FAMILY *and* SCHOOL *in the* U.S.S.R.

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FOREWORD

Among the many achievements of the Soviet Union in the forty years of its existence, those in the educational field are noteworthy. A country which before the revolution occupied almost the last place in Europe with regard to public education is now one of the foremost in the world in this respect.

The remarkable development in the U.S.S.R. of social forms of education and upbringing in the shape of an extensive network of crèches, kindergartens, general and specialized schools and boarding-schools and the numerous extra-school establishments, prompts the question: Will not this lead to a weakening of the part played by the home in upbringing and lessen the rights of the parents?

There are no grounds for such fears. Experience shows that the home influence is so profound and many-sided that it cannot be eliminated or noticeably weakened by social forms of education. After all, the aim of building communism is equally dear to teacher and parent alike, and in bringing up and educating children they have a common purpose. This makes it easier for them to find a common language and to solve, jointly, the complex problems of child training. The school is directly interested in enhancing the educational role of the family, since it knows that without the help of the latter the many delicate

problems associated with moulding the child's personality cannot be solved successfully.

The aim of the writer is, by means of a wealth of facts, to show the experience of home upbringing in the U.S.S.R., the diverse forms of contact between school and home and the parents' participation in school life and in guiding the different aspects of social upbringing. And the facts testify that social and home upbringing, far from being contradictory, constitute organic links in an integrated and multiform educational process.

A FEW GENERAL REMARKS

Parallel with laying the foundations of socialism and communism began the moulding of a new socialist man—a man of lofty consciousness, discipline and broad education, a real collectivist, a worker who takes pride in his job.

A feature of the young Soviet generation is its wholehearted devotion to socialism. Already during the first years of the revolution this devotion was personified in thousands of exploits in the struggle against the Whiteguards and interventionists and, afterwards, in rebuilding the shattered economy. Later, when the five-year plans began, thousands of members of the Young Communist League volunteered for the new construction sites. They built the Stalingrad Tractor Plant, the Iron and Steel Works in Magnitogorsk and the new town, Komsomolsk-on-Amur; they erected power stations, factories and blast furnaces, sank mines and built railways, threw bridges across rivers, built houses, schools, hospitals and clubs. This was a truly heroic epoch and it reared a valiant Soviet youth.

This quality was displayed with particular force during the grim years of the war against the fascist invader. The young patriots Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, Oleg Koshevoi, Yuri Smirnov, Sasha Chekalin, Liza Chaikina, Volodya

Dubinin and a host of other boys and girls won undying fame. Numerous books have been written about their exploits.

The country suffered terribly from the war. But the people, despite the sacrifices and devastation, remained undaunted. They energetically set about restoring and expanding the economy, with the youth marching in the front ranks. Some seventeen thousand Y.C.L. members volunteered for work in factories turning out prefabricated parts for building work; another sixteen thousand left for the Donets Coal Basin, while tens of thousands travelled to the sites of the giant hydroelectric stations at Stalingrad and Kuibyshev on the Volga, at Irkutsk and Bratsk on the River Angara. Three hundred and fifty thousand Y.C.L.'ers set out for the Siberian steppes and Kazakhstan to bring virgin and fallow lands under cultivation.

The children and adolescents, their life, upbringing and vocations have always been objects of the care of the Soviet people. This was strikingly manifested in the life-work of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin—the founder of the Soviet state.

Lenin loved children; but his feelings were least of all the sentimentality and condescension so typical of many adults in their attitude to the young. Lenin's ideas about children were always linked up with the future, for which the struggle was being waged—the struggle they would take over from their fathers as builders of the new world. It was just this attitude which sponsored his affectionate interest in children and his attention to their needs.

Lenin had no difficulty in identifying himself with children and gaining their confidence. Before the revolution, while living in Switzerland, he made friends with a neighbouring boy, and during his free time would play gaily with him and his companions. Sometimes, when someone complained about too much noise, he would say: "Don't interfere—we are playing." He had a great respect for the young, for all their efforts and activities. His wife and

Lenin and Krupskaya with their nephew Victor and the daughter of a worker

helpmate, Nadezhda Krupskaya, recalled the following characteristic detail.

In Ufa where she gave lessons to an engine-driver's ten-year-old daughter, Lenin would tiptoe past the door so as not to disturb them.

During the most trying years for the young Soviet Republic, Lenin, despite the burden of affairs of state, always kept an eye on the children. He was the first to wage a decisive struggle for the homeless waifs, helping to set up children's homes. On May 17, 1919, he signed the decree providing children up to fourteen years with free meals; later he signed a document containing provisions for juvenile dining-rooms and feeding centres. His care was shown even in the smallest detail. The following note by his secretary has been preserved:

"Two comrades from Azerbaijan have brought six wagons of caviar ... for your disposal. They await your instructions."

The note made by Lenin reads:

"Send the caviar to the Food Commissariat for the children."

Here is another document, a letter by Lenin, dated 7. 5. 1920, to the Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan Front:

"Please convey my thanks to the 30th Regiment of the Red Communards, Turkestan Front, for the macaroni and flour which I have handed over to the Moscow children."

In 1920, just before the Civil War ended, Lenin addressed the Third Congress of the Russian Young Communist League. The youth were still immersed in the struggle, but Lenin already clearly visualized the grand prospects of building the new society—and the young people had to be ready for the effort.

The task of the young generation was summed up by Lenin in one word—STUDY. The process of building communism requires the sum total of all knowledge, all the resources of human energy and means inherited from the

old society. This means that the Communist should master the wealth of knowledge amassed by mankind, but this grand heritage must be absorbed critically. Marxism, he said, signified the critical reworking of all human culture.

Knowledge, Lenin stressed, was essential for life and work. The youth should be educated to become active builders of the new society. The gap that had always existed between the text-book and practical life should be bridged and the education and training of the youth linked closely with the struggle of the working people for a new life.

The youth, he said, "should approach their tasks in education in such a way that every day, in every village, in every town the young people engage in the practical solution of some problem of common labour, even though the smallest, even though the simplest."

Lenin's speech served as a programme for the life and work of the young generation; it formed the basis of the plan for the cultural revolution.

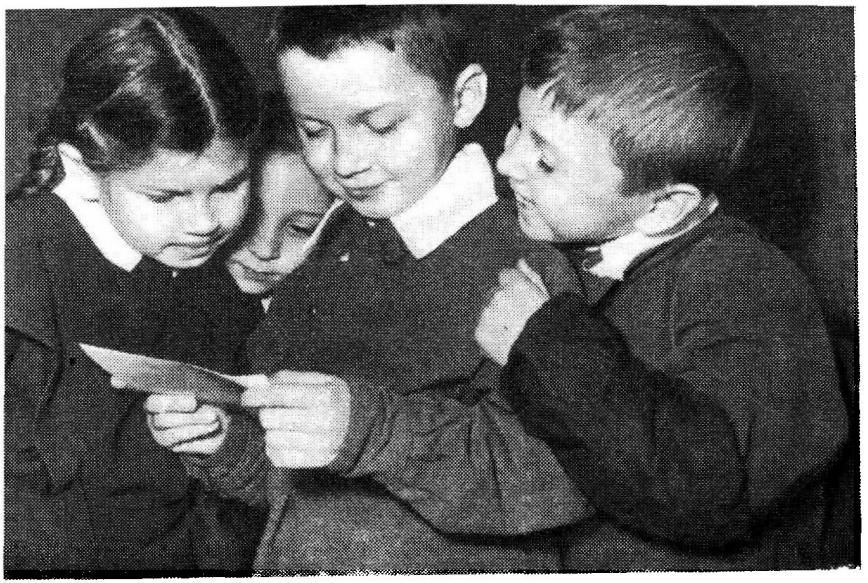
Here are a few figures illustrating the grand transformation of a country formerly backward and of low culture into one advanced and enlightened. In old Russia, only twenty-four per cent of the population were literate; now in the U.S.S.R. all are literate. After the revolution tens of nationalities were given a written language, trained their own intelligentsia and developed their literature.

Before the revolution the kindergartens accommodated a bare five thousand children; now they hold almost two million.

In old Russia the elementary, secondary and technical schools taught eight million; today the general and specialized schools absorb over thirty-two million.

Seven-year schooling is universal; by 1960 the change-over to universal ten-year schooling will have been completed.

Extra-school facilities were almost non-existent in the past. Now there are two and a half thousand Pioneer Palaces and Houses, over six hundred centres for juvenile



A curious letter

technicians, naturalists and tourists, one hundred and seventy children's parks and stadiums and thirty children's railways. There are, in addition, numerous children's libraries and theatres, sports, music and art schools.

An educational system, maintained and administered by the state, needs neither private nor public charity. It is secular, gives a scientific education and is free of charge. Boys and girls enjoy the same educational rights and privileges. All the stages—from elementary school to higher education—are interlinked and ensure free transition from one to the other.

Teaching is carried on in the pupil's national language and simultaneously ensures complete mastery of the Russian language.

The school, while linked with the different public organizations, is mostly associated with the family.

Anton Makarenko, a renowned Soviet educationalist, who made a major contribution to school-parent pedagog-

ics, considered that the new man of socialist society does not emerge all at once. Needed for this is an integrated system of education in which school and home complement each other and solve the common tasks of upbringing in harmony. Home upbringing and the teaching in the school should be guided by "considerable pedagogical knowledge." The school, armed with this knowledge, has a definite say in home upbringing. The school should set a standard and, through the pupils, transmit correct ideas of training to the family.

Makarenko, aware that many parents experienced difficulty in training their children, held that they should not plead lack of skill or time as an excuse. Training at home, the duty of every parent, is at the same time a noble undertaking capable of being performed by every citizen if approached in the right way. It can be successful only if the parents correctly understand its aims and principles. The aim derives from the goal which the Soviet people have set themselves—the building of a communist society the law of which will be: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

To achieve this aim the material basis alone is not enough, it is necessary to remould man; and this remoulding necessitates both all-round development of his capabilities and correct formulation of his needs. The chief thing is to train him to think for himself and to work with his own hands so that the transition from mental to manual labour, and vice versa, should be free and natural. As to his needs, which should be fully developed, especially his spiritual needs, it is necessary so to channel them that personal needs harmonize with those of society. This implies training in the higher forms of truth, justice, reason, faith and morality. Work that benefits the people, ceaseless service to society, becomes a vital personal need and, when satisfied, brings man great happiness, enriching his life with a lofty and noble sense of fulfilment.

This spirit should be imbued in the child from infancy. Sometimes, however, training is spoiled by prejudices carried over by the parents from the old society. Some parents, anxious to see their children happy, understand it as an egoistical and wholly material happiness gained at the expense of another's sacrifice, with these over-affectionate parents as the first victims—sacrificing everything, even their own happiness, for the sake of their children. Makarenko dubbed this as the "most terrible gift a parent could donate his child." Children brought up in this way are often egoistical, wilful and spoilt darlings.

The basic principle in one's approach, according to Makarenko, should be: "Maximum demands, maximum respect!" In the practical training of children this means being at once "loving and firm, tender and stern."

Some parents plead "lack of time" for their failure. But this plea is based on the false assumption that success depends on nagging, on keeping the child on "a pedagogical lead." Makarenko warns against overdoing the talk, admonition or reprimand. For him the chief factor is a correct regimen.

He also warns against too much guardianship and too much protection from "bad influence." The child should not be insulated against every possible negative factor, he should be trained to resist it.

Makarenko showed that the educational strength of the family is that it is primarily a collective and, secondly, a collective linked in many ways with the life of the country.

Makarenko's basic ideas on home upbringing are set forth in his *A Book for Parents* and *Lectures on Upbringing*.

A Book for Parents, a collection of stories on the subject of child education, is a model of its kind. The wealth of material, its expressiveness, penetration and topicality have made it popular among teachers and parents.

Build your body!

Lectures on Upbringing is also a valuable contribution to family pedagogics.

In the eight lectures, "General Conditions of Home Upbringing," "The Parents' Authority," "Discipline," "Play," "Inculcating Diligence," "Family Management," "Character Training" and "Sex Education," Makarenko examines the process of upbringing in the family as a complex of pedagogical means identical in aim and logic.

FIRST STEPS IN KNOWLEDGE

The process of education according to Makarenko takes place on every square yard of ground.

And this is really the case. The child is influenced at every step—street happenings, talking with mother, nursery rhymes, playing with companions, difficult tasks, tasty pies, unexpected tumbles, fascinating books—how many impressions, big and small, continually reach the child. And just as a huge edifice is built from the millions of small bricks, so the endless sequence of daily happenings builds up the knowledge and interests of the child, moulds his character and will, tastes and habits, skill and dexterity and his personality as a whole.

Everything affects the child—school, home, street, books, radio, cinema, playmates—in a word, his entire surroundings. And it follows that the more rational his regimen, the more his life will chime with the multifarious influences and the more successful will be his upbringing.

Home and school—these are the two main forces capable of ensuring a normal regimen. Naturally, the two forces act as allies in the common and noble undertaking of education. This alliance makes itself felt already in the pre-school period.

Although in the Soviet Union close attention is devoted to pre-school training for which there are over thirty-two