

https://dspace.org/

An American assesses the intentions of Russian education: [Review of the book The challenge of Soviet education by G.S. Counts (New York: McGraw Hill)]

1960-09
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24317
An American assesses the intentions of Russian education: [Review of the book The challenge of Soviet education by G.S. Counts (New York: McGraw Hill)]. (1960, September). Symposium: A Journal for Education in Southern Africa, p. 86.

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

BOOKS REVIEWED

tion of painting, percussion bands etc. here than in America. They are taught the correct way to use tools etc. in Californian schools though, and both boys and girls learn the techniques of handling such things as trysquares, mitre-boxes, rasps, clamps, brace and bit etc. at seven.

The volume is illustrated by lively photographs of various activities enjoyed by children of different ages, examples of children's conversations and spontaneous chants, and detailed descriptions of the teacher's role in providing materials and suggestions for various projects.

In addition there are chapters on the Child's Experiences in Social Living, Language Expression, Literature, Art, Music, Personal-Social Adjustment as well as a chapter on Teachers' Work with Parents. A School Day and a School Year for fives, sixes, sevens and eight, should prove most illuminating.

●

E.P.R.

An American assesses the intentions of Russian Education.

The Challenge of Soviet Education by G. S. Counts (McGraw-Hill).



Sputnik marked the end of an age: and the end of a Western Myth that no real science or literature could emerge from a totalitarian state. Certainly men who can plan the theory and later attain the actuality of launching Sputnik have achieved a very real scientific advance that no counter-propaganda can destroy; and the achievements of writers such as Boris Pasternak raise problems in that aspect of creative life that rests more squarely on value judgements and emotional involvements. In the U.S.A., Admiral Rickover, backed by the Edison Institute, launched a series of attacks on current inadequacies in American education, and even if this reached an occasionally hysterical note, it led to a re-thinking of the intentions of American schools that could not escape the hard fact that the wealthy U.S.A., spending an estimated three per cent of its national income on education, was running far behind the Soviet Union, which spends ten per cent. And the fact, which George S. Counts again emphasises in **The Challenge of Soviet Education** (McGraw Hill), that during latter years the Soviet has been graduating two or three times as many scientific technicians as the United States, has destroyed the popular complacency in the minds of many Americans. "No society in history," says Dr. Counts, speaking of Russia, "has ever committed itself so unreservedly in words to the mastery and development of mathematics and the natural sciences. Each youngster who completes the full middle school, takes ten years of mathematics, six years of geography, six of biology, five years of physics, four years of chemistry, and one year of astronomy. This is a formidable offering."

Dr. Counts is not concerned with a descriptive account of the Soviet Educational System. The reader who approaches this book looking ror elementary factual information would do better to start with Deana Levin's "Soviet Education." Dr. Counts's work is crammed with fact, but rather with the intent of deriving a final evaluation of aims and achievements and of establishing grounds for comparison. Dr. Counts accepts passionately the tenets of a free society and analyses Soviet education with the clear view of exposing even its more enticing achievements.

There is an historical review of the gradual order imposed by earlier Soviet leaders on an amorphous and collapsed society often opposed to their politics — and in the case of teachers, frequently actively opposed to them in such an effective way that, since the whole profession could not be liquidated without bringing the national life to a halt, the early Party Committee set out to win them over. Dr. Counts considers the goals of Soviet Education, the use of indoctrination to obtain complete obedience to the Party, and the growth of a class of intellectual élite, originally from peasant stock but nowadays reverting appreciably to the original class intellectual. He has much to say about political indoctrination, the re-education of deviates, and the technique of bolstering morale.

Whilst he freely admits the incomparable achievement of Soviet education, the understrutting fear and authoritarianism is most lucidly demonstrated. If our colleagues might envy a system in which children selecting leaders for The Young Pioneers enquire into their school marks, and boo those below "good", there is the horror of the purge, which the interested reader may discover in a book written by a Russian professor and a German scientist, who were jointly purged and lived to escape. ("Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession"; Beck and Godin, New York, 1951.) Women political prisoners never leave correction camps without losing "the human image", for males have the inalienable right to violate any of them. The worst of all crimes, far worse than murder, is actual or suspected political dissent. The lowest of all criminals is the man accused of treason. The Communists have perfected such a system of inquisition that confessions can be extracted from everyone from simple artisans to a cardinal of the Church. Political re-education starts with an arrest at 2 a.m. and proceeds without definite charge until fatigue leads to desperation and the admission of any suitable confession to escape from the non-stop insistence of the inquisition. One Young Pioneer achieved immortality, including becoming the hero of a ballad that ran into a circulation of 100,000 copies of his praise. This Sepan Shchipachev in 1951 turned over his own parents to the political police.

If there is much to admire technically in Soviet education, and only the most biased person could deny this, there is much in its philosophical implications to horrify. **The Challenge of Soviet Education** is thus a timely and mature book which adds to the growing literature on this colossus. Education, one realises again and again in the modern world, is a means to an end.

P.B.