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Raising Patriots Rather Than Physicists

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United Russia is apparently planning to solve the problem of Russia's "brain drain" once and for all. Thanks to its proposed school reforms, there may very well be no more brains to drain from Russia.

The reforms presented to the Education and Science Ministry could be implemented as early as this year and propose that, beginning in the ninth grade, the school day will be divided in two parts.

During the first part, students will attend class as usual, but in the second, they will take part in "patriotic education." This will include an old Soviet tradition of sending schoolchildren to old prominent World War II battlesites to dig for heroic artifacts and other activities aimed at increasing the level of student patriotism through the prism of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's autocratic power vertical.

Meanwhile, the number of academic subjects will be lowered to ten, of which only three will be obligatory: physical education, general safety and Russia in the World. The remaining

seven will be optional. In other words, learning to love Putin will be obligatory, while math and English will be optional.

These reforms would mean that the ruling regime has not only destroyed modern Russia but now wants to destroy Russia's future as well.

A state's future success can be measured by how much it invests in education. Look at China, for example. The cumulative value of scholarships awarded to university students in China increased more than tenfold from $240 million in 2006 to $2.7 billion in 2008.

Russian schoolteachers earn an average of just 13,500 rubles ($450) per month, and high school graduates cannot get into universities without paying bribes. Take a look at what Russia's privileged are learning at the so-called foreign campus of Moscow State University's law school in Geneva. Their knowledge of international law leaves a lot to be desired, but they are very well versed in "extracurricular activities," such as holding drag races in their Lamborghinis and Maseratis that their daddies gave them as high school graduation presents.

Even with its obsession on Communist ideology, the Soviet Union was nonetheless successful at turning out world-class scientists and technicians. The fact that the Patriotic Education class is replacing algebra and Love for Putin is replacing physics are clear signs of a dying society that has no more need for the exact sciences. I wonder where the top graduates of Love for Putin courses will find jobs. Surely not in Rusnano.

United Russia claims that the Education and Science Ministry's reforms are needed to combat fascism. But education, of course, is both a country's best weapon for modernization and its best defense against extremism. Who, after all, is the most likely to organize pogroms against minorities from the North Caucasus and Central Asia — university graduates with degrees in physics and mathematics, or Pyotr Pupkin who only has a high school degree whose favorite subject was the Love for the Motherland class in which he learned how the Jews crucified Christ?

The only difference between the Kremlin's so-called youth policy and fascism is its ostensibly unofficial character. Yes, Russians did burn books in public squares, but that was organized by the Youth for Russia, and not by the Kremlin.

Recall how the pro-Kremlin youth group Stal translated the "Ten Commandments of National Socialism" written by Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, replacing "Germany" with "Russia." But that was a private matter.

If Lake Seliger becomes a place of formal instruction, if Goebbels' slogans are studied in schools and if books are burned in Love for the Motherland classes, how will that differ from fascism?

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