

LIFE

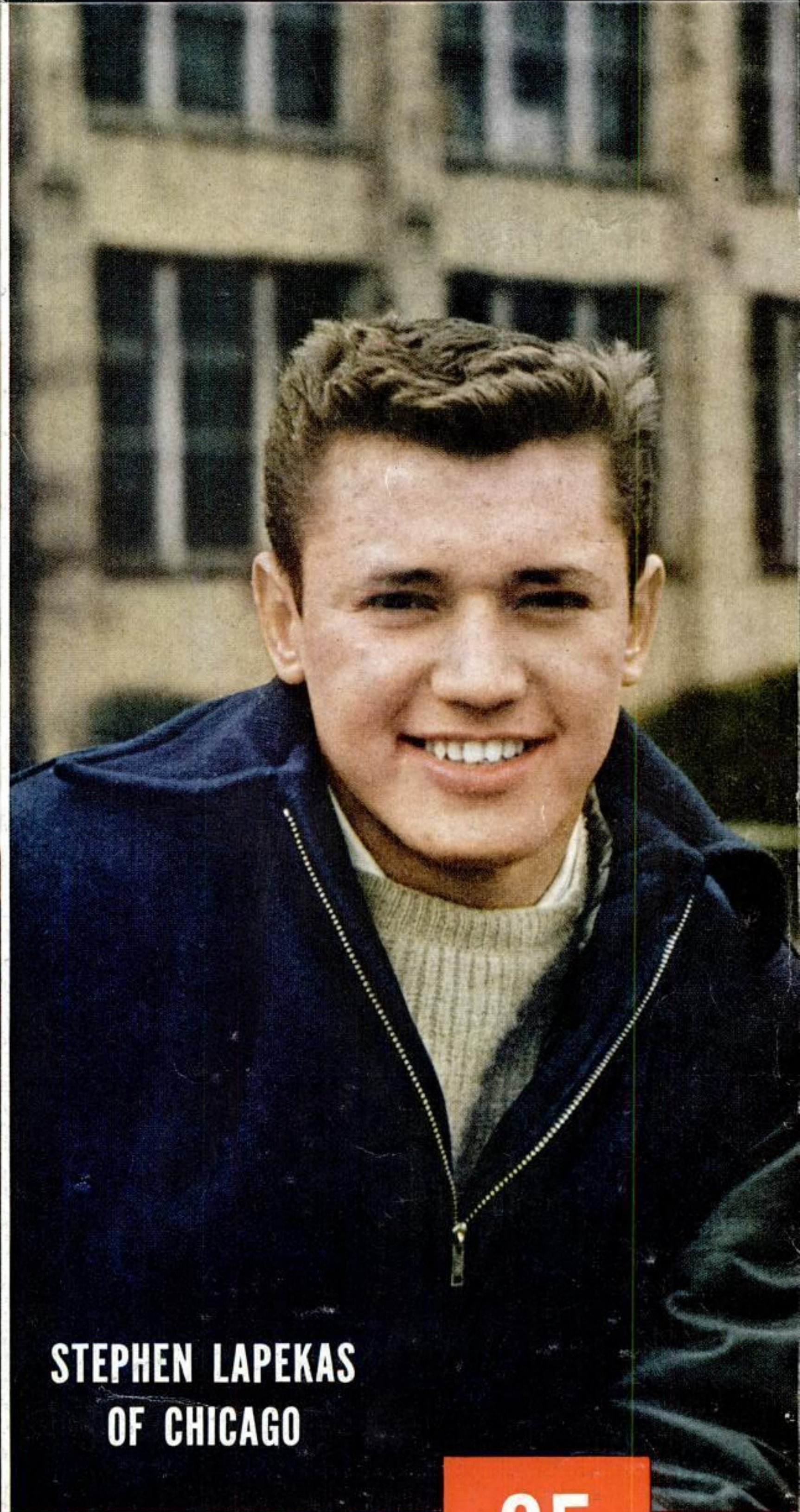
BEGINNING A VITAL NEW SERIES

CRISIS IN EDUCATION

EXCLUSIVE PICTURES OF A RUSSIAN
SCHOOLBOY vs. HIS U.S. COUNTERPART



ALEXEI KUTZKOV
OF MOSCOW



STEPHEN LAPEKAS
OF CHICAGO

MARCH 24, 1958

25 CENTS

BEGINNING AN URGENT 'LIFE' SERIES

LIFE

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CRISIS IN EDUCATION

FOR years most critics of U.S. education have suffered the curse of Cassandra—always to tell the truth, seldom to be listened to or believed. But now the curse has been lifted. What they were saying is beginning to be believed. The schools are in terrible shape. What has long been an ignored national problem, Sputnik has made a recognized crisis.

The only thing U.S. schools have plenty of is children. There are 33.5 million of these, sole owners of the nation's future brains and skills. There are not nearly enough schools. There are not nearly enough teachers. There is nowhere near enough money. The salient points of the crisis, amplified by Sloan Wilson on pages 36, 37, are these:

The schools have been overcrowded for years, but children still study in shacks and shifts and hallways and jerry-built classrooms.

Most teachers are grossly underpaid (some are not worth what they get). A great many, who know their jobs well and practice them with devotion, have to work without help, understanding or proper tools.

In their eagerness to be all things to all children, schools have gone wild with elective courses. They build up the bodies with in-school lunches and let the minds shift for themselves.

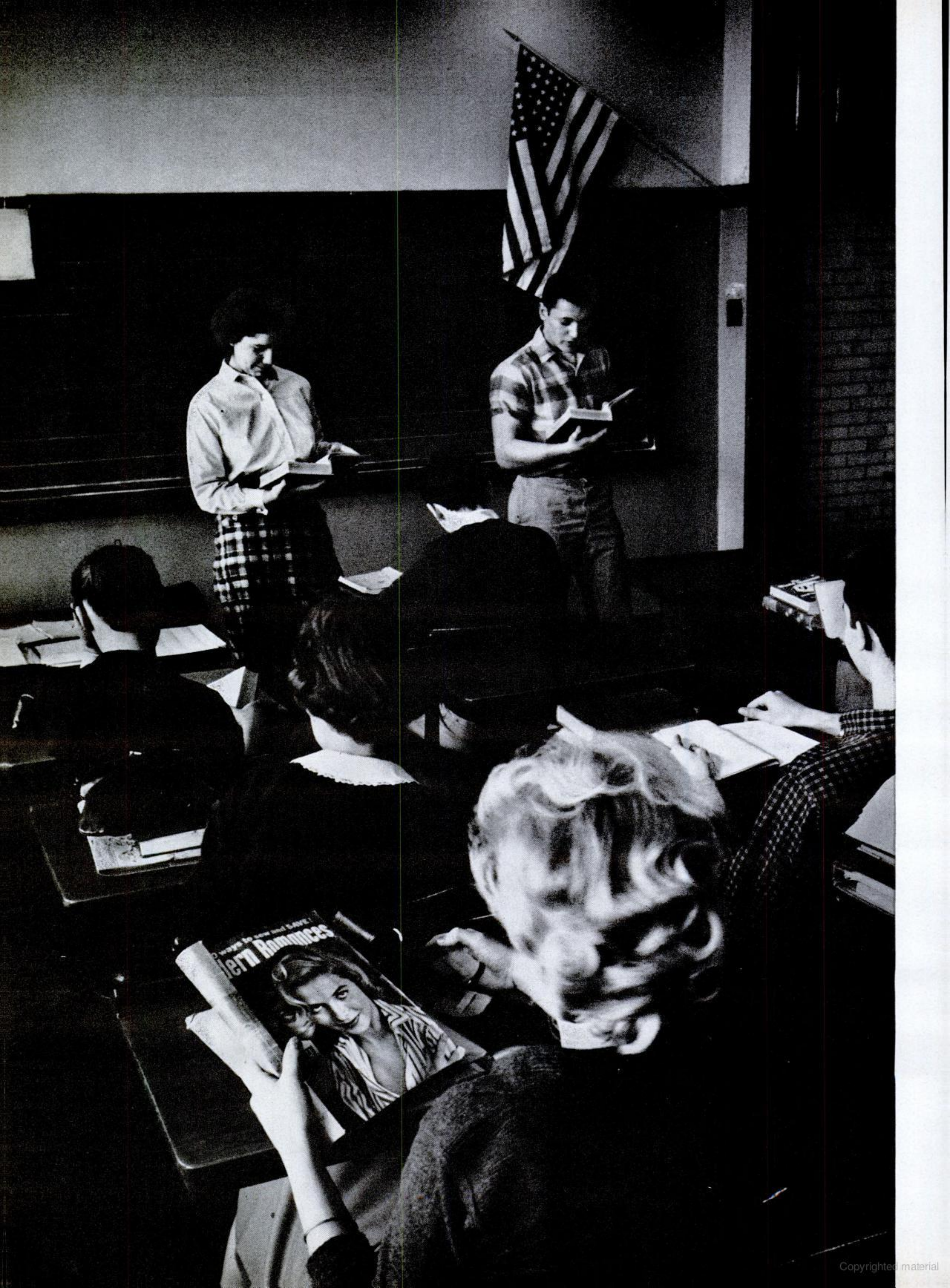
Where there are young minds of great promise, there are rarely the means to advance them. The nation's stupid children get far better care than the bright. The geniuses of the next decades are even now being allowed to slip back into mediocrity.

There is no general agreement on what the schools should teach. A quarter century has been wasted with the squabbling over whether to make a child well adjusted or teach him something.

Most appalling, the standards of education are shockingly low.

In this issue LIFE begins a series of picture essays that will examine the crisis in U.S. education. The series will limit itself to the elementary and secondary schools, the formative years, because if things go wrong then there isn't much the colleges can do. The first instalment, which starts on the next page, explores the field of battle for future brain power—the U.S. and the Russian schools. In instalments appearing in successive weeks, the series will show what a dedicated high school teacher has to put up with in order to stay on the job. It will look at the puzzling world of a gifted child who is nearly isolated by his own intelligence. It will point out some educational stirrings—new excitement about science, new courses, new subjects—and will give Dr. James B. Conant's blueprint for a good high school curriculum.





SCHOOLBOYS POINT UP A U.S. WEAKNESS

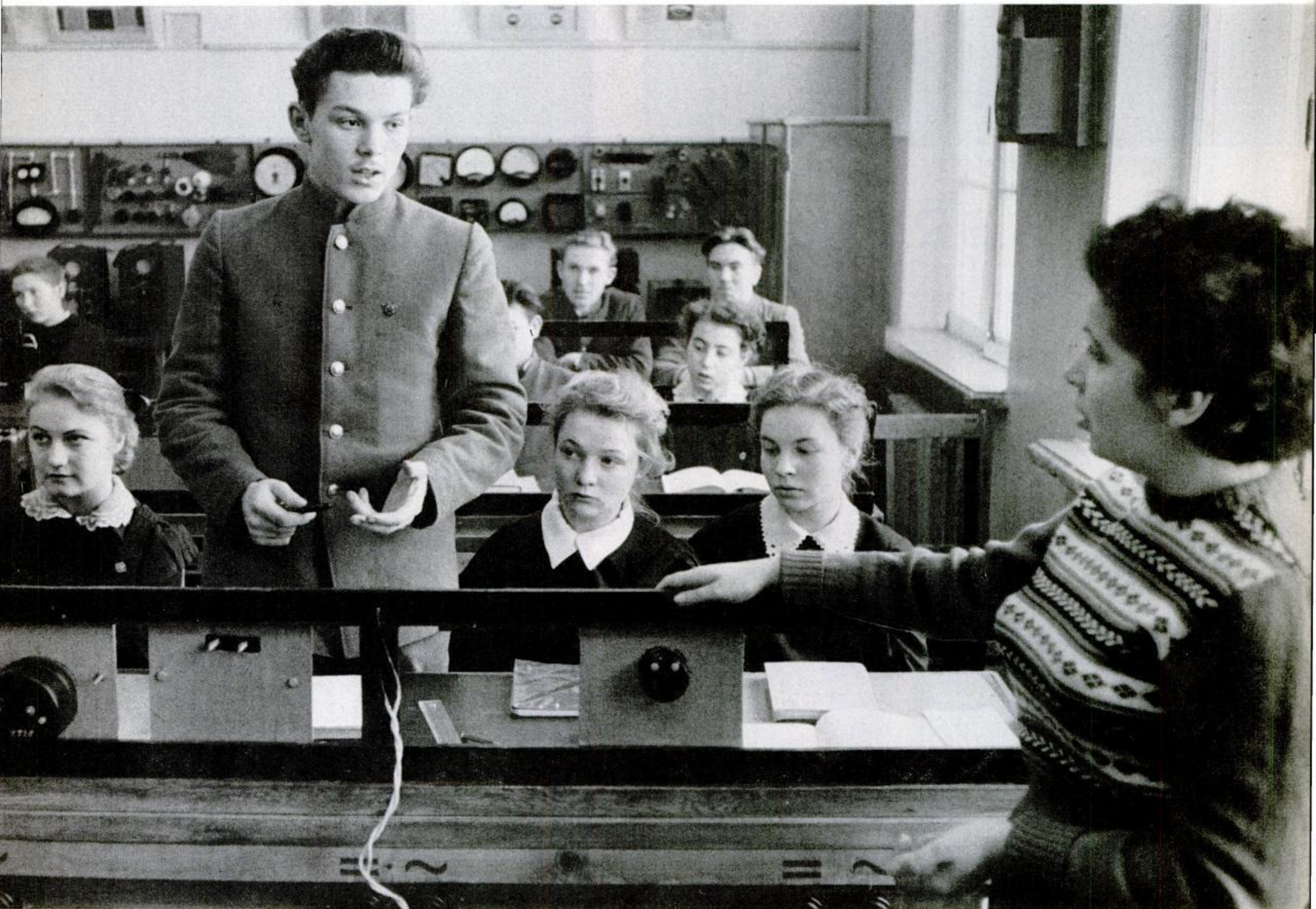
Two 16-year-olds, Stephen Lapekas of Chicago (*left*) and Alexei Kutzkov of Moscow (*below*), are getting what their own countries consider a good, standard public education. Stephen is an 11th-grader at Austin High, one of the city's finer high schools. Alexei is in his 10th and final year at Moscow School 49. But the difference in what they learn and the atmosphere in which they learn it measures the frightening scale of the problems the U.S. now faces in its public schools.

The pictures on these pages reveal candidly what happened in the lives of both boys during a recent school week. Stephen is an average student, likable, considerate, good-humored—the kind of well-adjusted youngster U.S. public schools are proud of producing. Alexei is hard-working, aggressive, above average in his grades—the kind of student that the Russian system ruthlessly sets out to produce. For Stephen, the business of getting educated seldom seems too serious. For Alexei, who works in a much harsher intellectual climate, good marks in school are literally more important than anything else in his life.

Stephen hopes to go to college after he finishes at Austin High but

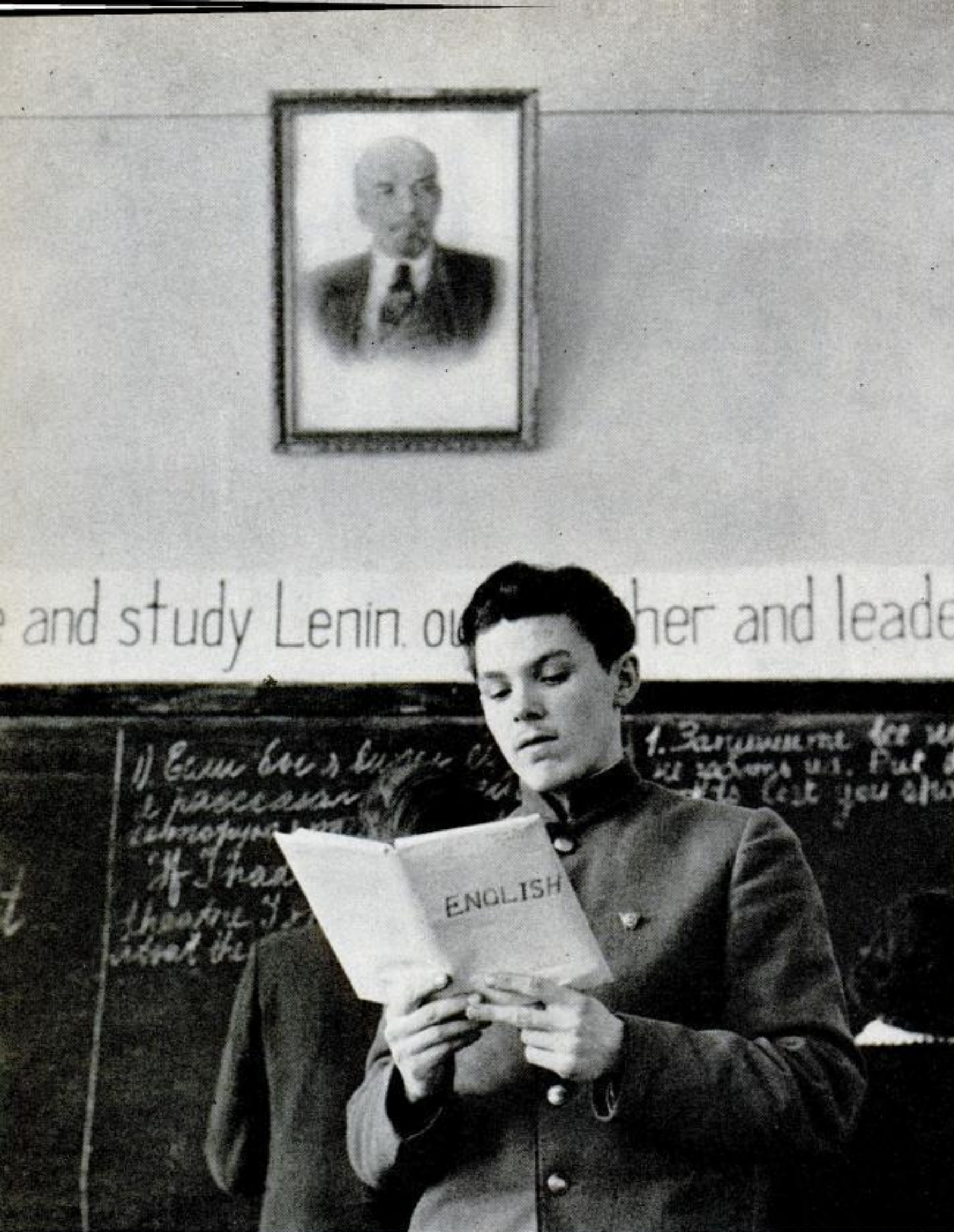
knows future success does not depend entirely on this. Alexei is filled with a fierce determination to get to college and become a physicist. In Russia, which desperately needs trained manpower, few can rise above a humble level without a good education. The entire school system has been geared to this. With a curriculum standardized across the country and with no elective subjects, the Soviet 10-year schools are like mammoth obstacle courses for the nation's youth. The laggards are forced out by tough periodic examinations and shunted to less demanding trade schools and apprenticeships. Only a third—1.4 million in 1957—survive all 10 years and finish the course.

For all its laxness, the system under which Stephen studies does develop flexibility and, in Stephen, qualities of leadership. For all its stern virtues, the system under which Alexei studies develops rigidity and subservience to an undemocratic state. But there is no blinking at the educational results. Academically Alexei is two years ahead of Stephen. As one example, he has read Shakespeare and Shaw in literature class while Stephen has only just finished reading Stevenson's *Kidnapped*.



← **CLASSROOM SCENE, U.S.A.** shows Stephen Lapekas and classmate reading from play *Victoria Regina* in English period at Chicago's Austin High School. They do not seem to have engaged the interest of blond student in foreground.

CLASSROOM SCENE, U.S.S.R. finds Alexei Kutzkov stiffly on his feet answering question in technical class at Moscow School 49. Pin on Alexei's school uniform shows him to be member of Komsomol, Communist youth organization.



IN ENGLISH CLASS ALEXEI READS ALOUD FROM DREISER'S "SISTER CARRIE"



IN CHEMISTRY LAB ALEXEI WRITES UP COMPLETE REPORT ON RESULTS OF

IN U.S.S.R.: ROUGH HAUL ALL THE WAY

In the austere atmosphere of Moscow's School 49, Alexei Kutzkov spends six intensive days a week on a formidable array of subjects. They include Russian literature, sixth-year English, fifth-year physics, fourth-year chemistry, electrical technique, mathematics, technical drawing, machinery and astronomy.

Russian schools put a heavy emphasis on science and more than half of Alexei's classroom time is given over to scientific subjects. But Alexei also has a firm foundation in literature and languages. He has studied all the great Russian writers, including Tolstoy and

Dostoevsky, and in his English classes English is spoken more often than Russian. Though the range and depth of the studies is impressive, there is one catch. Russian students learn a great deal by rote and seldom strike out to explore any subject on their own initiative beyond the material printed in their textbooks.

Though Alexei gets no direct political indoctrination in school, he is constantly reminded of his duties toward the state. Pictures and slogans of Lenin are few but conspicuous. The literature courses pay considerable attention to contemporary fiction which glorifies the Soviet

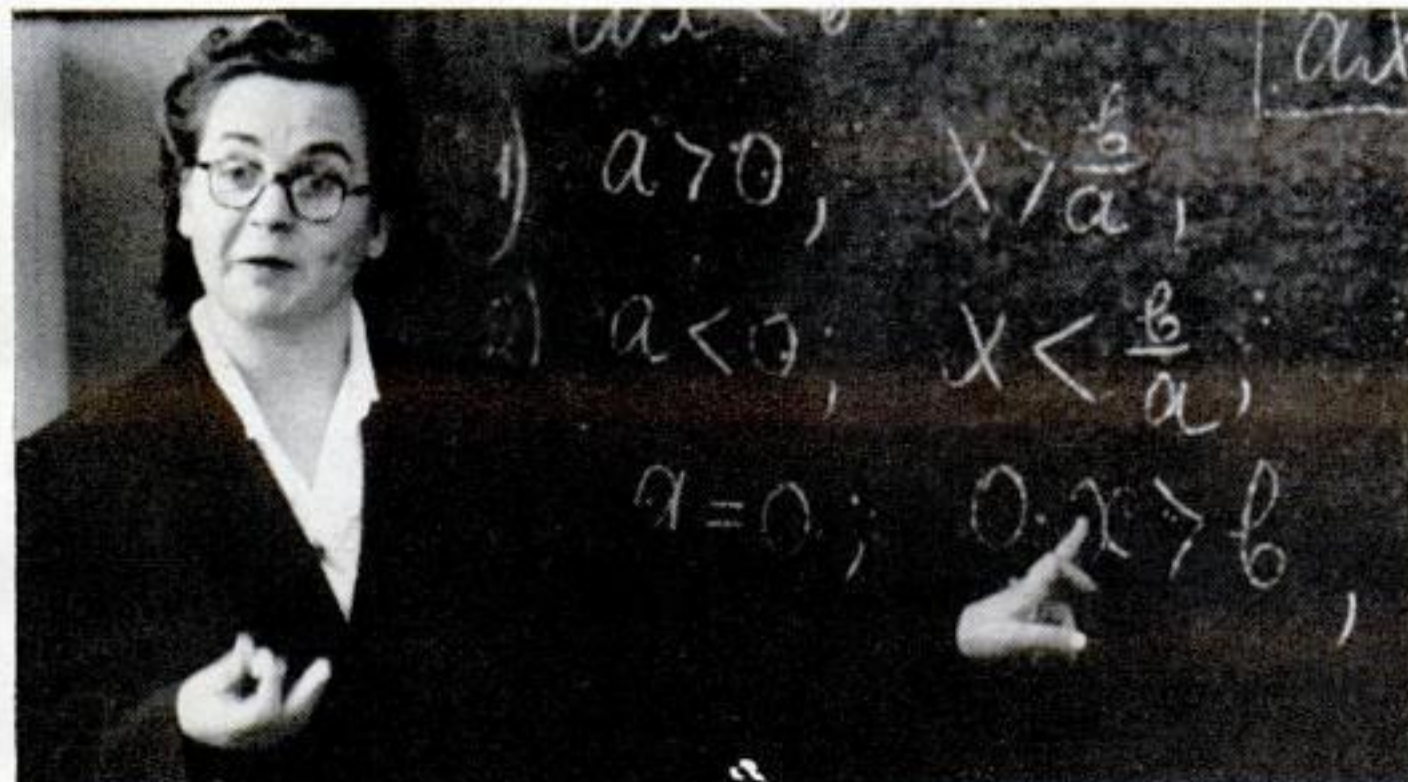
way of life. Modern history, which Alexei is studying this year, emphasizes Russia's feats in World War II. For a year after Stalin's death Russian schools stopped giving examinations in modern history, while the party rewrote texts to include Stalin's "personal errors."

Alexei's teachers (*below*) are well trained. They run their classes with a firm hand. Discipline has relaxed a little since Stalin's death, but pupils are still careful not to act up. If a student gets less than an A in behavior, school authorities can suggest pointedly that he reconsider his plans for applying to college.

SOME OF HIS TEACHERS



ALEXEI'S INSTRUCTORS are all women. Lydia Bremener (*left*), holding models of hydrocarbon molecules, teaches organic chemistry which in U.S. is considered too advanced for high school. Evdokiya Gusarova (*center*) teaches theory of

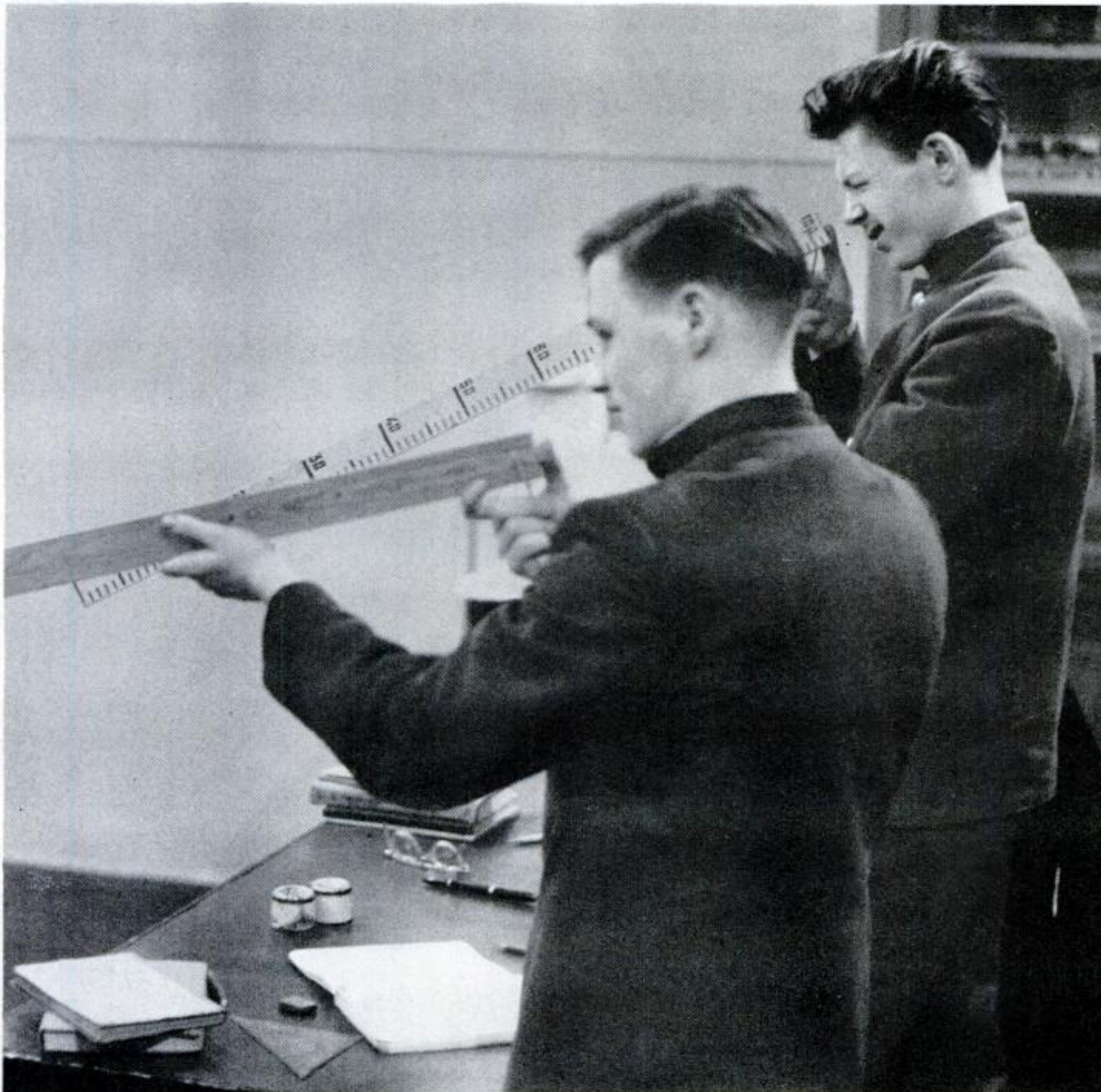


inequalities, a hard math taught in few U.S. high schools. School Principal Maria Skvortzova (*right*) also teaches history. A stern disciplinarian, she is an Honorable Teacher of Republic, has Order of Lenin and Order of Labor Red Banner.



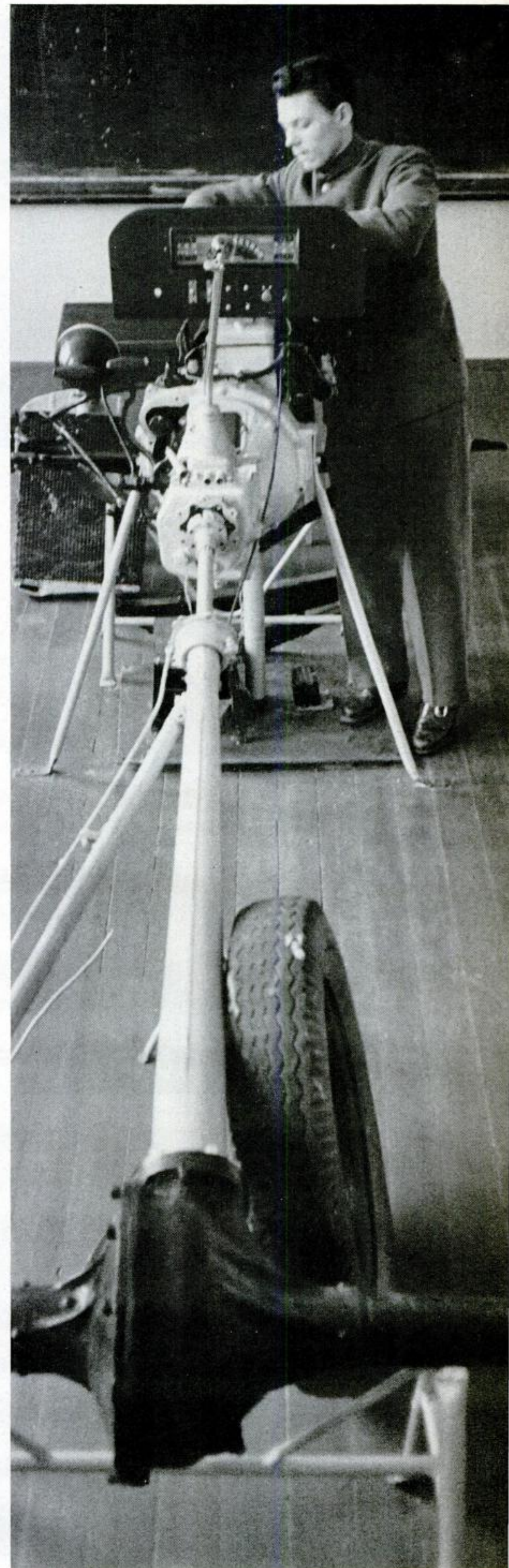


AN EXPERIMENT. EACH STUDENT IS PROVIDED WITH AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF CHEMICAL LAB EQUIPMENT



OPTICS EXPERIMENT in physics class examines behavior of light during an eclipse. Here Alexei (right) and classmate use rulers to gauge angle of

light rays in an artificial eclipse. Such simple equipment gives only approximate answers but does effectively put across the scientific principle involved.



SHOPWORK finds Alexei working on Gaz truck. Though he is college applicant, he must still take vocational courses because they are in curriculum.



AT MOSCOW SCIENCE MUSEUM ALEXEI (CENTER) AND CLASS ARE SHOWN MODEL OF EARLY RADIO TUBE



AT CONCERT Alexei chats with Oleg Koryakovsky beneath bust of Russian Composer Glinka. Alexei likes music of U.S. Composer Edward MacDowell.

A PURPOSE IN FUN TOO

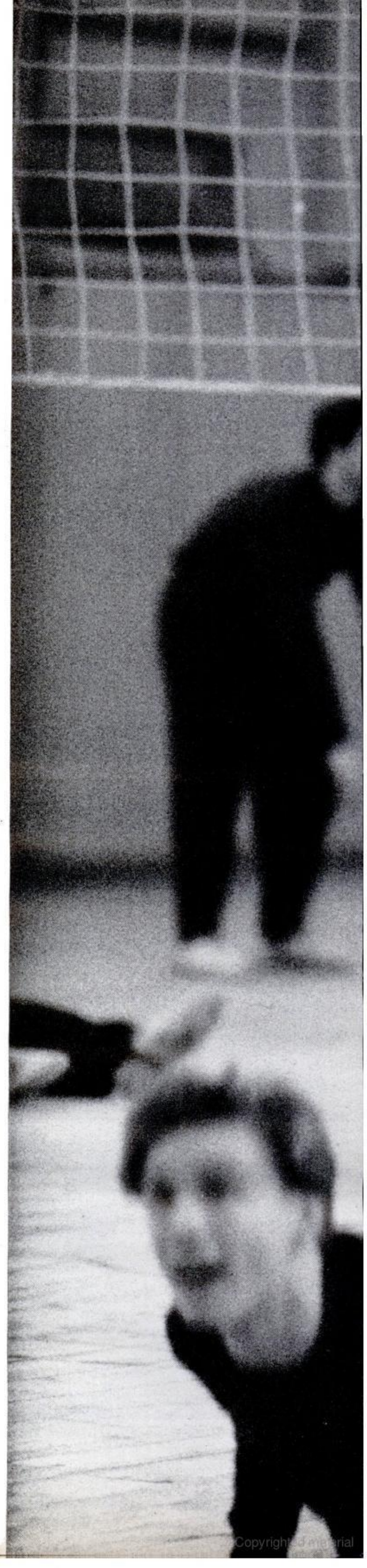
Outside the classroom Alexei keeps moving at the same determined pace. Five years ago he took up volleyball, Russia's No. 1 participant sport. Later he joined the Moscow Spartak Club, to which several of his schoolmates belong. Through tenacious practice he made the club's juvenile volleyball team which plays other teams in the city.

Late in the day, after his long homework chores are over, Alexei often comes back to school for a game of ping-pong, to play the piano for a party or to dance a quiet fox trot. His interest in girls, by U.S. teen-age standards, has been slow in developing. He has recently started paying hesitant attention to a pretty classmate, Marina Dubrovnikova (*opposite page*). But for solid companionship he prefers his best friend Oleg Koryakovsky. Together they spend hours over the chessboard (*below*) or go to concerts. Alexei's tickets are paid for by his mother, a cost engineer in the automobile industry. On more frivolous occasions he takes in a movie, as he did recently when he went to see a Finnish film called *Hilya the Milkmaid*.



PLAYING CHESS at Oleg's home, Oleg and Alexei battle through a long game. Both boys play well, and at the moment the game is even. But Alexei won.

PLAYING VOLLEYBALL, Alexei tensely watches ball as teammate stumbles during the game. An average player, Alexei capitalizes on his 6-foot height.





WITH A GIRL, Marina Dubrovnikova (*center*), and friend, Alexei reads Russian-English phrase book. They are on subway, on way to science museum.



AT THE PIANO Alexei plays a sedate fox trot for school evening social. A conscientious musician, Alexei finds time to practice an hour every day.



LAUGHTER FILLS AUSTIN MATH CLASS AS STEPHEN LAPEKAS LEAVES BLACKBOARD AFTER STRUGGLING THROUGH GEOMETRY PROBLEM. STEPHEN AMUSED



OFF TO SCHOOL, Stephen and Penny Donahue walk together through Chicago's residential northwest side. Stephen's father is decorator and painter.



IN THE POOL, Stephen practices his legwork with a kick-board. He specializes in the 40-yard free-style and practices 11 hours a week during the season.

BIOLOGY EXHIBIT of dead guinea pigs momentarily diverts Stephen (white sweater) and others who file past during study period. Exhibit was prepared





CLASS WITH WISECRACKS ABOUT HIS INEPTITUDE

by Austin student in connection with independent cancer research project. It was subsequently sent to citywide science fair where it took a first prize.



IN TYPING CLASS STEPHEN ADJUSTS THE TABULATOR. "I TYPE ABOUT A WORD A MINUTE," HE JOKES

IN U.S.: RELAXED STUDIES

Stephen Lapekas of Chicago starts out almost every school day by meeting his steady, Penny Donahue, and heading for Austin High. Ten minutes later he gets to the Typing II class, slips behind a large electric typewriter and another pleasant school day begins.

Classes at Austin are relaxed and enlivened by banter. For Stephen, who is taking an academic course, this year's subjects include English, American history, geometry and biology, respectable enough courses but on a much less advanced level than Alexei's. The intellectual

application expected of him is moderate. In English, for instance, students seldom bother to read assigned books and sometimes make book reports based on comic book condensations. Stephen's extracurricular activities, in which he really shows talent and energy, leave him little time for hard study. He is the high school's star swimmer and a leader in student affairs. As a result, though the teachers consider him intelligent, he is behind in math and his grades are mediocre. "I worry about 'em," he admits, "but that's about as far as it goes."



LEADING PRAYER as student council chaplain, Stephen opens council meeting with selection from Y.M.C.A. prayerbook. Students are hushed, reverent.



OUTSIDE HELP in geometry, Stephen's weak subject, is provided by Teacher Patrick O'Mara. Stephen's mother pays \$4 for one tutoring hour a week.



AFTER-SCHOOL THEATRICALS occupies Stephen Lapekas who, with Virginia Basile and Penny Donahue (right), dances *Rockin' Cha* at Y.M.C.A. Stephen spent four hours a week for two months rehearsing for Y.M.C.A. centennial.

AFTER-SCHOOL STUDY brings Alexei Kutzkov to the curtained silence of his friend Oleg Koryakovsky's home, a comfortably furnished Moscow apartment. Alexei, who seldom has a date, spends three to four hours a day on homework.



CONTINUED

It's Time to Close Our Carnival

Sloan Wilson, best known as a novelist (The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit and his forthcoming A Summer Place), is also a well-grounded critic of U.S. education. From 1949 to 1953 he was assistant director of the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools. He has also been New York Herald Tribune education editor.

THE facts of the school crisis are all out in plain sight—and pretty dreadful to look at. First of all, it has been shown that a surprisingly small percentage of high school students is studying what used to be considered basic subjects. Only 12½% are taking any mathematics more advanced than algebra, and only 25% are studying physics. A foreign language is studied by fewer than 15% of the students. Ten million Russians are studying English, but only 8,000 Americans are studying Russian.

People are complaining that the diploma has been devaluated in this nation to the point of meaninglessness. Bernard Leibson, principal of a junior high in New York City, recently admitted that while signing diplomas he suffers "great pangs of pedagogical conscience. Although Johnny cannot read above the fifth-grade level and Mary has barely mastered the fourth-grade arithmetic fundamentals, I have with the connivance of the duly constituted authorities helped to perpetuate the fiction that John and Mary have 'completed the course of study with a satisfactory record.' . . ."

Almost every conceivable reason has been offered for this state of affairs. Marion B. Folsom, who as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare is a top man in U.S. public education, has demanded fewer "so-called popular or easy courses" and "less chrome, less country-clubbing." Admiral Hyman Rickover, father of the atomic submarine, concurs, citing specifically such courses as love and marriage: "You can learn how to make love outside of school in the good old-fashioned ways."

The teachers are to blame, say some critics. Lester Vander Werf, dean of Northeastern University's College of Education, recently accused teachers of not being intelligent enough for the functions they perform.

The students are lazy, says another group. Surveys by Margaret Mead and by a group of



Who pays attention to teacher?

Purdue scientists have shown that most youngsters consciously avoid taking science subjects because they do not think a scientific career is worth all the effort. A junior high school teacher recently wrote that students nowadays "are being smothered with anxious concern, softened with lack of exercise, seduced with luxuries, then flung into the morass of excessive

sex interest. . . . They are overfed and underworked. They have too much leisure and too little discipline."

It is all the parents' fault, says a third group of critics. Dean Harry D. Bonham of the University of Alabama recently said, "I believe there is altogether too much parental laxity in requiring that the youngsters develop the habit of studying and doing their homework." Dean Thomas Clark Pollock of New York University's Washington Square branch blames the communities. Good high schools, he says, try to get rid of frills, "but too often their communities fail to understand or support them properly."

And finally the whole nation has been accused. A Dartmouth professor of chemistry wrote recently: "I am concerned about the easy living in this country. In the past, classes relieved from physical labor—the leisure class—always had some demanding ideal, bravery in war, social grace, or the responsible wielding of power. The only corresponding ideal in U.S. society that I can make out is being a good guy."

This is only a small sampling of the criticism of the schools that has been heard lately. The attack may seem unwarranted to many parents in conscientious communities whose good high schools regularly send graduates to the best colleges, but in the rest of the U.S. it is amply justified. And its cumulative effect has been devastating.

Falling behind Russia

OBVIOUSLY it is impossible to make sweeping pronouncements on the industry or intelligence of some 34 million schoolchildren and more than a million teachers. Some of the criticism is the inevitable blowing off of steam which always accompanies a democracy's efforts toward self-improvement. Still, the statistics cannot be disputed and it would be difficult to deny that few diplomas stand for a fixed level of accomplishment, or that great numbers of students fail to pursue their studies with vigor. Studies show that brilliant children in this country are nowhere near as advanced in the sciences as their opposite numbers in Europe or Russia. Why?

To find an answer it may be useful to go back in history and recall the way the U.S. school system developed. As recently as 50 years ago our high schools were almost carbon copies of their European counterparts. They offered a narrow selection of strictly academic subjects. The question of whether a youngster attended them depended at least as much on his social and economic station in life as on his intelligence. The age-old custom still held: education beyond grammar school was the privilege of the well-to-do.

Modern America changed that. This was the land of equality where no class distinctions were tolerated. If a rich man's son could go to high school, so could a poor man's son, and his daughter too. The schools began taking not only those who once would have fallen by the wayside for social or economic reasons, but also those who would formerly have been excluded for lack of aptitude or desire for academic work. It was pointed out that even the least intelligent youngster can learn something.

A new dream was born in America, and as a dream it was neither cynical nor naive.

Instead of trying to find students to fit a rigid curriculum, the schools decided to try to hand-tailor a course of instruction for each child. If poor Johnny could not learn chemistry or mathematics, the schools would not throw him onto the street. They would teach



Standards are lowered for average student

him woodworking, they would adjust him to life, they would make him a better citizen. And after he served his four years in high school, they would give him a diploma as fancily lettered as everyone else's.

There was a basic humanity in these changes and common sense too. It is true that even the dullest can learn something. Johnny undoubtedly was a better person and a more useful citizen after his four years of high school, even if he did not learn much in academic terms. And the destruction of social and economic barriers to education profited the nation enormously. The schools released a flood of energy and talent such as the world had never seen.

To run the new schools a whole new breed of educator appeared. They were men such as John Dewey and his disciples, who invented some of the silliest language ever heard (the "total personality" of a child was to be developed through "group psychological engineering"). The development—their apologists say the distortion—of their aims was disastrous in many cases. But these educators also emphasized some things that good teachers had known for centuries—briefly, that children learn quicker when they are led to understand and to enjoy their studies rather than simply being made to learn by rote, and that teachers should take the child's entire environment and nature into account in deciding how to teach him.

What went wrong?

In the first place, nobody foresaw how enormously expensive such a school system would be. We were already spending more on education than any other nation, but we were hardly able to provide the money needed for so much individual attention to so many. Educators as a result were forced to design programs for "the average student." Special courses were provided for those experiencing unusual difficulty, but the gifted students were largely ignored.

The lack of funds was only the beginning of the trouble. One by one the traditional spurs to effort were removed. With students no longer being held to a rigid level of accomplishment, report cards, as well as diplomas, became almost meaningless. Laws were passed

TO REVITALIZE AMERICA'S EDUCATIONAL DREAM WE MUST STOP KOWTOWING TO THE MEDIOCRE

by SLOAN WILSON

requiring even the dullest students to remain in school until their middle or late teens, and the educators found they could expel almost no one. Soon they discovered that it was less damaging to all concerned to let dullards progress through the grades with their contemporaries than to hold them back and let them disrupt classes of younger children. Automatic promotion, automatic graduation and report cards on which rarely was heard a discouraging word became the rule, and it was not one which inspired every student to do his best.

The fountainhead of the "new education" became Columbia University's Teachers College, which exaggerated the bad aspects of "progressive education" at least as much as it emphasized the good. This led in due course to the greater glory of the professional educationist and the increasing disillusion of many parents and teachers.

Unless a youngster arrived at school with a genuine desire for knowledge, there was very little incentive for him to study hard. And as we were to discover, precious few youngsters came equipped with anything like a real drive to learn.

In Russia and in Western Europe children had more reason to study. In the Soviet Union, especially, scientists and technicians were the new aristocrats, and the only way to join their ranks was through academic accomplishment. Today if a Russian boy fails in school he may face the bleak prospect of being a day laborer or serving in some other lowly capacity. No one in Russia can entertain the dream of leaving school early and making a million rubles as a salesman.

In Europe the possession of a diploma has continued to be a social distinction, and the educated man there is respected even if he is poor. And in both Russia and the other European countries the bright student, because he

drifting through school in search of easy roads to high pay and with the bland disregard of intellectual values which has affected many school administrators and teachers, along with most other Americans.

Upon arriving at high school today an American youngster is faced with a bewildering choice of literally scores of subjects, many combinations of which can lead to a diploma, and many of which are far easier than physics, mathematics or a foreign language. He can study marriage, chorus or "advertising arts." In some schools he must give time to the study of safe driving and the evils of alcohol. Courses in typewriting and dancing vie for his time.

Doing almost nothing well

WITH the accident rate and the divorce rate as high as they are, a good case can be made for instruction in both driving and marriage, and there is no real reason why a youngster should not be taught dancing if the school has the extra money and the pupil has the extra time for it. But all too often the school provides courses in safe driving when it doesn't have the money for adequate courses in chemistry. The schools are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the charge that in trying to do everything for everyone, they are succeeding in doing almost nothing well.

The upshot is that many a brilliant youngster finds that his school has assumed the aspects of a carnival. In one room pretty girls practice twirling batons. The sound of cheers is heard from the football field. The safe-driving class circles the block in new automobiles lent by an enterprising dealer. Upstairs funny Mr. Smith sits wearily on a stool in the chemistry lab trying to explain to a few boys that science can be fun, but who pays any attention to him?

It is hard to deny that America's schools, which were supposed to reflect one of history's noblest dreams and to cultivate the nation's youthful minds, have degenerated into a system for coddling and entertaining the mediocre. It is one thing to establish courses of varying purpose and of varying degrees of difficulty to fit the talents of various individuals, but it is quite another to run schools in which most of the students avoid the tough courses—and get away with it.

There is no point in trying to return to the 19th Century to find a cure for these ills. No one could seriously suggest nowadays that high schools should be restricted to the brilliant few, or to a small social or economic group. No, what we have to do is to recapture the enthusiasm for the great dream we once had, and to pursue it with a better sense of values. We must quit perverting it as we have in the past.

In the midst of the blare of commercial success we must recapture an honest respect for learning and for learned people. Abandoning that basic virtue in the first place was never meant to be a part of modern education and is part of no theory. It is one thing for us to glory in the tradition of the frontiersman in his buckskins who shouted "I'm as good as you are" to the whole world of bewigged and beribboned aristocracy, but it is quite another to allow a callow adolescent to slouch in his jeans and motorcycle jacket in smirking disrespect for a good and earnest physics teacher.

Democracy was never supposed to substitute license for discipline. Instead, it was meant to substitute self-discipline for oppression. But not even the most doctrinaire psychologists say that children can be expected to survive with self-discipline alone. Often they have to be told by both parents and teachers what to study and how to behave.

If we are going to start insisting upon honest respect for learning, hard work and good conduct, most of us will have to get tough with ourselves as well as with our children and the schools. A child who hears "eggheads" derided at home, and who sees his parents caring for little more than economic success and entertainment, can hardly be expected to excel as a scholar. And those who administer the



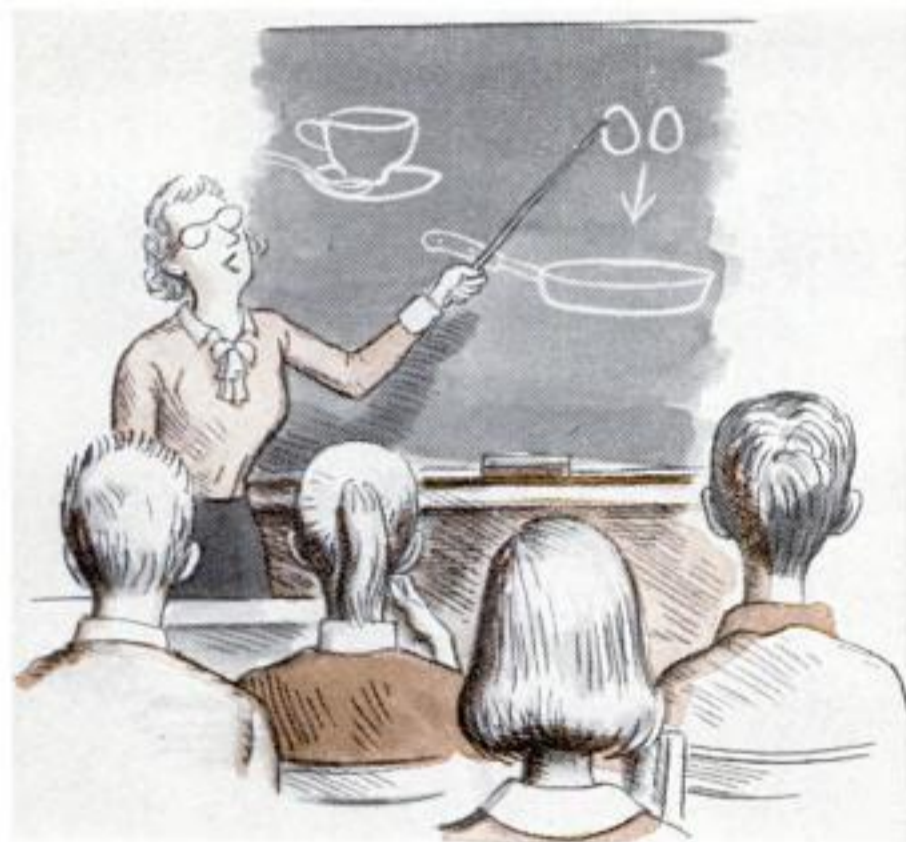
An eager student is branded a queer duck

schools cannot be expected to provide an education suited to each child's ambitions and needs if the money for small classes and good teachers is not forthcoming.

The sort of effort that is required is one which can only be expected in time of emergency. Such a time is, however, at hand. In past decades we could pride ourselves on the multitude of untutored geniuses who could and did devise the reaper, the electric light bulb, the airplane and countless other mechanisms which are now part of civilization. But times have changed. Space ships and intercontinental missiles are not invented by self-educated men in home workshops. They are developed by teams of highly trained scientists, most of whom must begin (and get much of) their education in the public schools.

It goes without saying nowadays that the outcome of the arms race will depend eventually on our schools and those of the Russians. It is just as obvious, if less often pointed out, that the kind of understanding between peoples which some day may perhaps make arms races unnecessary also depends in large part upon education.

The United States was the first nation in the world to provide schools for all children, and that is one reason we have prospered. If our schools fail, it will not be because we care too much for our ideals but because we care too little. We should not need the threat of Russia to be convinced that it is time to close the carnival and go to work.



Easy courses vie for a student's time

is very likely to become an important man, is widely admired by his contemporaries.

The American youngster who miraculously does arrive in school with an honest drive to learn finds himself having to play the role of "queer duck"—a difficult role indeed for most adolescents. Most of the public schools are simply not geared for him. True, he can usually find a chemistry or trigonometry course, and if he is lucky he may find a knowledgeable teacher who will greet him with open arms. But he must also contend with hordes of youngsters

NEXT WEEK: WHAT IS WRONG IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION