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Higher Education In The USSR

—Svetlana Miloslavskaya

TO receive a higher education in the USSR one must enter a university, institute, a specialized higher school, an academy or a conservatory.

Universities train highly qualified specialists in many fields of knowledge, such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, mechanics, geology, economics, biology, geography, history, philology, law, journalism.

Engineers are trained by technical colleges, which can be both polytechnical and sectoral. The former train specialists in different technical specialities. In a way, they are "technical universities". The latter provide training in one particular branch of the national economy. For instance, agricultural institutes or academies train farm specialists. Economists are trained by economic institutes or engineering-economic departments of technical colleges. Medical institutes train doctors and teacher training colleges—teachers.

Soviet higher educational establishments usually run full-time, evening and extra-mural courses. Needless to say, it is not that easy to combine work and study at a college. Therefore, the state provides extensive benefits to evening and extra-mural students. For instance, they are given a special (academic) paid leave. In the initial years of study it lasts 20 days and in subsequent years, 30-40 days. Graduation year students of evening and extra-mural departments have a day-off every week for which they receive half pay. Before graduation they are given four months' paid leave to prepare a thesis for their diploma. The Soviet state thus encourages and facilitates a person's effort to get a higher education. As a result of this policy, over 2.2 million young people can attend evening and extra-mural courses at higher educational establishments in this country.

In as much as full-time departments have the greatest number of students, I'd like to speak at length on this form

of education.

To become a student, one has to pass entrance examinations. Preparatory departments were opened in 1969 to help young workers and collective farmers to enter higher educational establishments. Enterprises and collective farms send their best workers to these departments. They are enrolled in keeping with the results of a preliminary interview. Students attending full-time preparatory departments are paid student grants and out-of-towners get accommodation in hostels.

The preparatory departments' curricula comprise the subjects of the entrance examinations. After 8 months of classes (or after 10 months if classes are conducted without discontinuing work) the students take examinations and get enrolled at an institute depending on their examination results.

Another way of preparing for the institute is to attend evening preparatory courses. The subjects studied are identical to those required for the entrance examinations. The tuition fee is insignificant. The students attending these courses have to take their entrance examinations on general terms.

The duration of higher schooling is 4 to 6 years.

Students making normal progress receive state grants. Those sent to study by an enterprise or a collective farm receive grants from them. Excellent students get a 25 per cent increment on their regular grant. Special scholarships are instituted for students who excell in all subjects and carry out extensive social work. Lenin's scholarship is the most prestigious of all. The best students at any institution of higher learning can receive it. In addition, each higher educational establishment has scholarships bearing the names of celebrated Russian and Soviet scientists who distinguished themselves in a particular scientific field.

Considering that hostel expenses (borne by those who come to study from a different town or a village) are only a token fee, a mere 2 or 3 roubles a month, and meals in student cafeterias are one and a half to two times cheaper than elsewhere, the grants (up to 60 roubles a month, depending on the type of a higher educational establishment) are quite enough for the student's living expenses.

How do students spend their free time?

Each term is followed by vacations: winter (two weeks) and summer (two months). One can spend his or her vacations at a holiday hotel or camp, a tourist or a sports centre. Vouchers are either free or cost only a small sum. In fact, any student can afford them.

A distinctive feature of higher schooling in the USSR is that the study of science is combined with research and production work. In practical terms this is effected through the extensive development of research at every institution of higher learning and their close links with enterprises on the basis of the joint use of laboratory and production facilities. This helps prepare students for the solution of concrete tasks in their future fields of endeavour, fosters in them habits of independently organizing and carrying out scientific research.

More often than not, students form thematic groups under college instructors. These groups work on theoretical problems and seek practical solutions to them. The results of such research have been applied in production and yielded a substantial economic effect.

Students can also do research in extra-curricular hours. They work in a variety of research groups and design sections. Many students are members of student research societies at their educational establishments. At their sessions, they read papers on the

results of their researches.

Such research groups and societies operate under the supervision of experienced instructors and scientists who can give a professional assessment of the scientific value and prospects of students research. The best student research papers are presented at student scientific conferences.