

# Soviet education hammer

by Fred Murphy for Canadian University Press  
*Oleg Shmelof, a 27 year old engineer, defected from the Soviet Union on June 5, 1980 at Gander Airport while en route to an assignment in Cuba. He attended a technical university in Moscow from 1971 to 1977.*

In the Soviet Union citizens are completely dependent on the state for even their basic human needs. As well the state uses deception, propaganda, and even brutal force to achieve total control over its citizens. The technology of repression, however, has developed more subtle methods for keeping citizens in than were used in Stalin's time when millions of Russians were sent to death camps. The state uses different methods to promote citizens allegiance to and compliance with the state depending on their age, position, and even geographical region. University students are subjected to perhaps the most

students are asked about relatives, nationality, and in an indirect way about relatives who had suffered under Stalin's regime. At many universities Jews are not accepted at all, but they are not denied the right to apply, after all the Soviet constitution states "all citizens are equal". The application process has a mechanism for weeding out students with bad character reports and Jews. These undesirable applicants may often obtain outstanding mark results in math, physics and chemistry, but exams in history and literature can be graded arbitrarily. If the administration wants to fail the student they can give him a poor mark in these subjects and it is pointless for the student to argue because in the Soviet Union there is no logical approach to history or literature. Even if a student has passed these two states there remains facing a panel that can ask an applicant any question they wish. This panel can deny admission to anyone on the basis of the interview and

to receive a security clearance during their university career. This clearance functions as another means the administration uses for dismissing or disciplining students whose behavior is deemed unacceptable. Students at technical universities cannot continue their studies without a security clearance. A student's answers to a questionnaire, his character report, and reports from the social organizations he is involved with are all taken into consideration when the administration decides whether or not to grant a student his security clearance. This clearance is granted with a set of conditions he must comply with so as not to void his security clearance. For instance, the student may be forbidden all contact with foreigners. Clearance is also required for courses in military education which are a necessary part of the curriculum for males at most universities.

Perhaps the most important lesson a Soviet university student learns is that he must please the state to get ahead and to avoid trouble. A student's devotion to the state is measured by his degree of participation in activities sponsored by the Young Communist League (YCL) and the Student Union which are under the total control of the Communist party. These organizations also sponsor numerous social activities that are designed, it would seem to insure that students have little time to spend alone. The YCL organizes a range of activities which students are required to participate in. These include a socialist competition, work on police auxiliaries, free weekend labour, indoctrination sessions billed as lectures, and rallies. When visiting heads of state are in Moscow the YCL is responsible for rounding up students to line the streets to greet the visitors. A whole day of classes is usually cancelled for this type of event as well as for May Day and Revolution Day rallies in Red Square. The YCL and the administration also make sure every student participates in elections — on the ballots there is always only one candidate for each position. Character reports on every student are written by the administration and the YCL usually. The YCL also forces students to write character reports on each other. Most students just write that so-and-so is a good person but in some cases envy, hatred, or jealousy may cause one student to give another a bad report. These character reports introduce students to the fact that they have to judge and be judged in terms of allegiance to the state.

Privileges are distributed to students not only according to their academic performance but also according to their participation in social activities and their degree of advancement in the YCL and student union. These privileges include special Lenin scholarships, trips to winter and summer recreation camps, admission to popular hockey games, concerts, plays, and parties, and the best rooms in the dormitories. In fact, during times when rooms in dormitories are scarce, only YCL activists get rooms, while other students are forced to seek housing on the expensive black market. More important than what a student may gain by his activities is what he may lose because of apathy or not partaking in YCL activities. The YCL can give a student a bad character report that can plague him for life or the YCL could take away his room in the dormitory. Even worse the YCL could recommend the student be dismissed from university in which case he is automatically drafted. Students have to get used to having their lives controlled by YCL activists. In later life this translates into being controlled by Communist party members. Students are also exposed to a basic truth of the Communist system that success and the privileges of the Soviet system are attained, as YCL activists well know, by showing one's devotion to the state.

Besides being dismissed on the recommendation of the YCL students can also be dismissed for bad marks or a refusal to do farm work — a necessary part of a student's obligation while at university. At one university in Moscow a group of students were dismissed and sent to the army for mildly protesting about the quality of the food at their cafeteria.

Students in vulnerable positions because of bad marks or bad character reports are often given the choice of a trip to the army or collaboration with the KGB, who keeps students under close watch. The YCL hierarchy are also approached and offered collaboration with the KGB; if they refuse their downfall in the YCL is inevitable.

While at university a student has to work up to three months every year on a collective farm. In addition the student may

The Soviet system is a situation of the state freedom food. Transfer up and analogical relation which basic hu

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rigorous applications of the instruments the state uses to bring up obedient servants for the regime.

From grade school through to graduating from university a Soviet student is constantly reminded he has to subjugate his own interests to the interests of the state, suppress his individuality, conform to a model. Every student is also aware that he is accompanied throughout his life by a character report on which his future depends. This indirectly but powerfully influences students, especially university students, to conform to the state's precepts of good behavior. A student's background is one of the most important factors the authorities consider when a student applies to a university. On the application forms

their decision is final.

When applying to a university in Moscow an outsider finds Muscovites seem to be more equal. Since an outsider has to compete for a residence permit to live in Moscow along with competing for admission to the university, he faces a competition for admission that can be up to 10 times greater than the Muscovite faces. Successful applicants from outside Moscow are given temporary residence permits which expire after one and a half to two years and have to be re-applied for. This re-application process again places a student at the mercy of the state and provides the state with a lever for influencing a student's behavior.

Students at technical universities have



spend many of his weekends doing compulsory free labour, part of his so-called socialist obligation, organized by the YCL. In the fall of every year students are required to help with the harvest. In the Moscow region a student has to work for a month on a potato or wheat farm, while students in southern regions can spend up to three months working in cotton fields. Discipline is very strict at these work camps and refusal to work leads to an automatic dismissal. Weekend free labour while university is on often involves menial labour on a construction site. The work is usually trivial, unorganized and inefficient. It is designed more or less to waste time than to accomplish anything.

The system of privileges Soviet students become acquainted with through the YCL during their time at university plays an important role in their later life. Those who are most active professionally with the Communist Party or with their

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*The soviet system no longer kills makes them human. A Soviet can suppress his conscience and minimize the blueprint the state has drawn for*

Trade Union, find that the services of the state are more available to them than others. For instance, they find it easier to place their children in daycare centres and they get trips to resorts for themselves and their children at greatly reduced prices. In the provinces where food stores only contain basic items such as bread, cereals, and milk, the distribution of fish, meat, eggs, butter and sausages is done through food cards given out at work. When demand exceeds supply the social activists are given preference. Upper level Communist party members in the Soviet Union enjoy the most privileges. They have access to the best food the Soviet Union and the West offers all year around as well as access to Western products which they can buy at special stores that only they can shop at.

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