

TWO WORLDS OF CHILDHOOD: U.S. AND U.S.S.R.

by Urie Bronfenbrenner

Russell Sage Foundation, 185 pp., \$7.95

To the accepted indices for judging a society's prospects, Urie Bronfenbrenner proposes adding a new one: *the concern of one generation for the next*. When he applies this criterion to child-rearing practices in the United States and the Soviet Union he finds facts and arrives at implications that will surprise some Americans and should disturb all of us.

The evidence that emphasis on conformity in Soviet education exacts a cost in individuality was, of course, predictable. Two other findings that Bronfenbrenner reports will produce some of the surprise. One is that the old-fashioned virtues, the absence of which among our own young is commonly deplored—good manners, neatness, helpfulness to others, civic responsibility—are being more effectively developed in Soviet schools than in ours. A more troubling conclusion the author reaches is that what we like to regard as the freedom we allow our children would be characterized more accurately as the adult neglect to which we subject them. The increasingly prevalent and visible consequences of that neglect, Bronfenbrenner warns us, are anything but benign—for the kids and for the country.

Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R. is much more than a fascinating essay on comparative socialization. It is a rare combination of carefully documented facts, an imaginative synthesis of cross-cultural studies, and a compassionate appraisal of the plight of children in modern society. All of this Bronfenbrenner then distills into a set of realistic proposals for improving the effectiveness of the family and the other institutions that shape children's lives.

The Soviet Union was chosen for comparison with the United States because primary responsibility for the upbringing of children is fixed so differently in the two cultures. In the United States that function is assumed (however mistakenly) to reside mainly in the family, with other agencies playing ancillary and auxiliary roles. In the Soviet Union, as one of their prominent educators put it, the family "is an organic part of Soviet society . . . the duty of a father toward his children is a particular form of his duty toward society." Not the family, but the "children's collective" is the main locus of responsibility for child rearing.

The word "collective" is obviously more than an apt label. From the nursery upward, by constant effort and con-

sistent design, the Soviet system emphasizes the individual's duty to the group. Competition is stressed, but to applaud team effort rather than individual performance. A pupil's superior record in mathematics, for example, is praised not because he has distinguished himself but because he adds luster to his school, his class, or his row in the room. Misdeeds are frowned upon not merely as evidence of personal failure but because they let down the "link."

Among the virtues of the American public schools, we used to boast, was their cultivation of patriotism and citizenship. Now, Bronfenbrenner tells us, the chief difference of the Russian schools from ours is their emphasis on *vospitanie*, a term not easily translatable, but meaning approximately "character education" or "upbringing." Its intent is the development of "Communist morality."

While many of the values and virtues promoted in Soviet schools would be as admired in Los Angeles as in Leningrad, there are differences. A poster widely used with Soviet ten-to-fifteen-year-olds illustrating the seventh law of the Pioneers ("A pioneer tells the truth and treasures the honor of his unit") bears the portrait of a now well-known pioneer of an earlier period, one Pavlik Morozov. Pavlik became a national hero and a model for succeeding generations by being martyred. During the rural collectivization era he was put to death by his fellow villagers after he had denounced his own father as a kulak collaborator. Now his statue has become a children's shrine.

One of the strongest elements in the Soviet collective system is the deliberate use of peer group support to reinforce adult values. When Soviet youngsters are compared, as they were in one group of studies, with children raised in England, Switzerland, and America, they were found to be much more concerned than their non-Soviet counterparts with such overt proprieties as cleanliness, orderliness, and good manners. On the other hand, they gave somewhat less weight to telling the truth and seeking intellectual understanding. They reflected, in brief, the relatively homogeneous value structure in which they grew up.

Recently, Soviet psychologists have begun to recognize the difficulties such conformity may obscure. L. I. Novikova, for example, approaching the



matter in historical terms, explains that earlier collectives operating under the unavoidable constraints of a developing society were required to establish a groundwork of uniform values, "common concerns and the civic outlook."

"Today," she says, "we have to discover how to create the kind of collective which will assure the most full and many-sided development of each person."

Turning from "The Making of the New Soviet Man" to "The Unmaking of the American Child," Bronfenbrenner compresses his observations and his uneasiness about changing American patterns into a succinct sentence: "*Children used to be brought up by their parents.*"

De facto responsibility for child rearing—and control over it—has been progressively relinquished by the American family. What is equally true, but less well recognized, is that neither the responsibility nor the control has been assumed by anybody else. This is not to say that the child-rearing function was ever concentrated wholly in the home. Children have always learned from many teachers, and only some of them have worked in schools. But the difference between the current and earlier scenes is not merely that today's children are denied the learning opportunities once found in shops, stores, farms, and neighbors' homes. What may be more significant is the lack of contact with a variety of competent adults. These are the people who were willing to encourage a youngster to watch, to answer his questions, even to let him lend a hand from time to time. At small cost in effort, organization, or travel time, most young people had available to them a range of "learning experiences" as rich in human values as they were relevant to the real world.

Without anyone's wanting or planning it, this family-centered community of interested adults has largely disappeared as an educational option. Even in school, children typically associate with one teacher, or at most a small group of similarly minded adults and a few dozen classmates all within a year of their own age. We are rapidly becoming a society segregated not only by race and class but also by age. More and more, Bronfenbrenner warns us, the vacuum of influence left as parents and other adults withdraw from children's lives is being filled by the age-segregated peer group.

If one consequence of adult abdication is to encourage reliance on peers, a second is addiction to TV. According to one study Bronfenbrenner cites, the average sixteen-year-old has spent 12,000 to 15,000 hours, or fifteen to twenty

months of twenty-four-hour days, before the flickering screen. Add the clear evidence of TV's influence on youthful behavior, and the effect is not easily dismissed. "Given the salience of violence in commercial TV, including cartoons especially intended for children, there is every reason to believe," says Bronfenbrenner, "that this mass medium is playing a significant role in creating and maintaining a high level of violence in American society."

The prospects for that society and most particularly for its children are unpleasant to contemplate unless we can develop better ways of socializing new generations. Fortunately, Bronfenbrenner is not content to set out the disturbing details and view them with alarm. What he plows up he seeds over. The most valuable parts of his book are his proposals for institutional reform.

As a good developmental psychologist, he proposes that we begin where we should—at the beginning, with greatly improved programs of prenatal and child care. His premise is irrefutable, and widely ignored in America: "The success of any program to foster the development of children requires as its first ingredient an intact child."

Given that child, he would encourage his development and learning through extensive use of "modeling," the systematic involvement of older children and adults in ways to stimulate and reinforce desired behavior. He would assign even young children real responsibility for tasks designed to serve the interests of a broader group. In social science jargon this is called emphasis upon the "superordinate goal." Less sophisticated old-timers will recognize the familiar notion that a child profits from learning, that the world includes more people than himself, and that to do things for others not only improves the world but can be satisfying as well.

Proceeding "from science to social action," Bronfenbrenner concentrates upon schools and teachers, the function of both of which he would change fundamentally. Schools he would use not as the temporary prisons for children they so often become, but as centers of action, influence, and help for families and communities. Given his way, teachers would move well beyond their traditional roles as instructors to become recruiters and organizers. They would assemble corps of other adults from many sources to serve as models for pupils and as teachers of subjects heretofore seldom included in the curriculum. The implications for teacher education are heavy, for Bronfenbrenner's teacher would be no eager amateur doing publicized good in a ghetto, but someone who knows as much about working with adults as he does about the nurture of infants and

small children. He would be a well-prepared, sophisticated professional, of a wholly new breed.

In the recent flow of books on education, among the horrified, the cynical, and the sentimental, *Two Worlds of Childhood* rises as a bright star in a murky sky. Make no mistake, this is one of the important books of this generation, and not because the author is a distinguished psychologist and a knowledgeable student of Russian and American education. Urie Bronfenbrenner is both to be sure, but, beyond pro-

fessional virtuosity, here is a man who sees through the current chaos to the values and the verities in which our possibilities as a people truly lie. "It is to these," he says, "that we must look if we are to rediscover our moral identity as a society and as a nation."

That, I suggest, is the "new educational strategy" we have been looking for.

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Guides for Students and Adults

Federal Dollars for Scholars, by Henry Toy, Jr. (NU-TOY, Inc., 1840 Fenwick Street N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, 200 pp., \$4.20 paper), offers the reader a beautifully organized guided tour through the maze of federal programs that provide support for individuals interested in education, research, or training. The 313 programs described range from support for disadvantaged unemployed while they are learning new skills to fellowships for post-doctoral research in medicine. An artfully designed "Program Finder" categorizes programs under four broad headings: 1) Restricted Eligibility (racial and national groups, migrants, veterans, etc.); 2) General Assistance (secondary school, undergraduate, graduate, etc.); 3) Restricted by Field of Study; and 4) Career Opportunities. Each program is described to make clear its purpose, who is eligible, procedure for applying, level of support provided, and number of awards available. Other sections of the volume offer a clear description of the Selective Service system, and a refresher course in the organization of the federal government, with special emphasis on those agencies that sponsor programs for the education and training of individuals. Altogether, *Federal Dollars for Scholars* should prove enormously helpful to a wide range of students and adults.

College Programs for High School Students, Summer 1970 (Directory Publishers Co., Hillsdale, New Jersey 07642, 195 pp., \$7 paper) offers bright high school students and their parents positive help in planning for fruitful summer activity. The guide describes 425 programs that will be offered during the summer of 1970 by 258 colleges and universities in forty-nine states. The programs range from short sessions, lasting only a few days, to those that continue for ten weeks. They cover virtually the whole spectrum of arts and sciences—some offer academic credit, others only the opportunity to sharpen already well-developed skills or the chance to explore new fields of interest. Nearly all provide a preview of college life that will be valuable to many students.

THE FIVE VOLUMES that make up the **Career Opportunities Series** (J. G. Ferguson, distributed by Doubleday, \$11.95 each) offer unusually attractive and helpful guidance information for prospective two-year college students and their counselors. Each of the five volumes treats a different occupational area: *Engineering Technicians*, edited by Walter J. Brooking (386 pp.); *Agricultural, Forestry, and Oceanographic Technicians*, edited by Howard Sidney (344 pp.); *Marketing, Business, and Office Specialists*, edited by Garland D. Wiggs (393 pp.); *Medical and Allied Health Specialists*, edited by Robert Kinsinger (386 pp.); and *Community Service and Education Specialists* (308 pp.). Individual chapters in each volume treat occupational specialties within the broad fields, presenting information about job opportunities, the nature of job activities, educational requirements, a typical curriculum, and a listing of the two-year colleges in the country offering training in each special field. The volumes are profusely illustrated with on-the-job illustrations that help students to visualize the nature and environment of different occupations. Both counselors and students should find that these volumes help to fill a long-felt need for career information. A special price of \$8.95 per volume is offered to schools and libraries.

—J. C.