EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE USSR

SOME ten years ago, a brief history of the role of education in relation to social mobility up to 1955 was sketched.[1] The period of the thirties and postwar forties was a time favourable to social mobility, and education was an aid to advancement on the social scale. The early fifties, however, ushered in a period when the expansion of secondary schools was not matched by anywhere nearly a sufficient intake of the higher educational institutions to maintain the position whereby completion of the secondary school served as an entrance to them. The paper spoke then of only half the graduates of secondary schools being able to continue their education at institutes or universities, considerably less than in the previous periods, and implied that a further decrease would take place.

In fact, however, Manevich[2] stated in his well-known article that half of those finishing school in Moscow, Kiev and Sverdlovsk entered higher educational institutions, presumably in 1962–63, according to a sample survey. He, too, expected the proportion to fall. The point is that the decline in birth rate due to the war was felt particularly in the later fifties, while the postwar bulge has been making itself felt in the sixties. In fact, if we look at the statistics, we see that the intake of full-time day education at *Vuzy* stopped increasing in 1954–55 and indeed declined, only reaching the figure of that year in 1961.

NUMBER OF ENTRANTS TO UNIVERSITIES AND INSTITUTES

Full-time day students only (thousands)

1940	*1950*	*1951*	*1952*	*1953*	*1954*	*1955*	*1956*
154.9	228.4	245.2	249.0	265.1	276.2	257.2	231.2
1957	*1958*	*1959*	*1960*	*1961*	*1962*	*1963*	*1964*
219.2	215.5	227.1	257.9	279.4	312.1	339.0	356.2

Number of school children (thousands)

Class	*1958/9*	*1960/1*	*1962/3*	*1963/4*	*1964/5*
9	1397	1385	2488	2620	3286
10	1589	1152	1681	2089	2153
11	36	57	427	945	1428

Sources: *Vysshee obrazovanie v SSSR* (M. 1961); *Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR* for the relevant years.

From 1961 intake of *Vuzy* has been increasing irregularly at the rate of 5–12% per annum. At the same time the number of schoolchildren in classes 9–11 has been increasing over the past few years at an annual rate of 20–25%. The recently announced increase, therefore, of some 34,000 entrants[3] to higher educational institutions not merely fails to take account of the fact that there are twice as many finishing school

[1] S. V. Utechin, *Education and Social Mobility* (1955), St. Antony Papers (mimeographed).

[2] E. Manevich, 'Vseobshchnost' truda i problemy ratsional'nogo ispol'zovaniya rabochei sily v SSSR', *Voprosy ekonomiki*, 1965, no. 6, p. 25.

[3] *Izvestiya*, 6 February 1966.

this year but also partially leaves aside the natural increase in those finishing school. It would appear that the increased intake of agricultural, vocational and technical schools is an essential aspect of the Central Committee measures.

A second factor which operated to reduce the number of those desiring to enter universities was the 1958 reform whereby the school leaver was expected to spend some two years at work before entering a higher educational institution. The system only operated partially and for a limited time since the defects were all too obvious. Faculties, particularly science, disregarded the new rules to an increasing extent, while students who had been at work could not compete even under the easier entry conditions with those fresh from school. Pressure to enter the *Vuzy* has thus been mounting, particularly over the past few years. The system of correspondence courses, while considerably expanded, has proved to be no substitute in view of their low standard and high rate of failure.

What then is happening to social mobility under conditions when opportunities for entering higher educational institutions are and have been becoming more and more competitive? Why, indeed, has the state not expanded *Vuz* education at a faster rate? What role in fact does education play in social mobility in the Soviet Union? These are the questions which this article tries to discuss.

It is useful to have a scheme of social stratification to provide the basis for an examination of social mobility. For this purpose a division along the following lines is suggested. Peasants or land-workers are in the lowest category; above them are the unskilled workers of the towns; still higher are the skilled workers. White-collar workers of low qualifications are in a similar position to the latter, but essentially occupy separate status owing to the fact that a large proportion are women whose social mobility is separate or differently determined from that of men and is partially dependent on the status of the husband. The highest level is occupied by the ordinary intelligentsia. Technicians lie between the skilled workers and the intelligentsia, being assimilated to one or the other. All these categories fall into what we may call the lower group. The higher stratum is composed of the leading party and government personnel, the economic controllers (planners, enterprise managers and heads of the bigger collective and state farms), the military and secret police officers and the higher intelligentsia such as the successful writers, actors, scholars and scientists.

This structure has quite clearly a number of ambiguities, but it does assist in illustrating the role of education in the formation of functional groups. What essentially divides the two groups is that the one controls the economy and state, as a consequence of which there is a marked income and status difference in favour of those who have the levers of power in their own hands. It is the contention of this article that while it is possible to move within the lower group through education, acquisition of educational requirements becomes progressively more difficult as one moves up the scale on the lower level. Transference to the élite is easiest on the highest gradation and can be partly performed through educational attainment. A one-generational jump from the lower gradations to the élite is possible and occurs, but has more of a token significance.

The numbers and educational level of the élite can be seen in the statistics of the 1959 census—which does indicate the much higher educational levels of the top personnel.

NUMBERS OF LEADING PERSONNEL IN ENTERPRISES, CONSTRUCTION SITES, STATE AND COLLECTIVE FARMS, ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR STRUCTURAL DIVISIONS (IN THOUSANDS):

1926	*1939*	*1959*
365	1536	1841 (2223)

Source: *Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1960 godu* (M. 1961), pp. 33 and 37.

These figures are obviously insufficient as well as being rather ambiguous for the year 1959 when two figures are given. The military and secret police establishment is presumably not included.

The importance of education for membership is shown by the following:

	Having higher or secondary (completed or not) education (per thousand of given groups)	
	1939	*1959*
Education of leading personnel:		
in government institutions and social organizations and their structural subdivisions	359	908
in enterprises and their structural subdivisions	285	853
of which		
chairmen and vice-chairmen of collective farms	23	704
engineering and technical personnel	630	910
Education of all manual workers:	82	386

Source: *Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1960 godu* (M. 1961), pp. 38 and 42.

If we commence at the bottom of the scale with the fast-disappearing peasantry, it appears that the overwhelming drive to enter the towns and the urban educational institutions has overcome the legal obstacles to horizontal mobility. In spite of lack of a passport peasant youth enter the towns, but with a much lower chance of obtaining places in the various educational institutions, if only because of the relatively low level of schooling in the rural areas. Shubkin shows that in Novosibirsk 28% of those completing schools in villages go to *Vuzy* as against 46% from towns.[4] The very nature of the escape from the farms, through the Soviet army or by working on construction sites, does not aid them in the process of rising along the vertical scale. That the peasant youth, however, drop out earlier in school, get worse marks and

[4] *Sotsial'nye issledovaniya* (M. 1965), p. 127.

RECORDS OF PUPILS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NOVOSIBIRSK IN 1963-64[5]

(SAMPLE SURVEY OF SOCIAL GROUPS IN THE POPULATION)

Social composition of population and family situation	*Relative proportion of given social group to total of those in survey*	*Results*				*Proportion of given social group of population to total of those surveyed*		
		Exc.	*Good*	*Sat.*	*Unsat.*	*Relatively backward*	*Second year in class*	*Left school*
Children of all social groups of the population	100	5.0	30.5	56.5	8.0	100	100	100
Children of								
1. Unskilled workers	16.07	1.0	17.4	66.0	15.6	40.3	34.0	33.0
2. Skilled workers	47.63	3.6	28.6	60.0	7.8	56.8	58.3	53.0
3. Office workers of low qualifications	7.2	4.0	32.8	54.4	8.8	0.6	0.7	—
4. Medium level technicians and similar personnel	7.0	5.4	30.7	58.5	5.4	0.8	1.2	3.0
5. Highly qualified personnel	22.1	11.4	43.0	42.4	3.2	1.5	5.8	11.0
Children educated at *internaty*	3.4	3.29	22.8	61.0	12.91	8.8	7.3	1.0

[5] I. M. Musatov, 'K voprosu o vosproizvodstve rabochei sily', *Izvestiya sibirskogo otdeleniya Akademii nauk*, no. 9, seriya obshchestvennykh nauk, vyp. 3, December 1965, p. 58.

generally have fewer opportunities for higher education is well known and only to be expected in a regime where the peasantry has provided the economic surplus to finance industrialization. The peasant youth thus tends to enter the lower ranks of the proletariat. Western observers meet few students whose origin is peasant and even then their fathers are often 'team-leaders' or kolkhoz chairmen, while they themselves have often lived all their lives in the towns. The experience of observers, however, tends to be confined to universities; less high-status institutes, such as agriculture or mining, clearly have a higher proportion of peasants. With regard to those peasant children sent to town boarding schools, it is necessary to take account of the poorer results of children in such schools. Statistics giving some indication of the school careers of children of different social groups are given in the table on p. 60.

The position of the peasants is really very similar to that of the unskilled workers in regard to education. Their children are much more likely to drop out earlier and get much lower grades than those children of parents of other social groups. Unskilled workers are not an unimportant part of the total labour force: their numbers are not declining but in certain cases increasing.[6]

It seems, therefore, highly unlikely that the son of an unskilled worker would be able to reach the better or high-status institutes or universities, though there is no reason why he should not enter the ranks of the skilled workers, since he would be able to do so after completing his compulsory 8-year education, either through the system of technical schools or through apprenticeship or other forms of education provided at the factory. In fact, an investigation or survey of a Leningrad factory showed that of the 692 persons in the sample, 511 or 73.7% were the offspring of workers; 142 were of peasant stock.[7] This does seem to imply that there is a strong tendency for workers to remain such. Another investigation at a Sverdlovsk factory found that 24 of a total of 42 workers' children became workers (57%), while 75% of specialists' children followed in their fathers' footsteps.[8] Clearly these surveys are of limited significance, but some idea of the degree of mobility or immobility is gained. They are consistent with the conception of movement from skilled worker to intelligentsia, while the children of the unskilled remain workers.

This is reinforced by the fact that most workers receive their skills through the factory, as Manevich pointed out. He gives a figure of 83% of workers in engineering obtaining their skills at the plant. The Leningrad investigation confirms this, as 462 of the 692 were trained at their place of work. The remainder were trained at the vocational and technical schools.

But both the vocational-technical training and factory training tend to be poorer than they should be, partly through lack of equipment. In *Trud* (13 January 1966) we read of a complaint of poor technical training of trainees They cannot deal with new equipment as only old machinery is given to them to practise on—to avoid any delays in fulfilment of production plans.

[6] *Sotsiologiya v SSSR*, vol. I (M. 1965), p. 355.

[7] I. P. Trufanov, 'O formirovanii i sovremennom sostave rabochikh kadrov leningradskogo zavoda "Elektrosila" im. S. M. Kirova', *Sovetskaya etnografiya*, 1965, no. 1, p. 98.

[8] *Sotsiologiya v SSSR*, vol. I, p. 414.

Under these conditions it is inevitable that workers must be retarded in their acquisition of skills, which in turn can only mean that by the time they are in the ranks of the highly skilled (if they do become such) they are past either their educational peak or desire. Trufanov[9] shows that of the 692 workers at this Leningrad factory only 6 were from the *tekhnikum*, while some 40% of those having education in classes 8-10 (p. 101) were in fact continuing their education part-time. Part-time education, however, is very unsatisfactory.

The picture then is essentially that of worker and peasant youth being able to improve their position as workers.

The sons or daughters of skilled workers have much better results at school than those of unskilled, but nonetheless have a high percentage of drop-outs and low marks. As a result, the number of workers—primarily skilled—entering institutes is relatively limited, though substantial. Again, however, the direction of the flow of those going to higher educational institutions appears to be that of a movement to the more specialized institutes like mining. Thus a sociological survey of the University of the Urals gave a figure of 61-67% entrants to the Sverdlovsk mining institute as coming from workers' families but 51% at the University of the Urals and 42% at the medical institute.[10] From Western observers at Moscow and Kiev universities we certainly did not get anywhere near such a high proportion, and the explanation would seem to be that Sverdlovsk and the Urals is an area where there is a large number of highly qualified workers who receive quite high pay. This would appear to add another dimension to the problem in that the peripheral industrial regions with universities and institutes of consequently lower status than that of the central regions are less sought after by the intelligentsia and élite and have consequently more opportunities available for workers—particularly skilled workers.

This has only been a discussion of the *full-time* courses, not the *part-time* ones. Here we are told[11] that most people studying part-time are workers. This is what is only to be expected, though the proportion might be different in different regions and universities. The quality, however, of part-time higher education, particularly correspondence courses which account for most of it, is universally deplored. A diploma, if obtained, is, as a result, of particularly low status. Recently in *Trud* (8 January 1966) a professor gave reasons. He complained that part-time courses for higher education are of much lower standard than the full-time ones. This was because of the little time left to students, much lower staff-student ratio, poor accommodation and relative lack of textbooks.

There has been a considerable expansion of part-time education but it is doubtful if it is worth the effort. Today it is recommended that students should only be admitted to those courses which are directly related to their work. This will, obviously, tend to limit scope for more direct jumps in the social scale. In addition, it appears that the proportion of students that do finally finish hardly justifies the expense on this form of education.

[9] Trufanov, *op. cit.* p. 24.
[10] *Sotsiologiya v SSSR*, vol. I, p. 412.
[11] *Ibid.* p. 413.

What are the reasons for this situation? (1) Schools situated in working-class areas are inferior to others—partly because of the pressure which the élite and to a lesser extent the intelligentsia can exert. In any event one would expect better teachers to flow to areas of greater influence. Special schools for brighter pupils or those specializing in foreign languages are especially sought after by those with a greater range of powerful contacts. (2) Material conditions at home play an obviously important role in the sense that the tendency for both parents to work, have more children and be subject to considerable overcrowding is greater for working-class families. Income also plays an overwhelming role in determining who goes to university: student stipends are ridiculously low, though higher in military and certain science establishments. They also vary from region to region. At Moscow university stipends are from 30-40 rubles, whereas at Kiev they are 20-30, though higher for the sciences, with the proviso that good marks must be obtained in all subjects. As vacations are short, work opportunities are limited. Again, after being at work for 2 years or having served in the Soviet army, would-be students are often of marrying age and, since no account whatsoever is taken of their families in terms of stipends or accommodation, hardship even for those of the intelligentsia who enter is tremendous. As long as stipends remain at this level, one must expect a bar to working-class children. Higher education at the best institutes—essentially concentrated in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev—must exclude a high proportion of working-class students, especially those from other towns or villages.

It might have been expected that skilled workers would work themselves up to foremen and then higher, but a recent discussion in *Trud*[12] showed that skilled workers have no desire to become foremen since the latter's wages are lower or at best the same as those of the skilled workers. There is, however, not the same responsibility or antagonism when remaining at the level of a skilled worker. In any event it is not a step to becoming a department head since the latter must have higher education. Again, one thinks of the problem of *incentive:* when once a skilled worker there is no monetary incentive to become an ordinary engineer or departmental head, while the sacrifices entailed in acquiring the necessary training would tend to put off most people.

We are then left with the intelligentsia and élite. Here it is that the institution of *blat* operates to favour the children of the élite since the ordinary intelligentsia cannot compete with the highly placed. A certain, relatively small proportion of the intelligentsia does not finish school, but most who do enter universities. The Shubkin article gave the statistical basis for this fact. It is here, however, that the special institutes of higher status, such as those of oriental languages, foreign trade, international affairs, i.e. those connected with the secret police or outside world, act as a direct line to the top. The bigger universities and institutes of the centre must favour those living in the centre, who are themselves privileged compared with the remainder of the population. Performance of those at home tends to be better than those who are living in hostels, with the result that the élite are further favoured.

[12] *Trud*, 6 October 1965.

Ultimately, the greater financial resources together with direct contact with entrance bodies ensures that children of the élite have a smooth ride into and through universities, particularly in those faculties and institutions of higher status. A well-placed father has little difficulty in arranging a similar status for his children in their age group.

If we look at the statistics of the censuses of 1926, 1939 and 1959, we see a tremendous growth in the ruling group for 1926-39 which was certainly possible in a period of massive expansion of education, industry and purges. The period after postwar reconstruction was one of relative stability with a decline in military and secret police personnel and with a relative decrease in the rate of growth so that one would expect to find that the élite had, to some extent, closed its ranks. Figures do show this from 1939-59, and one suspects that most of the increase took place in the war and immediate postwar years. At the same time, as already mentioned, institutions of higher education have not in recent years been expanding sufficiently to take account of the increase in output of those completing secondary education. This has meant increasing use of extra-legal methods of ensuring educational progress.

Why has higher education not been more rapidly expanded? After all it is then more difficult for the élite to ensure that their children obtain the necessary education and, even if they do, it entails more expense and more trouble. Hence it does not seem that the reason is a self-conscious desire to limit their numbers, but rather an economic effect imposed on them by the relative decline in rate of growth, together with a disproportion between the numbers requiring education and employment opportunities in an economy which still needs a large proportion of manual and less skilled personnel. Skilled manual work requires only a class 7 education,[13] so that expansion of education in secondary schools beyond that level may appear economically unjustified.

Finally, it is necessary to mention two groups, discrimination against whom helps to restrict entrance to the élite—women and Jews. It is instructive simply to look at the statistics in this regard.

INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES, 1 DECEMBER 1963

	% of women
Directors of enterprises	6
Chief engineers	16
Departmental heads	12
Engineers	38
Technicians	65
Foremen	20
Engineer-economists, economists, planners and statisticians	79
Norm setters	62
Chief and head bookkeepers	36

Source: *Vestnik statistiki*, 1965, no. 2, p. 93.

[13] Musatov, *op. cit.* p. 61.

This is clearly an indication of the fact that women are not admitted to the higher ranks. How far does education assist in this process? There seems to be a definite bias against women throughout education: where there is the possibility of reaching a position of responsibility and thus élite, a quota is established. This appears to apply to institutes of foreign affairs, secret police and the army and to the institutes of oriental languages and international affairs where a quota system operates, while the army does not conscript women and the secret police have a limited use for them. In addition, the attitude of many teachers to women is not serious. Even apart from heads of departments, engineers have a lower proportion of women, though much higher than in other countries. The basis for this lower social mobility in industry is that there is a definite bar, prejudice or quota against accepting women into many industrial institutes such as aviation, heavy industry etc., which in turn is partly induced by the fact that plants find women either leave earlier or transfer to less difficult jobs. Here the reason lies essentially in the heavy burden of household work which falls on women in the USSR, as well as the comparatively poorly-developed system of children's nurseries and household gadgets. Since the availability of nurseries and household durable goods is different according to social group, one would expect women of the élite to have the best chances.

With respect to the Jewish population there is a similar prejudice, making it more difficult to get into certain institutions—particularly those concerned with foreign affairs, or the humanities as compared with the sciences. This is not easy to prove. Statistics do show that on 1 December 1960 the percentage of Jewish students was considerably less than the proportion of Jewish specialists with higher education: of 3,545,234 specialists with higher education in economy in the USSR at that date, 290,707 (i.e. about 8%) were Jews, whereas the total number of students of higher education in 1960-61 was 2,395,545, of whom 77,177 (about 3%) were Jews.[14] Since Jews have a high proportion of persons in the intelligentsia and non-manual working class, one would expect, if Jews were following the same pattern as non-Jews, to get a closer relationship between these two figures.

In conclusion it would seem that education is having a contradictory effect. On the one hand it promotes social mobility between functional groups and yet on the other it assists in placing a barrier to entrance to the élite as well as providing a floor below which a member of the élite cannot fall. It is thus serving at one and the same time as a disrupting and stabilizing force. Under conditions where the economy does not permit sufficient expansion to take account of the increasing flow of those wishing to enter higher educational institutions, there must be increasing alienation of the youth from the rulers. As a result, incentive at all levels is reduced and so a feedback effect is made on the economy.

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[14] *Vysshee obrazovanie v SSSR* (1961), pp. 70 and 85.