

we have seen them in these pages, trooping gaily amidst the horrors, intent on the pretty colors of their own illusions. These are the amateurs.

In addition every nation has its contingent of professional interpreters of Russia who have made it their life's career to maintain appearances for the U.S.S.R. as Utopia-in-construction. With few exceptions they are a high-minded crew, coloring and concealing things with the noblest motives. Devotees of the theory of multiple truths, they speak more candidly than they write, and they think more candidly than they speak. They would as soon give the undiluted truth to their politically backward countrymen, whether readers of *The Nation* or the comic strips, as they would administer poison to children. Theirs is the logic of old-fashioned mothers who lie about sex to pubescent daughters—the American public, in their view, is simply too young, politically speaking, for the facts of Russian life. A few of them, I know, have inner qualms; the rest, on the contrary, feel positively heroic, strong in their ability to dispense with petty bourgeois prejudices about truth and mass brutality.

I decided, for myself, that I must tell the truth as I saw it. The decision in time assumed the magnitude of a pressing moral obligation.

V. Adventure in Idealism

DEVELOPMENTS in the Soviet Union since my departure have confirmed and deepened the conclusions forced upon me by my six years of personal observation.

The international alignment called for Soviet gestures to soothe the sensibilities of democratic nations which are potential allies in the looming war. The new Party line of united popular fronts, embracing all anti-fascist groups except communists disowned by Stalin, likewise demanded a pretense of democracy. Policy inside the country, however, remained stubbornly totalitarian. Prisons and "isolators" remained crowded with political dissenters; communists who strayed from the catechism continued to be dumped in Siberia and the Far North. The purges, in fact, grew bloodier.

Every new wave of hope for the liberalization and humanization of the Kremlin regime broke sickeningly on crags of terror. The G.P.U. was "abolished" by being rechristened Commissariat for Internal Affairs. The applause of the desperate optimists was still reverberating through the world when the assassination of Sergei Kirov evoked a saturnalia of vengeance. The "abolished" G.P.U. under its new name had lost none of its sadistic appetites.

Immediately after the promulgation of "the world's most democratic constitution" came the panicky annihilation of leading Old Bolsheviks—Kamenev, Zinoviev, Piatakov, Smirnov, Serebriakov, a dozen others—and the arrest of thousands more. The closest collaborators of Lenin were killed off in obscene haste after demonstration trials that were a mockery of the new constitutional guarantees. "Confessions" by demoralized prisoners to incredible accusations sown with self-evident lies, unsupported by documents or other independent evidence, without the formality of a credible defense, were made the excuse for wholesale extermination of the men who made the Bolshevik revolution. The fathers of the Soviet revolution were forced to paint themselves abjectly as depraved monsters, degenerates, allies of the most reactionary governments

in the world. The whole story reeked with the crude melodrama of the police mind. To believe any portion of it—other than that these founders of the Soviet Union despised Stalin and his regime as counterrevolutionary usurpers—would be to believe that the revolution was corrupt at its roots from the beginning. One man or a dozen may prove to be perverted arch-criminals, but that nearly *all* those who stood in the highest places in the first years of the Soviet revolution were of this stamp is too great a strain on credulity. And even if they were traitors ten times over—*especially* if they were men of such low moral caliber—why should they suddenly turn against themselves, besmirch their records as Bolsheviks, bare their villainy for all to see? The working of dreadful pressures is so clear that only the desperation of unreasoned faith or the cynicism of self-interest can compass credence in the trials.

Immediately thereafter came the sensational executions of a large number of the highest ranking leaders of the Red Army, among them newly created Field Marshals, national heroes of the civil war period, the heads of the mammoth civilian military training organizations: men like Tukhachevsky, Putna, Yakir. A wave of suicides engulfed leaders of the governments in constituent Soviet Republics, veteran revolutionists like Tomsy, key personalities in the Kremlin hierarchy like Vice-Commissar of War Gamarnik. No dependable facts beyond the standardized charges in the official communiqués are available and it may be decades before the truth of the bloody debacle in high quarters will be known, if ever.

Neither can anyone do more than guess at the truth behind the routine charges of "banditry," Trotskyism, collaboration with Hitler and Japan, lodged against former Premier Alexei Rykov; Nikolai Bukharin; Jacob Doletzky, for some fifteen years chief of the official Soviet news agency; outstanding Soviet journalists like Vladimir Romm and Lapinsky; the heads of the Jewish colonization effort in Biro-Bidjan; practically all the important leaders of the trade unions; the key people in nearly every important department of Soviet life. The charges are not mere political disputation—they spell ruin, imprisonment, exile, suicide, capital punishment for the thousands involved. Even those who were in direct control of the atrocities to which I was witness—yes, the very G.P.U. chieftains who prepared the information on which

Old Bolsheviks are being destroyed—are under arrest, accused not only of counterrevolution but of ordinary embezzlement.

The whole tragic process is shrouded in mystery. The only certainty is that on the eve of the twentieth birthday of the Bolshevik state, treachery and horror and violent death are daily commonplaces. Taking the official version of the orgiastic liquidations at face value, we still have the spectacle of fearsome discontents, maniacal hatreds, and desperate disillusionment precisely among those who have sacrificed most and achieved most for the revolution. Unlimited terror has bred constantly new terrors through the years. The only certainty is that the Kremlin stands neck-deep in blood. The very basic elements of the Leninist-Trotskyist-Stalinist methods of revolution are in disrepute. The cumulative and gigantic sacrifice may be justified ultimately, when history's record is clearer, chiefly as an object lesson *how not to make revolutions*.

One after another, at the same time, the remaining progressive and idealistic elements in the Soviet system have been liquidated. Old ranks and titles were restored. The enlightened attitudes toward birth control and family relations, which won for Russia more liberal and radical adherents than its economic innovations, were abandoned. The wage and class differentiations adopted out of necessity were, by 1936, sanctified by neo-Marxist labels. Everything modern or advanced or experimental in music, architecture, literature, pedagogy was ostracized as "bourgeois Leftism," loaded with ridicule, proscribed by arbitrary edict.

Any one of these things in itself may be unimportant. Some of them may be defensible. Taken together, their meaning seems to me beyond dispute: evident to the naked intelligence not blinded by fanaticism. The central fact of these last Russian years has been the intense entrenchment of the new ruling political and economic groups on a basis of thoroughgoing conservatism. There has been a constantly stronger reaction against modernism in every department of Soviet life. The *status quo* of socialism-in-construction, with its bureaucracy, its sharply stratified population, its contrasts of poverty and ease, its renunciation of that mood and temper which may be called, for lack of a better word, advanced, has emerged as fixed, static, one of the great forces for conservatism

in the present-day world. Other impulses may hammer down this system, but every ounce of the Kremlin's energy is now invested in establishing and maintaining a world equilibrium. The logic of Russia's struggle for survival as a state, coupled with absolutist government, has landed it in the camp of desperate and militant conservatism.

Underlying Moscow's new conservatism in every branch of its existence is the tacit admission that the present Soviet system will remain unaltered as long as its rulers can stave off change. The "transition period" has been accepted for all practical purposes as permanent.

It requires no special perspicacity to recognize that certain groups in the Soviet population by this time have large stakes in the "transition period," and that the normal conservatism of human nature—product of habit and fear of change—is operative. I refer not merely to the infinitesimal minority in the Kremlin, that small, closely-knit governing oligarchy, but its millionfold foundation of inter-dependent officials: the bureaucrats, large classes of privileged military and police officials, administrators, better-paid technical workers, the new Soviet-made intelligentsia.

The revolutionary driving force had petered out long ago, and in the last few years we have been watching the rebound. Those radicals who prefer to fool themselves with the old slogans and shut their eyes to the actualities are in fact supporting a reaction which with every month brings the Soviet state closer in essence to the fascist states in Germany and Italy.

The new Russian chauvinism, this or that decree, the liquidation of this composer or that novelist, a thousand other expressions of the reaction may each be argued or defended in itself. But the defense, assuredly, cannot rest on "revolutionary" grounds; no matter how impressive the arguments, they are tory arguments unrelated to the original philosophy and the original impetus of the revolution. The attitude which we normally associate with a revolutionary nature—an attitude of scientific skepticism, defiance of established authority, freedom from intellectual bondage, healthy doubt of the infallibility of dead or living prophets, courageous defense of unorthodox views—are more alien to Stalin's party than to Stanley Baldwin's or Herbert Hoover's. The U.S.S.R.

no longer has any room for agitators and innovators, whether in government, economy, or the arts. Its ideals, like the ideals of every ruling clique, are stability, productivity, conservatism.

Sooner or later, the fervid friends of the U.S.S.R. the world over will have to separate in their minds the economic innovations (state ownership of all the means of production and distribution) from the cultural and human reaction; an economic set-up that has in it the germ of the world's future from a political set-up that is wholly of the past; the Marxist formulas from the Stalinist actualities. They will have to distinguish between Russia and the socialist dream.

Until they make that adjustment they will continue to defend every form of injustice and obscurantism, every reactionary thought and act, every insult to their larger hopes, merely because these are stamped "Made in the U.S.S.R." Though tormented in their private conscience, they will continue to stand up for such parodies of justice as the Zinoviev-Radek trials; for the degradation of the human spirit, the sycophancy, the one-man rule through one controlled party, which are increasingly the marks of old Russia in its new habiliments.

2

Stalin stands as the symbol of the "permanent transition" which has taken the place of the permanent revolution once basic in socialist thinking. The purity of his motives and his fitness for the job are of only academic interest. Like his Romanov predecessor, Stalin works his will through governmental machinery: a Politburo, a Cabinet, a Central Committee, an impotent legislature. What is crucially important is the restoration of a single, personal incarnation of the state. The ancient Russian symbol of absolutism, the "Little Father," is again enthroned.

The glorification of Stalin must be seen to be believed. I quote at random from Soviet newspapers on my desk:

Our own, our passionately beloved, our great leader, Comrade Stalin. . . . The unmatched genius and courage and brilliant wisdom of the great and beloved Stalin. . . . To you, Comrade Stalin, whose marvelous leadership brings us still more socialist triumphs. . . . Long live the great Stalin, leader and inspirer of the working classes of the

whole world. . . . The great and glorious Stalin, head and brilliant theoretician of the world revolution. . . . Stalin, the great and beloved. . . .

As recently as 1928 or 1929, it was still possible to find an unadorned reference to the "boss" (as communist officials call him in private) simply as Comrade Stalin. Today, the name is never mentioned publicly without a profound verbal genuflection. The continuous hosannas depend on repetition rather than originality for their effect. The adjectives and qualifying phrases in which the ineffable name is cushioned are fairly standardized. Innovations, even in the direction of juicier flattery, are dangerous. A new adjective needs the sanction of usage in the columns of *Pravda* or in the mouth of some impeccable grand vizier like Kaganovich before it is woven into the routine litanies of praise.

Currently the words most used are *veliki i liubimi*—"great and beloved." They are so continuously attached to his name that they have lost their original contours and merged with Stalin, like a part of his name or a prescribed title. The most casual mention in a public gathering is the signal for a demonstration—every speaker automatically pauses for the ovation, just as a trained comedian pauses for his laugh. In printed matter, the worship has been standardized to a point which to an outsider is not without humor. Other objects worthy of enthusiasm are followed in the stenogram by the one word "applause." When the occasion is the mention of Stalin or anything pertaining to Stalin the parentheses record "thunderous applause" or "stormy applause," and sometimes add, "everybody rises and sings the *International*." A wisecrack from any less elevated source may be followed in the record by the word "laughter." A witticism by Stalin is invariably followed by "hilarious laughter." In a published photograph where Stalin appears with other leaders, the line underneath identifies the figures in the picture by listing Stalin first, regardless where he may be located in the line-up, then going back to the left to list the others. His name in an editorial is always printed in larger letters than the rest of the text, just as the name of deity is capitalized in Western print.*

* Recently, in 1937, a curb was ordered on the verbal adulation of Stalin, but the substance, in his deification, remains unchanged.

The fawning exaltation of the man is official and largely synthetic. The Russian people do not know him. The glorification is almost impersonal. Not a real, living, human Stalin, but the figure carefully molded by Party politicians and publicists is the recipient of the adulation. The character of that synthetic figure changes: at the height of the Iron Age it was a symbol cast in iron; now it is increasingly a benevolent leader kissing a little child. . . .

The worship is exaggerated but not exuberant. It is vast but neither deep nor soaring. The newspapers and orators and poets who sing paeans of praise to Stalin are official newspapers, official orators, and official poets. Possibly this apotheosis is not wholly his own doing. He may have been convinced that for his subjects, conditioned by centuries of autocracy at one end and slavery at the other, power must be personified in one man. When I left Russia, I was sure that the exaltation of a mortal creature could not be carried any further. I was mistaken. The Soviet press bulges with proofs that the human animal's capacity for groveling sycophancy is literally boundless.

Powerful beyond any medieval tsar in his own domain, the "great and beloved" is also acknowledged pretender to an international throne as dictator of the Comintern. Millions in all nations of the world bring him unquestioning obedience as the incarnation of their hopes, recognizing no fatherland but his Russia. Underground in places like Japan and Germany, aboveground in most countries, the viceroys of Stalin, leaders of their respective communist sections, are ever alert for the snap of his whip, the accent of his wishes. The pseudo-scientific movement which he has broken to his will has been raised to a pitch of mystic consecration, so that he is at once emperor and pope, general and infallible oracle, comrade and master.

Stalin is without the cool genius of a Lenin, without the flamboyant talents of a Mussolini, without the hysterical fervor of a Hitler. An uninspired practical politician, this slow-moving, slow-thinking but implacable Caucasian has hoarded and organized power slowly through his years and made himself the strongest person on the face of the earth. Reckoned by the numbers who willingly or under coercion bring him allegiance, Stalin's temporal empire dwarfs Caesar's and Napoleon's, and it has a spiritual content theirs did not possess.

Thus the collectivist idea has come to fruition in the apotheosis of an individual. Absolutism reigns in the name of a collectivist philosophy. One man is regent for Demos—which, come to think of it, was precisely the role of the “tyrants” in ancient Greece. History has again played one of its gruesome jokes and the cosmic bellylaugh will echo through endless generations.

3

In my six years in the Soviet Union there was little of the spectacular. There were routine difficulties without end and buzzing annoyances and occasional half-hearted threats of expulsion. There were intense moments of purely professional achievement or failure, isolated episodes bordering on drama, and a vast number of human contacts touched with high color.

But I can inflate none of these experiences into major personal risks in the do-and-dare tradition of newspaper legend. At no time did I endanger life or limb or face any more serious hazard than a bruised conscience or a reprimand from the home office. As for the shrill little triumphs and defeats of competitive journalism, they seem petty enough in retrospect.

Even at the time, these five-minute scoops and ten-minute beatings were edged with absurdity. Against the background of desperation and enthusiasm and pitiless bigotry, against the life-and-death struggles amidst which we foreigners had our sheltered alien being, the breathless race of American newspapermen to file an emasculated blue-penciled little dispatch ninety seconds before a rival was, in sober fact, grotesque. When the dispatch, as so often happened, dealt in mealy-mouthed fashion with some decree that snapped the props from under millions of human existences, that race for a few seconds' advantage was almost obscene.

No, there was no melodrama in my foreign assignment. The surveillance to which we were subjected had nothing in common with the terror which, as I saw a thousand times over, turned strong men and women into whimpering wretches, bled them white of all dignity and self-respect. We lived in relative spaciousness in the midst of ghastly overcrowding, and never lacked cake when bread was a luxury to 90% of our neighbors.

Yet the six years are in my mind like some great and continuous adventure, crowded with vivid excitement and suffused with deep

feeling. Though I was myself never hurt, the memory is filled with pain. Though my function was merely to cable news developments tersely and inexpensively, the memory is touched with elations and flaring hopes. It seems a stretch of turbulence marked off by the calmer years that preceded and the quiet since my return.

When I try to trace that turbulence to its source, I discover that it flows from the things that happened to Russia and its people rather than to me.

The adventure was real enough. But I lived it on an intellectual and emotional plane rather than a physical level. The feelings stirred in my blood by the first mass demonstration on Red Square, by the unfoldment of the Shakhty trial, by my first view of the *Tzika* in session, by the epic tragedies of the peasant revolt and the man-made famine are woven into that intense spiritual adventure. The mental anguish and searching and desperate rationalizations as my imported certainties crumbled under the hammering of everyday impressions, likewise, are in the intricate design of that memory.

The material events were all outside myself. All the promptings of personal comfort and career were in the direction of casual and uncritical acceptance of the Soviet scene as raw stuff for reportorial dispatches—picturesque, titillating, but without inner relation to my own life. All the pressures of friendship, of respectable conformity within my own social group, were for unreasoned hosannasinging or, failing that, a synthetic enthusiasm.

Had I been differently constituted, therefore, the Soviet years might easily have flowed over me without leaving any deep marks. When I record that I did take the Soviet reality closely to heart and did become emotionally and mentally involved in the processes I was reporting, I am neither boasting nor apologizing. The “objectivity” which accepts the revolution, its promises and its disappointments, as just so much grist for the journalistic mills was simply beyond me. I had too large an investment of personal hope and faith at stake.

4

My conscience has stood behind me, looking over my shoulder as these pages were written. Again and again, it forced me to go back and re-assay my judgments. Repeatedly, it protested against

the sharpness of a phrase, the finality of a conclusion. Even more often it pulled me short when I seemed minded to accept the shadow for the substance or to flatter the self-deceptions of the believers. It would not permit me to compromise with that cumulative memory.

And now its voice is more insistent than ever. Have your dreams, it demands, been a silly delusion? Horror has seared your nerves, but has it burned out all hope? Were it not better, perhaps, to bury your knowledge in your own heart instead of carrying it to others? Because an adventure in idealism in one place has ended in a new reaction, because a fight for economic freedom has ended in a new form of slavery, shall you—and millions like you—yield utterly to despair? Shall you sink your dreams in the muddy morass of disillusionment, and join the “practical” men in ridiculing the utopists, the visionaries, the prophets of all time?

To which I reply: I despair only because I lack the skill and the eloquence to translate my deepest feelings for other men’s minds. I wish I were able to convey to them that the Russian experience has been for me less a disillusionment than a rededication. It has forced me to pitch my hopes above the merely nutritive, to recognize that man lives not by bread alone. In the knowledge of the Russian experiment I am able once more to affirm without shame the value of such things as justice, humaneness, truth, liberty, intellectual integrity, and human dignity. From the Russian mistakes I have drawn the strength to assert that without these things social systems can only be variations on the old injustice.

I have seen that movements for economic change are worthless, even dangerous, as soon as they throw off respect for life, for liberty, for justice. The very fact that such an assertion, which would have sounded axiomatic in the past, now has a quixotic ring is a measure of the distortion in our mass thinking. Our epoch is gangrened by a contempt for the protoplasm of society: the individual human being. It is steeped in a machiavellism that styles itself “scientific” and hurls all fundamental human values indiscriminately into the retorts of its “experiments.” Perhaps it is the revenge of the machine age; its insensitive gods of statistical efficiency have spawned monstrous mechanistic religions in which people are mere cogs and digits. The gangrene set in with the

World War and has been eating more deeply into the flesh of the race. It is a stench in the nostrils of mankind in Russia and Germany, on the battlefields of Ethiopia and Spain. It has turned leaders and nations into cynical vivisectionists. However the rotting flesh may be disguised with slogans about race and class and nation, the horror shows through in prisons and concentration camps and wholesale slaughters of human beings, in ugly fears and uglier propitiations of flattery.

I, too, was infected by that disease. I was ready to liquidate classes, purge millions, sacrifice freedoms and elementary decencies, arm self-appointed dictators with a flaming sword—all for the cause. It was a species of revenge rationalized as social engineering. Then I saw these things in full swing and discovered that the revenge was being wreaked on the very masses who were to be saved by that cause. I found that the means are more real than the professed end; that they harden into a system of power and privilege which must postpone the end in order to maintain itself. Having seen the putrescence where the disguise was most convincing, I have found the courage to declare that I am a humanitarian, that I respect truth and that I abhor the vivisection of human beings for their own good.

I am convinced that any philosophy of human progress which does not rest uncompromisingly on respect for life, no matter how honest its original intentions, becomes brutalized and defeats its own professed purposes. A socialism that offers to fill the bellies of its people but retains the privilege of slitting those bellies at will is reactionary; it cancels out ages of struggle and costly victory in the domain of the human spirit. On those terms, indeed, competitive capitalism too can make the same offer to fill the bellies of its robots; the bargain has already been struck in Germany and elsewhere. The economic security of a prison or a military barracks—the “ideal” for which our epoch seems ready to barter all the human values accumulated through the ages—seems to me the most repulsive ever foisted upon mankind. It is the *reductio ad absurdum* of a dehumanized materialism.

Precisely today, when such words and such concepts are being spat upon, it is important that those for whom they still have some meaning should defend liberty and honesty and justice. The gangrene cannot be fought in one country and allowed to fester

in another. No plan for economic salvation must be accepted if it is diseased with disdain for life. Ultimately, Russia will not be judged by how much bread it has given its people—by that standard other countries and other systems may be far more successful—but by how much freedom, self-respect, justice, equality, truth, and human kindness it has brought into the world.

I know only too well that those who elect to stand on this bedrock of human decencies and cherished freedoms will be exposed to the sneers of their more "practical" fellow-men. They will be pelted with sophistries and insults and under the temptation always to turn "practical" likewise and put on some denominational uniform—to defend one set of horrors against another instead of fighting them all. They will be taunted because they cannot provide scientific definitions: "What is this truth, this liberty, this justice of which you prate? What is its color, how much does it weigh, where have you seen it in its pure form?" As though we should worship ugliness because no one has succeeded in defining beauty, or darkness because no one has succeeded in marking the boundaries of light. . . .

But I know also that through changing systems, through conflicting programs, those undefined values have survived and will survive as the ultimate tests of all systems and all programs.

No set-back can end the adventure in idealism. That adventure began with the dawn of the race and will continue when the slogans and phobias of our own day will have been forgotten.

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