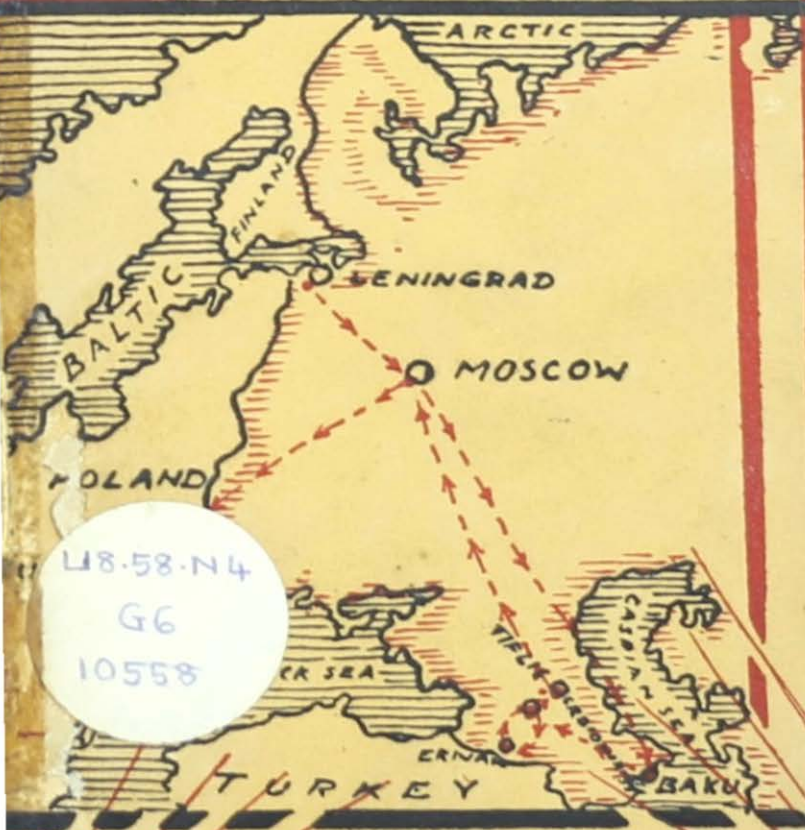


SOVIET SIDELIGHTS

By
M. R. MASANI



FOREWORD
BY
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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FOREWORD

Probably on no other subject have so many books been published in modern times as on Soviet Russia. One wonders at the abundance of them; they come out unceasingly from the European and American publishing houses (Nazi-land and Fascist Italy excepted) and disappear in millions of libraries and homes. And still the demand exceeds the supply.

Why is this so? Why do Russia and the other territories of the U.S.S.R. attract and fascinate or sometimes repel? Whatever our reactions may be, whether we are intellectually inclined or emotionally influenced, we cannot cast out the spell. Partly this pull is due to disillusion with the old world and its ways, a desire to escape from a system which has no real hope to offer; even more so we are drawn by the building up before our very eyes of a new civilization, so different from the old, with different values and standards, new motives, hopes and desires. We talk of the Russian experiment but already it is something much more than that; it has vast achievement to its credit and the history of the world has been changed thereby.

We stand at the threshold of a new era,—that is a commonplace oft—repeated by almost everybody to-day. Yet few realise it fully or

understand its implications, and while they talk glibly of change and transition, keep in the same old mental ruts and refuse to look around. That new era is not a dream of the future; it is the actuality of the present in the U.S.S.R. With all its defects and mistakes and ruthlessness, it is taking visible, vital shape there, stumbling occasionally but ever marching forward.

Of this vast enterprise, so full of lessons for all, it is very difficult for most of us to form an adequate conception. A few fortunates may see with their own eyes, the rest must depend on books and on the intelligence and good-will of the authorities who ban books in India. Unhappily that intelligence and good-will are singularly lacking in our ruling classes, and the wide net of the censorship keeps out of our ken not only most books on Russia but much of the new literature which is stimulating the best minds of Europe and America to-day. The man of the sword and the ordinance does not think in terms of the book or of the clash of ideas. It is doubtful if he thinks at all; he acts.

I have so far read only a few chapters of Comrade Masani's little book, as they came out from time to time. I like his fresh, intimate approach and am interested in his reactions to this new world. I think such books have a definite value, especially in India, where knowledge of the U.S.S.R. is terribly limited. They do not tell us very much about it or put a full pic-

ture before us. They are not meant to. But they do give us glimpses of the masses of a vast country putting their shoulders to the wheel and pushing ahead, and building and creating, and obliterating many of the black spots which have disfigured our world too long. Those glimpses are helpful; they provide some background to our thinking.

For the more serious student there is no lack of books and those who are fortunate will go to that wonderful picture of the new Soviet civilization which Sidney and Beatrice Webb have drawn up with all their amazing learning, industry and scientific insight. But for most of us, I am afraid, such books are beyond reach. They should at least read the lighter books, like Masani's, and provoke their minds to serious thought about Russia, the world and India.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU.

Lausanne, 26th February, 1936.



Komsomolka (Young Communist) reading a Turkish newspaper in Latin script to peasants at a kolkhoz (collective farm) in Azerbaijan Republic,