Lenin and the Politics of Education

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MEN whom Hegel defines as world-historical figures because they shape the lives of generations by establishing systems of rule, law, or belief are sometimes called educators of their times. In such a general and figurative use of the term, the title educator is of course honorific and not bestowed for achievements specifically educational. This has happened to Lenin. When a historian attributes to him "an enormous pedagogical success," [1] he really means that Lenin managed to impose upon his party a style of rule in which expedient action is supported by ideological justification. The educator in this case is a master political strategist and might seem to be a more suitable subject of inquiry for the political scientist than for the historian of education. The metaphor, however, conceals a part of reality. It is true that Lenin wrote no treatise on education. His ideas on the subject were few and unoriginal, and he left no master plan to guide the Soviet educational system. Yet it is also true that, as head of party and state, he participated directly in the making of educational programs and policies, often devoting astonishing attention to details. Out of his speeches, memoranda, notes, and letters that deal with pedagogical problems and set forth his recommendations and decisions, a certain conception of education emerges. There is evidence that his actions and authority helped impart to the course of Soviet education a direction basically maintained until today.

As one surveys his contribution, one soon realizes that it defies classification in terms educators customarily employ. He does not fit into any chapter of a general history of educational thought, nor can he be characterized by association with a school or movement, though his dialectical materialism might mislead one into thinking so. Rather, he takes one out into a broad territory of indistinct boundaries where a variety of claims and interests meet, mingle, conflict, and become overlaid with one another. It should be remembered in this connection that Lenin performed successively a number of historical roles. He was first a subversive political revolutionary, then a statesman, and in his very last years he became an impatient promoter of national economic development. All these roles are reflected in what he said and did about education. Following these different strands and varying emphases, one finds oneself in the midst of a dynamic complex of interdependencies.

[1] Adam Ulam, *The Bolsheviks* (New York, 1965), p. 455.

If a label for it must be found, perhaps "the politics of education" comes closest to conveying what is involved. However we choose to designate it, our subject will not submit to the simple humanistic treatment in which pedagogues defend the autonomy of education against the encroachments of sociologists, political scientists, and social planners. With such preconceptions, it would be impossible to understand and do justice to the problems Lenin had to cope with. Some of these did in fact arise because he cut himself off from certain modes of educational thought that had come to be accepted in Russia as well as in the West. It is therefore appropriate to begin this study with a brief summary of two traditions that still had strong appeal to the educational profession when Lenin began to attack them and to deny them further influence.

The first of these is the secular tradition of modern public education that derives from the late phase of the Enlightenment and is inspired by its moral beliefs. Trust in the natural goodness and rationality of man is set against corrupt social institutions that have to be remade and restricted by democratic control so that eventually they may promote rather than obstruct the perfection of the individual. Accordingly, the more consistent *philosophes,* notably Condorcet, demanded that future national systems of education be placed under the control of autonomous bodies of intellectuals, scientists and teachers. Under their protection a rational public opinion would be formed to act as a safeguard against any future relapses into political tyranny and religious mystification. Although Lenin retained the belief in social progress of the Enlightenment, its optimism concerning the self-emancipating force of reason struck him as excessively naive. His own view of the agencies of human progress was formed by a study of Hegel, Marx, and Engels, who tied reason to certain forms of power and made its triumph contingent on society's passing through lawful stages of historical development. To entrust the rule of reason to the alleged autonomous force of education was to think abstractly, that is, unhistorically and unpolitically.

It was therefore clear to Lenin from the very start of his revolutionary career that within the workers' movement education would play a subordinate part, serving the class struggle of the adult masses by making them conscious of their economic condition and preparing them for their historical role. In short, Lenin reasserted the political domination of education that the most consistent exponents of the Enlightenment had hoped to end forever, with the consequence that in prerevolutionary Bolshevik strategy, organized political action replaced education as the primary instrument of social change. Revolution had to precede cultural reconstruction, for which it alone could lay the basis. Then, in the new society, political ideology would continue to control educational institutions in order to secure its gradual internalization and to direct common efforts toward the attainment of planned social goals. The irreconcilable conflict between this position and that of the Enlightenment became manifest immediately after the October Revolution. In December 1917 the All-

Russian Federation of Teachers, founded in 1905, went on a three months' strike in defense of the principles of professional autonomy and a democratic concept of education. It refused to act merely as a willing instrument but wanted to be an independent participant of educational decision-making. A year later the Federation was dissolved as counterrevolutionary.

The second educational tradition Lenin confronted in the person of Lev Tolstoi. Tolstoi revived in Russia the social and educational philosophy of Rousseau, whom he so greatly admired, but gave its anarchic and pessimistic elements an unusual emphasis. In contrast to such conservatives as Herbart and Hegel, Tolstoi—like Rousseau—did not identify education with the transmission of culture. Instead of turning the young generation into robust trustees of existing institutions, they looked to it for the regeneration of society.

Tolstoi especially cast himself in the role of the child's protector vis-à-vis society, state, and church, whose educational aims he branded corrupt and stultifying. In Russia his literary and moral authority lent a special appeal to this gospel of child-centered, free education, in which his experience of teaching peasant children at Iasnaia Poliana had confirmed him. Moreover, his educational views harmonized with his philosophy of culture and society as developed in his later writings. The suppression of children's spontaneity in state school systems had its counterpart in the extinction of human brotherhood in adults who lived by the fictitious values of society.

Lenin's condemnation of Tolstoi was tempered because he admired the artist and because he found useful elements in Tolstoi's critique of society that appealed to non-Marxists. Still, Tolstoi's philosophy remained "unpardonable": it was pacifist, anarchic, utopian, and permeated by Oriental pessimism.[2] In an overwhelmingly peasant society to which organized political action was alien, it was a dangerous influence that had to be fought. Although Lenin was familiar with Tolstoi's essays on educational theory, he made no specific reference to them. The explanation seems to be that educational ideas generally did not attract him. Despite his philosophical interests he never entered into a discussion of the antitheses at the heart of the Rousseau-Tolstoi tradition—the antitheses of nature and culture, of creativity and conformity. He acknowledged them only indirectly by taking issue with their political implications.

The Bolshevik revolution did not extinguish the Tolstoian ethos in Russia. For many, including Lenin's wife Krupskaia and some of her closest educational collaborators, Tolstoi remained a deeper source of inspiration than Marx. She repeatedly acknowledged a profound indebtedness to him. In 1923, for example, she spoke entirely out of the Rousseau-Tolstoi tradition when she said that "children and youth should not become instruments for the realization of aims that are extraneous and contrary to their interests." [3] Had that belief been allowed to determine

[2] Lenin's five articles on Tolstoi, written between 1908 and 1911, are reprinted in *Lev Tolstoi kak zerkalo russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1965).

[3] N. K. Krupskaia, *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia* (Moscow, 1958), II, 143.

Soviet educational practice, it might eventually have contributed to sustaining some form of humanist socialism. But both the economic conditions and the political-administrative style of the party denied any such hopes. Krupskaia never exercised any power in the party leadership, and Lenin himself realized only too late, if at all, that socialist culture supposed a quality of human relationships that authoritarian administration and organization could not create.

We have thus far described Lenin's view of education within the context of modern intellectual history by contrasting it with two major traditions of educational thought. The first of these, deriving from the Enlightenment, conflicted directly with his political ideology; the second, represented chiefly by Rousseau and Tolstoi, was rendered ineffectual by the single-party state and its totalitarianism. We turn now to a more detailed examination of Lenin's view of the uses of education in the years before the Bolshevik seizure of power.

1

At a Shrovetide party of the Petersburg Marxist circle in 1894, where Lenin first met his future wife, the conversation turned to the problem of illiteracy. Some in the group looked to education as a means of changing the social order. Lenin greeted their remarks with a cold little laugh that Krupskaia never forgot. "Well, if anyone wants to save the country through the Committee for Illiteracy," he said, "we won't hinder him." [4] He was then only twenty-four years old but remarkably sure of his convictions and strategy. Political revolution must precede cultural development. To reverse this order and to set one's hopes on the gradual reform of existing conditions was to indulge in childish fantasy. A decade later he restated this view, but this time as a party policy from which there was to be no deviation. Among other things, German revisionism had in the meantime had its divisive impact upon the Russian Marxists, and Lenin's earlier mockery of the social reformers changed to condemnation. Whoever, he wrote in 1905, would reduce the political problem to a question of education ceased to be a true Social Democrat. And should such a person take it into his head to appeal to the masses with the promise of education, thereby turning it into a slogan distinct from and opposed to the politics of the Social Democratic party, he would descend to the level of demagogy.[5] Of course, Lenin granted, the party's politics always contained an element of education: this consisted in raising the most backward stratum of the working class to a level of consciousness where it would become politically active.

This principle of the primacy of political action over education Lenin maintained with perfect consistency to the end. When, during his illness in 1923, he had time to reflect on what had gone wrong with the

[4] N. K. Krupskaia, *Vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow, 1931), p. 5.
[5] V. I. Lenin, "O smeshenii politiki s pedagogikoi," in *O vospitanii i obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1963), p. 165.

party and the state apparatus and how little had yet been accomplished by way of cultural construction, he still justified the course he had taken as the only right one. The political revolution had to be made first, for it alone could create the conditions for the second, or cultural, revolution that would develop the country's productive forces, including education. He granted that to establish socialism a certain level of culture was indeed necessary. But who could determine what precisely this level should be? [6] Even now he was chiding as cowards and pedants those among the Russian Marxists who had argued that the country was not ready for socialism because it was too poor, its population too passive and illiterate. Their faulty ideas of revolution were derived from German textbooks, and thus they failed to realize that the October Revolution was *sui generis* and that history outgrew all models. Soviet socialism had to be built with the corrupt human material that feudalism and capitalism had bequeathed; there was no other. It was utopian to argue that the remaking of man was a necessary prior condition to building a new social order. But once political and economic power had been seized, there was no disputing the importance of education for developing and perfecting socialism. Late in 1920, with the civil war essentially over, Lenin was able to turn his attention to this "third," neglected front.

Before we follow his efforts in this direction, certain ambiguities in his definition of the relation of politics to education must be brought to light. These ambiguities helped to fuel a pedagogical dispute that arose among Soviet educational theorists after his death and culminated at the end of the decade. What was in question was the role formal educational institutions should or could play in the cultural revolution. A group led by V. N. Shul'gin[7] revived demands advanced by radical Communists right after the revolution: schools should be replaced by an organized social environment, preferably work communes in association with farms and factories. Only communal life, they argued, and not the school, could achieve the necessary transformation of personality. Except for a few experiments, these ideas were not put into practice, and then the NEP period cooled the enthusiasm of their proponents. In 1928 the proclamation of the First Five-Year Plan rekindled the earlier hopes. It signaled to many the beginning of the transition to the end phase of communism and provided the cultural revolution with a fresh impulse. To men like Shul'gin the vision of many millions participating in the total reconstruction of society suggested a wealth of human experience beside which the work of formal educational institutions paled to insignificance.

To these educators the schools were not only feeble but retrograde and

[6] "O nashei revoliutsii," in *O vospitanii i obrazovanii*, p. 569.

[7] Viktor Nikolaevich Shul'gin (1897–) was since 1922 director of the Institute of School Methods in Moscow, renamed in 1930 the Institute of Marxist-Leninist Pedagogy. His closest collaborator was M. V. Krupenina. For an excellent summary of Shul'gin's ideas and their significance, see Oscar Anweiler, *Geschichte der Schule und Pädagogik in Russland vom Ende des Zarenreiches bis zum Beginn der Stalin-Ära* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 414–28.

even pernicious in their influence. During the latter part of the NEP the subject-matter curriculum had, in fact, been reestablished and polytechnical education had made no visible progress. Few students engaged in physical labor as well as in learning. This led to Shul'gin's reproach that the schools had regressed to verbalism and scholasticism. He further asserted that the ideological gap between the majority of teachers and the workers' children remained unbridged. The nine-year urban school provoked his sharpest criticism because few working-class children graduated from it. Among its students he found persistent and open anti-Semitism, pornographic literature circulated, and sexual promiscuity was not unknown. Coeducation remained ineffective in combating the degrading bourgeois relations between the sexes. Religious organizations recruited young people with impunity. Children from orphanages and national minorities suffered social discrimination, and the Young Pioneers were powerless to create comradely relations. But worst of all to him was the continued isolation of the school from life. While Soviet children read Fenimore Cooper and Harriet Beecher Stowe, they remained ignorant of the achievements of the October Revolution. In a questionnaire sent out by his institute, many students wrote that the basic accomplishment of the revolution was the abolition of serfdom.[8]

These charges helped to support Shul'gin's thesis that the traditional school had no place in a communist society and that, like the state, it was an institution destined to die out. In support of this conclusion, Shul'gin invoked the authority of Lenin with citations that placed high value upon what the masses learned directly and informally from their participation in revolutionary struggle. Thus the concept of *stikhiinost'*, the elemental and spontaneous power of the masses that was long familiar in Russian socialist thought, entered the debate over education. To Shul'gin and his followers it meant that the masses, faced with a moribund tradition of formal schooling, should take education into their own hands and by a kind of participant, grass-roots socialism accelerate the work of the cultural revolution.[9]

Now it is true that Lenin stated, both before and after the revolution, that the masses learn from their own experience, failures, and errors. He also admonished the party membership to remain, as the phrase went, "close to the people": in propagandizing and teaching the masses, party members must not resort to the book alone but should share the experience of the people. Shortly before his return from exile, he paid special tribute to the importance of spontaneity in a speech in Zurich in January 1917. Referring to the role the Russian metalworkers played in the revolution of 1905, he said: "The real education of the masses can never be separated from their own independent, and especially their revolutionary, struggle.

[8] These indictments are found in his book *O vospitanii kommunisticheskoi morali* (Moscow, 1928). Krupenina made similar charges in some of her writings.

[9] V. N. Shul'gin and M. V. Krupenina, *V bor'be za marksistkuiu pedagogiku* (Moscow, 1929), p. 18.

Struggle alone educates the exploited class, reveals to it the measure of its strength, broadens its horizons, raises its capacity, clears its mind, and forges its will." [10] The meaning of these magnanimous words was not, however, to restrict the role of the party as preceptor of the proletariat. In the preceding sentence Lenin belittled the spread of free public education in *Western countries, perhaps because it tended to weaken revolutionary* zeal. "When the bourgeois gentlemen and their uncritical lackeys, the socialist reformers, talk so conceitedly about the 'education' of the masses, they usually mean by it something schoolish and pedantic, something that demoralizes the masses."

Such statements strongly appealed to certain radical Soviet educators, who usually ignored the context in which they were made. The idea of liquidating the schools and with them the discipline of methodical learning never entered Lenin's head. When the small minority around Shul'gin propounded the opposite view, they took the liberty of extending what Lenin had written in *The State and Revolution* to the school and revolution. They seemed to see a parallel between what Marx had described in *The Civil War in France* and the Soviet cultural revolution. Just as a standing army could be replaced by an armed populace, so the professional work of Soviet teachers could be dissolved into the processes of communal life. Factory foremen, union officials, local soviets, and social services could all initiate the young directly into economic and cultural work. The meaning of this primitive socialism was not merely that the wall between school and life had to come down. Direct, spontaneous participation in socialist construction was proclaimed a better education for life than formal and compulsory institutions could provide. Lenin's thesis of 1917 that the state and freedom are mutually exclusive was transferred to the schools with a consistency he would very likely have considered maddening. Like the state, schools were held to be compulsory institutions that obstructed a truly socialist construction, and they should be allowed to wither away. Whereas *The State and Revolution* was laid to rest because it was an embarrassment to Lenin's politics, its message was far from lost upon this group of revolutionary educators. They stubbornly defended the utopia of a self-educating proletarian democracy until all of them were silenced in 1931 and defamed as leftist deviationists bent on destroying the schools.

When Lenin came to sit in the statesman's chair, his capacity for realism, which biographers have noted, asserted itself also in education. Here, as elsewhere, the absolutes of Marxist ideology collided with the sad Russian realities. Whereas some people thought they could change the educational system from the ground up, he tempered such radicalism by a large dose of prudence. Generally speaking, he balanced the values of cultural continuity against the novel demands of a society whose shape had yet to be determined. The attempt to apply in Russian schooling the concept of polytechnical education inherited from Marx provided a first important

[10] *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* p. 301.

test of his ability. Like other ideas, it could not simply be transplanted to Russian soil. Moreover, its transfer from theory to practice was beset by numerous difficulties unresolved to this day.

To understand what was at stake, it should be recognized that in the economic ruin at the end of the civil war the very principle of a general education for all was in dispute. The party had committed itself to realizing that principle in a nine-year school, called the unified labor school. This institution had jettisoned most of the scholastic burden of the gymnasium. Greek, Latin, Old Slavonic, religion, and much history were dropped from its curriculum so that, like the former *Realschule* it resembled, it appeared well adapted to the requirements of an industrial society. But, even in this revised form, a general education seemed to certain groups a social luxury. Although Lunacharskii and Krupskaia defended it valiantly, they and the entire Commissariat of Education were criticized for this by the Komsomol, by the major economic commissariats, and by the trade unions. All pressed for a diversified system of vocational and technical training, to begin at an early age, that would minister directly to acute manpower needs. In addition there was opposition from the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, which followed an independent course under the leadership of Grinko. After either four or seven years of elementary instruction, Ukrainian students passed directly into specialized technicums. Extreme material want gave rise to such shortsighted educational utilitarianism, and concessions were inevitable. Long before the principle of the single school providing a general polytechnical education for all was abandoned under Stalin, its advocates were in fact fighting a losing battle.

Nor was the urgency of economic needs the only argument they had to counter. In 1922 all schools providing a general education beyond the first four grades enrolled only 5–6 percent of the age group twelve to seventeen.[11] Of these institutions the nine-year school enjoyed a superior reputation. It was in fact a descendant of prerevolutionary, academically oriented schools, and in it children of proletarian origins remained a minority throughout the 1920s. It was therefore not surprising that this school should become the target of social criticism as well. The Komsomol leadership, for example, charged it with being elitist, bourgeois, and indeed reactionary. The defenders of general culture, Soviet style, were thereby put in a difficult position. Under the prevailing restrictive conditions their attempt to institutionalize a high principle of social justice was bound to miscarry. All during the 1920s the nine-year general school remained, as Lunacharskii frequently acknowledged, the problem child of his commissariat. But when he and his staff reluctantly made concessions to utilitarianism by establishing special types of vocational schools, they

[11] A. V. Lunacharskii, *O narodnom obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1958), p. 197. According to *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo* (Leningrad, 1927), Diagram 17, the social composition of the nine-year school in 1927 was: workers' children 28.2 percent, peasants' children 14 percent, others 57.8 percent.

aroused the suspicion of many teachers. Though few of them cared about Marxism and still fewer about Bolshevism, many were deeply committed to educational reforms that would abolish the traditional social discriminations resulting from a dual educational system. When a department for vocational education was established in Lunacharskii's commissariat in 1920 and special schools for peasant youth (1923) and urban factory youth (1925) were opened, the teachers' disillusionment was understandable. Such measures seemed to signal a retrogression to the tradition of a social-class system in which premature specialization excluded the children of the underprivileged from attaining full stature as men and citizens. It also seemed to many that the polytechnical principle had been routed by vocationalism pure and simple. What was Lenin's response to these strains and dilemmas?

He had himself drafted with Krupskaia's assistance those paragraphs of the party program, adopted by the Eighth Congress in March 1919, that prescribed the introduction of the general polytechnical school and deferred vocational training to after the age of seventeen. When it became all too obvious by 1921 that these objectives were unattainable, the period of general education was curtailed by two years, and the last two grades were devoted in part to various vocational courses. Lenin wanted it understood that this was a temporary retreat forced upon the party by the extreme poverty of the country. Neither the abandonment of the original program nor a surrender to the vocationalists was involved. But unless his realism deserted him this time, he must have been aware that the distinction he drew was an academic one. Secondary education of equal quality for all was not years but decades away. (The official target date today is 1970.) In the meantime vocational or monotechnical training programs built upon a four-year elementary school would have to be accepted by many young people as an inferior substitute for a general polytechnical education. And once such programs became institutionalized and relied upon by the economic commissariats to satisfy chronic manpower shortages, they would be difficult to remove. Was there after all then a real issue between monotechnical and polytechnical education? Certain participants at the first party conference on education, held in early January 1921, thought so. Among them were Grinko, the Ukrainian Commissar of Education, and Shmidt, who headed the new Department of Vocational Education in Moscow. They argued that early training for a single industry was necessary and that the general polytechnical school, because it remained a "verbal school," was of little use.[12]

Such talk was sharply rebuked by Lenin: to make an issue of monotechnical versus polytechnical education was idle chatter and vapid theorizing. The party had clearly stated that the Marxist polytechnical principle was not in jeopardy, no ideological commitment was being sacrificed in the temporary change of program, *ergo* there was no issue. Party officials

[12] Historical note in *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* p. 646.

were advised to turn from "abstract slogans" to the practical improvement of education in which experienced teachers stood ready to assist if only party members would take the trouble to seek them out. Lenin's irritation with pretentious Communist leadership exercised in splendid disregard of real problems was beginning to mount. Yet his steady stream of admonitions to learn from experience, to consult with the experts, and to work for concrete results could not resolve the dilemma that had been posed. He refused to be drawn into discussing its grave social and pedagogical implications. To more scrupulous Marxists his counsel to be "practical" must have sounded like a call to redouble one's efforts while the aims of socialist humanism grew dimmer and were finally lost sight of. In the light of this situation it is worth reflecting for a moment on what polytechnical education meant to Marx and what it came to mean for Lenin.

From the educator's point of view, "the fully developed individual fit for a variety of labors" [13] defines the essence of Marx's humanism. The many-sided amateur, not confined to any exclusive sphere of activity but "accomplished in any branch he wishes," was envisioned as a distinct possibility in the higher phase of communist society. Labor then ceased to be a means of life and became "life's prime want." The individual would be liberated from economic necessity as the productive forces increased and gave scope to his all-round development. In *Capital* Marx sketched in bare outline the "technical instruction, both theoretical and practical," that would "take its proper place in the working-class schools" once the proletariat came to power. The theoretical part he defined as a knowledge of the general principles underlying all processes of production; the practical, as skill in handling elementary instruments of production.

Though Marx himself seems not to have employed the term polytechnical education,[14] it came to be regarded as representative of his ideas and carried certain meanings and messages. As interpreted in early Soviet educational thought, the concept of polytechnical education served as a warning not to relapse into narrow vocationalism, as a road sign to the industrial-collective culture of the future, and as a humanist imperative to bring up the young as masters of both nature and the man-made environment. As an educational plan, the concept was less successful. Workable ways of relating the emergent industrial culture to programs, curricula, and methods remained to be discovered.

Lenin took up the challenge in characteristically practical terms. Even

[13] *Capital* (New York, Modern Library), p. 534.

[14] The German term in *Das Kapital* is *technologischer Unterricht,* and a very similar equivalent was apparently used in an analogous passage in *Instructions to the Delegates of the Provisional Central Council,* which Marx wrote in English for the Geneva congress of the International in September 1866. The original English publication of the *Instructions* in *The International Courier* in 1867 is now rare and was not available to me. The Russian translation of the term in the relevant passage is *teknicheskoe obuchenie* (K. Marks and F. Engel's, *Sochineniia,* XVI [Moscow, 1960], 198), whereas the German translation is *polytechnische Ausbildung* (K. Marx and F. Engels, *Werke,* XVI [Berlin, 1962], 195). Hence the uncertainty.

if he had had the time and inclination, the very remoteness of Marx's ideal would probably have deterred him from attempts to round out the latter's sketchy notions and construct a more instrumental theory. Once again the question before him was "what could be done," what initial steps, however modest, could be taken to move the schools in the desired direction. He answered the question in some hasty notes he wrote for Krupskaia on the so-called theses she was to present at the above-mentioned party conference on education. His wife's conception of polytechnical education seemed to him too abstract, destined for a distant future but inapplicable under present conditions. Accordingly, he jotted down some practical suggestions, and these remain his fullest statement on the whole subject of polytechnical education. Their importance should not be exaggerated. They were confidential, intended for Krupskaia alone and not as policy directives. Besides, they were not published until 1929.[15] What influence they may have had was indirect, mediated by his wife. Their interest lies primarily in the insight they afford into how Lenin grappled with a difficult question.

To begin with, Lenin proposed that the upper grades of the general school (ages 12–17) be merged with, and indeed transformed into, vocational-technical schools because carpenters, joiners, locksmiths, and the like, were desperately needed. All must learn a trade. Did this mean that he was adopting the position of Grinko and Shmidt? No, because these fellows blundered into a general denial of polytechnical education—Lenin's language was a good deal stronger and more colloquial (*peresobachit' do gluposti*)—whereas he did not. For even as all students were learning some trade, their intellectual horizon would be broadened by expanding the teaching of such subjects as communism, general history, the history of revolutions, geography, and literature. They had also to master the basic concepts of electricity and agronomy, and they were to be shown the application of electrical power to the machine and chemical industries. There were to be regular visits to power stations, to state farms and factories where lectures and practical exercises would be held. For this purpose engineers, agronomists, and all graduates of university physics-mathematics departments were to be mobilized. It was the urgent task of the Commissariat of Education to draw up the necessary schedules and instructional programs; if Lunacharskii had not yet done so, Lenin half-facetiously wrote in the margin, he ought to be hanged.

This was a brave effort to adapt the Marxian principle to Russian conditions, but the difficulties were nearly insuperable. The demands made on scientific and technical personnel were already excessive without the addition of teaching responsibilities. Few schools even in cities were near enough to factories and enterprises to make visits and on-the-spot object lessons feasible; where such an opportunity existed, few enterprises were willing or sufficiently well managed to serve for demonstration purposes.

[15] Full text in *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* pp. 482–84.

Regular teachers who understood the relations of science to technology as Lenin wanted them taught were almost nonexistent, and the educational theorist able to project a coherent plan of a labor school in the context of industrial culture was a rare exception.[16] Furthermore, consumer needs were still being provided for by handicrafts, notably in the villages, so that polytechnical education was likely to be misunderstood as a return to old-fashioned apprenticeship in trades and crafts. In many instances labor education was practiced in the form of pupils' self-help and self-service, such as gathering firewood for their school, cleaning floors, repairing roofs and windows, and the like.

It hardly required exceptional foresight to perceive that the universal man in overalls must long remain a distant goal. In *The Infantile Disease of Left-Wing Communism* (1920) Lenin warned that specialization of labor would continue. The training of many-sided men able to do everything was of course the ultimate aim of communism. But to try to realize it now was like attempting to teach higher mathematics to a four-year-old. Socialism could not be built with an imaginary man created by our own fancy; it had to be done with the deformed humanity about us. The more Lenin turned to education in the concrete, the less he dwelt on the ultimate aim and its humanistic justification. As his impatience with the slowness of economic progress grew, he urged the introduction of specific educational measures to accelerate the pace.

As early as 1918 he recommended the study of the Taylor system as a means of increasing productivity by teaching labor discipline to the Russian worker. When O. A. Ermanskii published in 1922 a revised and enlarged work on the subject (*The Scientific Organization of Labor and the Taylor System*), Lenin wanted it to be required reading in all vocational and general secondary schools, provided the author would make it less verbose.[17] He was still more delighted by I. I. Stepanov's book, *The Electrification of the RSFSR,* published the same year, to which he wrote the foreword. As is well known, Lenin had extravagant hopes for what electrification of the country would do for socialism. A course on the subject had already been decreed a required subject in all higher educational institutions of the RSFSR. Now, with a book available that combined technical merit with optimistic propaganda, the resolution could be put into effect, and Lenin himself wrote detailed instructions of how to proceed.[18] Stepanov's text would be used in all schools. It would also be distributed to elementary-school teachers and engineers who were to explain the electrification plan in informal study circles, especially among peasant youth. Every power station would serve as a center for instructing and propagandizing the population. As a third illustration of Lenin's growing preoccupation with educational crash programs, there is a letter to Lunacharskii

[16] One whom Lenin read and admired was P. P. Blonskii. His book, *Trudovaia shkola,* appeared in 1919.

[17] *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* p. 550.

[18] *Ibid.,* pp. 544–45.

urging the publication of textbooks and propagandistic material on peat production. This, too, was to be made an obligatory subject in schools and higher educational institutions.[19]

None of these curricular innovations for achieving technical breakthroughs in the economy seems to have been carried out, and that was just as well. Precipitate changes of this kind would have further increased the instability of instructional programs, about which criticism later mounted until Stalin returned the schools to inflexible and uniform curricula. Paradoxically, Lenin was both by temperament and for reasons of cultural policy a strong advocate of systematic study. If in the examples cited above he appears to contradict himself, it is because he spoke not as an educator mindful of methodological and curricular problems but as a promoter of economic development.

In extenuation it must be said that he received little help from the Commissariat of Education. Lunacharskii was a literary man addicted to the theater and uninterested in technology. As an administrator he was a failure, and though he would spend half the night in brilliant talk or writing modernistic plays, he did not harness himself to any of the tasks Lenin considered most pressing, such as the liquidation of mass illiteracy or the drafting of instructional programs. Lenin's reprimands and appeals, his recurrent inquiries whether this or that particular request had been acted upon, went for the most part unheeded. M. N. Pokrovskii, the historian who was second in command, was more dependable and scientifically oriented. He was also better attuned to Lenin's drive for attaining specific, concrete results. Among other things he promoted the *rabfaki* (workers' faculties) to provide access for youth of proletarian origin to higher educational institutions. He fought against reducing Marxism in the schools to a catechism and insisted that "the true Marxist must above all be a good naturalist" [20] and know the natural sciences and their history. Lenin appointed him head of the State Science Council (GUS) in 1919. When his *Brief Outline of Russian History* appeared in 1920, Lenin warmly congratulated him but suggested a few improvements to make it more serviceable as a textbook. If only more Communists would follow Pokrovskii's example and write useful textbooks, especially in the social and natural sciences, socialist culture would measurably advance.

2

But what really was socialist culture? No writing of Lenin's provides an inclusive answer. He did not have a unified conception of it from which well-coordinated programs and directives could issue. But as he became involved in finding answers to specific questions, he could scarcely help deciding also matters of principle. Being a rationalist as well as a revolution-

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 508.

[20] M. N. Pokrovskii, *Marksizm v programmakh shkoly I i II stupenii* (Moscow, 1924), p. 16. For a brief summary of Pokrovskii's educational achievements, see *Pedagogicheskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1966), III, 430–31.

ary, he did not look upon culture as spontaneous growth but as something to be organized. Given such a view, educational policies necessarily became prime instruments for cultural construction. As we pursue Lenin's work in this field, at least piecemeal answers to the problem of socialist culture emerge. This is most evident whenever he was faced with settling conflicting claims or, more truly speaking, of having to assert his own preferences against rival notions. What importance, for example, was to be assigned to political indoctrination as compared with the spread of scientific-technological information? Was socialist culture something original, as the proponents of Proletkul't claimed, or must it ingest large parts of traditional culture? And if there was to be a blend of continuity and innovation, how could this be achieved without loss to the revolutionary *élan?* These were obviously difficult questions, and Lenin's answers were not always clear or uncontradictory. What he said, however, was more than improvisation; it carried the imprint of his whole cast of mind. To examine the problem of socialist culture, we turn first to the matter of continuity and innovation.

In Soviet texts and lectures on general pedagogy a prominent place has long been assigned to the speech Lenin delivered at the third Komsomol congress in October 1920. Between the 1930s and the 1950s it was practically regarded as his educational testament and construed to lend authority to Stalin's notion of the school as a learning institution of bookish character, from which the activity programs and project methods of the earlier experimental phase were excluded. Though this was a distortion, Lenin's speech did reject the indiscriminate condemnation of the "old school" in fashion at the time. He offered a qualified defense of traditional learning and had the courage to address it to an audience of politically excited young adults eager to perpetuate the revolution, chiefly by exterminating what they deemed bourgeois. It required considerable persuasion on his part to convince them that young Communists must now assume the prosaic burden of serious, persistent study. The backing and filling of his rhetoric, now making concessions to their prejudices, now assaulting them, shows that he knew what he was up against. The following passage illustrates his mode of argument.

> It is said that the old school was a learning school, a school of drilling and cramming. That is true, but we must know how to distinguish what was bad in the old school from what is useful to us, and we must be able to select from it what is necessary for communism. The old school was a learning school that forced people to master a great bulk of useless, superfluous dead knowledge which stuffed their heads and transformed the younger generation into conformist bureaucrats. But you would make a great mistake if you draw the conclusion that it is possible to become a Communist without mastering the store of human knowledge. It would be erroneous to think that it is sufficient to learn Communist slogans or the conclusions of Communist science without mastering that sum of knowledge of which communism itself is the result. Marxism illustrates how communism emerged from the sum of human knowledge.[21]

[21] "Zadachi soiuzov molodezhi," in *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* pp. 434–35.

The main purpose of the speech was to drive home the point that the task of destroying the old order had been accomplished but that the still more difficult task of building communism lay ahead. To prepare for it, youth had to become intellectuals of a kind. They must not treat Marxism as though it were an inert idea, "something you have learned by heart, but rather something you have reasoned out for yourselves." Their model was to be Marx, who combined scholarship with criticism and innovative thought. For a moment Lenin appeared to be affirming the values of independent thought. But in fact any tampering with the dogmas of dialectical materialism made him angry.[22] What he meant was not freedom from, but freedom within, the system: young people should learn to apply the truths of Marx with some imagination to practical problems.

The overriding consideration in this defense of intellectual discipline and continuity was certainly pragmatic. What was needed was know-how, and this could only be learned from the bourgeois specialists. They would, of course, not be on top, only on tap. Whether they served in the army or in industrial management, in universities or in schools, the party would control them. But in every sphere they were indispensable as teachers. They would transmit and diffuse what had been the possession of a privileged class and so become the agency of turning the former minority culture into a mass culture. You confront the tasks, Lenin told the Komsomol, of reorganizing agriculture and industry on a modern technical and scientific basis. When you have mastered the required knowledge, Russia will emerge from want and poverty to become "a country of wealth."

What Lenin did not explain was how knowledge plus organization plus wealth would add up to a socialist culture differing in quality from preceding cultures. Perhaps he believed that at some point increase in quantity would, by the law of dialectics, become change of quality. Perhaps the previously untapped energies and talents of the people would be developed in such range and force as somehow to surpass anything ever witnessed in the history of civilization. But he was inarticulate on this question and far too preoccupied with present problems to scan the distant horizon. He was certain only that those who took a different view of socialism and how to achieve it were talking "utter nonsense." Lenin was referring to the proponents of the proletarian-culture movement in art, literature, and education, toward which he felt a deep repugnance. The feeling was in large measure inspired by the person who led the movement. Bogdanov (pseudonym for A. A. Malinovskii, 1873–1928) was an old leftist Bolshevik who had clashed with Lenin before. The full history of their antagonism, in which political and philosophical issues were involved, is not a part of this study. Certain aspects of it, however, deserve discussion. Lenin's hostility becomes intelligible when it is seen in historical perspective. More important yet, the entire question of the nature of socialist culture and the means of realizing it nowhere else receives such full illumination.[23]

[22] V. I. Lenin, *O kul'ture i iskusstve* (Moscow, 1956), p. 496.

[23] For biographical and historical information I have drawn on the well documented

Following a few years of initial collaboration, Lenin and Bogdanov first opposed each other in 1907 over the position the Bolsheviks should take on the elections to the third Duma. Bogdanov along with many others favored a boycott, but Lenin opposed it. The gulf between them deepened as Lenin began to fear that his opponent would capture the leadership of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party. This fear seems to have been the chief motive for his mounting an ostensibly philosophical attack on Bogdanov. In *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1909) Lenin denounced him as a Machist and Idealist, labels he borrowed from Plekhanov. None of the leading old Bolsheviks took the book seriously as a philosophic treatise, but like Pokrovskii they regarded it as a "purely political pamphlet." At issue was not so much a theory of knowledge as the person of Bogdanov, whom Lenin wished to disqualify from playing a major ideological and organizational role within the party. Bogdanov soon ceased to be a serious political opponent, but that was largely his own doing. In 1910 he abandoned Marxism because it seemed to him to have been degraded from a revolutionary theory into a new absolute, with Plekhanov and Lenin regrettably among its victims. In 1911 he left the party and from then on wrote and acted as an unorthodox Russian Communist.

After the revolution, Bogdanov founded in 1918, together with Lunacharskii, the adult-educational organization known as Proletkul't (Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organization). His ideas on socialist culture attracted intellectuals and artists, and his importance as an independent educational leader was rising. Lenin sensed a new threat, and in 1920, in the single-paragraph foreword to the second edition of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism,* he once again accused Bogdanov of spreading reactionary views, this time under the cover of "proletarian culture." Lenin watched and inquired into the Proletkul't organization: what was its status, who appointed its directorate, how much financial support did it receive from the Commissariat of Education? And was there, he wrote Pokrovskii, anything else of importance about its work he should know?[24]

As the second All-Russian Congress of Proletkul't convened in Moscow in October 1920, Lenin drafted a resolution according to which the organization would (1) accept Marxism as its general philosophy (rejected by Bogdanov long ago), (2) forgo the ambition of "inventing" a new culture, but rather help to promote the best models and traditions of existing culture, and (3) renounce the autonomy it had thus far enjoyed and subordinate its work to that of the Commissariat of Education. He relied on Lunacharskii to convey his views to the congress, but learned from the newspapers the next day that the latter had said

study by Dietrich Grille, *Lenins Rivale: Bogdanov und seine Philosophie* (Cologne, 1966). See also the short account by S. V. Utechin, "Philosophy and Society: Alexander Bogdanov," in *Revisionism,* ed. Leopold Labedz (New York, 1962), pp. 117–25.

[24] *O kul'ture i iskusstve,* p. 299.

the very opposite of what had been agreed upon. Lunacharskii was reported[25] to have spoken in favor of full autonomy for the organization and of continuing financial support since it had a special task to perform in promoting creative talents among the working class with a view to producing a monumental new art of the masses. When questioned by Lenin, Lunacharskii protested that he had been misrepresented in the press. Since it was the last day of the congress, Lenin acted with dispatch to have his resolution presented in the name of the Central Committee. It was adopted unanimously.[26] Bogdanov left the organization but continued to write and to teach at several institutions of higher education. He never challenged Lenin's power but withdrew to his original profession, medicine, and in an institute financed by public funds devoted himself to experimental work on blood transfusion and means of prolonging human life.

The term proletarian culture, introduced by Bogdanov in 1909 and consistently employed by him thereafter, was meant to convey the idea that the realization of socialism required more than the conquest of political and economic power. Essentially, it depended on the moral and social maturity of the working class, which, having given birth to a new ethos, would go on to produce also a new art and science. The inception of this new culture was occurring, Bogdanov maintained, even while the proletariat still lived in a capitalist environment. The base of the new culture was the fraternal solidarity, the cooperative spirit and work rhythm of human labor in large-scale enterprises. Bogdanov equated this embryonic proletarian culture with ideology. This was a heresy of far-reaching consequences. It meant that ideology ceased to be something exclusively political, administered authoritatively by the party leadership, and became instead an active democratic force.

From this basic difference flowed contrary views on the role of education and culture under socialism. Whereas Lenin thought of the education of the masses as something to be organized and directed from above, Bogdanov conceived of it as a spontaneous process inherently self-regulating. Lenin regarded dialectical materialism as indispensable for ideological education. Bogdanov held that philosophy, materialism included, was a dying intellectual discipline. Under socialism it would be altogether useless and would be replaced by theories of organization and scientific methodologies. These would regulate economic and social processes according to optimum conditions. Lenin, as we know, argued for the selective acquisition of capitalist and Western culture by the proletariat for such practical purposes as the party would determine. Bogdanov warned against the passive acceptance of any cultural heritage because culture to him was not a store of values but the organizing principle of social life. Unthinking reception of previous cultures threatened subtly to subvert the

[25] *Izvestiia,* Oct. 8, 1920.
[26] *O kul'ture i iskusstve,* p. 547.

thought and feeling of the working masses. To avert this danger, the traditions of the past and the treasures of great art must be interpreted in the light of fresh social experience.

Nor did Bogdanov agree that socialism was attainable by simply perfecting technology with the help of bourgeois experts. Though he was by no means hostile to technology and in many of his writings speculated about the organizational and scientific problems of the future, socialism had for him an essentially spiritual meaning. Just as in intense aesthetic and contemplative experiences the separation of the self from the world vanished, so it would occur in the making and the performance of the collective will. Socialism must be understood as a dynamic affair in which men's mutual understanding and communication were being constantly enhanced. Men became truly fellows only when nothing in their experience remained unintelligible or inaccessible to others. This did not mean that socialist fellowship reduced everyone to psychic sameness. On the contrary, human individuality would make a necessary contribution to collectivism in the form of initiative, criticism, and originality. Human experience was thereby mutually supplemented and enriched, and gradually the plenitude of life would come within the reach of all. This humanist vision of socialism was presented as early as 1904 in an essay entitled "Sobiranie Cheloveka." The term, which cannot be translated literally, means the unification and integration of man, surmounting all former fragmentation and stultifying specialization. Bogdanov concluded that essay in quasi-Nietzschean language, saying that "man has not yet arrived, but he is near, and his outline is clearly discernible on the horizon." [27]

After the revolution Bogdanov made an immediate start to realize these ideas. The Proletkul't organization was set up independently of the party so that it might pursue its own cultural work. Its leading educational institutions were the Socialist Academy for Social Sciences and, associated with it, several "proletarian universities." In addition, Bogdanov had his own journal called *Proletarskaia Kul'tura*. By these means he planned to promote the intellectual maturity of the working class. An important place in instruction was reserved for scientific methodologies by which hitherto fragmented bodies of knowledge could be unified and grasped more easily by an average worker's intelligence. Knowledge would cease to be the possession of learned specialists and become, as Bogdanov put it, "democratized." Popularization would do away with all unnecessary technical jargon. He also planned a workers' encyclopedia—it remained only a project—in which the achievements and methods of science were to be presented with exemplary clarity. Workers enrolled at the proletarian universities for short periods of study and then returned to their jobs. Professors were advised to establish broad and free communication with them, inviting criticism and suggestion. The educational aim was not

[27] A. A. Bogdanov, *O proletarskoi kul'ture: Stat'i, 1904–1924* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924), p. 36.

simply routine instruction for the sake of ordinary or technical literacy but rather what Bogdanov once called "social literacy." The older universities, he was convinced, were by origin and long tradition unfit to achieve this aim. A few reforms, such as throwing open their doors to all who wanted to attend, as was in fact done, could not alter the authoritative setting and guild atmosphere that pervaded them. A new model had to be constructed, and this was the real purpose of the proletarian universities.[28]

These ideas had long been germinating in the mind of Bogdanov, who was one of the very few old Bolsheviks with a serious interest in education. His experience reached back to the mid-1890s, when he began teaching workers' groups in his native Tula. Later he helped to conduct the party schools in Capri in 1909 and in Bologna in 1910. He had thereby become familiar with a certain type of adult student who was politically active, keenly interested in social problems, and intellectually curious, though there might be serious gaps in his knowledge. Bogdanov understood that this student required an approach and a method of teaching very different from the customary one in gymnasiums and universities. Lenin, by contrast, lacked any teaching experience and close contact with young workingmen. Practically, he had only his own school years to remember, and, in the absence of other experience, they may possibly help to explain his more conventional views of teaching and learning. He had been a model student and graduated from the classical gymnasium at Simbirsk with a gold medal. His wife thought it curious that he had submitted unprotestingly to what she and many other reformist pedagogues of his generation regarded as an antiquated curriculum and repressive regimen.

With regard to the content of instruction the two men were largely in agreement. Though Bogdanov did not use the term polytechnical, he too favored the social and natural sciences over other subjects, and since he anticipated the coming of automation, general education seemed to him of greater value than vocational training in equipping men for coping intelligently with constantly changing work conditions.[29] These minor similarities were overshadowed, however, by the larger differences that ultimately derived from their diverging conceptions of socialism. Although Bogdanov minimized the importance of political action and shifted the emphasis to cultural work, his program could not escape political implications. In the Soviet context the very existence of an autonomous organization like Proletkul't constituted a potential threat to the party's power. One criticism brought against Bogdanov was that he dissipated or detracted from the full force which party and state wished to concentrate on educational campaigns, such as the elimination of illiteracy or mass propaganda for electrification. A more acute threat was

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 231–38.

posed by his consistent disparagement of the importance of the class struggle. As early as 1910 he wrote: "It is not enough to unite proletarians in an organization; it is not even enough to put before them slogans of economic and political struggle." The strength of a class, like that of an army, lay in its spirit, in the unity of thought and feeling that turned it into a living organism. The tasks before the working class were immeasurably broader and more difficult than those of an ordinary army, and therefore "its inner bonds and its spiritual unity must be deeper and closer." [30] This spiritual unity consisted, as we have seen, in the fellowship of creative cooperation, not in organized militancy.

Lenin, and Trotsky too, took the opposite view. In his Komsomol speech Lenin tried to defend the party and communism against the charge of lacking morality. But his reply was evasive. "We say that our morality is completely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat." Trotsky was more outspoken. "All the energy of the proletariat," he wrote in 1924, "that remains at its disposal after meeting the elementary demands of life has gone and is going towards the elaboration of this political 'style.' " [31] The passage occurs in Trotsky's discussion of proletarian culture and art, of which he gave an informed and reasoned criticism. Lenin, by comparison, did no more than dart occasional sarcasm at the utopian aspects of the movement. Their conclusions, however, were the same: the proletariat had no culture, only a politics and a political ideology. The proletarian-culture movement was dangerous because it diverted attention from perfecting the proletariat's political style and from increasing the power of its dictatorship.

Bogdanov's convictions were not changed by the October Revolution, which he regarded as far from the final or most decisive phase of a continuing, more comprehensive struggle. At the same time, his criticism of the party, which he did not rejoin, became audacious. In a speech at Moscow University in 1922, he characterized its politics as bourgeois and appealed for a workers' movement to bring about the true socialism of the future. This was said in a cultural, not a political, context, but from the Leninist point of view it came close to aiding counterrevolutionary tendencies.[32] Bogdanov also renewed his charges of moral corruption in the party. In an article written in 1918 he pointedly inserted a quotation from a resolution he and other leftist Bolsheviks had drawn up back in 1909. It spoke of the widespread habit among the membership of blind trust in certain authorities, reliance on the opinion of avowed leaders, personal ambition, and intolerance of comradely criticism.[33] Now that the party had risen from underground to absolute power, these already estab-

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[31] Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 206.

[32] N. Bobrovnikov, *Proletariat i kul'tura* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1929), pp. 22–23. The book is a polemic, from the Leninist point of view, against Bogdanov, Pletnev, and the proletarian-culture movement.

[33] Bogdanov, p. 245.

lished traits were likely to be magnified and become dominant. One may assume that Bogdanov regarded the party as a dubious instrumentality for the realization of socialism.

These views on the ethics and culture of socialism were not a monopoly of Bogdanov's, nor were they confined to the organizations directly sponsored by him. Their ramifications extended into art and literature[34] and into early Soviet educational theory. A particularly interesting example of the latter is the first appeal made by Lunacharskii, as Commissar of Education, in October 1917 to "the citizens of Russia." He spoke, among other things, of the masses' thirst for knowledge and education, and as he described how this desire might be satisfied under the new regime, he made an important distinction between education (*obrazovanie*) and instruction. Instruction was the transmission of knowledge, and this service the state and what remained of the old intelligentsia could provide. Education, however, was a more difficult and subtle achievement that comprised whatever enlarged and perfected human personality. Neither the state nor any other power could provide it; the masses had to achieve it themselves in the context of an emerging socialist culture. He continued: "The masses will develop their own culture, consciously or unconsciously. They have their own ideas, derived from a social situation which differs so greatly from that of the ruling classes and of the intelligentsia, who have hitherto produced culture. The masses have their own ideas, feelings, and approaches to all the problems of individual and society. The urban worker and the rural laborer will, each in his own way, build their own bright world view pervaded by the workers' class consciousness. There is nothing more majestic and beautiful than what the next generations will witness and take part in: the building by working collectives of their own common, rich, and free spiritual life." [35]

Lunacharskii's trust in the spontaneous creative powers of the people was similar to Bogdanov's, but his exuberance did not long survive. His official position and his loyalty to Lenin compelled him to compromise his beliefs and to commit himself increasingly to party policy. Still, his reports and speeches retained to the end of his term in 1929 traces of unorthodox ideas and sentiments that echoed his earlier intellectual independence and his sympathies with Bogdanov.[36]

The comparison made between Lenin and Bogdanov has sought to clarify the question of the nature of socialist culture, and the answer may now be summarized. In addition to their political and philosophical

[34] For this aspect see Edward J. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928–1932* (New York, 1953).

[35] N. I. Boldyrev, ed., *Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniia sovetskogo pravitel'stva o narodnom obrazovanii, 1917–1947* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1947), p. 11.

[36] Both had a certain appreciation for Nietzsche. It is interesting to note that the 1958 edition of Lunacharskii's papers and speeches on education omits the reference to Nietzsche that can be found in the earlier edition, *Problemy narodnogo obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1923), p. 60. There are numerous other omissions as well.

antagonisms, the two men were divided by their different and even contrary views of culture. In Lenin's case the emphasis was all on acquiring and spreading an existing culture, not on creating a new one. He took an essentially traditional position, blurred though it occasionally was by a certain ambivalence toward the past and to bourgeois culture in particular. On the whole, his view that education consisted in the transmission of culture strikes one as old-fashioned, belonging more to the nineteenth than to the twentieth century. One is reminded, for example, of Matthew Arnold, though Lenin would probably have resented the comparison. But "the best that has been said and thought in the past" is not so very different from "that store of human knowledge" that Lenin commended to the attention of young and not so young Communists.

Of course Lenin did not esteem equally all parts of that heritage: rational knowledge and useful skills clearly ranked above aesthetic and literary values. His use of tradition, moreover, was highly selective, and his approach to history entirely pragmatic. Antiquarianism, to speak in the terms Nietzsche employed in his essay on *The Use and Abuse of History,* that is, the pious regard for the roots of our being, was hardly a part of Lenin's nature. Monumental history, however, from which one could draw strength and derive models of greatness, appealed to him, and in fact he needed it. Marx for him was monumental, and so, in another sense, were Pushkin and other Russian classics of the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, philosophy, literature, and art fell into this second category. Lenin had none of Nietzsche's misgivings that the monumental use of history might have a sterilizing effect upon the present and end in the dead burying the living. For the third, the critical or surgical, approach to history, Lenin's own politics provided the most illustrious example of the century. The knife of the revolution cut out what was deemed malignant—dynasty, empire, state religion, social classification, and private property. In these respects the break with tradition was of such magnitude that it carried the threat of profound individual insecurity and social dissolution. Lenin seems to have known this intuitively: if unchecked and unlimited, the revolution would end in destroying itself. For this reason, and not merely because of his conventional tastes and upbringing, he was a cultural conservative and disciplinarian whose command, "Learn, learn, learn!" is still prominently displayed in every Soviet school.[37]

Lenin's cultural conservatism had still another side: it was nationalist. Why it took on this hue is explained partly by the constellation of international powers after the First World War. The peace of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, costly though it was, had the merit of preserving the Russian state. As it had become still more obvious by 1921 that hope for revolution in Germany had to be abandoned, socialism had to survive and

[37] Lenin's tastes in art and literature are described by Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin* (New York, 1964), Chap. 34.

succeed in one country. Despite the early professions of internationalism by the Bolsheviks, an opposite trend had already been set in motion.

With respect to cultural affairs, Lenin had taken a nationalist position even earlier. In 1914 the question of cultural autonomy for national minorities within the empire was discussed in the Russian press. The liberal position was that minorities should have the right to conduct elementary schools in their own language but that, in the interest of a common national culture, Russian should continue to be taught and recognized as the official language. Lenin differed from this policy in just one respect: Russian must not be made obligatory—"We do not want to drive people into paradise with a club." Nor was it necessary. The growth of capitalism in Russia, as well as the whole trend of social life, would bring different nationalities into closer contact with each other. Hundreds of thousands of people, he predicted, would move about from one end of the country to the other, and this would create a natural need for learning Russian. As for the cultural riches to which language was the key, he needed no reminder from the liberals. "We know better than you," he remarked, "that the language of Turgenev, Tolstoi, Dobroliubov, and Chernyshevskii is a great and mighty language . . . And of course we are in favor of every inhabitant of Russia having the opportunity to learn the great Russian language." [38]

It is curious to observe how the principal differences between Lenin and Bogdanov extended right down to the question of language. Whereas Lenin found good reasons for strengthening traditional and Great-Russian cultural elements, Bogdanov staunchly remained a radical internationalist. Socialism could only succeed by simultaneous development in many countries, and this would require a suitable means of international communication. Bogdanov dismissed synthetic products like Esperanto and suggested English: it was used in many parts of the world and was the language of the majority of the industrial proletariats; it was concise, simple, and rich in cognate words. Since nationalist feelings were deeply entrenched, he had no illusions that English could soon become the workers' international language. But he advocated that the proletarian-culture movement, which incidentally found fleeting expression also in Germany and Belgium, should take the long view in planning for the future.[39]

At about the time Bogdanov promoted the teaching of English to Russian workers, Lenin wrote repeatedly to Lunacharskii, Pokrovskii, and Litkens in the Commissariat of Education urging them to assemble a group of scholars to compile a new Russian dictionary. He was upset by the corruption of the Russian language through needless, imprecise use of foreign words, especially in the newspapers. Why say "defects," for example, when there were three good Russian words to choose from?

[38] *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* p. 280.
[39] Bogdanov, pp. 328–32.

Dal's great four-volume dictionary was obsolete and should be replaced by a shorter one for general use and for teaching purposes. This should be a dictionary of classical, "true" (*nastoiashchii*) Russian, containing both present usage and the literary language used from Pushkin to Gorki.[40]

In Bogdanov's ideas and proposals the utopian element stands out clearly enough. He idealized the workingman and exaggerated the people's capacity for sustaining the revolutionary ethos for any length of time. He underrated the power of tradition and neglected the role of force in history. Little of what civilizations achieve and of what holds societies together is, in fact, due to brotherly love and human fellowship. Refusal to accept this judgment and to try instead to enlarge the power of ethics in social life is perhaps the chief characteristic of the true socialist. To judge by a half-century of Soviet power, it makes him as admirable as it has rendered him ineffectual. History has cast Bogdanov aside,[41] while Lenin led its victorious battalions.

Many others through whom the socialist conscience found a voice suffered the same fate as Bogdanov. Krupskaia and Shul'gin, neither of them identified with his movement, are but two examples referred to here. In different ways they all raised the painful questions that any educator-moralist was bound to face. Was the success of establishing a new power state worth the cost if a new culture—call it participant democracy, fraternal solidarity, a higher quality of human experience, or a new man—did not emerge? Were these not the promises that had fired the revolution and given ideology its all-important meaning? Without at least some realization of those hopes, ideology was bound to become a shell. It could indeed be made a compulsory subject of instruction, administered by an educational bureaucracy, and later propped up by the cult of Lenin's and Stalin's personalities. But it could not act as leavening of the body politic as Bogdanov had conceived of it. Instead of being an organic part of culture, ideology was assigned the role of controlling, manipulating, and censoring it. This posed the problem of indoctrination and propaganda, and we shall now inquire to what extent here, too, Lenin set the pattern for later developments.

3

In liberal societies the reputation of the teaching profession suffers when it is suspected of failing to distinguish between indoctrination and propaganda, on the one side, and education, on the other. There is a general awareness of the danger to intellectual and political freedom when they are confused or, worse, purposely identified. We have come to regard the educational systems of totalitarian regimes as paradigms of such

[40] *O vospitanii i obrazovanii*, pp. 404, 406, 423, 513.

[41] Soviet educational historians, moreover, see to it that he should also be forgotten. Neither the two-volume *Pedagogicheskii slovar'* (Moscow, 1960) nor *Pedagogicheskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1964–66), of which three volumes have thus far been published, carries an entry for "Bogdanov," "Proletkul't," or "proletarskie universitety."

identification. When examined more closely, however, propaganda and education are found to be anything but clear and distinct ideas. The difficulties political scientists have encountered in drawing a line between them cannot be discussed here. They have been apparent since the early writings of Harold Lasswell[42] and have persisted to the present, with the consequence that the problem has today largely been abandoned by political scientists and sociologists. Jacques Ellul,[43] though still maintaining the rational, responsible person to be the ideal aim of education, asserts that what technological mass society really needs is opinionated, responsive citizens, and these both propaganda and education, now declassed as subpropaganda, produce in abundance.

This pessimism was not shared by liberal American intellectuals who appraised Soviet education and society in the 1920s. Critical of laissez-faire economics and its moral concomitants at home, they were predisposed to look for the constructive consequences of the revolution. Dewey, for example, sensed a "burning public faith" behind the Soviet collective enterprise. Though this faith might be inspired by propaganda that had its obnoxious aspects, the identification of education with propaganda in the Soviet case seemed to him basically justified. "The broad effort to employ the education of the young as a means of realizing certain social purposes," he wrote, "cannot be dismissed as propaganda without relegating to that category all endeavor at deliberate social control." [44] The lack of a clear definition of propaganda, combined with contrary judgments about its political uses, should at least caution us against dismissing Lenin's views of the matter by simple references to totalitarianism and the moral condemnation that implies.

Lenin wished perhaps nothing more ardently than that the burning public faith Dewey described should be real, for it might help to solve some major problems. But the public statements of his last years show that he knew there was no such moving force. He was aware of the people's apathy and distressed by the growth of a callous, incompetent bureaucracy. The system he had introduced was already becoming autonomous. Efforts to control it failed, despite special commissions such as Rabkrin and the Central Control Commission, with their instructions to expose and correct abuses by party and state officials. With the people separated from a hierarchy of power, the prospect was hardly promising for official propaganda to be enthusiastically accepted as a gift of education.

Lenin realized that the efficacy of propaganda as a means of social control was in jeopardy. Whether he would eventually have been driven, as was his successor, to depend more heavily on the cruder means of

[42] See especially "The Theory of Political Propaganda," *American Political Science Review*, XXI (1927), and the introduction to *Propaganda and Promotional Activities* (Minneapolis, 1935).

[43] *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York, 1965), p. 109.

[44] John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World, Mexico, China, Turkey* (New York, 1929), pp. 81–82.

compulsion and terror is a question which his early death relieved him of having to answer. To leave aside such speculation, it must be stated in fairness to Lenin that he distinguished between different uses of propaganda. That which was designed to mobilize youth and adults for important social and economic tasks he approved. The other, which amounted to thoughtless indoctrination, he denounced. The first was difficult to implement because it required that party propagandists should understand the country's needs and sense the people's mood. The second was easy and appealed to indolent, dogmatic minds, with which, by Lenin's admission, the party was abundantly supplied.

It cannot be said, however, that his own statements on the subject helped the membership to keep the two clearly apart. His repeated insistence on the need to politicize the schools is apposite. His often quoted phrase that "the school apart from life, apart from politics, is a lie and hypocrisy" [45] proclaimed a general principle but left its specific meaning undefined. It was a slogan of the early years, uttered in August 1918 and again in January 1919, when the party, still smarting from the "sabotage" of the Russian teachers, suppressed the old Federation of Teachers and replaced it with the Union of Internationalist Teachers. The profession was explicitly denied the luxury of ideological noncommitment. The party program adopted in March 1919 defined the school as an instrument of the class struggle. It was not only to teach the general principles of communism but "to transmit the spiritual, organizational, and educative influence of the proletariat to the half- and nonproletarian strata of the working masses." [46]

Yet to Lenin this did not mean a simple program of political indoctrination. The zealots who drew this conclusion and "clumsily implanted politics in the minds of the younger generation" (neither Russian nor Soviet usage has a simple term for indoctrination) were guilty of misinterpreting and distorting the principle of political education. It was an error, he added, which the party "would always have to fight." This seems to amount to an admission that the temptation of choosing the cruder, simpler ways of carrying out party doctrine was, so to say, built in. Moreover, the distinction between right principle and wrong application has since become a familiar device by which the party extricates itself from difficulties for which it declines to accept responsibility.

Lenin did not explicitly state his reasons for disapproving of the political indoctrination of schoolchildren, but it is fairly obvious that he thought the schools had more fundamental things to teach that could not be accomplished anywhere else. Nor can the difficulties of teaching Marxist ideology to minors have escaped him. He wrote no instructions for this subject as he did for the technical projects he was so eager to have inserted into the curriculum. The teaching of philosophy and the social sciences in universities interested him more, and he wanted those subjects placed

[45] *O vospitanii i obrazovanii*, pp. 337, 349.
[46] Boldyrev, ed., p. 7.

in the care of Communists as soon as possible. Low-level indoctrination, such as the memorization and reiteration of Marxist slogans and phrases, he regarded as unintelligent and unproductive. Of course, political indoctrination need not result in stupefying conformity. At its best it may conceivably create the mental and emotional dispositions that make propaganda more effective. In Soviet usage these dispositions are described as *soznatel'nost'* and *ideinost',* terms denoting not critical judgment and discernment but disciplined acceptance and affirmation of what has been taught. Lenin did not elaborate upon these qualities, which were later counted among the ideal civic virtues that Soviet schools attempt to inculcate.

His preference for propaganda over indoctrination must finally be viewed in the light of Soviet history. The October Revolution was itself a denial of doctrinal orthodoxy. The adulteration of Marxism by Leninism had the consequence of laying ideology open to pragmatic interpretations. As the meaning of ideology was determined by the use to which the party chose to put it, in that measure political indoctrination was deprived of a fixed and stable catechism. Propaganda was, by comparison, far more important. Lenin intended it to be a means of mobilizing people for action, and since the building of socialism was for him an immense practical task, the value of propaganda was obvious.

His pragmatism was most bluntly and emphatically stated at the beginning of the New Economic Policy. He told a congress of party propagandists and political educators in October 1921 that "the results of political education can be measured only in terms of economic improvement." [47] He confessed that he did not like the term "political educator," and he was vexed by the creation of a special organization with the high-sounding name Central Committee for Political Education (Glavpolitprosvet). Why this mania for still more bureaucracy and pretentious labels? Officially, the organization was charged with coordinating all political education outside the schools. It controlled village reading huts and libraries, adult education centers (called Communist universities), and party schools. Its personnel consisted almost exclusively of party members who were to teach and propagandize the adult, especially the peasant, population so as to bring it within the reach of politics.

Lenin was dissatisfied with their work. Instead of going among the people as ordinary citizens and setting an example by personal conduct, the political educators acted like officials, issuing a stream of directives without troubling to ascertain the local effectiveness of their work. If the good comrades would stoop to help adults learn to read, they would be more useful. They might even put the Extraordinary Commission for the Liquidation of Illiteracy out of business and thus render a double service by diminishing bureaucracy. Having done with illiteracy, the political educators might then devote themselves to stamping out the bribery of officials. As long as that existed, the political process as Lenin

[47] *O vospitanii i obrazovanii,* p. 531.

understood it could not even be initiated, and political education in the narrower sense of the word was futile. What he apparently meant was that bribe-taking reduced government to a system of favoritism and local boss rule.

The obvious conclusion was that the most elementary conditions of a common culture had yet to be created before a political system that required the support of the masses could begin to function. Moreover, the establishment of a new politcal system would be an empty triumph unless it succeeded economically. Lunacharskii expressed the same idea in more vivid language. Glavpolitprosvet was a department of his commissariat, but since the party retained a measure of direct control over it, differences arose as to which kind of education should receive priority. The party favored political education, whereas the commissariat, while not neglecting it, felt chiefly committed to general and technical education. To give people political education without the other, Lunacharskii said, would be like feeding them salt without bread.[48]

The impression left by the sum of Lenin's educational ideas and policies is one of ordinariness and hard common sense. The revolutionary who so profoundly changed the political history of the twentieth century was never tempted to initiate a new epoch in the history of education. On the contrary, he used his power and authority to guard against adventures and high-minded schemes that aimed directly and impatiently at realizing the humanist promise of Marxist socialism. That a few such attempts were, in fact, undertaken is not surprising, for the ultimate justification of the revolutionary ideology was the realization of man's humanity, and this inevitably imparted to education a new and exceptional significance. Some who took up this challenge thought it necessary to break entirely with the scholastic tradition of learning, to dissolve the schools or replace them with models of communal life in which to fashion the new Soviet man. Although many others were less radical, they still agreed that socialist education should form the whole man and give particular attention to his emotional and social development, neglected by the old school.

Lenin stood aloof even from this moderate and widely shared conception. With all the changes he recommended or approved, the new Soviet school remained for him a school: its chief responsibility was to teach a body of received knowledge and cognitive skills useful for the internal development of the country. Schools would thus remain instruments of statecraft, as education in general was an extension of politics. This view has been familiar since the early years of the nineteenth century when Napoleon, with his reform of the French educational system, provided the first modern example. Lenin restated it, but with a consistency and rigor that were appropriate to the single-party state and its anticipated development into a highly industrialized, competitive nation.

[48] *O narodnom obrazovanii,* p. 235.