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COMPARATIVE EDUCATION REVIEW

VOL. 30, NO. 3 AUGUST 1986

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The New Soviet Educational Reform

BEATRICE BEACH SZEKELY

Introduction

Between June 1983 and December 1984, the Soviet government adopted an educational reform that embodied three major points: the enrollment of 6-year-olds in primary school, universal vocational training for secondary school pupils, and improvement in the curricular content and performance of teaching throughout the national school system. None of these represented startling innovation. Six-year-olds had been selectively admitted to primary school preparatory classes for years; vocationalism in the secondary school had been on the upswing for 15 years; and, as anyone with even a modest familiarity knows, the history of Soviet education since World War II has been one of cyclic curricular reforms, most notably the Khrushchev polytechnical labor education reform of 1958-64. Announcement of the new reform meant a commitment on the part of the Soviet political leadership in the 1980s to make those changes and others that had also been adopted on a limited basis mass practice.

By way of departure, the new Soviet educational reform needs to be considered briefly within the context of the agenda for general socioeconomic reform that has been put forward by the three successive political leaderships since the November 1982 death of Leonid Brezhnev. The preliminary attempts during the last decade of the Brezhnev regime, which was marked by lackluster leadership and inept administration in the Soviet government, to adopt the changes that are being advanced in the current educational reform were insufficient. Since 1983, the Soviet education system has been mobilized and made a highly visible component of the impressive efforts by the new governments to shore up the sagging national economy and to solve serious social problems. Education has been brought into the plans for general socioeconomic reform with specific tasks to fulfill, most important of which, at this juncture in Soviet history, is that of better preparing young people for work. Other goals include extending the public day-care provision in the school system, joining school resources to the officially declared war on alcoholism and to state policies aimed at lowering the national divorce rate and raising the birthrate, and using secondary education in the first efforts to make the Soviet

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population computer literate. Purely pedagogical desiderata also enter in and are central to those changes that are being made on the school curriculum and teaching.

At the onset, this attempt to plug Soviet education into national socioeconomic reform begs for comparison with its predecessor in that regard, the polytechnical labor education reform of the Khrushchev era. Such an exercise nets a further probing of the reasons for the new reform. Both reforms, that of 25 years ago and that of today, have been motivated in large part by a fallen Soviet birthrate and a perceived need to train young people in school for their future work. In the Khrushchev era, the drop in the birthrate was caused by the disastrous effects of the Soviet mortality rate in World War II on the size of the population. A more recent cause is longer-term demographic effects of the war coupled with the effects of the increasingly urbanized life-style of the Soviet nuclear family, in which a single child is the norm. Soviet school rolls fell by close to 10 percent between 1970 and 1980. As was the case during the Khrushchev years, in the new educational reform, Soviet education is asked to train the scarce national resource of youth for work through labor training programs built around secondary schools. Sharing this economic motivation, the enrollment of 6-year-olds in primary schooling, aside from its long-argued pedagogical desirability, is a means whereby the day-care provision for the children of working mothers is being extended. The expansion of the national preschool provision and of prolonged day primary and secondary school programs are other such measures. Special courses are being added to the Soviet school curriculum to deal with the social problems of alcoholism, divorce, and the stresses of modern family life and to introduce computer literacy.

If the new educational reform is similar in economic motivation and underlying economic causation to that of Khrushchev, it is set in different, more difficult economic circumstances. Fallen production indexes in the national economy and the need to switch from an almost 60-year-long pattern of extensive economic development that relied on ever-increasing inputs of new raw materials and manpower to one of intensive development that makes better use of existing resources and modern technology mean that any renewed labor training mission of Soviet education needs to aim at preparing youth for work in a technologically sophisticated labor force. With the recovery, albeit temporary, of the national birthrate and the political demise of Nikita Khrushchev in the mid-1960s, the Khrushchev educational reform was dismantled quickly, leaving scarcely a trace. That is far less likely to happen this time. Although there are signs of a slight recovery in the Soviet birthrate, the prevailing choice of small families has proved difficult to change, despite pronatalist policies of the government. Moreover, the structural changes that are currently taking place in the

economy, accompanied by a new emphasis on such production branches as electronics, will, in all likelihood, prove permanent. Accordingly, a far-reaching and long-lasting response to socioeconomic challenges is demanded of education by the post-Brezhnev Soviet political leadership.

Never mind that some would deem the Soviet state economy a proven failure and further attempts to use the national school system to produce critically skilled manpower foredoomed. The three changes in the leadership of the Communist Party and Soviet government since the death of Brezhnev finally resulted in a stabilized political situation last year, and the new leadership seems to have a sure and true grasp of the situation.¹ In the summer of 1984, Oskar Anweiler wrote that the year following the June 1983 plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, at which the new educational reform was formally announced, had been one of "critical balance" that marked the end of the Brezhnev years and the beginning of a new era.² Looking back, 2½ years later, at the start of what is being billed as the pivotal Twelfth Five-Year Plan for Soviet economic development (1986-90), during which the accomplishment of a sharp turnaround in the poor performance of the economy through its technological modernization is intended, there are grounds for guarded optimism on behalf of the rejuvenated government and its education program.

In January 1984, 1 month before Yuri Andropov, the first of the three new General Secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union died, a set of draft "Fundamental Directions of the General and Vocational School Reform" was published.³ This important document in launching the educational reform had been prepared since the June 1983 reform announcement by a special commission within the ruling Communist Party Politbureau, which was first chaired by Konstantin Chernenko. Once he succeeded Andropov to the Communist Party General Secretaryship, the school reform commission chairmanship passed to Mikhail Gorbachev, who, during the short, 13-month tenure of Chernenko as General Secretary, was to devote much attention to the adoption of the educational reform while laying the groundwork for his own assumption of power. Following 3 months of broad public discussion in the early months of 1984, which was engineered through the party's propaganda organs to mobilize public support, a final set of "Fundamental Directions . . ." was adopted in April

¹ Y. V. Andropov was General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from November 1982 to February 1984. K. U. Chernenko occupied this position from February 1984 until the March 1985 accession of M. S. Gorbachev.

² Oskar Anweiler, "Die Sowjetische Schul- und Berufsbildungsreform von 1984," *sozialtopia* 33 (November-December 1984): 854.

³ "The CPSU Central Committee's Draft Basic Guidelines for Reform in the General and Vocational Schools," *Pravda and Izvestia* (January 4, 1984), trans. in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press (CDSP)* 36, no. 1 (February 1, 1984): 1-9, 14-15.

2 months of Chernenko's tenure.⁴ By the end of 1984, Gorbachev was directing the government behind the scenes as Second Secretary of the Communist Party, and he had appointed new leadership in the USSR Ministry of Public Education to empower the educational reform.

Oskar Anweiler and John Dunstan blazed the trail in examining the reform process during its adoption. In the above-cited article, Anweiler gave an overview of the background to the policies proposed and a rundown of plans to lengthen the program of the combined primary and secondary Soviet general education school from 10 to 11 years by enrolling 6-year-olds in first grade, to provide universal vocational education to all senior-secondary-school-age Soviet youths in both the general education school and the separate vocational-technical school network, to revise the academic school curriculum and enhance the position of teachers, and to intensify ideological education and the teaching of Russian as a second language, which are also part of the reform. Dunstan based a later article on an analysis of the April 1984 "Fundamental Directions of the General and Vocational School Reform," detailing in his discussion the substance of the reform program and probing deeply the ramifications of early moves toward implementation. The particular contribution of the Dunstan piece is its extensive documentation and broad coverage of the reform, which is interwoven with interpretation that is strengthened by information gathered from interviews in the Soviet Union.⁵

To allay any residual skepticism on the part of those who have a working knowledge of the fate of the Khrushchev polytechnical labor education reform and who, as a result, wonder what enduring value can really be expected from this new round of Soviet school reforms—despite the grounds for a more serious intent as argued above—Dunstan shared the impression, based on 1984 conversations with important figures in Soviet educational research and administration, of "a new sense of direction and self-confidence among professional colleagues."⁶ This also comes through loud and clear from a regular reading of the Soviet press. Since the adoption of the new reform, writing in newspapers and education journals has displayed a greater candor than ever before, as it is part of the newly avowed policy of greater openness in government. There is an air of pragmatism and hard-nosed realism, which Anweiler has also noted.⁷

⁴ "The Fundamental Directions of General Education and Vocational School Reform Endorsed by the CPSU Central Committee Plenum on 10 April and by the USSR Supreme Soviet on 12 April (1984)," *Soviet Education (SE)* 27, nos. 6-7 (April-May 1985): 158-91, trans. from *Uchitel'skaya gazeta (UG)* (April 17, 1984).

⁵ John Dunstan, "Soviet Education beyond 1984: A Commentary on the Reform Guidelines," *Compare* 15, no. 2 (1985): 161-87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷ Anweiler, p. 843.

within the usual parameters of public schools, within the prevailing ideological structures, there are signs of fresh approaches.⁸

For purposes of further analysis, the time frame since the reform was launched may be broken down into three stages: adoption, mobilization, and implementation. The roughly yearlong period of adoption, dating from the June 1983 announcement in the Central Committee plenum to the April 1984 formal adoption of the "Fundamental Directions . . ." has received extensive treatment by Anweiler, Dunstan, and others.⁹ This contribution to the literature, which should be read as a continuation of their work, focuses on the almost 2-year period of mobilization since then. During this time, the reform has been well publicized among the professional groups involved, and the machinery of educational research and development in the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences has been brought into action.¹⁰ The early efforts at reform implementation have also begun.

The narrative that follows traces the course of events during the mobilization stage, from the end of 1984 when Gorbachev chaired the education reform commission in the Politbureau and during his inaugural year as General Secretary of the Communist Party. Beginning with an analysis of the December 1984 leadership change in the Ministry of Education, an examination of the key points in the reform that affect change in the structure of the Soviet school system is made within a framework provided by a description of that system, and likely difficulties to be encountered in making the structural changes are discussed. Then, a chronological pattern is used to show how momentum gathered during 1985 to push the reform forward from paper to action. Following that, a pause is taken to assess the scope of the job to be done during the implementation phase, using quantitative data current at the start of the 1985-86 school year. Because such data only provide measures at the start of the reform's implementation and because the vagaries of Soviet statistical reporting extend to education, there is much speculation and—in the time-honored tradition of Sovietology—some conjecture in this part of the essay, as there is throughout. Finally, a discussion of changes inside schooling focuses on the new state curriculum, courses, and standard textbooks that are the pedagogical heart of the reform. The concluding paragraphs offer a prognosis for success and failure.

⁸ See Beatrice Beach Szekely, ed., "The Adoption of New Soviet Educational Legislation," *Journal of Comparative Education Research* 27, nos. 3-7 (March-May 1985).

⁹ DeLbert Long, *Educational Reform in the Soviet Union*, Special Studies in Comparative Education, no. 14 (Buffalo: Comparative Education Center, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1984); Charles P. McLadden, "The 1984 Educational Reform in the USSR" (paper presented at the Comparative and International Education Society's Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., April 1985); and Joseph Zajda, "Recent Educational Reforms in the USSR," *Comparative Education* 20, no. 3 (1984): 405-20.

¹⁰ See Beatrice Beach Szekely, ed., "Mobilization for Implementation of the New School Legislation," *Journal of Comparative Education Research* 28, nos. 1-4 (November 1984-February 1985).

go on to further education. As others have noted in analyzing the prospects for fundamental change in Soviet society under the new political leadership, "The fact that Gorbachev has brought to the fore several Party leaders more skilled than others at making the system function, does not mean that he intends to initiate radical reforms of that system."¹⁶ The Gorbachev regime signifies a reformist period in Soviet government, one of "measured change to improve the existing order without fundamentally transforming existing social, political, and economic foundations or going beyond prevailing ideological values."¹⁷ These qualifications need not dampen any enthusiasm or interest in the new reform; they simply set a horizon of reasonable expectations.

The Structure of the Soviet School System and Inherent Administrative Problems

It has been mentioned that the job of the USSR Ministry of Education under Shcherbakov's direction is primarily that of administering the combined primary and secondary school of general education and its teacher training system. Preschooling, which is to be expanded during the years of the new reform from its current intake that varies greatly from an almost universal provision in major cities to far less in rural areas, also falls within the education ministry's purview. Technical and higher education, which are provided by the technicums and training colleges that make up what is called secondary specialized education and by the institutes of higher education, do not. These institutions are administered by the USSR Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education. Repercussions of the new educational reform are being felt throughout the higher education system, but the focus is really restricted to schools.

In the mid-1970s, Soviet schooling was made compulsory throughout the secondary level, an achievement that was hailed in the USSR as the transition to universal secondary education. Within the structure of the school system, there is a common provision of primary and what is termed incomplete secondary education and a furcated senior secondary provision. Currently, the combined primary and incomplete secondary school of general education extends through the eighth grade. According to the terms of the new reform, incomplete secondary general education will extend through the ninth grade when 6-year-olds are admitted to the first grade of primary school and when the complete structure of the general education school, through the senior secondary level, converts from a 10- to an 11-year program. Within the general education school,

¹⁶ Ian Elliot, "And Now Gorbachev, the Great Reformer," *Survey* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 7.

¹⁷ Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience, Politics and History since 1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 131.

then) will revert to 4 years when the educational reform is implemented. Pupils are 15 years old at the point of furcation, at the end of incomplete secondary general education school. The reform does not change this, since the new, eleventh school year has been added at the bottom of the educational ladder. Presently, the majority (roughly 60 percent) of the 15-year-old national cohort goes on to the 2-year senior level of the general education school, and a minority goes on to separate vocational technical schools, which offer narrowly specialized occupational training in from 1- to 3-year programs. Since 1969, ever-increasing numbers of a new type of school have come into existence—secondary vocational technical schools that offer a slightly modified version of the curriculum of the senior secondary general education school—in addition to occupational training. Further increases in this type of school are likely to be both a route to the success of the educational reform by way of its vocational training mandate and a source of problems from the point of view of central administration.

The vocational-technical schools are administered directly by the many ministries in the industrial, agricultural, and service sectors of the Soviet economy, for whom they train skilled job recruits, with coordination and direction from the State Committee for Vocational and Technical Education of the USSR Council of Ministers. The new educational reform envisions a reversal in the distribution of the intake percentages of 15-year olds between the senior secondary general education school and secondary vocational technical schools as that distribution now stands. Soviet statistics are deficient, perhaps deliberately so, in data that provide a 1981-85 baseline by which to measure progress toward that end. The goal is to double the present catchment of 15-year-olds entering vocational technical schools from about one-third of the national age cohort to as high as two-thirds by the end of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, which will be carried out by the conversion of all vocational-technical schools to a secondary footing and by the establishment of new ones. An additional percentage of young people who graduate from the complete secondary general education school—currently one-quarter of the 17 year-old cohort—will attend vocational technical schools and receive 1 year of occupational training. The administrative difficulties inherent in expanding vocational technical school enrollment stem from the need for the State Committee for Vocational and Technical Education to coordinate the efforts of the many ministries involved and from the inevitable overlap in responsibilities between that state committee and the Ministry of Education in overseeing the general education curriculum and teacher training.

Before leaving this outline of the administrative problems that face those responsible for realizing the school reform, special emphasis needs

to be attached to the system, but regard in which Soviet educational administration has been held since the early Brezhnev years. Complaints in the education press are legion concerning such perennial issues as failure to achieve school construction targets in Central Asia, where population growth is disproportionately high, and the widespread practice of grade inflating that is encouraged among teachers by municipal school officials, who are overly interested in cranking pupils through the grades. S. G. Shcherbakov was brought to the Ministry of Education not simply to lead it in realizing the specific points of the new educational reform but to produce improvement in the administrative efficiency and overall performance of the Soviet school system.

Gathering Momentum in 1985

Once in place at the end of 1984, the first act of the Gorbachev-Shcherbakov leadership to move the reform forward quickly toward implementation was the January 1985 announcement by the Collegium of the Ministry of Education of the plan to introduce a computer technology course into all Soviet senior secondary schools. This bold stroke signified a concentration of energy on a headline-grabbing aspect of the reform that would seize hold of the popular imagination and impress both the Soviet people and the world at large. The "Fundamental Directions of the General and Vocational School Reform" had cited the need "to equip pupils with the knowledge and skills necessary to make use of modern computer technology" and had envisioned the introduction of "computers into the educational process on a broad scale, setting up special school and interschool computer centers for this purpose. . . ."¹⁸ The new administration took the "Fundamental Directions . . ." a giant step forward and pledged the resources of the government to make the "computerization" (*komputerizatsiia*) of the Soviet school a reality. A March 29, 1985, Politbureau meeting affirmed the goal of teaching the new course "Principles of Information Science and Computer Technology" in the ninth and tenth—to be tenth and eleventh—grades of the general education school and in vocational-technical schools.¹⁹ Forthwith, work began to enlist the foremost computer science education experts in the Soviet Union for preparation of the requisite course syllabus and teaching materials to get the new subject into schools by the fall.

This ambitious undertaking was initiated only 1 month before Gorbachev made the signature speech of his early months in power, in which he called for "the acceleration of scientific and technological progress . . ." so that a "decisive turnaround to conquer negative tendencies in the economy and social life, accumulated by the end of the 70s and the

¹⁸ "The Fundamental Directions . . ." (n. 4 above), p. 168.

¹⁹ *UG* (January 15 and March 30, 1985).

beginning of the 80s, might be accomplished. "Citing the need to activate the human factor," he summoned those to whom administrative responsibility for the education reform was delegated to join in that endeavor, saying further that it was time to move to realization of the school reform.²¹ Gorbachev's speech, which appeared in virtually every newspaper in the USSR, is cited here from Shcherbakov's "New School Year" article of September 1985 to indicate the latter's recognition of its message as a guidepost for his own work.

The April speech was followed by a conference convened by the Party Central Committee on the subject of accelerating scientific and technological progress.²² Throughout the spring and summer months, while the labor discipline campaign that Iurii Andropov had begun among industrial and agricultural workers in the early months of 1983 was being reactivated, more central directives from the government were issued with the intention of mobilizing support for the school reform from the education professions and from society at large.

On April 22, as an offshot of the nationwide push for discipline in all areas of public life, a new set of rules to govern school pupil behavior was issued, although, curiously, they were not published in the three-weekly *Teacher's Gazette* (*Uchitel'skaya gazeta*) until August. Four kinds of conduct were listed, instead of the two in the previous pupil rules, and an evaluation at the lowest level was made grounds for the refusal of entrance to school-leaving examinations. Not since the strict wartime regulations for pupils of 1943, which had themselves harkened back to those of the prerevolutionary Russian gymnasium, had such a high level of conduct—both in and outside school—been demanded of children and adolescents, observed one satisfied parent in a newspaper interview.²³ Although there was some disagreement on the part of those who felt that different sets of rules should be established in different schools, most people, the paper concluded, approved.²⁴ The new rules, summoning all Soviet school pupils to "study, live and work in a communist way, and to prepare themselves for the defense of the socialist Fatherland," went on to spell out the virtues expected—industry, patriotism, comradeship, respect for elders, and courtesy were chief among them—and to list the ways in

²¹ S. G. Shcherbakov, "Novyi uchebnyi god," *Narodnaia obrazovaniia*, no. 9 (1985), p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Gennadi Alekseiovich Iagodin, the prominent rector of the Mendeleev Institute of Chemical Technology in Moscow who spoke up during the proceedings of that June conference to criticize the current situation in the training of Soviet engineers, was to be named in July the new Soviet Minister of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, see Friedrich Kuchart, "Erbauungsgesellschaft Wandel, Wissenschaftspolitik und Hochschulreform," Halbjahresbericht zur Bildungspolitik und Pädagogischen Entwicklung in der DDR, der UdSSR, der VR Polen, der CSSR und der VR China, 1985, 1 (Ruh-Universität Bochum, Institut für Pädagogik, Arbeitsstelle für vergleichende Bildungsforschung, 1985), pp. 51-53.

²⁴ M. Vladimirov and I. Kulakov, "Voz'mishe za pravdu," *UG* (September 1985), p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

which they might be applied, principally through participation in socially useful labor, diligent attention to school work, observance of the school rules, and rational use of one's leisure time.²⁵ The purpose of the new school rules was to enhance the social responsibility of Soviet school pupils in preparation for their adult roles as disciplined workers and citizens.²⁶

In May, party and government resolutions were forthcoming "On Interschool Production Training Centers, Labor Education and the Occupational Guidance of School Pupils" and "On the Organization of the Socially Useful, Productive Labor of General Education School Pupils," which were detailed sets of orders about how these aspects of the labor education mission in the reform should be carried out.²⁷ The interschool production training centers, an innovation of the last decade, are a key phenomenon in drawing general education school pupils into job training. There were some 2,700 in operation at the beginning of the 1985-86 school year, relying on the resources of local factories, plants, and farms to make equipment, materials, and training mentors available to teach upper-secondary school pupils job skills in a few sessions a week.²⁸ Getting enterprise managers and farm directors to commit their resources to the training centers is the important task of interagency commissions set up by local governments and party committees, and complaints of withheld support are frequent in the press.

In June, the announcement was made of new procedures to govern a countrywide recertification of the close to three million teachers employed in Soviet schools. Annually between 1986 and 1990, 20 percent of the national teaching body is to be subjected to a highly complex process of peer and supervisory review, from which all are to emerge at the end of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan with one of four possible ratings. Special teachers will be recognized for superior work at the local level as "teacher-methodologists" or at the union republic level as "honored teachers," and particularly outstanding individuals will be awarded the national decoration of "hero of socialist labor" or the newly created title of "people's teacher."²⁹ The mass of teachers will be judged either competent to remain in their present positions, in need of in-service training, or as candidates for job

²⁵ "Tipovye pravila dlia uchashchikhsia," *UG* (August 27, 1985), p. 2.

²⁶ See Elizabeth Teague, "Labor Discipline and Legislation in the USSR, 1979-85" (paper presented at the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Washington, D.C., October 1985); *Radio Liberty Research Supplement* 2085 (October 16, 1985).

²⁷ "Polozhenie o mezhskol'nom uchebno-proizvodstvennom kombinate trudovogo obucheniia i professional'noi orientatsii uchashchikhsia," *UG* (June 4, 1985), p. 3, and "Polozhenie ob organizatsii obshchestvenno-poleznogo, proizvoditel'nogo truda uchashchikhsia obshchego obrazovatel'nykh shkol," *UG* (June 6, 1985), p. 2.

²⁸ Shcherbakov, "Novyi uchebnyi god," p. 5.

²⁹ Shcherbakov, "Kachestvenno-novyi etap razvitiia sistema natsional'nogo obrazovaniia" (in 15 above), p. 8.

dismissal. This largely bureaucratic undertaking is something of a school principal's nightmare, but potentially of enormous value. The results will be used to apportion the salary raises, averaging 35 percent, that Chernenko promised to the national teaching profession simultaneously with the reform adoption in April 1984. Teachers who are judged to be working at a level of superior performance and who are given the four titles listed above will receive increments to their monthly salaries.

A concluding event in the surge of activity by the new leadership to push the reform forward before the start of the 1985–86 school year was the August publication of a Communist Party Central Committee resolution, "On the Party Guidance of the Work to Carry Out the Reform of the General Education and Vocational School in the Gorky Region."³⁰ In the established tradition of negatively critical agitation and propaganda resolutions, this one identified poor performance in one area of the country and held it up as an example through which to castigate the school system of the whole country for dragging its heels in getting down to the business of school reform. It was revealed that 30 percent of Gorky Region school pupils in the upper grades were not involved in productive labor experiences arranged by local production enterprises.³¹ All aspects of the school enterprise, from preschool construction quotas to the selection of young people to be steered into teaching careers in large numbers, were touched on. The message was sounded from the political center to republic, regional, and local party committees that they must make the needs of the schools a priority in the weeks before the September 1 opening date and in the coming months.

Assessing the Scope of the Reform

Pausing to assess the scope of the job that lay ahead as the educational reform process moved forward last year from mobilization to implementation, three quantifiable indicators are (1) the number of 6-year-olds entering first grade to break ground for the structural reform of the general education school to an 11-year program; (2) the number of pupils being trained for work, in both general education and vocational technical schools, in fulfillment of the promise of universal vocational education, and (3) the actual salary increases paid to teachers at all levels of teaching as a means to stimulate improved performance.

It is not known what percentage of 6-year-olds was actually enrolled in first grade last year, but the number was very small. There were to be 1.2 million 6-year-olds enrolled in primary school preparatory classes,

³⁰ "On Party Guidance of Work to Carry Out Reform in the General Education and Vocational Schools of Gorky Province," *Pravda and Izvestia* (August 10, 1985) (trans. in *CPSU* 3, 1985: 32) (September 1, 1985): 8–9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

which were to be converted into the new first grade after 1986.³² The reorganization of primary schooling, reverting to the pre-1966 structure of a 4-year program, will be phased in gradually, with the first sizable crop of 6-year-old entrants moving through the primary grades by 1990. An assumption must have been made by the educational reform decision makers that room for the added grade was available because of the drop in the national birthrate and the shrinkage in national school rolls—from 49.2 to 44.3 million—between 1970 and 1980.³³ It now appears that any enrollment projections for the general education school in this decade that were based on such reasoning were in error. Fred Hechinger reported hearing on a 1985 trip to the Soviet Union that there were more 6-year-olds to be taken into first grade than had been anticipated, which means that full realization of their enrollment may have to be put off in order to avoid overcrowding and that a hoped-for reduction in primary school class size as part of the reform—from up to 40 pupils down to 30—will have to be postponed.³⁴

Overcrowding has always been a problem in Soviet schools, ever since the Stalin era when primary education was first made compulsory. Previously avoided in the Soviet press, some statistics that gauge the extent to which it has persisted have been forthcoming since the adoption of the new educational reform. Complaints of overcrowding in day nurseries for 6-month- to 3-year-old children, where the norm is 18 per nursery group, and in the 3-year kindergarten, where the norm is 25, are common, with overcrowding by 50 percent reported as typical for Soviet preschools.³⁵ Fully eight million primary and secondary school children attend schools used twice a day, in a second shift—a figure that will perforce be increased in proportion to the enrollment of 6-year-olds for whom there are as yet no classrooms or other facilities.³⁶ School construction targets call for a 20 percent increase in the total number of pupil places during the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, reflecting the intent of the new reform to deal with the overcrowding problem.³⁷

Universal vocational education will be pursued within the reform through senior secondary general education school labor training programs and through the expansion of secondary vocational-technical

³² Shcherbakov, "Novyi uchebnyi god" (n. 20 above), p. 5.

³³ N. Khromenkov and V. Mashikov, "Demographic Policy and the School," *SE* 25, no. 12 (October 1982): 36–37, trans. from *Narodnoe obrazovanie*, no. 2 (1982).

³⁴ Fred M. Hechinger, "Soviet Reforms Have Familiar Ring," *New York Times* (November 12, 1985).

³⁵ "Small Children Are a Big Concern," *Izvestia* (October 21, 1985), trans. in *CDMP* 37, no. 42 (November 13, 1985): 21.

³⁶ The 8,000,000 figure represents enrollment in 29.5 percent of Soviet schools, F. G. Panahin, "Nauchno-tekhnicheskii progress i shkola," *Vospitanie shkol'nikov*, no. 5 (1985), pp. 2–8.

³⁷ K. Nozhko, "Ukreplenie uchebno-material'noi bazy obrazovaniia," *Narodnoe obrazovanie*, no. 10 (1984), p. 8.

Cameo
*CORP.

schooling. In addition, some 15-year-old incomplete secondary general education school-leavers enter technicums and training colleges of secondary specialized education to prepare for such semiprofessional careers as those of laboratory technicians and preschool teachers. That figure was 6 percent in 1980, the last year for which complete statistics for the distribution of incomplete secondary school-leavers seem to be available. Sixty percent of the 15-year-old cohort then went on to senior secondary general education school and 33 percent to vocational-technical schools.³⁸ Among the two major routes to expand vocational education, the addition of labor training programs to the general education school is highly problematic because the combined senior secondary program that results needs to prepare a large segment of Soviet young people for both higher education and for work in the mass occupations of the national labor force. The dysfunctionality of training "the better prepared youth with high level intellectual potential" who are pursuing the full academic curricula of general education studies simultaneously for work in "the more simple occupations" was verbalized by the Moldavian Republic Minister of Education, D. G. Zidu, at a May 1985 national conference on vocational education, making explicit the Soviets' open recognition of the problem, in addition to an identification by the British and West German observers, Dunstan and Anweiler.³⁹

The goal of vocational education in the general education school is to attract increasing numbers of 17-year-old graduates into the national labor force where they are needed. This will mean manual employment at factories and farms for many youths in the foreseeable future, despite plans of the Gorbachev government for technological modernization, and occupational guidance has become a strongly upgraded function of the secondary general education school in recent years in order to drum up interest. Within the general education school curriculum, polytechnical education, the traditionally strong element in Soviet Marxist pedagogy that means teaching the scientific principles that underlie industrial and agricultural production and their major applications, is closely tied to specific production circumstances, harkening back to the slogan of the Khrushchev polytechnical labor reform to "strengthen the tie of the school with life." Extracurricular arrangements include courses at production training workshops and farming plots located directly at schools and at local or district interschool production training centers. Outside formal schooling, and edging toward part time employment, "about 35 percent

³⁸ B. Gershunskii and V. Travin, "Vseobshchee professional'noe obrazovanie: metody zhuivleniia nauchno-tekhnicheskogo progressa," *Politicheskoe samoochrastovanie*, no. 11 (1983), p. 893.

³⁹ I. Zaverskaia, "Pervye etogi reformy," *Sovetskaiia pedagogika*, no. 10 (1985), p. 11. John Dunstan, "Equalisation and Differentiation in the Soviet School, 1958-1985, a Curriculum Approach" (paper presented at the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Washington, D.C., October 1985), p. 29, and Anweiler (in 2 above), p. 844.

of senior grade pupils will undergo job training in workshops located directly at industrial enterprises" in the current (1985–86) school year.⁴⁰ Under Khrushchev, the last time it was tried, a similar package of labor training measures attached to the general education school failed because of a lack of coordination of the enterprise and because of poor public response. The leadership in charge of administering the new education reform has the advantage of working with a smaller segment of the age cohort because a sizable portion is being removed to the secondary vocational-technical schools, and the interagency commissions that are being established will coordinate pupil labor training at the local level, along with formalized school-and-factory or school-and-farm relationships of patronage.

Despite the somewhat improved prospects for general education school labor training, the expanded vocational-technical school is likely to prove the more successful way of training teenagers for employment because of its de facto linkage with the sectors of the economy for which it carries out specialized job training. Even there, however, cause for unbridled enthusiasm is lacking. I. A. Kostin, the First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Committee for Labor and School Problems, which is the agency responsible for overseeing the entrance of youth into the work force, has observed that 15–20 percent of vocational-technical school entrants are not personally well suited to the work that they will be trained for and that, as a result, 20–30 percent of vocational-technical school graduates do not show up at the places where, legally, they are to fulfill a job placement immediately after graduation. Furthermore, 40 percent change their occupation shortly after entering the labor force.⁴¹ At present, an overwhelming majority of Soviet youths are not being trained for specific careers that they will follow after school beyond a short term of employment.

Carrying out the third major quantifiable measure in the school reform, the teacher salary increases first promised by Konstantin Chernenko in 1984 will add to the costs of the school reform for the hard-pressed Soviet economy, whose revival the reform is itself intended to fuel. Yet they are highly necessary in order to improve the morale of teachers and evoke improved performance; to draw more teachers to outlying, rural areas—where some 40 percent of Soviet schoolchildren live—and to attract men to a profession that is 70–80 percent women.

To use a phrase often repeated in the American setting, salary raises in education have not kept up with those for other professional groups. In the USSR, "The average monthly salary of workers in public education, including highly paid instructors in higher education, was 137.5 rubles

⁴⁰ Slcherbakov, "Novyi uchebnyi god" (n. 20 above), p. 6.

⁴¹ Zaretskaia, p. 9.

in 1982, which put them in fourteenth place among other broad groups of workers, while in 1965 they had occupied ninth place by that indicator.⁴² Chernenko announced in April 1984 an overall increase of 35.7 percent for Ministry of Education employees in the preschool and general education school, 30.4 percent for vocational-technical school teachers, and 29.7 percent for those at secondary specialized institutions—all to be phased in from 1984 to 1987.⁴³ A reduced teaching load was also promised for primary school teachers: from 24 to 20 hours of lesson time per week. Most recent available data for September 1, 1984, report an average salary for the education sector of 142 rubles, still far less than the 184.8 rubles that is the average for industrial workers and white-collar employees in the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ The 35 percent increase proposed for teachers' salaries overall, will, if realized, just bring their pay up to par.

Of note is the designation of elementary teachers employed at school boarding hostels, usually in rural areas; at children's state homes; and at vocational-technical schools for agriculture and the mining industry as among the first subgroups to receive their increases in the 1984-85 school year.⁴⁵ Apparently, they are, or were, the most poorly paid and those for whom the most critical demand had been generated. The 1985-86 increment was to pay priority attention to teachers and administrators in all types of educational institutions in those geographic areas of the country with the worst shortages of qualified teachers: the far north, far east, Urals economic region, and elsewhere.⁴⁶ Attention is also being paid to the provision of housing and to the living conditions of teachers. Coupled with all this are plans to increase the length of the training programs at pedagogical institutes for teachers of the school disciplines (from 4 to 5 years) and the teacher recertification plan; a picture of big plans emerges for the Soviet teaching profession.

Changing Schooling

Moving from outside the school system, from the realm of Communist Party and government plans and from quantifiable measures of change, changes taking place inside Soviet schooling are best expressed in revisions of the single state curriculum and uniform teaching syllabi of actual

⁴² E. R. Filippov and V. A. Malova, "O nekotorykh napravleniakh povysheniia effektivnosti obrazovaniia," *M*, 28, no. 4 (February 1986), in press; trans. from *Sotsiologicheskii issledovaniia*, no. 2 (1984), p. 79.

⁴³ E. E. Protschenko, "School Reform in the USSR," *Soviet Education Study Bulletin*, Vol. 1 (Spring 1985), 7.

⁴⁴ "Srednemesiachnaya denezhnaia zarabotnana plata rabochikh i sluzhashchikh po otrashiati narodnogo khoziaistva," *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 10 (1985), p. 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

tion and in new school courses and standard textbooks. Like all its predecessors in the cycle of postwar Soviet educational reforms, beginning with the Khrushchev polytechnical labor education reform, the revision that is currently taking place in the contents of teaching—for which there is an official policy of uniformity throughout the Soviet school system—is intended to correct the excesses of its immediate predecessor. The general education school curriculum was last revised in 1977 in an attempt to correct the excesses of the academic school curriculum reform of 1966, itself—to bring the postwar reform cycle full circle—a reaction to the excessive vocationalism of the Khrushchev reform. The 1966 academic curriculum, while strengthening the intellectual rigor of the general education school, had resulted in a teaching program that proved too difficult for the mass enrollment of pupils in senior secondary school in the mid-1970s. The course syllabi and textbooks that resulted from the 1977 curriculum revision removed some of the excessive difficulties that critics charged were characteristic. "Overly complex subject matter," "duplication," and "too much detail" were buzzwords.⁴⁷ The syllabi and textbooks accompanying the curricular revision in the new educational reform take off in that same direction while responding to the structural changes currently taking place in the school.

The general education curriculum, having undergone these cyclic permutations, dictates all the subjects taught and the hours allocated weekly to them in each of the Soviet school grades.⁴⁸ Because of the addition of labor training and occupational guidance courses, the incremental requirement of socially useful labor, and the new courses in selected fields of social relevance and computer technology, the number of class periods to be taught in all the 11 grades of the reformed general education school has been increased from 280 to 326 in the new curriculum, which was published in June last year.⁴⁹ In addition, there is room in the curriculum for elective courses that are offered in the senior secondary school for academically motivated pupils, presumably those pupils who will go on to higher education. Electives may fill in the gaps left by the 1977 and 1985 curricular revisions' removal from the 1966 academic curriculum subject matter that has proved too difficult for a common school provision. Something else added on to the general education school program is compulsory labor practice during the summer holidays, ranging from 10

⁴⁷ See "Evaluation of the Recent Curriculum Reform," *SE* 19, nos. 7 and 8 (May and June 1977), pts. 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ N. Kuzin and M. Kondakov, eds., *Education in the USSR* (Moscow: Progress, 1977), p. 45, and John Dunstan, ed., "Model Curriculum for the Secondary General School," *Soviet Education Study Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 66-67.

⁴⁹ Dunstan, "Model Curriculum for the Secondary General School," p. 65.

days (3 hours daily) in the fifth through seventh grades to 20 hours (6 hours daily) in the summer following tenth grade.⁵⁰

Like the general education school curriculum of the Khrushchev era, within the newly revised one, socially useful labor for young children simply means learning to dress and care for oneself and to do household chores and take care of school rooms as well as mastering the rudiments of manual labor with tools. In the final, seventh through ninth grades of the new incomplete secondary school, elementary vocational training is being grouped around blocks of common occupations for which recruits are needed in the local labor force, such as farm equipment operators or dairy maids. In the tenth and eleventh grades, the training of each pupil in a specific occupation is to be culminated by certification with a skill rating based on the list of some 7,500 occupations officially recognized in the Soviet economy. Several hundred jobs or occupations reportedly appear on the list now in use for the construction of labor training programs in general education schools in cooperation with local farms, factories, and service enterprises.⁵¹ This is far fewer than the 1,500 occupations for which specialized and far more intense training was given in vocational technical schools as recently as in 1978—jobs in which two thirds of the country's labor force was then employed.⁵² With regard to the limited provision of vocational training for that segment of youth that enters the senior secondary general education school to pursue its primarily academic course of study, the question is whether, in the few hours a week that are scheduled for them, locally designed labor training programs at schools, production training centers, and economic enterprises can be made effective.

Within the general education component of the new school curriculum the number of hours allotted to the subject disciplines has remained almost unchanged in comparison with that of the 1977 version, with slight reduction, for example, in the number of hours scheduled for physics in grades 7–11—from 16 to 14.5—and for foreign languages in grades 5–11—from 16 to 14—in order to make room for labor training and the other additions.⁵³ The attenuated nature of the dispersal of the Soviet school subjects through the grade levels, which has meant that a course might meet only once or twice a week in certain grades, has been retained.

⁵⁰ V. Ministerstve prosvetsheniia SSSR. Polozhenie ob organizatsii obshchestvenno poleznogo proizvodnogo truda uchashiikhhsia obshcheobrazovatel'nykh shkol, *Nastoiashche obshchestvo*, no. 9 (1980), p. 96.

⁵¹ "K novym turezhnam obshchego obrazovaniia," *Sovetskaya pedagogika*, no. 1 (1980), p. 10.

⁵² V. O. Rukavishnikov, "Perechen' professii. Noveye vozmozhnosti obshchestva," *Psikhologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 2 (1985), p. 99.

⁵³ Compare Kuzm and Kondakov with Dunstan, "Model Curriculum for the Secondary General School," pp. 66–67.

peating the words and phrases that had set the stage for the country-wide socioeconomic reform with which the new educational reform had taken shape—the need to “accelerate” and to increase the role of the “human factor.” Section 2 of Part V of the program draft was devoted to public education and reiterated the policy goals of the new educational reform, including the promise that “in the course of the realization of these measures, the further development and convergence will take place and, in the future, the merger of the vocational and general education school.”⁶² Such a merger would realize the ideal of a comprehensive school, combining academic and polytechnical education with labor training, which has provided a frame of reference for reform throughout the history of Soviet education, since its articulation by the founders of the national school system in the United Labor School Decree of 1918.

The incorporation into the party canon of the latest thrust in Soviet educational reform was followed by codification in law. New “Fundamentals of Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics in Public Education,” superseding those last promulgated in July 1973, were issued in December.⁶³ The policies in the new educational reform were thereby transformed into official legislation. Thus was the stage of reform mobilization completed.

To conclude this survey of the early reform period with a prognosis for success and failure, the major policy changes that have received attention here—the enrollment of 6-year-olds, universal vocational education, and an overhaul in the contents of teaching—are fundamentally sound and will prove realizable, although not completely within the time frame projected for the school enrollment increases during the Twelfth Five-Year Plan and not without compromises in the qualitative changes projected for schooling. The primary school enrollment of 6-year-olds will take longer than the 5-year plan because of the excessive number of children unless additional and more severe crowding is allowed in already overburdened school facilities. Universal vocational education will be somewhat easier to pursue than 25 years ago during the Khrushchev reform because of the mixture of labor training programs and the infrastructure of vocational-technical schools in place today, but not necessarily easier to realize in terms of training large numbers of Soviet youth for long-term employment in blue-collar occupations. The revision of the school curriculum, course syllabi, and textbooks and the introduction of the newly added school courses will be finished before 1990, although—as has always been the case with Soviet curricular changes—these revisions will receive mixed reviews for their academic and polytechnical content and social relevance and before long will become obsolete and have to be

⁶² “Programma Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza, novaya redaktsiia,” *UG* (October 26, 1985).

⁶³ “Osnovy zakonodatel'stva Soiuza SSR i Soiuzykh Respublik o narodnom obrazovanii,” *UG* (December 5, 1985).

updated again. The principal stumbling blocks in carrying out these individual measures will be the administrative problems outlined above and uneven funding due to the present economic situation.

The strongest accomplishment of the new reform, in general, is that it may well end the pendulum-like swings of its two forerunners, striking something of a balance between relative emphases on labor education and academics. Despite the fact that the strong upsurge of vocationalism threatens to replace the traditional predominance of polytechnism in Soviet education with a monotechnic bias, this is apt to be tempered by shortfalls in the desired majority enrollment of senior secondary school pupils in vocational-technical schools and in the provision of general education school labor training programs, which will be caused not only by the types of factors noted but also by simply a lack of popular response. In the years ahead, the reform of the 1980s is likely to be viewed as having been a step forward in Soviet educational development toward the realization of a comprehensive school provision, however much the size of that step may have been compromised by the reality of what could be afforded at the time. At least the problems that arose as a result of the transition to universal complete secondary education during the 1970s will have been corrected, if within the limits imposed by the maintenance of a dual senior secondary school.

The possibility has been raised of uniting the administrations of the general education and vocational-technical school systems in one or two union republics on an experimental basis, which poses a partial, if only bureaucratic, solution to the problem of a dual provision.⁶⁴ It will take a strong recovery of the Soviet economy for the country to afford the truly comprehensive school long dreamed of. Recognition on the part of the Soviets that administrative and economic problems are the major barriers to further progress is signified by the formation of a new research institute at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in those fields. It is to the Institute of the Administration and Economics of Public Education that one may look for Soviet studies that monitor implementation of the new educational reform and for signs of further change.

⁶⁴ M. Zimaoui, "Following Leninist Principles for the Development of Public Education," *IE* 28, no. 1 (November 1985): 67, trans. from *Kommunist*, no. 7 (1985).

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DESCRIPTIONS: Single copies without membership in the area: Yearly individuals \$28.00, institutions \$55.00, postage for foreign subscriptions (does not include U.S. student subscriptions) \$17.00, and must be accompanied by a statement signed by the student's advisor. Copy rates: individuals \$7.00, institutions \$13.25. Payment should be made payable to The University of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, IL 60637. Postmaster: Send address change to the University of Chicago Press at P.O. Box 37005.

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The REVIEW is indexed in EDUCATION INDEX, etc.
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