

## *Russia's Secret Weapon*

M A R I O P E I

THE RUSSIANS have at their disposal a secret weapon, not recognized as such by our keenest observers, which tends to give them a disproportionate advantage over us. Despite the fact that they started the industrial race fifty years after we did, that their economy does not and cannot function as well as ours, that they lack a firm foundation for moral principles, having renounced God as a source of ethics, they nevertheless enjoy a tremendous superiority over us which we need not at all allow them to retain.

Their big advantage lies in the field of education. Their secret weapon consists of the fact that they are using, by and large, the educational methodology and point of view that we discarded fifty years ago, in favor of the will-of-the-wisp of progressivism, permissivism, and "life adjustment," to which we cheerfully sacrificed discipline, respect for authority, content and subject-matter, and the formation of individuals rather than cogs in a machine.

The last item may sound strange, in view of the fact that we are supposed to be the individualists, they the subordinators of the individual to the all-powerful state. Yet

in the field of education their present system, like our system of half a century ago, tends to form a complete, well-rounded individual, equipped with those items of information that really matter, and therefore intellectually free even if politically and economically enslaved; while our present system places far too much stress on the individual's adjustment and conformity to his sociological environment, and too little on the development of his power, as an individual, to rise above that environment, think for himself, and select his own reactions to life's problems.

Fifty years ago, the schools of this country, like the Soviet Union's today, were firmly based on discipline and respect for constituted authority. Self-discipline can arise in the immature mind only as the result of discipline imposed from without, and gradually relaxed as the individual develops, until the day comes when it is no longer necessary. To abolish discipline and respect for authority in the immature mind is tantamount to condemning that mind to remain forever immature. The American child fails to grow up as he advances in years. The result is the utter irresponsibil-

ity and aimlessness, the vandalisms and hoodlumisms, the juvenile delinquency we so often deplore, but of which we persist in ignoring the true basic causes—lack of respect for parental, church, school, even governmental authority. It will avail little to say that such authorities are occasionally unworthy of respect. They were so then, as they are now. But by and large, the parent, the teacher, the priest or minister or rabbi, the policeman or truant officer, are superior to the youngster, if only by reason of age and experience. This superiority, of course, is neither inherent nor everlasting. It will and should gradually vanish as time rolls on—but only gradually, and as time rolls on. For parents, teachers, juvenile court judges, to make themselves, or rather pretend to be, the equals or even the inferiors of the growing children is a ridiculous procedure, which is studiously avoided in the Soviet Union, but unfortunately widespread here. Children are still children. They should be lovingly, but firmly treated as such while they remain children, at the same time that they are lovingly, but firmly taught the principles of individual responsibility from which so many of their elders shrink.

The old-style school, like the Soviet school of today, was a place for learning, and the learning tended to be factual. It did not attempt to be all things at once—church, home, social center, pleasure palace, sports arena. Extra-curricular activities, proms and dances, athletics, discussion clubs, were limited in number and scope. What the school did, it did thoroughly and well. It did not turn out graduates who could not yet read, write, spell, or do simple arithmetical operations. It was taken for granted that social adjustment (whatever that term may mean), physical culture, sex life, would largely take care of themselves on the outside and at the proper time. The student's main job was, as the name

would seem to imply, to study, not to discover how to go out on a date, cheer for the team, or gripe about living conditions that are today incommensurably superior to those of fifty years ago.

The Soviets are turning out of their schools young people who are in all respects but one similar to those we turned out in the first decade of this century—people who are well informed, self-reliant, willing to work—the raw material out of which a successful society is built. The one important respect where they differ is the matter of political indoctrination and conformity. In that one and very important respect, we are still their superiors, though even that is tending to disappear by reason of government meddling in our educational system. Our younger generations are poorly prepared for what concerns factual subjects, indoctrinated with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and what the world owes them rather than what they owe the world, an impatience to arrive too far too fast, coupled with a lack of the intellectual means to get there, a built-in tendency to conform unthinkingly and uncritically to fads and mass standards.

The children of today are the men and women of tomorrow. Judging from present indications, the Soviet Union of thirty years hence will have a population of political robots who will, however, be well-equipped intellectually, be capable of initiative, hard work, self-discipline and self-sacrifice. We will have a population of highly nervous, not to say neurasthenic people, uninclined to work, effort, or sacrifice, poorly equipped in factual knowledge, tending to follow mass standards of conduct and worship material things, whose only advantage will reside in the fact that they still have left a modicum of political choice, a sense of discrimination for what concerns their leadership, and some shreds of continued belief in a God-given moral code.