

Expansion of Economic Education in the Soviet Union

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Introduction

The Soviet Ninth Five-Year Plan (1971-1975) places great emphasis on expanding economic education. During the years 1971-1975, the Soviet Union will graduate 370,000 students majoring in economics. During that period, the Soviet Union is attempting to increase the economic knowledge of the approximately 90 million persons in its work force. This goal appears to be much more than just another propaganda campaign; it is a serious effort to increase the economic sophistication of the work force.

On September 16, 1971, *Pravda* printed on its first page the Communist Party's resolution, "On Improving the Economic Education of the Working People," which states that "economic training is an important condition for a rise in the scientific level of economic management and for the growth of the initiative and activeness of the working people in the management of production and in the implementation of the program for the development of the national economy" [1].

Probably the major reason for the Communist Party's emphasis on "economic education" is the declining growth rate in the Soviet "GNP" and productivity. To reverse this trend, the Party hopes that economic education will increase efficiency in production and labor productivity [2].

Given the fact that practically all Soviet education is permeated with the ideology of "Marxist-Leninism" there are problems of deciding what is meant by "economic education" in the Soviet Union. For example, a Soviet course in "political economy" is classified as a course in economics but it is essentially a course in ideology. The Soviet definition of "economic education" includes some aspects of curriculum which Americans would call "business administration," "engineering," or "political science." Apparently, however, the Soviet Union does follow the American practice of not including "agricultural economics" in its statistics on economic education. In fact, except for courses in "political economy," we have reason to believe that the content of applied economics courses in the higher educational establishments in the Soviet Union does not appear to be radically different from that in the United States [3].

Historically, economic science has not been taught to school children in the USSR as an independent discipline. Apparently, the school system as of 1973 has not introduced "economic courses" as such for school children, but it has increased the economic content of courses in history, economic geography, and other social sciences [4]. The Ninth Five-Year Plan to increase economic education in the Soviet Union is essentially one of "adult education."

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Expansion of Economic Education in Higher Education

As in the 1960's, the economic institutes apparently will continue to train the majority of the economics graduates. The distinction between an institute and university in economic education lies in the fact that an institute offers a narrow specialization while the universities usually offer somewhat broader training. Since the universities graduate mainly "political economists," however, the graduates of the institutes often are better trained than the university graduates. In the 1960's, about 10 percent of the economics graduates came from the universities [5].

Between 1966 and 1970, 270,000 economists were trained in the Soviet Union, and the Ninth Five-Year Plan is for 370,000 graduates [6]. In comparison, between 1966 and 1970 in the United States approximately 80,000 persons received bachelors, masters, or doctorates and the number of economics graduates in 1971 was 1,566 less than in 1970 [7].

We have a few clues as to the composition of the economics student body in the Soviet Union. In the 1960's, about 50 percent of the economics majors were female [8], and the student body was about 60 percent correspondence students, 20 percent daytime students, and 20 percent evening students [9]. The Ninth Five-Year Plan for expansion of the student body of economics majors "will be realized chiefly through the growth of admissions to daytime instruction: the share of daytime instruction in total admissions to the economic specialties will increase from 24.2 percent in 1965 and 35.7 percent in 1970 to approximately 41-42 percent in 1975" [10].

We also have a few clues as to the trends in the areas of economic specialization. During the Eighth Five-Year Plan, "the graduation of economists in the specialty 'Planning of the National Economy' increased more than twofold; 'Planning of Industry,' threefold; 'Economic Labor,' sixfold" [11].

Economic Education for the Work Force

The goal for the Ninth Five-Year Plan is to improve the economic knowledge of approximately 90 million persons. The level of economic instruction will be taken into account in certifying workers, in assigning them to skill groups, and in promoting them [12].

The Central Committee

"instructed the Union-republic Communist Party Central Committees, the territory and province Party Committees, the Central Council of Trade Unions, the Young Communist League Central Committee, ministries and departments, Party organizations, and the executives of enterprises, associations, state farms and collective farms to take steps for the fundamental improvement of the economic education of cadres, engineers, technicians and specialists in all branches of the national economy and the broad masses of workers and collective farmers" [and] "to determine . . . an approximate volume of economic knowledge for each category of personnel and the periodicity and forms of their instruction; to work out, jointly with the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Higher and Specialized Secondary Education and the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers' State Committee for Vocational-Technical Education, model curriculums and syllabuses of economic instruction in the system for the advanced training of managerial cadres in all sectors of the national economy, specialists, workers, office employees and collective farmers" [13].

On the factory level, economic training involves "the study of methods of production planning and management, problems in the scientific organization of labor, the determination of avenues to the more complete utilization of fixed and working capital and labor resources, and the search for reserves for increasing labor productivity, for reducing the enterprise cost of production, and for improving product quality" [14].

Personnel for instructors are to come from the "best-trained Communists, execu-

tives of enterprises and collective farms, specialists in the national economy . . . economic services of enterprises, ministries and departments and economic research institutes, and professors and instructors of higher education" [15].

Directors and instructors for the economic schools for workers will be trained at the larger industrial plants, government offices, and at higher educational institutions [16].

Newspapers, magazines, radio and television have been instructed to support the campaign. The U.S.S.R. Journalists' Union is to take steps to improve the economic training of journalists [17].

Effectiveness of Campaign

In 1971 about 14 million people were enrolled in the "new" and regular economic courses at Party schools and universities. The number of students in economic specialties in higher and specialized secondary educational institutions has reportedly "doubled" [18]. In 1972 Party organizations indicated that most executives, 30 to 40 percent of middle-level production management personnel and specialists, and 15 to 20 percent of workers and collective farmers were involved in some form of economic studies. A two-year period of instruction outside normal working hours has been accepted as optimal in terms of length [19].

Studies made reportedly indicate that workers studying the fundamentals of economics produce fewer defective products, that their products pass a first inspection, that they are better able to calculate expenditures of working time, and that they are more active in innovation [20].

Among the economic, political, and indoctrinational measures promoting effective economic education

"a significant role belongs unquestionably to cost accounting . . .

Within the enterprise, it is important that cost accounting be brought to literally all shops, sectors, and brigades, and in the form of personal economic accounting, to every worker. This makes it possible to achieve the most important goal: the economic responsibility of every subunit and of every worker for the expenditures that they can influence" [21].

The Party's ideological work reportedly has become more practically oriented.

"Theoretical, scientific-practical and methods conferences of the Party-economic leadership have become a stable part of practical ideological work everywhere . . . Active forms of instruction of personnel—preparation of reports, research papers, fulfillment of assignments relating to the analysis of the economic performance of the enterprise, shop, sector, etc.—are becoming more and more widespread" [22].

An Example

The Moscow I.A. Likhachev Automotive Plant reportedly already had an effective economic education program under way by 1972. Engineering and technical personnel were the first to receive economic training at the plant [23].

The "school of communist labor" for the average worker will start with a "first stage" of two-year elementary economic training. The workers will study the role of industry in the development of communism, national planning, labor and wages, the enterprise cost of production, cost accounting, and the scientific organization of labor. The program includes the study of the classical works of Marxism-Leninism and the most important documents of the CPSU. In 1972 there were 1,100 schools of communist labor at the automotive plant with 23,000 "students" [24].

These "students" were in a 32-hour program at the plant and studied problems of "interplant cost accounting, increasing the actual interest of the workers in improving the operation of the enterprise, increasing the role of credit in the development of the industrial production process, improving wholesale prices on industrial products" [25].

The next, higher stage of economic instruction for the "workers" is a "three-year training primarily for foremen, senior foremen, and sector chiefs . . . The curriculum of this stage includes the study of the economic policy of the CPSU, of the scientific principles in the management of production, of the new system of planning and economic incentive, of progressive techniques, of the introduction of modern equipment, technologies, etc. . . . Approximately 4,000 persons are receiving training in the second stage of instruction" [26].

A third stage is the highest stage of economic training. In 1972, "2000 engineers, technicians, and employees of the plant are improving their knowledge at the economics faculty of the evening university of Marxism-Leninism, in theoretical seminars of economic problems, in economic readings devoted to the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the CPSU, and in permanent courses for engineering and technical personnel under the auspices of the technical control department" [27].

Instruction in a new specialty—"The Economics and Organization of the Machine-Building Enterprise"—was commenced under the auspices of the plant's higher technical educational institute. This course is for managers and other engineering and technical personnel with diplomas in higher technical education. After three years of study, they will receive an additional diploma in economics. The annual enrollment in this specialty is 75 persons [28].

Evaluation

The Soviet Ninth Five-Year Plan includes an ambitious program to wipe out economic illiteracy in the Soviet work force. The objective is to train the workers and managers in the basic principles of economics without making them critical of the Soviet economic system. The program includes the traditional elements of ideological propaganda and avoids study of the merits of other economic systems. However, the program involves true economic education because it requires the members of the work force to take courses in various levels of accounting and economics depending on the worker's previous education and training.

This mass economic education program for the Soviet work force is a unique experiment in the history of economic education and should be watched closely by American economic educators. If the program does increase the efficiency of the Soviet work force, economic educators will have a practical argument for convincing American business and political leaders that instruction in accounting and economic concepts should be readily available to the American work force and population. The expansion of economic education in the Soviet Union may convince American educators that economic illiteracy can be wiped out in the United States. Perhaps a first step is for American economic educators to insist that all social science majors in higher education be required to take a course in economics and possibly accounting.

Summary

In 1971 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union adopted a resolution entitled, "On Improving the Economic Education of the Working People." The goal for this part of the Ninth Five-Year Plan is to improve the economic knowledge of the 90 million persons in the Soviet work force. Economic instruction apparently is standardized for each broad category of occupation and takes place mainly "on the job." The average worker apparently takes about a 30-hour course over a two-year period in cost accounting, production management, and general economic principles.

Professional economists, technical people, executives, and party leaders are the instructors in these courses. The number of economics students graduated during the Ninth Five-Year Plan will increase by about 33 percent and will have a major role in this economic educational campaign for Soviet workers and managers.

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