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Higher Education Reform In The USSR

—Gennady Yagodin

IN our times, improvement of the higher education system is going on throughout the world because technological progress has increased the "quota" of intellect in all trades and professions. In the Soviet Union acceleration of social and economic development in all areas of life calls for serious reform of higher education because that is what provides the personnel who introduce the latest scientific and technological achievements into the national economy.

The need for higher education reform arises from the fact that in recent years the greater number of graduates have not ensured better quality of training. There has been a marked negative tendency in the employment of college graduates, especially engineers, a considerable number of whom have been filling jobs that do not require their qualifications. On the other hand, there is a shortage of school teachers despite the greater number of

teachers training colleges. A large number of agricultural college graduates do not work in their line and the role of the integration of education, science and production has been greatly underestimated.

Modern production calls for a system of uninterrupted training for all workers and experts even with the highest qualifications. In order to organize such a system it is necessary to provide the bedrock of knowledge because education is possible only when it is built on a solid foundation.

It is the major task of the secondary and higher school today to build that foundation. That means we have to work to select the most important information and strike out everything that is redundant in our text books and programmes.

One of the "bricks" in that foundation is the students' independent work. It is this type of work that has always made the greatest contribution to education and the develop-

ment of the personality. Only by working on one's own can a person learn to work properly. In higher education, this individual work has been sacrificed to collective forms of work, such as the collective seminar, the collective lecture, collective practice, collective lab work. We are trying to remedy the situation now.

Text books are another problem. Till now practically none of them ever posed questions that required answers. They usually propounded definite concepts, provided material that had to be read, understood and remembered in order to be recounted when necessary. True knowledge should find other ways of expression like, for instance, solving problems that require reflection, research and mental effort. It will not be easy to right the situation.

Another very important feature of the reform is that part of the instruction will be linked with production. The work should be

grounded in the students' knowledge, and the knowledge, in turn, should intensify the process of production.

Colleges are allowed to reduce the number of disciplines by combining them. For the senior students there will be practicals to last up to a year during which instruction will be combined with work at their work places, for instance, in the capacity of technicians or engineers. Of course, the students will not work full time or full working week.

Another very important issue is the material and technical facilities of education, which have been lagging far behind. It will not be easy to bring them up to par for some time yet. It will take a lot of money. Under the present circumstances, we will be able to resolve the problem fully only by the year 2000. However, we hope it will happen sooner thanks to the revolutionary changes which education will introduce in science and all areas of life. (APN)