

The usual examining process is one in which a student comes to the teacher's desk, takes a piece of paper by lot, and looks at the questions. If he does not like them, he puts them down and takes another piece of paper. And on these pieces of paper there will typically be three questions, two of which will be drawn from these booklets which have been published in advance. The effect of this system is, of course, simply to produce a memoriter learning situation, in which the pupil spends months in advance of the exam memorizing answers to questions. Do you really think this is a significant type of learning or that it produces mastery of a subject and it is "his for life?"

So much for this. The truth is that the Soviet Ten-Year-School is not a challenge to the American school, and the newer Soviet Eleven-Year-School, which represents, as a matter of fact, a shift toward the direction in which American education grew, is also not a serious challenge to American education. The Soviet devotion to and support of education may be a challenge to us, but nothing going on in Soviet classrooms is a serious challenge. And we would not be talking about it were it not for politicians and persons who are seeking to have an impact on the general pattern of American education by political influence and headline-hunting. I therefore pass from this subject, which I think not worthy of significant attention at the Industrial College, to one which I think is.

This is not to identify the specific characteristics of American education--they are, I am sure, better known to you than they are to me--but to try to evaluate it. Take our system of education--the whole structure--the enterprise of education; public and private; higher and lower; pluralized as it is with its multiple goals and its fantastic diversity; does this system work? Well, how are you going to tell? You can ask yourself some questions: "Does it contribute to the well-being of an individual?" "Do people who have more schooling make more money?" "Is the nation better off?" And the answer is yes. In fact, you can measure it out and prove it. There is what we call a linear correlation. The more years that a human being spends in an American school, the more money he makes, on the average. You can prove it in terms of productivity of the person. And the thing checks out; it literally checks out year for year. Six years of schooling is better than five. Five is better than four.