

## Totalitarianism? Elementary Education in Leningrad, USSR, and Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Canada, During the 1980s<sup>1</sup>

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In the West, the former USSR is often characterized as 'totalitarian.' While definitions of totalitarianism differ, some include attempts by a centralized, one-party state to harness all facets of life to achieve a perfect society (*Columbia Encyclopedia*, [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)). It is often argued that Nazi and Soviet societies were varieties of totalitarianism (for example, see Arendt 1951).

Schooling is held to be central to achieving totalitarian and other state-sponsored goals in so far as it is an instrument for indoctrinating or conditioning citizens "in such a way that they voluntarily believe what the ruling elite required them to believe" (Schapiro 1972:36).

We shall examine the view of Soviet schooling as totalitarian by comparing and contrasting the school experiences of our two daughters in Leningrad, where they attended elementary school for eight months in 1981-82, with their previous and subsequent elementary school experiences in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Our methodology in making this comparison will focus on our view of the ideological foundations of Soviet and Newfoundland societies during the early 1980s. Roughly following Dolbear and Dolbear (1971), 'ideology' is defined here as a set of beliefs which provides answers to certain ques-

tions about a society: (1) Why is society the way it is? (2) Is its present form good or bad? (3) What, if anything, should be done about it? Ideologies may exhibit various degrees of inconsistency (see Bartels 1999).

The explicit central tenets of the Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation of the Soviet state were that capitalist exploitation had been eliminated in the USSR (see Afanasyev et al. 1974), and that the Soviet state, as directed by workers' councils, or Soviets, was a democratic instrument of working people's rule. Surplus produced by Soviet workers was supposedly to be used to insure the security of the Soviet state and to improve Soviet living standards (see Khorzov et al. 1977). Soviet socialism was theoretically based on the principle, 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their work,' and was seen as a stage on the evolutionary progression toward a Communist society which would be organized on the principle, 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need' (see Khorzov et al. 1977:393-406). In contrast, the ideological foundation of Newfoundland society centred on freedom of individuals to speak, to worship, to travel, to own as much property as they wished and were able to acquire, and to participate in a multi-party parliamentary electoral system.

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2004 conference of the Society for Socialist Studies in Winnipeg, Canada.

The latter, coupled with the right of individuals to own property, was widely conceived as democratic. This type of democracy, despite obvious social and economic inequalities in Canada and Newfoundland, was widely assumed to be the pinnacle of social and economic organization.

When we moved to Corner Brook, Newfoundland, in 1975 we were unaware of the extent to which religion pervaded the society and the school system. Elementary and secondary schools were administered by four Christian ‘denominations’: (1) “Integrated,” composed of the Anglican Church, the United Church, and the Salvation Army; (2) Roman Catholic; (3) Pentecostal; and, (4) the Seventh Day Adventists. Full-time teachers were required to belong to the denomination(s) that administered the school where they were employed. If a teacher quit the denomination(s) which employed them or, in the case of Roman Catholic teachers, divorced or married outside the faith, they could lose their jobs. Some did. Even though denominational control of education involved clear violations of human rights, it survived in Newfoundland because its retention was negotiated when Newfoundland-Labrador joined Canada in 1949. In the mid-1980s, we were told by the Newfoundland-Labrador Human Rights Association that legal challenges to denominational education under the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms were futile because the provincial government could invoke the ‘Notwithstanding Clause’ of the Charter. This clause (33.1) allows provincial governments to give existing provincial legislation precedence over particular rights and freedoms listed in the Charter.

Before we moved to Newfoundland, Alice completed teacher training at the University of Alberta. In Newfoundland, she applied for teacher certification but was repeatedly denied because she did not have a religious affiliation. She was eventually certified after telling school authorities that her father was Jewish. But even after she was certified to teach, her lack of religious affiliation insured that she would never get a full-time teaching position in the denominational school system. (This system changed after a referendum in 1998).

Our older daughter started kindergarten in

an Integrated (Protestant) school before her fifth birthday. At age six we enrolled her in a Roman Catholic elementary school because, unlike schools of other denominations, it would hire non-Catholics as short-term substitute teachers. At one point our older daughter’s grade one teacher asked her when and where she had been baptized. Our daughter replied that she had never been baptized. In front of the class, the teacher accused her of lying. Another time, the teacher became angry when our daughter asked who made God. When the teacher said that after death the souls of good people go to heaven our daughter asked why good people don’t commit suicide in order to get to heaven immediately. This also made the teacher angry.

At age six, our older daughter decided to join Brownies, a national organization for young girls that promoted allegiance to God, Queen, and country. Brownie activities at that time stressed learning to braid, sew, and cook. Our daughter found these activities boring. She had hoped to learn to build fires and go camping like the male Cub Scouts. She also resented having to pray before being given cookies. During grade two she quit Brownies.

After she finished grade two, we withdrew our older daughter from the Catholic school and enrolled her in a nearby Integrated school.

In order to forestall misunderstanding, we told our daughter’s teacher that we were not a Christian family but that our daughter wanted to sit in the religion class anyway. The teacher said, “Not to worry. The religion book is so bad it would put anyone off religion for life.” The local Baptist minister was behind us and overheard. He didn’t allow his daughter to take religion that year. She stood in the hall during the daily class.

In the year before we went to the Soviet Union our older daughter was in grade four. Her curriculum consisted of math (mainly multiplication and long division), English (based on a reader with short stories), art, geography (learning locations of the Canadian provinces and provincial capitals), and Newfoundland Culture. Pupils learned a lot about the U.S., but very little about Canada. Religion – i.e., Protestant Christianity – was taught every day.

Physical education and choir were taught separately by male teachers. School prayers were compulsory.

Our older daughter's teacher respected pupils and treated them fairly. Boys and girls nevertheless formed cliques based, in part, on the socioeconomic status of their fathers. For example, the children of doctors, lawyers, and businessmen generally played and socialized together.

Our younger daughter began kindergarten under an excellent teacher at her sister's Integrated school. She also joined Sunbeams, a pre-Brownie organization for four and five-year-old girls. The Sunbeams met in the basement of the Anglican church. The wife of the priest at this church was the Sunbeam organizer. The girls wore a yellow shirt and a bright blue jumper. Sunbeam activities included hymns, prayers, and various games that promoted cooperation. Our daughter recalls that the Sunbeam organizer did not tolerate cliques.

At age six, our younger daughter began grade one at the Integrated school. Her teacher treated her pupils fairly irrespective of their socioeconomic status or religious backgrounds. The pupils were taught to share and to be kind to each other. Subjects taught were reading, arithmetic, nature study, choir, physical education, and religion. The latter focused on the Ten Commandments, the Christmas story, and other well-known Bible stories such as the tale of David and Goliath. Religion was taught daily. All subjects were taught by the teacher except physical education and choir which were taught separately by male teachers.

Despite the teacher's efforts to promote fairness and equality, pupils formed cliques according to their clothing and toys. Fashionable toys and other prestige items were regularly displayed by pupils at 'show-and-tell' sessions at school.

Grade one social divisions also followed gender lines. Boys played with war toys and Lego. Most girls did not.

Our younger daughter suffered from eczema which often left visible marks on her hands and wrists. Repeated prescriptions of cortisone cream were ineffective. As well, our daughter had a misshapen thumb, the result of an accident with a door. Her eczema and her thumb set her apart, and some of the children treated her as infectious.

Our younger daughter decided to join Brownies and inherited her sister's uniform. The Brownies met on the school premises, and our younger daughter found that the cliques which existed in school persisted in Brownies. She quit within a year.

The mothers of a few of our younger daughter's female classmates attempted, like her teacher, to teach their children to treat others courteously and fairly. Our daughter always received valentines and party invitations from these girls.

When it became known that our younger daughter was going to go to the Soviet Union, her homeroom teacher told the class that our daughter was going to embark on "a difficult, exciting adventure." The teacher encouraged her pupils to write letters to her while she was in the USSR. The teacher hoped that our daughter's replies would allow pupils to learn about life in the Soviet Union.

We went to the Soviet Union to investigate Soviet policy toward indigenous peoples of the Soviet North and Far East (see Bartels and Bartels 1995). Our research was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and we were hosted in the USSR by the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

In Leningrad we lived in a one-bedroom apartment in a large Academy of Sciences apartment building on Ploshad Muzhestva (Courage Plaza) a few kilometers northwest of spectacular landmarks such as the Hermitage in the heart of the city. Our daughters attended School 105 which specialized in teaching English. It was about a half kilometer from our apartment.

We met with the principal and vice-principal of School 105 – two middle-aged women – before our daughters started classes. We were told that discipline would be strict in comparison to Canadian schools. As we left the meeting, we dodged younger pupils boisterously careening around the wide corridors during recess, while young girls in upper grades strolled by, arm-in-arm, ignoring the mayhem.

Grade 1 students entered School 105 at age seven. After eight years of compulsory education, students could leave school, but most stayed on through grades IX and X in order to prepare for entrance

exams to various post-secondary educational institutions (see Grant 1979). In Newfoundland, students left school after grade 11. There was no grade 12 at that time.

Teachers at School 105 elected two of their number to be Principal and Vice-Principal. In Newfoundland, Principals were appointed by denominational school boards.

Pupils at School 105 began taking English classes when they reached Grade II (age 8) (see McFadden 1985: 53). Most upper level classes were taught in English. Our seven-year-old daughter would normally have been placed in grade I, but since she knew no Russian she was 'skipped' to grade II where her classmates were beginning to learn English.

Classes started at 9 a.m., Monday through Friday, and finished in the early afternoon. On Saturday, classes finished by noon. With parents' permission, students could stay at school under supervision on weekdays after classes ended. Many students, including our daughters, took advantage of these "prolonged days." Students were conventionally seated at desks in rows which faced the teacher and the blackboard, as they were in Corner Brook. All students wore standard uniforms, as they did in the Catholic school system in Corner Brook. Girls' uniforms at School 105 were brown wool dresses. Black aprons were worn for most school activities and white aprons were worn on special occasions. White lace collars of various styles were hand-stitched to each of the girls' uniforms.

School uniforms had to be washed. Washing of girls' uniforms involved taking the collars off by ripping out stitches. The collar was then washed by hand and ironed before being handstitched on again. Washing, drying, and ironing of uniforms were usually done by mothers or grandmothers.

Boys wore blue trousers and a blue jacket over a white shirt. The trousers and jacket were made of synthetic material.

Many younger pupils went to school with a parent or grandparent. Many of the students lived within walking distance of the school.

Parents were expected to buy vouchers every week for snacks and hot meals that were served every day in the school cafeteria. Hot meals and snacks

included bread, butter, *kasha* (porridge), meat, rice, root vegetables, fruit, weak coffee with lots of milk and sugar or strong lemon tea, and fruit juice. If parents could not afford vouchers they were purchased by the school's Parents' Committee. The budget of this committee was probably provided by the local factory with which School 105 was associated. Milk in small bottles was distributed in 'prolonged day.' It was sometimes already sour.

A large proportion of our younger daughter's weekly classroom hours were devoted to English, Russian (eleven hours per week), and math (six hours per week). Other subjects were art (one hour per week), music (one hour per week), physical education (two hours per week), history, nature study (one hour per week), and *trud* or 'work' (two hours per week), which involved, among other things, learning to operate a treadle sewing machine and cleaning the classroom. This included mopping floors and washing wood surfaces.

When our younger daughter started school her eczema was very bad. We were told to take her to a doctor at a children's polyclinic in our neighbourhood. The doctor, a woman, told us how to determine whether the eczema was caused by something in our daughter's diet. A bright-green disinfectant and coal tar cream were prescribed. The doctor also prescribed daily ultraviolet treatments for some weeks at the local polyclinic. All Soviet polyclinics were state-funded. There were no user-fees, and the state paid for all prescribed drugs. In Newfoundland, the state did not pay for prescription drugs for children, although medicare would have covered visits to the doctor.

Soon after our younger daughter started treatments, her eczema disappeared. It didn't come back for a couple of years. No treatment for eczema that our daughter received in Canada was as effective as the treatment that she received in the former Soviet Union.

The primary instrument of political-cultural socialization for younger pupils at School 105 was the Young Octobrists, a country-wide organization which all pupils joined when they entered elementary school. The major pedagogical focus of the Young Octobrist was Lenin's childhood. The Young

Octobrist badge featured a profile of Lenin as a child. Pupils were taught that Lenin received top marks in school on the Soviet/Russian scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), that he respected and helped his parents, that he helped others, and that he worked for a better society. Young Octobrists were taught to emulate him. Our daughter's homeroom teacher supervised Young Octobrist discussions about student conduct and discipline and pupils took these discussions very seriously.

Pupils were taught about the 900-day World War II siege of Leningrad with special emphasis on the hardships suffered by children. Stories were told of cases where adults starved because they gave their meager food rations to children. (Over 300,000 citizens of Leningrad died during the siege). There was a small statue in a meeting room of a School 105 alumnus who had died heroically while fighting the invaders. Pupils were taught about Nazi atrocities. As well, they were taught that conditions for most people were not good during Tsarist times and that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 **was therefore necessary**. They were also told about atrocities committed by the Whites during the Civil War (1918-20).

Lower level pupils were not explicitly taught that capitalism involved 'exploitation,' but there seemed to be an awareness that conditions in the West were not always good. When it became known that two sisters who attended School 105 were going to emigrate to the U.S., several schoolmates questioned our daughters about conditions there. Would the emigrés be safe in a country where everyone had a gun? The Soviet pupils had heard about high U.S. crime rates, but didn't seem to understand the concept of 'safe areas' and 'unsafe areas' which are largely tied to income differentials in North America.

When a pupil at School 105 received low marks or behaved badly, their parents could be given paid leave from work to discuss their child's problems with the school principal. We saw parents close to tears in such meetings. Parents in Corner Brook were not given paid leave from work to meet with their children's teachers or school administrators.

Despite teachers' efforts to instill a sense of social responsibility in pupils, unpleasant incidents sometimes occurred. Our younger daughter's winter jacket,

purchased in Canada, could be clearly distinguished from the other children's jackets. One day it was repeatedly slashed with a sharp instrument while it hung on a peg outside her classroom, presumably by another student. We never found out who did this, or why. But the teachers were very concerned and had the coat repaired.

Gender roles were traditional. Male students were expected to be rambunctious and unscholarly while female students were expected to be studious and polite. The teacher often chided the boys to match the high grades of the girls. There was, however, a great deal of solidarity among female pupils. When a boy in our younger daughter's class called her an "American pig," he was scolded and humiliated by the girls. (Our daughter pointed out that she was Canadian, but many people did not seem to understand the difference between Canada and the USA.).

Students at School 105 were taught about civil defense. The teacher used our younger daughter as a model to demonstrate the use of gas masks to the class. Our daughter found this terrifying. In retrospect, she suspects that the teacher was trying to show other pupils that, even though our daughter was from North America, she was equally at risk with other students from an attack by the USA on the USSR.

Because our younger daughter did not know Russian when she entered school, she could not understand what was going on. Her teacher did not stop her when she sometimes wandered out of class in order to visit the school nurse whom she liked a lot. By Christmas, however, our daughter spoke Russian well and participated fully in school activities and classes. She did well in art, and we were told that she should, if we were staying another year, attend the special school for art.

The situation of our ten-year-old daughter was quite different. She entered School 105 in Grade V and had different teachers for math, history, art, English, Russian, physical education, music, and *trud* ('work'). She was not expected to keep up in all classes because she did not know Russian. Also, because we were returning to Newfoundland she was tutored by her mother at home in math according to the

requirements of Newfoundland school curriculum. Math was taught at a relatively high level at School 105 in comparison to the level of math taught at our children's elementary school in Corner Brook.

Topics covered in our older daughter's history classes (two hours per week) included the Bolshevik Revolution. English classes (six hours per week) focussed on grammar and vocabulary exercises and simple stories. The mathematics classes (six hours per week) covered topics that were far in advance of topics covered at an equivalent grade level in Newfoundland. In art classes (one hour per week) pupils were taught how to create realistic, three-dimensional representations with pencils or water colours. In physical education classes (two hours per week), students did calisthenics and learned rope-climbing. Six hours per week were devoted to Russian. In 'work' classes (two hours per week) female students were taught to sew with treadle machines. Boys learned metalwork and woodwork, including welding.

During "prolonged day," our daughter and several other students who remained at school were given weekly piano lessons by the music teacher, a woman.

In the first week of school, our daughter made three friends who remained close to her throughout our stay. Two were Russian and the third was of Indonesian descent. They communicated in a sort of English-Russian pidgin.

All of our children's classmates were very curious about Western toys and eager to share their toys with our daughters. Rarely a day went by without at least one gift coming home.

A boy in our older daughter's classes once called her a capitalist. This was intended as an insult. Our daughter angrily protested to her friends and to her teacher. The teacher told the boy and the rest of the class that our daughter was "red."

There was much serious discussion among students and teachers when our older daughter asked to join the Young Pioneers, the country-wide organization which students entered in Grade IV. The discussion, in which we were included, focused on the question of whether a non-Soviet student should be allowed to join. It was eventually agreed that she could join, but she was exempted from repeating the

part of the Pioneer oath that enjoined loyalty to the Soviet Union. At the school ceremony where she was inducted, she swore "to live, learn, and struggle as the great Lenin bade us and as the Communist Party teaches us" (Grant 1979:73). After taking the oath, she was presented with her red Pioneer scarf.

Young Pioneer activities included organizing school assemblies, visiting war veterans, trips to museums, parties at "Pioneer Palaces," and attending summer camps that were supported by various productive enterprises, etc. (Grant 1979: 74-75). The Young Pioneer slogan was, "Always prepared," very similar to the slogan of the Boy Scouts in Canada.

Young Pioneer activities which our daughters attended included a New Year's celebration at a Pioneer Palace. New Year's celebrations in Leningrad were similar to Christmas celebrations in Newfoundland. In both places there were decorated trees, coloured lights, parties, and gifts for children.

We are not sure whether puppet plays and ballets for children which our children attended were sponsored by the Young Pioneers.

The Young Pioneer Code of Conduct included the following tenets: "A Pioneer loves his motherland and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; a Pioneer honours the memory of those who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom and for the prosperity of the Soviet motherland; a Pioneer is friendly to children of all countries; a Pioneer learns well; a Pioneer is polite and well disciplined" (Grant 1979:77).

In retrospect, our daughter feels that students who were seen by teachers as exemplary Young Pioneers were favoured over students who were not. She feels that this sometimes precluded marginal students from fulfilling their potential. She also feels, however, that this categorization was not based on the wealth or status of students' families.

Our older daughter and her classmates did not like their English teacher, a Russian woman who humiliated students and made them cry when they did not do well. In contrast, the grade VI English teacher, another Russian woman, was friendly and helpful.

Our older daughter felt that her classmates, particularly the girls, were generally friendly and pro-

tective toward her. When our daughter once stayed at home from school with a minor illness, her three friends visited our flat and anxiously asked where she was.

Children with infectious illnesses such as sore throats were not permitted to attend school, and doctors made house calls to examine them. This was intended to prevent illnesses from spreading. Parents with sick children at home were eligible for paid leave from work. Public service announcements on TV cautioned people who were sick not to go to work. These practices were absent in Corner Brook.

As in the lower grades, classes in Grade V were orderly and quiet. But before school, between classes, and after school, there was mayhem as younger children boisterously ran or played games in the wide school corridors. Young Pioneers and older students were supposed to insure safety in the corridors, but this was not always possible. Our older daughter told us that a large boy in her class broke the collarbone of a smaller boy in a fight. The offender was kept home from school for a few days and his classmates, including our older daughter, were asked to decide how to deal with him. The students initially proposed expelling him permanently from the Young Pioneers. This was regarded as a particularly harsh punishment. Under the guidance of teachers, students eventually decided that the offender would not be allowed to participate in Pioneer activities until he had atoned for his offense by doing “something good.” Within a few weeks, it had all blown over.

Our daughter and one of her Russian school friends agreed, without telling us, that a hamster would be given to our daughter. The Russian girl brought the animal to school in a box. While the hamster was at school it escaped, and the teachers and students had to conduct a search for it. The teachers did not like having the rodent at school and were anxious to have it found and removed. Our younger daughter found the hamster in a closet and was roundly praised by her classmates and the teachers. When we arrived we were greeted by many teachers and students who wanted to see if our daughter could keep the pet. We could hardly refuse in front of so many witnesses, especially when the girl who gave it to her promised to take it back when we left to go back to Canada.

Our older daughter’s friends often visited our flat, and she was sometimes invited to her friends’ homes. Our younger daughter and her friends didn’t see much of each other outside of school and prolonged day.

When our older daughter returned to Newfoundland in 1982 she entered grade six in an Integrated elementary school. Our daughter felt that she was liked and taken seriously by the teacher, a woman who taught English, science, religion, and social studies.

Math was taught by the male Vice-Principal. Choir and physical education were taught by different male instructors. Our older daughter did exceptionally well in math that year, so perhaps some of the math classes at her Leningrad school had rubbed off.

Student cliques based on wealth and status of parents still existed, and our daughter felt excluded from them. Her journey to the USSR made her ‘weird,’ and some of the male students ‘jokingly’ called her a ‘Commie.’ Only one girl was curious about her life in the USSR.

In class, the Vice-Principal once asked our daughter what she thought of life in the USSR. She said that she had liked it. The Vice-Principal said, “You’ll have to tell us about it sometime.” Our daughter suspected that he would never ask her about it again, and he didn’t.

When we returned to Newfoundland, our younger daughter entered grade three in the same Integrated elementary school attended by her sister. Her teacher was a young woman who taught science, religion, English, math, and history. Choir and physical education were taught separately by males.

The teacher was very religious. Our daughter once dropped a thumbtack in the classroom, and exclaimed, “God!” The teacher angrily asked who had taken “the Lord’s name in vain.” She ceased to be angry when she realized that the culprit didn’t know that she had ‘sworn.’ Pupils were once asked in class to draw a picture of God for a test in religion class. When our daughter, whose grandfather is Jewish, said that Jews are not supposed to make pictures of God, the teacher told her to be quiet and draw the picture. Not surprisingly, there were ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ ways to draw God. In ‘correct’ drawings,

God was a white or pink-skinned old man with a big white beard.

Our younger daughter felt that she was different from the other pupils because she had visited the USSR, and because she had become unfamiliar with Canadian/Newfoundland culture and language during her absence. During unsupervised recesses on the school grounds some of the boys in her class called her and her family “Commie spies,” and tried to hit her. Because outdoor playtime was required but unsupervised, children were free to bully each other and to play dangerous games. This could sometimes result in injuries. The worst playground injury that our younger daughter saw was a broken limb.

The comparison of our daughters’ school experiences in Leningrad and Newfoundland sheds light on our initial characterization of totalitarianism. The concept of totalitarianism was used during the Cold War to equate Nazism with ‘Communism’ in order to discredit the latter. This equation still persists, but it is difficult to sustain because Western powers have consistently supported Fascist-style, anti-Communist regimes where state power is used to support capitalism and to suppress democracy and the left, in some cases by torture and terror (see Blum 2000). In light of this ideological conundrum, some mainstream Western academics have characterized these regimes as ‘authoritarian’ or ‘autocratic’ and attempted to distinguish them from totalitarian regimes (for example, see Macridis 1986; Kirkpatrick 1982:51). It is then suggested or implied that while authoritarian regimes are undemocratic, they theoretically do not involve comprehensive state-sponsored attempts to achieve a perfect society (Kirkpatrick 1982:99-102). ‘Market forces’ and the ‘invisible hand’ are supposedly free to work their beneficial magic in authoritarian societies, but not in totalitarian societies.

In the former USSR, the activities of the Young Octobrists and the Young Pioneers can perhaps be seen as attempts to mould the sorts of people who

could continue the struggle to achieve a communist society in the indefinite future. To the extent that these activities promoted equality and fairness in relations between children and in relations between students and teachers, they were consistent with the ideals that many Christians profess.

The definition of totalitarianism as a state-led attempt to achieve a perfect society obviously cannot be applied to Newfoundland in the 1980s. While social and economic problems in Newfoundland were widely acknowledged, their solutions were not generally seen as requiring structural or revolutionary change. It can be argued that the religious intolerance in Newfoundland schools was outside the Canadian norm. Nevertheless, the notion that solutions to social and economic problems had to be sought within the supposedly ‘perfected’ institutions of parliamentary democracy was a central feature of the dominant ideology, or *doxa* (see Jenkins 1992), not only in Newfoundland, but in the rest of Canada as well. It still is. The contradictions inherent in this ideology were exemplified by the school experiences of our children in Newfoundland. While some teachers and parents attempted to instill the democratic and ‘Christian’ ideals of equality and fairness, this was difficult in a socio-economic context where some people clearly had more wealth and power than others, and where it was acceptable to ‘get ahead’ at the expense of others. The latter ‘messages’ were constantly reinforced by mass media, especially in advertising (see Bajpai 1996). While these ‘messages’ seemed to be absent in Soviet elementary schools and mass media, this did not prevent large numbers of young Soviet intellectuals who went through these schools from supporting a transition to a so-called free market economy during the early 1990s (see Bartels 2008).

In conclusion, we feel that our family was fortunate to experience schooling in both capitalist and socialist societies. It gave us a comparative perspective which is increasingly rare.



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