

- A group of British writers report on a new revolution in Russia — in education.

INSIDE SOVIET RUSSIA TODAY

The society and economy of the Soviet Union are in state of momentous flux. The visiting observer, although forcefully reminded that this is a country where free thinking is still a very timorous beastie, cannot escape a sense of mounting excitement as he speculates what sort of new Russia may be erratically emerging.

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The biggest single fact about the Soviet Union today — at once old communism's one real success and the most exciting seed of change within it — is the educational revolution. This has been dramatic, and may now be convulsive. The Soviet Union has always held out considerable opportunities for mass education to its people, but for those who had become set in their careers before Stalin's death the incentive to push their education outside very narrow bounds cannot have been

exactly lively. In the topmost positions eleven years ago it was better to be quiescent than dead; among the masses, up to 1953 it was illegal to change one's job without permission (to do so, or even to be more than twenty minutes late for work, was actually a criminal offence), while to rise in one's career or to acquire knowledge beyond a certain point could often be pretty dangerous. By contrast, for those who have completed their education or grown to intellectual maturity since the Stalin ice age melted (broadly speaking the one half of all Russians below the age of 30) self-improvement has been, and is, all the rage.

In remoter villages compulsory education up to the age even of 14 is not yet fully established, but in the big towns education up to the examination equivalent of age 17 or 18 (most often by part-time study) is quite

quickly becoming the general rule. There is good reason to believe the official claims that 57 million Soviet citizens, over one in four of the population, are doing some form of part-time study today; and that 12 per cent of all young people can now expect to go on to university or its equivalent. Compared with Britain (where nearly 60 per cent leave school and often all forms of learning at 15, and only 7 per cent go on to university or its equivalent) this is a pretty educated — and, within limits, an increasingly thoughtful — young Russian society that is now being created. Compared with the Russia of yesteryear, it is a metamorphosis.

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Between 15 and 20 per cent of Russian homes now have television sets, compared with 80 per cent in Britain and nearly 50 per cent in Japan. In some recent estimates for the Rand Corporation — which would seem to be broadly right — Janet G. Chapman has estimated that the average real industrial wage in the United States is more than four

times as large as in the Soviet Union, but average consumer income per head only about three times as large. The American people buy 83 times as many motor cars per head as the Soviet people, about 11 times as many refrigerators, have about 4 times as much housing space buy three times as many eggs, twice as much meat, shoes and radio sets. But in purchases of clothing (leaving aside questions of fashion) the volume purchases in the two countries is more nearly equal, while the Russians surpass the Americans in cinema attendances per head; in second best durables like motor bicycles and sewing machines, in starchier foods like bread and potatoes and also in some social services (although certainly not in all: the collective farmers, who make up such a large proportion of the population and are not counted as state employees, get no old age pensions at all).

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Even in the limited number of "unofficial" encounters that our programme permitted, it emerged that dangerous thoughts are not con-

fined (as the official monopoly likes to insist) to a few pampered adolescents. Not all the questioning minds encountered had been through a higher education. A few were students, but more were, although young, already embarked on active working lives. It is, however, the ferment of ideas in the universities that seems to worry the authorities most. Most of Moscow University has now been quite well insulated in the gigantic new buildings well out of town, with entry tightly controlled by passes. Leningrad university, with its 14,000 students, is still perilously embedded in the the centre of the city, and, despite its historical interest, it is not a place to which the visitor's attention is directed. We were not taken to either.

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There can be few countries where people read so many books — not only in the innumerable libraries, but on the underground, in buses and parks: both fiction and textbooks on medicine or nuclear physics, on economics or philosophy. Talk to youngsters who have already

left school and they will usually tell you about their evening classes or correspondence courses or, at least their plans for further education. The government has put its money on education and the young men have seized their opportunities with both hands. You may be surprised how small the purchasing power of the salary of your hotel chambermaid or driver still is. You should not be surprised to learn that their children have gone to college.

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It is thus no wonder that in Russia, the old tend to talk in generalities and the young to quote facts and figures. Soviet leaders emphatically deny any antagonism between "fathers and sons." They are right to the extent that there are exceptions on each side. It is also true that — unlike, say, their Polish counterparts — the young Soviet people most eager for change take for granted the system in which they were born and want to reform it only from within. And even the most sophisticated of them suffer from nu-

cated and impressively learnerous blind spots about both home and foreign affairs.

Yet the difference in spirit and mental make-up between generations, and the young people's eagerness to learn about the outside world as well as their own, are striking. They already know more than is to be found in

Pravda or even the *Daily Worker*. Their critical spirit seems bound gradually to invade all fields. Already they are not quite content with official versions and, though still timidly, are trying to learn what "the other side" has to say in an argument. — From *The Economist* June 1, 1963.

HONESTLY?

There has been a flood of denials from officials whose names appear in Stonehill's "Blue Book" of any unethical relations with the ex-GI. They had nothing to do with Stonehill or whatever they did for him was entirely proper; at any rate, there was no corruption of public officials, according to the statements. Was the Stonehill economic empire founded, then, on the rock of honesty? — Teodoro M. Locsin.

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SCIENCE AND EVIL

Science has powers for evil, not only physically but mentally; the hydrogen bomb can kill the mind . . . it is necessary that those who control government should have enlightened and intelligent ideals, since otherwise they can lead mankind to disaster. — Bertrand Russell.