UNIVERSITIES
IN THE
U.S.S.R.

Report of a tour of British Students
to the U.S.S.R. August 1939

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QUAECUMQUE VERA
This account of the Soviet Universities is the result of a student tour to the U.S.S.R. organised by the University Labour Federation in the summer of 1939.

A party of 38 students and graduates left London on July 22nd. by Soviet steamer and returned on August 9th. We spent eleven days in the Soviet Union, visiting Leningrad for a couple of days on the way in, and one day on the return, and spending the other 8 days in Moscow.

Unfortunately, our visit was during the Russian University vacation. Nevertheless, several exceedingly useful and informative meetings were arranged for us. We had a meeting, arranged by V.O.K.S., (Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) with a number of students of Moscow University, together with one of the Deputy-Directors of the University. Another meeting was held with some student leaders, and there were many informal discussions with individual students.

In this report we have put together the information obtained directly from these sources with that previously available in this country in books and pamphlets of different kinds; in particular we have found useful a report on "Education and the Universities in the U.S.S.R." prepared by Soviet students for the International Conference of the World Student Association held in August 1939, and a pamphlet "Soviet Students" by S.Kaftanov, Chairman of the Committee on Higher Education of the Council of Peoples Commissars of the U.S.S.R. (Available at Collet's Bookshops, price 3d.)

Article 121 of the Soviet Constitution reads:--

"Citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to education. This right is ensured by universal, compulsory, elementary education; by the fact that education, including higher (and University) education is free of charge; by the system of state scholarships for the overwhelming majority of students in the higher schools; by instruction in schools being conducted in the native language; and by the organisation of free vocational, technical and agronomic training for the toilers in the factories, machine and tractor stations and collective farms".

Statistics (Mainly for the year 1938)

There are 716 Universities and institutions of higher learning in the Soviet Union, with a total of 601,000 students. (A considerably larger number than the total of students in all European countries in that year). In addition there are 2,572 technical schools, not
giving University education, with 711,000 students. These figures may be compared with the 91 Universities and 112,000 students existing in the days of Tsarist Russia.

The bulk of this expansion has come about in the period of the first, and especially of the Second 5-Year Plan. For example, between 1924 and 1939 the number of Universities and higher institutes in Leningrad has increased from 29 to 50, and the number of students from 51,000 to 120,000. In the years 1934-8 State expenditure on the Universities increased from 986 million to 2,190 million roubles per annum. The magnitude of the expansion that still lies ahead is measured by the estimate that in 1943 the country will have 1,000 University students; the country will then have the services of 540,000 University trained teachers and specialists in addition to the present 750,000, and a total of 2,000,000 technicians and specialists of all kinds will be trained in this period of 5 years.

The Position of Universities in Soviet Society.

Already at the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (March 1939), Molotov listed 91 million intellectuals and technical workers. These do not form a separate class in Soviet society, but as Stalin described them at the same Congress:

"a numerous new Soviet intelligentsia has arisen in our country, an intelligentsia which has arisen from the ranks of the working-class, peasantry, and Soviet employees, which is the flesh and blood of our people, which has never known the yoke of exploitation, which hates exploiters, and which is ready to serve the people of the U.S.S.R. faithfully and devotedly. I think the rise of this new socialist intelligentsia is one of the most important results of the cultural revolution in our country".

It is very necessary, in order to prevent misconceptions and inapplicable comparisons, to bear in mind this fundamental fact, that the Soviet Universities exist within the framework of the world's first socialist society. Their purpose is to advance and develop this classless socialist society, and to train citizens for the highest form of social living. It is because of this, that they are able to teach the fundamental tenets of science and to give every encouragement to the acquisition of knowledge, besides treasuring and passing on all that is best in the cultural heritage of mankind. (e.g. the publication in millions of copies of the works of foreign writers such as Shakespeare and Voltaire, and of Russian classical writers such as Pushkin.)
The idea of the Universities, both as a preparation for life of the individual and as a contribution to national life as a whole, has thus a special significance for the Soviet Union. In England these phrases are only the reflection of aspirations which suffer inevitable distortion and frustration, but in the socialist society they are real things and represent the liberation of the Universities from bondage. The connection between the Universities and social life and thought is very marked and is constantly emphasised; it explains much in the organisation of University courses and in the every-day life of the Soviet student.

**Equality of Opportunity.**

All education in the Soviet Union, including University education, is free. Primary education from 8 to 12 years old, is compulsory throughout the U.S.S.R., as is also 3 years of secondary education ("incomplete" secondary schools). Already, however, a large proportion of children in the towns are studying in "Complete" secondary schools up to 18, or in middle technical schools of similar standard, and this 10-years education will be compulsory when the schools and teachers are available. All those completing the full secondary course with satisfactory marks can continue to the University if they want to; others must pass a State entrance exam, and this also allows the entry of workers from industry and agriculture.

The students in Tsarist Russia were almost entirely drawn from the upper classes, the sons of noblemen, officials, industrialists and rich peasants; it was extremely difficult for a worker's child to reach the University. To-day 20% of the students come from collective farms, 43% from workers' families, and 28% are children of office workers and technicians.

The Soviet Union is the only country where equality of the sexes is a real thing, because the economic and social basis for inequality has been removed. 43% of Soviet students are women, including 63% of those in medicine, 47% in teaching, 42% in economics and law, and even in the industrial faculties 29%. Already 34% of University-trained specialists are women. There are 60,000 women doctors, and 100,000 women engineers and technicians in large-scale industry. There are 12,500 women scientific workers, and the scientific deputy-director of Moscow University, whom we saw, is a woman.

Even more significant is the representation in the Soviet Universities of the non-Russian peoples, the inhabitants of the former Tsarist colonies, who previously had very poor educational opportunities, and whose numbers in the Universities were severely limited. To-day in Moscow University 32.5% of the students are members of 48 different non-Russian nationalities. There are also Universities, 250 in all, in every one of the Autonomous Republics. One of the students we met in
Moscow was the son of a herdsman in the Caucasus; a member of a nationality numbering only a few tens of thousands, he had had to learn Russian on coming to Moscow, where he was studying to become a chemist.

Not only is University education completely free in the U.S.S.R., but 90% of the students receive stipends while studying, varying from 140 to 210 roubles a month, including vacations. Only those whose families can support them do not receive such payments, about which there is no odour of charity. The state grant fund from which they are made has increased from 308 million roubles in 1934 to 801 million in 1938.

Types of University Institution and their Direction.

There are:-

1) 24 Universities as such, situated in the principal cities, and each comprising a large number of faculties.

2) The higher educational institutes or V.U.Z., giving education of University standard, but only in one faculty.

3) The specialised Industrial Academies, giving practical and theoretical training of University standard to workers from industry.

4) Other specialised institutes, for teachers, agriculture, physical training, etc.

In addition there are correspondence courses organised by the Universities, by means of which at the present time 300,000 workers and collective farmers are studying for diplomas.

For the general technical training of workers there are Technicums and courses organised in the factories. Workers may study in the "Rabfacs" (workers' faculties) to reach the necessary standard for entry to a University institution. There, however, are not included as higher education.

In the total of 716 higher educational institutions there are 119 industrial institutes, 29 institutes of transport and communications, 84 agricultural colleges, 71 medical schools, 27 economics institutes, 11 law schools, and 211 others, including teachers' training institutes, music conservatories, institutes of literature, theatrical and art colleges, institutes of architecture, and so on.

Education generally in the U.S.S.R. is under the control of the People's Commissariats in the Constituent Republics, as it is considered that the problems vary too widely to be dealt with by an All-Union Commissariat. There is however, an All-Union Committee on Higher Education, which is directly
attached to the Council of People's Commissars, and whose activities cover all Universities, V.U.Z. and specialised institutes and University correspondence courses. The functions of this Committee are general supervision over the development of the Soviet Universities; inspection of balance-sheets; confirmation of professorial and tutorial appointments; fixing the number of students in different Universities and faculties; planning the absorption of graduates and postgraduate work; endorsement University programmes, textbooks, etc.; endorsement and removal of University directors, heads of faculties, etc.; provision of refresher courses for University staff.

Working under this committee is the Supreme Attestational Committee for the awarding of degrees, and also departments to deal with the various types of specialised institutions (4 above) such as the Railway Institutes, Medical Faculties, etc. These are also linked to the People's Commissariats (of Railways, Health, etc,) in the U.S.S.R. as a whole and in the separate republics. The specialised industrial academies (engineering, building, mining, textiles, electricity, etc) are under the control of the State industrial organisations for which they train specialists, but are under the general supervision of the Committee on Higher education.

Education in the Soviet University.

The ordinary diploma course lasts for 5 years. There are 3 terms; the first from 1st Sept: to the end of December, when there is 10 days vacation; the second from January 10th to the end of March; and the third from April 10th to June 30th. The six day week including one rest day is adopted in the Universities as in the rest of Soviet life.

The aim of all courses, even the most specialised, is to produce people who have a good all-round knowledge of political and social problems, and who are thus competent to play a full part in Soviet society. Economics, History of the Bolshevik Party, historical and dialectical materialism are included in the programme of study in all faculties. In the first two years lectures and seminars are given in Marxism-Leninism as well as in political economy. In the Arts Faculty special attention is devoted to dialectical materialism, and there are courses arranged in economics and philosophy.

The main method of teaching is by lectures, which cover about 50% of the academic time. The remaining time is occupied by seminars, laboratory work, discussion circles, individual study, etc. The seminars usually run parallel with a course of lectures and deal with the special problems raised in the latter. There is a programme for each subject, drawn up by a member of the Faculty, and discussed by a commission of experts, after which it is endorsed by the heads of the Faculty.
Attendance at lectures, seminars, and practical work is compulsory, and in the first year these average 6 hours a day, beginning at 9:00 a.m. In the later years more and more time is devoted to individual study and to "productive practice"; that is, work in laboratories, factories, scientific expeditions. In the final 2 years about 30% of the academic time is spent in this way, the students being sent to the most advanced factories, schools and collective farms. Students can consult their professors and tutors at any time about difficulties arising in their lectures or individual study. There is a system of "Socialist competition" between students and staff, whereby mutual contracts are entered into with the aim of improving the quality and efficiency both of their teaching by the professors and lecturers and of their application to work by the students. The general impression is that there is no social gulf between staff and students; most of the professors and lecturers are young ex-aspirants, many of them ex-workers, and their average age level is much lower than in Great Britain. The students have a greater share in the direction of University affairs than in this country, while the staff has the decisive voice in the organisation and direction of the academic side.

Every student must learn at least one foreign language. There are also lectures at every University in the literature both of Russia and of the world, at which attendance is optional.

In the evenings students can take an active part in public life, in art circles, in producing wall-newspapers, in sports' clubs, and in the life and activity of the Communist Party, the Young Communist League, and the student Trade Union organisations.

Examinations, Degrees and Research.

Before 1932 there was no system of compulsory examinations in the Soviet Universities. The quality of the specialists produced by the Universities and Institutes today is much higher than it was then. Oral and written examinations are conducted in every subject, usually by the tutor who has given the course. The timetable of examinations is published a month beforehand, and the exact days and subjects for each student about 10 days beforehand.

A student graduating from the University does not receive a special degree, but a diploma stating his speciality. Work done during the whole of the University course is taken into account in awarding this, and the student has publicly to defend a thesis on some aspect of his subject. Graduation is the result of a State examination, and there are two classes - "Very Good" and "Good". The following degrees may be taken: Candidate of Sciences and Doctor of Sciences. There are also three grades in the University staff - Aspirant or Assistant, Lecturer and Professor. The status of Assistant is conferred on those graduates who have sufficient qualifications to undertake research work and technical work under the direction of a Professor.
These research studentships or "Aspirantships" last for a fixed period of 3 years, at the rate of 400 roubles per month, with an additional 200 roubles for those who do part-time lecturing or demonstrating in addition. Research is co-ordinated, organised and distributed by a special Committee, working in contact with the different People's Commissariats, which state the problems they wish to have studied. There are about 15,000 research workers in the Soviet Universities this year.

In order to become a Candidate of Science the Aspirant has to defend a thesis embodying original research. The status of Lecturer is conferred on Candidates, and they carry out research and do tutorial work. The Doctor's Degree is given to Candidates who defend another thesis, and carries with it the status of Professor.

**Student Life and Recreation.**

Most of the students live in communal hostels, for which they pay at the fixed rate of 7% of their stipend (this compares with the normal Soviet procedure that rent shall not be more than 10% of the workers salary.) This includes furniture, laundry, etc. Attached to the living quarters and to the Universities are dining-rooms, canteens, hairdressing saloons, laundries, boot and clothing repair shops, baths, creches, kindergartens and club-rooms. In many towns University Cities have been built, where several thousand students live as a single community. Meals of excellent quality are given in the refectories at reduced prices, as they are in the factory canteens.

The health of students is very carefully looked after. Like the rest of the population, they receive all medical attention and hospital treatment entirely free. Students are given a medical examination on entry and receive further medical and dental treatment as required. Every University has its own rest-homes and sanatoria for staff and students, expenditure on which in 1937 was 23,000,000 roubles. Many students spend at least a month of the summer vacation in such rest-homes (in 1938 over 60,000 students visited rest-homes and about 6,000 received medical attention in sanatoria.) In addition there are one-day rest-homes where thousands of students relax on their weekly free day.

Student travel is assisted throughout the length and breadth of the Soviet Union, both in the form of scientific expeditions, and for holidays. Last year the various Trade Unions spent about 1,000,000 roubles in providing such holidays for students.

Sports and physical culture are highly encouraged in Soviet Universities. In the first 2 years of study for a diploma physical culture is a part of every course. Entry to all sports organisations is free, and equipment and expenses are provided from the University budget. Parachute-jumping, gliding and flying are popular sports among students, competing with swimming, tennis, volleyball etc.
Recreation and cultural opportunities are provided by numerous student clubs, artistic circles, choirs, dramatic groups, literary societies, etc. There is a widespread system of collective visits to cinemas, theatres, concerts, etc, arranged by the student organisations at reduced prices. Often special film shows and dramatic performances are given in the Universities themselves.

**Marriage**

There is no bar to students of either sex getting married while at the University, and there are always crèches and kindergartens provided for the children of students and staff. The students' Trade Unions provide family allowances in addition to the stipend. Women students who become mothers are allowed an extra year to complete their course. Certainly a large number of students are married, due no doubt to the completely secure future possessed by Soviet students, as well as to their higher average age than, for example, British students. The latter point is accounted for by the extensive recruitment of students from workers' faculties in industry, thus opening up the Universities to those who may have left school at an early age.

**Careers and Employment.**

At school, information is available on all the careers open to Soviet youth. At the beginning of each University year all freshers are given a talk by the professors as to the nature of the course and the various possibilities of employment. The first two years of any course are mainly devoted to general education, and during this period students are helped to decide upon what they are going to specialise.

There is no searching for jobs in the Soviet Union, because there is unlimited scope for every type of trained personnel. The available specialists are therefore carefully looked after and assigned where they are most needed. Six months before graduation all students know where they will be working, and are able to make personal arrangements and to study the conditions and problems of that particular factory, laboratory, school or farm.

**Military Training.**

Students are exempted from the normal period of compulsory military service while they are at the Universities. Those who become teachers in rural areas or specialists in industry are completely exempt, as they are too valuable to be spared for the armed forces. However there is a very widespread and popular movement for voluntary military education and training through the "Osoviakim" (Society for Chemical and Aerial Defence), which has units in all Universities and Institutes. Students thus receive military training of a more specialised kind.
Each University is under the control of a Rector chosen for his or her ability, with assistants (co-rectors or deputy directors) responsible for the administrative and scientific sides. There are no barriers of sex, race or colour in the selection of candidates for these posts. We spoke with the science deputy-director of Moscow University, and were impressed by the fact that this leading position in the most important University in the Soviet Union was held by a woman. The rector is assisted by an All-University Council composed of representatives of each of the faculty councils and of the students. Each faculty council is composed of the dean of the faculty, the professors and representatives of the students. The faculty committee is the main link between the individual students and the all-University Council, and the medium through which all questions relating to the academic side of the student's life are regulated.

The professional organisation of students is in the Trade Unions which include all workers in the profession for which they are studying - engineering, mining, teaching, agriculture, etc. There is for example the Trade Union for Educational Workers which has as members everyone employed in schools, including cleaners, maids, etc, and also students training to be teachers. There is a special Trade Union for workers in higher educational institutions including Universities. In each faculty there is a student Trade Union Committee ("Profkom"), and an all-University Trade Union Committee ("Mostkom") represents the students as a whole. These committees have roughly similar functions to the Student Unions in Britain, but have considerably wider powers in the organisation of student life and in representing students on the academic councils of University and faculty. Election to these committees is based on the faculties and is by secret ballot, and the committees elect their own officials.

There is no all-Union organisation of the students as students and this in the past has been a cause of difficulty in establishing close relations between British and Russian students. There is, however, a Central Student Bureau, attached to the Central Council of Trade Unions, for guiding and co-ordinating the instructors approached by the various Trade Unions for work among students. There are also frequent conferences on a regional and all-Union scale which bring students together on a faculty basis.

In addition, there is the political organisation of students in the Young Communist League (Komsomols) and Communist Party. These groups cut across faculty divisions and embrace both students and staff. The Communist Party groups, although small (in Moscow, 200 out of 4,600 students; 107 out of 633 staff), consist of the most politically advanced individuals, and have therefore a very considerable influence in University life. The Komsomol organisations are much larger (in Moscow, 2,383 out of 4,600 students; 40 out of 633 staff), and play a very big part in co-ordinating activity in the Universities for the realisation of the aims of the Communist Party and the Government. Locally and nationally,
there are special Y.C.L. Officials for the control and development of work among students.

It is important to realise when discussing student organisation, that neither politically nor culturally nor professionally, are the Soviet students regarded as a class apart. They are integrated with the rest of the national life, and consciously cared for as the technical and administrative specialists of the future.

Conclusion.

What then is our general impression of our investigation into the Soviet Universities? That here for the first time, in the socialist sixth of the world, higher education is able to spread and develop along with the growth and development of the entire economic and cultural life of the country; that here for the first time, there is real freedom for the intellectual development of every individual, as a contribution to the advance of the whole country, and not the imaginary freedom for the few to construct their own fantasies, which is all that bourgeois society has to offer; that here for the first time, are being put into practice those principles of education with a purpose which have inspired Humanists and thinkers throughout the ages. This is what Socialism means for the Universities; it enables them to come to fruition instead of struggling blindly, crippled and confused by the conflicts and chaos in material and intellectual affairs inflicted upon them by the decaying system of capitalism and exploitation. In the Soviet Universities we see the promise of the Universities of the future, just as in the Soviet Union as a whole, we see the advance-guard of a new civilisation.

We are certain that the organisation of this student tour to the U.S.S.R. has completely justified itself, both from the point of view of its members and of the U.L.F. as a whole. For the work of a student socialist organisation in this country cannot but be aided by the collections and diffusion of reliable information on the life and organisations of students in the first socialist country of the world. We have several times made comparisons with British Universities, but in general have left the facts to speak for themselves, and the readers to draw their own conclusions. In addition, the contacts we made will prove very valuable in the future.

We wish to thank all those students, University Officials and others in the Soviet Union who made our trip such a success, the Society for Cultural Relations with the U.S.S.R., the Friends of the Soviet Union and Prospect Tours who helped in the organisation, and everyone else who assisted in different ways.
Notes on the Teaching of Science

(Notes on an interview with M. Balaban, student of organic chemistry; a member of the Communist Party; married, with a child of 3; age, 28.)

Studied six years at evening classes before entering the university. His salary was then 400 roubles per month. He is already assured of a position when he graduates, at a salary of about 700 roubles per month. His scholarship at present provides him with 200 roubles per month, which will continue for two months after graduation. He is social secretary of his student trade union; as such, he is to some extent responsible for the social life of the students; provision for vacations, lodgings, money for needy students (the latter provided from a fund of 106,000 roubles per year).

Courses in chemistry and in engineering are five-year courses, in which the following is the official time-table of work, although of course, the students work much more:

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For the chemistry course, about 18 out of the 30 hours are spent in study of Chemistry. In connection with graduate work; last year 20 out of 102 continued studying after five years of (organic chemistry). They are assistants after graduation, and they go on studying for their Ph.D. degree, which takes three years.

Laboratory equipment and chemicals are provided free. All foreign periodicals dealing with science are available, but the supply is actually insufficient for the number of students seeking to use them. German textbooks previously enjoyed wide usage, but now American textbooks are being used to the greatest extent.