Social mobility and equal opportunity

SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET

The degree of social mobility in America has long been a point of dispute not only among social scientists but also among political advocates. The once popular acceptance of America as the golden land of opportunity, for example, rested on the belief that it offered unparalleled chances for those in the lower ranks of society to improve their position. This theory of social mobility was also adopted, though for different reasons, by socialists attempting to explain the relatively low level of class consciousness among workers in America. They argued that because American workers could realistically hope to improve their circumstances and move out of their class, they were less likely than their more deprived European counterparts to support revolutionary movements. Socialists who made these assumptions, from Marx on, anticipated the emergence of radicalism among the working classes at a later period, when changes in the economic system would have sharply reduced upward mobility. And the notion is by now widespread that the chances for upward mobility would diminish—and have in fact diminished—as a result of the ongoing processes of urbanization, industrialization, and bureaucratization.

In the past, most discussion of social mobility has focused upon the extent to which the lowly have a realistic hope of moving up
the social ladder. The fact that it was indeed possible for some to go from rags to riches was generally taken as evidence that opportunity to rise was a reality in the United States. But today the traditional American notion of equality of opportunity has to a large extent given way to a newer, more radical version. According to this new understanding, real equality of opportunity requires not merely that the children of the lower classes have a realistic chance of achieving a high degree of success, but that they do in fact achieve such success in equal proportions with the children of the middle and upper classes. This view of equality of opportunity would demand, for example, that the children of the poorest tenth of the population be represented in institutions of higher learning or in privileged occupations in equal numbers with the children of the richest ten per cent.

Especially in the light of the stringent demands made upon the mechanisms of social mobility by this new ideal of social justice, it becomes a matter of importance to know something about the actual rates of social mobility in America. Has the rate of social mobility in America declined? What is the influence of racial and ethnic factors in this context? How does America compare with other industrialized countries in regard to social mobility? Have the Communist nations been more successful than their capitalist rivals in promoting equality of opportunity? What are the factors which seem to limit social mobility, and to what extent can they be mitigated or eliminated altogether? These are the questions which this essay attempts to answer.

Has equality of opportunity in America declined?

It has often been argued that an advanced stage of industrialization, such as that achieved by contemporary America, is likely to produce an increasing "rigidification" of social classes. But a number of analyses of the pattern of opportunity in American society clearly indicate that there has been no decline in social mobility; in fact, in some respects American society today is less rigid in terms of social advancement than it was in the past. A *Scientific American* survey of the backgrounds of big business executives (presidents, chairmen, and principal vice-presidents of the 600 largest U. S. non-financial corporations) found that the business elite has been opened to entry from below in a way that had never been true before in American history. Since this study has never been widely disseminated, it may be worthwhile to reproduce some of its findings here:
Only 10.5 per cent of the current generation of big business executives ... [are] sons of wealthy families; as recently as 1950 the corresponding figure was 36.1 per cent, and at the turn of the century, 45.6 per cent ... two thirds of the 1900 generation had fathers who were heads of the same corporation or who were independent businessmen; less than half of the current generation had fathers so placed in American society. On the other hand, less than 10 per cent of the 1900 generation had fathers who were employees; by 1964 this percentage had increased to nearly 30 per cent.¹

Surprisingly both to scholars in the field and to those radicals convinced that a mature capitalism would become increasingly immobile, particularly with respect to sharp jumps into the elite, the evidence indicates that the post-World War II period brought the greatest increase in the proportion of those from economically "poor" backgrounds (from 12.1 per cent in 1950 to 23.3 per cent in 1964) who entered the top echelons of American business; and there was a correspondingly great decline in the percentage from wealthy families (from 36.1 per cent in 1950 to 10.5 per cent in 1964). A number of underlying structural trends appear to be responsible for this development: the replacement of the family-owned enterprise by the public corporation; the bureaucratization of American corporate life; the recruitment of management personnel from the ranks of college graduates; and the awarding of higher posts on the basis of a competitive promotion process similar to that which operates in government bureaucracy. Because of the spread of higher education to the children of the working classes (almost one third of whom now attend college), the ladder of bureaucratic success is increasingly open to those from poorer circumstances. Privileged family and class backgrounds continue to be enormous advantages in the quest for corporate success, but training and talent can make up for them in an increasing number of cases.

Other, more broadly-focused studies provide further evidence that there has been no hardening of class lines in American society. According to the findings of Stephan Thernstrom (who has played the leading role among historians both in doing research and in stimulating work on the part of others), there has been a continuation of a high rate of social mobility over an 80-year period. In

¹The Big Business Executive/1964: A Study of His Social and Educational Background (A study sponsored by the Scientific American, conducted by Market Statistics, Inc., of New York City, in collaboration with Dr. Mabel Newcomer). The study was designed to update Mabel Newcomer, The Big Business Executive—The Factors that Made Him: 1900-1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950). All comparisons in it are with materials in Dr. Newcomer's published work.
Boston, which he studied himself, there was "impressive consistency in . . . career patterns . . . between 1880 and 1968. About a quarter of all the men who first entered the labor market as manual workers ended their careers in a middle-class calling; approximately one in six of those who first worked in a white-collar job later skidded to a blue-collar post." Almost identical patterns to Boston's have been reported in a "dozen samples [from various cities] for the period from 1850 to World War I;" about 30 to 35 per cent from manual families moved into middle-class positions in various surveys. Rates of downward mobility also do not vary a great deal; the large majority of those from middle-class backgrounds (between 70 and 80 per cent) maintained middle class status.²

Thernstrom notes that these findings challenge the often-voiced belief that changes in American capitalism have created a permanent and growing class of the poor. In fact, all the available evidence points in the opposite direction. Statistical data from Poughkeepsie in the 1840's, Boston in five different samples from the 1880's to recent years, and Indianapolis in 1910, as well as various post-World War II surveys, local and national, indicate that most of the sons of unskilled workers either moved up into the ranks of the skilled or found middle-class jobs of various kinds.

These conclusions are reinforced by the most comprehensive and methodologically sophisticated national sample survey of the American population, that of Blau and Duncan in 1963. They analyzed the mobility patterns of American families over several generations by relating family occupational background to first job (thus permitting a comparison of the very young still on their first job with the experience of the very old when they were young), and found that "the influence of social origins has remained constant since World War I. There is absolutely no evidence of 'rigidification.'"³

Recent historical research has not only challenged the conventional wisdom about mobility rates, which assumed that the growth of large corporations would mean movement from greater to lesser equality of opportunity; it has also upset long-cherished notions about the direction of change in the distribution of income from the early 19th century on. The tentative conclusion which may be reached from a number of studies is that Jacksonian America—

described by Tocqueville and others as an egalitarian social system (which, compared to Europe, it undoubtedly was)—was characterized by much more severe forms of social and economic inequality than the society of the 1970's. As historian Edward Pessen points out:

The explanation, popular since Karl Marx's time, that it was industrialization that pauperized the masses, in the process transforming a relatively egalitarian social order, appears wanting. Vast disparities between urban rich and poor antedated industrialization [in America]... Even Michael Harrington and Gabriel Kolko whose estimates reveal the greatest amounts of [present-day] inequality, attribute percentages of income to the upper brackets that are far smaller than the upper one per cent of New York City controlled in income in 1863 or in wealth in 1845.4

Most other pre-Civil War American cities resembled New York in these respects, and even in rural areas the pattern of property distribution was extremely unequal.

Without entering into the issue of trends in the distribution of income since 1900, it is obvious that economic growth has brought with it an almost constant increase in the national income. Average per capita income has increased almost sixfold during the course of this century, and this dramatic growth has brought about a wide distribution of various social and economic benefits, usually wider than in any other country. Thus, a much larger proportion of the population graduates from high school (over 80 per cent) or enters college (close to 50 per cent) in America than in any other nation. The greater wealth of the United States also means that consumer goods such as automobiles, telephones, and the like are more evenly distributed here than elsewhere. A recent evaluation by the (London) Economist, using 12 social indicators to assess the relative advantages of different countries as places to live, placed the United States far in the lead over eight other non-Communist industrialized states. The wider distribution of consumer goods that inevitably accompanies greater wealth means that the gap in standards of living between American social classes, while still great absolutely, is small by comparative world standards.

Do mobility patterns differ for minority groups?

The simple analysis of varying rates of opportunity or general

consumption levels is far from the whole story with respect to the underlying pattern of opportunity over time. It is important to recognize that in America class position has been differentially distributed among ethnic and racial groups. For much of its history, the United States has been divided between “majority” and “minority” ethnic groups. The latter have, in effect, repeatedly provided new sets of recruits for the lowly paid, low-status positions, thus enabling others of less recent settlement to rise. An analysis of Census data by E. P. Hutchinson reported that in 1870 and in 1880, “the foreign-born were most typically employed in the factories, in heavy industry, as manual laborers and domestic servants. Clerical, managerial, and official positions remained largely inaccessible to them.” 5 The Census of 1890 gathered information for the first time on the occupations of the native-born children of immigrants, thus permitting a comparison of the two generations. As Hutchinson shows, they varied considerably:

Unlike the immigrant males who were in highest proportion among domestic and personal service workers, the second generation males were most numerous relatively among workers in trade and in transportation and manufacturing. It is also notable that those in the second generation were more successful in entering the professions, even though not as successful as members of the native stock (the native born of native parents) . . . . Altogether, the second generation conformed more closely to the occupational distribution of the entire white labor force than did the foreign born.

This pattern, in which the second generation was, as a group, in a much better position than the immigrant generation, continued for the duration of mass immigration. Thus Hutchinson reports that in 1900 “the foreign born were no more widely distributed by occupation . . . than in 1890, but that the second generation became more widely distributed and moved closer to the occupational distribution of the entire labor force in 1900.” The Census was not as comprehensive in gathering comparable occupational data from 1910 on, but the evidence clearly indicates comparable patterns to those summarized above for the remaining period of mass immigration through 1924.

More recently, particularly since the economy began a prolonged period of relatively full employment in the 1940’s, migrants from various parts of North America—Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and, to a small extent, French Canadians—have furnished the bulk

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5E. P. Hutchinson, Immigrants and Their Children (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1956).
of the less skilled labor force. As Reinhard Bendix and I wrote in our analysis of mobility processes in the late 1950's:

Now, as before, there is a close relationship between low income and membership in segregated groups. A large proportion of seasonal farm laborers and sharecroppers in the South and Southwest come from them. In the cities, Negroes, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans predominate in the unskilled, dirty, and badly paid occupations. These twenty million people earn a disproportionately low share of the national income; they have little political power and no social prestige; they live in ethnic ghettos, in rural and urban areas alike, and they have little social contact with white Americans. Indeed, today there are two working classes in America, a white one and a Negro, Mexican, and Puerto Rican one. A real social and economic cleavage is created by widespread discrimination against these minority groups, and this diminishes the chances for the development of solidarity along class lines. In effect, the overwhelming majority of whites, both in the working class and in the middle and upper classes, benefit economically and socially from the existence of these "lower classes" within their midst. This continued splintering of the working class is a major element in the preservation of the stability of the class structure. 6

The assumptions made in that analysis about the difference between the situations of initially underprivileged whites and blacks were given a more elaborate statistical confirmation in the largest study of American social mobility, that of Blau and Duncan. These authors found in 1963 that lowly social origin had little negative effect on the chances of whites—including the children of white immigrants—to advance economically. The mobility picture for whites is such that Blau and Duncan reject the notion that a "vicious cycle" perpetuates inequality "for the population at large."

But if whites, including working-class whites, experienced a fluid occupational class system, in which the able and ambitious could rise, the reverse was true for blacks. Blau and Duncan's data indicated "that Negroes are handicapped at every step in their attempts to achieve economic success, and these cumulative disadvantages are what produces the great inequalities of opportunities under which the Negro American suffers. . . . The multiple handicaps associated with being an American Negro are cumulative in their deleterious consequences for a man's career."

Education, which we have seen opens all sorts of doors for whites, even many of quite low social origin, did not work in the same way for blacks:

The difference in occupational status between Negroes and whites is twice as great for men who have graduated from high school or gone to college as for those who have completed no more than eight years of schooling. In short, the careers of well-educated Negroes lag even further behind those of comparable whites than do the careers of poorly educated Negroes. . . . Negroes, as an underprivileged group, must make greater sacrifices to remain in school, but they have less incentive than whites to make these sacrifices, which may well be a major reason why Negroes often exhibit little motivation to continue in school and advance their education.

The Blau-Duncan findings on mobility data have been reinforced by a detailed analysis of racial differences in income by Albert Wohlstetter and Sinclair Coleman, using data running through the end of the 1960's. Although they report that nonwhite personal income has increased twice as fast as white since 1948, they conclude that even at the end of the last decade "nonwhite family and personal income are much inferior to white incomes along the entire distribution of each." The differences between the two groups are greatest in the upper echelons: "In fact, compared with white, there has been little or no change in nonwhite income at the top." The evidence also indicates that nonwhites are more likely to be affected by economic dips than whites. While increases in educational attainment improve income possibilities for both groups, Wohlstetter and Coleman conclude that even if education were equalized, the economic return for nonwhites would still remain far behind that for whites. 7

Still, we cannot lose sight of the significant social and economic progress made by black Americans during the past decade. They have made their most impressive gains in the area of education. If median school years are used as an indicator of formal educational attainment, then by 1970 blacks had come very close to parity with whites. More important, 1970 Census data suggest changes in the traditional pattern of discrimination noted earlier—the pattern whereby better educated blacks were worse off economically relative to comparable whites than were blacks with less education. During the 1960's, better educated blacks improved their market position. 8 It is still true, however, that at each educational level black men earn less than comparably educated whites; as in the 1950's, for example, young black males with high school diplomas

7 Albert Wohlstetter and Sinclair Coleman, Racial Differences in Income (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, October 1970).
mas still have a lower median income than young whites who have completed only grammar school. The earnings of black men relative to those of whites still decline as their educational levels increase. During the 1960's, this "earnings from education" gap began to narrow, particularly among college-educated men. The most striking transformation, however, occurred for black females. As of 1969, black females at both the high school and college level actually had a higher median income than their white counterparts. Yet, despite the considerable progress of certain segments of the black community, whites are still enormously advantaged by the presence of a racial minority which (together with other minority groups) handles a heavily disproportionate share of the less rewarded jobs and status positions.

Is there greater mobility anywhere else?

The evidence presented so far tells us a good deal about social mobility in our own country. But in order to evaluate America's performance in this area, we must also look at the evidence on mobility rates in other nations. The earliest effort at broad international comparisons of social mobility, that of Sorokin in 1927, reported on literally hundreds of limited studies in various countries, some dating back to the 19th century. While these data did not permit any systematic statistical evaluation of variations in rates, they did suggest that none of the societies or structures reported on could be described as "closed" or "non-mobile" systems. That is, all studies located substantial minorities who rose or fell in occupational status as contrasted with the jobs of their fathers or their own first jobs.9

Sorokin's findings and the many subsequent national surveys in many countries do reveal a number of international differences in social mobility with the United States having a slightly higher rate. But the differences are not substantial. Blau and Duncan conclude

that there is "indeed little difference among various industrialized nations in rates of occupational mobility between the blue-collar and the white-collar class." The most recent effort at a systematic quantitative comparison of data from 13 countries by Philips Cutright suggests that countries with a higher industrial level (and lower proportion of the work force in agriculture) have higher rates of social mobility for the population as a whole. The differences, however, are considerably reduced when comparisons are limited to nonfarm population. In any case, the variations are not great, and still serve to confirm Joseph Schumpeter's insistence that "class barriers are always, without exception, surmountable, and are in fact surmounted. . . ."

The Schumpeter-Sorokin thesis, which suggests that forces making both for the hereditary transmission of advantages and for considerable mobility operate in varying types of social systems, has received striking confirmation in a number of empirical surveys of social mobility in Communist countries. Notable among these is a highly comprehensive and sophisticated survey of rates and patterns of social mobility in the most industrialized Communist country, Czechoslovakia. Czech sociologists systematically compared their 1967 data with those gathered by Blau and Duncan in 1963. Zdeňek Šafeř, a Czech scholar, concludes that the "openness of both systems . . . is surprisingly great." He stresses this finding in the context of refuting "the hypothesis frequently presented in Western sociological literature concerning the 'mobility blockade' of the socialist countries."10 In other words, Šafeř argues it is not true that socialism means a lower rate of social mobility, that in fact its rate is as high as that under capitalism!

The comparability thesis is also strongly supported by surveys in several other Eastern European countries. As the authors of some of these studies note, their findings tend to reinforce the assumptions of the leading Polish sociologist, Stanislaw Ossowski, that the basic processes affecting rates of social mobility are structural—linked to the pace of economic development rather than to political or economic systems—and should therefore be comparable in socialist and capitalist countries. A Soviet sociologist, M. N. Rutkevich, has also noted that upward movement into the elite is inherent in the general dynamic of industrial societies, in which the "progress

of technology and culture demands an accelerated rise in the number of scientists, engineers, technicians, teachers, physicians and other experts...”; he explicitly indicates that these generalizations apply to America as well as the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{11}

In Communist countries, as in the United States and other Western nations, the growth in opportunity to enter the elite through educational achievements has seemingly led to a denigration of manual and peasant occupations. Soviet studies of occupational prestige and aspiration reiterate the findings of American surveys that the large majority of the children of the lowly aspire to high status. One Soviet scholar, V. Kantorovich, has even complained that, unlike the situation in the West, students in his country avoid working their way through school, because physical labor is regarded as degrading.

[...][1]n our country (and this is by no means limited to the ranks of the salaried professionals) people are prepared to condemn a juvenile—and, even more, the parents of one—who will work for pay... Abroad, children from diverse strata of society (except the elite, of course) regularly earn money by working as baggage-handlers, salesmen, dishwashers... and so forth. Should one be surprised that having been trained from childhood only for mental work, for study, the Leningrad secondary students... had decided that they were born only for the professions and not for any other kind of work? When life compels them to “become a worker,” this is taken as demeaning and even as a catastrophe.\textsuperscript{12}

Finally, Ossowski has stated that the “American conception combining classlessness with the maintenance of great differences in national income, which is contained in a certain version of the American Creed, is by no means alien to the Soviet Union and the People’s Democracies in relation to their own societies.” He goes on to say:

The Socialist principle “to each according to his merits” is in harmony with the tenets of the American Creed, which holds that each man is the master of his fate, and that a man’s status is fixed by an order of merit. The Socialist principle allows of the conclusion that there are unlimited opportunities for social advancement and social demotion; this is similar to the American concept of “vertical social mobility.” The arguments directed against uravniłovka [equalization or levelling of wages] coincide with the arguments put forward on the other side of the Atlantic by those who justify the necessity of economic inequalities in a democratic society. “The maximisation of effort in an achievement-

\textsuperscript{11}M. N. Rutkevich, “Elimination of Class Differences and the Place of the Non-Manual Workers in the Social Structure of Soviet Society,” Soviet Sociology, 3 (Fall 1964), pp. 4-5, 11.

\textsuperscript{12}V. Kantorich, “Sociology and Literature,” Soviet Sociology, 7 (Summer 1968), pp. 32-33.
oriented society calls for considerable inequality”—wrote [the American sociologist J. J.] Spenger in 1953. This sentence could equally well have been uttered by a statesman in the Soviet Union or the People's Democracies.13

What factors limit social mobility?

In discussing their findings, most sociologists stress the fact that, in spite of the broadening of opportunity inherent in the expansion of intellectual occupations and of higher education, there remain strong forces (other than purely economic ones) which promote the hereditary transmission of inferior positions. In the Soviet bloc, in Western Europe, in Israel, in the United States, sociologists have found that increased educational resources and access to more and better schooling are not sufficient to make up for the cultural situation of the family and the norms and values the child receives.14 A Soviet scholar, V. V. Ksenofontova, concludes that the “differences in career plans of workers and [upper-level white-collar] specialists are not caused primarily by material circumstances. . . . A much greater role in this matter is played by family traditions, particularly in the family's cultural level and general living conditions.”15

Underlying the relationship between family, class background, and occupational opportunity is, of course, the long-term effect of differences in learning during the pre-school years. The most comprehensive analysis of the American research literature on “school effectiveness” concludes that the “socio-economic status of a student's family and community is consistently related to his educational outcome.” As the summary states, “Background factors tend to dominate the results. . . . In fact, there is very little evidence that school resources in general have a powerful impact upon student outcomes, even rejecting the question of which school resources are influential.”16 Many experiments designed to evaluate the effect of

15V. V. Ksenofontova, “Career Plans of 8th and 9th Grade Students in their Realization,” in M. N. Rutkevich, ed., The Career Plans of Youth (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1969), p. 49. This translation of a Russian volume contains 16 articles, most of which contain statistical data from different parts of the country which document the sharp correlation between socio-economic background and educational achievements.
tutoring for pre-school children, of special classes, and of integrating students with diverse class and ethnic backgrounds have also been performed in Israel, with equally pessimistic conclusions. Additional resources turn out to benefit children from middle-class homes much more than those from poor ones.\footnote{Tessa Blackstone, “Education and the Under-privileged in Israel,” \textit{Jewish Journal of Sociology}, 13 (December 1971), pp. 180-182.}

The role of the family environment in perpetuating inequality has also been emphasized by French sociologists. A summary of discussions of the failure of French educational reforms suggests that what the “reformers had failed to perceive was that in their chances for success in school, middle-class children had an advantage over working-class and peasant children from earliest childhood, not from the beginning of formal instruction.” This is explained as follows:

Provided with books at an early age, stimulated by family conversations, taken to museums, plays, and concerts, impressed by the high value placed on formal education in the circles in which his family moves, and assured of financial support, a lawyer's son, for example, takes it for granted he will enter a university. . . . Because of his parents' low level of education, a working-class child receives little or no intellectual stimulation outside the classroom in which he spends only a fraction of his time. Academic learning is alien to his experience. He therefore has much less chance of reaching the upper levels of the French educational establishment than a middle-class child, even if all structural restraints to his advancement are removed.


In addition to indirectly passing on such cultural advantages, upper-income parents may directly use their income to buy extra educational resources for their children. In America, this is most apparent in the widespread use of private schools by the more affluent, as well as in the generous funding of public schools in wealthy suburbs. In the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, similar processes are in operation. In 1969, the Rector of Moscow University, discussing the advantages which some applicants had in gaining admission, pointed to the fact that “many children frequently make use of the services of private coaches.” In that year, 85 per
cent of those admitted to the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics at this university had received private special instruction before they took the entrance examination. This fact provoked Komsomolskaya Pravda (the Young Communist newspaper) to comment:

With the approach of summer, many teachers at higher educational institutions display feverish activity. . . . For the duration of the coaching “boom” some even give up their summer holidays. . . . They have made out a scale of payments for their services: the average fee is 5 rubles an hour, but the children of well-to-do parents pay more.

. . . Some fond fathers and mothers will go to any lengths to obtain a “guarantee” that their son or daughter will be accepted. Behind the closed doors of secluded houses, countless meetings and “confidential” negotiations take place [since some of the tutors are “prepared, on the basis of their connections, to guarantee success in the entrance examinations.”] 19

Inequality in the Soviet Union

It is interesting to note that in the Communist countries, as in the United States, some of those seeking to reduce inequality suggest the lowering of admission standards and/or the creation of special quotas for those of lowly origins who do not qualify for admission by competitive standards. A Russian scholar, V. N. Shubkin, who has played a major role in calling attention to the way in which the Soviet competitive educational system serves to maintain hereditary school privileges, also sharply challenges the desirability of formal ascriptive standards (quotas) as a means of remedying the situation: “Efforts to establish preferential conditions for admission to higher educational institutions for particular social groups, regardless of level of preparation, not only will not help to solve the problem but, on the contrary, may reduce the general level of education, which would be equivalent to holding back the progress of science and technology.” 20 Kantorovich also argues that inequality

19S. S. Voronitsyn, “Class Distinction in Soviet Higher Education,” Bulletin of the Munich Institute for the Study of the USSR, 17 (November 1970), pp. 42-43. This practice occurs elsewhere in the Communist world. An article in the Bulgarian paper Trud (October 20, 1970), reported that many “teachers, lecturers, readers, and scientists have been organizing private schools and courses. . . . A victim of this racket said ‘my family are at the end of our resources, we have paid over 700 leva for private lessons.’ ” In a subsequent issue of Trud (November 11, 1970), letters discussing the situation appeared, in which it was commented that “frequently the parents’ desire to secure a place in the university for their children appears to justify the expenditure of large sums of money on private tuition.” (The quotes from Trud are reported in ABSEES: Soviet and East European Abstract Series.)

stemming from varying family cultural backgrounds, such as the fact that “children will develop more rapidly in the family of a professor . . . cannot be resolved by the use of reduced entrance examinations.” Rather he suggests that “there is no reason why forms of additional positive help to able children from low-income parents cannot be given: for example, schooling in certain ethnic districts of the USSR is a year longer than usual.”

During the Khrushchev era, efforts were made to modify the egalitarianism in higher education by requiring 80 per cent of the entering students to have been previously employed for at least two years, and by making vocational training obligatory in all secondary schools. These efforts, designed to influence occupational choice by upgrading manual work, had little effect. The quota for those with work experience was dropped in 1965, ostensibly because it lowered the quality of higher education, but also because it was evaded in practice by many institutions. “Soviet educational authorities have pretty definitely rejected the idea that standards should be lowered in any way for the disadvantaged and the unprepared. If the drive for equality of educational opportunity is to continue, Soviet educational authorities believe that it must take two forms: equalization of the quality of primary and secondary education, particularly as between the cities and the small towns and villages; and special programs for launching the graduates of inadequate schools into higher education on an equal footing with other students.”21 It should be noted, however, that entrance requirements favor those from culturally privileged backgrounds. In a statement issued in 1969, the Soviet Minister of Higher Education “made it clear that the sole qualification for admission is the applicant’s level of formal knowledge. The long-standing ban (from 1936) on any kind of testing but academic subject-matter tests has thus far made it impossible to include aptitude or achievement tests as admission criteria.” The effect of these changes, as sociological investigations make clear, has been “some decline in the proportion of workers and peasants (in terms of social composition) among students.” Seemingly in answer to criticisms that such a trend violates socialist values, L. I. Sennikova argues that this drop “does not by any means signify that Soviet higher schools have lost in the slightest degree their distinguishing feature—their genuinely public character. Em-

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ployees and intelligentsia are also part of the people, the working people." 22

The degree of inequality in the Soviet educational system is considerable. Evidence brought together by MIT Sovietologist Zev Katz from the published work of Soviet scholars points to variations as great as those in advanced Western countries. The chances of obtaining higher education for the children of peasants as compared with the scions of the urban intelligentsia are something between 1:16 and 1:24. . . . If data were available for still more narrowly defined groups, such as the children of unskilled farm laborers and of parents belonging to the higher intelligentsia, the disparity in chances for higher education would probably be twice or three times greater. . . . A study of the average length of schooling received by children in the towns of Ufa and Orenburg, for example, showed that children of peasant families received an average of 7.31 years of schooling, the children of working-class families 7.66 years, and the children of the intelligentsia (broadly defined to include all non-manuals) 12.22 years. . . . A study of students enrolled in three high-prestige departments in Leningrad University in the summer of 1967 showed that the offspring of specialists, who are classed as members of the higher intelligentsia and constitute only 10 per cent of the population, occupied 60.6 per cent of the available places. . . . 23

In commenting on findings such as these, Sennikova noted: "This is a completely understandable phenomenon. Such higher educational institutions as the Medical College and the University are attended by large numbers of children of doctors, teachers, and the like, for among the intelligentsia these occupations are often 'hereditary.'"

The correlation between family socio-economic background and educational advancement means that much of the public expenditure on higher education serves as a "transfer payment" from the less affluent to the more well-to-do, and thus reinforces inequality. Such conclusions about the class bias of "free" systems of higher education in America were made in the late 19th century by two radical economic theorists, Karl Marx and Henry George. The founder of revolutionary socialism noted that the fact that some of the "higher educational institutions [in America] are also 'free' only

means in fact defraying the cost of the education of the upper classes from the general tax receipts.” Henry George made the same point when he commented that the University of California was a place to which the children of the poor sent the children of the rich. This proposition was recently documented by a comparative survey of the median incomes of families with children in different levels of public higher education in California (the university, state colleges, junior colleges) and those without children at these institutions. As anticipated, those benefiting from public higher education had a much greater income than those not, and the more prestigious the type of school the children were in, the higher the family income. The authors estimated that families with children attending the University of California received an average subsidy of $4,900.

The thesis that many publicly supported "free" institutions actually represent a subsidy from the less privileged to the more privileged has also been advanced in the Soviet Union. Thus Kantorovich asks "to what degree free services which in our country add 35 per cent to total wages and salaries, act in the proper direction, particularly 'to give a boost' to the children of the materially least prosperous and least educated parents. Which family—that with many children, or one from the non-manual category with but a single child—receives more material aid per capita from the free benefits provided by the society?"

Inequality and the family

As these studies by Communist scholars themselves show, the advanced Communist countries have been no more successful than the advanced Western countries in removing all major barriers to upward social mobility. In all the industrialized nations, higher education is an almost essential prerequisite for social advancement. And despite the efforts of many societies to insure that educational resources are equally available to all, everywhere lower-class children seem unable to take full advantage of them. It would be possible to offer a genetic explanation for this phenomenon, but such an argument is unnecessary in view of the enormous importance of cultural influences which are transmitted through the family. Recently

reemphasized by sociologists, the central role of the family in the handing down of social inequality has been recognized at least since the time of Plato.

In the *Republic*, Plato indicated that in the just society it would be necessary to take children away from their parents and have them raised by the state, in order to eliminate the tendency toward inherited social privilege. In the early 19th century, Robert Owen specifically proposed that all children, regardless of the class status of their parents, be educated from childhood in state-supported boarding schools. This suggestion was actually advanced by leaders of the New York State Workingmen's party of the 1820's and 1830's. In party documents they argued that since the social environment in families of varying wealth and culture differed greatly, the only way to assure that the children of the poor had the same chance for success as those of the well-to-do was to send all to public boarding schools. Writing in 1830, these early American radicals, anticipating recent sociological research, held that integrating the children of the rich and of the poor in the "common" (integrated) school was not enough. For they argued that the most important part of education goes on outside the classroom:

For our parts, we understand education to mean everything which influences directly or indirectly the child's character. To see his companions smoke segars is a part of his education; to hear oaths is a part of his education; to see and laugh at drunken men in the street is a part of his education. And if any one thinks that an education like this (which is daily obtained in the streets of our city) will be counteracted and neutralized by half a dozen hours of daily schooling, we are not of his opinion. . . .

Is not the development of social habits, of the dispositions, of the moral feelings, the most important of the teacher's duties? And what opportunity is there of fulfilling them, unless the pupil be at all times under his very eye and control?

We conceive, then, that State Schools, to be republican, efficient, and acceptable to all, must receive the children, not six hours a day, but altogether; must feed them, clothe them, lodge them, must direct not their studies only, but their occupations and amusements; must care for them until their education is completed, and then abandon them to the world, as useful, intelligent, virtuous citizens.

We do not consider this question regarding day schools and boarding schools as a non-essential matter that may be decided either way without ruin to the cause. On its decision depends whether the system of education which the people call for, shall be a paltry palliative, or an efficient cure; whether aristocracy shall be perpetuated or destroyed; whether the poor man's child shall be educated or not; whether the next generation shall obtain their just rights or lose them.
There are few reformers today who would be prepared to make a suggestion as radical as this one. Perhaps even more than the taking away of children from their parents, the kind of all-pervasive moral supervision called for by the New York Workingmen probably seems repugnant even to today’s most committed egalitarians. But it is necessary to raise the question of whether these radicals of the 1830’s did not see the issue more clearly and reason about it more consistently than many radicals of the 1970’s. For if one really wishes a society in which there is not merely formal equality of opportunity, but where class background has absolutely no relation to success, one must be willing to pay the necessary price. And that price would appear to include the practical abolition of the family, the suppression of varying cultural and ethnic influences, and a rigorously imposed uniformity in the education of the young. As the Communist experience has shown, the abolition of capitalism, at least in itself, is by no means sufficient.