2010

Soviet Education: Communism in the Classroom

Alison W. Berryman
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses

Part of the European History Commons, and the Other History Commons

Colby College theses are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/602

This Honors Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact enhodes@colby.edu.
Soviet Education:
Communism in the Classroom

Completed by
Alison W. Berryman

For Honors in History
History Department
Colby College
May 6, 2010

Dr. Paul R. Josephson, Advisor

Dr. Larissa J. Taylor, First Reader
Soviet Education: Communism in the Classroom

Alison W. Berryman
Colby College
Advisor: Paul R. Josephson
Second Reader: Larissa J. Taylor
Spring 2010
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

I. Introduction to Education in Russia 1

II. *Yaslie-Sady*: Nursery-Kindergartens 12

III. Soviet Children’s Literature 18

IV. Curriculum 28

V. “Socially Useful” Labor and Polytechnic Education 41

VI. Conclusion: Consequences and Achievements of Soviet Education 49

Select Bibliography
Acknowledgements

My appreciation and thanks to everyone who has helped me complete this thesis. Special thanks to Professor Paul Josephson for sparking my interest in Soviet history, for reading and commenting on numerous drafts, and for always having a great sense of humor. Thanks also go to Professor Larissa Taylor for reading many drafts and for her guidance and friendship throughout the year. The generosity of Mr. Jonathan Barry, for funding the Jonathan Barry Grant, and of the Dean of Faculty at Colby College, who has funded the Special Student Project Grant, made my field research at Princeton University and Harvard University possible. Mr. Aaron Pickett, Curatorial Assistant at Princeton University's Cotsen Children's Library, and Mr. Hugh Truslow, Librarian for the Davis Center Collection at Harvard University, gave thoughtful assistance and guidance while I researched. Thank you to my classmates Courtney Cronin, Steve Tatko, Rine Vieth, and Aimee Kidder, who were always cheerful and supportive during our 8:00 a.m. fall thesis seminar. Thanks to Ms. Bonnie Moses, my history teacher at Harpeth Hall School in Nashville, for two great years of classes and for encouraging me to learn more about history. Finally, thanks to my parents and my brother Alec for their love and support.
I. Introduction to Education in Russia

There is no other country so barbarous and in which the masses of the people are robbed to such an extent of education, light and knowledge – no other such country has remained in Europe; Russia is the exception. –Vladimir Lenin, 1913

Just prior to the October Revolution of 1917, Russia was an “educationally backward” country. In 1915, the literacy rate of the entire Soviet Union barely reached 32% and the majority of the population received only an elementary school education.¹ Near the end of Nicholas II’s rule in 1917, only one fourth of children between the ages of seven and fourteen were literate.² The duma, or the legislature, had planned to implement compulsory education by 1922, but due to the outbreak of World War I, revolution, and civil war, did not achieve this goal.³ To carry out a cultural revolution and ensure the success of the Bolsheviks’ political revolution, Vladimir Lenin and other Soviet leaders realized that illiteracy had to be eliminated. Lenin stated that “a communist society cannot be built in an illiterate country.”⁴ The Soviet Union created an educational system to establish universal literacy, to promote the rapid development of science and culture, and to educate children according to communist ideals and principles.⁵

Though most considered Russia “educationally backward,” the eighteenth century saw substantial educational growth in Russia. Peter I, or Peter the Great, who ruled from 1682-1725, played an important role in the establishment of education in Russia. While many ecclesiastical schools already existed, Peter I founded a number of secular schools

¹ Nigel Grant, “Fifty Years of Soviet Education,” The Irish Journal of Education 1, no.2 (1967), 91.
² Seymour M. Rosen, Education and Modernization in the USSR (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1971), 25.
³ Rosen, Education and Modernization in the USSR, 25.
that provided training in areas such as “naval service, public administration, diplomacy, teaching, architecture, and engineering.” The School of Mathematical and Navigational Sciences, established in Moscow in 1701, provided a “college preparatory and higher technical education.” Its heavily science-based curriculum included mathematics, English, navigation, engineering, and the physical sciences. Peter I went on to establish the Surgeons’ School in Moscow, an engineering school, an artillery school, and multiple elementary and secondary schools as well. Few students, the majority of whom were “children of clergy, soldiers, and clerks,” attended these schools. Despite Peter I’s efforts to establish education throughout Russia, attendance and retention rates were low, and ultimately the schools became almost entirely based upon preparation for military service. The foundation of education in the future Soviet Union owed much to Peter I’s interest in the subject.

In tsarist Russia, uniform educational opportunities did not exist, for many elementary schools received funding from government departments and social organizations instead of a central source. Due to funding differences between various sponsors, the quality of each school varied substantially, specifically in terms of the curriculum, faculty, facilities, and “the entire organization of teaching and upbringing work.” Elementary schools provided children with basic literacy and labor skills rather than with adequate preparation for secondary school. As a result, the majority of children did not have the opportunity to attend secondary school and instead became workers with

---

minimal education. Between 1917 and 1928, the Soviet Union continued to build the foundation for the new educational system that would emerge fully in the 1930s.

Soviet educational reform was on V. I. Lenin's mind long before the October Revolution in 1917. The decrees Lenin issued during the October Revolution laid out the steps necessary to reform education and highlighted the importance of quickly eradicating illiteracy. Protsenko explained that the Soviet state, under Lenin, faced the task of "break[ing] down the old state apparatus in the field of education and [of] rebuild[ing] the entire system of public education in a vast country in the interest of the working people, in the interest of the socialist transformation of the country." In order to accomplish this reform, Lenin, with the support of the Communist Party, focused specifically on the education and training of workers.

In 1917, Lenin established Narkompros, or the People's Commissariat of Education, and appointed A. V. Lunacharsky as the chairman. Narkompros oversaw many aspects of educational culture in the Soviet Union: extracurricular activities, theaters, museums, and publishing companies. By 1919, Narkompros employed approximately 3,000 people in 28 different departments. The main priorities of Narkompros, however, were the creation of a new socialist school and the rapid eradication of illiteracy. In order to achieve these goals, Narkompros began its work by making education available to all children. Narkompros worked quickly and effectively in its early years. In 1911, there were 47,855 primary schools in the Soviet Union, and

---

10 V. Protsenko, "Lenin's Decrees on Public Education," Soviet Education (3) no. 4 (International Arts and Sciences Press, 1961), 52
by 1919, that number rose to 63,317. The numbers of students and teachers increased from 3,060,418 and 73,040 in 1911 to 4,796,284 and 149,797, respectively, in 1919.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1918, the Soviet government set about to achieve radical secularization of public education. On January 23, 1918, it issued the “Decree of the Soviet of People’s Commissars on the Separation of the Church from the State, and of the School from the Church.” This decree stated, “The school is hereby separated from the church. The teaching of religious doctrines is not permitted in any state, public, or private educational institution where general educational subjects are taught.”\textsuperscript{16} Following this decree, all state-sponsored public schools were secularized. New schools were established in both urban and rural areas throughout the entire country, and the government launched a campaign to eliminate adult illiteracy.\textsuperscript{17} Secularization of public education enabled the Soviet government to create schools and curricula without adherence to church doctrine.

In order for a cultural revolution to occur, the “opportunity for the children of all working people to attend any type or level of school” had to exist. This required the complete reorganization of the Soviet educational system “on the basis of the principle of unity and complete continuity among its various levels.”\textsuperscript{18} In the fall, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee issued the “Resolution on the Unified Labor School of the Russian Soviet Federal Republic (RSFSR),” which established the unified labor school. All children, regardless of nationality, socioeconomic status, or religious affiliation, could

\textsuperscript{15} Konovalova, “The First Steps of the People’s Commissariat of Education,” 54.
\textsuperscript{17} Kuzin, “The Great October Socialist Revolution and Education,” 19.
\textsuperscript{18} Piskunov, “Lenin’s Concept of Cultural Revolution and the Creation of the Soviet School,” 67.
enroll. For this reason, the establishment of the unified labor school "marked the beginning of the cultural revolution in the direct sense of the word."\textsuperscript{19}

A. E. Izmailov claimed that Lenin's approach to education demonstrated the "comprehensive character of the entire communist education system."\textsuperscript{20} Lenin firmly believed that the "inculcation of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism" were crucial to communist education and he infused family, teaching, and education with the communist ideology and the Party's political agenda in order to lay the groundwork for the new Soviet educational system.\textsuperscript{21} Youth leagues provided the government with an opportunity to fuse education, teaching, and extracurricular activities with communist ideology.

The Komsomol, or the Young Communist League, established in October 1918, sought to "control the behavior of the new generations."\textsuperscript{22} Membership became universal in 1919 when the Central Committee of the Komsomol required that all youth under the age of twenty-one belong to the organization, and by October 1919, membership reached 96,000.\textsuperscript{23} By forcing all youth to belong to the Komsomol, the Soviet government ensured communist indoctrination. In 1920, Lenin explained that the Komsomol's "whole purpose of training, educating, and teaching young people today is to imbue them

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Piskunov, "Lenin's Concept of Cultural Revolution and the Creation of the Soviet School," 67.
\textsuperscript{20} A.E. Izmailov, "V.I. Lenin's Concern for the Development of Culture and Education in the Republics of the Soviet East," \emph{Soviet Education} (23) no. 4, 54.
\textsuperscript{21} Izmailov, "V.I. Lenin's Concern for the Development of Culture and Education in the Republics of the Soviet East," 54.
\textsuperscript{22} Kassof, "The Historical Background" in \emph{The Soviet Youth Program: Regimentation and Rebellion} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 11, 21.
\textsuperscript{23} Kassof, "The Historical Background," 11, 16.
\end{flushleft}
with communist ethics.”24 Although the Komsomol never actually included a majority of Soviet youth, it was vigilant about membership.

Youth organizations became increasingly effective means of indoctrination in the 1920s. The Young Pioneers, created for school children in 1922, was exclusively linked to education.25 Young Pioneers were the first step to full membership in the communist party; only school children were eligible for membership. It appeared mandatory because it “provid[ed] the principal context for extracurricular and out-of-school programs, and constitut[ed] a major item in classroom work itself.”26 Children belonged to these groups in order to fit society’s norms; if a child did not belong to a youth organization or did not participate in related activities, then he or she risked being labeled a non-communist or an enemy of the State. By establishing youth organizations, Lenin ensured that all aspects of a child’s life, both in and out of the classroom, promoted communist ideals.

The decree, “On the Further Improvement of Ideological and Political Education Work,” called for the improvement of schools’ communist-education work and stressed the importance of inculcating school children with both ideological conviction and communist loyalty.27 Lenin was adamant about combining general education with vocational training. He explained that “without work and without struggle, book knowledge about communism, obtained from communist pamphlets and written works, is absolutely worthless.”28 As early as 1920, Lenin established factory training schools, where children both learned to read and to become skilled laborers. These schools

26 Kassof, “The Historical Background,” 20.
27 N.I. Dumchenko, “Realization of Lenin’s Ideas on Vocational and Technical Education,” Soviet Education (23) no. 4, 78.
focused primarily on "communist labor." But what differentiated "communist labor" from non-communist labor? Lenin explained: "It must be labor for the common good without regard to norms or remuneration. It must be labor based on the habit of working. It must be labor as a requirement of the healthy organism." The factory training schools created in the 1920s would later serve as models for the schools that were connected to or affiliated with collective farms and factories during Stalin’s rule.

Soviet leaders adopted their polytechnic education from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx and Engels greatly influenced education in Western Europe, and the Soviet Union incorporated parts of the Western European education model into the Soviet system. Karl Marx declared:

> Education means to us these things: (1) intellectual development; (2) physical development; (3) polytechnical education; which will give knowledge relative to the general scientific principles of all production processes, and will at the same time give children and youths practice in the use of elementary tools of all branches of production.

Marxists claimed that in order to be a productive member of society, one must understand the organization of workers and factories, the connection between man and nature, and that science was the basis of all production. Marx’s belief that “theory and practice must be linked together so that the worker regards his work intelligently; so that he knows its meaning and importance in the scheme of society” influenced Lenin’s attitude toward the implementation of “socially useful” labor in schools. Additionally, in his work entitled *Anti-Dühring*, Engels said that “polytechni[z]ation was intimately bound up with the construction of socialism” and that equality could only be achieved through polytechnic

---

29 Dumchenko, "Realization of Lenin’s Ideas on Vocational and Technical Education," 79.
training and development in all areas. Lenin combined the thoughts of Marx and Engels and sought to establish universal compulsory education and to implement “socially useful” labor in all Soviet schools.

On December 18, 1923, the RSFSR Council of People’s Commissars ratified the “Regulations of the Unified Labor School,” which divided the school into two levels: the primary and the secondary. The primary level, a five-year program, catered to children aged eight to thirteen, while the secondary level, a four-year program, catered to children aged thirteen to seventeen. The government called for the creation of new textbooks, syllabi, and curricula, as it deemed the existing pre-Revolutionary copies unacceptable. In addition to new course materials, the concept of productive labor entered the curriculum. Productive labor, “not as a means of paying for the upkeep of children or in the limited sense of a particular teaching method, but as productive and socially necessary labor,” quickly became the core of school life and activity.32

According to Rosen, the new Soviet education system retained the following aspects of tsarist education: “that the education system should serve the needs of the state,” a traditional classroom environment, a strong secondary school curriculum, and professional training at specialized higher education institutions.33 By keeping the face of education consistent with tradition, the Soviet government could introduce communist doctrine in a system familiar to many Soviet citizens. These principles remained present in the educational system as it developed under Lenin in the 1920s and under Stalin in the 1930s. The new system expanded to include the entire population, adopted a policy of Communist indoctrination, integrated a vocational component into the general education

33 Rosen, Education and Modernization in the USSR, 25.
curriculum, and systemized education to meet the state’s demands for skilled workers. Lenin established this policy of Communist indoctrination in his decree, “On the Further Improvement of Ideological and Political Education Work,” which included improved and expanded communist-education work within schools and focused on cultivating in children both ideological conviction and loyalty to the Communist party. The combination of old and new aspects led to an organized educational system that would develop into an instrument of the Communist state.

Between 1928 and 1930, an unprecedented number of peasants migrated into the cities and entered the industrial work force. These peasants lacked the education necessary to be productive laborers. In 1930, the XVI Party Congress took an aggressive approach to establish education in the countryside to ensure that peasants obtained the basic literacy skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to the Soviet cause. The campaign set a goal of 100% achievement in the eradication of adult illiteracy and the establishment of universal primary education, particularly in the rural areas. While education benefited future industrial laborers, it also benefited peasants who remained in the countryside; but most of all, it benefited the state. Collectivization required peasants to learn advanced skills, and the government believed it imperative that peasants receive a primary education and, at the very least, become literate.

In rural areas, the government took an authoritative and militaristic approach to establishing education, much like its approach to collectivization. In many areas, teachers were actually soldiers, and the government prohibited children of kulaks from

---

35 Dumchenko, “Realization of Lenin’s Ideas on Vocational and Technical Education,” 78.
enrolling in schools.\textsuperscript{37} The Soviet government discriminated against the peasants; it sought to educate those peasants who remained in the countryside only at a minimum level, while it offered more educational opportunities to peasants who left the countryside and joined the industrial labor force. In the Soviet Union, the government used education as a tool to benefit the State and established an educational system that supported the government's goals.

On October 1, 1930, education became universal and compulsory for the first time in the history of Russia. At first, compulsory education applied only to children between the ages of seven and ten, but it extended to span four years by 1933. By October 30, 1930, over 24,000 newly established schools opened their doors to nearly 1,500,000 students; by 1931, over 12,000,000 children were expected to attend public schools.\textsuperscript{38} Enrollment rates continued to increase dramatically, and by 1975, over 49,000,000 children attended Soviet schools.\textsuperscript{39} Compulsory education was one of the greatest, and most enduring, aspects of the reformed Soviet educational system. While education in the Soviet Union was universal, however, it was not equal in quality and content. Despite the Soviet government's institution of universal and equal education for all, disparities existed between rural and urban schools. Urban areas provided more extensive educational opportunities for students to pursue higher education.

The Soviet school system included three general schools: four years of primary school in all rural areas, seven years of "incomplete secondary" school in small urban centers, and ten years of "complete secondary" in all large industrial centers.\textsuperscript{40} Although

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934}, 161,163.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Walter Duranty, "Soviet Introduces Compulsory Study," \textit{The New York Times}, November 9, 1930.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Kuzin, "The Great October Socialist Revolution and Education," 15.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Victor Peters, "Education in the Soviet Union," \textit{The Phi Delta Kappan} 73, no. 9 (1956), 422.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
all Soviet boys and girls theoretically had access to education, in practice rural
inhabitants had very limited access because the government focused more resources on
urban schools. In 1930, when the Soviet government established compulsory education,
it required only five years of compulsory attendance for children in rural areas, while
children in urban areas had to attend for eight years. Education was not universal
because urban children clearly had an advantage over rural children.

Between the October Revolution of 1917 and the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953,
the Soviet educational system underwent extensive transformation. Over the course of
the 1920s and 1930s, the government focused on establishing a uniform, general
education system throughout the entire Soviet Union. By the end of the 1930s, the Soviet
state successfully established an extensive public education system that offered “socially
organized preschool education and general-education, vocational-technical, secondary,
and higher specialized schools” to all Soviet people. The successful conversion of
Russia into an industrial powerhouse depended on the education and literacy of the
masses. The Soviet Union established an educational system that “guaranteed universal
literacy [and] rapid development of science and culture.” Its actual goal, however, was
not simply to educate the masses for the sake of creating a more informed, literate, and
intellectually curious population; its goal was to instill strong Communist loyalty from a
very early age and to expedite the process of industrialization by educating future
workers in “socially useful” labor.

41 Peters, “Education in the Soviet Union,” 422.
42 Kuzin, “The Great October Socialist Revolution and Education,” 7; George S. Counts, “The
Reconstruction of Soviet Education,” in Khrushchev and the Central Committee Speak on Education
44 Nigel Grant, “Fifty Years of Soviet Education,” #
II. Yaslie-Sady: Nursery-Kindergartens

*The precious feeling of collectivism begins right here.*

A Soviet Nursery School Class

Prior to 1917, Soviet kindergartens were primarily private, urban institutions that typically enrolled only children of the intelligentsia. Philanthropic groups and private donations provided funding for twenty-five public kindergartens, known as “people’s kindergartens.” One such philanthropic organization, the “Children’s Friend Society,” collected money and supplies and established play schools, crèches, and children’s homes. The Society’s members were primarily education specialists and psychologists who worked together to write instructional pamphlets about how to care for children and

---

how to properly educate them. Unlike these trained professionals, Lenin was primarily interested in starting communist indoctrination at a young age, rather than providing a nurturing environment in which children could learn and grow. Lenin believed nursery schools and kindergartens were “shoots of communism,” because young children were especially susceptible to indoctrination and did not have the knowledge or power to question communist teachings. If exposure to such ideas began in the earliest stages of education, then children would be less inclined to challenge communist ideas later in their educational careers. In 1918, Lenin established the first kindergarten open to working-class children in Petrograd, which marked the beginning of the Soviet kindergarten campaign.

Legislation involving pre-schools and kindergartens first appeared in March 1919 when the Eighth Party Congress officially adopted the Second Party Program. One aspect of the Second Party Program concerned education, which the government considered a “definite, deliberate, and continuing concern of the State.” The Second Party Program called for the widespread establishment of preschool and kindergarten institutions that provided social education for children and “emancipa[ted] working mothers.” In 1920, A. V. Lunacharsky, the People’s Commissar of Education, signed the “Declaration on Preschool Education,” which designated preschools and kindergartens as core components of the Soviet educational system. Lunacharsky declared that “every child must be organized,” and nurseries, preschools, and

kindergartens, were perfect venues for such organization. In 1928, 62,000 children attended nursery school and 130,000 attended kindergarten. By 1930, a campaign for kindergarten was fully underway. The government devoted much of its time and resources in order to make the plan for 100% kindergarten enrollment a reality by 1932.

Although the Soviet government allotted 60,000,000 rubles for the establishment of 71,000 nurseries and preschools, it opened only 6,000 new schools by June 1, 1931. The drive to expand education occurred almost simultaneously with rapid urbanization and industrialization, and industrialization took priority. By 1931, however, the Soviet Union had more nurseries and preschools than all the other nations of the world combined. The Soviet government established many yasli (nursery) and detski sad (kindergarten) programs to begin moral and civic training at an earlier age and to create jobs suitable for the many women entering the work force.

In its early stages, the Soviet kindergarten was neither compulsory nor universally accessible. Nursery schools offered supervision and care to children aged six months to three years, while kindergartens provided children aged three to seven with the foundations of moral education and an introduction to the basic components of the socialist lifestyle. Although in 1924 the Third All-Russian Conference on Pre-School Education designated nature, labor, and society as the most important elements of the preschool curriculum, a report issued in 1927 expanded these components to include:

1. The active participation of children in the building of their own life
2. The emphasis upon socially useful labor

---

57 Ageloff, “The Soviet Pushes Pre-School Work.”
58 Ageloff, “The Soviet Pushes Pre-School Work.”
59 Hans, Comparative Education, 312.
60 Hans, Comparative Education, 312.
(3) The establishment of intimate connections with contemporary life
(4) The study of nature and the development of a materialistic outlook on the world.61

These core components introduced preschool children to communist ideology and laid the groundwork for future indoctrination and education of good Soviet communists.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, numerous nursery schools and kindergartens merged to form yaslie-sady, or nursery-kindergartens.62 In the early 1930s, the Soviet government declared that “every child in the industrial and collective farm sections must take his place in a kindergarten.”63 Although preschools and kindergartens never officially became compulsory, attendance was highly encouraged. The government believed that the most successful future workers began their communist careers at a young age and in a structured environment. The organization of kindergartens mirrored that of collectives as children worked together in accordance with the communist spirit. Children learned teamwork, organized work habits, and how to properly care for their tools and toys.64

Beatrice King, author of Changing Man: The Education System of the U.S.S.R, published in 1936, identified three distinct characteristics of the Soviet preschool system in the 1920s and early 1930s not found in other countries’ preschools: polytechnization, cultivation of the collectivism, and self-government. Polytechnism familiarized children with the Soviet Union’s goals of industrialization and increased production. Children “played” with tools and learned simple, useful skills necessary for future work. Children gained a collective outlook through group work and interactive play. The majority of

63 Ageloff, “The Soviet Pushes Pre-School Work.”
64 Hans, Comparative Education, 312.
activities required multiple participants and children had to work together. Self-
government presented itself through responsibility and independence. Adults did not do
anything for the child that he could not do for himself, and children, not adults, were
responsible for “order, tidiness of rooms, care of toys and apparatus, cleanliness, [and]
laying tables.”65 The Soviet preschool strove to prepare children to become successful
members of a social and collective society.

The Program of Instruction in the Kindergarten, published by the Ministry of
Education, established the standards and expectations of all Soviet kindergartens.
Drawing, a seemingly fun activity, actually introduced children to the concept of socialist
realism. In the 1930s, the emergence of Socialist realism required that art “must make a
positive contribution to society (and therefore depict it in a positive manner) and
require[ed] that it be representational rather than abstract.”66 Susan Jacoby, an author
who visited a Moscow kindergarten, described the walls as being covered with children’s
drawings. These drawings were technically precise and proportionally accurate, and
depicted two subject matters: “students doing calisthenics” and “children drinking
milk.”67 When Jacoby inquired about the subject matter, the teacher replied, “We have
one period a month in which the children are allowed to draw a subject of their own
choice.”68 Children could not draw what they pleased, but instead copied from approved
models and images. Clearly, even “fun” activities had communist components.

---

68 Jacoby, Inside Soviet Schools, 66.
The Soviet government used the school as a conduit to transmit communist ideas such as collectivism, loyalty, and dedication to the Soviet state; to ensure compliance with the government’s orders; and to transform Soviet society. In the eyes of the government, the purpose of education was to transform the essentially illiterate population into literate, knowledgeable, and cultured Soviets willing to devote themselves to the State. N. H. Gaworek described the Soviet educational system as “centralized, bureaucratized, and controlled by the Communist Party which, since the 1930s has overseen all aspects of scholarship, teaching, and creativity.” The exclusive right of the State and Party to control education meant that children were educated in accordance with communist doctrine.

III. Soviet Children’s Literature

During the 1920s, children’s literature, including both storybooks and textbooks, increasingly became a vehicle for the communist indoctrination of children. Two Soviet authors, B. P. Yesipov and N. K. Goncharov, claimed that children “love[d] everything heroic,” and that stories “about [the] Motherland, about the heroic episodes of the struggle of the workers for their freedom” effectively instilled a sense of love and loyalty in children.72 Stories depicted “how in the Red Army the warriors help one another and save one another under the most grievous circumstances, how people work in a collective and through a collective conquer nature, [and] how Comrade Stalin and the Soviet government watch over every Soviet person.” Along with tales about the country and its workers, teachers told children “stories” about such leaders as Stalin, Lenin, Dzerzhinsky, and Sverdlov in order to teach children “love of and devotion to their people.”73 Soviet kindergartens instilled communist doctrine into children in every available way: through stories, hands-on activities, and individual conduct. Until the mid-1920s, change in Soviet children’s literature was gradual, but between 1927 and 1933, change in literature became abrupt and radical.

In “Miraculous Horses: Reading the Russian Revolution Through Soviet Children’s Literature,” William B. Husband examined the development of Soviet children’s literature as a phenomenon of propaganda and communist indoctrination. In 1923, the Party Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) introduced the Red Line, a specific program that regulated children’s literature. The Red Line controlled virtually all aspects of children’s literature: the content, format, layout, illustrations, and

73 Yesipov and Goncharov, Pedagogy, in I Want to Be Like Stalin, 11.
paper-type. It emphasized themes such as collectivism, industrialization, and glorification of the Soviet state and its leaders, particularly Lenin and Stalin. The creation of the Red Line directly led to the drafting of a resolution by the Thirteenth Party Congress in May of 1924. This resolution ordered publishers to “create literature for children under the careful supervision of the Party, with the aim of strengthening in this literature class, international, and labor education [vospitanie].” 74 Husband cited many examples that featured communist principles. The book We Meet the Third!, meant for preschool children, illustrated the government’s control of children’s literature. We Meet the Third! celebrated the third year of the Five-Year-Plan for industry and throughout its storyline: “locomotives puff[ed], tractors roll[ed] out of factories, [and] weaponry gleam[ed].” 75 This story familiarized children with industrialized agriculture and increased production, two developments that enabled the Soviet Union to become more powerful.

Following the death of Lenin on January 21, 1924, N. K. Krupskaya began to write a series of children’s books about Lenin and other important Soviet leaders. Deti Revoliutsii (Children of the Revolution, 1929), Krupskaya’s most propagandistic work, depicted “all Soviet youth as Lenin’s children.” 76 Children’s literature reform in the early 1920s was slightly less radical than that of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Krupskaya did not want to eliminate existing children’s literature, but wrote “I think that old literature must be reexamined and we must take what we can from it but other parts can be

discarded. An old book must be remade, must be ‘Sovietized.’” Lunacharsky, the head of Narkompros, believed that stories could introduce children to subjects such as the Five-Year Plan, by basing plots on topics such as collectivism and industrialization.

Two stories, Repka, by B. Filippov, and Elektromanter, by Boris Ural’skii, emphasized collectivism and industrialization.

A popular scientific children’s book, Elektromanter (The Electrician, 1931), touted the glorious impact of technology and industrialization. The author, Boris Ural’skii, and illustrator, Aleksandr Deineka, combined words and pictures in order to

teach that prosperity and success resulted from new technology. Illustrations of smoke-belching factories represented the new Soviet industrial centers. Two cars, symbols of modernization and technological advances, and a large urban building, symbolize urbanization. Two light bulbs, which symbolize the electrician’s work and productivity, as well as modernization, dominate the illustration. Soviet power, which demanded the electrification of the entire country, contributed to the communization of the Soviet Union. Electricity eased labor, enabled the construction of factories and the production of cars and of all other goods possible, and literally and figuratively contributed to the illumination of the entire country.

Image reduced to a lower resolution.

Elektromonter Back Cover

Ural’skii, Elektromonter.
The back cover of *Elektromonter* depicts a rural farmhouse and grazing donkey with new power lines overhead. The electrician’s skills and labor brought electricity and technology to the peasants. The presence of electricity and power lines in the countryside aided in collectivization; without modern technology in the countryside, new technology such as tractors and other mechanical tools would not have existed.

Characters, specifically peasants or urban laborers, were of particular importance because of their influence on children and the likelihood of a child imitating a character’s actions. Acceptable characters in children’s books were productive laborers who participated in collectivized farm labor or industrial factory labor, or “good” Soviet citizens. Characters in children’s literature, therefore, were shown “helping each other and acting in a positive, constructive, and socially useful manner.” Additionaly, illustrations brought the characters and their actions to life. Evgeny Steiner, author of *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of Early Soviet Children’s Books*, suggested that images served two purposes: they “creat[ed] a language for society-building” and “facilitated a subconscious psychological adaptation to new conditions.” Stories represented the Soviet ideal and children associated characters and events in stories with the people and events they experienced in their own lives. Tales about dedicated, productive workers in industrial factories, and peasants reaping the benefits of collectivism, familiarized children with the new ways of the great Socialist state. One children’s book, *Repka*, highlighted the benefits of collective labor through relatable characters and simple illustrations.

---

In *Repka* (The Turnip, 1924), a children's story, Boris Filippov emphasized the benefits of collectivism. In *Repka*, a peasant man and his family attempt to harvest a giant turnip. The peasant first tries to uproot the turnip alone, but he does not succeed. Next, his wife helps, and although they make some progress, they still cannot uproot the vegetable. Finally, when the man's wife, daughter, dog, and cat all work together, they successfully uproot the giant turnip. This simple story taught Soviet children that in order to be successful, everyone must work collectively. Peasant children especially related to the characters and the plotline because they engaged in farming activities and experienced firsthand the process of collectivization. When the government forced individual, private farms to combine into collective farms, peasants had to work together to harvest crops. A story such as *Repka* reinforced the importance of collective agriculture and highlighted its success.
Image reduced to a lower resolution.
Image reduced to a lower resolution.
Dmitrii Bulanov’s illustrations brought Filippov’s story to life and made its message transparent. Illiteracy rates tended to be higher in rural areas, and if peasants could not read, they still understood the story by simply looking at the pictures. Furthermore, illustrations in Soviet children’s literature involved a variety of colors, depending on the topic and quality of the book and its intended audience. The illustrations in Repka were solely black and red. Bulanov used red, a color associated with the Communist party, specifically for accent and emphasis. An illiterate peasant would have known the connection between the color red and the Communist party, and therefore could have “read” the pictures.

The period between 1927 and 1933 marked the time of the most intense change in Soviet children’s literature. The Central Committee issued the decree, “On Measures for Improving Youth and Children’s Publishing,” on July 23, 1928, ordering that the State must:

Create a wealth of books promoting the Party upbringing of youths according to the tenets of Marxist theory as well as an artistic literature responsive to everyday social questions facing young people. Along with this, [the State] must create popular scientific and technical literature in order to furnish our young people with knowledge about fundamental aesthetic and technical questions.  

As a result, the government controlled the publication and distribution of nearly all children’s literature by the early 1930s. Once the government assumed control, the Central Committee issued a series of legislation that established the desired characteristics of new children’s literature. The following decree, issued in the early 1930s, established that:

---

The children's book must be lively in true Bolshevik fashion—a call to arms, a call to victory. The children's book must demonstrate, in vivid and image-laden forms, the socialist remaking of the nation and the people, and educate children in the spirit of proletarian internationalism.86

This decree officially changed the purpose of children's literature; like other aspects of society, literature became uniform.

In newly published stories, production replaced fairy tales and traditional folk tales and "worker-heroes" became the most common characters.87 Children saw similarities between the stories and their lives. Jacqueline M. Olich explained that new children's stories, influenced by "Stalinist proletarian, urban, and militarist mythology," featured loyal Soviet workers and great hero projects.88 Under Stalin's rule, children's literature "help[ed] children find their place in the larger social struggle" and taught the definition of a good Soviet citizen.89 Children's books were no longer meant for entertainment, but for indoctrination.

86 Steiner, Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of Early Soviet Children's Books, 7.
87 Olich, Competing Ideologies ad Children's Books: The Making of a Soviet Children's Literature, 269.
IV. Curriculum

Beginning in 1930, elementary and secondary schools became prime places to instill communist philosophy and its doctrines in young children. Soviet education began with nursery school, where children “learned their A B C’s from posters issued by Mopr, the Russian organization for the defense of political prisoners.”90 These propaganda posters offered examples such as “A is for atheist, whom the priests persecuted.”91 A first grade classroom was described as “gaily decorated with red stars pasted around the blackboard above which hung portraits of Lenin and Premier Joseph Stalin.”92 Soviet children’s literature also contributed to the spread of Communist principles; the majority of children’s literature was rewritten to incorporate Communism.93 These propagandistic books were “powerfully-direct” and served a “frank and obvious” purpose.94 Former students at Moscow’s Model School No. 25 recalled that “propaganda gave meaning to our lives. For us, the tsarist was gray; the socialist, blue. We believed in communism.”95 Propaganda within literature and schools influenced the Soviet youth.

Communist propaganda, though present in virtually every academic subject, was most obvious in history courses. The government under Stalin rewrote history in accordance with the philosophy and policy of the new Soviet Union. On May 16, 1934, the Soviet of Peoples’ Commissars of the Union and the Central Committee of the Party officially announced that all history textbooks in the Soviet Union must be rewritten.

91 Winter, “The Soviet Way with the Child.”
92 Duranty, “Soviet Introduces Compulsory Study.”
Non-Communist leaders and events were written out of history. The country’s most powerful leaders, Stalin, Kirov, and Zhdanov, supervised the process and critiqued textbook outlines submitted by selected scholars. As a result of the demands of Stalin, Kirov, and Zhdanov, the new history textbooks “fully support[ed] the communist direction” and were “saturated with ‘materials of socialist construction.’” The Soviet leaders’ roles in the rewriting of textbooks illustrate how the government, not education specialists or trained teachers, dominated the Soviet educational system.

Image reduced at a lower resolution.

---

66 Yesipov and Goncharov, Pedagogy, in I Want to Be Like Stalin, 17-18.
67 Yesipov and Goncharov, Pedagogy, in I Want to Be Like Stalin, 19.
68 P. O. Afanas’ev, Bukvar (Moscow: UchPedgiz, 1933).
Bukvar (Primer, 1933), a textbook written by P. O. Afanas’ev and N. A. Kostin, reinforced communist societal ideals through images that appeared alongside short lessons or examples. One illustration depicts a Soviet classroom with photos of Stalin and Lenin prominently displayed on the walls. Many Soviet classrooms featured photographs or posters that glorified Soviet leaders, and therefore children identified with the children and the classroom illustrated in this primer. The next picture emphasizes collective farming. The bottom half of the next page consists of crude outlines of a peasant woman, a bucket or pail, and a large basket. The top half consists of a detailed drawing of peasants on a collectivized farm harvesting vegetables. One of the central characters is a school-aged boy holding up a carrot. Under this illustration are the words
“Mallia Ha” and a drawing of a carrot. The detailed drawing shows how the highlighted objects are applicable to everyday life. Illustrations such as these were powerful tools of indoctrination; each time Soviet children opened their textbooks, they saw images of the ideal communist society.

During the “The Great Fatherland Patriotic War (World War II)” the government used preschool children’s activities to reflect the current Soviet war effort. Teachers provided children with a phrase to illustrate, e.g. “Our tanks are always victorious; the Fascist tanks usually burn…,” and children drew pictures of powerful Soviet tanks.

Riddles, a popular activity, also focused on patriotic themes:

It walks, trees to break;  
Destroys in all its wake.  
Of barriers unaware—  
The enemy’s nightmare—  
It walks in its might,  
The Soviet people’s pride.99

The answer? A Soviet tank. Solving riddles, such as the one above, made children think, but the answers were limited to communist topics. Since children knew the answer would always be a communist concept or thing, they could rely on memorization rather than critical thinking. With such limited answers, children did not have to think as much as they would have if the answers were not limited to communist issues.

In 1943, the Soviet government published the textbook *Text in the Russian Language for the Elementary School: Grammar and Spelling, Part I and II*. Exercises for younger children (first and second grade students) subtly presented communist ideology, while those written for older children (third and fourth grade students) made no

---

attempt to hide communist references. In exercise 24, the textbook instructed children to copy and underline all vowels in the selection entitled "We Will Win":

We Will Win
The pilot gets into the airplane.
The tank driver goes forth to battle.
To victory our nation leads,
Our beloved Stalin.100

The above exercise taught children that each individual had a job and task to perform, and if each individual completed these tasks, then the nation, under Stalin's command, would be victorious. Everything was logical and served a purpose. Victory could not be achieved if the population did not work together. Communist indoctrination increased in each grade level. The following second grade exercise required children to read the selection entitled "About the Brave," to answer, both orally and in writing, a series of questions, and to memorize the entire passage.

About the Brave
Stalin is proud of the brave.
The brave are loved by the people.
Bullets fear the brave one,
The bayonet will not pierce him.101

After reading this selection, children responded to the following questions:

Who is proud? Of whom is he proud?
Who loves? Who is loved?
Who fears? Whom do they fear?
What does not pierce? Whom does it not pierce?

Such exercises served two purposes: first, to help children practice basic grammar and reading skills, and second, to inculcate communist ideology in children. The content of both exercises is blatantly propagandistic.

B. P. Vesipov's and N. K. Goncharov's *Pedagogy*, a textbook approved by the Ministry of Education of the RSFSR and published in 1946, outlined the importance of educating children in the "communist morality" and in "qualities of Bolshevik character." Vesipov and Goncharov believed that history classes exposed children to "the exploitation, the oppression, the backwardness, and the humiliation of the workers under [tsarist autocracy]." An understanding of tsarist Russia allowed children to appreciate the socialist achievements and inspired them to participate actively in the creation of a communist society.

Elementary school assignments required children to answer from memory questions about various topics relating to Russian history. For example, an elementary textbook exercise asked students to answer the following questions about the topic "The Great October Revolution":

1. Which party directed the revolution?
2. Who were the leaders at the head of the communist party?
3. To whom did the factories, the mills, and the best lands belong before the Great October Socialist Revolution?
4. To whom does this belong now?

The textbook provided the following answers:

1. The communist party.
2. Lenin and Stalin.
3. Factory owners and landed gentry.
4. The workers and the peasants.

The exercises taught children about Russia's history, but the government approved the answers provided in the textbook. The approved answers illustrate how students learned only the details the government deemed important. Furthermore, materials and teachers

---

presented prominent figures, such as Lenin and Stalin, as the "greatest leaders of history" – not just the greatest leaders of Russian history, but the greatest leaders of all history. Children learned that the Soviet Union achieved socialism due to Lenin's and Stalin's dedication and stubborn persistence.\(^\text{107}\) History classes enabled the government to influence both a child's knowledge of the past and appreciation of the State's leaders.

Because academic subjects were taught according to communist ideology, the Soviet government urged teachers to select material applicable to everyday communist life. Literature and writing assignments often pertained to the ordinary Soviet people who "sacrificed personal interests for the common good" or the heroes of the Great Patriotic War.\(^\text{108}\) In mathematics classes, children solved problems relevant to the local economy, military budget, or industry. Students calculated ratios that compared "the work performed by a horse to that of a tractor."\(^\text{109}\) These exercises taught children that mathematical knowledge was crucial to management of the State's finances, the defense of the Motherland, and to the increase of industrialization and production. In geography classes, children read compasses, studied topographical maps, and defined cardinal points, all skills directly related to the military.\(^\text{110}\) While children learned important skills, the main purpose of these lessons was to expose children to the Communist ideology.

Krupskaya saw geography as an important subject that taught children about the new socialist economy. She explained that "when geography is connected with other

\(^{107}\) Yesipov and Goncharov, Pedagogy, in I Want to Be Like Stalin, 8.
\(^{108}\) Yesipov and Goncharov, Pedagogy, in I Want to Be Like Stalin, 9.
\(^{110}\) Yesipov and Goncharov, Pedagogy, in I Want to Be Like Stalin, 9, 69.
subjects, it is transformed into a powerful weapon of communist education."\[111\]

Geography classes taught children the location of coal, iron, and oil deposits, and therefore illustrated the potential of heavy industry and industrialization.\[112\] The locations of farm lands also helped children learn about the benefits of collectivization. The connection of subjects such as natural science, mathematics, geography, and underlying political and moral ideas, enabled children “to apply the knowledge they learned to practice” and brought “school closer to life.”\[113\]

Communist propaganda entered schools not only through literature lessons, but through correspondence with Soviet leaders and party members. In particular, N. K. Krupskaya exchanged letters with children in Yermolinsk. Teachers read these letters aloud to children. While the body paragraphs of the letters either praised the children, detailed Krupskaya’s own experiences, or posed questions to the children, the last lines explicitly promoted communism. In May 1929, Krupskaya ended a letter with, “Kindest regards, my dear comrades. I would like you to grow up to be good Leninists.”\[114\] Shortly after, she concluded another letter with “Best wishes and good health to you. I wish you very much that you might grow up to be good communards.”\[115\] In 1939, she closed with “I will be glad if you write again, especially about your social work.”\[116\] Krupskaya deliberately planted these lines at the end of her letters because they were the last things children heard and remembered. She made her requests personal; she “asked” rather than “ordered” the children. Krupskaya used her position to encourage children to

be good Soviet citizens and to uphold the communist ideology. This was reinforced by the obedience and respect for authority that children learned in schools. By establishing a personal connection with children, teachers, and schools, Krupskaya spread communist ideology.

The Soviet government believed that Party members were the most qualified people to inculcate children with communist ideology. Described as "the engineer[s] of the human soul," Soviet teachers "occup[ied] a forward position in the battle for the world, [and fought] on the ideological front in the first line of fire." N. K. Krupskaya believed that communist education could not be successful unless all teachers were fully loyal to the communist cause, possessed a strong communist character, and appropriately trained according to government standards. Therefore, the government positioned Party members in school as instructors. Some teachers were labeled "radishes," because they were red on the outside and white on the inside. This meant they externally displayed Communist tendencies but were internally disloyal. The Party immediately removed any teacher declared a "radish" from the school and hired a loyal Party member to fill the position. Vladimir Samarin, who attended school in the 1930s, recalled:

"History was not taught at all, its place being taken by 'social science,' which was usually taught by a member of the Communist Party. In the school which I attended it was taught by a Party member who had completed a Party school and one year at the Communist Academy."

Samarin’s teacher was a prime example of the Communist Party’s control over teachers and instructors.

Nina Lugovskaya, a young Soviet girl, described her school experience in a diary she kept from between 1932 and 1937, when the NKVD, or the secret police, confiscated it. Lugovskaya devoted much of her writing to complaints about her days at school, her friends and teachers, the large amount of homework, and her boredom—typical teenage subjects. Several entries, however, shed light on the curriculum's communist indoctrination, the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers, and Lugovskaya’s outlook on a dull future.

Lugovskaya alluded to the communist indoctrination when she wrote, “[The teacher] told us to write a story using the words imperialists, capitalism, opportunists, enthusiasts, shock workers, and new society—and walked out.”¹²¹ What did a student learn from such an assignment? In the eyes of the student, nothing—it only intended to make the student think about the glorious Soviet future. This type of assignment, as well as a teacher’s attitude, was not a one-time occurrence in Lugovskaya’s school. Nina later said, “the biology teacher was giving us homework for the summer and told us to do them because the government said so.”¹²² From the assignments’ content and the teachers’ attitudes, Nina realized that much of her education was useless, and she frequently expressed her disappointment in the uninspiring and unchallenging curriculum.

Although she did not specifically say that communism was a crucial component of her school’s curriculum, Nina acknowledged the role of the party and government on the administration. This is most noticeable in her description of the school principal and his qualifications:

¹²² Lugovskaya, The Diary of a Soviet Schoolgirl 1932-1937, 47.
The director – a terribly disagreeable little man with broad shoulders – was sitting behind a desk. His course face was devoid of any inner beauty (and outer beauty, needless to say). It was the typical face of a hardened worker who had seen a lot and had made a career because of his Party card, his baseness and his ability to carry out orders from above without demur.¹²³

Nina knew that the director was qualified for his job only because of his Party loyalty, not because of his educational background. The Soviet government deliberately placed Party members in positions of authority in schools, yet Nina saw through this ruse.

Lugovskaya’s outlook on her future is telling of the Soviet educational system’s shortcomings. Instead of inspiring students to pursue careers or further studies about which they are passionate, it adequately prepared students to enter specific “socially useful” careers and positions. Nina wrote, “What next, I ask myself… I’ll finish school, and then college, and then I’ll be assigned some job. That will be even worse – while you’re a student you still have hopes.”¹²⁴ Nina, like many other Soviet students, knew that once she was assigned her job, her aspirations for the future would come to a halt, and that she would be stuck.

Nina’s diary abruptly stops on January 2, 1937, and on January 4, 1937, the NKVD confiscated it when they raided her family’s apartment. On March 16, the NKVD arrested and interrogated Nina. Citing entries from her diary, interrogators forced her to confess to having an “extremely hostile attitude towards the leaders of the Bolshevik Party and primarily towards Stalin” and “terrorist designs on Stalin.”¹²⁵ Though Nina did confess, she did so only because she wanted the harrowing interrogation process to be over. Ultimately, Nina, her mother, and two sisters, were sent to Kolyma, a Stalinist labor camp, where they completed five years of ‘hard labor,’ and then spent seven years

in exile in Siberia. Upon her return from Kolyma and Siberia, she never spoke of her childhood experience, and her diary remained property of the NKVD archive until published in 2003.\textsuperscript{126}

\textit{Bukvar: Little Octoberist Ceremony.}

Communist indoctrination did not stop at the end of the school day. The government required each Soviet child to “strive with tenacity and perseverance to master knowledge, in order to become an educated and cultured citizen and to serve most fully the Soviet Motherland.”\textsuperscript{127} Extracurricular activities provided the perfect opportunity to extend indoctrination outside of the classroom. Soviet children participated in mandatory extracurricular activities beginning at age seven. Participation in political groups began upon entry to primary school and continued until graduation. Children aged seven to


\textsuperscript{127} Appendix, \textit{I Want to Be Like Stalin}, 149. (Soviet of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR on August 2, 1943. \textit{Soviet Pedagogika}, October, 1943, pg. 1)
eleven belonged to the Union of Little Octoberists, which was established in 1925; youth aged twelve to fourteen belonged to the Children's Communist Organization of Young Pioneers in the Name of Comrade Lenin, which was established in 1922; all youth fifteen to twenty-three belonged to the Young Communist League, also known as the Komsomol, and were eligible for Party membership at age eighteen.\textsuperscript{128}

V. "Socially Useful" Labor and Polytechnic Education

We speak of the labor school as a...school which should learn the labor activity of men in the Soviet land and abroad; that should appreciate and introduce the children, according to their powers and as far as they can gauge such problems, to the participation in the Socialist labor activity of the toiling population. 129 – S. Shutzki, 1928


All activity in Soviet schools served a specific purpose: to strengthen the students’ loyalty to Communism. Activities were designed to develop loyal Communists and to shape children in accordance with the Communist ideal. 130 The implementation of polytechnic education in schools introduced children to the skills necessary for success in

129 Shore, Soviet Education: Its Psychology and Philosophy. 166-7
industry and production. According to prominent Soviet educator Kalashnikov, polytechnic education was:

[The] organized education of children and adolescents, in the transitory period, in the interests of the workers’ class; in the sense of combining heavy industry, including socially useful labor, with the educational plan of the school... Polytechnic education will change typically in the various stages of the transitory period.\(^{131}\)

Kalashnikov’s definition accurately characterized the combination of academics and labor in Soviet schools. In the eleven-year educational program, the curriculum allotted time for “socially useful” labor during regular school hours. Students only undertook “useful” projects and school directors ensured that each project or labor skill was appropriate for each student in terms of both personal character and amount of work.\(^{132}\)

In 1931, Lenin issued a decree mandating that wherever possible, schools were to be connected to a productive unit.\(^{133}\) As a result, the majority of secondary schools in the Soviet Union were connected to specific factories, collective farms, or other “producing unit[s] of industry.”\(^ {134}\) The “Experimental Station for Communist Education,” a model school complex located just outside of Moscow in the rural village of Kaluga, trained teachers to instruct students in all tasks associated with a collective farm. Although the curriculum’s primary focus was the development of useful labor skills, the teachers also sought to eliminate illiteracy.\(^ {135}\)

“Socially useful” labor began in preschool as early as age two. The youngest children’s responsibilities included caring for classroom pets, watering plants, and putting

\(^{131}\) Shore, Soviet Education: Its Psychology and Philosophy, 167.

\(^{132}\) Elizabeth Moos, Soviet Education: Achievements and Goals, 37.

\(^{133}\) King, Changing Man: The Education System of the U.S.S.R., 60.

\(^{134}\) R.D. Charques, “Education in the Soviet Union,” International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939) 11, no.4 (1932), 500.

\(^{135}\) Winter, “The Soviet Way with the Child.”
away classroom toys. Older children performed domestic chores; they cared for their school's lawn and garden, collected wood for cooking, helped prepare meals, and learned to check the quality of ingredients. Designated classroom "work corners" introduced older preschool children to industrial production. Initially, Soviet work corners contained "simply rubbish, factory waste, metal scrap, pieces of wood, and bits of wire," and beams and blocks replaced toys. As work corners developed, many included child-size work benches and cupboards stocked with hammers, chisels, saws, and other tools necessary for production. Teachers used these stations to acquaint children with different production processes and materials; the goal of "socially useful" labor in pre-school was simply to familiarize the children with production.

Pre-schools and elementary schools introduced children to labor outside of the school through observations and excursions. Beginning with the most basic laborers, schools invited repairmen, such as plumbers, carpenters, and painters, to visit the children in the classroom or community. After a visit from the workers, the children went to visit simple workshops of blacksmiths, locksmiths, and carpenters. On these excursions, children did not perform any labor, but instead observed the process.

Interactions with various laborers and establishments influenced children's play and contributed to the introduction of a "productive element" into toys and games. Prushitzkaia explained that "the adaptation of the toy to action [bore] a striking resemblance to the action of the objects and tools with which the children work(ed) or

---

137 Pinkevitch, 118.
140 Pinkevitch, 118.
which they [saw] their elders use. Thus the coffee mill, the meat grinder, nails, hammers, and saws enter[ed] increasingly into the life of the child and displac[ed] the toy."\textsuperscript{141}

Toys, therefore, were not just for play. When choosing toys for preschool classrooms, the government encouraged teachers to ask themselves, "to what extent does [a child’s] occupation with this material teach him, or give him an opportunity to learn collectivism?"\textsuperscript{142} Common toys, such as wagons and sleds, required physical force to operate, and built muscle control, strength, and coordination in children.\textsuperscript{143}

Beatrice King, an author who visited a Soviet preschool in 1932, observed that adults were not concerned about children hurting themselves when using the tools, and that the children produced "an excellent motor car and sewing machine" out of the scrap metal found in the work area.\textsuperscript{144} When she returned to the Soviet Union in 1934, King found that the polytechnic curriculum included cooking. Children worked together to learn how to prepare simple dishes, such as pastry and soup. Children exercised self-government because they, as a group, decided what dish to cook or what project to build.\textsuperscript{145}

Though preschool children did not participate in the actual labor process, they did attend groundbreaking ceremonies and dedications of new buildings. At these events, children sang songs about the glories of technology and industrialization, such as "The Aid of Iron":

\begin{quote}
The machine is our best friend!
It smoothes collective labor!
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{141} Pinkevitch, 119.
\textsuperscript{142} Fediaevsky and Smith Hill, 84-5.
\textsuperscript{143} Fediaevsky and Smith Hill, 87.
\textsuperscript{144} King, \textit{Changing Man: The Education System of the U.S.S.R.} 65.
and “Industrialization”:

We’re building factories
Lots of machines,
Rushing to finish
The plan in four years.

......
And now, children,
Into the shock brigades,
Our country calls us all,
To help in the factory!\(^{146}\)

Such songs provided the perfect vehicle to transmit communist ideology to children. To the children, learning songs was a fun activity; music and songs were not uncommon in nursery schools or pre-schools. When children memorized songs, they also memorized the Soviet government’s goals. The song “Industrialization” directly referred to Stalin’s desire to complete the first Five-Year Plan in only four years, and to show the Soviet Union’s power and capability to the entire world. While pre-schools exposed children to “socially useful” labor in the form of play and song, elementary and secondary schools boldly incorporated actual labor tasks in the daily curricula.

“Socially useful” labor did not interfere with other academic classes but it was a core component of the Soviet education system. The following two passages appeared in the textbooks used by first and second grade students and demonstrate how “socially useful” labor appeared in academic subjects throughout a child’s education.

“We Must Work”:

Whistles scream
Levers will be turned
Machines will thunder
Machines will growl
The hands hurry
To work we hurry
We need a million

\(^{146}\) Sorochenko, “Pre-School Education in the USSR,” 10.
New machines.\textsuperscript{147}

and "The Combine":

The Collective farm received a combine. The children gathered immediately to see this huge machine. The members of the collective farm gathered the harvest with the combine.\textsuperscript{148}

These exercises emphasized the important goals of the Soviet Union: industrialization, production and collectivization. The passage "We Must Work" reinforced the Soviet Union's goals of rapidly increasing industry and production, while "The Combine" described the introduction of technology and collectivization.

Polytechnism and "socially useful" labor became more complex in primary schools. Children aged eight to twelve did "practical work" in a workroom, typically a small room connected to a classroom, or a large corner of the classroom, that included materials such as "cardboard, paper, tin, wire, wood, textiles, and clay."\textsuperscript{149} The government required that students only make articles that were useful either in the home or in the school. Beginning in 1934, in addition to working with wood and metals, students learned needlework and sewing. The needlework curriculum included "mending, darning, simple cutting-out, and the use of the sewing-machine, as well as the making of simple articles."\textsuperscript{150} Surprisingly, children learned how to make puppets—something not typically classified as "useful."

As students advanced through primary school, the government devoted more class time to polytechnic instruction. In urban schools, the youngest children, Classes 1 and 2, spent two hours per six-day school week on polytechnic activities, while Classes 3 and 4

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{148} deLissovoy, "Elementary Grammar: Soviet Style," 201.
\end{footnotesize}
spent three hours per six-day school week. In rural schools, Classes 1, 2, and 3 spent three of twenty-four hours per seven-day school week on polytechnic activities, and Class 4 spent four out of thirty hours per seven-day school week on polytechnic activities.¹⁵¹ As the curriculum devoted more time to polytechnic education, children learned to make more complex items and mastered basic skills.

The Soviet government encountered problems perfecting the polytechnic curriculum. A shortage of teachers and lack of adequate resources prevented polytechnism from expanding. In 1931, the government founded the Institute of Polytechnisation in Moscow. In 1932, Director Nechayev stated that the Institute’s purpose was:

> to find out how to train children as Communist citizens who will not only be skilled workers—that is not enough for a Soviet citizen—but who will have a knowledge and understanding of the foundations of science, and the scientific basis of industry. Only with the help of such workers will it be possible to realize the aim ‘to catch up and outstrip the foremost capitalist country in the world.’¹⁵²

The Institute of Polytechnization offered programs that trained teachers, lecturers, and workers in polytechnic education. In addition to courses, it facilitated conferences that covered important issues applicable to schools, such as how to teach successfully biology, chemistry, or physics, or how to solve general problems within a specific region or school district. In 1936, the Institute educated 21,625 people in various fields of polytechnism. Additionally, the Institute created the tools necessary for production. One of the Institute’s most unique experiments was the development of tools for people of all ages. The Institute dedicated much of its resources to making the tools of industrialization and production suitable for children, such as various sized hammers and

a "platform, which was comfortable for four different purposes, on which children could stand at the machine, and so on."¹⁵³ The Institute of Polytechnization supported the government's goal of incorporating "socially useful" labor skills into education.

VI. Conclusion: Consequences and Achievements of Soviet Education

The achievements of the Soviet educational system are obvious in the sheer number of enrolled students that grew every year. In 1926 and 1927, a total of 1,059,078 children attended grades V-VII in urban and rural secondary schools. By 1933 and 1934, this number rose to 4,083,588, and by 1938 and 1939, it reached a total of 8,780,049 enrolled students.\textsuperscript{154} One in two Moscow residents attended some form of school.\textsuperscript{155} Enrollment numbers satisfied government officials for a variety of reasons. The growth of schools, both in the city and in the countryside, led to the elimination of illiteracy and enabled the implementation of communist propaganda in every aspect of education. Another reason, officials believed, was that more children in schools meant more skilled and loyal workers to advance the Soviet Union to the ideal socialist society.

Universal education both standardized and stabilized the Soviet educational system. Education included academics and vocational skills; students became knowledgeable and skilled communist workers able to contribute to the building of a great socialist state. By incorporating communist doctrine into the school and in the home, Stalin and his followers succeeded in his goal of converting education into a government vehicle of indoctrination. The implementation of compulsory education ensured that the government could subject all children to communist doctrine. The incorporation of "socially useful" labor into all grade levels provided the Soviet machine with capable workers loyal to the Soviet cause. Though students emerged from schools with ample knowledge of production and labor skills, they lacked an intellectual and truly academic education.

\textsuperscript{154} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934}, 238.
\textsuperscript{155} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934}, 238.
Communist education did not provide adequate intellectual education to the people of the Soviet Union. In 1940, the director of the Academy of Pedagogical Science, Professor Kairov, explained:

> By communist education we mean the education as an all-around developed person of a communist society. This education for the all-around development of the following: intellectual and manual education, and moral and aesthetic and physical education.\(^{156}\)

Kairov's statement accurately described the curriculum and structure of universal communist education available to all children. From the first year of school all the way through the last year, children learned communist ideology, political and moral views, and labor skills as a part of their everyday education. Although the government already knew the importance of a communist and manual education, it realized the importance of an intellectual education near the end of Stalin’s rule. During the 1940s and 1950s, education moved away from the model established under Lenin and Stalin and included more academic material. Nikita Khrushchev issued legislation in the 1950s that both praised the achievements of the Soviet educational system and set forth the steps necessary to enhance the academic and intellectual focus of education.

In September 1958, Nikita Khrushchev issued the memorandum, "On Strengthening the Ties of the School with Life, and Further Developing the System of Public Education." While the memorandum suggested that further reform of the educational system was necessary, it also highlighted the achievements of the Soviet system that formed in the 1920s and 1930s. Khrushchev acknowledged that it achieved high enrollment rates and established numerous schools and academic facilities, and he also praised the inclusion of labor. In 1914, the number of students enrolled in both

elementary and secondary schools totaled 9,600,000; by 1958, that number exceeded 28,700,000. In 1914, 182,000 students attended the upper forms of secondary schools and higher education establishments, but by 1958, the number reached 4,000,000.\textsuperscript{157} Khrushchev applauded the labor component of the schools when he said that children should "be psychologically prepared for the fact that in the future they will have to take part in socially-useful activity, in work, in creating values necessary for the development of the socialist state." These accomplishments, which made a lasting impression on Soviet education and society, cannot be overlooked.

In order for the Soviet Union’s political and economic policies to succeed following the Revolution, the population needed to be educated.\textsuperscript{158} During Stalin’s rule, communist indoctrination took priority over gain of academic knowledge in the Soviet educational system. The Soviet government used education as a tool to force communist ideology into the minds of all citizens, particularly young children.\textsuperscript{159} Because the Soviet youth were the future workers and builders of the great socialist State, it was imperative to instill a communist philosophy at an early age. As a result, the Soviet government deliberately used education as a vehicle for communist indoctrination that produced ideal Soviet citizens capable of creating a great communist state.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{158} King, \textit{Russia Goes to School}, 5.
\textsuperscript{159} King, \textit{Russia Goes to School}, 5.
\textsuperscript{160} King, \textit{Russia Goes to School}, 8.
Select Bibliography

Primary


Afanas'ev, P. O. Bukvar. Moscow: UchPedgiz, 1933.


Filippov, B. Repka. Leningrad: 1924.


**Secondary**


