6 From Innovation to Independence

The movements for change in Russian schooling continued. It was not always clear exactly how the various groups and individuals operated and overlapped. Teacher innovators such as V.F. Shatalov, Shalva Amonashvili, and Sophia Nikolaevna Lysenkova, appeared to continue to work in their own particular style, opting for a freer and more democratic form of teaching within the general system of education. Lysenkova, whom I met in April 1990, had just returned from a meeting in Bukhara, attended by many of the same people as the original gathering in Peredelkino in October 1986, when the pedagogy of cooperation was proclaimed. At the seminar of the Commune groups held in Zvenigorod in April 1990, there were representatives from Amonashvili’s school in Tbilisi, from the Eureka Clubs and from the Creative Union of Teachers. The aims of the various groups were largely synonymous and there was certainly much overlapping in their activities.

By mid-1990 the individual innovators seemed to have the support of the chairman of the State Committee for Education and, to a large extent, the educational establishment. In January 1989, however, when her latest book, Metodom Operezhaiushchego Obucheniiia, was published, Lysenkova complained that things were still not easy for innovators and that her work had been waiting for a decision for eight months.¹

THE CREATIVE UNION OF TEACHERS²

The Creative Union of Teachers which had been set up in 1988 had been broadened to encompass all groups of innovators and workers in education, parents and teachers. During the early part of 1989 there were reports of the formation of branches in the Far East, in Siberia and throughout the Soviet Union.

Enthusiastic support for the Union was expressed by educationalists and leaders of the Eureka movement in Siberia and the Far East.
Initiated by Mikhail Nikolaevich Nevzorov of the Khabarovsk Pedagogical Institute, and with the support of teachers from Magadan, Sakhalin, Kamchatka, the Amur oblast, the Primor'e and Khabarovsk, a meeting to set up the Orgkomitet of the Far East Creative Union of Teachers was organized in a boarding school in the village of Valdgeim in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. This was followed by a meeting of the local Union from 11–13 May, on a steamer between Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk on Amur.3

The first full conference of the Union, at which its constitution was laid down, was held in Sochi in May. A resolution was passed to the effect that the Union’s aim was to participate not only in the solution of specifically educational problems, but also, and this was its major task, to participate in the solution of the principal problems of educational policy, on which the success of the renewal of society depended. This included the radical renewal of education, increase in the prestige of teachers, the development, widening and defence of pedagogical creativity, and the uniting of the efforts of a wide selection of the community in the task of educational perestroika.

The conference passed a special resolution that Shatalov and Lysenkova should be nominated for the award of People’s Teacher of the Soviet Union. It maintained that their work was so well known that the ultimate praise for teachers was to say that they worked like Shatalov or Lysenkova. It set up a programme divided into basic subject areas; the Union and society, the Union and culture, the Union and the protection of children, the Union and the school, the Union and the teacher, the Union and sociopedagogical initiatives and the Union and science. Also part of the future programme was to be close cooperation with the State Committee and the Komsomol on the problems of the content of education, new curricula and syllabuses and discussions on the priority direction of the development of national education. A data bank was to be set up so that teachers might have details of new ideas and research which was being carried out.

A Central Council of 27 members was elected, among whom were E. Dneprov (to become Russian Minister of Education in summer 1990), E. Grechkino, S. Soloveichik, educational journalist, O. Gazman, leader of the Commune Movement, V. Davydov, Deputy President of the APN. Shalva Amonashvili was elected President with V. Matveev (former chief editor of Uchitel’skaia gazeta) and A. Adamsky, his deputies. Before being elected to this office Amonashvili wrote an article calling for closer cooperation between