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C. M. LLOYD



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## PREFACE

THESE Notes appeared in the autumn of 1931 as a series of articles in *The New Statesman and Nation*, on whose behalf I paid a short visit to Russia. I have only altered a few words here and there for the sake of clearness.

I did not expect to find in the Soviet Union, and I did not find, either a paradise or a hell. What I did find was a stupendous experiment in which there is happiness and suffering, hope and fear, difficulty and promise. The experiment, whether you like it or not, is politically, economically and culturally of profound significance to the world.

My impressions and comments do not pretend to tell the whole truth about this new Russia. Nobody can do that. But they are set down without favour or malice, and if they help to stimulate interest and to dispel some misconceptions, they will have served their purpose. For readers who want to learn more, there are books in plenty, good, bad and indifferent. Among the best of those recently published I should put *The Soviet Planned Economic Order*, by W. H. Chamberlain (World Peace Foundation); *The Soviet Challenge to America*, by George S. Counts (John Day Company); and *Red Bread*, by Maurice Hindus (Cape). *The Soviet Union Year Book* (Allen and Unwin) is a sort of Whitaker's Almanac, full of facts and figures.

C. M. LLOYD.

December, 1931.

# RUSSIAN NOTES

## CHAPTER I

### THE WORKERS' STATE

MOST Englishmen who go to Russia and come home to write about it are conscious enough of their handicaps. They know but little, if anything, of the language, and their time has been all too short. I do not pretend to be an exception to this rule. I am not fluent in Russian, and I do not set up as a pundit on the strength of a few weeks in Moscow and Leningrad and Nijni Novgorod. But that is not to say that all one's impressions and judgments are valueless. There are Russians as well as foreigners in the U.S.S.R. who talk English, and one does not go about deaf and dumb and blind. And what you can learn in a few weeks depends partly on what you knew before (and Russia, be it remembered, is not an unexplored land) and partly on how you use your time. As for the common gibe that "of course you only see what they want you to see," there is singularly little in it. Naturally a foreign visitor will not get in to a private meeting of the Politbureau or the Comintern, or be invited to watch the G.P.U. dealing with political prisoners. Would he be welcomed at a session of the British Cabinet or an administration of the "Third Degree" in America? For the rest, there is a great deal that the Russians cannot prevent you from seeing, even if they wished. And in general they are desperately anxious to show you everything they are

doing. You may even visit places where you are not expected and where no preparations have been made to impress the bourgeois tourist. Nor do you find spies under your bed or dogging your footsteps to prevent conversation. Bolshevism has its darker side, and Russia is not England; but it is not Bogyland. So much by way of apology and justification for these scraps from a Russian note-book.

It is some twelve hundred miles by sea from London Bridge to Leningrad, and the week on board ship (for you will probably put into Hamburg for a couple of days to load cargo) makes an agreeable introduction to the U.S.S.R. The Soviet boat is comfortable without any pretension to luxury. The food is abundant and well cooked, ranging from caviare to roast goose, from sturgeon to *pêche Melba*. But nobody drinks cocktails or dresses for dinner. The real interest for the observant traveller, however, is not in the saloon and the passengers; it is in the crew. Soviet seamen and stokers and stewardesses do not, as some imagine, give orders to the captain, though they may address him as "Comrade." They do their job as quietly and effectively as any other sailors, but discipline does not appear to press hard on them. They have an air of "liberty, equality and fraternity." They are no longer the "lower classes." Some of them come from the factory or the farm; some have been, and others are going to be, university students. They are all highly conscious of their importance as manual workers. They will play deck-tennis with the passengers, air their bit of English or let you air your bit of Russian, discuss the books they are reading. They will show you their quarters—cabins for two, replete with berths and bedclothes, cupboards, wash-basin, and writing-table. On the deck astern is their mess room and "Red Corner," with bust of Lenin, pictures of Karl Marx, the progress of the Five Year Plan and the other usual stimuli and warnings to the Soviet citizen. Here you may play dominoes or dance to the gramophone or listen to a



stewardess discoursing classical music on the piano. And when the voyage is over, nobody asks for or expects a tip. All this, though it might stagger an admiral of the old school or an habitu  of the White Star Line, is not a very shocking aspect of the Revolution. Other and grimmer aspects await you ashore.

Leningrad is a fine city with a foul climate. It may be this climate, damp and cold, a prolific breeder of tuberculosis, that helps to give a serious look to the crowds that swarm in the streets, peer into the thinly stocked shop windows, and fight their way on to or off the incredibly packed tramcars. These crowds in Leningrad, in Moscow, in all the big towns, bring you sharp up against the new Russia, its character, its present discontents, its resolution and its hopes. The masses that move up and down the Nevsky Prospect, or the great thoroughfares in the heart of Moscow, are "the masses." There are no walking fashion-plates—only workers in coats and shirts and skirts and shoes that have done long and hard service. It is as though the Grands Boulevards and the Rue de la Paix had been permanently occupied by the population of the Faubourgs. The bourgeoisie has been swept out, and the proletariat in the cloth cap and his family have flowed into its streets and its shops and its dwelling-places.

But all these millions of workers, who have been exalted in the new Republic, have yet to be satisfied. There is not enough house room; transport is inadequate and uncomfortable; there is a general scarcity of food and clothing and household necessaries. There is immense activity on all sides in building, in the remaking of roads, in the turning out of taxis and cars and lorries; there is even a project for an underground railway in Moscow. But it takes time and money to catch up with the immense and ever-growing demand. It is, of course, the food and clothing shortage that has been hardest to bear. Under the pressure of the Five-Year Plan, Russia has been forced to live in "war conditions," to ration itself for necessaries and

to pay exorbitantly for anything in the nature of superfluity. I have seen toys offered for sale at 20 roubles (a couple of guineas in our money<sup>1</sup>) that would be worth a few shillings here; neckties for 5 roubles, that you could get for eighteen-pence in the Mile End Road; soap at 2½ roubles a cake. A young woman whose salary is 260 roubles a month told me that she had paid nearly 100 for a pair of shoes.

The rationing system is carefully framed. The population is divided into categories, the highest of which is that of the manual workers (and with them are now joined the specialist or technician class). These and the children, for whose welfare the Soviet State is extremely solicitous, come off best. The articles covered by the ration-card (I am referring to Moscow in August) are bread, sugar, meat, fish, various cereals, butter, milk, tea and soap. The quantity of bread allowed is adequate—for the manual worker, at least, who gets 400 grammes (rather under a pound) of black and the same amount of white a day; office workers and children get half these quantities. The fish and meat might be more adequate, if they were there; but frequently the stores are short of supplies for days or weeks. The allowance of butter for the worker or the child is very limited, for others there is none—unless they choose to buy it outside the Co-op. at 8 or 9 roubles a lb. Sugar,

<sup>1</sup> One must be cautious in translating Russian money into its English equivalent. The par of exchange is 9.50 roubles to £1—i.e. a rouble = 2s. 1d. and a kopek = ¼d. But the internal value of the rouble is generally speaking much less; some put it at about one-fifth or one-sixth of the foreign exchange figure. Actually, the relative cost of things in Moscow and in London depends on what the things are and who the buyer is. The State-fixed prices of retailed articles in the Co-ops. are pretty low. But the prices, as well as the quantity and the quality, will vary in the different stores at which different people must make their purchases. Some things cost the same for anyone. Black bread (best quality) is 6 kopeks and white bread 10 kopeks for 400 grammes. A newspaper is 5 kopeks; a tram fare (for any distance) 10 kopeks. "Scarcity goods," including clothes, shoes and other necessaries and luxuries, are much dearer than in England. Rents, for the manual workers, are much lower. Prices in the first-class hotels frequented by foreigners are fantastic. A plate of soup will cost three or four shillings, steak and vegetables nine shillings, a pint of beer five and sixpence.

too, is severely rationed, and soap worst of all. Every citizen is entitled to one lump of toilet soap and the manual worker to half a kilogramme of laundry soap per month. These meagre rations may be, and of course are, supplemented by purchases outside—either in the “ free market ” where peasants or odd hucksters sell their produce at anything they can get for it, or in the State shops, where “ commercial ” prices are charged. But even there, supplies are shorter than they should be, and prices consequently higher, owing to several causes. There is a rising standard of life in the country as well as the towns, which means a greater consumption of food products at their source. There is the shortage of meat, due to the wholesale destruction of live-stock by the peasants in their first mad fury against collectivisation. There is the heavy export of butter and other comestibles in order to pay for the necessary imports of machinery and the rest. And lastly, there is the lack of transport to get the stuff into the towns.

The pinch is obviously hard, though it is universally admitted that it has been eased this summer, and there is a hope of gradual improvement. But hard as it is, it would be a great mistake to imagine that the Russian people are in a mood of misery and dejection. The workers and the peasants are no longer “ wage slaves ” living at subsistence level. The average rise in real wages since 1914 is, I am told, seventy per cent. Whether that figure is accurate or not, the improvement is quite plainly enormous. Not only have earnings increased all round (and in many cases, under the piece-rate system, to undreamed-of figures), but communal provision and privileges have gone far. Pensions, medical treatment, holiday homes, free or cheap amusements, are all gains. Rents, for the manual worker in particular, are very moderate. Nor is his nourishment confined to what he buys in the store or the shop. Meals are provided in the dining-rooms at many factories and offices, and they are cheap and good. At one large works that I saw the dinner consisted of soup, a meat or fish dish

with vegetables, and a slice of water-melon, at a cost of 35 kopeks. At another place, run by Centrosoyus, the Co-operative Union, for a whole group of factories, 20,000 dinners are provided every day, prepared by a staff of several hundred cooks and assistants with up-to-date machinery under the most elaborate hygienic conditions. The cost here was less than a shilling for a meal that would stand comparison with what I should have had to pay from ten to fifteen times as much for in my hotel.

The critic in Western Europe or America may raise an objection at this point. Granted, he will say, that the Russian worker has improved his material lot, and that he may still further improve it, yet he is living under a tyranny that allows him no genuine political rights, and aims at mechanising him into a robot. But is it not important to remember the history of the Russian worker and his difference in traditions and environment from his British and American brothers? It may be that one day he will want a parliament after our fashion, and the freedom to throw bricks at his government. For the moment, however, there is no evidence that he does. The Revolution deprived him of no rights that he had before. On the contrary it gave him a new status, an equality that appears as a pre-eminence and—within certain limits, which may seem very large to him—liberties of speech and criticism, methods of expressing his will, that may be as good as, or better than, those enjoyed under a parliamentary democracy. The Soviet State, so far as one can judge, does not present itself to the worker (though it did till recently at least to the peasants) as a hard taskmistress or a cruel stepmother. He does not resent the mechanisation of industry and agriculture; he sees in it a new and glorious adventure and the means of a larger life and culture. And, despite all his speeding up, he has not begun to think of himself as a robot—and he certainly has not begun yet to shape like one. He believes in himself—sometimes a little

too arrogantly—and he believes in his own and Russia's future. Elated by the hope of this future, pricked on by the fanatics of the Communist Party and by every form of propaganda, as well as by the incentive of higher earnings, he is working stolidly, cheerfully or enthusiastically at the Herculean task of the Five Year Plan.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW THE PLAN WORKS

THE Five Year Plan is not a stunt. Anybody who goes to Russia with such a notion will be disabused of it in twenty-four hours. The Plan pervades the country from Leningrad to Vladivostok, from Archangel to Baku. It is immensely ambitious, but it is not fanciful. Why should it be? It was not a case of tinkering with a highly developed economy or finding work that should not be mere "relief" work for the unemployed, but of developing a territory of  $8\frac{1}{2}$  million square miles, with a few comparatively feeble industries, a primitive system of agriculture, and vast untapped resources. Nobody supposes this will be accomplished in five years. The original figure of five (which has now come down in actual time to four) was taken for convenience and to set definite periods for programmes of work. There is nothing sacred in it; the programmes have been revised and revised again, and in many cases they have already been completed. But there is a prodigious amount yet to be done, and more plans will follow.

Of the success of the Plan as a whole there can be no doubt in the mind of anyone who has seen it in operation. Of course, it is not perfect; it has weaknesses of which I shall speak in a moment. It may go awry in the future. Or it may produce a type of civilisation that many will deplore. But here and now, as a scheme of economic reconstruction, it is achieving remarkable results, and I can see no reason why it should not continue to do so. The most spectacular achievements so far have been in the heavy industries and agriculture, which have had pride of place. There is the huge hydro-electric power plant at Dnieprostroy. There is Stalingrad, which is designed to

turn out 50,000 tractors a year and is already turning out a hundred a day. There is Avtostroy at Nijni Novgorod, which is nearing completion and will have an annual output of 140,000 Ford cars and trucks. Magnitogorsk, in the Ural Mountains, is expected to extract 6,500,000 tons of iron ore and to produce annually 2,500,000 tons of pig-iron, 2,300,000 of coke, 2,700,000 of Martin steel, and 2,100,000 of rolled iron. These are only two or three of the giant undertakings. Add to them and their like the coal-fields, the oil of Baku (I found no confirmation of the rumour that this is running dry), the Turksib railway. Add, above all, the Collective and the State farms. Allow what you like for checks or accidents; discount some of the figures. But do not imagine that what the Bolsheviks are building is castles in Spain.

The light industries, though their expansion has been subordinated to that of the heavy, are also doing their part. I was told of a boot and shoe factory which is at present producing 21,000 pairs a day, working a six-day week with three shifts, and expects presently to turn out eight million pairs a year, and of a chocolate works which with a daily output of 160 tons has completed its plan in two and a half years. There are new enterprises, too, constantly starting. The first artificial silk factory—the precursor of twenty-five similar plants—is nearly finished. A macaroni factory was recently opened at Kazan which is equipped to produce 12 tons a day of this nourishing if nasty stuff. A plant in Daghestan will manufacture next year 120 tons of iodine crystals—an amount equal, it is said, to the total annual import of iodine by the U.S.S.R. A new cotton-growing area of 2,500,000 acres is in preparation—half of which, it is hoped, will be ready by the spring. And the spring will also see, in all probability, a spurt in the light industries. Kuibishev, the chairman of the State Planning Commission, has announced that he regards the heavy industries as pretty well established and that more energy can now be devoted to supplying clothes, textiles, boots, dairy and food products.

But it is time to look at the other side of the picture. There have been, and there are, hitches and handicaps. One is the delay in getting machinery and materials. This is due to two causes ; the State, for reasons both financial and political, is limited in the amount it can import, and the internal transport system is unequal to the demands put upon it. Nor can the demand for labour be satisfied. Every able-bodied Russian, of course, is fully occupied, and there is a small sprinkling in the factories and on the farms of foreign workers—mostly Americans, Germans, Scandinavians, Czechs. Some of the less skilled sort of work is done on urgent jobs by clerks and teachers and students, who give up their holidays to what they regard as a labour of love or duty. The value of their labour is not to be scoffed at, I was told. Another weakness is on the managerial side. The nucleus of foreign engineers and experts that the Soviet Government has hired at a great price is supplemented by Russians whose theory is generally better than their practice—or so the Americans commonly assert—and who in any case are not yet enough in numbers. But to this the Government is quite alive, and strenuous efforts are being made to recruit and train specialists and administrators for industry and agriculture.

There remains the unknown quantity—the manual worker, on whom in the last resort so much depends. How will all these millions of men and women shape in an economy of machines and mass production ? I have plied foreign experts, who direct them, as well as Russians, who know their countrymen, with this question. And the answer in brief runs thus. The Russian worker (the phrase is, of course, a wide generalisation) is at present nothing like the equal of the English or American or German. He has not their skill or finish or quickness. But he is not a Kanaka or a Red Indian. There is nothing the matter with his brain or his physique, and there is no reason why the mechanics and machinists of the U.S.S.R. should not be on a level with those of the West, when they have had the training and the experience. And when, their Russian



censors add, they have unlearned that slovenly, easy-going habit of mind which is summed up in the word *Nitchevo!* *Nitchevo* to the Communist zealot is one of the deadly sins, and by word and pen and example he is hunting it down. Meanwhile, a combination of ignorance, slowness, ardour and hustle has inevitably resulted in a great deal of inferior work and waste of material, and of high costs. Critics of the Plan have fastened on its weakness in quality as distinct from quantity of output. And those in authority have admitted the truth of the charge, and the word has gone forth that quality is now to be put before quantity.

Before we leave this subject, there is a word to be said about the means employed to keep up the pace of construction and production. Compulsion in the crude sense of the word has played very little part in it. There are unhappy *kulaks* and some others who have been set to work unwillingly. But it is absurd to imagine that the Five-Year Plan depends on "forced labour." The methods are both more subtle and more simple—propaganda, appeals to patriotism, to Socialist ideals, to personal pride and group pride, and last but not least to the pocket. Two or three of these are of peculiar interest. One is the device of "Socialist competition," which sets factory A to challenge factory B to a race for the completion of the programme. Another is the "shock brigade" system, under which a handful of enthusiasts band themselves together in the works or office or farm to do a particular job at lightning speed, thus hastening on the accomplishment of the Plan, and at the same time setting the pace for the rest or inspiring them by their example. The *udarniki*, or shock-brigaders, are encouraged by material rewards and privileges as well as by public esteem. They are exalted in the press and on the factory "wall-sheets"; they may even go farther. Along the river bank in the people's park at Moscow I saw what looked in the distance like the row of busts of Roman Emperors in the British Museum. On closer inspection they turned out to be the heads of com-

mon workmen—or, if you please, uncommon workmen—*udarniki* who had done a bit more than their bit. Each pedestal bore the name of the man and the feat for which he had been awarded the “Order of Lenin” or the “Order of the Red Banner.” The foreign tourist may perhaps think it funny. But the Muscovite does not.

Finally, there is the piece-rate system, whose recent extension (it was not an innovation in the U.S.S.R.) has excited so much interest abroad. Whatever may be thought about the principle of the thing, there were evidently strong practical arguments for it. Many tales are told of the anomalies, the discontent and the slackness resulting from equal (or more or less equal) wages. And many are told of the increased productivity under the new incentive. In one coal-pit for which I was given figures, the average earnings of the hewers went up promptly from 4.6 roubles a day to 6.2; and this was not regarded as at all an exceptional case. (Now they will presumably be higher, for a new schedule of rates has come into force in the coal-fields as well as in the steel industry. In the latter the rates are graded in eight categories, and earnings may range, it appears, from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  roubles to 13 roubles a day.) That this inequality is repugnant to Socialist doctrine, or a danger in a Socialist State, the Communists will not admit. Whatever your income in Russia, they say, you cannot use it to exploit your fellows. Nor need trouble be feared from having slightly different levels of comfort; education, together with the fact that anyone with brains and character can reach the highest level, will prevent that. And ultimately with abundance, all difficulty will disappear; it will be “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” They may be right or they may be wrong. But in any case it looks as if the piece-system has come to stay in Soviet Russia.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MAN WITH THE HOE

A SHREWD observer told me the other day that the most vital part of the Five Year Plan, and the most remarkable of the Communists' achievements, was the collectivisation of the farms. I dare say he is right. The feeding of Russia is obviously a problem of the first magnitude, and the peasantry—some 80 per cent. of the population—with their ignorance, their conservatism, and their powers of active or passive resistance, were from the outset the Achilles' heel of the Revolution. But it looks now as if one stone has been found to kill several birds. The collective farm policy promises to settle the question of the food supply, to establish a Socialist system of agriculture, to turn the peasant from a menace into a pillar of the State, and to raise him from barbarism to civilisation. It has not been carried through without a struggle, and it has involved intense hardships for those who have kicked against the pricks. But if the end can ever be allowed to justify the means, Stalin and his friends have shown themselves something more than clever devils. They may claim to have taken a short cut to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and they have scored what seems, not merely to biased Bolsheviks, but to cool critics, an astonishing success.

Those who want the whole story will find no lack of books that tell it. Two in particular which can be recommended are *Red Bread*, by Maurice Hindus, and *Red Villages*, by Y. A. Yakovlev, the Commissar of Agriculture. The former is an extraordinarily able and sympathetic account of the peasants' mentality and trials and hopes by one who was himself born of a Russian peasant family.

The latter deals with the problems as they present themselves to the Government. I must confine myself here to certain outstanding points and to comments in the light of what I saw and heard in Russia.

The big drive for collectivisation began in 1929, and was conducted so furiously that the figures laid down in the original plan were exceeded in the course of a few months. But the pace was too hot, and the methods employed not merely to extirpate the *kulaks*, but to force in the poor and "middle" peasants, provoked widespread resentment. The Government was alive to the danger, and in the spring of 1930 Stalin published his famous article, "Giddiness from Success," in which he rebuked the zealots who were going too fast and too far. The pressure was relaxed and gentler measures introduced. The immediate result was a great exodus of the peasants from the new collectives. But in the autumn they came back again with little or no persuasion, and now 60 per cent. of all the peasant households of the country are collectivised—this time far more securely—and it will not need much effort to raise the percentage. Production has mounted rapidly with the change from the primitive culture of the smallholding to large-scale co-operation, and it is supplemented by the output of the State farms, some of which run to a prodigious size. (It has just been decided that some of them are too big, and that they should be kept down to a maximum of 125,000 acres.) The production will continue to mount as more land is taken into use, as the tractors and combines multiply, as the workers acquire skill and experience. There is no sign of slackening of effort on the part of the authorities in any of these directions, and there is the same awareness, in agriculture as in industry, that quality must not be subordinated to quantity.

Nor are the great grain farms and the squadrons of tractors the only concern of the apostles of this revolution. Their plans cover everything from tea and cotton and tobacco to tomatoes, water-melons and pigs—particularly pigs, for pigs, as Yakovlev has said, "produce meat faster

than any other kind of live-stock and they give more meat per unit of fodder than do cattle." I visited a State farm near Moscow which is nearing completion and which expects in a few months' time to house 1,500, and eventually 5,000, pigs. They should have no complaint to make of their sties, from which they will be driven (if you need to drive a pig to its food) by asphalt paths to their mechanised communal kitchen and dining-room. Next year, it is prophesied, there will be three million pigs, and in 1933 not less than seven million, making bacon in the U.S.S.R.

But what about the human side of all this, it will be asked? Does the man with the hoe like his metamorphosis into the man with the tractor? Do the Russian peasants really appreciate being brigaded and bossed and educated and de-loused? Is the primitive passion for three acres and a cow—to be tilled in mediæval strips or milked dirtily—really being sublimated, or simply suppressed, only to break out presently and take its inevitable revenge? It is not possible to give a short and confident answer to those questions. There are, however, certain facts and probabilities on which a judgment can be based. It would be absurd to compare the Russian peasants to the happy harvesters in Morris's *News from Nowhere*. But it is equally absurd to depict them as a solid body of discontent, ground down by a remorseless tyranny and pining for what they have lost. Malcontents there no doubt are, on the farms as in the factories. The individualistic spirit still exists, and the Bolsheviki themselves do not make light of it. Years of determined struggle, it is said, will be needed to overcome the prejudices of the petty property owner, and to effect the final "liquidation" of the *kulak* class. But there is no evidence that the great mass of the peasants shares the feelings of the *kulaks* towards the régime, or is even deeply moved by their sufferings, shocking though these have been. The poor or the "middle" peasant may, in some cases, be actuated by fear of a like fate. On the other hand, he is offered better prospects and, indeed, already finds himself beginning to

get a larger share of the produce of the land, improved housing and social amenities. Nor, on the collective farm, is he completely communised, the mere paid and property-less servant of the State. He is a co-operator who, though largely controlled by the State, still in part helps to make the orders that he obeys. In the *artel* form of organisation, which covers the majority of the collectivised peasant households, he still keeps his own home and garden and an animal or two, and in some co-operatives for common cultivation he is required only to pool his land and beasts for sowing and harvest.

Lastly, the Bolsheviks have an enormous asset in the youth. The influence of the young is apparent everywhere, in the countryside no less than in the town—from the school children who laugh their parents out of church-going, to the Young Communists who, singly or in groups, devote themselves to the task of inspiring, leading, pushing, organising and, if need be, intimidating the sluggards or doubters. These young men and women have had their education (about which I shall say more presently) in the Communist schools and universities or in the Red Army. They have energy, enthusiasm and faith, and they have careers open to their talents, in agriculture as well as in industry. (At one collective farm I went to, a small dairy, fruit and vegetable farm with a total personnel of a hundred, a dozen of the younger "labourers" were away doing university courses.) Every year will increase their numbers and decrease the numbers of the elders who may hanker after ancient ways. In these circumstances, unless some economic or political catastrophe upsets all calculations, the odds are against a peasant revolt.

On the significance of the Plan as a whole it is not my business to speculate here. But there is one point of some practical importance on which I shall say a word. The Communists boast that, bar accidents (and the chief accident they fear is a "capitalist war" on the Soviets), they will in the course of ten or twelve years surpass the production of the United States. American and other

business men with whom I have spoken, if they do not quite believe that, believe at least that Russia is in the way to becoming a dangerous competitor in the markets of the world. But surely that depends, first, on what is the object of the markets of the world. If it is to supply the needs of the world to the fullest possible extent and with the least possible restriction, then the output of Soviet oil and timber, corn, butter and eggs—and of manufactured articles, if and when their quality is assured—should be a blessing and not a curse. If it is a curse it will be political perversity that makes it so. Secondly, apart altogether from political considerations, Russia's own internal market is almost limitless. At present the Soviet Government is driven, in order to pay for the imports necessary for reconstruction and development, to export goods that are clamoured for at home. It cannot, nor will it desire, to pursue such a policy indefinitely. The people of Russia are kept going by the hope not merely of spiting the capitalist world, but of getting more food and clothes and comforts for themselves. When they have got more they will want more still. And long before they are satisfied, the danger of the competition of Communist Russia with capitalist America and Europe will have disappeared. For who can suppose that either the one or the other will be a generation hence what it is to-day ?

## CHAPTER IV

### PROLETARIAN CULTURE

FEW will accuse the Russian Communists of indifference to popular education. Their task of combating not merely ignorance, but blank illiteracy, was a formidable one, and the ardour with which they have gone about it must provoke some admiration even in their enemies. The older men and women who cannot read or write may still be numbered in millions, but the millions have grown less year by year. In the case of the young, the *tempo* (to use the fashionable word) is of course faster. It is claimed that the number in the primary and secondary schools has risen from 7,800,000 in 1914 to 20,000,000 in 1931, whilst that of the pupils in technical and factory apprenticeship schools is now about a million and a half. There is still (partly, no doubt, owing to the subordination of cultural to economic development) a very serious shortage of school buildings, of equipment, of text-books and, last but not least, of teachers, who, in the ambitious phrase of Lenin, "must reach such a high level in our country as they never did and never will in bourgeois society." These difficulties are being gradually overcome. As regards new schools, if those that I saw in Moscow are typical of what is being done elsewhere (and I am assured that they are), the Soviet educationists will presently have something which they need not be ashamed to show to the Western world. Nor are they concerned only with building and equipping schools and universities and institutes. Their museums, which are rich in treasures and exceptionally well arranged from an instructional point of view, are being extended, and the use of educational films and of the wireless is being developed. Those who are past school age



get facilities and encouragement in learning through the co-operatives and the factories. And the youths in the Red Army spend their two years in an intensive course of education which goes far beyond drill and musketry.

At the present moment Russia is engaged in applying a sort of "Hadow Report" scheme which is designed to reorganise the basis and the character of the whole system of elementary and secondary education. This plan goes by the rather forbidding name of "polytechnisation." It aims at making the curriculum less academic by bringing it into closer touch with real life, which in the Russia of to-day means with "productive industry." The primary school, therefore, is to be linked with a factory or, in the country, with a collective farm, so that the children will be familiarised from their earliest years with machines and processes as well as with books. This does not imply that all the children from the daughter school are going, when they leave, into the mother factory or farm. Nor does it mean, as Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, declares very emphatically, that the school is to become a mere trade school; against that, she says, the Communists must set their face. The first object, in short, is not so much to train the child's hands as to familiarise his mind with the tools and the technique of one sort or another that he will have to use in years to come. Such a scheme of education is not, of course, a new idea invented by the Communists. It has been thought about and fought about by experts and by laymen in the capitalist world, and I do not propose to discuss its obvious advantages and its equally obvious dangers. I will only point out, if it needs pointing out, that in the peculiar circumstances of Russia one strongly felt objection, at any rate, disappears. Russia is not only an industrial, but a Socialist, state; the Russian workers are not the "lower orders"; and the Soviet Union has no Etons and Roedeans and other private academies for giving a superior education to young ladies and gentlemen.

But this brings us to a larger question. Granted that the new culture which the Bolsheviks envisage is to be univer-

sal and not the privilege of a few, what sort of culture is it going to be? Will all this passion for the conquest of matter, for the mechanisation of everything, this intense concentration on economics, end in producing a new race of "economic man" with a standardised, machine mind—and no doubt a sprinkling of clever, narrow specialists with a smattering of general knowledge—a travesty of the travestied American? That is what some critics, not all of them unfriendly critics, predict. I think myself that it is much too alarmist a view. But the theories and practices of the Communists certainly do raise some doubts. Not only the whole educational system, but science, literature and art are heavily biased with Marxian politico-economic dogma. There is, to be sure, no attempt to conceal this, and no scruple or hesitation about it. The Communist Party has its bible which it swears by and lives by as does a Fundamentalist Christian by his. It carries on its work of conversion with the fire of the Crusaders or of Mohammed, with the subtlety of the Jesuits, and with the ruthlessness of the Holy Inquisition. It imposes a severe personal discipline on its members; it devotes immense care to the training of its apostles. And the results of all this are a bewildering mixture of good and ill. One is moved alternately to admiration, to tears and to laughter.

Consider for a moment the propaganda which covers the land. Some critics talk of it as though it were a plague or a blight; but that is a criticism which does not do justice to the Communists. A great deal of their propaganda (I am speaking of the domestic and not the foreign kind) is not merely legitimate, but praiseworthy. The innumerable posters which advertise one aspect or another of the Five Year Plan vary in quality. Some are really artistic, others are poor. But none that I have seen is so ugly or vulgar as many of the pictures with which our own towns are plastered—the bottles of beer and gin, the pot-bellied butlers handing out cigarettes, the boosts of aperients or furniture on the hire-purchase system. Another kind of poster in which the Russians specialise may do useful work

in inculcating good habits and manners among the young. Pictures of virtuous little boys and girls brushing their teeth, going punctually to school, wearing the right kind of clothing and eating the right kind of food, all these are in much demand.

But it is when the fervent Bolshevik turns his energies to literature and drama and the fine arts that one begins to feel uneasy. There is an enormous zest for reading in Russia, and there is a great output of books. There is also a censorship. It may not be oppressive, but it is sufficient to prevent the circulation of the sort of book which the Communist Party considers a Soviet citizen ought not to read. The stage and cinematograph are largely given up to propaganda, which may be impressive, tiresome or amusing, according to one's temperament or mood. I saw two plays of this sort, one dealing with the collectivisation of the farms, and the other with a gang of professors engaged in counter-revolutionary intrigues. Both of them were superbly acted and produced, and were watched with absorbed interest by packed houses. My film shows included an anti-religious (or, to be strictly accurate, anti-clerical) picaresque comedy, and a highly moral and faintly sentimental story of the "liquidation" of the waifs and strays. And then there was a ballet, exhibiting the sufferings of Chinese coolies, the almost superhuman virtue of a Soviet naval captain, and a set of caricatures of capitalists and Imperialists—the chief villain with the air of Sir Austen Chamberlain, and wearing a cap and uniform that one would have said were a British Admiral's, save that they were chocolate-coloured. But it is only fair to say that other things are permitted and enjoyed. I saw in Leningrad the ballet *Esmeralda*, which is nothing more nor less than the story of the Hunchback of Notre Dame. And I noticed that, during one week when I was in Moscow, the performances at various theatres included two operas and a ballet of Tchaikovsky's, the *Barber of Seville*, *Aida*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Carmen*, Tchehov's *Cherry Orchard*, and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the Hermitage gallery at Leningrad I had the double pleasure of seeing the pictures and the use to which a really paternal State can put them. An earnest young official guide was taking a party round—a party composed of workers and soldiers. She halted them before Rubens' *Bacchus*, pointed with scorn to the mountain of pink, sagging flesh, and delivered a homily on the sin of over-eating and over-drinking. They passed presently to the portrait of a delightful old burgomaster by Frans Hals. "Look," she cried, "the typical bourgeois of the seventeenth century. Notice his cunning, greedy eyes!" I do not quote this diverting episode simply to mock—nor to suggest that all Communists despise their pictures except as texts for sermons. I do not think they do, and certainly they are no iconoclasts in their galleries, whatever they may be in the churches. Of music I can say little, save that I discovered the existence of a society called the "Russian Association of Proletarian Music," which aims at eliminating all bourgeois elements from the music of the Soviet State. Music, it holds, cannot be separated from the class struggle, and hymn tunes, sentimental love songs and jazz alike must be banned. But I gather from what I heard in other quarters that these enthusiasts have not made much headway in their campaign against the capitalist Muse.

What is more important to know is how much headway the serious Communists have made in fitting artists, scientists, philosophers and plain men to their intellectual Bed of Procrustes. A good deal, it would seem, and they may make more before they have finished. But I do not believe that they will destroy the freedom of the mind and all original creative art in Russia, or even shackle them permanently; for these things will be too strong for them in the long run.

## CHAPTER V

### WOMEN AND CHILDREN

THE Soviet State, like Plato's Republic, makes the least possible discrimination between its male and female citizens. All offices and all occupations, with a very few exceptions, are open to women. The Russian Commissar of Finance is a woman, and so is the Soviet Ambassador to Norway, and women fill a number of the minor posts in the hierarchy of government and of the Communist Party. In the factories, and in outside jobs such as building and transport, the two sexes work side by side—and, of course, on the farms also. Women workers were officially estimated early in 1930 at something over one-third of those engaged in the larger units of industry, and the All-Union Council of Trade Unions states that another million have been brought in during the last twelve months. They are prohibited, as they are here and elsewhere, from working in the mines and in certain dangerous or exhausting trades. Outside these processes, however, one can see women engaged on jobs that involve a heavy physical strain. If it is too heavy, as some critics aver, the excuse is the urgency of the Five Year Plan.

So far as wages are concerned, the Russian woman worker is, theoretically at least, in a better position than her sisters abroad. The principle of "equal pay for equal work" is laid down by law. But this does not mean that women in general earn as much as men. The majority of them are in the less skilled and lower-paid categories, and the extension of the piece-work system will, no doubt, tend still more in favour of the men. As regards social insurance, however, there is no inequality. Men and women get the same benefits—and neither pays any contribution. In

the matter of maternity, Russia is exceptionally generous (or should one say sensible?). The manual worker has two months off before her confinement and two months after, the office worker six weeks before and six weeks after, and in both cases full pay is allowed for the whole period. An extra benefit is given for the *layette*, and free medical treatment or advice is available in hospitals, clinics or infant welfare centres.

The most striking change in the position of women is not in the sphere of politics or of work, but in their private relations. The Soviet laws regarding marriage and divorce have excited world-wide curiosity—and a part of the world, at any rate, is making an arrant fool of itself about them. Those who have examined the system and its results are within their rights in expressing doubt or disapproval. But the cry of “nationalisation of women” is simply ignorant or malicious twaddle. It would be just as true—and just as untrue—to talk of the “nationalisation of men.” Women are not the prey of men in Russia to-day. Promiscuity is not the rule, nor the fashion. Indeed, the Communists frown upon licentiousness, and sometimes punish it severely. Prostitutes may survive here and there, but they are very little in evidence. There are no brothels, licensed by the State, as there are all over the Continent, or unlicensed, but tolerated by public opinion and only disturbed by an occasional police raid, as in this country. Nobody makes a living by pornography in Russia. And the sex-stuff popularised by the Hollywood film producers leaves Moscow cold.

The ceremony of marriage in the U.S.S.R. is as easy as it is here. The State merely wants to know the relevant facts—and perhaps I should add, to impart some relevant information. This it does with a vengeance in the ante-room of the registry office. The walls are covered with pictures, diagrams and models, showing the sexual organs and the processes of gestation. Other placards call attention to the hospitals and clinics where abortions will be properly performed; for abortion is legal in the U.S.S.R.,

and only discouraged, I understand, in the case of the first child. And mixed with these will be alluring pictures of happy families, eating, sleeping, cleaning up, or what not. After inspecting this exhibition—or ignoring it, if they choose—the intending spouses go in to the registrar and furnish the necessary particulars of their identity, age, and so on. They must also make a solemn declaration that each is fully informed as to the state of the other's health ; and a false declaration is a criminal offence. The couple may be married in a church as well, if they wish, but the State only recognises a civil wedding. Marriage involves no subjection whatever of the wife to the husband. She may take his name or keep her own maiden name, or the man may take hers. Any property she had before marrying remains her own ; any acquired by either party afterwards is joint. Each is liable for the support of the other in case of incapacitation or unemployment. And this liability applies also to couples who are living together unmarried—which they can do without any social stigma on themselves or their children. There are no “ illegitimate ” children in Russia.

Divorce is equally easy, or even easier. It may be obtained—also at the registry office—on the application of either spouse, and no ground need be alleged. The registrar only requires to be satisfied that the children, if there are any, will be properly provided for and that if either party is unable to work, the other will contribute to his or her support. If there is a dispute on these points that cannot be settled by the registrar, it goes to a court of law. The result of this facility has naturally been a great increase in the number of divorces, though the number is not quite so prodigious as some think. I have no up-to-date statistics. But I am told that three or four years ago the figures (for the Russian Republic) showed one divorce to every four marriages, as compared with one to six in the United States of America. The rate is higher, as one would expect, in Moscow and the big towns than in the countryside. But I gather that the friendly efforts of the registrars do some-

thing to keep it down ; one of them with whom I talked said that she frequently persuaded people who came for a divorce in a huff over some trifle to think better of it. However, the rate is high, and it may be argued that so large a freedom for parents must often work to the disadvantage of the children. But it is absurd to pretend that the Communists are deliberately trying to destroy family life, either by their marriage laws or by their encouragement of communal cooking and communal feeding. And if they were trying, there is singularly little evidence of their succeeding. Industrialisation and the mechanisation of agriculture must, of course, disintegrate the family as an economic unit. But in its essential form, as an intimate association of parents and children, I do not believe that it is in any danger of disappearance.

Let us now turn to the children themselves. There can be no question of the advance that has been made in their welfare. The State is solicitous for their education, for their nourishment, for their physical culture, for their medical treatment. It begins its concern for them before they are born, and it carries it on through infancy with crèches, nursery schools and kindergartens, clinics, hospitals, and sanatoria, as well as by propaganda and pressure on the parents. The provision of all these things is as yet far from adequate, but it is going on steadily, and the results are already beginning to be apparent. The coming generation in Russia shows promise of abundant health and vigour. But this is not all. The Revolution has given the young an awe-inspiring responsibility. It has allowed them a large measure of freedom—freedom of self-expression and freedom of criticism, including criticism of their teachers and their “elders and betters,” though not, I need hardly say, of Karl Marx. But it has also imposed on them the duty of thinking for and working for the community. The task of being a good citizen begins at an early age, and it does not consist merely in keeping out of the policeman’s clutches. It involves doing, or at least trying to do, something useful to the State. That something may



range from the helping of the Five Year Plan by hand or mouth, or both, to smelling out heresies or improving the manners and the morals of father and mother.

I should not like to say that all the children in Russia get full marks all the time ; for Russian children are not superhuman. But the discipline of the schools and the Communist Party is a potent instrument, and has achieved remarkable successes in the creation of a group spirit, of altruism, and of juvenile zeal. The manifestations of this zeal are sometimes amusing. There is a story told by Krupskaya of a child of eleven soundly rating a thousand textile workers for their slackness about education. And another boy of the same age (at a children's conference held to discuss polytechnical schools!) put the directors of the factory to open shame. " You talk about what you will do for the school," he said, " but when we started to build a rabbit hutch for the study of rabbits, you would not give us any nails." Yet, if there is some precocity and priggishness among these boys and girls, there is also a good deal of the virtue that is claimed for our Scouts and Guides. And may not the ideal of social service be a better one with which to imbue the young than that of our own Dr. Samuel Smiles, of blessed and persistent memory? In any case, whatever be its merits or demerits, this youth movement, fostered by the Communist Party, and organised in the Young Communist League, the Pioneers, and the Little Octobrists, is an extraordinarily powerful force in the moulding of the new Russia.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DICTATORSHIP

“ A PRINCE,” said Machiavelli, “ ought to choose the fox and the lion ; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves.” The “ prince ” in Soviet Russia is the Communist Party, and the Communist Party is a good disciple of Machiavelli. It exercises its dominion by an elaborate mixture of force and craft. It is not the Government ; it is not an organ of the Constitution. But it is in fact sovereign. It is not simply *a* party, but *the* Party—the only legal party in Russia—and its members hold all the key positions in the State—in the Soviets, local, district, regional, national and “ All-Union,” in the Ministries, in the Red Army and the police, in the economic syndicates and trusts, in the Trade Unions, the factories, and the farms. At the top of its pyramidal structure stand the “ Politbureau,” a committee of a dozen men, and Stalin, the secretary-general. He is called by foreigners “ the dictator,” and he is, indeed, the most powerful individual in the State ; but he is neither theoretically nor actually an absolute monarch.

Such in essence is the dictatorship of the proletariat—a system of control that vies with and surpasses that of Italian Fascism in its ingenuity and its effectiveness. It is a régime which is repugnant to British traditions of liberty. But one must put aside prejudice in order to understand it. It is not all brutal violence and malevolent cunning. The Communists are not a pack of Yahoos torturing a nation of Houyhnhnms. Critics often say that the dictatorship of the proletariat means dictatorship over the proletariat. And so it evidently does. But the Communists conceive

this dictatorship as a trusteeship and, moreover, they are not an entirely alien body, a class with separate interests. The Party is overwhelmingly proletarian in its composition, and it deliberately keeps up the preponderance of manual workers among its members. It enforces its will on the masses, no doubt ; but it would claim that its will is the will of the majority. For the minority who disapprove of its ways it cares nothing ; it treats them on the maxim of *oderint dum metuant*. As an instrument of fear it has at its disposal the G.P.U.<sup>1</sup> This famous body of special State police is the successor of the old Cheka of the early days of the Revolution, and is designed to combat " political and economic counter-revolution, espionage and banditry." It does not, as some people in this country appear to believe, harry or threaten the ordinary visitor to Russia ; its agents may even help him if he is in a difficulty. Nor does it interfere with the ordinary Soviet citizen. But for counter-revolutionaries or malcontents, or those under suspicion, it has a hundred eyes and a hundred hands. It can act boldly and secretly. It can be used, and it has been used, to spread terror and ruin among the innocent as well as the guilty, and it has won a sinister reputation. Its activities within the last year or two had become excessive, and its too ferocious chiefs were recently turned out and replaced by milder ones.

But the real strength of the Communists derives from other sources than the G.P.U. The Party itself is sustained by the consciousness of a high purpose (however dubious that may sound to its adversaries), and it is fortified by an iron discipline. Its membership has grown rapidly ; it is now about two and a half millions. Yet entry is still hard, and expulsion is pretty easy. Candidates are put through severe tests before they are admitted, and they have to undergo a waiting period of six months if they are manual workers, and longer if they are not. Once in, they enjoy

<sup>1</sup> The initials (pronounced *gay-pay-oo*) of the Russian words meaning " State Political Department." It is sometimes called by its full title O.G.P.U. The " O " stands for the word " Unified."

various privileges ; but they pay for them with heavy sacrifices—sacrifices of liberty, of leisure and of money. None may pocket a salary of more than 300 roubles a month. All must give extra service to the community, and the service may be a difficult or distasteful one imposed by superior order. Anyone is free to express his own opinion on a policy or a project whilst it is still under discussion. But once it is settled it is the Party decision, and must be accepted without question. Plain living and high thinking are enjoined ; lechery and habitual drunkenness are grounds for censure, degradation or expulsion. Corruption may involve the death penalty. And slackers are periodically purged in large numbers. There are, of course, black sheep in the flock. Some join the Party with an eye to a career or the benefits they hope to get from it. Some may even be “ radishes,” as I have heard them called—very red outside and white within. But it is not believable that the bulk of the members are insincere ; so gigantic a hypocrisy could not achieve what it does. The Communist Party, in fact, has the outstanding marks of the religious order—zeal, asceticism, altruism, bigotry. The love of God, of course, it has not ; atheism is one of its tenets.

Nor is this all. Below the Party itself, as I mentioned earlier, a host of youths and maidens and children is organised, and taught to think and work on similar lines. The League of Communist Youth has something like four million members between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three, and a great number of them will pass in due course into the Party. These Komsomols, as they are called, are the pick of the young men and women, carefully trained in economics and politics as well as in their own jobs. They are active in the factories, the villages and the schools. They are to be found in every propagandist campaign ; they are prominent as “ shock-brigaders.” I saw a team of them working furiously one night at relaying about three hundred yards of tramlines in the middle of Moscow. They began about midnight, and they had disappeared and the

trams were running there before eight in the morning. It was the Komsomols, too, who three or four years ago successfully took on the task of clearing the streets of the *bezprizornie*, or homeless children. Next come the Pioneers, aged from ten to sixteen, and then the Little Octobrists, from eight to eleven. Each organisation inspires and guides that below it. Each has its rules, its slogans and its technique; but all are of the same pattern and concentrated on the same purpose. Cynics may suggest that some of these children will have wearied of well-doing before they reach the age when they can blossom into full Party members. Perhaps they will. But at present the stimulus is strong; the Soviet society itself is only in its infancy, and the task of tending it and developing it offers a perennial interest. In any case, all these youthful millions are themselves being educated and are educating others in a new model; they are establishing new codes of morals and manners; and they are contributing in the measure of their abilities to one of the biggest economic plans which the world has seen. They are a portent. And the fact that none of them knows, except by hearsay, what a capitalist society is, or the meaning of parliamentary democracy and of a dozen other institutions that we prize or grumble at—this also may be a portent.

There remain two questions which exercise many minds here or in Russia. The first is whether the Communists, in this State where classes are abolished, are entrenching themselves as a new upper class, with the habits and the privileges of masters. Naturally they repudiate any such intention. The Party is not a closed order. Its doors are open—or at least ajar—and, as education spreads and the State grows stronger, they will open wider. The tutelage it exercises is only temporary. And in any case there is no danger of that exploitation for personal profit which is the mark of the bourgeois class. All this is, no doubt, fair argument, and if the Party sticks to its fundamental principles, the classless society may be achieved, in which the only inequality will be the inequality of ability. But

power is an insidious temptation, and bureaucracy is a peril to be guarded against. The peril has been seen more than once in the history of the Russian Revolution, and Lenin himself attacked it with the demand for more democracy. Much will now depend on the attitude and influence of the younger generation.

The other question is of more immediate interest. Is the Soviet Union arming for war? Does it aim at national aggrandisement or at the spread of its revolutionary creed by aggression on its neighbours? The Communists' answer is, of course, an emphatic "No." They are proud of the Red Army, though their pride is not merely in its military efficiency, but in the cultural training which the young conscript undergoes and in the economic service he can render to the State. But all this armed force, they protest, is for defence, not offence. They are not "Imperialists." They have offered to disarm if others will do likewise, but the world only laughs at them. In all the circumstances, and with the bitter memory of the attacks launched on them a few years ago by Europe and America as well as by Russian counter-revolutionaries, they are not disposed to relax their précautions. Everyone in Russia, from top to bottom, so far as I can make out, is under the illusion (if it is indeed an illusion) that the capitalist countries are itching for a chance to fight Bolshevism. The defence of the republic, therefore, is a supreme necessity, and the whole population, including the children in the schools, is instructed in the use of arms or in the taking of cover from air-bombs or in antidotes to "capitalist poison gases." Apart from all this, Russia is at present, and will be for a long time to come, absorbed in her own internal development. Any foreign war would certainly mean a serious check to the Five Year Plan, and might utterly wreck it. And so, if other people let Russia alone, she will be only too happy to let them alone. Stalin and his colleagues, whatever else they may be, are not mentally deficient.