear anything more from you today.'

"With head down, Larissa silently returns to her seat, a teardrop flowing down each cheek."¹²

While this may be trumpeted by the revisionists as "socialist" pedagogy for trying to develop a "collective consciousness" among the youth in opposition to the individualism of the Western imperialists, the question has to be posed: collective consciousness for what? For gaining adherence to the reactionary status quo, for going along with the social-imperialist tide. This is not socialist. The bottom line here is kowtowing to authority, using "the majority" as a club to gain obedience.

However, despite the detailing of every minute proper behavior and the great attention paid to gaining the compliance of the youth, the Soviets don't have qualitatively more success in suppressing the youth than the schools do in the U.S. A Soviet magazine article called "A Typical Day in A School Without Uniform Requirements," bemoans the lack of discipline in a typical school. The article describes such anti-social behavior as refusing to stand when answering in class, prompting other students and arguing with the teacher, causing commotions in the hallways — "pushing everybody they meet out of their path." And worse yet "a welter of confused and discordant sounds fills the air" (this must be particularly displeasing to the revisionists since "harmony" is the hallmark of a dutiful subject of social-imperialism). According to this article, even the student monitors lose faith in having success in "putting things right" and prefer to go about their own business. The article concludes:

"School is over but the students continue to roam about. Such kind of discipline is characteristic of many schools. No serious disruptions take place. Sometimes a pupil breaks a window pane or is rude to a teacher. No greater transgressions of established norms occur than copying an assignment, cheating, coming late or failure to greet. If only academic progress is good, such a school is considered as good.

However, Russian pedagogues believe that from an education point of view such a discipline is disturbing. Lack of firm requirements and indifference to little things educate indifferent people with a negligent attitude to work and society, inclined to show off and even, if necessary, to cheat."¹³

And even, perhaps, to question and rebel. . . .

How the Soviets View the Socialization Process

The Soviets themselves lay out quite frankly how they see developing what they call "a communist world view" in their students. Unfortunately, the "communist world view" — in the Soviet rendition — is hard to distinguish from the tenets of good citizenship taught in U.S. schools.

A recent Soviet text on education — in a section specifically devoted to "instilling a communist world view" — correctly notes that "the formation of a communist world view . . . cannot be reduced solely to the assimilation of a sum total of scientific facts." Values and attitudes are also critical. But the values and attitudes spoken of here seem to be obedience pure and simple:

"Thus, the formation of an attitude towards knowledge taught in school (belief in its truthfulness) and toward the school's norms and rules of behavior (acceptance of the latter) must be singled out as yet another stage [in the development of a communist worldview]. This stage includes an understanding of the need to master basic, socially necessary knowledge (scientific principles) and behavioral norms and to make one's own value judgments."¹⁴

Search as one might through this entire work, and you will not find anything about the need to develop the capacity to criticize, or still less what Mao once called a conquering spirit. The closest that the text approaches this is somewhat later, when the need to defend one's convictions in disputes against "philistines and rumor mongers . . . ideological opponents and religionists" is stressed. But the far more important quality that must be developed — the need to be willing to go against a tide of those in authority and (closely related to that) to be able to discern a Marxist-Leninist from a revisionist line — is utterly negated. Indeed, the emphasis on defending "one's convictions" against what in the Soviet Union are essentially minority viewpoints is little more than a call for the sort of self-starting ventriloquists' dummies so common in bourgeois society. And when the authors sum up the sort of qualities they *are* trying to instill, one reads a homily little different than the Boy Scout credo:

"The world view is inseparable from the general orientation of the human personality. A person who possesses a communist world view is characterized by

honesty, principle, staunchness, courage, purposefulness, decisiveness, steadfastness in carrying out formulated tasks, and a feeling of responsibility for an assigned task."¹⁵

The text also covers the role of the schools in this process. The authors note how the teacher can use the various subjects to draw out the basic principles of materialism. But this materialism is a very dry and dessicated thing indeed, well within the bounds of bourgeois conventional wisdom, at least of the liberal variety. All reactionary ideology, for example, is here reduced to religion; the need to combat the more pervasive, sophisticated, and damaging bourgeois philosophies of positivism, pragmatism, agnosticism, and the various mechanical materialist ideologies (social-Darwinism, reductionism, etc.) is not mentioned at all.

Beyond that, missing in this training is the *masses*. The only way given in the text for instilling in the "pupils a feeling of proletarian internationalism and fraternal solidarity with the peoples of countries that are fighting for their liberty and independence" is geography! Contrast that with the orientation in the *New Programme of the RCP, USA* towards this task of the socialist education system:

"This [education in internationalism] will be done not only through study and general discussion, including classes educating all students in the real history, scientifically understood, of the various oppressed peoples and nations, inside and outside this country, of the oppression of women in class society, etc., but also by bringing out from the experience of the masses themselves, and through debate and struggle among them, what the concrete effects of national oppression, the oppression of women, and similar crimes of capitalism are and whose interests they and their ideological expressions of racism and chauvinism serve. And this will not be carried out by the students alone, in isolation from the rest of society and the masses of people, but by having representatives of the masses, including even workers and oppressed people from other countries, come into the classrooms and give the students a living understanding of these questions, and by having the students go out broadly among the workers, the formerly oppressed nationalities, women and others, and hold discussion and struggle with them on these decisive questions."¹⁶

In contrast, in this Soviet text on education, the notion of the importance of extracurricular activity is similarly slanted. Field trips, of course, are *de rigueur*, and the teacher is encouraged to allow especially apt pupils to prepare lectures, etc. But all this has a very pat character – again, the similarity to the class trips to Washington, D.C. and to various imperialist shrines in the U.S. comes immediately to mind – and is far from actually plunging actively into the class struggle.

The Soviets also take note of the importance of labor, but the reasons adduced have nothing to do with narrowing the gap

between mental and manual labor, or making education serve proletarian politics; indeed, just the opposite. We are told that "this work helps pupils choose an occupation and, at the same time, introduces them to the general principles of work organization at a socialist production enterprise through the example of actual production." Again... U.S. educational reformers, take note!

The Rat Race, Soviet-Style

As in the openly capitalist societies, grades are used to train the students in a bourgeois attitude towards knowledge and in bourgeois values generally. Grades, along with entrance exams, determine what kind of job the student will get. High grades in grammar school funnel a student into an academic high school; high grades and good test scores lead from there to a higher education institution – the *vuz* – and from there to the middle or upper levels of Soviet society. Low grades, on the other hand, channel the student to technical school and manual labor – that is, to wage-slavery.

Why study? To get rich. Soviet sociologists are clear on this:

"Direct material stimulation is immediate reward for specific activity through increased pay. Indirect stimulation is not connected with such direct reward; it is rather, the individual's hope that he may improve his material situation, by say, increased skill or productivity. In the final analysis, both material and moral incentives aim to implant a correct social evaluation of education and to develop among youth the aspiration to increase their knowledge."¹⁷

What all this pseudo-scientific claptrap comes down to is promotion of "me-first" bourgeois ideology through Pavlovian behaviorism, plus the "socialist" part of helping society through doing a good job of helping yourself. Play the game well and you will be rewarded. The moral incentives spoken of are not those of communist morality serving the struggle to liberate all of humanity, but the bourgeois morality of the chase after commodities. These are the high aspirations and so-called "socialist consciousness" instilled by the workings of the education system.

A young Soviet woman described this scramble for "rewards" in *Moscow Women*:

"In the beginning, it wasn't too bad, but the older I became the worse it got. When I reached the eighth or ninth grade I could hardly stand it any longer... You know, our system is antiquated. They don't beat us the way they did under the czars, but otherwise nothing has changed. The system forces us to learn things by rote, to study without understanding. It's very seldom a teacher tries to arouse the students' interest in anything. Everyone is required to learn the

same thing and think in the same way. And the hysteria over marks is horrible. Even seven- and eight-year-olds strive for high marks, and many are beaten if they come home with D's and F's. There's a terrible ruckus in school as well if someone gets a bad mark. The teachers yell and the students have to go to meetings and stuff like that to discipline them. That must absolutely be the worst way to get a child to learn something."¹⁸

The grading system teaches the students to shrewdly calculate their market value, and to identify that with their essence, their very *raison d'être*, or at the least their worth as humans. The message is made clear — those who are not trained to run the maze well are worth less, and the working class is worth least of all. Knowledge is private property, something to be hoarded rather than shared, used to raise one's selling price rather than revolutionize the world. The explicit lip service paid to rule of the proletariat, the nobility of manual labor, and so on — which is admittedly quite prevalent in the Soviet school system — counts for little against the content of the entire practice of the Soviet education system. At best it amounts to making a minor icon of The Skilled Tradesman.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities have historically played an important part in the Soviet educational system; especially before the recent introduction of "options" or elective courses in the late '60s — essentially a method to give some students the "option" of college-prep courses and others the "option" of vocational ed — these were the main way of giving specialized college preparatory instruction to students in general schools.¹⁹ While the stated aim of these activities is the all-around education of the youth, this too is aimed toward nurturing "special talents" among the better students while others take up more ordinary interests. The after-school clubs generally focus on subjects such as math, science, etc., and aim to give the students accelerated work outside the "egalitarian" curriculum of the general school. Obviously it's not wrong for students to pursue special interests in, say, science or language, but the role of these clubs is to enhance the practice and view of increasing personal capital through specializing in a prestigious field at an early age. The heavy emphasis on academics from the 6-day school week to the 3-4 hours recommended daily homework, to the addition of "clubs" which essentially prime the students for college entrance exams, all point to the revisionists' view that an advanced youth is one who has his/her nose stuck in a book at all times.

In addition to school clubs are children's sections of Palaces and Houses for Pioneers and Schoolchildren. These often have special circles in math, science, astronomy, and languages for the "academically gifted" who can only get in based on entrance requirements of good grades. Testimonials

from circle leaders give an added boost for *vuz* (higher-education institution) entry. These are much more accessible in the major cities than in rural areas and much more so in the European republics. There are also the extracurricular Young People's Mathematics Schools with selective admission that teach engineering design, electronics, and computer technology, as well as mathematics. Attendance and hard work are obligatory at these schools; in fact at some, applicants have to produce medical certificates showing they can take the pace! There are also Little Academies with faculties of architecture and construction, geology and geophysics, biogeography, math and physics, chemistry, medicine, history, foreign languages, literature, and journalism.²⁰

From a bourgeois point of view these extracurricular activities show the excellence of Soviet education. All these activities lay heavy stress on pushing youth to find a specialty at an early age and pursue it. No doubt those who lack such an earnest revisionist view of life lose out on the ladder to personal gain and fame as an adult. The Puritan work ethic is alive and well in the Soviet Union.

While the official "egalitarian" policy has all the students for the first eight grades sit in the same class irregardless of their marks, the splitting of them socially into those who "diligently study" the great majority of their time and the "laggards" and goof-offs who just want to have fun after school and on weekends is bound to be encouraged by the set-up itself without ever having to say an official word. This social division is carried into the openly tracked high-school system where the technical schools report a much greater problem with discipline — absenteeism, lack of respect, alcoholism — than in the general schools.

Political Education

Thus far we have focused on the ideological viewpoint inculcated in the students of the Soviet school system. At the same time, in any educational system there is also an important role for direct political training. Political education in the early grades in the Soviet system is strikingly similar in essence to that of the U.S. They have various rituals whose messages concern patriotism: "how lucky we are to have it so good," "working hard for ourselves, our family, our collective and our country," etc. In certain respects the form is closer to fundamentalist bible schools in the U.S., without the corporal punishment, than to the general run of the public schools. The children may be too young for study of the revisionist version of the "science" of Marxism-Leninism, but they can still be inculcated with the devotion of a penitent to the state religion.

The "life and activities of Lenin" is a main focal point of political education throughout all grades. Jacoby, an American writer who lived in the Soviet Union, describes it:

"Lenin is an adequate substitute for any gods the children might desire. My first impression of the similarity between Soviet schools and the Roman

Catholic schools I attended as a child was reinforced by the 'shrines' to Lenin in nearly every kindergarten classroom. Each room would have a portrait of Lenin surrounded by fresh flowers and ribbons, usually placed on a small table beneath the picture. Sometimes there would be a popular picture of Lenin with children on his knee, reminding me of my old schoolroom pictures of Jesus the Good Shepherd."²¹

Lenin's main attribute for consumption by children, according to the revisionists, is his concern for the welfare of the people – a kindly old uncle. To increase the active involvement and interest of the children in studying and "believing in" this benevolent old man, the students sing songs and make field trips to different places connected with Lenin.

"Teachers read stores about Dyadya Lenin (Uncle Lenin) and his love and concern for children. The children sing songs about Lenin. The five- and six-year-olds make excursions to different places connected with the life of Lenin... their teacher told them: This spot is where Dyadya Lenin made one of his most important speeches to the workers. They were people just like your parents, and he told them in our country from that day on, no children would ever be hungry. There were children like you who had never seen white bread. They would not have recognized the candy and ice cream which you have for dessert. Dyadya Lenin dreamed of a world in which all these things would seem ordinary to children like you and his dream has come true."²²

So here we have Lenin as father of "ice cream communism," completely stripped of his revolutionary line and spirit.

In the eighth grade all students take a course called "Fundamental Principles of the Soviet State and Law," which is roughly equivalent to "civics" or "Constitution" courses in the U.S. This is the first formal political-education course the students take. An extremely enlightening (and self-exposing) article, "V.I. Lenin and the Teaching of State Law to Youth," appeared in a 1980 journal of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. The article is written for teachers in pedagogical institutes who teach political education courses, and itself is an excellent example of using the "bible verse" method of so-called Marxism – quoting phrases from Lenin as an authority totally out of context to make this or that revisionist point. The article goes into the need for the "Teaching of State Law" course and what purpose it hopes to accomplish:

"In recent years our country has developed and implemented a number of basic measures to intensify the law education of youth. The program for this activity was formulated in Comrade L.I. Brezhnev's well-known words that 'respect for the law must become everyone's personal conviction.'"

And,

"Moral education creates the necessary prerequisite for instilling a deep respect for the authority of the law, and education about the law affirms communist morality in everyday life." ²³

Any why is it so important for the youth to have such a "deep respect for the authority of the law"?

"Teaching the 'Fundamental Principles of the Soviet State and Law' promotes more active participation of school youth in the maintenance of public order. It is illustrative that in the last two years, the number of young Dzerzhinski-ites and Young Friends of the Police[!] has increased more than 1.5 fold and is now over 50,000."²⁴

The article goes on to criticize schools that try to avoid introducing children to involvement as finks and enforcers through such things as "school monitor duty, order and discipline patrols... and Friends of the Police." It then cites the "gap between books and practical life that Lenin warned against" as the theoretical justification for the practice of ratting. This would be laughable if it weren't so reactionary. Not only is the nature of this course completely reactionary but they utterly distort Lenin's line on education to justify their aims.

Using Lenin as the ultimate authority and god-like fixture is one of the main ways the revisionists operate to keep the thin veneer of socialism in place. For example, another reason cited in the above article for the importance of legal knowledge for youth is that Lenin studied law and was himself a lawyer, and that further, "Lenin had a profound knowledge of Soviet legislation and was interested in its development down to the finest detail." Well, of course. He was leading the Bolshevik Party at the time the proletariat seized power and moved to completely abolish the tsarist and bourgeois superstructure and, for the first time in the world, replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat – meaning whole new institutions, laws, etc. This socialist superstructure was an historical first and it was necessary for the laws to reflect new and arising social relations from the communist point of view. So, of course, Lenin paid a lot of attention to such important matters. But from this reality is abstracted the notion that "Lenin was interested in laws" and the unsaid conclusion – therefore you should be interested too. Then to make this analysis appear "materialist" the following is added, "Naturally this [Lenin's interest] was not an interest in abstract legal pseudo-science, remote from life. He was interested in the striking precision of legal formulations." This is the theoretical basis for requiring eighth-graders to memorize current revisionist legal formulations, just as U.S. eighth-graders memorize the Constitution, Bill of Rights, etc. The article concludes:

"Further development of Lenin's ideas on the education of youth in a spirit of civic-mindedness, deep respect for law and intolerance of lawbreaking, and

improvement in the forms and methods of this work is one of the prerequisites for a state of society in which people become accustomed to observing elementary social rules that have been known for centuries and have been repeated for millennia in all the written maxims governing communal living."²⁵

This whole use of Lenin was anticipated, albeit unknowingly, by Lenin himself, in his famous opening to *The State and Revolution*:

"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their teachings with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to surround their names with a certain halo for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time emasculating the essence of the revolutionary teaching, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it."²⁶

In high school the revisionists' version of history is studied. The major history text is *History of the USSR*. After each chapter, students are required to regurgitate the material by answering such stirring questions as "How did our country prepare for the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution?" and "How did the representatives of other countries feel about the USSR's jubilee?" The same text is used throughout the Soviet Union, and it clearly upholds the Great Russian domination of the oppressed nationalities as part of an overall social-imperialist view of the world. One stark example is the treatment of the liberation struggles of the Kazakh people against tsarist annexation and enslavement. Before the revisionists seized power and rewrote the history books, these struggles were upheld as powerful revolutionary-nationalist uprisings. According to the "revised" history, this movement "was a reactionary, feudal-monarchical manifestation, aimed at holding the Kazakh people back and strengthening the patriarchal-feudal system, working toward the alienation of Kazakhstan from Russia and the Russian people."²⁷

Not surprisingly high-school literature classes also introduce revisionist politics at every opportunity. Here again, we find the fascination with Lenin's life both as a method of promoting him as a great man — minus his sweeping communist line — and as a ludicrous exercise in rote thinking. The following is a sample:

"An article on the teaching of Russian in Ukrainian schools suggested several activities to whet the students' appetite for Russian literature. In a lesson on Chekhov, the pupils might 'independently look for facts in the articles of V.I. Lenin . . . in order to complete an assignment on the theme: "Chekhovian im-

ages in the works of V.I. Lenin." The ninth-graders of another school completed a three-step assignment on the works of the nineteenth-century poet Nekrasov. The purposes were: (1) To select material testifying to the fact that Lenin liked the poetry of Nekrasov. (2) To select facts characterizing the influence of the works of Nekrasov on Soviet poetry. (3) To establish facts to support the conclusions: The poetry of Nekrasov is close to us, the Soviet people."²⁸

This approach to literature seems guaranteed to turn off the students to Lenin, Chekhov, and Nekrasov. By the way, the method of question number 3, of finding facts to support an *a priori* conclusion is a fairly common method of teaching in the Soviet Union. This is the kind of "creative" thinking that is promoted.

At the *vuz* level, for the first time students take up serious and concentrated study of the history of the Communist Party of the USSR, political economy, and so-called historical and dialectical materialism. These are required courses for all students regardless of specialty, and amount to about 10 percent of their total course load. Here both the primary works of Marx and Lenin are studied, along with a heavy dose of the latest directives of the party and the current leaders' interpretation of philosophy and political economy. It is quite striking that no one else in society except college students, professors, and party functionaries actually studies these subjects directly, especially reading actual works of Marx and Lenin and not just one-sentence quotes. Lenin's works are portrayed broadly to the masses as extremely difficult to read and grasp — that in order to understand what he's saying you have to know everything about the particular situation he was writing about and for this it is best to have an interpreter. Heaven knows, only experienced scholars and high-level revisionists can interpret Lenin's works correctly. The ordinary person might make the mistake of getting the essence of what he was saying.

The fact that Marxist works are only studied after years of revisionist indoctrination in the grade school and high school makes you wonder if it is not a conscious method of the social-imperialists to both bore and mystify the students for years with the so-called "Marxist-Leninist" catechism so that by the time they are old enough to read it for themselves, either all interest has been squelched or else the views of Marx and Lenin have become so distorted that the theory is rendered harmless. But even when Marxist theory of sorts is studied at the university level, theory is something to be memorized, the "truth" to be swallowed whole and regurgitated. For example, college students who are training to be teachers of social studies and Soviet law courses are offered courses that teach you how to find an appropriate quote from Lenin on just about any subject, putting the official blessing on the "bible verse" method of instruction in "Leninism."

Yet, this is a society where supposedly the working class rules. One of the major revolutionary transformations of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China was the widespread study of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung

Thought by the broad masses of all ages. No dry, boring subject restricted to the classroom, the masses were mobilized to take up revolutionary theory as a weapon in the class struggle and apply it to all spheres. Workers', peasants', and students' study circles sprang up, which studied and debated the major struggles and often wrote up theoretical contributions applying that theory to production, science, and class struggle. But in the Soviet Union the "gifted and talented" run the party and state on behalf of the workers. This elite, as well as the intellectuals and technicians, are schooled in the theory of revisionist ideology and politics to use it as a club over the heads of the masses. As in every sphere of political life, the revisionists have creatively adapted the science of revolution to fit the practice of social-imperialism.

One cannot do justice to Soviet political education without taking some note of the rather pervasive military education. The 1967 new Law on Military Service, which reduced the length of service by one year, instituted preinduction military training for children of fifteen and older. The Soviet organization DOSAAF — the Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation and the Navy — claims to have about 80 million members. According to the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*:

"[M]ilitary-patriotic education is called upon to instill a readiness to perform military duty, responsibility for strengthening the defense capability of the country, respect for the Soviet Armed Forces, pride in the Motherland and the ambition to preserve and increase the heroic traditions of the Soviet people. . . . Of great significance for military-patriotic education is the mastery of basic military and military-technical skills which young people acquire in secondary schools, technical schools, higher educational establishments, in studies at the houses of defense and technical creativity, aero-, auto- and radio clubs, at the young technicians' stations, in military-patriotic schools, defense circles, at points of preinduction training, in civil defense formations."²⁹

Mass military training is hardly bourgeois or imperialist *per se*; indeed, all genuine socialist societies have relied on arming the masses both politically and militarily. The context of Soviet society in which this training occurs is what mainly stamps it as imperialist. Beyond that, we note that observers have commented on the specifically patriotic thrust of this education in the Soviet Union and the ways in which the actual training seems to be designed toward slotting youth into one or another specialty of the imperialist armed forces, rather than schooling them in proletarian politics and proletarian military science.

Soviet Education and the Social Division of Labor

All this — the ideological and political training, in all its variegated forms, open and hidden — speaks directly to the underlying role of the Soviet educational system, i.e., broadly inculcating the bourgeois-revisionist outlook in the youth. At the same time, like all good imperialist education systems, it accomplishes this in the course of training, that is, aiding in the reproduction of the social division of labor, and most particularly in the reproduction of bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Tracking

The Soviets have an official prohibition against tracking, a prohibition which they have formally maintained despite various "innovations" which in reality have instituted tracking. This prohibition was initiated by the Bolsheviks as part of their revolutionary program in education following seizure of power. It was continued under Stalin and was viewed as one of the principles of socialist education. To openly toss this out the window on a policy level and argue that students should be tracked from grade school on up, into tracks leading to various occupational levels, would tear away some of the facade which the revisionists keep up to make a differentiation between their so-called "socialist" system and capitalism. Each time the revisionists have further widened the gap between "ordinary" students and "gifted" students, the majority line of the CPSU has been to carefully try to find justification under a "socialist" signboard.

Yet the formal prohibition cannot cover the actual function and practice of the school system which ends up efficiently "guiding" children into their proper place in society. No doubt the revisionists would object to this characterization. They can show that a substantial minority of university students are children of industrial workers and a lesser share from the agricultural workers. In fact, in some higher education institutions a majority are from worker families. They argue that since all tuition and fees are free and students receive a living stipend, tracking by income level is impossible.

But it is not true that capitalism, especially when it reaches the stage of imperialism, has to keep the workers and peasants all uneducated, nor that a certain percentage of them cannot be drawn into the ranks of professions that demand a college degree. In fact the need for a relatively educated laboring class historically differentiated capitalism from feudalism. The need to bring some workers into the ranks of technicians and professionals even becomes more pressing when those occupations are developing and expanding.

But the upward mobility of a minority of the working class does not negate the fact that the proletariat as a class continues to exist within imperialist society, as does the contradiction between mental and manual labor. And as we shall see later on, the "democratization" of the Soviet education system is

highly exaggerated. In the most prestigious universities, students from the industrial workers form a much smaller percentage than those from the intelligentsia and bureaucracy, and those from the peasantry a tinier percentage still.

The widespread stratification of the Soviet education system does not depend on blatant tracking, although tracking in fact exists. But there is also the use of grades and exams in determining access to higher education, the already existing advantages for the children of intellectuals and of technical strata on entering the school world, and the competitive race for a limited number of spaces that all serve to reinforce the class divisions in Soviet society and the split between mental and manual labor. At best the Soviet system aspires to a bourgeois model of gradually building "equal opportunity" for the children of any stratum to grow up and become a bigshot or overlord.

The exacerbation of the mental/manual contradiction in the Soviet Union begins at the earliest grades – at the entry to school at age seven. While the majority of grammar schools are considered "egalitarian," i.e., students of varying "abilities" sit in the same class, the fact that children come to school with various backgrounds, combined with the type of curriculum, favors certain social strata over others.

The curriculum is a classical academic one: the 3 Rs plus music and art in the primary grades, and the 3 Rs plus heavy emphasis on math and science in the upper elementary grades. These are taught in rote fashion and based on bourgeois methods and viewpoint. Thus, those children with parents who have a more academic background tend as a group to "naturally" adapt to the situation and do better than those who do not. In addition to this group are those students who accept and excel at the bourgeois ideology of the system at an early age, who commit themselves to working hard at rote learning and learn for the sake of "making it," who go along with the program and are "good little boys and girls." If they pursue this and get good grades, children of industrial and farm workers can also "do well" (relative to others in the working class) in school, but this still does not change the fact that the education system streams working-class children overwhelmingly into the working class while children of the middle and upper strata overwhelmingly stay in those strata.

We have seen the emphasis placed by the Soviet education system on adapting to societal norms and assimilating knowledge as it is fed to them. Those who adjust to this bourgeois mold are considered "bright" and "gifted" and are rewarded with good grades. In the primary grades it is already mainly apparent which children will be headed toward the academic future, which toward skilled jobs, and which toward unskilled jobs.

Special Grammar Schools

Alongside the so-called egalitarian policy applied to the general grade school is the policy for "talented" or "gifted" students. Special schools are set up which only admit "excep-

tional" students, starting in the first grade and continuing all the way through high school.

In the mid- to late-1960s there was a great expansion of special schools, especially language schools. These were set up overwhelmingly in the big cities. They were established to train cadres of future diplomats, dealers in international commerce, translators to serve them, etc. They concentrated on English and other main European languages.

Admission is highly selective – the pupils entering the school at first grade (age seven) must take an entrance exam to get in. A Soviet journalist compares the commotion around getting into such a school to that around Moscow State University at entrance exam time:

"Smartly turned-out children go before an incomprehensible and consequently still more terrifying committee, whose job it is to find out their aptitude for foreign languages, by listening to their poems and hearing them describe little pictures."³⁰

Of course, right off the bat, children whose parents speak a European language or English to them or read them poems and stories, or whose parents can afford and have the connections to send their child to the special foreign-language nursery schools – i.e., the children of the intellectuals and party elite – will have an added edge. By going to these special schools they have a much better chance to get admitted to the *vuzy*. The average *vuz* entrance rate in 1968 was 65.7% of language-school graduates compared with 25% of youth leaving all Soviet secondary day schools. And at certain language schools an 80% admission rate is reported. About 1 in 150 Soviet pupils attends one of these language schools, and while the authorities try to play down the fact that these are special schools, they are elite and highly sought after, as is expressed in this excerpt from a short story by Yuri Trifonov:

"Nataska became a schoolgirl. The special English school in Utinyi Lane, object of desire and envy, gauge of parents' love and their readiness to go to any lengths. A different microdistrict! It was almost unthinkable. And it would have been too much for anyone but Lena [the mother]. Because she got her teeth into what she wanted like a bulldog."³¹

Such are the high aspirations championed by revisionism. This story was not at all criticizing Lena but rather typifying a common experience and aspiration. For all the talk of "socialist consciousness," this is quite naturally the product of a system that makes developing your labor power to sell at the highest price the name of the game.

"Marxist" Explanation for Tracking

The official "Marxist" explanation dreamed up by the revisionists to justify their rapid expansion of special schools and

tracking is that this policy is an application of the socialist principle "from each according to his ability to each according to his work."

This is an utter perversion of Marx, who saw that principle as transitional and almost on the order of a necessary evil, and who in the same passage focused on the need to transcend humanity's "enslaving subordination to the division of labor" and to transform labor from an odious necessity into man's greatest want. Historically, revisionists have always emphasized and absolutized the second half of Marx's phrase (to each according to his work). They have emphasized material incentive, negated the "incentive" of communist revolutionary spirit and politics, and "forgotten" that Marx saw payment according to work as merely a transition to "to each according to need."

But leave it to the Soviets to creatively interpret the first half of Marx's principle, too. They twist the principle of "each according to his ability" to mean that some have more ability than others in subjects such as science, math, and foreign languages and that therefore they should not be "held back with ordinary students." Of course, some people might have a special talent for fixing tractors or pitching hay which doesn't require much schooling, so it would also be holding them back to keep them in school any more than the minimum since they won't have much use for knowledge of science and history . . . as they are not in the class which runs society! So what is left of Marx's slogan? Each in his own place making his own contribution to society according to job classification. And expect payment accordingly. A standard recipe for the status quo in all capitalist societies.

Labor power is a commodity in the Soviet Union, and from this fact flows the ideology of trying to develop your own commodity of labor power to the maximum degree so as to secure the highest price for it. For the masses, the school system offers at best nothing but a way to increase their exchange value on the market.

To further justify this state of affairs, the revisionists argue that people will have no incentive to learn if they can't parlay their knowledge into a direct personal material reward. In the article "What Is the Intention of People of the Lin Piao Type in Advocating 'Private Ownership of Knowledge'?", Chinese revolutionaries get to the heart of the matter: "As regards the allegation that knowledge will not be learned if private ownership of knowledge is criticized, this is but a major exposure of the reactionary nature of the bourgeoisie who contend for what is profitable and refuse to do anything unprofitable. . . ."32

Furthermore, while major and even rapid developments can and do take place under capitalism, knowledge as private property is ultimately a fetter on the development of science and culture:

"Because they are interested in personal fame and gain, they will not painstakingly pursue scientific truth for the revolution or brave difficulties and dangers to scale the pinnacles of science. With their minds filled with bourgeois ideas and the idealist or

metaphysical world outlook, their recognition and mastery of objective truth will also be affected. 'People are afraid of becoming famous and pigs are afraid of growing plump.' The idea of fame and gains often makes people with a little fame become timid and cowardly. They either look upon themselves as an 'authority' or repress the new things."³³

This line and practice leaves largely untapped the knowledge and creativity of the broad masses of people which the class struggle is the key catalyst for unleashing.

In the Soviet Union today in order to hold a position as a leader or manager, a person must first have a college degree. And not only a degree, but a degree in the proper specialty. So when high-school students apply to the university or institute, they not only apply to a particular school but to be accepted in a certain specialty. These specialties are ranked, as are the universities. To become a part of the upper echelon a person must go to one of the top universities. As we have seen, this process often begins years before.

To become a foreign diplomat, for example, a person would start at age seven in the foreign-language school, progress through such a school through high school and then apply to the prestigious Moscow Institute for International Relations for university training. This university is so exclusive that it is not listed in the manual of all higher-education institutions and their specialties available to college applicants. Admission is said to require a recommendation from a *raion* (a district equivalent to at least two U.S. counties or larger) party secretary, plus considerable influence, even at Central Committee level. A few other institutes, university faculties and military academies — some secret — may also resemble the Institute for International Relations in this respect.³⁴

Given this state of affairs it is not hard to understand the tremendous competition for *vuz* places at all levels, but especially for the top places. It is quite widely acknowledged that parents will use all their influence whether it is personal connections, political clout, or monetary bribery to get their child into the university. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported:

"Reliable and respected engineers and teachers, intelligent people who have been through the war and the period of reconstruction, suddenly lose their human dignity and become pitiable supplicants, blocking the doorways of rectors' offices and ministries, bombarding prominent friends with telephone calls and imploring almost on their knees: 'Get my daughter (or son) into an institute'. . . No stone is left unturned, from the exploitation of the names and the reputations of forebears to gambling with what are the most sacred values for us all."³⁵

Private coaches are hired by the vast majority of applicants who succeed, and they often charge upwards of \$10 an hour.

The entrance procedure consists of mainly oral exams in front of a panel, as well as taking into account high-school grades, recommendations, and awards. If an applicant doesn't

pass the exam of the specialty of their choice, she/he may be admitted to another *vuz* which has unfilled places and will accept lower marks. A quite clear ranking of specialties is inherent in the system. The admittance procedure is bound to favor those who have been favored all along through the tracking system, weeding out the vast majority of college-age youth.

"In the Leningrad region, which is already favored by virtue of being a major urban area, it was reported in 1969 that 73 percent of the children of 'intellectuals' secured daytime places at universities and technical colleges, while only 50 percent of industrial workers' children and 35 percent of agricultural workers' children did so. (These figures refer not to the population as a whole but to the social origins of high-school graduates *applying* to universities. This set of statistics sheds some light on the plight of farm children, since students on collective farms in the immediate region around Leningrad... have much more access to cultural amenities than students on ordinary farms located far away from large urban areas.)"³⁶

It should also be remembered that most children of workers and peasants don't even apply to the *vuz* and that many of the rural pupils who do get into higher-education institutions are the children of management of the farms.

Tracking into Manual Work

Given the heavy emphasis on personal status and "making it" into a prestigious job, it is not surprising that a large percentage of high-school students want to go on to higher education. Yet this presents a contradiction for the Soviet rulers since there are not nearly as many places available as there are applicants. This leads to cutthroat competition.

The economy still needs a large number of unskilled workers and the pool of youth coming out of school is the main source of new laborers for such positions. While society clearly holds that the valued goal is to be an expert or a bureaucrat (for which college education is mandatory), 73% of the workforce of the Soviet Union are manual workers.

In addressing this problem to the masses, the party uses its "socialist" facade to put forward hollow decrees and appeals to the youth on the "nobility" of manual work. When labor power is so clearly a commodity and more knowledge means a higher selling price, it is a contradiction for the youth to be exhorted (and now required) to receive a high-school education, when one will later be paid according to the value of unskilled labor not requiring such knowledge. On the other hand, many youth pay little attention to the idea of doing any kind of manual work and continue to aim for an academic career even though only 1 in 8 high-school graduates enter college.

A study done in 1973 of 792 school-leavers in the Cheremushki district in Moscow showed that only 16% actually wished to go out and work, although this was greatly at

odds with the requirements of the labor market. Of the 83.8% who planned to continue their education, 70% wished to go into *vuzy*; about 10% aimed at secondary special education institutions (which turn out skilled workers and semi-professionals); and a few percent looked to vocational training. The study also showed differences in aspirations between youth in different types of schools. Going to work was unpopular everywhere, but youth in the special schools were the least oriented towards it (1%) and in fact did go to work less than any others (26%). In the boarding schools where the "underprivileged" children predominated, while only 2% wanted to go to work, they had the highest percent actually going to work (54%), with only 12% who studied and 17% who worked and studied. *Pravda*, March 23, 1977, spoke about this contradiction:

"With the transition to universal secondary education, four-fifths of the general school leavers get jobs immediately after graduation. Yet the thrust of the school programme, that is, the content and scope of the curriculum, remains virtually the same. In fact, the 'modernization' of instruction that has been carried out in the last few years has intensified this one-sidedness. Is there any wonder that many pupils, teenagers especially, display indifference towards learning and the grades they receive, declaring, 'I won't get into an institute anyhow, and I don't need high grades to get a job'. . . . The times dictate that we redefine the pedagogical aim of present-day general secondary education."³⁷

What they then call for is even more specific job training in high school and in the general schools, which essentially means even heavier tracking, especially at the juncture between grade school and high school. Already there is a split after eighth grade where official tracking begins. Students then choose either to continue at the general school (which was in the past, and is still seen today, as the path to the *vuz*) or a technical high school where they can receive a general diploma as well as a trade certification. The increasing emphasis on job specialization at the high-school level would mean that most students would choose their life's manual career at age 15, while a small minority would choose theirs upon entering college.

The manual training which does exist in the general (i.e., college-prep) schools is aimed at diverting some of the students who aspire to college to self-track themselves towards manual jobs and to go to vocational high school instead of the general academic high school.

But the very pulling-and-pushing anarchy of imperialism militates against the efficient slotting of each student into the proper place. We have already examined the attitudes of the youth. In addition, teachers at the general schools object to manual training because it cuts into "academic standards." And managers of factories and farms don't want to bother with students working or learning in their enterprises because often the youth don't care about such work, and allowing students to

come in and work disrupts production and the almighty pursuit of profit. Despite the desires of the revisionists to get more youth to want to take up production jobs, production work by itself combined with bourgeois ideology will not change anyone's attitude towards "love of labor." No, those who end up there do so by the workings of the market, when they don't get accepted to the *vuz* or find any other way to get into the better-paying, more prestigious jobs.

Elite High Schools

The opposite side of the "streamlining students into manual jobs" line is the policy of elite high schools for "gifted" students. In the 1960s, schools for math and physics, computer technology, biology and agrobiolgy were established, in addition to the elite language schools spoken of earlier and special sports and arts schools. These schools, like the universities, have competitive entrance exams. They are elite in the sense that they take 15-year-olds who have already specialized in certain fields and give them further special (and hothouse) training which practically guarantees admittance to universities and then quite likely to graduate schools from which high positions are obtained.

Pupils at the math and physics schools have a 100% entry rate to *vuzy*. Pupils of language schools are three times as likely to enter *vuzy* as those at ordinary general schools (and it should be remembered that this figure excludes the many youth who go to technical high schools where there is a 0% entry rate to *vuzy*). Students at other special schools are three to four times as likely to be admitted.³⁸

For this elite, while their specialty is the main thing, the revisionists recognize the necessity to have all-around potential bourgeois retainers, thus necessitating a more all-around education than that of most students. An article from the periodical *Sovietskaia Pedagogika* deals with the broader education of these students:

"...Academicians Kolmogorov and Kokoli, Professor Smorodinski and other teachers constantly orient their students toward not being locked within the narrow boundaries of their specialty, and toward aspiring to be broadly educated and spiritually enriched people who love and understand creative literature and art and who are patriots of their socialist motherland and active participants in its social."³⁹

And what "socialist" phenomena are they talking about?

"[Kolmogorov] gave an interesting, richly illustrated lecture on Michelangelo Buonarroti. In the last school year he gave the student collective his record player and collection of classical music. Naturally, such an attitude on the part of the venerable mathematicians and physicists toward art and the humanities is transferred to the students."⁴⁰

Yes, indeed. Lock, stock and barrel — reverence for bourgeois culture handed down from venerable teacher to pupil. What better way to raise up the new generation of revisionist successors and flunkies to their new place in society and set them apart from the ranks of the "ordinary?"

As students progress through the two or three years of this special high school, their potential is assessed and then "it is determined by assessing the young people's aptitudes whether they should be trained as specialists in a restricted field, as all-rounders or as science administrators."⁴¹ Thus at age 17 they are elected a future in the intelligentsia or even the higher strata of the party.

One of the country's leading scientists and head of the math and physics high school at Akademgorodok in Siberia put the matter this way:

"There are different kinds of elite; the young people being educated at the FMSH (math and physics school) are not a hereditary intellectual aristocracy but represent the most talented and dedicated few who will have to undertake the most difficult problems and responsibilities. An elite, as we understand it in the Soviet Union, is the ornament of society, its pride, the best part of it."⁴²

We would agree that "hereditary" is not the crux of what an elite is, but it is worth noting that substantial percentages of the students at these schools just happen to be the children of mathematicians and other highly educated scientific parents of the Russian nationality. They are almost all from the cities. And it just so "happens" that the talented, creative youth of the Soviet Union are mostly male. In 1975 at Akademgorodok it was six males to every female. And the most favorable male to female ratio in all special high schools in the USSR was in Kiev, where it was 3 to 1.⁴³

Maintaining and Reinforcing the Rural/Urban Contradiction, National Oppression, and the Oppression of Women

Up to this point we have examined the education as it applies in general throughout the Soviet Union and to students in general. But it is further revealing to examine the education system in relation to the rural/urban contradiction, the national question (which interpenetrates with the rural/urban contradiction), and the woman question.

Rural

Rural schools are acknowledged by the Soviet authorities to be much inferior to those in the cities. Though a number of upgrading policies have been put forward, the conditions of life in general are more backward due to the dominance of the law of value, which causes agriculture to lag behind. There is still a need in the Soviet Union for a large number of unskilled agricultural workers who don't need much education to do their job, and this is reflected in the inferior quality of the rural schools. A teacher in a Siberian rural school described what she regarded as the typical rural student:

"Most of my children came from homes where the parents did not have a high-school education. There were no books in their homes, and they didn't have the opportunity to go to a kindergarten. Most of them had never been to a movie or a museum; they had radios but not television sets. The parents worked much longer hours than people do in the cities – very hard physical labor. Most of them didn't have the time or the energy to help their children with their homework, even if they wanted to. Most important of all, there were no people around to inspire them with the importance of learning. . . . Most of the children became high-school drop-outs. . . . I wanted to help change things when I came, but the older teachers – there were only three of us in our small school – said, 'You can't do anything. This is the way these people have lived for centuries.'"⁴⁴

The fact that the revisionists let the rural schools languish far behind the city schools, not expecting the children there to learn very much, is further shown through examining the condition of the school facilities and equipment. Jacoby interviewed a number of teachers who had returned from their two-year mandatory tours of duty spent in the rural schools (following graduation).

"They spoke of a 50% dropout rate before seventh-grade, one-room schoolhouses for children between the ages of seven and thirteen, severe textbook shortages and nonexistent equipment. 'I taught for two years in an elementary school in the far northeast,' one teacher told me. 'The first year, there were exactly four math textbooks and six reading books for fourteen students. The second year was the switch to the new curriculum and we were supposed to receive entirely new sets of textbooks. The textbooks for the year beginning in the fall of 1970 arrived in March of 1971.'"⁴⁵

Further, many of those who do gain an education and have been to the city do not want to return to the village. As of 1973, people in the Soviet Union born on farms were not issued internal passports. Without this passport they are not allowed to move to the city. One of the few legal ways to get

one is through admissions to the *vuz*. Letting too many youth off the farm to college would contribute to the labor shortage. Those rural youth who are encouraged to go to the *vuzy* are mainly trained in professions and vocations that are needed on the farm, since no one else wants to go there. It is almost unheard of for urban youth to choose a profession that would place them on a farm.

However, since rural education is so poor, few rural youth get into the institutes and thus the chance of getting any decently trained teachers to come to the village to stay (as opposed to consigning recent graduates for two years) is reduced, keeping the quality low.

The chairman of a rural Soviet executive committee in a mountainous area of Georgia wrote the following letter to *Izvestia* on the problem:

"Every year we prepare for the next semester of our school with loving care. We purchase fuel and repair the classrooms and the teachers' apartments. Recently we built an annex to the school to accommodate 150 students. When September 1 comes, however, our disappointment begins. What could be wrong? We await our teachers, but they do not arrive. When we address ourselves to the Ministry of Education in Grozny, reminding them of our request, they reply: 'There are not enough teachers in the republic, so give the ones you have more work and hire assistants.' That is what we are doing, since there is nothing else we can do. What troubles us most, however, is that not one of the twenty-seven graduates of our school last year was admitted to a (teacher-training) institute. Through your newspaper we would like to ask just when the Ministry of Education will send teachers to our school."⁴⁶

And Georgia has the best education throughout its republic of all the republics in the Soviet Union, including the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic!

The following letter which appeared in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* illustrates the contradictions faced by the rural youth trying to gain admission to the *vuz*:

"I live in a village. When I come to the city I often see the announcements glued on special boards: 'I give lessons in physics, apply at the following address. . . .' 'I am looking for a tutor in. . . .' The pages of the city newspapers are also full of such notices. A strange feeling is created. It seems, then, that the skills you received in school are something unreal, while for 'cash' they'll force authentic knowledge into your head and then you'll definitely get into an institute.

"This is one side of the case. There is another. What should we do, the villagers? Young men and women who grow up here also dream about one or another institute and also deserve to receive a higher education. Where are they to find coaches? We have

no professors or Ph.D. candidates in our villages. Here it is difficult just to find good teachers. Who will prepare our children for entrance to the institute?

"Even without this [coaching] the village school is behind the city schools. Here the people often complain: the teacher is not as good, and the equipment is not the same, and the libraries do not compare at all with those in the city. The village children, especially those who live far away from the regional roads, are deprived of museums, theaters, lectures. Consequently their preparation is already worse. But in addition to all these other things, one must add 'the competition of the purse. . . .'"⁴⁷

The revisionists have from time to time set up some experimental programs to provide special tutoring for the rural students mainly for cosmetic purposes, but these programs were abandoned after a year or two, being summed up as too expensive. The reality is that it is not in the interests of the revisionists to make higher education a reality for rural children since they don't need it for their manual jobs and it would only continue the already serious exodus to the cities. As with the mental/manual contradiction, the division between city and countryside is not viewed as a political contradiction — one of relations between people — nor are the masses called upon or politically mobilized to struggle to narrow these divisions. It is all a matter of balancing and planning at the top, with profit and the political needs of *social-imperialism* as the key criteria, to try to even out the worst consequences of this inevitable schism.

National Question

The problem of poor quality education producing a dearth of teachers native to the rural areas is related to the national question. Many of the teachers, especially in the Central Asian republics (which have 50% of the schoolchildren in the USSR), are university graduates of the Slavic nationalities doing their two-year compulsory work stint. Most have no intention of staying in these areas after their mandatory work assignment is up and they have little understanding or sympathy for the culture of the people. Since they do not know the native language, they teach only in Russian. Thus, children entering school for the first time who already have little contact with books, libraries, museums, television, and movies are also confronted with a teacher who does not speak their language and books written in a foreign language. Jacoby relates the following example of this situation:

"I met two young Russian women who were students at a teacher-training institute in Kustanai, a city of approximately 100,000 in Kazakhstan. One was the daughter of an army colonel, the other the daughter of an engineer. They had both lived in Kazakhstan for

seven years and they were studying to become secondary-school English teachers. One of the girls pulled out a snapshot of her English class of fifty students. She proudly drew my attention to the one Tatar and the two Kazakhs in the group. . . the other students in the picture were obviously Russian or of some other 'European' origin; yet Kazakhs and minorities like the Tatars make up over half the republic's population.

"Neither of the girls spoke Kazakh, and they expected that all the Kazakh high-school students who were studying English would already speak excellent Russian. '[Kazakh] is a very difficult language,' one of the girls said, 'and I won't really need it. Kazakh is my third language, and it would be much too difficult for me to teach English to students who did not speak Russian.' Her statement illustrates the difficulties any minority-group student would encounter unless he mastered Russian at an early age."⁴⁸

The policy of the revisionists since their first major reform, the Education Reform of 1958, has been one of forcible assimilation and Great Russian chauvinism in the form of Russification of the oppressed nations — suppressing the languages of the oppressed nationalities through such things as teaching only in Russian, or demanding that Russian be taught wherever another language is taught (but not vice versa). One Soviet text declares, "Groups of people who have changed their language, in the course of time, usually also change their ethnic [national] identity."⁴⁹

Since 1958 the trend has been more and more to teaching only in Russian at earlier and earlier grades, although Russian is theoretically elective. The Russian language is the official language of the Soviet Union. It is the medium of communication between the central government and that of the republics. To enter any institution of higher education, the applicant must demonstrate a mastery of the Russian language. Although, again theoretically, a student has a right to be taught in his/her native language in the *vuz*, this rarely happens since there are not the appropriate professors fluent in the language.

Almost all managerial and technical jobs demand mastery and use of Russian and since these jobs require a college diploma, which also requires mastery of Russian, this reinforces the use of Russian. In Central Asia it is a particularly stark situation. Almost all the people in professional positions are Slavs — predominantly Russians, while the native people work on the farms and other unskilled jobs. Here the "benign neglect" of the schools cited earlier stands out quite clearly as part of the process of enforced Russification. The children are given such a poor education that even those who receive their primary education in their native language most often drop out after eight grades, so there are very few who go on to higher education. Of those who do go to the *vuz*, most are siphoned off for various reasons.

The policy of Russification is in sharp opposition to policies carried out under Lenin and Stalin (at least until WW2). Then the native language was encouraged and in some

languages for the first time an alphabet was developed and put into written language. A conscious effort was made to develop teachers from the republics to teach in the native languages.

Today in the Soviet Union, grade-school texts are still translated into the main minority languages, but the translation of secondary textbooks lags way behind and text translations for smaller language groups have lower priority. One official in Moscow bluntly stated, "Is it so bad to expect a high-school student to study science in Russian? Let's face facts - Uzbek isn't going to be an international scientific language."⁵⁰ What better statement of the oppressor mentality and Great Russian chauvinism of the Soviet revisionists?

While the overall trend is towards rapid Russification, there are differences in the success of this among different nationalities and in different republics. Most of the smaller nationalities in the Russian Republic are not taught in their native language at all any more and the others only in the earliest grades together with the Russian language.

In the urban centers of the minority-nationality republics there are many Russians and Russian is the official language of all state business. The pull away from education in the native language is helped along both by the Russians working in these areas, who only send their children to Russian schools, and the non-Slavic parents who want their children to make it into scientific or technical jobs requiring university degrees (which require Russian). This leaves the workers and peasants in what national-language schools that do exist. The end result is a clearcut class difference along national lines in the quality of the education received.

At this time the continuation of instruction in a child's native language is continued mainly for the purpose of easing the child into the transition to Russian, much as is done in bilingual education when it is offered in the U.S. It is not to preserve and develop the culture of the minority nationalities and enhance their ability to contribute to society in all spheres, but rather to aid in enforcing a "peaceful transition" to the complete dominance of Russian and Russians in all spheres of the Soviet state.

Woman Question

In the Soviet Union, women make up 51% of *vuz* students. After Finland this is the second highest percentage in the world. This is often advertised by the Soviets as another reason why their "socialist" system is superior to Western imperialism.

History, as well as the particular problems and needs of social-imperialism, plays an important role in this. The Bolsheviks after 1917, led by Lenin and then by Stalin in the later 20s and '30s, fought hard to bring women into the economic and political life of the society. Universal literacy was basically achieved in this period. Quotas were set aside in the *vuzy* for women workers and peasants, not only in traditionally women's fields but in scientific and technical fields as well.

Then with the preparation for and outbreak of WW2, women were called upon to take up even more responsibility

in the running of the economy since most men were mobilized in the armed forces. At that time the percentage of women in all schools was at its highest, for example, 77% in the *vuzy*.

The tremendous loss of life in the Soviet Union during that war left the country with a severe labor shortage, especially in jobs that were still mainly done by men - so women continued to be called upon to work in almost every field, both mental and manual, and this was reflected in the education system.

When the revisionists seized power, the labor shortage caused by WW2 still existed and was forecast to continue for a long period because fewer children had been born to the WW2 generation during and after the war. Mainly because of this and because the socialist tradition of women working outside the home had been firmly established, the revisionists did not demand that women quit working outside the home, but rather used the precedents achieved under the dictatorship of the proletariat to serve the needs of the bourgeoisie. Few job barriers not crossed before the revisionists took over have been crossed by women since that time, and the breakdown of sex ratios in various fields of study, especially in the vocational schools and the *vuzy*, reflects that.

From raw statistics of participation in schools and the workforce, women have equality to a higher degree in the Soviet Union than in the U.S. However, scratch the surface of this picture and you will find the bedrock on which the profound oppression of women rests intact and upheld by the social-imperialists - woman as the primary caretaker and provider of the basic maintenance needs of the family. Not surprisingly this is also reflected and reinforced in the education of the younger generation.

Soviet social theory, as well as social practice, claims that men and women have innate personality and psychological differences which result in women being naturally more nurturant, emotional, supportive of others, modest, and restrained than men. Women have a knack for household work and men do not. Women are good at taking care of others' needs, men are not. This theory reflects the actual sex-stereotyped roles of women and men in Soviet society.

Even without the reinforcement of the education system, this ideological and political line is no doubt powerfully (though often wordlessly) conveyed to the youth through example and tradition. However, the education system *does* play an important role in promoting these ideas. The most blatant way is in sex-differential courses. For example, in the upper grades of grammar school, girls take the equivalent of U.S. junior-high home ec and boys take "shop" for their "labor" courses. In high school, during the compulsory military courses, boys get combat training and girls take first aid.

But there are also more veiled, pervasive, and effective ways of promoting women's oppression in the education system, through concentrating and reflecting the status quo in the daily lessons. A recent study of early-grades Soviet textbooks by a U.S. sociologist shows a definite sex-role bias. In the USSR all textbooks come from the central education ministry and are written with very conscious goals in mind, not only for the grammar or alphabet or math, but also for the

political content and "moral lessons" to be conveyed. This is not an aberration but a conscious promotion of women's oppression to the children and youth. The author of this study states that:

"The findings are dramatic: the stories present a view of adult males as sources of directive and instructive behavior, altruistic, and politically involved. The male has a favorable self-image and is concerned with his advancement. He has potential for leadership. Though male children are sometimes selfish and anti-social, this is not true of male adults. A boy rarely engages in nurturant behavior and only infrequently participates in household tasks. The adult female, on the other hand, is heavily involved in traditional household tasks and nurturance in these stories. Women tend to be presented as emotionally expressive and supportive of the advancement of others, though relatively unconcerned with their own self-advancement. They tend to be careless. They also engage in more passive activities (reading, sitting, watching) than men do. Not only are they uninvolved politically, they are actually politically naive."⁵¹

The one story in the four reading books studied that had a female as the central character in an overtly "political" story was "Tania, the Revolutionary." While the girl herself is a heroine and saves her father from the tsar's police, her mother is "in no way involved with her husband's underground activities, is ignorant of the plans for an armed uprising and is so thoroughly frightened of his participation that he reprimands her: 'You are chattering nonsense! Are you not the wife of a Bolshevik? You dare to be a coward!'" According to the study, this type of adult woman is not at all unusual in the stories. For example, in another story about the Bolsheviks before the revolution, the only female character in the story does three things: "She 'silently prepares dinner,' she lies to the detective who comes to confiscate the leaflets and she cries after the detective departs."⁵²

But more telling is that the main concentration of stories with women as the central characters was around International Women's Day, which in the Soviet Union has been reduced to their version of Mothers Day. Of the 23 separate stories and poems in the four readers studied, 19 were concerned with women identified as mothers and most of these were "eulogies to mothers." Only one story, about Krupskaya, was about a woman in the revolution.⁵³

There were numerous stories involving characters and their occupations. It is interesting to note that of all the occupations listed, more than twice as many involved male characters as female — a typical proportion especially as the stories become more complicated. Of these, the characters overwhelmingly follow the occupational breakdown in society, and in fact exaggerate it.

Another aspect of the education system which reinforces and promotes the oppression of women is that almost all the teachers in the nurseries, kindergartens, and grammar

schools are women, a clear statement to the children that it is the women's job to take care of the children. In the general high schools women still predominate, while in the vocational high schools men predominate. The student body of these technical schools which produce skilled workers is also overwhelmingly male. This is especially true in the rural areas. A survey done in 1970 in four European *oblasti* found that 90.3% of the students in the rural technical schools were male.⁵⁴ In another study it was revealed that not a single girl was accepted into the six agriculture mechanics schools in the Smolensk *oblast* in 1965, yet at that time 60% of the agricultural labor force of the *oblast* was female. Even where there is a 30% rate of acceptance to the technical high schools (in the cities) women mainly enter into trades connected to the garment industry or other concentrations of female labor.⁵⁵

Often this tracking of male and female students into mainly male- or female-dominated occupations happens "naturally." The clearcut sex roles in society as well as the subtle and not so subtle steering by parents, teachers, and fellow students lead spontaneously to a sex-typed division of labor.

However, there is blatant discrimination as well. Here the form is not based on an officially stated belief that women are too stupid, or too fragile, or not mathematically inclined, etc., but directly on her role as potential (or actual) mother. Reasons given are that she would take off days to be with a sick child (it is unheard of for a man to do such a thing), that she would not relocate for the job, or might have to relocate because of her husband's job, that she would not be able to keep up with new developments in a profession because of the time spent on her "home job." Since higher-education admissions quotas are based directly on state-projected quotas for fitting personnel into particular slots in the economy, requests from directors of industries for men-only are projected directly onto *vuzy* (as well as secondary technical school) admissions. A young Soviet woman relates her experience with the subtle and not so subtle tracking by sex:

"In school I said that I wanted to be a geologist, but I was told that it was better to be a geophysicist. But that didn't have anything to do with what I was dreaming about. It was the taiga, the campfires, and the other romantic stuff that attracted me. When I left school (high school) I didn't have any idea what to do. So finally I applied to a geological institute, but they didn't accept girls except as reserves. They said that girls would eventually have families, and a woman with a family couldn't be a real geologist. Since I wasn't accepted, I had to find something else. I didn't know where to turn to find a job, and didn't have a soul to ask or consult. Finally, I enrolled in a trade school to learn lathe work, a two-year course. There were only boys. I did okay even though I didn't exactly love it. I liked the work, but it was a strain to be the only girl. My group wasn't too happy to have me around, and the fact that I did well didn't help any."⁵⁶

She eventually dropped out.

The admission quotas by sex are often based on employers' orders. Employers may request only boys for jobs at which girls may be equally well-suited, according to a study by V.B. Mikhailiuk done in 1970. "As a result," she states, "girls study mainly those occupations in which simply by tradition female labor is widely employed."⁵⁷

Further, because girls tend to gravitate towards certain traditionally "feminine" professions like humanities and health sciences, there is a much greater competition among them for the limited number of places in the *vuzy*. A study done in 1968 of applications to five major *vuzy* in Leningrad found that there were twice as many female as male applicants, yet the actual enrollment showed an approximately equal number of men and women admitted. Eighty percent of the women applicants were not admitted, compared with 50% of the men.⁵⁸ The preference for males, even in female-dominated fields such as medicine, is defended on the basis of the greater long-range productivity and reliability of men who have no family responsibilities other than earning an income:

"Boys, and it is unfitting to conceal this, are accepted to medical institutions with a lower average than girls. . . . Girls occupy a more complex position in medicine than do boys: marriage, immobility for purposes of assignment, departures from work — temporary or permanent — when family interests outweigh professional considerations, especially when the family's material situation makes this possible. Boys may not always have deeper knowledge nor do they know how to apply it any better, but given time they become dependable workers."⁵⁹

The Soviet school system, in sum, both reflects and promotes the oppression of women.

Conclusion

Education is one of the Soviet Union's showpieces to the West and the rest of the world — "proof" of the success of socialism. Youth in the USSR receive an enlightened, modern education with greater emphasis on science and math than in the U.S. Education through graduate school is free. They have almost achieved universal complete secondary education among the younger generation. In the realm of equal opportunity to education, women are over 50% of all university students, and children of workers constitute over 50%. Higher education institutions have been built in areas of minority nationalities. Discipline and order among the youth are stronger than in many advanced Western countries. Job and career training are built into the education system, with students trained to take jobs upon completion of school.

These attributes are praised by Western educators and pointed to by the Soviets as further evidence of the superiority of socialism:

"Such an increase in the level of education can't be considered simply a normal consequence of a country's industrial development. This is a monumental historically unprecedented leap from illiteracy to universal complete secondary education."⁶⁰

The actual differences, however, are only significant when making comparisons based on bourgeois standards. There is no qualitative difference between the "achievements" of the Soviet revisionists and the Western imperialists. The specific features that the Soviets hold up as socialist are fundamentally bourgeois but with a specific revisionist character that serves the ideological, economic, political, and military needs of social-imperialism as it has developed in the Soviet Union.

The emphasis on science principally serves contention with the advanced Western technology, especially for military needs. They have had to come from behind in raising the level of scientific and technological know-how in comparison to the West and therefore emphasize this in education and among youth broadly. It is also to address these needs that lots of resources (for such things as free tuition) and much attention are devoted to education.

On the higher percentage of workers attending higher education institutions: This is necessary because of the expanded needs of the economy and military for technical strata. The expansion of middle- and upper-level jobs also holds out the possibility to the workers of "making it" if they work hard. From the standpoint of viewing socialism as mainly a rising standard of living and increased opportunities to better yourself, the gains in this development are perhaps impressive. But from the point of view of the proletariat revolutionizing society, transforming class relations, narrowing the differences between mental and manual labor and city and country, and entering into and mastering all spheres of society (as opposed to being taken care of and gradually raising the standard of living), there is no rupture from bourgeois relations, much less a radical rupture.

As for the much-touted, supposedly socialist "collectivism," order and self-discipline among the students, one must ask — for what? In this case it serves to promote going along with the status quo, preserving the order and stability of a reactionary social system through peer and societal pressure. The social purpose of such behavior is succinctly stated in the following quote from a popular Soviet child "up-bringing" book cited by Bronfenbrenner:

"Obedience in young children provides the basis for developing that most precious of qualities: self-discipline. Obedience in adolescents and older school children — this is the effective expression of their love, trust and respect toward parents and other adult family members, a conscious desire to acknowledge their experience and wisdom. This is an important aspect of preparing young people for life in a Communist society. We shall be asked: what about developing independence in children? We shall

answer: if a child does not obey and does not consider others, then his independence invariably takes ugly forms. Ordinarily this gives rise to anarchistic behavior, which can in no way be reconciled with laws of living in Soviet society."⁶¹

Teaching of atheism is also pointed to as proof that the Soviet education system is socialist. It is true that this practice from the dictatorship of the proletariat was continued by the revisionists but again we must ask – why? All the better to promote *revisionist* morals and philosophy – revisionist humanism and pragmatism, blind reverence for living authorities on earth instead of invisible ones in the sky. Certainly atheism is more progressive than religion, but it alone cannot be equated with materialist dialectics, and in the Soviet Union what replaces religion is a state religion fundamentally opposed to the development of class consciousness and to revolution.

The Soviets still advertise internationally their practice (ever-shrinking and limited more and more to younger ages) of teaching in the native languages of minority nationalities. They say this shows their greater concern and the equal treatment of these peoples in contrast with Western imperialist countries. To the degree this practice still exists it is due both to the resistance of the various minority nationalities to the liquidation of their language and culture, and to the attempts by the social-imperialists to use bilingual education as a more effective method of teaching Russian. Wherever a native language is the main language in use in the schools, Russian is also supposed to be taught. And in many areas where a native language is supposed to be taught there are no teachers who can teach in that language, leaving many of the children semi-literate and dropouts as teenagers.

The rural economic and cultural backwardness of the Soviet Union is a major problem for the social-imperialists and not something they point to with pride. But this is viewed as a long process of overcoming the historical legacy of the tsars, a long struggle to upgrade the education there and achieve universal secondary education. While this legacy is real, the struggle to upgrade is based on the overall needs of social-imperialism and not a struggle to narrow the differences between the mental/manual, town/country contradictions. Some upgrading is necessary to expand the number of mechanics, agricultural technicians, etc., and upgrade their skills. But still one-third of the Soviet labor force is tied down to agriculture, and a large number of these work by hand (mostly women and youth). The rural youth are educated for what they need to know for their job and in fact schools in the countryside are allowed to languish as one way to stem the exodus of rural youth to the cities. If they get too much education they will take their more valuable labor power to someplace more lucrative.

The high educational level women as a group have achieved is a big public relations bonus for the Soviets in chalking up their "equal opportunity" selling points against those of the West, but this too reflects the particular needs and problems of social-imperialism in the USSR. Due to the massive loss of lives in World War 2, the number of women far exceeded that of men

after the war, and to this day there are still 20 million more women than men. This means that the revisionists need women to work all their lives on a full-time basis and at the same time to have as many babies as possible. This accounts for the high percentage of women in the *vuzy*, including substantial numbers in fields like engineering and other technical jobs. The need to boost the birth rate also accounts for the "mother workshop" trend in school textbooks.

The attributes and criteria of the Soviet education system do not shatter but in fact flow from a bourgeois framework. They reflect a goal of more planned, "equal opportunity" imperialism suited to the particular needs of the economics, politics, and ideology of an imperialism with a socialist cover. A successful, quality product of such a system – the so-called communist man – is a competent specialist, hard-working, keeping up with his field, giving his best in hopes of material reward and the personal satisfaction of thinking he has helped his fellow man in the bargain. This is a profoundly conservative system underneath its progressive, enlightened, "socialist" exterior. □

Notes

¹ Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution, The Revisionist Coup in China and the Struggle in the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1978), p. 54.

² M.T. Iovchuk, ed., *The Cultural Life of the Soviet Worker: A Sociological Study* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 44.

³ V.I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Youth Leagues," *On Youth* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 240.

⁴ See, for example, Shi Ming Hu, and Eli Seisman, eds., *Toward a New World Outlook: A Documentary History of Education in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1976* (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1976).

⁵ Iovchuk, *The Cultural Life of the Soviet Worker*, p. 64.

⁶ Following a period of struggle and experimentation to create a new Marxist education system linked with the production and class struggle, the Soviet leadership, in the 1930s, brought back the basic academic curriculum which was then in effect in Europe, along with an emphasis on grades and exams, discipline, rote teaching, uniforms, etc. They attempted to give these bourgeois forms a

socialist content (training workers as experts, encouraging the ideology of serving the then still genuinely socialist Soviet Union, etc.). All this was part and parcel of a whole package of changes in Soviet society in that period, flowing from Stalin's assessment that the interests of the international proletariat lay chiefly in defending socialism in the Soviet Union. That meant particularly within the Soviet Union subordinating everything to rapid industrialization as the main way to prepare for war. An analysis of the early period and the changes in the 1930s is beyond the scope of this article; however, for a theoretical framework readers should refer to Bob Avakian, *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will, Revolution*, No. 50 (December 1981).

The education reforms in the 1930s redefined the main task of the communist youth organizations from that of mainly being active in the political struggle to studying hard and maintaining discipline among the students and looking out for their welfare. However, it is not as though Stalin neglected the political education of the youth. He spearheaded the gigantic (and correct) effort to develop Marxist textbooks especially on history, dialectical and historical materialism, and political economy. But these were grafted onto old bourgeois forms as "subjects" to memorize and recite in class while sitting up straight at a desk. Still as late as 1938 he put forward the line that the key task of the universities and the university students was their ideological and political training. His aim was to bring up proletarian experts and technicians, but this was squeezed into a rather narrow academic scope. No doubt this flowed in part from his analysis that there were no longer antagonistic classes in the Soviet Union.

With the outbreak of World War 2 and Stalin's bending everything to win the war (which meant dredging up Russian patriotism, etc. — see *Conquer the World* for major analysis of the line in this period), this too was reflected in the education system. All sorts of old Russians from the days of the tsars were brought out as heroes in the readers, and patriotism and Russian chauvinism dripped from their pages. This is also the period when Lenin began to appear as the kindly old uncle, a national icon of sorts, to the children.

As Avakian said in *Conquer the World*, it would have taken a major shakeup in the superstructure of the magnitude of the Cultural Revolution in China to get back on the correct road after World War 2, and this did not happen. The revisionists were able to take much of the education system intact for the first few years after they seized power. They took the bourgeois methods and curriculum that existed during the last 20 years of the dictatorship of the proletariat, gutted and twisted the genuinely Marxist analysis and stand which *did* exist alongside the errors in some of the courses and books under Stalin, and substituted revisionist analysis. Furthermore, many of the things which the social-imperialists point to today to prove that their "socialist" education is superior to the other imperialists, such as the greater achievements in equality of women and national minorities, greater overall literacy, free tuition, etc., were all achieved under socialism and have been continued by the revisionists only because they further their own class interests (both economic and political).

⁷ Abraham Kreusler, *Contemporary Education and Moral Upbringing in the Soviet Union* (Milwaukee: University Microfilms International, 1976), p. 104.

⁸ Kreusler, *Contemporary Education*, pp. 140-43.

⁹ Mao Tsetung, "Remarks at the Spring Festival, February 13, 1964," in Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 204.

¹⁰ *Strive to Build a Socialist University of Science and Engineering* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), p. 35.

¹¹ *Strive to Build a Socialist University*, p. 32.

¹² Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood, U.S. and USSR* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 63.

¹³ Kreusler, *Contemporary Education*, p. 139.

¹⁴ "Instilling a Communist World View," *Soviet Education* (July-August 1980), Vol. xxii, Nos. 9-10, p. 129. This is a reprint of Chapter 9 of the book *School Pedagogy*, written by a collective at the Lenin Pedagogical Institute in Moscow, Iran Ogorodnikov, ed., and Arlo Schultz, translator. The U.S. publishers of this journal note that this book was selected by a jury of the USSR Ministry of Education as the best manuscript submitted for a competition held in the late 1970s.

¹⁵ "Instilling a Communist World View," *Soviet Education*, p. 130.

¹⁶ Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, *New Programme and New Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1981), pp. 82-83.

¹⁷ Iovchuk, *The Cultural Life of the Soviet Worker*, p. 67.

¹⁸ Cited in Carola Hanson and Karin Liden, *Moscow Women* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 59.

¹⁹ The options reform itself ran into trouble in the form of the Soviet version of "back to basics" in the '70s. Time for options was increasingly cut into by the need for more time for military training for boys. To sweeten the pill of military training and keep up with the modern "job training" image, new options were introduced for military-technical training, such as driver of motor vehicles and cycles, helmsman of motor launches, radar station operator, radio telephone operator, electrical engineer, radio engineer, and TV engineer. No doubt some of the graduates of these courses are putting their training to use and being all that they can be today in Afghanistan.

²⁰ See John Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence and the Soviet School* (Windsor: NFER Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 210-13.

²¹ Susan Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 172.

²² Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 173.

²³ N. Ia. Sokolov, "V.I. Lenin and the Teaching of State Law to Youth," *Soviet Education*, February 1981, p. 86. (Originally published in Russian in 1980 by USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences.)

²⁴ Sokolov, "Lenin and the Teaching of State Law," p. 86.

²⁵ Sokolov, "Lenin and the Teaching of State Law," p. 94.

²⁶ V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p. 5.

²⁷ *History of the Kazakh SSR (1957)*, quote in Revolutionary Union, *Red Papers 7: How Capitalism Has Been Restored in the Soviet Union and What This Means for the World Struggle* (Chicago: Revolutionary Union, 1974), p. 90.

²⁸ Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 182.

²⁹ *Sovetskaya Voennoye Entsiklopediya*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976), p. 245; cited in David Holloway, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 161.

³⁰ Cited in Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence*, p. 99.

³¹ Cited in Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence*, p. 101.

³² Liang Hsiao, "What Is the Intention of People of the Lin Piao Type in Advocating Private Ownership of Knowledge?," in Raymond Lotta, ed., *And Mao Makes 5* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1978), p. 343.

³³ Liang, "What Is the Intention of People of the Lin Piao Type?," p. 342.

³⁴ See Mervyn Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), p. 48.

³⁵ *Komsomkaya Pravda*, September 19, 1970; cited in Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 141.

³⁶ *Solialnye Problemy Truda i Proizvodstva*, (Moscow: 1969), pp. 56-57; cited in Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 143.

³⁷ *Pravda*, March 23, 1977; cited in Mervyn Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union, Policies and Institutions Since Stalin* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp. 55-58.

³⁸ Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence*, p. 128.

³⁹ A.V. Zosimovski, "An Interesting Experiment," from *Sovetskaya Pedagogika*, 1965, in Fred Albin, ed., *Contemporary Soviet Education: A Collection of Readings from Soviet Journals* (International Arts and Sciences Press, 1969), p. 124.

⁴⁰ Zosimovski, *Contemporary Soviet Education*, p. 124.

- ⁴¹ Cited in Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence*, p. 128.
- ⁴² Cited in Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence*, p. 137.
- ⁴³ Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence*, p. 127.
- ⁴⁴ Cited in Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 147.
- ⁴⁵ Cited in Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 150.
- ⁴⁶ Cited in Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, 1952.
- ⁴⁷ *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, March 8, 1972; cited by Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 141.
- ⁴⁸ Cited in Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 157.
- ⁴⁹ Cited in Revolutionary Union, *Red Papers* 7, p. 90.
- ⁵⁰ Jacoby, *Inside Soviet Schools*, p. 160.
- ⁵¹ Mollie Schwartz Rosenhan, "Images of Male and Female in Children's Readers," in Dorothy Atkinson, et al., eds. *Women in Russia*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 296-97.
- ⁵² Rosenhan, "Images of Male and Female," p. 299.
- ⁵³ Rosenhan, "Images of Male and Female," p. 302.
- ⁵⁴ Ethel Dunn, "Russian Rural Women," in Dorothy Atkinson, et al., eds., *Women in Russia*, p. 176.
- ⁵⁵ Dunn, "Russian Rural Women," p. 176.
- ⁵⁶ Hanson and Liden, *Moscow Women*, p. 101.
- ⁵⁷ Cited in Richard B. Dobson, "Educational Policies and Attainment," in Dorothy Atkinson, et al., eds., *Women in Russia*, p. 283.
- ⁵⁸ Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society, Equality, Development and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 150.
- ⁵⁹ Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, pp. 150-51.
- ⁶⁰ Iovchuk, *The Cultural Life of the Soviet Worker*, p. 48.
- ⁶¹ Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, p. 12.