



ARTICLE

## Schools and Teachers in the USSR

Frank C. Johnstone

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I was drawn to *Schools and Teachers in the USSR* by Frank C. Johnstone from Volume 6 1969 as Soviet history is an area of interest to me. I was fascinated to hear of descriptions of the developing 'Kindergartens' originally set up by factories and collective farms to look after children whilst their mothers worked. Now (in 1969) the government were taking over this role, looking after children aged 3 to 7 (nurseries take them up to 3 and they start school at 7), in places that were open 24/7 staffed by teachers, assistants, 'domestics' nurses and a part time doctor! The idea of nurturing and developing the pre-school child is not new!

In the USSR children all had to learn a language, usually from age 12. Johnstone visited a special language school where children started to learn that second language from age 9. He observed science and maths lessons being taught in the language being studied – CLiL in 1969 Moscow! He says that it is difficult to find subject specialists with the additional language skills and that teacher training establishments are encouraging anyone that shows linguistic skills to stay on a additional year to build on these. A lesson to be learned today?

I was fascinated by the idea of all children being expected to participate in some 'socially helpful work' (active citizens?) and that all children and parents were involved in the behaviour of students, with any 'delinquent' being brought up in front of the pupil council and, for particularly serious issues, one including parents. The idea of such pupil/parental involvement in the school running very much parallels the talk of today if not the action.

In all a wonderful insight into a bygone era that very much talks to today.

Claire Molloy  
June 2016

# Schools and Teachers in the U.S.S.R.

Educationists in Britain have had little success in enlightening the general public on the real issues involved in comprehensive education and so it has been left to the politicians to do battle. Apathetic parent spectators doubtless find it difficult to discern the pros and cons when so many of the combatants are reluctant to fight anywhere except on their own favourite *emotional* battlefields.

Would public reaction be more noticeable if it were announced that, from September next year, children up to the age of fifteen had to be accepted, till accommodation was exhausted, by any school to which they applied, that there was to be no selection, no intelligence tests, no 'streaming', no 'setting', no group-teaching, and that every child was to follow exactly the same course throughout, including one foreign language?

My own reaction to the existence of such a system in Russia was one of mixed scepticism and curiosity. Prior to the dismissal of Lunacharski in 1929, education there had largely followed the most 'progressive' Western ideas of child-centred, 'activity' schooling. Then had come what amounted to an educational revolution—the restoration of examinations, marks, homework, record-cards and the authority of the teacher. Finally, in 1936, came the abolition of intelligence testing along with everything associated with the idea of innate and more or less unalterable degrees of intelligence. The decisions then taken settled the framework of Russian education down to the present day and their influence can be traced through all the ramifications of Russian educational theories. The volte-face was brought about for political and economic as well as for educational reasons. The explanation of a Leningrad teacher whom I questioned was that the 'permissive' education of those early years was producing young people ill-equipped in knowledge and in character to help build a nation on the ruins left by the collapse of the economy and the ferocious civil war. There was no place for a child who thought he was the natural centre of interest and that others existed to make life easy for him. This view is probably the accepted one, for much in Russian educational aims can be seen to be in accordance with it.

In spite of this rejection of certain Western educational theories, the undeniable fact is that Russia's transformation from one of the most backward and illiterate nations into one of the most technically advanced has continued at an ever-accelerating rate. The technocrat may judge the

results to be excellent; but reports and statistics reveal so little of the human side that it seemed essential to see what the people behind the statistics looked like. So one day I found myself on the fourteenth floor of the Ukraina Hotel in Moscow in a large, well-equipped 'room with bath'. As is the custom, I shared the room, but my fellow-guest contributed little to my stock of information since he invariably beat me down to breakfast and never showed up again till well after midnight. Downstairs, however, I could and did talk with many people of all nationalities (what a boon to have English as one's native language!) and learned much regarding education as well as other matters.

'Intourist' I found very willing to help when I explained my special interest. Groups of little children, about twenty-four of them in charge of one motherly-looking woman, were to be seen in both Moscow and Leningrad walking two by two and hand in hand. My first visit was to one of the Kindergartens from which these little ones had come. As the statutory starting age for compulsory schooling in Russia is seven, these schools cater for children from age three to seven. This particular Kindergarten was open twenty-four hours a day and was staffed not only by teachers and the usual administrators but by assistants, domestics, a nurse and a part-time doctor.

Like the Nurseries, which receive children up to the age of three, the Kindergartens were started to care for children while their mothers worked. Factories, collective-farms, etc., built them for the convenience of their workers but now the government also is increasingly undertaking their erection where required. It is significant that, whereas it was customary up to the mid-30's to regard the family as bourgeois, it has been steadily restored to a place of honour. Those who staff the Nurseries are instructed not only to look after the physical welfare of the babies but to surround them with loving care, and help their development by talking, smiling and singing to their charges, so providing the valuable stimulation which a good mother would. The same warm contacts are expected between the staffs of the Kindergartens and the children in their care, while the psychologists help in the practical details of how to establish and maintain the right relationships.

The Kindergarten, however, is assuming a more important role—the preparing of the child for entry to school at age seven. It is claimed that a

child among other children learns habits of clear speech, cleanliness, tidiness, consideration for others, etc., more effectively and happily than he would at home. One soon becomes aware of the importance attached by Russian educationists to environmental influence and to the example of others and the same influences can be seen at work throughout the entire compulsory school years.

Recently, too, more systematic attempts have been made to accustom the child gradually to the future school routine. About the age of five a start is made with an occasional and later with a regular short lesson to develop the children's ability to attend to and understand what is said. Self-expression as an aim is not highly rated; one teacher said it was a waste of time till the children had something to express. Drawing and painting is old-fashioned by our way of thinking and seems largely aimed at developing muscular control and co-ordination. Simple counting and the identification and drawing of letters of the alphabet seem to be as far as the children go. Though the number of Kindergartens grows rapidly and now provides for over 50% of the age group 3-7 (ten years ago the percentage was about 17%), many children arrive at school untaught except by their parents. Perhaps this is why arithmetic and reading are taken no farther than they are. The importance now attached to this stage of the child's life is underlined not only by the increase of places, paid for by the parents unless their incomes are too low, but by the efforts being made to improve the qualifications of Kindergarten teachers. Many recently erected buildings combine Nursery and Kindergarten so that parents will be able to leave children from a few months old up to seven years of age at the same place. This should also result in a saving in administrative costs and greater continuity in the training of the children.

Here, at the pre-school stage of the child's life, one sees in action the sustained concern with developing sound health, encouraging helpful habits, eliminating undesirable habits and fostering the realisation that purposeful activity is more fun than lolling around. Throughout school these aims are always in the background, as they are in such organisations as the Octobrists (for pupils under ten) and the Pioneers (for ages ten to fifteen). It would be very interesting to have a dependable, unbiased report on how far these aims are succeeding.

The next sponsored visit was to a special language school. These schools started as an experiment and have proved an undoubted success. In the past ten years their number has trebled but the demand is still unsatisfied. Every pupil in the U.S.S.R. must

learn a foreign language, but, whereas in the ordinary ten-year school it is taught as a subject from the fifth year (age 12) onwards, in the special language schools it is usually started in the second year (age 9). In the older classes certain other lessons such as those dealing, perhaps, with a science subject or mathematics, are taught in the language being studied. Naturally it is not easy to find sufficient subject-teachers capable of conducting their lessons in a particular language. To meet this situation, any student entering a Pedagogical Institute, the main teacher-training college, who is planning to become a subject-teacher and who shows promise as a linguist, is encouraged to extend his course by a year if necessary to permit a more intensive study of the language. A teacher who teaches his subject in a foreign tongue draws a higher salary.

Each language school concentrates on one language only, but it is possible, if a pupil is willing to travel, to find a school specialising in almost any language he could wish. The greatest number of special language schools are concerned with English; French and German are next in popularity. The English language school I visited seemed to be well-supplied with language laboratories, etc., though I was told by a Swedish teacher that in most schools expensive equipment was in short supply. Great stress is placed on the spoken word and, as far as I could judge, the results in this school were most impressive.

The existence of these special language schools seemed to me to imply some degree of selection, but the teacher answering my questions would have none of this. The children, he claimed, were accepted from the area served by the school or in order as they applied. They covered exactly the same ground and reached the same standard in all subjects as children in other schools did: the experiment had been to see whether children who started a language earlier, and were constantly hearing and using it, would learn the language more easily and effectively. This, he claimed, they did, though overall results were still being carefully checked and compared. If this is so, one can foresee the time when the idea may be almost universally applied.

My next sponsored visit was to the new section of Moscow University, completed in 1953, which houses the scientific faculties. There was a great deal here to see and learn but no opportunity of discussion with either staff or students. Higher education is outside my terms of reference but it would be a pity not to say a word about this massive building which, with its central thirty-two storey block, dominates the Lenin Hills. With the smaller 18th century Lomonosov building in Moscow itself, it claims over 30,000 students and has lecture-rooms, laboratories,

indoor sports arena, etc., to match. I gathered that as attendance at lectures is obligatory, the courses heavy and the prescribed reading lists lengthy, the students are regarded by outside observers as hard worked compared with those in most countries. To the casual observer, however, they bore no noticeable signs of stress, looked fairly lively and in good spirits and were casually, somewhat shabbily dressed, though more conventionally than many of our own students. I was told that far more extra-curricular activity is carried on than in our own universities and that participation in some form of sport is obligatory. For this I had to depend on hearsay.

To accommodate the residential students, thousands of rooms are available. Those which I saw accommodated two students to a room, with each two rooms sharing a small bathroom and toilet. Accommodation in Aberdeen's Halls of Residence may be superior but the smaller rooms in Moscow are pleasant and well-equipped. The accommodation is allocated to men, to women, to married couples with no more attempt to keep the sexes in separate sections than in an ordinary boarding house. Co-education and the mixing of the sexes in every field of activity is so much a part of Russian life that it occurs to no one to think of segregation. The only break in the co-educational tradition was in the schools during the Nazi invasion when boys and girls in school were separated from the fifth year upwards. Stalin, it is said, felt co-education was preventing boys growing up 'tough' enough to meet the terrible conditions of the times. Be that as it may, co-education in the schools was restored in 1954.

As already remarked, this brief survey is concerned with the universal, free and compulsory education provided in the Ten-Year School. The supply of teachers, however, is dependent on Higher Education. One of the problems in Russia, as in Britain, is how to ensure a sufficient supply of teachers of certain subjects. Russia has the additional problem of supplying some very isolated and unattractive areas with the technicians, engineers, and specialists required to develop resources. To meet this, every graduate may, if required, be directed to his first post and is obliged to remain there for three years. This power of direction can be used for educational emergencies also and, to make sure that those directed will be of use in schools, every university undergraduate whose subject is taught in school must include in his course classes in educational theory, psychology, methods and teaching practice. In actual fact, it is said that most of those who finish up in schools were aiming at teaching as a career.

In the schools, children are expected to perform each week some socially helpful work and in the oldest classes they may work occasionally in factory or farm. This duty is imposed upon pupils so that, later in life, there will be good rapport between manual and white-collar workers. Apparently the Russians recognise the danger that the two may be separated by a widening social gulf—and for similar reasons it has been decreed that applicants for institutions of higher education should have had two years productive work before admission. But for really outstanding graduates of the Ten-Year School, whose future contribution to the nation is judged too valuable to demand of them two years in the factories, 20% of places in the university and other higher institutions are reserved—an incentive, to those doing at all well, to work really hard at school.

Of the new teachers entering the schools each year the universities contribute only some 13% and the Pedagogic Institutes are by far the chief source. The number of applicants for admission to these Institutes is usually about three times the number of places available. In addition to having done the two years work in factory or farm, the young man or woman wishing to become a teacher must satisfy the authorities as to character and political outlook and sit an extremely competitive examination. Successful applicants who intend to teach in a Kindergarten or in the first four (Primary) years of the Ten-Year school follow a four year course with special emphasis on understanding the child. Those aiming at teaching the secondary classes (i.e. from fifth year upwards) have to be subject-specialists and for them a choice is offered of a four-year course specialising in one subject or a five-year course with specialisation in two subjects. Every student continues the study of a foreign language, studies the aims, ideals and economic theories of Communism and engages in sport and physical training. He spends much of his time on his special subject and attends the various courses in educational subjects. Practice in teaching is approached in the third year with the observing and discussing of demonstration lessons given in schools attached to the Institution and reminiscent of our own Demonstration schools. Eventually he is entrusted with continuous practice in an ordinary school and, by the time he graduates, has completed altogether four to four and a half months' teaching practice. Students in training are also encouraged to offer their services as voluntary youth leaders to help in the extra-curricular activities of schools or in some of the numerous Pioneer centres. Everyone must, as part of his training, spend three weeks during the two-month summer vacation (July and August) acting as Youth Leader in a Pioneer camp. Incidentally it is rather

startling to realise that the only other vacation consists of two weeks in the winter.

It is not easy to compare the status of the Pedagogical Institute with that of the University. The courses in both are reputed to be equally onerous and demanding but, whereas the University graduate is supposed to have a more complete mastery of his subject, he is not considered to have such an extensive knowledge of the art of teaching or such an intimate understanding of children as the graduate of the Pedagogical Institute. The prestige attached to the University as a centre for advanced studies is to some extent counter-balanced by the power of the Institute to grant the degree of 'Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences'. Selected teachers with a few years' experience can return for a three-year course of post-graduate study, or, if they prefer, take a correspondence course lasting four years and then return to full-time study at the Institute for one year. For teachers in service not aiming at the Candidates' degree the Institutes run numerous refresher courses and every encouragement is given to their staffs to engage in research.

One other means of entering the teaching profession still exists—the Pedagogical School. This played its part in supplying teachers for the Kindergarten and Primary classes at a time when the demand was so desperate that high qualifications were less important. Official policy seems to be to allow these schools gradually to disappear.

Though the visits arranged for me by 'Intourist' were extremely interesting, there is always a suspicion that in organised visits one is directed to special show-places. I was pleasantly surprised that no objection was raised to my suggestion that I might visit, in passing, the unpretentious school not far from the 'Intourist' office. There I was lucky very quickly to find an English-speaking teacher. I saw two classes at work, had an animated but somewhat restricted talk (in English!) with three healthy-looking, good-humoured girls of fourteen, all wearing the red scarf of the Pioneers, and ended my visit with an interesting exchange of views with the teacher. The experience, though informal, was so stimulating that I visited other schools in the same way. Not one of them was an outstanding building by our standards: they varied from two to four storeys, had little, if any, playground and were either old buildings which had been adapted or they had been erected quickly in the period of expansion following the Nazi war. Twice I failed to find anyone who could understand English and had to retreat, conscious of the mystified gaze of the people around. From my first and the

other three successful visits, I felt I learned fewer facts than when on sponsored visits but I gained much more enlightenment.

These schools were not such 'closed' establishments as our own schools and a similar atmosphere would probably not be very welcome here. People of all kinds seemed to enter or leave without formality. I assumed that some of the younger people were paid and unpaid helpers who assisted with extra-curricular activities and that the others were mostly parents, members of some of the committees prescribed by law. These committees undertake various responsibilities concerning the maintenance of the buildings and the running of auxiliary activities.

The brief glimpses I had of classes at different stages bore out what I had expected regarding classroom procedure. Generally speaking, the main part of the lesson was 'chalk and talk' by the teacher. But before the talk there seemed to be the usual questioning (I was told homework was assessed at this stage) and, after the talk, question and answer was brisk. Pupils rose quietly to their feet as they answered and, in English and mathematics at least, made use of the blackboard now and again.

I had heard much of the great amount of work demanded from Russian children but suspect it is rather regular and steady application which is demanded. I do not think I saw any signs of undue strain or self-consciousness. The children's attitude towards their teachers and other adults was natural yet respectful and most of them seemed in excellent physical health. In response to my comment on this apparent robustness, one teacher remarked that naturally the woman-doctor attached to the school was concerned rather more with building sound health and health-giving habits than with curing disease. At the time, my only reservation about these children was that they were perhaps too docile and did not have enough initiative: later I was still not sure and decided to keep an open mind till I could see them in different surroundings.

After each lesson, lasting about forty-five to fifty minutes, there is a break of ten minutes or so during which children talk, look over work, or read. School finishes, as far as formal lessons go, early in the afternoon, so the rest of the afternoon is left free for extra-curricular activities of all kinds—instrumental music, painting, model-making, chess, games and, for the brighter children, more advanced work in various subjects than is being covered in class. This latter form of activity is quite voluntary. Slower, or lazier pupils may at this time try to catch up with the work done by their class-mates. This individual choice of activity undoubtedly counteracts the



formalism of the earlier part of the day and the informal contacts with helpful, friendly adults must provide a valuable social experience.

As regards the uniformity of method, the setting of time for the completion of various sections of the course, the establishment of a formalistic relationship between teacher and taught, all this has the advantage that children do not have to adapt themselves—or fail to adapt themselves—in changing from one subject taught by a strict disciplinarian to another by one who seeks to 'win' the children, or from a teacher who sits on the front desks and jokes with the girls to one who stands square on his dignity and frowns on familiarity.

The system of habitual discipline ('self-discipline' the Russian teachers insist) undoubtedly helps to maintain an atmosphere in which children can learn. A young teacher in certain notorious areas of urban Britain may, if she is unlucky enough to be 'landed' with a really 'tough' anti-social class, have to fight for survival, almost on her own, but in the Russian school she would find the whole of tradition, example and the community behind her. It must, in fact, be difficult for the promising young trouble-maker to develop into an older, more-experienced nuisance even though, or perhaps because, corporal punishment is illegal and the imposition of 'lines' would be regarded as a foolish waste of time.

On the first day of September following his seventh birthday, the young scholar arrives at school with his parents, and carrying the traditional bunch of flowers for his new teacher. And on that day begins his indoctrination. With the other new-comers he is welcomed by the director and receives gifts from the senior pupils. It is impressed on him in ways suitable for his age—and it will be repeated on many a day to come—that it is a wonderful privilege to be able to come to school, that everyone expects him to do his best to learn, that the boys and girls of the class in which he finds himself (strictly by chance and without selection of any kind) will remain together right through school and that he must do everything to maintain the good name of his class. If anyone falls behind, it is his duty to help him: should he himself find things difficult then his fellow-pupils will come to his aid. Until he reaches the most senior classes, he will have a 'Guardian', about two years older than himself, who will help to sort out all his troubles and difficulties.

From the fifth year onwards, each class elects officials from among its members and begins to hold meetings to discuss matters of interest to the class. By this stage, almost everyone presumably has the wish, though perhaps not the will, to escape having to

repeat a year's work. Should our potential school delinquent disturb the class or bring discredit on it outside, he will probably be reprimanded by the class committee or he, and perhaps his parents may be interviewed by the parents' class committee who do not relish having a bad example set to their children. If he still does not mend his ways, the school parents' committee or youth leaders will join in and various privileges will be withdrawn. Fundamentally this is the same procedure as was in force in New Trier High School, Winnetka, Illinois, thirty years ago. It was assumed there that the teacher's function was to teach, not to spend valuable time as a disciplinarian. Complaints as to behaviour, inadequate preparation or poor examination results were noted on the relevant forms and collected by the group's 'adviser'. He duly interviewed, remonstrated with and appealed to the offender, consulted the parents if he thought fit and, if all else failed, passed the case on to the Dean who, should his more impressive exhortation produce no satisfactory results, could apply the final sanction of expulsion—seldom, if ever, required. Admirable as the American system appeared to me at the time, it seems now almost primitive in its dependence on individual personalities when compared with the streamlined Russian echelon, backed ultimately by the whole community.

It is asserted that in Russia today there is greater respect and enthusiasm for education among the population at large than in any other country. This is a difficult assertion to prove one way or the other, but the bookshops and the reading matter in the hands of travellers on the Metro show that a weightier kind of reading is more popular than is usual elsewhere. Certainly public interest in, and co-operation with the schools has been developed skilfully and systematically and, though many parents doubtless wish for nothing better than to be left alone, there are obviously many who closely follow their child's school career, take advantage of the many opportunities of learning about the school's aims and methods and help in the mundane affairs of the school.

Significantly, one of the duties of the 'Academy of Pedagogical Sciences', a much respected body of some hundred of the most distinguished educationists in the Union, is to see that the general public is kept abreast of the latest developments in education. Members of the 'Academy' are all engaged in advanced research in education—and all of them are in receipt of a substantial addition to their salaries because of their membership. As information is widely disseminated everywhere, no parents can claim ignorance of the kind of behaviour expected from their children inside and outside the school, and

so they may find themselves involved in inquiries into their children's shortcomings. Parental responsibility for children's behaviour is, indeed, recognised by the law courts which may impose fines on the parents of children under twelve who steal, defy traffic regulations, are rude to adults, or behave in other 'anti-social' ways.

Where the parents of a really 'difficult' child are themselves a bad example or where, because of chronic illness or poverty, the home influence is not helpful, the child may be admitted to a boarding school. Parents pay for board, lodging and clothing but payments may be reduced or waived according to income. The provision of a stimulating, healthy and active environment is claimed to achieve remarkable success though academic attainment tends, understandably, to be lower. Official and public satisfaction is indicated by the fact that, whereas ten years ago there were some fifty boarding schools, there are now over ten thousand. To meet the case where children require environmental training but the parents are unwilling to part with them, some boarding schools keep children from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. each day.

Considering the enormous amount of school building which has taken place, I was not surprised that school furniture was often shabby. All the classrooms I saw had the desks arranged in rows facing the teacher, but, though the desks had seen many years of service, they were not, I was interested to note, carved up with initials or other spare-time handwork! Since there was no superfluous floorspace, there was really no room for the movement we consider necessary in the classroom. There were no broken hinges, doors, etc., and one teacher explained that the children themselves carried out simple repairs and older children had brightened the woodwork with paint provided by the Parents' Committee. On the walls were numerous neatly written papers. The photographs displayed round the points of a red star were of pupils deserving honour, I was told, because they had promoted the success of the class by their helpfulness and example. The photographs were the work of the school's photographic circle.

It is difficult for us to imagine what it is like to be a teacher in a system in which the content of each lesson, day by day, is detailed officially. This was a topic I found it impossible to discuss with the teachers: they seemed to find it difficult to see what alternative there could be. It certainly makes sure that no class will fail to cover all assignments, that no teacher has to worry as to whether he is devoting enough time or too much time to any section of the course, and that either pupil or teacher can move to the other side of the town or a thousand miles away and take up where he left off. It makes possible a

fairly accurate assessment of the results achieved by any class or school as compared with the norm. There are said to be signs of a trend towards greater freedom for the teacher as to how he covers the required material. Certainly, just as the rigid central control of industry is breaking up and responsibility is devolving upon the individual managements, so the rigidity of central control in education may begin to weaken. It seems doubtful, however, that the slackening of control will, for many years to come, extend to content and examination standards. The differences between urban and rural conditions, between European and Asian backgrounds are too vast to permit of anything other than uniformity.

Some 70% of Russian teachers are women. Like their pupils, they did not impress one as particularly intellectual but were competent, free from tension and most of them were comfortably and confidently aware of their status and the authority which their profession conferred. Salaries are nowadays often regarded as symbols of status; it would, however, be difficult to assess Russian teachers' status by the amount they earn. Basic salaries, from all accounts, are low, considering the esteem with which teachers are said to be regarded, but basic rates are supplemented in so many ways that it is not easy to estimate the actual earnings. A teacher, too, need never wait for a flat if he requires one and it is said he enjoys certain perquisites, particularly if he teaches in a fertile rural area. Salaries were raised in 1964 and are due to go up again before 1970.

The official number of hours of teaching for the six-day week is not excessive—24 for teachers of Primary classes (first to fourth years) and 18 for those teaching secondary classes (fifth year upwards). Outside of these hours teachers are said to be free, but in fact there are various duties to be seen to and, because there are even yet not enough teachers, most put in a few more hours, for which they receive extra payment. Teachers act as Chairmen at meetings of their Class Parents' Meetings, discuss school matters at the Pedagogical Council (a meeting of the whole staff to which the Chairman of the Parents' Praesidium is co-opted), keep in touch with their children's home conditions by visiting and take an interest in the extra-curricular activities of the school.

There is apparently no difficulty in finding the numbers for the various refresher courses and every teacher is expected to take at least one such course during each five years of teaching. Teachers may be released for one day a week, or for a short, full-time course, on full salary. A platform for the airing of views is provided by 'Pedagogical Reading' circles



where teachers may present their ideas and have them discussed. The more important talks are published and distributed.

To make sure that every pupil and parent knows exactly what the teachers and the community expect, twenty 'Rules' are printed in the permanent Record of marks, etc., which a pupil carries throughout his school days. These Rules, drawn up during the Nazi invasion and perhaps influenced by the uncertainty of those times, throw light on the classroom atmosphere and the kind of behaviour aimed at outside school. A selection is illuminating—The pupil stands when the teacher or the Director enters or leaves the room, should sit straight during a lesson and not let attention wander, should be clean and neat in appearance, should be considerate of the old and the weak, should rise and offer his seat to them in buses, etc., should obey his parents, should be polite to elders, should cherish the honour of his class and school. There is one negative rule—he should not smoke, gamble or use vulgar language.

It was not till 1949/50 that it was at last possible to have seven years compulsory education throughout the Union. Later, for a number of years, though there were many Ten-Year schools, the compulsory stage ended at eight years. Now, at last, ten years' compulsory schooling is almost established. Many boys and girls will doubtless leave school without managing to complete the course but the number of these is said to be dropping. According to reports not more than 10% of the pupils reaching school leaving age in 1968 had had to repeat a year.

To finish this brief survey without saying something about that most influential organisation, the Young Pioneers, those proud wearers of the red scarves, would be a serious omission. Membership is voluntary but members are made to feel they belong to something very important. Over 90% of the age-group 10 to 15 join. Every school has a special room for them, there are Pioneer 'houses' or 'Palaces' everywhere and youth leaders, volunteers, teachers and experts of all kinds endeavour to arouse the young people's interest in games, sports, hobbies, music, art, etc., and help to organise the Spartakiads (competitions in sports and athletics) and the Olympiads (competitions in academic subjects, chess

etc.). Both of these are run on a local, regional and national level. When boys and girls reach the age of fifteen, they are, though still at school, eligible for the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), but not everyone is accepted since it is more political and members must satisfy their branch as to conduct and loyalty. About 30% of the age group (15-27), but perhaps 80% of students, are members and their influence in schools, though not so obvious as that of the Pioneers, is still pervasive.

This brief survey is an attempt to present not only some facts but also some impressions of Russian education. If I may be permitted to express a personal opinion, it seems to me that, just as the Communist system of government would be completely alien to a people at our stage of development, so the Russian system of education, astonishingly successful as it is, would not be in keeping with our national temperament. Yet I found my enquiries impelled me to consider again the results of our own educational system and it would be narrowly insular not to see in Russian education much that is worthy of study.

Arising from this there are three matters in particular I should like to hear discussed:—

1. There cannot be many educationists who would not welcome the emergence of a lively and informed public interest in education. Are we doing our best to create this and to gain the active co-operation of the community?
2. Many children see little connection between what they are taught in school and life outside the classroom. Could we make sure there is a real connection and that, if there is, the children are fully aware of it?
3. Investigators have been drawing attention to the educational handicaps of children of manual workers, etc., and have questioned whether we are failing to tap the potential ability of these children. Are we dredging the 'pool of ability' for the last tiny minnow when there are thousands of first-rate fish in the lake?

**Frank C. Johnstone.**

