

JAMES C. MC CLELLAND

Bolshevik Approaches to Higher Education, 1917–1921

The period 1917–21 in Russia found the fledgling Bolshevik government engaged in desperate military struggles with imperial Germany, with several White Russian armies assisted in varying degrees by foreign troops and supplies, with national movements for independence, and with a newly restored Poland. Yet despite an ever-present military threat to the very existence of the new government, many Bolshevik leaders remained constantly aware that theirs was a revolutionary regime, with the goal of achieving a radical transformation of the social, economic, political, and cultural institutions they had inherited. Consequently this same period witnessed, in addition to the crucial military conflicts, several experimental efforts to achieve thoroughgoing institutional change.

Higher education was one such target of reform, and this paper will describe succeeding attempts undertaken during 1917–21 to implement three radically different blueprints for reform of the higher educational system.¹ In the first attempt, officials of the People's Commissariat of Education (Narodnyi Komissariat Prosveshcheniia, or Narkompros; literally, "People's Commissariat of Enlightenment") enthusiastically sought to expand all types

1. The most important Soviet secondary accounts of higher education during this period are F. F. Korolev, "Iz istorii narodnogo obrazovaniia v Sovetskoi Rossii: Nizhnie i srednie professional'nye shkoly i vysshee obrazovanie v 1917–1920 gg.," *Izvestiia Akademii pedagogicheskikh nauk RSFSR*, 1959, vol. 102, pp. 3–156; V. V. Ukraintsev, *KPSS—Organizator revoliutsionnogo preobrazovaniia vysshei shkoly* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 17–137; *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta* (Moscow, 1955), 2:7–79; *Moskovskii universitet za 50 let Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 27–52; L. A. Shilov, "Leninskie dekrety i sozdanie organov rukovodstva vysshei shkoly (1917–1921)," *Izvestiia vysshikh uchebnykh zavedenii: Pravovedenie*, 1964, no. 1, pp. 3–15; L. A. Shilov, "Leninskie dekrety-zakonodatel'naia osnova organizatsii vysshei shkoly v SSSR," *Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta: Seriia ekonomiki, filosofii, i prava*, 1964, vypusk 1, no. 5, pp. 94–108; L. A. Shilov, "Deiatel'nost' kommunisticheskoi partii po perestroike vysshei shkoly v pervye gody sovetskoi vlasti (1917–1921 gg.)," unpublished dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences, Leningrad State University, 1965. For a recent Western work which touches on Bolshevik higher educational policies during this period see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917–1921* (Cambridge, 1970).

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association in December 1969 and at a Stanford University faculty colloquium. The author would like to express his appreciation to the former Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants for making possible an academic year in Moscow, and to the Hoover Institution for grants which facilitated the later stages of research and writing.

of higher educational facilities, to increase drastically the enrollment of working-class students, to emphasize a Marxist-oriented general education at the expense of vocational training, and to substitute a decentralized form of "social control" over the educational process for the former tsarist system of bureaucratic centralism. Soon, however, the economic, political, and military strains of the Civil War revealed the impracticality of this original policy. In early 1920 the regime plunged headlong in a new direction toward the vocationalization of education and the militarization of students. Formulated simultaneously with Trotsky's plan for the militarization of labor, the new policy, despite a few sound features, soon proved to be just as utopian as the program it succeeded. The introduction of the New Economic Policy in the spring of 1921 was accompanied by a new plan for higher education as well. Devised primarily by Lenin, the new educational policy placed first priority on the achievement of centralized political control over the higher educational system, relegating the social and economic functions of higher education to positions which, though still important, were distinctly secondary.²

This paper's emphasis on the diversity of early Bolshevik approaches to higher education should not obscure the existence of certain common assumptions which underlay all three programs, and which led to persistent conflict throughout this period between the Soviet authorities and the professoriate. Most professors, both before and immediately after the Revolution, adhered to what might be termed the "liberal" position on the university question. This position maintained that the proper function of universities was to conduct a free and unhampered pursuit of science and scholarship, that this activity could and should be above all class or partisan interests, that there should be no criteria for admission to universities other than ability and preparation, and that all higher educational institutions should be independent of governmental control.³

2. One explanation for the conflicting educational policies during this period is that for education as for most other areas the Bolsheviks had few systematized plans before the Revolution. Lenin's writings that touched upon educational matters were more concerned with promoting a revolution than with outlining the structure of a postrevolutionary educational system. Krupskaja is a partial exception to this rule, since she made a study of educational theory while in emigration that culminated in the publication of her major treatise, *Narodnoe obrazovanie i demokratiia*, in 1917. It has been reprinted in N. K. Krupskaja, *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia v desiaty tomakh* (Moscow, 1957-63), 1:249-350. Lunacharsky also had a more than passing acquaintance with pedagogical theory before the Revolution. But neither Krupskaja nor Lunacharsky had given much thought to the problem of how their pedagogical concepts could be applied under Russian conditions. Furthermore, their ideas were much more relevant to primary and secondary education than to higher education. For a discussion of the educational ideas of Lenin and Krupskaja before the Revolution see Oskar Anweiler, *Geschichte der Schule und Pädagogik in Russland vom Ende des Zarenreiches bis zum Beginn der Stalin-Ära* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 75-89.

3. The most concise statement of the liberal position can be found in the theses for

All Bolsheviks, despite other disagreements among themselves, were united in opposition to this liberal position on two main grounds. First, together with many non-Marxist progressive educators both in Russia and abroad, they attacked the liberal conception of science as excessively abstract and theoretical, arguing instead for an educational process more oriented to "labor" and integrated with the practical problems of "life."⁴ Second, and more important, they rejected the idea that education could under any circumstances be above political or class interests. "The very term 'apolitical' or 'nonpolitical' education," said Lenin in November 1920, "is a piece of bourgeois hypocrisy, nothing but a deception of the masses. . . . We must put the matter frankly, and openly declare, despite all the old lies, that education cannot help but be connected with politics."⁵ Whereas liberals sought to eliminate politics from higher education, Bolsheviks sought instead to capitalize on the purportedly inherent political nature of education by redirecting its impact to benefit the working classes.

But these common assumptions, though they united the new government in opposition to the program of the professoriate, were capable of diverse and even mutually exclusive interpretations. The extent of these differences will emerge from a closer analysis of the three successive policies adopted between the years 1917 and 1921.

The first phase of Soviet higher educational policy, which took place during the years 1918–19, was dominated by the leading officials of the newly formed Commissariat of Education. For the first twelve years after the Revolution the Commissariat, or Narkompros, was headed by Anatolii Vasilievich Lunacharsky, a Marxist intellectual of catholic interests and frequently independent views. Lunacharsky's chief lieutenants in the Narkompros hierarchy were Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaja, and the well-known historian, Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovsky.⁶

higher educational reform drawn up by Petrograd Professor L. A. Chugaev in 1918 and located in Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii (TsGAOR), fond 2306, opis' 2, ed. khran. 12, listy 213–26. See also E. D. Grimm, "Organizatsiia universitetskogo prepodavaniia po projektu novago ustava," *Russkaia mysl'*, April 1916, pp. 109–22, and continued in the issue of May 1916, pp. 52–67; A. A. Kizeveter, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii (vospominaniia, 1881–1914)* (Prague, 1929); M. M. Novikov, *Ot Moskvy do N'iu-Iorka: Moia zhizn' v nauke i politike* (New York, 1952).

4. See in particular the party resolution on higher education reform found in *Direktivny VKP(B) po voprosam prosveshcheniia: Voprosy narodnogo prosveshcheniia v osnovnykh direktivakh s'ezdov, konferentsii, soveshchaniu TsK i TsKK VKP(B)*, 2nd ed. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1930), pp. 319–20.

5. V. I. Lenin, *Lenin o narodnom obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 354–55.

6. There are no adequate studies devoted to the educational thought and activities of Lunacharsky, Krupskaja, or Pokrovsky, although the standard works on pedagogy and primary-secondary educational policy during this period contain relevant material concerning the first two. See F. F. Korolev, *Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki*,

Narkompros policy during this early period was based on two main principles. The first was the conviction that the most essential step in the construction of socialism was not so much to develop an industrialized economy as to achieve a wide-ranging proletarian class-consciousness among the mass of the population. Krupskaja wrote, "the strengthening of proletarian culture (in its broadest sense), the spread of influence over the entire population is a necessary condition for the accomplishment of socialism. Socialism will be possible only when the psychology of people is radically changed. To change it is the task standing before us."⁷ The way to accomplish such a goal was to construct an educational system that fostered a broad and well-rounded development for its working-class students. Rigorously to be avoided, according to Lunacharsky and his colleagues, were the educational pitfalls of narrow vocational training on the one hand, and an overly theoretical approach on the other.

A second principle of Narkompros in the early stages after the Revolution was the belief that education should be administered primarily at the local level, with much less emphasis on the traditional tsarist method of control by the centralized bureaucracy. In his first public statement after becoming Commissar of Education, Lunacharsky said, "The State Education Commission is in no way a central power, governing academic and educational institutions. On the contrary, all school matters must be transferred to the organs of local self-government. The independent work of class workers', soldiers', and peasants' cultural enlightenment organizations must possess full autonomy in relation both to the state center and to the municipal centers."⁸

These two principles suggest certain affinities between Narkompros and other like-minded groups within the Bolshevik party at that time. To be sure, with the possible exception of Lunacharsky, the Narkompros leaders did not entirely adopt the principles of the Proletkult, a group devoted to the creation of a uniquely proletarian culture, including proletarian poetry and drama, and in some cases proletarian science. Nor were the Narkompros officials directly linked with the movement that sought to establish local workers' control in the factories after the Revolution. Yet despite the absence of formal links be-

1917–1920 (Moscow, 1958), and Anweiler, *Geschichte*. Reference should also be made to the valuable but unpublished dissertation by Ruth C. Widmayer, "The Communist Party and the Soviet Schools, 1917–1937" (Radcliffe College, 1953). The most convenient sources of the major educational writings of each of the leading Narkompros officials are the following collections: *A. V. Lunacharskii o narodnom obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1958); Krupskaja, *Ped. soch.*; M. N. Pokrovsky, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1965–67), 4:9–21, 457–553. For additional articles by Pokrovsky on education see the bibliography of all his works in *Istorik-marksist*, 1932, no. 1–2 (23–24), pp. 216–48.

7. Krupskaja, *Ped. soch.*, 7:12.

8. From a proclamation issued by Lunacharsky, Oct. 29–Nov. 11, 1917, and reprinted in N. I. Boldyrev, ed., *Direktivy VKP(B) i postanovleniia Sovetskogo pravitel'stva o narodnom obrazovanii za 1917–1947* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1947), 1:11.

tween the three groups, similarities in basic outlook are readily apparent. They all identified themselves with what they perceived to be the interests of the individual workers, which they implicitly distinguished from the interests of the economy. They all called for the autonomy of working-class groups, and placed a higher priority on the development of a proletarian class-consciousness than on the demands of industrialization.⁹

Narkompros sought to implement its principles in several ways. The most revolutionary measure was a decree of August 2, 1918, which proclaimed with gusto the abolition of all admission requirements to higher educational institutions except the one specifying a minimum age limit of sixteen. Explicitly disavowed were the former requirements of a secondary school diploma, the successful completion of an entrance examination, the restrictions based on nationality or sex, and the assessment of tuition. The decree directed higher schools to undertake extreme measures to enlarge their facilities so that everyone who wanted to study could be accommodated. If despite such measures the higher schools were still unable to admit all applicants, then preference was to be given to representatives of the proletariat and poor peasantry.¹⁰

Narkompros also encouraged during these early years a well-nigh revolu-

9. The most important source materials for a study of the Proletkult are its journal, *Proletarskaia kul'tura* (Moscow, 1918–21), the protocols of its first conference, *Protokoly pervoi Vserossiiskoi konferentsii proletarskikh kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh organizatsii, 15–20 sent., 1918* (Moscow, 1918), and the writings of its chief theoretician, A. A. Bogdanov, especially the collection entitled *O proletarskoi kul'ture, 1904–1924* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924). For opposition to Proletkult and Lunacharsky's defense of it see *Izvestiia TsIK*, no. 172, Aug. 13, 1918; no. 62, Mar. 22, 1919; and no. 80, Apr. 13, 1919. For Krupskaya's attitude see *Ped. soch.*, 7:10–12, 58–62, and 139–44. For Lenin's opposition see *Lenin o nar. obr.*, pp. 351–53. Brief secondary accounts include V. Polonsky, "Literaturnye dvizheniia oktiabr'skogo desiatiletiia," *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, 1927, no. 7, pp. 15–80; V. V. Gorbunov, "Bor'ba V. I. Lenina s separatistskimi ustremleniiami Proletkul'ta," *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1958, no. 1, pp. 29–39; V. Zavalishin, *Early Soviet Writers* (New York, 1958), pp. 141–56; Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917–1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), pp. 9–19; Edward J. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928–1932* (New York, 1953), pp. 6–10. The Workers' Control movement has received a more extensive treatment in the secondary literature. See Frederick I. Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917–1920: The Formative Years* (New York, 1968); Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923* (Baltimore, 1966), vol. 2, esp. pp. 64–80, 392–99; Paul H. Avrich, "The Bolshevik Revolution and Workers' Control in Russian Industry," *Slavic Review*, 22, no. 1 (March 1963): 47–63; and the references to primary sources included therein.

10. Actually, there were two decrees, one announcing the abolition of admission requirements, the other stipulating that preference was to be given to proletarians and poor peasants. Lenin himself drafted the latter decree, whereas the former was apparently drafted by Pokrovsky. They were both approved by the Sovnarkom on August 2, and first published (in *Izvestiia*) on August 6. Some sources refer to them as the decree (or decrees) of August 6. The most accessible text of the decrees is *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti*, 4 vols. to date (Moscow, 1957–68), 3:137–41.

tionary increase in the total number of higher educational institutions, with special emphasis on universities. In line with its convictions that the Soviet government should not be stingy with funds for educational purposes, and that the initiative should come from below, Narkompros adopted the practice of approving and allotting funds for new universities whenever the local soviets requested them. As a result, 1918 witnessed the mushrooming of universities in such unlikely spots as Astrakhan, Orel, Kostroma, and Tambov. By 1921 the number of higher schools of all types that existed at least on paper had reached 278, which was exactly three times the number of higher schools in existence in 1914.¹¹

In its reforms dealing with the administration of higher education, Narkompros was primarily concerned with weakening the influence of the full professors, who had traditionally composed the membership of the chief administrative organs of each higher school. But whereas the tsarist regime had sought to control the professors from above by means of governmental appointment of high administrative officials and limitations on the authority of the university councils, Narkompros tried to achieve control from below.¹² Believing that the elimination of admission requirements would result in a predominantly working-class, pro-Bolshevik student body, Narkompros issued a decree requiring that one-fourth of the members of all administrative organs must be students. In a further effort to weaken the power of the professoriate, Narkompros announced the abolition of all academic degrees, of all professorial ranks, and of the tenure system. All professors of ten or more years' experience

11. For data on the number of higher educational institutions and students for selected years, 1914–15 to 1938–39, and on the founding of new universities during this period see appendixes A and B of my doctoral dissertation, "Bolsheviks, Professors, and the Reform of Higher Education in Soviet Russia, 1917–1921" (Princeton University, 1970). For decrees on the founding of new higher educational institutions see *Sobranie zakoneniĭ i rasporiazhenii rabochego i krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva RSFSR*, 1917–18, no. 47, art. 557; 1919, no. 2, art. 21; and *Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii rabochego i krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva po narodnomu obrazovaniiu*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1919–20), 2:21–22. (The *Sobranie zakoneniĭ* will be cited hereafter as *SU*, the *Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii* as *SDP-NO*.)

12. Narkompros's plans for reform of university administration are most clearly expressed in a draft university charter which was drawn up by Pokrovsky and P. K. Shternberg during the spring of 1918. This draft formed the basis of discussion at two conferences in July and September 1918, attended by professors and Narkompros officials. Because the two groups failed to reach an agreement the charter was never implemented as a whole, although Narkompros did enact several of its provisions on a piecemeal basis. The draft charter is in TsGAOR, fond 2306, opis' 18, ed. khran. 28, listy 13–17 obratno. The best source for the opinions of Narkompros and the professors at this time are the speeches, debates, and resolutions of the July Conference on higher education. See TsGAOR, fond 2306, opis' 18, ed. khran. 28 (for an explanation of the Narkompros concept of "social control" see esp. list 77), and fond 2306, opis' 2, ed. khran. 12.

were required to stand for re-election by university bodies in which junior faculty and students were well represented.¹³

What were the results of this first phase of Soviet higher educational policy? By the end of 1919 it was apparent that the policy had failed to achieve its goals in nearly all respects. Whether the main cause of failure stemmed from inadequacies in the policy itself or from the unexpectedly severe military and economic crises of the time is debatable; both factors seem to have contributed to the prevailing state of educational chaos.

The abolition of admission requirements initially resulted in a flood of students overflowing the classrooms, but before long the number who were actually attending classes dwindled to even less than previously.¹⁴ Attendance dropped, among other reasons, because many new students realized that they had received inadequate academic preparation to benefit from the lectures, many of them faced harsh economic conditions which required them to seek full-time employment, and many proregime students decided to aid the Civil War effort by joining the Red Army. These factors assumed particular importance for working-class youth. As a result, not only did the total size of the student body fail to increase during this period, but its social composition remained much the same as in the past.¹⁵

The attempt to expand the institutional network of higher education was somewhat more successful, but nonetheless fell far short of its goals. The Civil War and the shortage of both material and intellectual resources presented serious obstacles to the establishment of viable, functioning new higher schools.

13. *SDP-NO*, 2:8-9; *SU*, 1918, no. 72, art. 789; *SU*, 1918, no. 80, art. 836.

14. A Moscow University professor who subsequently emigrated states that after the initial flood in 1918 the student body soon began to fall back to its "normal" size. V. B. El'iashevich et al., *Moskovskii universitet, 1755-1930: Iubileinyi sbornik* (Paris, 1930), p. 158. It would seem that, if anything, the number of students actually studying at this time was less than usual. A Narkompros source estimates that in 1918-19 there were 55,000 students actually studying in all institutions of higher education in the RSFSR. See *Narodnoe prosveshchenie: Ezhemesiachnyi sotsialisticheskii organ obshchestvenno-politicheskii, pedagogicheskii i nauchnyi* (Nov.-Dec. 1919), 16-17:109. (This journal will hereafter be cited as *NP*, monthly.) This number compares with a figure of 85,000 students over a roughly comparable area in the more normal year of 1914-15. See *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo RSFSR: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1958), p. 352. In any event, it is clear that the discrepancy between the number who formally enrolled in 1918 and the number who persisted in carrying out their academic work was immense. Narkompros states that of 3,568 registered students at Moscow University's historical-philological faculty only 177 were actually studying in 1918-19. There were many more students, however, studying in the medical faculty. See *NP*, monthly (1920), 18-20:89. See also the table in Korolev, "Iz istorii narodnogo obrazovaniia v Sovetskoi Rossii," p. 127, which compares the number of students formally enrolled in fourteen selected higher schools, as of January 1920, with those actually studying. In most cases the latter number was only 10 to 25 percent of the former number.

15. For Narkompros admissions that there were very few workers in the student body see *NP*, monthly, 16-17:107, and 18-20:92-93.

Of the thirteen new universities that sprouted at this time, only four were still in existence by 1922.

Nor did the policy of social control produce the expected results. According to Pokrovsky the working-class elements in the local soviets, which were responsible for founding many of the new universities, displayed a "huge and touching naïveté" in carrying out their responsibilities. On the one hand they often invited professors of theological academies and Kadet journalists to be professors at their institutions, yet on the other hand they frequently drove out qualified teachers on the exaggerated pretext that they were White Guardists.¹⁶ Except for a minuscule contingent of Communist students, most of whom soon entered the ranks of the Red Army, the student body as a whole proved to be unsympathetic to the Bolsheviks, so that the increased representation of students in the administrative organs of the universities did not lead to the desired changes in policy. The decree requiring professors to undergo a new competition for their posts did not produce the expected promotions of younger faculty members more sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, but elicited instead a stand of solidarity with the professoriate on the part of the student and junior faculty representatives, and the re-election of the old professors virtually en bloc.¹⁷

The only effective and lasting reform of this period was the creation of Workers' Faculties at most higher schools. Designed to provide workers with the equivalent of a secondary education so that they would be able to undertake university studies with profit, the Workers' Faculties used the facilities and teaching staff of the higher educational institutions to which they were attached. Although not all the students were in fact bona fide workers or poor peasants, the Workers' Faculties nonetheless did represent the most constructive means of increasing the access of the working classes to higher education. They continued to fulfill an important function in the Soviet educational system until 1940, when they were no longer deemed necessary.¹⁸

16. *NP*, monthly, 18–20:7.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 91; *1917–Oktiabr'–1920: Kratkii otchet Narodnogo komissariata po prosveshcheniiu* (Moscow, 1920), p. 56; El'iashevich, *Moskovskii universitet*, p. 159.

18. Definitive policy statements concerning the Workers' Faculties are found in Lunacharsky, "Rol' rabochikh fakul'tetov," *Lunacharskii o nar. obr.*, pp. 164–71; and Pokrovsky, "Kak u nas nachalas' proletarizatsiia vysshei shkoly?" *Pravda*, Sept. 28, 1922. The basic decrees are in *SU*, 1919, no. 45, art. 443, and 1920, no. 80, art. 381. Perceptive observers of Workers' Faculties (and of many other elements of university life at this time) were Sergei Zhaba, a student leader who subsequently emigrated, and Paul Scheffer, correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt*. See Zhaba, *Petrogradskoe studenchestvo v bor'be za svobodnuiu vysshuiu shkolu* (Paris, 1922), esp. pp. 24–29; and Scheffer, "University Life and the Press in Revolutionary Russia," *Manchester Guardian Commercial: Reconstruction in Europe*, July 6, 1922. The best secondary account of the Workers' Faculties is Frederika M. Tandler, "The Workers' Faculty System in the

The modest success of the Workers' Faculties, however, was not enough to counteract the criticism of Narkompros's educational policy which was rising among the Bolshevik ranks. This criticism came from two different quarters, and reached its peak by the end of 1919. First, those who shared the educational goals of Narkompros attacked the Commissariat for its failure to achieve these goals, and argued that the reason for this failure was an insufficiently radical attack on the existing educational institutions. The other type of criticism came from the economic commissariats and trade unions, who argued that the goals themselves were wrong because they totally ignored the desperate need for vocational education.¹⁹

It was the second line of criticism that carried the day. Early in 1920 most Bolsheviks thought the Civil War was at an end, and were eager to turn their attention from the military to the economic front. Five years of war had been ruinous to the nation's industrial base, and the need for a quick revival seemed to demand the most drastic measures. It was at this point that Trotsky proposed to apply the methods that had proven so successful with the Red Army to the struggle to restore the economy. His plan for the "militarization of labor" called for the conscription of workers, their transportation under conditions of military discipline to areas in need of labor, and their registration in the highest ration category, equivalent to that of Red Army soldiers.²⁰

In order to apply the new system to education, a special organ for vocational education was created and endowed with substantial independence from Narkompros. The Glavnyi Komitet Professional'no-tekhnicheskogo Obrazovaniia, or Glavprofobr for short, was headed by O. Iu. Shmidt and given the mandate to coordinate strictly the educational system with the immediate needs of the economy.²¹ Shmidt made no bones about his basic disagreement with the principles of Narkompros, especially the tenet that the spread of general education should be given priority over the building of the economy. In September 1920 he said, "Marxists, or anyone whom life has taught to think

USSR," unpublished doctoral dissertation (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1955).

19. For a discussion of a set of theses presented by Communist students accusing Narkompros of an insufficiently radical attack on the educational system see *NP*, monthly, 18-20:3-9. For a discussion of the inadequacies of the early Narkompros program of vocational education, and the opposition this program aroused within the government, see O. G. Anikst, *Professional'no-tekhnicheskoe obrazovanie v Rossii za 1917-1921: Iubileinyi sbornik* (Moscow, 1922).

20. For descriptions of the economic crisis of this time and of Trotsky's program to overcome it see Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (New York, 1965), pp. 486 ff.; and Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, 2:194-200, 213-21.

21. *SU*, 1920, no. 6, arts. 41-42. Narkompros sharply protested the formation of Glavprofobr, and defended its own educational policy in an angry appeal for more funds that was dispatched to VTsIK, Sovnarkom, and the Party Central Committee. TsGAOR, fond 2306, opis' 1, ed. khran. 320, listy 5-6, 50-51.

in Marxist terms, know that it is not words, it is not studies, it is not upbringing that creates new people, but a change in the economic structure—it is this which provides the conditions that permit your pedagogical activity to produce new people. Everyone agrees that if socialism is not accomplished in the economic sphere, all attempts to accomplish it via the school will be in vain. Hardly anyone will repeat the arguments, heard . . . in 1918, that we will arrive at socialism by means of a reformed school. No, this does not happen.”²²

The reforms inspired by Glavprofobr during the first half of 1920 resulted in several radical changes in higher education. Engineering and medical students were declared “militarized,” as the result of which they received Red Army rations and top priority transportation passes to get them to and from school, where they undertook accelerated course work and were subjected to the specified norms of an “academic obligation” (*uchebnaia povinnost'*) that was similar in intent to the military or labor obligations imposed on other citizens.²³ The curricula of the higher technical schools were thoroughly overhauled. Courses dealing with politics, history, or other nontechnical subjects were eliminated, and the whole course of study was shortened from five or more years to three. Efforts were made to curtail the recent expansion of higher education and to divert funds instead to the task of strengthening the network of secondary vocational schools. Entrance examinations were re-established for some faculties, and admission quotas for different specializations were instituted, not on the basis of student preference for a subject but rather in light of the projected need of the economy for trained personnel in the various specialties.²⁴ Even Lunacharsky, despite his general opposition to Glavprofobr, felt compelled to support at least part of the new program. In the fall of 1920 he stated, “We will not consider the desire, or the declaration, ‘I want to be a builder, and you are making me into a chemist’; we will say, ‘Here it is necessary to do what the Red Army does; it sends to specialized work those whom it deems necessary to send, and not according to individual desire.’”²⁵

The essential principle of the Glavprofobr program for higher education was the rigorous subordination of all other possible functions of education to

22. *Vestnik prof-tehnicheskogo obrazovaniia* (1920), 3–4:3.

23. Pokrovsky had become immediately converted to most aspects of the Glavprofobr program, and it was he who spelled out the most comprehensive rationale for the militarization of students. See *Narodnoe prosveshchenie: Ezhenedel'nik Narodnogo komissariata po prosveshcheniiu* (1920), 59–61: 1–3. (This journal will hereafter be cited as *NP*, weekly.) For student militarization decrees see *SU*, 1920, no. 20, art. 111; no. 34, art. 164; no. 67, art. 304; and no. 72, art. 333.

24. The major decree concerning reform of higher technical education is in *SU*, 1920, no. 54, art. 234. A longer explanation of the principles behind the reform is in Anikst, *Professional'no-tehnicheskoe obrazovanie*, pp. 62–66.

25. Lunacharskii *o nar. obr.*, p. 135.

the economic function. Gone was the effort by Narkompros to stimulate the general development of the individual and to achieve a psychological transformation of the masses. Greatly minimized was the attempt to achieve significant social change by means of a drastic increase in educational opportunities for working-class youth. Generally neglected was the possibility for achieving governmental political control over the administrative organs of the higher schools, and for inculcating loyalty to the regime by means of required courses of a political nature.

Through its application of military methods, its emphasis on centralization, and its use of ideological exhortation, compulsion, and differential distribution of rations rather than monetary rewards as its main incentives for the population, the Glavprofobr program formed part and parcel of the system of "war communism" that had begun in 1918 and culminated in 1920. This program had a totally different orientation from the early Narkompros policy, but its successful implementation would have required an equally revolutionary alteration in the institutional status quo. By the end of 1920, however, it became clear that Glavprofobr had been no more successful than Narkompros in achieving its objectives.

The main reasons for the failure of the efforts to militarize the economy and educational system were, paradoxically, both military and economic in nature. Successful implementation of the program would have required a strong economic base. It was simply beyond the power of the regime in those confused days to achieve the centralized control and efficient marshaling of resources which the militarization plans demanded. Even the task of supplying militarized students with rations was found to be impossible. Consequently many of them had to take time to provide somehow for their own livelihood, making full-time study and the completion of the accelerated courses on schedule an impossible task.²⁶ Although the task would have been difficult enough under peacetime conditions, renewed military conflict, first with Piłsudski's Poland, then with Baron Wrangel, inflicted a yet more severe strain on the country's resources. The attention of the chief political leadership, which had been turned ever so briefly to matters of the economy and education during the winter of 1919–20, was in the summer forced back to military and international considerations. When in the late fall of 1920 it was again possible to take stock of internal matters, previous solutions no longer seemed feasible or attractive.

Although Lenin had personally approved the policies first of Narkompros and then of Glavprofobr, he had not played an active role in their formulation. Now he personally set out to establish guidelines for a new higher educational policy. Like the New Economic Policy it was implemented in 1921 and

26. Anikst, *Professional'no-tehnicheskoe obrazovanie*, p. 23. See also Shilov, "Leninskie dekrety," *Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta*, p. 97.

remained essentially unchanged until the adoption of the First Five-Year Plan.²⁷ By instituting his new policy Lenin was saying, in effect, that both Glavprofobr and Narkompros had been wrong. Rather than attempting to accomplish a radical transformation of existing institutions and personnel in the interests of achieving dramatic cultural, social, or economic goals, Lenin sought instead to preserve much of the existing educational system intact, while establishing firm governmental and party control over it. In short, he gave first priority to achieving centralized political control over the existing higher schools and their teaching staffs of “bourgeois” professors.²⁸

The major step of the new policy was the drafting and implementation of the first Soviet university charter. This statute surpassed even the reactionary 1884 charter in its complete denial of autonomy, and in its subordination of university administration to the central governmental apparatus. Although remnants of Narkompros’s earlier policy of “social control” were retained in provisions calling for representatives of students, local soviets, and trade unions to participate in the work of the university councils, these bodies were deprived of almost all of their previous power. Principal authority in each higher school was vested in a three to five-man board (*pravlenie*), all of whose members were to be appointed by Narkompros. A special effort was made to appoint party members to these positions.²⁹

27. There are three major collections of Lenin’s educational writings: *Lenin o nar. obr.*; V. I. Lenin, *O vospitanii i obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1963); and V. I. Lenin, *O nauke i vysshem obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1967). For secondary accounts of Lenin’s role in the formulation of Soviet educational policy see the articles in N. K. Goncharov and F. F. Korolev, eds., *V. I. Lenin i problemy narodnogo obrazovaniia* (Moscow, 1961).

28. A recent article and ensuing debate in the *Slavic Review*, although devoted to primary and secondary education rather than higher education, have nonetheless raised many of the general issues dealt with here. See Frederic Lilge, “Lenin and the Politics of Education,” *Slavic Review*, 27, no. 2 (June 1968): 230–58; and R. H. Hayashida, “Lenin and the Third Front” (with reply by Frederic Lilge), *Slavic Review*, 28, no. 2 (June 1969): 314–27. Although I agree with many of the conclusions of both authors, I am led to dissent on two points. First, the tendency of Lilge and Hayashida to group together various aspects of a state-oriented (as opposed to an individual-oriented) educational policy under the single rubric “political” is misleading. My analysis suggests that various components of state-oriented educational programs can be mutually exclusive, or at best in conflict, and that clarification results from categorizing them separately in terms of social, cultural, economic, and political functions. Second, the periodization of early Soviet educational policy presented by Hayashida (as well as by most other writers on the subject, both Soviet and Western) is at odds with the periodization offered here. By grouping the years from 1917 to the end of 1920 into one period rather than dividing them into two periods with nearly opposite tendencies, the standard periodization, in my view, erroneously ignores the importance of the establishment of Glavprofobr in early 1920.

29. The 1884 charter is in “Svod ustavov uchenykh uchrezhdenii i uchebnykh zavedenii vedomstva Ministerstva Narodnago Prosveshcheniia,” *Svod zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, vol. 11, part 1, arts. 400–559. The 1921 charter is in *SU*, 1921, no. 65, art. 486.

Lenin insisted that courses dealing with Marxism and the principles of the Soviet government must be taught in all higher schools, including technical institutes, even if this meant lengthening the course of study and slowing down the rate at which trained graduates would become available for the economy.³⁰

By his relatively conciliatory policy toward the professoriate, Lenin shocked his more radical colleagues. To be sure, he demanded that the professors were to be kept under firm administrative control, but on the other hand he insisted that all but the most obstinately anti-Bolshevik must be retained in their teaching positions, even those whose specialty was the social sciences. His stipulation was that professors in those fields must be required to teach from specially prepared Marxist-oriented syllabi.³¹

Lenin did not disregard the social and economic functions of higher education, but in line with the New Economic Policy he adopted a much less radical approach. Gone were the stringently compulsory aspects of the militarization system and the excessive vocationalism of the Glavprofobr approach. At the same time, however, the training of qualified personnel for the economy was proclaimed one of the basic tasks of higher education.³² The educational network as a whole was carefully altered over the next few years to provide increased facilities for secondary vocational education at the expense of the less utilitarian aspects of higher education.³³

No return was made to the 1918 abolition of admission requirements. All applicants were to demonstrate their ability and preparation before special admission committees. Nonetheless, a quota system for entering students was established in an effort to favor working-class applicants. According to the quota system, various official agencies, such as the Trade Union Council, the party, and the Komsomol, were requested to recommend candidates for ad-

For emphasis on the political appointment of administrative officers, see *Direktivny VKP(B) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, pp. 320–21.

30. *SU*, 1921, no. 19, art. 119.

31. Pokrovsky, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 4:12; V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958–65), 52:155. Lenin's tolerance did not extend to Mensheviks (see 52:90, 374).

32. *SU*, 1921, no. 65, art. 486, provision 1.

33. This trend, strongly advocated by Preobrazhensky, was unsuccessfully resisted by Lunacharsky. See E. Preobrazhensky, "To, o chem nado skazat'," *Pravda*, no. 154, July 16, 1921, and "O professional'no-tekhnicheskoi obrazovanii," *Pravda*, no. 201, Sept. 10, 1921; Lunacharsky, "Ekonomiia i kul'tura," *NP*, weekly, no. 84, Aug. 10, 1921, p. 2. For figures comparing the number of students in higher as opposed to secondary vocational education for the years 1914–15 to 1938–39, see the graph in *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo SSSR: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1940), p. 102. In 1914–15 there were more than twice as many students in higher education. By 1924–25 the numbers were equal, and from then on the number of secondary vocational school pupils exceeded the number of higher school students. The total number of secondary vocational school pupils increased throughout the entire period, whereas the number of higher school students decreased between 1922 and 1924, and began to increase again only in 1928–29.

mission, and were allotted a certain percentage of the entering class. The number of prescribed vacancies for those who could not secure any such recommendation was placed as low as 16 percent, although in practice it amounted to a much larger number.³⁴

In conclusion, I think the most significant aspect of the Leninist policy toward higher education was its fairly successful effort to achieve a balance between the social and economic functions it demanded of the educational system. Neither the Narkompros program, with its emphasis on widening proletarian access and developing class consciousness, nor the Glavprofobr policy of stressing vocational training had even tried to achieve such a balance. Indeed, the two functions were in many respects incompatible, since the attempt to educate large numbers of relatively unprepared working-class students at the expense of better-prepared upper-class students would lower the educational standards, with the result that graduates would be less well qualified when they entered the economy. Lenin's program was not to stress one at the expense of the other but to try to steer a more moderate course toward both of these goals at the same time. Meanwhile, the political goal of control remained dominant and the goals of cultural and individual development fell by the wayside.

34. For the planned quotas for the academic year 1922-23, see *Vestnik prof-tekhnicheskogo obrazovaniia* (1922), 1-3:53-57. For the actual enrollment in each category see *Vysshaia shkola v RSFSR i novoe studenchestvo* (Moscow, 1923), pp. 46-47. Students unable to secure recommendations (who were required to pay tuition) constituted as much as 41 percent of the entering classes that year instead of the planned 16 percent.