P.S. to the NEWS
by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

RELEASE: MAY 20, 1980

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

IS IVAN BETTER EDUCATED THAN JOHNNY?

Would you believe -- that Russian students are ten times better educated in mathematics and science than American students? That is the finding of an intensive study of the Soviet educational system made by University of Chicago math expert, Professor Izaak Wirszup.

The mandatory math/science courses in Soviet high schools include algebra, geometry, calculus, physics (including an introduction to Einstein's theory of relativity), chemistry, astronomy, biology, geography, mechanical drawing, and many hours of workshop training. By contrast, only 9 percent of U.S. students take physics and only 16 percent take chemistry.

"The disparity between the level of training in science and mathematics of an average Soviet skilled worker or military recruit and that of a noncollege-bound American high school graduate, an average worker in one of our major industries, or an average member of our all-volunteer Army is so great that comparisons are meaningless," Wirszup said.

It is naive to think that advanced math and science high school courses are important only to those who will get college degrees in those subjects or engineering. The changes in military and industrial technology make it imperative for enlisted personnel and skilled labor to have good math and science training.

The Soviet army is highly trained technologically, whereas 6 out of every 10 U.S. Army recruits are below average in intelligence. The U.S. Navy is losing its ability to fight because of a shortage of skilled petty officers to run the ships.

Professor Wirszup said that this lack of skilled sailors is "rapidly approaching a crisis." The failure of the four helicopters sent to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran was probably due either to defective operation or defective maintenance.

Ever since the SALT I Treaty of 1972, which allowed the Soviets a 3-to-2 superiority in numbers of strategic nuclear weapons, Americans have reassured themselves with the comfortable belief that we needn't worry because we enjoy a technological advantage

(more)

over the Soviets. We can no longer afford such self-delusion.

According to Wirszup, "we are becoming a phony giant because of our rapidly eroding scientific and technological leads." He believes that the balance is already tipping in favor of the Soviet Union and that we need to retrain our entire nation in order to produce the skilled workers we need for the scientific/technological revolution.

That's the way the Soviets did it. They required all students to have an education in science and math which is substantially better than most U.S. college graduates have. All Soviet high school students study calculus for two years while only a small percent of U.S. high school or college students take calculus at all.

The large pool of young Russians trained in math and science has produced a major spurt in discoveries and inventions. And that inventiveness is being channelled into building military weapons rather than into consumer goods.

In the U.S.S.R., 97.7 percent of 17-year-olds graduate from high school, as compared with only 75 percent of American 17-year-olds. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics reported that not only are students taking too little math, but that one out of seven math teachers is not qualified.

Professor Wirszup is a director of two National Science Foundation studies, a "Survey of Recent East European Mathematical Literature" and a "Program on Soviet Applications of Computers Management." They were partially responsible for President Carter's February 8 directive to the NSF calling for a review of science and engineering policies in this country.

Another distinguished mathematics educator, Professor Edwin Hewitt of the University of Washington (Seattle), called Wirszup's findings frightening and asked, "When will the U.S.A. wake up to the fact that the Soviets, despite their frightful political system, are overtaking us in education and technology?"

Each year we will be paying a bigger price for our growing inferiority to the Russians in students well trained in mathematics and science. This is a major challenge to our young people, to our educational system, and indeed to our survival as a free and prosperous nation.

(end)