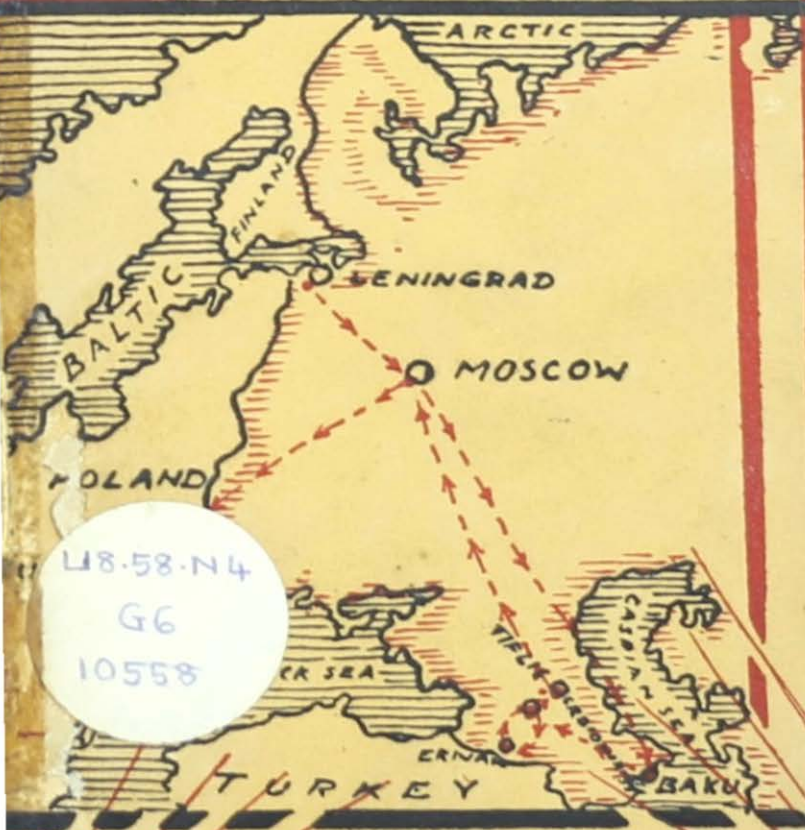


SOVIET SIDELIGHTS

By
M. R. MASANI



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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,

ON A SOVIET SHIP

LENIN and Stalin apart, there are only two or three other leaders of theirs whom the Russians honour by naming after them their towns and roads and institutions. One of these is Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Pole. Known best as the chief of the G. P. U. (State Political Department), the new name given to the secret police, Dzerzhinsky struck terror into the hearts of the opponents of the Soviet regime by his ruthless suppression of those who plotted against the new order and gained a reputation for bloodthirstiness from the capitalist press of Western countries. In Russia he is remembered with affection and gratitude not only for the determination with which he defended the Soviets from domestic and foreign foes but also for those gifts of the heart which made him find time for projects of penal reform and the protection of destitute children. The story goes that this ruthless police chief who sent hundreds to their death with a stroke of the pen could not pass an injured dog or cat in the street without stopping to take it away for attention.

It is said that falling in love is the result of 90 per cent proximity and 10 per cent obstruc-

tion. My taking the boat to Leningrad was the result of a like combination of opportunity and obstruction.

When on my way to England, I had thought vaguely of visiting, perhaps, the Soviet Union. It was when on my arrival there my passport was impounded by the British Government that I suddenly began to realize my disappointment at not being able to visit the Workers' Fatherland. What was more natural, then, that when my right to travel was restored to me I should make the most of my opportunity? And *Intourist*, the Soviet Travel Agency, had already brought to my attention through its advertisements in the London press the attractions of travelling with its assistance. So on August 17, 1935 I boarded the *Dzerzhinsky* in the Thames from a wharf in the heart of London.

A voyage on a Soviet ship is different from life on any other ship. The first thing I noticed when I got on board the boat was a man selling something on deck—only, it wasn't the usual collection of trinkets and curios but Communist literature! The "latest" was a special issue of the "Imprecor" containing full reports of the proceedings of the Congress of the Comintern then drawing to a close in Moscow. There was Dimitrov's speech outlining the new United Front tactics Communist Parties were to adopt in various countries. There was R. Palme Dutt's admission that Communists had followed secta-

rian and ultra-leftist tactics and had wrongly dubbed parties differing from them "Social-Fascist" when they were not Fascist at all. I remembered that as late as the beginning of this year Palme Dutt himself had denounced the Congress Socialist Party as "Social-Fascist"!

What a mixed crowd of passengers we had on board! An ex-Chairman of the British Labour Party on a mission of selling herrings to the Russians, an Austrian journalist, a French Radical deputy, a German exile fresh from a British prison after serving a sentence for alleged espionage, an ex-Tsarist general now a loyal attache to a Soviet embassy abroad.

There were three classes of passengers on board—First, Tourist and Third. But you could not tell who was which. Our third class cabins were rather small for four, but considering that we could move all over the ship—the saloons and the decks were common to all classes—and that our menu included caviare daily, we of the Third Estate felt that the proletarian state was looking very well after the lower orders! Besides, every cabin had a loud-speaker. So we could, at will, get Moscow or London broadcasts. On the P. & O. S. S. *Strathaird* on my way back to India we could not get the result of the General Election in England for a whole day because there was no broadcasting on board!

Not only were there no distinctions between the passengers but there were few among the

officers and the crew. Outside the sphere of work, they were all equals. The crew had a "Red Corner" where they all fraternised when off duty. Some of us took the liberty of visiting them our first evening on board ship.

The "Red Corner" was equipped with a piano, a radio set, newspapers and magazines and a wall-newspaper. This last feature, which one comes across in every factory, school or other institution in the Soviet Union, needs a little explaining. In the wall-newspaper one sees the reflection of the life of the institution to which it belongs. Articles, cartoons, questions, answers, announcements, are all there in different hand-writtings written in ink of different colours. Questions of common interest are discussed, the conduct of a superior officer or a comrade is called in question. That of the crew of the *Dzerzhinsky* contained now and again criticism by a sailor of the Captain's conduct of a particular operation in navigation! Can one imagine that happening on any but a Soviet ship?

It is in the "Red Corner" too that the branch of the Communist Party on board ship functions, where classes are conducted by the senior members for novices among the crew in Marxist theory.

The next morning brought us to Dunkerque and there we passengers from England were joined by about a hundred French "Friends of the Soviet Union." As the boat glided out of

harbour again, these hundred men and women, mostly young, gathered at the sides and shouted to their comrades on the pier: "*Pour les Soviets et la Paix*" (for the Soviets and Peace.) Then one of them produced an accordion and they sang the songs of the *Front Populaire* (the alliance of French Radicals, Socialists and Communists against the Fascist menace) from the *Marseillaise* of the Revolution of 1789 and the *Carmagnole* of the Paris Commune of 1871 to the Red Army March and the *Internationale*.

For the rest of the voyage, the crowd on board—passengers and crew—became a huge, happy family listening to the accordion, singing with it, dancing to it. There were breaks in between, of course, for sleep and food and discussions. Discussions—in twos and threes and scores; in English and in French. There were debates among the passengers and question-and-answer meetings when passengers put questions about Russia and about their working conditions and members of the crew answered them.

There was just a night's break in the revolutionary atmosphere. That was when we passed through the Kiel Canal. Guards with Swastikas were on the banks. A chill crept over the ship—a premonition of impending menace from the Swastika to the Workers' State? There was no singing that night, no attempt at fraternisation. The next day the passengers' wall-newspaper contained a mocking question: "How

did the singers of the *Internationale* lose their lusty voices last night?" A French comrade answered that it was done so as not to embarrass their hosts, the Soviet Government, by giving Hitler any excuse for provocative action.

When in jail I had been struck by the similarity between the life there and the life on board a ship. There is in both cases the same break from normal life. You are suddenly thrown into the midst of a crowd of strangers with whom you must, willy-nilly, develop a measure of intimacy through constant throwing together and a lack of privacy. Then, just as suddenly, you step out of this world into the usual one again and see little, if anything, of your fellow-travellers.

On the *Dzerzhinsky* it struck me that the difference between life there and on board a ship flying any other flag was the difference between imprisonment during a Civil Disobedience campaign with twenty or thirty comrades in your yard and a sentence served in solitude in "peace time" with hardened convicts. In the first case there is a sense of fellowship, a feeling of all having the same cause at heart.

The fifth day brought us to Leningrad. I guess most people were glad because, though everyone had had a splendid time and found a rare *camaraderie*, they were looking forward impatiently to their stay in the Soviet Union—some for their first glimpse of it; others, like me, for another look.

II

LENINGRAD

LENINGRAD is the ideal gateway to the Soviet Union. An impressive facade is all very well if you want to halt on the pavement and admire the structure from outside and pass on your way. If, on the other hand, you are the sort of fellow who insists on running up the stairs and down the corridors and poking his nose into every other room, be it parlour or scullery, I commend a not-too-impressive view from the door-step to avoid disappointment and to heighten the enjoyment of discovery. Such a doorway is Leningrad.

Essentially still the ex-capital of the Russian Empire, the second biggest city in the Soviet Union is more a memorial to its past grandeur than an augury of the greatness to come. Less so, undoubtedly, than at the time of my previous visit in the summer of 1927. There were now more people, new buildings, brighter shops, more life all round. Petrograd had faded further away and Leningrad had taken more concrete shape and form. The change of name had not yet, however, been followed by a complete change of identity.

I hope to see that change an accomplished fact when I visit that city again. When?

Having only a limited number of days to spend in the Soviet Union, I decided this time to cut down my stay in Leningrad to a few hours. The *Dzerzhinsky* arrived in Leningrad about noon and by midnight I was off again for Moscow.

Even those few hours were enough, however, to produce an impression of progress made since my last visit. Our hotel was a vast improvement on its counterpart in 1927. Then our complaints regarding uncleanness and noxious smells had been met with polite explanations of their inability to satisfy "bourgeois" standards of cleanliness! This time there was not the slightest need to complain.

The city, too, presented a less dilapidated sight. There were fewer palatial buildings looking mournfully deserted with their shutters up; more newly built houses, factories, homes for workers. The shop windows, too, were gaily decked. One thing that struck me was the number of food shops—*Gastronome*, they were called—and the way they made your mouth water with their wonderful display of delicacies.

Intourist offered to drive a few of us round the town before we rushed off to Moscow. *Intourist*, I must explain again, is that efficient and very obliging department of the Soviet administration which attends to foreign tourists. Every-

one in Russia must fall into one or other category and every foreigner who desires to tour in Russia must go as an Intourist. I was Intourist No. 32505.

We were taken that evening all over Leningrad in a taxi,—the horse and carriage, rather like the Bombay 'victoria', which had in 1927 been the normal conveyance, had practically disappeared from the streets,—whisked from one imposing edifice to another, passing palaces and churches and mansions built by various Tsars and Grand Dukes for their more various mistresses. There was a very lovely little mosque—a solitary outpost of the East—which was still allowed to function because evidently there were a score or two of Moslems in Leningrad who were prepared to keep it going. The mosque had been built some centuries back by one of the Ivans or Peters who abound in Tsarist history as a symbol of his friendship and alliance with the Emir of Bokhara and his toleration towards the colony of Moslems in Petrograd then.

My attempts to divert the sightseeing from architectural beauties to housing and institutions failed. Our guide, a very serious girl, had her own ideas of how these things should be done.

"In Leningrad, you must see Old Russia; in Moscow, you will get plenty of opportunity to see the New."

Glad that I had planned an early exit from the Old to the New Russia, I acquiesced for the

rest of the evening in the young Comrade's decision.

I arrived in Moscow rather bleary-eyed early in the morning. That was the result, not of any lack of comfort in travelling, but of lack of sleep through sitting up too late that night talking to a Red Army Commander also travelling from Leningrad to Moscow.

Third (or, as it is called in Russia, hard) Class travelling by night—and I speak as one who travels third in India and abroad,—is more comfortable than in any other country of the world that I know. Every passenger has a whole berth to himself and the hardness of the wooden boards is softened a little by the blankets and clean sheets and pillow, sealed with the laundry seal, which the conductor provides you with on payment of just two roubles.

This luxurious allotment of sleeping accommodation to every passenger, soft or hard class—(yes, there *are two* classes of travel),—restricts the number of travellers by night rather considerably. Take along with that the fact that the number of "common people" who travel has gone up considerably since the Revolution and you get the not unnatural result that you have to book your place a good few days ahead unless, of course, you are that privileged creature, an Intourist, in which case doors open to you much quicker.

The number of people using Soviet railways has gone up in phenomenal fashion. In 1913, the

number of passengers carried was 185,000,000; in 1934 it had risen to 945,000,000.

Imagine the bulk of the peasantry in India indulging in long distance railway travel and the state of collapse of the transport system which would ensue! One would begin to regret even the present disgraceful overcrowding! The Soviet railways have, in addition, to face the burden of goods transport made necessary by the putting through of the entire Industrial Revolution in 15 years. From 132,400,000 tons in 1913 the freight carried by railways had risen to 317,000,000 tons in 1934.

Transport has been, and is still, one of the weakest links in the Soviet chain. Militarily, that weakness constitutes a menace. It has broken more than one senior Communist leader who was placed in charge of transport. Then Stalin—I beg your pardon, I mean the Council of People's Commissars—placed the ablest of the younger leaders, Kaganovich, in charge. The Moscow papers were full of figures showing his achievement. He had succeeded in raising the average daily loading of carriages from 46,334 in 1930 to 55,717 in 1934. The result is that Kaganovich is already being mentioned as one of Stalin's possible successors in the dim and distant future.

But to get back to the Red Army Commander in the train. He was a young man in the early thirties, and spoke French. Every officer in the Army, he said, had to learn at least one foreign

language. He was an officer commanding an artillery detachment. What struck me and my fellow-tourists was the youth of this man whose rank was the equivalent of that of a Colonel!

Queerly enough, my last night in the Soviet Union was also passed in a railway compartment with another Red Army officer. Only, this time it was a General. His age, too, was thirty-four. He joined the ranks of the Red Army during the Civil War at the age of 17 and fought on almost every front—against Wrangal and Koltchak and Denikin—with distinction. At the end of the Wars of Intervention, he was picked out for training at the Military Academy and, after that, returned to the Army as its youngest General. He was now second in command of the entire forces on the western frontier of Russia. A charming and cultured young man, speaking French and German and learning English, this Soviet General showed a knowledge of the world and its peoples and politics—every officer goes through his training in Marxism—that was astounding. He had read Tagore, of course—every educated Russian has. Gandhi's autobiography is the next most widely read book written by an Indian.

Both these officers were, of course, Communist Party men. What a contrast they made to the old men who command other armies! How, in a clash, would such a staff show up against those of the Western Powers or the Japanese War Lords?

III

A NEW MOSCOW RISES

ON August 30, I left Moscow for the South. On September 10, I returned to the metropolis. On the drive back to my hotel from the station I noticed two changes. A fairly large building at a street corner in the heart of the city had vanished. Within two hundred yards of that site, the hotel of the Moscow Soviet (with 1,000 rooms) which was, when I left, an ugly mass of scaffoldings and hoardings, now presented a clean and impressive façade.

These two 'little' changes were symbolic of what Moscow is going through. Symbolic not only of changes in its structure but also of the tempo of that change. An Englishman who had lived in Moscow for about three years told me that parts of it had altered so much he could not remember what they used to be like when he came!

Moscow, with its 3,500,000 inhabitants, its 2,500 streets and lanes, its 51,000 houses, its 1,000 factories and industrial plants, took shape in the course of eight centuries. It grew in that period from a little village to this large city, whose map looks so much like a spider's web,—one circle inside another, till we come to the innermost circle.

of the Kremlin, with radial streets linking up these circles. And so the proletariat of Moscow inherited it, a veritable labyrinth of winding lanes, back-streets and blind alleys, with its contrasts of palaces and slums.

Indeed, the Revolution only made confusion worse confounded. The establishment of the Soviet capital in Moscow and the rapid process of industrialisation led, on the one hand, to a rapid rise in population and, on the other, to rapid progress in the construction of houses to cope with the overcrowding in the city. From 2,025,900 in December 1926, the population rose by January 1934 to 3,613,600. In the same period some 3,500 new houses were erected. With every month and every year the number of automobiles on the streets of Moscow increased. The aggravation in traffic congestion had best be left to the imagination.

In true 'Bolshevik fashion' the Soviet leaders decided that Moscow must be re-planned and to a large extent rebuilt.

There were two suggestions the Communists rejected. The first was to spread the city over a very much wider area and make Moscow what they termed contemptuously "a large village", thus denying the very principle of a city; the other was excessive urbanization of the conventional capitalist type—another New York with its skyscrapers and overcrowding. Stalin, in characteristic Communist style, declared that a struggle on two

fronts would have to be waged against the Left and Right deviationists who made these suggestions. In Russia everyone who disagrees with the official line of the Communist Party is classified as either a Left or Right deviationist!

The plan actually adopted is a compromise. While a large new area, at present undeveloped, will be built on and made part of the city, most of the present city will be re-planned, whole buildings being destroyed or moved from their present sites. Moscow will in the result have a territory at least half as big again as its present area. The banks of the Moscow river are among the most popular sites for new construction.

"Some people think that the planning of a city is a luxury, that it can be postponed for at least a few years", said Kaganovich, the Commissar for Communications. "These comrades make a great mistake. The art of our city-building lies in the fact that we include the construction of each small section, each house, in the one single unified plan of the future city. In rebuilding Moscow we must look years ahead, otherwise we will be erecting a lot of buildings and structures of every sort in places where they should not be."

And so, with a ruthlessness which wins your admiration when you think of the miserable, tinkering and dilatory measures of municipal authorities in Bombay and elsewhere, the Moscow Soviet is pushing on with its gigantic schemes of

widening roads, making pavements, creating parks and amusement grounds, planting trees, building houses fit for Soviet citizens to live in. If a house comes in the way, it must be moved out of the way if it is worth preserving or be pulled down altogether if it is out of date. Fortunately, the Moscow municipal authorities are not bothered with the existence of landlords who demand compensation for an encroachment on their "rights"! On the other hand, they can mobilise the active support of the people.

"The successful reconstruction of Moscow demands," said a Communist leader, "that each citizen, each worker, should love the street in which he lives, should work unceasingly to create cultural conditions in his house, court, lane and the places bordering upon them, the squares and parks."

There are two big projects in this connection which deserve individual mention. The first is the Volga-Moscow Canal. On 10th September, 1935 the Moscow papers contained a Report on the Canal, signed jointly by Molotov, as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, and Stalin, as Secretary of the Communist Party. The Report mentioned among other things that the cost of the canal was 1400 million roubles (the rouble is officially worth about a dollar), that its length would be 127 kilometres, its depth 5.5 metres and its width 30 metres, giving a capacity of about 136 million cubic metres. To be able

to visualize the immensity of the task it is necessary to mention corresponding figures for the Suez Canal with its length of 164 kilometres and capacity of 75 million cubic metres and the Panama Canal with 81 kilometres and 160 million cubic metres respectively.

As a job, therefore, the Volga-Moscow canal is only next to the Panama, while it will be the biggest river canal in the world. The task it performs is no less than to join Moscow with the Baltic on the North and the Black Sea on the South. The Canal will raise the level of the Moscow River by three metres and make it navigable by big ships, make Moscow a salubrious place and provide it with water for its people and its factories and mills.

The other noteworthy project in Moscow—in fact, it is an accomplishment—is the Metro, or underground railway.

“Have you seen our Metro?” the poor tourist is asked almost as soon as he is introduced to a Muscovite.

“Wonderful”, he replies if he is wise, taking the word out of his questioner’s mouth. And wonderful it certainly is.

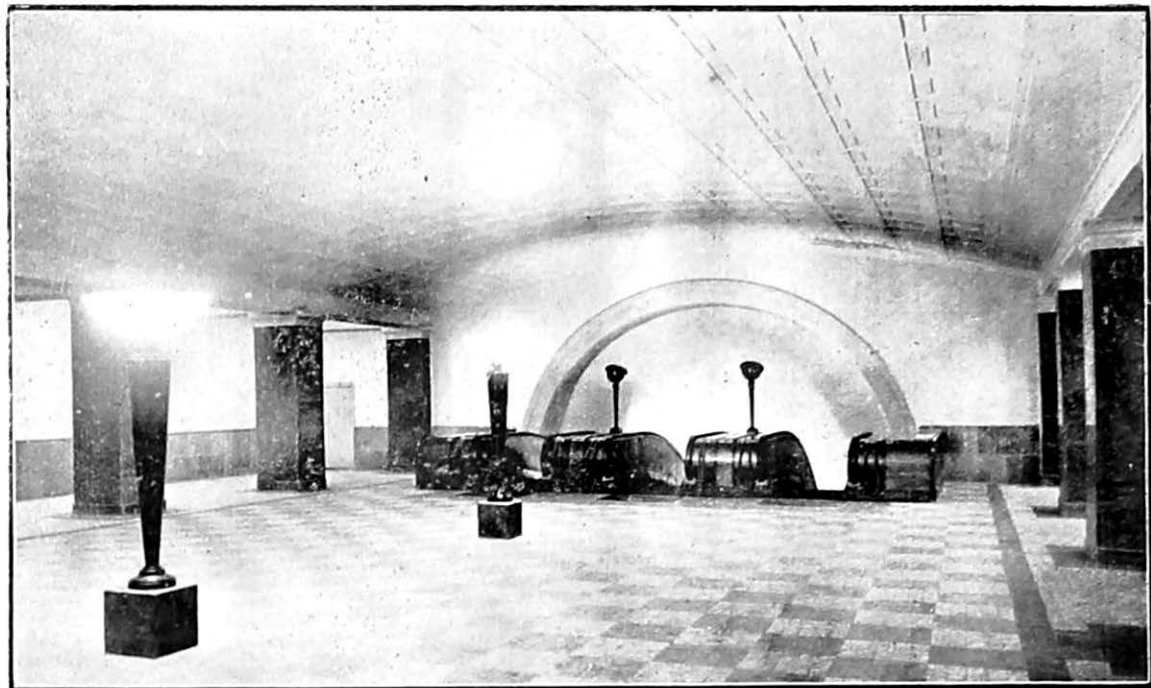
Planned in 1932 and constructed in 1933, 1934, and the first half of 1935, this underground railway extending 11.9 kilometres is the pride of the people of Moscow. Not only does the speed of the work compare favourably with similar efforts in the European countries but the result is magni-

ificent. While the Paris Metro is miserably dingy and depressing, while the London tube is quick and clean but monotonous, the Moscow subway is a world of brightness and joy. The stations underground are built of marble. They are brightly lit and scrupulously clean.

They give the lie to the usual tripe about Socialism producing a dead level of monotony and uniformity. "Socialism means barracks," rants the anti-socialist. Is it only an accident then that, while every underground station in London is *exactly* like every other, *every* station in Moscow is built in a style all its own? Groups of architects were set to work on each station completely independently of the others, in 'Socialist competition.' The result is a marvel in variety. Straight lines at one stop, beautiful curves at the next, greet the eyes of the traveller as one station succeeds another. No longer is marble the monopoly of the plutocrat. Every Moscow worker may now live awhile in a marble palace. And it is *his*. As like as not, he took a hand in its making.

Speaking in July, 1934 in the presence of Shock Brigaders of the Subway Construction, Kaganovich, who was in charge of the enterprise, had said: "The subway is a concentrated expression of the attention, that love which the working class and collective farm peasant show for the reconstruction of our great socialist capital."

A year later, in his speech at the opening of the Underground, Kaganovich again struck the



The Workers' Marble Palace. At the top of the escalator in an underground station of the Moscow Metro.

same note: "If, comrades, we are asked how we built the Metro, we could answer briefly: 'We were not only building a Metro, but were fighting for the success of our first Soviet Metro'."

This electric railway has come to achieve for the Russian an importance altogether out of proportion to its length. It is a symbol of what can be achieved by the revolutionary zeal of the workers. It is true that the Soviet Government voted 70,000,000 roubles for the purpose, but if it had not been for the hundreds of *komsomols* (Young Communists) who volunteered to work, the shock workers which every factory and collective farm in the region deputed as its representatives for the task, the thousands of Moscow workers who, after their seven hours of labour at their own jobs, went and picked up pick and shovel to put in another two or three hours' hard work for the Workers' State, the Metro would still be an aspiration and not an accomplished fact.

I met in Moscow a *komsomolka* (Young Communist girl) who had helped in the construction of the railway as an auxiliary. Her job had been to run a daily newspaper for the thousand or two thousand men who were working at one of the shafts. It was a works newspaper concerned only with the life of the workers, the progress of the work and the problems and difficulties of construction. In the paper she promoted a discussion of the difficulties, ventilated the criticism anyone volunteered. That was how the efficiency of the men and the speed of the work were improved.

Let Kaganovich, the head of the team, speak again: "What is remarkable about the Moscow Metro is the fact that we have not merely marble, not merely granite, not merely metal, not merely concrete. In every piece of marble, in every piece of metal and concrete, in every stair of the escalators is embodied the new spirit of man, our socialist labour; they embody our blood, our love, our fight for the new man and for socialist society."

The Metro is not only the high water-mark of socialist construction. It is also a measuring rod of values. It sets a standard—and a very high standard—by which our Muscovite can judge things. All ill-made road, a square strewn with rubbish, a smelly gutter, a slummy home go ill with a marble Metro. Ivan Ivanovich suddenly finds these things jarring on him in unprecedented measure as he steps out of his marble palace.

"This will never do," he mutters. "By Lenin and all that's sacred, something will have to be done about it. Am I a pig that I should live like this? Or a Soviet citizen?"

Thus is the public conscience stirred, a divine discontent fostered by the only Government in the world which does not fear discontent on the part of its people, because it only spurs them on to fresh efforts in socialist achievement.

IV

WHAT MOSCOW EATS

MY first day or two in Moscow I spent in looking round and arranging for the best use to make of the time at my disposal.

I strolled along the pavements watching the automatic traffic-control through coloured lights in some places and smart *militia*—men (police) directing traffic with brisk movements in others.

Once or twice I found a policeman blowing his shrill whistle and waving his arms at me. Very puzzled, I made inquiries on getting back to my hotel and learnt that I had been guilty of the minor offence of crossing the road at the wrong place. If I had not been a foreigner I would have been collared by the policeman and fined two roubles for not crossing the road at the dotted line.

I mounted trams which, despite the relief afforded by the Metro, are still very overcrowded, the passage being full of people standing. I found people standing behind me always asking me some question. On asking a Russian friend, I was told the only question people asked others in a tram was: "Are you getting off at the next stop?" Be-

cause if not, you are expected to let the questioner get nearer the exit!

I had tea at a cafe which was fitted with very modern steel furniture and provided delicious pastries. Which reminds me. The food at my hotel, the "Savoy", was very good too. Judged by European standards I would say it was what Thos. Cook's would describe as a "good second-class hotel." My room was most luxuriously fitted. Not only was there central heating and hot and cold water but wonderful antique furniture. The chairs seemed to be made for Grand Dukes; they were twice too big for me, anyway.

On one of my strolls I came to the headquarters of the G. P. U. —the Soviet Secret Police. But I forget. The G. P. U. has been "abolished" now, the Russians tell you. It is now called the Commissariat for Home Affairs! In the same manner, the Communists had at the time of taking power abolished the Cheka (the Tsarist C. I. D.) and re-named it the G. P. U. (State Political Department) and had abolished the police and called it the militia!

I called at *Voiks*, the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, which is a non-political organization. There is an Eastern Department which includes India in its sphere—with a charming lady, Comrade Linde, at its head,—but I learnt that they have no corresponding organization in India such as exists in almost every civilized country in the world.

Along with the tourists from the *Dzerzhinsky* had arrived in Moscow 700 German tourists from the pleasure cruiser *Stuttgart*. A special concert had been arranged for them at the House of the Red Army. The programmes were printed in German, a lot of the songs were German too and at the end there was no *Internationale!* It was rather startling to see these 700 stolid upper-class Germans,—I heard my neighbour called Baron,—presumably among Hitler's most reliable adherents clapping furiously in the Red Army House! How were they reacting, one wondered, to this hospitality of a State which was being reviled daily in the Nazi Press, of a people who were openly threatened by the German Government with an invasion of the Ukraine? Were they licking their chops with anticipatory delight and saying: "How nice it will be to occupy Moscow"? (Before 1914 it had been Paris they dreamt of possessing!) Or were they being softened, feeling: "What quarrel have we with these charming people?"

During the interval in the performance—which was a splendid variety show—I strolled round the picture gallery of the Red Army. There were scenes there from all the fronts in the Civil War and the Wars of Intervention. There were portraits of all the commanders, big and small alike. There were Voroshiloff and Budenyi and Blucher and several more. But surely there was something missing, it struck me. Where, of all people, was Trotsky? Where was the maker of the Red

Army, the organiser of revolutionary victories? Sad to say, Trotsky was missing.

Later, I was to ask a Russian friend—an intellectual—for an explanation of this remarkable falsification of history. Why this petty persecution, I asked?

“But it is perfectly correct,” said the comrade unblushingly. “Trotsky became a counter-revolutionary and undid all his work for the Revolution. Therefore, objectively, he never existed.”

“Objectively”! I seemed to remember the word drop from Indian lips in distant Bombay. But never had it been used so unobjectively!

One of the first institutions which I visited in Moscow was a kitchen-factory. It would be equally correct to call it a factory-kitchen. If on the one hand it has all the proportions of a factory in itself, on the other it is the kitchen of the factory or factories to which it is attached. The one I visited was Moscow Kitchen-Factory No. 1 situated at Fili, a suburb of the city.

Near by there were big metal works and the function of this institution was to feed the metal workers who worked there or lived in the neighbourhood. The workers evidently breakfasted at home. It was left to the factory to provide them with the main meal of the day which, in Russia, is early in the afternoon and with supper some time in the evening. In fact, for bachelors who had no one to give them their breakfast, this com-

munal kitchen even provided the early morning meal. So it was open from eight in the morning till midnight.

Let me give some idea of the mass feeding performed by the kitchen. Its dining halls had a seating capacity of 1800 at a time. Actually, no less than 7000 meals were served, there being four services of the mid-day dinner.

After 6-30 p.m. the establishment became a cafe serving light teas and suppers, with an orchestra playing throughout the evening.

I had taken good care to see that I was taken to the kitchen at meal-time! So I had a chance to eat the metal worker's meal that day. I ordered a three-course meal which cost two roubles. There was first *borsch*, the Russian 'national' soup, which contains meat and cabbage and is almost a meal in itself. Then came two beef cutlets served with potatoes, tomatoes and cucumber. To finish up with, a vanilla ice-cream. It was a meal more substantial than what I used to get in the refectory at my college in London and in no way inferior to it in quality. I was told that the average three-course meal ordered by the workers came to 1.10 roubles. The young lady who acted as my guide and interpreter on that occasion told me that at the office where she worked the same meal would cost her at least twice as much and then there would not be so much of it. This discrimination is one of the many ways in which the

worker is still treated as the favourite child of the Soviet Fatherland.

After eating, I went round the kitchen itself,— seeing the huge cauldrons of soup, the grills, the bakery. In the last, I was shown a selection of cakes and pastries which in variety was certainly in no way inferior to what can be had in the best tea-shops in London. And all this variety in just an ordinary metal-workers' kitchen!

There was a separate kitchen for invalids. The kitchen had on its staff a full-time doctor who was consulted by those suffering from digestive and other disorders who prescribed a special diet for them, specially prepared in this part of the kitchen. And the man got it for the same price as the mass dinner.

I remarked on the cleanliness of the kitchens and of the staff, of whom there were 674, 80 per cent. being women. I was thereupon taken to the rooms where the cooks and waitresses change into the clean working clothes which are ready for them in their small pigeon-holes every day. But first they must have a shower bath. This shower and change of clothes every day is compulsory.

Next we proceeded to the laboratory where a qualified bacteriologist tests the meat, fish, milk, butter and other natural products to see that they are pure and also to assess their food value in calories.

The doctor emphasised that all his apparatus was made in Russia. That was one of the several

times when I came across a strong spirit of "Swadeshi" in the Soviet Union.

"This is made with machinery *itself* made in Russia.....We make our own automobiles now.....We do not have to import aeroplanes any longer."

This spirit of Swadeshi touched a particularly responsive chord in me. It struck me, too, how much more basis there is for that spirit where its results benefits the entire community and not the fortunate owners of the goods, as in India.

Suddenly our talk with the doctor in charge of the kitchen laboratory was disturbed by a siren and the doctor rushed out, mumbling some apology. I asked what the commotion was about and discovered he had left to participate in anti-aircraft 'gas drill' through which the entire staff was being put. I followed suit and saw hundreds of women and men being trained in the process of putting on gas masks. A chilling reminder that while the workers of the Soviet Union had fought their way successfully to a Workers' State and a square meal, they might yet be forced to fight again to guard it from Imperialist aggression.

My visit to the kitchen factory ended in the office of the woman director (manager).

"Aren't you bored to come all this way from Moscow to see this? What is there to see? It's all so simple!" exclaimed the good lady.

Then, rather inconsistently, she produced a visitors' book and asked me to write a few words in it.

"It has made me both happy and sad," I wrote, "to visit this kitchen." Happy to see that Russian workers are fed so well; sad that the workers in India still starve. Such care and attention to the workers' food is only possible in a Socialist State. That the man who produces food and wealth has a right to eat seems obvious to you; it is a proposition by no means accepted in the world outside the limits of the Workers' State."

V

SOVIET COURTS AND COUNSEL

HAVING been trained as a lawyer and having for some time practised as one, I could not resist the temptation of visiting once again, as I had done in 1927, a People's Court. I therefore spent a morning at a District Court, one of the ten in Moscow city. As the same Court possesses criminal and civil jurisdiction, its counterpart in Bombay would be a combination of the Presidency Magistrates' and the Small Causes Courts for a particular Ward of the City.

The class of cases in this District (or Ward) Court could in the main be classified thus:— criminal; civil (e.g., division of family goods); housing disputes; labour disputes (e.g., regarding working conditions); inter-departmental disputes. It must be borne in mind that most of the civil litigation over property rights as we know it does not exist in the Soviet Union simply because those rights, e.g., in land, business and factories, have been abolished.

Below the District Court are the Factory Courts and the House Courts (known as "Comrades' tri-

bunals"), which are a sort of factory and house *punchayat* to try petty local disputes. These are composed of a president and two members elected, in the one case by the workers in the factory, in the other by the tenants in the house. From these domestic tribunals an appeal lies to a judge of the District Court in chambers.

Above the District Court are the City Court of Moscow (the Court of Cassation), higher still the Supreme Court of the Republic and ultimately the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union. These higher courts have both original and revisional but not appellate jurisdiction.

The jurisdiction of the District Court is exercised by a judge sitting with two assessors, though in its Indian meaning the term is misleading, because the assessors have an equal voice with the judge and can, if they agree, over-rule him.

The judge is a professional lawyer. He has to be a graduate in law. He is a full-time and salaried functionary. The assessors, on the other hand, supply the "lay" or popular element. They are workers from the local factories elected for the year by their mates. Twenty thousand such assessors are elected every year by Moscow factories. They are trained (unlike jurors in the rest of the world) for two weeks in their spare time in the elements of their work. They then sit in court for fifteen days in the year. While on duty, their salary is paid as usual by the factory,

The position of the lawyer in the Soviet scheme of things is of great interest. The legal profession was reorganised in 1929. It forms a Collegium with a Council (rather like a Bar Council) composed of lawyers *and representatives of the Soviets*. This council controls and supervises the working of the profession and the distribution of lawyers between the various courts. There are ten to twenty lawyers practising in each of the District Courts in Moscow City, forming a Bureau attached to each Court.

The position of these lawyers is something in the nature of a compromise between that of a legal practitioner and a state official.

The litigant, or the accused in a criminal case, pays a fee fixed by the Lawyers' Bureau according to the nature of the case. He also chooses the lawyer he desires to brief. The lawyers do not, however, receive the fees so fixed. They are paid a salary by the Bureau. But since the salary varies from lawyer to lawyer and also changes from time to time for the same lawyer, one understands that the busier and more popular lawyer gets a substantially higher salary. The range of difference is, however, small—varying from about 500 to 2,000 roubles a month, that is, from twice a skilled factory worker's salary to about five times the amount.

At this point I felt impelled to put before the Chief Judge of the Court I was visiting, who had

been giving me all this information, a difficulty I saw in the smooth working of the system.

"Since the cost of a lawyer does not increase with the demand for his services in the Soviet system, how," I asked, "is it that every litigant does not ask for the most popular lawyer, thus dislocating all business?"

Comrade Judge smiled.

"That does happen, of course, but not to such an extent," he replied. "There are in every court lawyers more sought after than others, but we do not have anything like the mad rush after 'eminent' counsel that you have in capitalist countries. For one thing, in most cases the parties appear in person and do not engage lawyers at all. Even in the others, the judges are not at all influenced by the manner in which the case is argued but by its merits. And then, don't you think that in capitalist countries through boosting and advertising an unnecessarily wide gulf is created between lawyers 'at the top' and others, which does not in fact exist so far as their quality goes?"

I admitted that was so—to an extent.

"Well, over here, if too many litigants want the same lawyer, they must put up with the delay which must ensue until he is free to appear for them. The Bureau would not force a man to engage any other lawyer than the one he desires..

But we manage to get on all right, just the same."

The fact seems to be that the phenomenon known as the 'fashionable' counsel does not exist in Russia. The tying down of lawyers to particular courts limits to a large extent the potential number of cases they can be engaged in.

The last question on which I sought information from the Judge was regarding free legal aid for those who could not pay the fees fixed by the Lawyers' Bureau.

"Every person accused of a crime, no matter how petty its nature, has a right to demand the free services of a lawyer for his defence and the Court is bound to ask the District Collegium of Lawyers to nominate one of their number for the purpose. In addition, every Trade Union has a bureau for free legal consultation and defence for its members and you will remember that almost everyone in a Russian town is a Trade Unionist."

Having thanked the Chief Judge for his patient explanation, I proceeded to see his junior colleagues at work. At the first court I looked into, a manager of a co-operative store was being tried for gross neglect of duty. Gross neglect at one's job is a criminal offence in the Union and Article III of the Code prescribes a maximum penalty of 3 years' imprisonment and a minimum of correctional work from a day to a year. Cor-

rectional work means that while the man retains complete personal freedom and even his job, he is under surveillance and has up to 20 per cent of his salary deducted as a fine every month. In other words, it is a fine payable by instalments coupled with a bond for good behaviour.

There was a much more interesting case starting when I passed on to the next court room. On the bench were the judge and two assessors, one of whom was a woman. Before them stood a young man and woman. The woman was prosecuting the man for failure to pay the amount fixed by the court in 1930 for the maintenance of the child she had by him.

It was an all too common story. And it had become common enough for the Soviets to amend the law and make it a criminal offence for a father to fail to pay maintenance for his child. Whether it is by his legally married wife or not makes no difference because, incidentally, no child is 'illegitimate' in Russia. The very idea makes the Russians laugh. "How *can* a child be 'illegitimate'?" they ask.

The respondent in the case was a printing worker. He was the son of a collective farmer in White Russia and had been in the Red Army. In the past he had been accused of "theft of socialist property" but had been acquitted.

The complainant started telling her story. She was a worker in the municipal baths. She

had not been legally married to the respondent but they had lived together and had a child in 1930. In that year the respondent had left her and married another woman and the Court had ordered him to pay her 10 roubles per month for the baby girl's keep. Since January, 1933 the respondent had not paid anything. She had tried to find him, but he had changed his factory and for a long time she could not trace him. By this time, the girl was sobbing.

The Judge called on the man for an explanation.

Respondent: "I was falsely charged with theft, but later acquitted. After my release from custody I wrote many letters to her but she did not answer any."

Judge: "That is no explanation. According to Soviet law the father is bound to find the mother and child. You should have inquired about her whereabouts at the Address Bureau."

Respondent: "I did not know her surname."
(Laughter in court).

Judge: "What do you propose to do in future?"

Respondent: "I shall pay."

Judge: "If your child had died through neglect and starvation we would have considered you a murderer. Have you anything to urge in your favour?"

Respondent: "I have a wife and two children by her."

The judge and assessors then retired to another room to consider their judgment. They were away for full twenty minutes. It was clear that a sentence of imprisonment would hit not only the man but his wife and innocent children. I surmised that was what was causing the delay. When the judge and assessors returned, the judge read out a short judgment, the whole court standing the while.

The man was sentenced to six months' correctional work. This meant that he kept his job, but would be fined a portion of his salary for that period. In addition, he would of course pay the respondent the maintenance allowance. The law provided, however, that the total deductions for decree and order of maintenance could not exceed 50 per cent of his salary.

"A Daniel come to judgment," I said to myself as I left the Court.

VI

'HOW SWEET TO BE A CRIMINAL!'

ONE of my days in Moscow, I joined a party organised by the Society for Cultural Relations to visit the Labour Commune at Boloshevo, some twenty miles from Moscow. It was a day well spent.

The Boloshevo Labour Commune is one of fourteen communes where convicts released before their time are sent and set to work. Boloshevo was the first such to be established and the others are run mostly by ex-members of this Commune.

Boloshevo has a population now of about 8000, about 3500 of them being ex-convicts.

We were taken, when our charabanc arrived at Boloshevo, to the lecture-theatre in a school which catered during the day for children and at night for adults.

On the blackboard was inscribed that historic algebraic formula which brought back school-boy memories to my mind:—

$$(a+b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$$

There, one of the local officials told us the romance of Boloshevo, a town only ten years old. I shall tell it as he told it to us.

As a result of the Civil War, the Foreign Intervention and the Famine, Russia faced in the early years of the new regime a problem all its own,—the problem of the *byez prisorna* or the homeless children. This was no local problem, but a large scale one which consisted of thousands of children, not only in Moscow but in all big centres, who had no parents, no homes, no education and who begged, stole or robbed in bands. These "wolf-children" threatened to become a permanent menace to the Soviet State.

In 1924, a handful of these children, the hardest types, were taken to the place which was now Boloshevo and set to work there. As the experiment seemed to work and these apparently incurable children began to shape themselves into useful workers and citizens of the future, a further experiment was tried by adding to these boys thieves and pickpockets released from prison before their time on parole.

After that, there was no difficulty as regards recruitment, because of the *esprit de corps* that exists among criminals! Each man brought after him his friends in prison.

The administration of the Commune started with a general meeting of its members who elected the Soviet. A Conflict Commission was also

set up to maintain discipline, with plenary powers.

For offences, such as drinking alcoholic drinks,—which is completely prohibited in Boloshevo,—the punishment would be a day or two of isolation, but not involving locking up. Or, interviews with relatives and friends would be suspended.

For the biggest offence, that of running away from Boloshevo, the punishment in the case of unrepentent absconders was to be sent back to jail to serve the balance of their term.

A "Reception Committee" is also elected, which goes round the prisons recruiting new members. At present the Committee is recruiting 800 persons from various prisons. The age of admission now is between 16 and 20 years.

At first the people of neighbouring towns and villages got very alarmed at this letting loose in their midst of the most hardened of criminals! Petitions rained into Government offices asking for the removal of the Commune to a more distant place.

At the very first harvest, however, members of the Commune went to help the peasants of surrounding villages to collect the harvest. Soon, the process was reversed and villagers applied for work in the factories which were springing up in Boloshevo.

Let us follow the life of the man released from prison to work at Boloshevo. Our recruit starts by being a "candidate" aspiring to membership of the Commune. He (or she, because women have also begun to be recruited,) may not leave the town for the first two months. After that, he can get a permit to be away for specific hours. After the fifth or sixth month, he can stay the night out!

If his work and general conduct have been satisfactory, the "candidate" is admitted to full membership.

As a member, he can leave Boloshevo on the weekly "off-day". All these months he has resided in a dormitory along with others. After completing a year, however, he can apply for a room for himself. Also, he can obtain permission to marry.

The first marriage to be solemnized—if one can use that word for a Soviet wedding—was that of the Director of the shoe-factory in Boloshevo—an "outsider" and a member of the Communist Party—with a girl from a neighbouring village. This set the ball rolling and Commune boys began finding village maidens who would come and join them at Boloshevo.

There are certain special preliminaries which must, however, first be gone through. A Commission elected for the purpose calls both parties and satisfies itself as to the suitability of the match.

The "lay" man or woman who desires to marry a Commune member is told of her or his past offence, so that there is no marrying under false pretences. After the Commission's approval, the proposal has to get the sanction of a general meeting of the Commune!

After a stay of between two and three years, our member of the Commune "graduates". This means that he gets a passport. Every Soviet citizen, you see, has a passport even if he has no intention of leaving Russia or even his home town. It is a mark of his full citizen rights. So that getting a passport means freedom to stay at Boloshevo or to leave it at pleasure. It means the right of voting at Soviet elections. It speaks volumes for this Labour Commune that the majority of men restored to freedom and to citizen rights stay on and make Boloshevo their permanent home.

Indeed, increasing numbers of these ex-convicts have been given responsible administrative positions in Boloshevo itself. For the last four years, hardly any of the local officials have been outsiders. Service in a responsible position means a further privilege. The Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, in these cases, expunges the criminal record of the man, with the result that he becomes eligible for membership of the Communist Party and the Red Army.

Education receives great attention at Boloshevo. Most teachers at the school are them-

selves former convicts. The school was established in 1918, and now education is compulsory for ten years, as in the rest of the country. There is also a normal school. An American doctor who was in the party told me that the science laboratories in the school were very good. For higher studies students are sent to Moscow and Leningrad Universities, where about 50 members are studying at present.

After walking round the school-premises, our party was shown an exhibition of products made in Boloshevo.

The first section was devoted to tennis-racquets, ice-skates and other sports goods, the second to gramophone and other musical instruments, the third to shoes, clothes and wood-work and the fourth to pictures. One of the paintings on the walls showed George Bernard Shaw at Boloshevo !

We then visited the factories where these things were produced. Like all other factories, those in the Labour Commune worked for 7 hours a day (8 including an hour off for lunch) and the workers in them received payment for their work, the wages being the same as in Moscow factories.

"Our task," said the manager of the factories, "is to effect a psychological change. They are most of them good workers—after a start."

There could be no better conditions, certain-

ly, than those prevailing in Boloshevo for attempting that change.

As we strolled round the town, walking in and out of cafes and creches, polyclinics and kindergartens, we could hardly realize that the majority of the people of the town were ticket-of-leave men from prison. There were no barbed wire-fencings round the town, no armed guards. You could enter or leave as you liked. If you were wise, you stayed and made the best of Boloshevo.

One of the small officials told us that he had tried to run away to Moscow soon after his arrival years ago. Fortunately for him, in the train, he ran into some comrades from Boloshevo off duty and they persuaded him to return voluntarily. Otherwise he would have led a miserable existence and ended up in jail again. To-day, he would not leave Boloshevo, not unless he was forced to!

No wonder a French tourist had, after visiting Boloshevo, exclaimed: "Ah, how sweet it is to be a criminal!"

VII

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

MY visit to the People's Court gave me two leads which I decided to follow up. One was the penal system and the other the question of marriage. I had already had a glimpse at the former. So far as the latter was concerned, I felt that I could not do better than talk to a person who dealt with marriages and divorces at first hand and so one morning I went to the Civil Registry (called *Zags*, the word being a combination of the initial letters of a name of four words) in one of the Moscow Districts (Wards) and talked to the Registrar. This lady had, among other things, to register births and deaths, marriages and divorces.

The registry offices consisted of two rooms, one for the registration of births and marriages, the other for divorces and deaths. The classification could hardly have been made at random! I noticed also that while the birth and marriage registry was decorated with flowers, there were none in the other. Divorce had evidently fallen from its high pedestal.

The Registrar appeared to be a woman of intelligence and some imagination, not just an automaton, coupling and uncoupling people.

There were on an average 7 or 8 divorces per day and 15 to 25 marriages in that *Zags*. On the "off-day", people had to queue up to get married, she told me.

I must explain that the Soviets have abolished the seven-day week with a holiday on Sundays. They have instead a six-day week, each sixth day (i.e. the 6th, 18th, 24th and 30th day of each month) being a holiday. So people refer to the day of the week not as Monday or Tuesday but as the first or second day of the week.

I got Comrade Registrar talking of divorces. Generally both parties came together and asked to be separated. But sometimes the man or woman petitioning ('demanding' would be a more appropriate word in the U.S.S.R.!) came alone. In such cases she often suggested to the applicant to bring the other party so they could all have a good chat and see if a divorce really was necessary.

I asked her if this was part of a government policy of discouraging divorces and whether it did not really mean a veiled form of pressure.

"Oh, no. If a man or woman insists on an immediate divorce, I have no option but to grant it. My idea is only to give time to the parties to think it over a little more calmly. The fact that

I sometimes succeed shows that it is the right policy," she said.

"How many homes have you saved from breaking up?, I asked.

She thought a moment. "About thirty or forty cases, perhaps, last year. And they are grateful to me for my intervention, I assure you."

"Do people divorce in haste and re-marry at leisure?" I ventured.

Comrade Registrar smiled. "Do they? Why, in some cases I have married the same people three times!"

I inquired what were the grounds advanced by applicants for divorce.

"Wives applying for a divorce generally complain of drunkenness", was the reply. "Husbands allege adultery or bad housekeeping. But no grounds need to be mentioned at all."

"Am I to understand, Comrade, that the breed of unfaithful husbands has died out in Russia?" I asked.

"Oh, I thought it was understood," she said, "that the *first* ground for divorce by a wife is always unfaithfulness!"

"What about the children?" I asked, putting a hackneyed question.

"Well, an agreement between the parents is equivalent to a decree of Court. Where there is

-a dispute as to custody, the mother keeps the child in the period between the divorce and an order of the Court."

"Has the sex of the child got any bearing on the Court's decision, or its wishes?"

"No, I don't think so. After the age of fourteen, however, its wishes are certainly considered."

Just as we were finishing, a young couple came in to get married and I was privileged to witness the wedding.

They sat facing the Registrar at the table: Name, occupation and address? Age? (Eighteen years is the minimum for both men and women in the Soviet Union.)

Having put these questions, the Registrar proceeded to warn the parties that a false declaration was punishable on the same footing as perjury, that bigamy was a crime and that five years' imprisonment was the punishment for those who married knowing they were suffering from venereal disease without informing the other party and later infected the other with the disease!

After which encouragement, the young man and woman signed on the dotted line in the Marriage Register and were duly declared to be man and wife.

It was all very matter of fact,—just a little more so than in a civil marriage registry in Eng-

land. There was no exchanging of rings, which have gone right out of fashion in Russia, but the customary kiss was there. Immediately after that, however, the bridegroom rubbed his hands, smiled to the Registrar and said with great glee: "Ah, *now* I shall be able to beat her as much as I like!"

I had occasion several times during my stay in Russia to discuss the question of marriage and divorce and of the family generally with Russian friends. They all expressed great amazement at the stories spread abroad about nationalisation of women, bigamy and the break-up of the home, which are supposed to have taken place in the Soviet Union. They equally resent the more recent suggestions that Russia, having burst the bonds of religious superstition in so far as it affected marriage and the family, is now going back to the old worn-out conventions.

Comparing notes with what I had gathered during my visit in 1927, I felt that there was undoubtedly a new tendency visible this time. After the Revolution, when marriage was removed from the domination of the Church and made an entirely voluntary agreement, there was a tendency to make the fullest use of this newly won freedom to enter into and terminate marital relations. One gathered that among certain sections of Communists and the youth of Russia too many divorces and a certain measure of promiscuity were rampant. I think it was somewhere

about 1927 that Kalinin, the head of the State, uttered the first warning against this tendency when he declared that a good Communist should exercise proper restraint over his sexual life and realise the social consequences of not doing so. Since then, the whole weight of the Communist Party with all its weapons of propoganda and persuasion has been thrown on the side of conservatism.

To-day a good Communist may certainly with impunity live with a mate to whom he is not legally married, but he may not go on changing his mate, whether legally married or not, too often. I was told, for instance, that while five years ago about half the young people lived together without getting married, to-day a very large majority went through the form of registering their marriages.

"The Russian girl is now very much like a girl anywhere else; to her the next step after falling in love is to get married," a young Russian told me.

At the same time, the law regarding marriage and divorce, which is defined in the "Code of Marriage, Family and Guardianship," still remains the same. What change there is has been the result of the influence of the propoganda of the Communist Party through the Press, the Trade Unions and other instruments of moulding public opinion.

VIII

THE ROMANCE OF BAKU

EARLY one morning I started from Moscow for Baku, the capital of the Azerbaijan Republic in the Transcaucasian Federation at a distance of some 1900 miles. With the time at my disposal, it would have been impossible for me to see anything of Asiatic Russia—with its peculiar appeal to an Indian—if it had not been for the aeroplane. Baku, you will remember, is very near the Persian frontier, further away from Moscow than is London. Yet with 14 hours of flying I was there.

With a country covering a sixth of the surface of the globe and distances to travel much longer than that from Bombay to Calcutta or Lahore, the Soviet leaders have realized the importance of the development of civil aviation. It is a country, besides, in some parts of which aviation is practically the only means of long-distance travelling. In the North, for instance, along the Arctic Coast, the only alternative method of travelling is that of reindeer sleighs. It is not surprising, therefore, that the progress made in this direction in the last few years is as rapid



A change from huts for the Turkish worker. Modern working-class flats in Baku.

as that in the departments where Soviet achievement has been at its quickest.

In 1934, there were 74,000 flights of civil aircraft in the U.S.S.R., in 1935, no less than 110,000 were expected. In 1934, civil planes had covered a total distance of 19 million kilometres; in 1935, they were expected to do 29 million kilometres. The progress made can best be illustrated by the fact that to-day as many planes fly daily from Moscow Aeroport as took off from there in the whole of 1929! This efficient civil aviation service to-day links together no less than 165 towns in the Soviet Union.

Moscow Aeroport early in the morning presented the appearance of a fairly busy railway station. Every few minutes, planes were starting for different parts of the Soviet Union as well as for foreign countries. As I and my Russian companion,—who was to act as my guide, interpreter and friend during this flying visit to Asia,—waited for our turn to come in the waiting-room at the air port, an official there would come and announce every few minutes the impending departure of some plane or other and at this several travellers would jump up, pick up their suit cases and dash off to the plane.

It was very varied country over which we flew. When we had got beyond the borders of Russia proper, we entered the corn growing country of the Ukraine at which Hitler is to-day casting covetous eyes. We landed for a few

minutes at Kharkov and again at Rostov-on-Don and spent the night in an airport at Armavir.

While flying over the agricultural country, I had noticed the effect of collective farming on the view from the air. Instead of the usual odd assortment of little farms and holdings—strips of land of all shapes and forms one sees from the windows of railway carriages in India and England,—flying over Russia one saw big squares and rectangles all along. This was the result of the big size and the symmetry of the *kolkhozes* (collective farms). Often times I felt I was looking down on a chess-board where the fields were the little squares and the houses or hay-stacks the pawns.¹

Early next morning, we were up again in the air and were soon skirting the Caucasus range of mountains. So as not to fly high over it, we flew round it and spent an hour or so looking down upon the greenish-blue waters of the Caspian Sea. Then about noon we seemed to be approaching a thick forest, but as we came nearer I saw it was not a forest of trees but a forest of oil producing derricks of the Baku oil-field.

I enjoyed my three days' stay in Baku more than any other experience during my glimpse of the New World. This city, which is now the capital of the Azerbaijan Republic and in the vanguard of Soviet industrial advance, figuring prominently in the achievements of the Five Year Plans, has still hanging round it the mists

of a romance of a different age and a different culture. In the environs of Baku we came upon a cave on the hill-side where Stenka Razin, the Robin Hood of the Caucasus, took refuge from the forces of the Tsar. He led a revolt of the peasantry in which the Turks of Baku also joined and was finally captured and taken to Moscow and executed some time in the seventeenth century. Near by we saw also an old Zoroastrian fire-temple now in ruins.

In the city itself there is a quarter known as the Old Turkish Town. It reminds one of the fact that till the Revolution, Baku was divided into quarters where Turks, Armenians, Georgians and Russians lived apart in more or less complete segregation. As you walk along the lanes of this old Oriental quarter you seem to be in a different world from that of the oil-wells and of the main streets of the city, whose shop-windows look no whit different from those of Moscow itself.

In the Turkish town, there is a castle of the Khan of Baku, the sovereign of the place till the Russians conquered it. Near the castle is a high tower called the Maiden's Tower. The story goes that in that tower one of the old Khans had imprisoned a princess who refused to marry him. The waves of the Caspian used then to beat against the foot of the tower and one fine morning the beautiful princess was found to be missing because she had preferred to be swallowed up by those waves rather than to vegetate in captivity.

In the old town there is also a mosque, with a dignified old mullah to whom I talked. He told me there were twenty or thirty of the faithful who came to worship every day. He remembered the old days when the mosque used to be full; now only the very old frequented it. They were generally peasants from the country-side living with their sons who were working in Baku. As for the young? "They live in a different world," said the Mullah. "And how can one blame them for it when they have sports and reading-rooms and Parks of Culture and Rest and study-circles of the Party or Trade Union to attract them?"

I asked him how the old people looked upon the social changes which they had seen under the Soviet regime. He said different people had different ways of looking at it. So far as he was concerned, he felt a lot of good had come of it, but he did not approve of the abolition of the *chaddar* (*pardah*). It was against the injunctions of the Koran.

The Mullah had spent his whole life in attendance at that mosque. There was a peculiar sadness on his face when he admitted that in a few years more there would be nobody coming to the mosque and it would have to be closed down or converted into a school or a social institution of some sort.

"The Will of Allah be done," he said with a sigh. It was the resigned surrender of a dying order.

It was a dying order, however, that had lasted right up to the year of the Communist Revolution, a social order with its *coolie* standards of living for the *Turk* workers of Baku, steeped in illiteracy and superstition, and with imprisonment behind the veil and domestic slavery for the *Turk* women.

As I stepped out of the Old Turkish Town not a minute's distance from the Khan's castle and the mosque, I came up with a shock against a huge portrait of Karl Marx looking over a square! I was instantly in the new Baku, its streets full of Russians and Turks and Armenians and Georgians rubbing shoulders as comrades and its women, a prettier lot than is to be seen in any capital of Europe, Russian and Georgian blonds walking arm in arm with Turkish brunettes. Here was a Baku with a romance no less thrilling than the romance of the Old Turkish Town and the deserted Zoroastrian fire-temple.

How has this miraculous transformation been worked almost overnight? We shall answer that question later, but if I tell the story of the Turkish Women's Club in Baku and its director, Kadirbekova (note the Moslim name and the Russian suffix), I shall have shed some light on the subject.

Here is the story as Comrade Kadirbekova herself told it to me sitting at the table in her office. She is a woman of about 35, dressed in western costume, good-looking, charming and remarkably intelligent.

Kadirkbekova is a peasant by origin. In 1922 she joined a training school for teachers in a provincial town in the Azerbaijan Republic. Next year she joined the Communist Party and worked in the country-side as a woman organizer for the Party. In those days the bulk of the women outside Baku was still behind the veil and so she had herself to use the *chaddar*. By 1926 she had risen to be the head of the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Turkish Woman and two years later she was put in charge of the Women's Club. In 1930 she was appointed chief of the women's section of the Communist Party of the Transcaucasian Federation. In 1933, however, the women's section became unnecessary owing to the completion of the process of the emancipation of women and so it was abolished and Kadirkbekova returned to the club. Along with her work there, she is also the editor of the *Eastern Woman*, which is the organ of the Party in the Azerbaijan Republic.

The Club of which she is the head was founded in 1920, within one month of the establishment of the Soviet Government. Owing to Turkish women of that time being 99 per cent. illiterate, approach to them was difficult except by *pardah* women, and without such access the new laws for their emancipation were even less effective than is the Sarda Act in India to-day! Unfortunately, too, there was then no supply of trained women social-workers or propagandists. This led to the amusing expedient of women Communists ad-



(1) A Baku Oil-field. (2) Kadirbekova, Director of the Turkish Women's Club, snapped as she was talking to the author. (3) The author in a park at Tiflis, (4) A scene from the Youth Day pageant snapped by the author.

dressing gatherings of *purdah* women by repeating sentence by sentence a speech made by a man hiding behind the door! Also, it was considered immoral for women to work or even to leave their homes and so house-to-house visits were necessary and feasts and marriages had to be utilized for the purpose of feminist propaganda!

The Club set up a Bureau for Legal Consultation and Defence, advising women and instigating the Public Prosecutor to prosecute men for polygamy, which had been made illegal, and for cruelty and other forms of ill-treatment.

"Is there no polygamy left at all now?" I asked Kadirbekova.

"Only a little, and that in a disguised form", she said. "There are a few cases where a man takes a legal divorce and marries again, but persuades his first wife to continue to live with him also."

I told Kadirbekova of the Sarda Act and how it had been reduced by an unsympathetic Government to a dead letter and asked her what the position was regarding child marriages. The minimum age for marriage, she said, was 18 for men and 16 for women, as against 24 for men and 18 for women in Russia proper. A breach of this law was punished severely, the sentence ranging from 3 to 5 years imprisonment for the bridegroom, the father of a minor girl and the father of the minor boy. Great publicity was also given

to such prosecutions for the sake of producing an educative effect.

"Is there also a law," I asked, "making the keeping of women in *purdah* a crime?"

"No," replied the director, "but there is a law that the man who prevents a woman from obtaining education or employment or social life can be punished. The Club generally approaches the husband in such cases and, if the husband does not yield, we prosecute him and he can be imprisoned for three years. In a number of such cases, however, the wife breaks down in court, backs out of her story and tells the court that her husband is very nice to her!"

In spite of these difficulties, however, the miracle was performed. During my three days' stay in the city, I could not have come across more than half-a-dozen women with faces half-veiled and they were all very old women. In villages where women work, as in India, there never had been any rigorous seclusion. The women generally, as in India, used to draw the *chaddar* across their noses.

One of the teachings of Socialism is that without the economic independence of women there can be no real equality between the sexes. The emancipation of women from social serfdom and their education has resulted in their increasing employment in industry. Before the Revolution there were only some 200 women employed in a tiny textile factory. In 1933 there were no

less than 5100 women employed in heavy industry and 15198 women members of trade unions in Baku.

The Women's Club, which had in the earlier stages acted as the headquarters of what may be called the feminist movement, has with the achievement of educational and social equality now become predominantly an educational and social institution. It employs to-day no less than 120 teachers for such different departments as training classes for teachers, classes for shorthand-typists, midwifery classes and music and dancing lessons. The first Turkish midwives were produced by the Club and its orchestra won the prize recently at the Transcaucasian Olympiad of music and dancing.

"Have you institutions like this for the emancipation of women in India?" Kadirbekova asked me towards the end of a long talk.

"Have we got a People's Government in India?" I asked back.

Kadirbekova smiled. She admitted that they got 15,00,000 roubles every year from the Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan Republic. She also admitted that the wonderful work which they had done in breaking the shackles of the *Turk* women could not have been achieved without the material support and the moral, and sometimes legal, coercion of the Soviet State behind it.

I remembered how in 1927 Kameneva, Kamenev's wife and Trotsky's sister, had told me that even if the Soviet Revolution of 1917 had achieved nothing else, to her it would have been worth while for the emancipation it had achieved of the Russian women. How much greater and more miraculous have been the achievements of the Revolution for the women of the Tsar's Asiatic domains!



Orchestra of Turkish girls which won the prize at the Olympiad of Music of the Trans-Caucasian Federation.

IX

I MEET A COMMISSAR

"Did you meet Stalin when in Russia?" I have been asked so often since my return to India.

As it happened, the thought of calling on the Dictator in his rooms in the Kremlin never occurred to me in Moscow, but I heard of someone who did entertain the idea, and thereby hangs a tale.

As it happened, a certain member of the Indian Legislative Assembly—who shall be nameless—was in Moscow just before me and I met an official whom he had interviewed.

"He wanted to see Stalin," said the Russian in an injured air, "as if Stalin is one of the sights of Moscow. What did he want with Stalin, anyway?"

"I guess departmental heads could have told him all he wanted," I ventured.

"Departmental heads!" he rejoined in disdain. "What he needed was lessons in the elements of Socialism from one of our Pioneers (boy scouts)."

Evidently an M.L.A. is as unimpressive in Moscow as in Delhi !

Anyway, I can plead guilty to meeting a couple of live Commissars. The first was the Commissar for Education of the Azerbaijan Republic. His name, Shakbazov, sounded Russian but his colour, no lighter than mine, left no doubt as to his Asiatic origin. I spent an afternoon with him trying to understand the "national" policy of the Soviet Government which in fifteen years had transformed the inhabitant of Baku from an ignorant, superstitious, half-starved *coolie* into a literate, well-fed and well-dressed worker looking no different from his comrade in Moscow or Leningrad.

Shakbazov, along with his Armenian Assistant, received me in his sanctum at the Commissariat, with its padded, sound-proof doors. For once I was very sorry I did not know Persian when the Commissar invited me to converse in the language of our common ancestors, so as to cut out the necessity for interpreting!

We talked of the communal problem and its solution. Shakbazov said he remembered the fearful Turk-Armenian *pogroms* in Baku, with their repercussions on the countryside where whole areas were laid bare due to inter-racial strife. Now, in collectives, the same peasants worked together side by side.

"The root cause of the problem was the Tsarist policy of divide and rule. The police,

would let the rioting proceed, watching the fun, and then come down with a heavy hand on both sides. The Turk and Armenian *bourgeoisie* also took a hand in fomenting strife in order to divert attention from the real causes of the misery of the masses by providing a safe channel for their discontent. In the process, the Turks began to look to Constantinople for deliverance and the Armenians for protection to the Tsar.

"Fundamentally, the problem was solved by the abolition of feudal and capitalist exploitation, the grant of the fullest local, cultural and linguistic autonomy and the discouraging of appeals to fanaticism by Christians and Moslems alike."

Shakbazov proceeded to describe the autonomy they enjoyed; how the Azerbaijan Republic to-day was ruled by a cabinet seven of whose nine members are Turks, one an Armenian and the last a Russian; how the official language is *Turk* and how every one including Russians desiring employment must know it. In the village and town Soviets, the same autonomy obtains, so that in areas where Armenians are in a majority there can be an Armenian executive.

"So there is still a tendency for people to vote for candidates of their own sect?" I asked.

"There has been, undoubtedly," was the reply, "but it has gone on diminishing and the experience of collective farms goes to show that

the peasants select the best men to run the farms for them irrespective of race."

"Isn't this autonomy rather illusory?" I asked, "considering that the Revolution was made under Russian leadership and the dictatorship of the Communist Party means that of Stalin and the men in Moscow?"

I could notice a trace of resentment on the Commissar's hitherto friendly face.

"You don't seem to understand, comrade," he said, "that the Azerbaijan Party is an autonomous body. Its secretary is a Turk and so are the big majority of its executive. The leadership of our Party has always come from the factories and the land, and the peasants and 60 per cent of the workers are Turks."

"Besides, you are wrong in thinking that our Revolution was imposed on us from Moscow. Even in 1905, it was the Turks who revolted. Our leader, Narimanov, was, because of this, one of the Presidents of the whole U.S.S.R. till his death and now his place has been taken by Mussabekov."

"Our cultural and linguistic policy has probably had an even greater effect. Our educational policy is based on the principle that culture should be socialist or international in content but national in form. National culture is the medium through which alone we can reach the masses with our international gospel."

"Our educational system therefore gives the maximum scope to all the native cultures, the chief of which are Turk, Armenian, Georgian and Russian. There are smaller national groups like the Kurds, Oudins, Tats (Iranians), making in all fourteen. In our elementary schools there are no less than fourteen media of instruction. In some cases dialects which had in the course of history lost their scripts had their alphabets re-discovered for them by a commission of experts sent down from Moscow for the purpose. Though Turkish is the State language, it is not therefore the medium of instruction but a compulsory second language. Russian, as the language of the U.S.S.R., is also a compulsory second language in the high schools. German and English are compulsory in technical schools."

"Why so much diversity?" I asked. "I feel you go too far in your linguistic autonomy. A little more uniformity seems desirable."

"It is at present the only way to reach the masses. Look at the results and see if the policy has not justified itself. Before the Revolution, what little education there was, was religious. The bulk of Turks had little knowledge of their language. They only learnt the Koran by heart. The rich sent their children to schools in Petrograd or abroad. Women were 99 per cent illiterate.

"Consider the change. To-day, for a population of two million we have 3,180 schools,—2,200

elementary, 932 middle and 48 high schools. Of the 400,000 pupils in the elementary schools, 250,000 are Turks and of these 102,000 are girls. In Baku, 75 per cent. of the Turk women are now literate.

"In 1920, there were 621 students at the University of whom 22 were Turks. Now, there are 2494 of whom 1045 are Turks. Education is free, right up to the University."

"Do you have co-education in your schools, Comrade?" was my next question.

"To start with, it was impossible," he replied. "We had to commence with schools for girls with women teachers. By 1925, however, it was possible to go in for co-education in Baku and now it has spread to the countryside. We are making a special effort to complete the process this year."

"Tell me something of your Anti-God movement, Comrade," I said. "I am a rationalist and so particularly interested."

"We never had the sort of militant crusade they had in Russia. You cannot smash Religion as you can Capitalism at one stroke. Our policy has been a more cautious one, relying on education to prepare the ground for the fight against superstition by spreading a scientific outlook. The results are very encouraging. The younger people are, as a rule, irreligious. Even the Muslim collective farmer sees the advantage of not having to work extra for a good time in the next

world by paying the *mullah*! I am not saying the Russian policy was wrong. They could afford to go quicker there because the people were better prepared for the change."

"And now", said mine host, "it is my turn to cross-examine you about India."

"Go ahead," I said. So the rest of our talk falls outside the purview of this chapter.

That evening I had an opportunity of seeing the products of Comrade Shakhbazov's educational system. I could not have chosen a better time to be in Baku than on 1st September which is observed as Youth Day, not only in the Soviet Union but by the Socialist parties on the Continent also.

I was present when the procession of the youth of Baku marched past the Communist Party leaders who took the salute. From eight o'clock to half-past ten that evening I stood on the dais watching seventy-five thousand young men and women go past.

First came twenty thousand members of various sports organizations, boys and girls in bathing costumes and gym tunics, some carrying flags in their hands, others with tennis rackets, guns, spears, parachutes, or flowers. I remember a *Turk* girl, spear in one hand and red flag in the other, standing poised on a shield carried by six boys with the legend: "Ready for labor and

defence." Fifteen years ago that girl, I thought, would have been behind the *pardah*.

There followed detachments of archers and parachutists, and then cyclists, motor-cyclists and motorists driving their machines,—members of "Dinamo" Club which numbers its members in lakhs.

The sports brigade was followed by detachments from every ward of Baku. They all shouted "hurrah!" as they went past.

"Did you know that "hurrah" is a Turkish word?" asked my Russian companion. "It means hit or strike. It was probably adopted by Europeans from the war-cry of the Ottoman troops."

The slogans which the processionists bore were of particular interest. Those of the Lenin district were: "The deadly foe is Fascism" and "Cadres decide everything."

The Molotov district presented a globe with a proletarian youth sitting on top with a banner saying. "The whole world will be ours."

Followed the State Publishing House carrying a huge card-board dummy edition of Marx's *Capital*.

The Ordjonikidze district bore a placard showing Stalin and a Nazi smoking their pipes in each other's faces. Stalin's smoke was certainly getting into the Nazi's eyes! In fact, a feature

of the demonstration was the persistent caricaturing of the man (he looked more like a hog) with the Swastika on his arm. One such was the pantomime showing a worker pushing a Nazi off the globe.

The Dzerzhinsky district was led by a *Turk* band of *tablas* and *pepuoris* reminiscent of India, followed by a *Turk* boy carrying the effigy of a Christian priest.

The State Theatre presented a pantomime showing Negroes and Chinese in chains, with a 'white' boss in a sola topi behind.

The demonstration came to an end with kids from school shouting "*Inquilab*". Only a few weeks earlier I had heard the same word on the lips of Bombay workers. It was a reminder of how near home I was. Yet what different world it was! A Brave New World with an *Inquilab* separating it from the Old.

X

COLLECTIVE FARMING IN ARMENIA

FROM Baku to Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, and from Tiflis to Erivan, the capital of the Armenian Republic, I travelled again by air. The flight from Tiflis to Erivan, over the high Caucasian mountains, was of more than ordinary interest. We flew at a height of 13,000 feet above sea-level and 11,375 feet above the ground. Flying mostly above the clouds we could see nothing below but a sea of foam. Occasionally we ducked below them and saw the hill-tops covered with snow in early September. The thermometer on the wing of our plane, which had been at 30 C. when we took off, fell steadily till it reached 6 C. and then rose again as we descended.

The tallest of the giant mountains was Mount Arrarat, which we skirted as it was in Turkish territory just beyond the Soviet limits. There Noah had landed from his Ark after the Flood. I was in the cradle of humanity—the home perhaps of the Caucasian race.

"Wild fruit grew in ancient times in Armenia; wild wheat still grows there," my erudite Russian companion shouted to me in the plane. "Another home of wild wheat is Northern India. There are five world centres of cattle and Armenia is one of them."

It was to the world of wheat and cattle that I devoted most of my time in the Armenian Republic.

Seven and a half miles from the metropolis there is a village called Parakar, with a population of 1300. Let me tell its story as I gathered it, mostly from eight peasants in the fields picking grapes whom our party inveigled from their work one morning.

For two hours or more, I and my companion squatted under a tree chatting with these eight collective-farmers. With one hand I jotted down the bits of information I gleaned from their talk, with the other I helped myself to the wonderful grapes they placed before us in a never-exhausting supply.

Before the Revolution, the greater part of the land in Parakar was owned by an Armenian landlord. Some of the peasants had strips of land of their own, but since they were rarely big enough to give them the wherewithal to live, they supplemented the crop from their uneconomic holdings by cultivating land leased to them by the landlord. Of the produce of such land

they had to part with 75 per cent to the landlord.

Came the establishment of the Soviet power. The landlord joined the colony of White Russians in America. His own personal farm was turned into a model state-farm (*sovkhos*.) The land leased out to tenants was added to their own and redistributed among the peasants more or less equally, though the landless labourers did not get quite as much as the others.

Individual cultivation continued till 1929 when the second Agricultural Revolution began. By that time a *kulak* class had developed in the village. They acted as money-lenders also.

When collectivization came, of the 300 families in the village, some 30 joined the collective (*kolkhoz*.) Of the rest 25 were kulak families which were deliberately excluded. The process of collectivization was not, however, complete even as between these 30 families. While arable land, implements, horses and bullocks were pooled, garden-lands were only partially collectivized and cows, sheep and poultry not at all.

The proportion of peasants joining the collective rose in 1930 to 20 per cent, in 1931 to 50 per cent and when I was there it had reached 80 per cent.

The *kulaks* had been practically "liquidated" in the process. Some families were deported for alleged sabotage—deservedly, my eight infor-



Group of peasants of the Parakar *kolkhoz* (collective farm) snapped by the author in the fields after a chat.

mants seemed to believe,—others were allowed to remain but were given the poorest of land, and very little of it, to cultivate. There were therefore 250 families in the collective now and 45 outside.

As a result of collectivization, the production of cotton, which had been 600 kilograms per hectare ($2\frac{1}{2}$ acres) on the eve of collectivization, was now 1600 kilograms. This was due largely to the méchanisation which had become possible under socialised cultivation,—through sowing machines, tractors and vacuum picking-machines. Parakar requisitioned three tractors from the nearest Motor Tractor Station, which had a fleet of 82 tractors catering for 48 collectives.

The revolution wrought in the lives of the peasantry was brought home to me most forcibly by the personal experiences of the peasants with whom I was chatting.

I shall mention the case of Mamikon Petrosian, aged 38 and a brigadier (that is, in charge of 8 men). He and his wife had between them put in 537 working-days in the past year. For this labour they were paid by the *kolkhoz* partly in cash and partly in kind; each working day getting them 4.40 roubles, 5 kgms. of wheat, 1 kgm. of grapes, $\frac{1}{2}$ litre of grape-juice, 2 kgms. of hay and as much wood as they needed for fuel. Part of the wheat Comrade Petrosian had sold; the rest of the produce he and his wife had used themselves. With the money he had bought.

during the last few weeks a steel spring bed, a gramophone, a suit of clothes for himself, garments for his wife and four small children and he had bought up the cottage in which he lived for 600 roubles. Formerly he paid 100 roubles as rent for the cottage every year.

"What would you say is your income in terms of cash?" I asked him.

"About 10,000 to 12,000 roubles per annum between the two of us," was his reply.

"And before collectivization?"

"In 1929, I earned 2,000 roubles, less a tax of 5 per cent. But then, mine was a small holding. A prosperous middle-peasant used to make about 5,000 roubles in those days."

When one remembers that the basic wage in a Soviet factory is about 200 roubles per month, Petrosian and his wife, each earning 500 roubles per month in a semi-Asiatic country, seem to be almost like a miracle, even allowing for the fact that he was a brigadier and therefore earning above the average.

After the hours in the field, I went round the village visiting in turn the office of the Director of the Collective, the village Soviet, the school—with an English-speaking principal and 7 or 8 teachers for about 300 pupils, extending its course in that year from 7 to 10 years' compulsory education,—the kindergarten, the creche with 30 beds and the village dispensary. The village

post-office had a telephone on which we spoke to Erivan. Electric light had come to Parakar in 1932.

Back in Erivan, I visited the Commissar for Agriculture of the Armenian Republic, Comrade Vartan Mamikonian. He told me something of the history of agriculture in Armenia. Before the Revolution, the Church was the biggest landlord and the number of *kulaks* was large. The system of tenure was rather complex, the cultivator being partly peasant-proprietor and partly a hired labourer. The *kulak* was the middleman, so far as marketing the harvest was concerned. He cornered the local market and sold at a huge profit in Tiflis.

The Tsar's policy had been to settle Russian colonists on the land to act as outposts of Imperialism. The result was that the average Russian peasant had a holding of about 4 hectares while that of the Armenian or Turk was $\frac{3}{4}$ hectare. Grinding poverty was the peasants' lot. Ignorance and superstition also,—for 90 to 95 per cent. were illiterate.

The Soviet regime faced agriculture in a state of collapse. In 1920, the year of its establishment, the total yield was 1600000 kilograms of wheat, that is, 2 kgms. per head of population. Hunger drove the people to emigrate in large numbers.

The Soviet slogan was, of course: "Land to the peasants." Luckily there was enough land

for all and the smallest holdings, which were never uneconomic, were $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 hectare.

Collectivization came in 1930. The Armenian Communists were over-hasty and relied too much on coercion. The result was that the peasants destroyed about half the stock of cattle rather than allow them to be collectivized! A halt was soon called and progress since then has been steady, though not by any means slow. On 1st July, 1935, 62 per cent of the peasantry had been collectivized in 1007 farms. In the last two-months, the Commissar told me, 23,000 families had applied for admission. The process should be complete in 1937.

The incentives to joining the collectives are of course obvious,—the comparatively lighter taxation and facilities such as tractors which are available to collectives only.

The Second Five Year Plan, in so far as it affects agriculture, prescribes the irrigation of 50,000 hectares of land for cotton and grape cultivation by water brought in canals from Lake Sevan. The water power will be utilised also for the construction of two power stations supplying electricity to all the Transcaucasian Republics. The canal should be completed by 1937 and result in cotton production being multiplied by 150 per cent.

The Commissar then told me that about the Saradarabad Dam on the Turco-Soviet border.

At present it feeds Armenia with water but can also be put to use by Turkey.

"Only two months ago," he told me, "several Turkish ministers met me at the Dam, to study our work. They have now invited Soviet engineers to construct a replica of our canal on their side of the border. That is one of the ways in which we strengthen our friendship with our Turkish neighbours."

I told the Commissar that I had just returned from a visit to the village of Parakar.

"Parakar will cease to be a village in five years", he commented.

He then unfolded before me a plan of what Parakar and hundreds of other Armenian villages will be like in a few years. It was the plan of a town. Big buildings were to arise in its centre,— offices of the Soviet, the Party and the Collectives, schools, hospitals, libraries and other institutions which a village can never know.

"We are inventing a thing unknown in history—an agricultural city. It will be the centre of two or three collectives round about. The peasants will live here and go to the fields for work. There will be main streets where cars and buses and trams can run; in between the backs of the rows of houses will run lanes along which the cattle and pigs can be taken to and from the fields. The farmers will build their houses with their own hands. To-day, even in our cities,"

concluded the Commissar, "the worker is too often a peasant by mentality; individualistic, with an instinct for property all his own. The destruction of the village and the invention of agricultural towns will make the peasant a worker,—as good a proletarian as the factory worker."

Here was a revolution in the making, it seemed to me, which history, looking back, would describe to be as fundamental in its effects as the Industrial Revolution.

When cynics abroad talk of the Soviet Union abandoning Socialism, they would do well to consider the tremendous significance of the disappearance of private enterprise in the field of agriculture and of private property in land which is under way in the U.S.S.R.

Before this tremendous achievement of the last eight years—80 per cent complete—and the State and Co-operative monopoly of all trade, resulting in the liquidation of the Nepmen (private traders) who had 30 per cent of the internal trade in their hands when I was in the U.S. S. R. in 1927, the existence of inequalities, disturbing as it is, pales into insignificance. The Soviet Union has its feet firmly planted on the road to Socialism and nothing can stop it.

Nothing? I remember the feeling I had when, after flying from Erivan to Tiflis and travelling back from Tiflis to Moscow, I had at last to bid a reluctant farewell to the Workers' Fatherland.

As our train puffed slowly over the border into Poland, where General Goering has just been on another of those ominous "hunting-parties" with Polish diplomats, I saw two wooden posts, the height of a man, facing each other at a distance of a few feet. They marked the respective frontiers. From these posts ran barbed-wire fencing, dividing the Socialist from the Capitalist world. On the Polish side of the frontier was a high watch-tower. It seemed to me to be on the wrong side of the border.

XI

CONCLUSIONS

Before the curtain drops finally at the end of a play the audience expects all the actors to line up and give a parting bow. In like manner, at the end of a book of random impressions such as this, a demand is made for a general survey, a summing up of one's experiences, the striking of a balance.

Considering the immensity of the subject and the fact that Sidney and Beatrice Webb had to write a work running into more than a thousand pages in order to do it justice, the conclusions to a book of this light nature cannot be expected to be either dogmatic or exhaustive. They are an attempt rather to fill up the wide gaps left by the previous chapters and to piece together into a whole these scattered impressions.

"So you think the Soviet experience is succeeding?" one is asked so often.

To answer "Yes" is rather inadequate. What has happened in the past 18 years on a sixth of the surface of the globe is much more than an experiment. It is achievement at a speed and on a scale hitherto unknown in the history of the human race. That is not to say that socialism has been achieved or that the Soviet Union is a heaven on earth. For one thing, it is doubtful if one can build up a completely socialist society in a capi-

talist world, like an oasis in the desert, any more than one can have perfect health and security in the midst of pestilence and disease. But that apart, even the limitations of material resources and equipment and of human nature do not vanish quite so quickly.

There are those who say that the Soviets have abandoned their goal and fallen back on State Capitalism. They point to the inequality that exists in Russia to justify their statement. Inequality there undoubtedly is. And it is substantial enough to be disturbing to all Socialists who see it, as Ethel Mannin was disturbed during her recent visit at the contrast between the luxury in which a Commissar and his wife were living and the poverty of those living only a few hundred yards away from them. While the basic wage in a factory is in the vicinity of 150 to 200 roubles per month, there are Soviet citizens,—managers of trusts, authors and actresses,—whose monthly income comes to well over 5000 roubles. The soft and hard classes in trains, the half-a-dozen rates of theatre-tickets and the restoration of officer-titles in the Red Army, go ill with an equalitarian regime. The airy dismissal of equality as an essentially bourgeois conception by Comrade Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, is hardly calculated to sooth the socialist conscience. Socialism *does*, in the rough, mean equality.

What then is the answer to the charge? The first corrective to this picture is that it is preci-

sely because they are set against the background of a State based on social justice that these inequalities appear disturbing, though they are nothing in comparison with the inequalities that are taken for granted in other countries of the world. Before the fact that the salary of the British Prime Minister is 90 times that of the average Englishman, that the salary of the Viceroy of India is 5000 times the average income of an Indian, or that the income of Henry Ford is 40,000 times that of the average American worker, the inequalities in a State—whose dictator, Stalin, gets 300 roubles per month,—pale into insignificance.

I had occasion to discuss this question with Comrade Kwering, the first Secretary at the Gostplan (State Planning Department). His explanation was the one which is given by any intelligent Russian to one's doubts and fears. To-day, the Soviet Union is in the Socialist stage of society, that is to say, a stage where owing to the limitations of production the Communist principle of supplying to "each according to his needs" cannot be put into operation. The characteristic of this socialist society is payment according to work or results. The U. S. S. R. manufactures to-day so many aeroplanes, so many motorcars, so much of the good things of life. If everyone cannot have them, the only fair method of distributing these commodities is to place them at the disposal of those who contribute more to society than others. When

enough cars and enough aeroplanes and enough of these good things are manufactured they will be made available to all who desire them. That will be the Communist stage of society.

These definitions of Socialism and Communism thus contrasted would hardly be accepted by most Socialists, but what it really comes to is the self-evident proposition that Russia has not yet achieved the completely socialist society.

It may be pointed out that the incentive to which the Communists in Russia appeal is the same self-interest, that some competitive instinct, which is the predominant *motif* in the capitalist order. The Russian Communist will reply that the acquisitive or competitive instinct is only one of the several instincts on which the new regime places reliance, such as moral fervour, pugnacity and class solidarity, the will to succeed, the creative instinct, the appeal to the heroism, mutual aid and co-operation, hope, and faith in human nature.

"The whole of history," wrote Kari Marx, "is nothing but the progressive transformation of human nature."

That transformation of human nature is to-day proceeding in Russia but an appeal to self-interest must be retained so long as the bulk of the Russian proletariat consists of peasants and ex-peasants.

That is the debit side. Put against it the fact that the ownership of land and all the instruments of production is in the hands of the community and not of private owners and that 80 per cent of the land is collectively cultivated and you realise how striking is the balance of achievement.

Since 1927, when I had last visited the U. S. S. R., the *Nepmen* (private traders) who had 30 per cent of the internal trade in their hands had been eliminated, the *kulaks* had been liquidated and 80 p.c. of the peasants had ceased to be individual cultivators and had become workers on collective farms.

The approach to a Socialist Society in the U. S. S. R., is the biggest single advance in Social Justice since the days of the caveman. A few men may for a while consume more than their less useful brethren but no can hire out land or buildings or machinery or hire the labour of another for his profit.

The advance is not only in Social Justice but also in Social Organization. The results are visible already. In a world where every other country is burdened with a large community of unemployed, there are literally no unemployed in the U.S.S.R., and there is everywhere a demand for more workers. At a time when the standard of living of the masses in every country in Europe and America is going down, the people of the Soviet Union are experiencing prosperity such as they have

never known before. It is no objection to say that the Russian worker is still not so well fed or clothed or housed as the British or the American worker. Of course he is not. But the fact remains that he is much better fed and clothed and housed than he was under the Tsar or even in 1927, before the first Five Year Plan. The hopes of one year become the achievement of the next and alone in the world the Soviet citizen looks forward to scaling new heights of achievement, attaining higher standards of life, year by year.

To-day, after having had to tighten their belts during the years of the first Five Year Plan, the Russian people are reaping the "rewards of abstinence" in the shape of the results of the Second Five Year Plan. They are visibly letting themselves go and having a good time.

The progress is not however in the material sphere alone. The cultural progress has been perhaps even more wonderful. In 1913, the figure of literacy of the Russian Empire was 33 per cent. In 1928 the Soviet Union had already reached the figure of 58.4 per cent and in 1932, 90 per cent of the people had attained literacy. Has a movement dispelling on such a vast scale and in such a short period the darkness of ignorance been known before in human history?

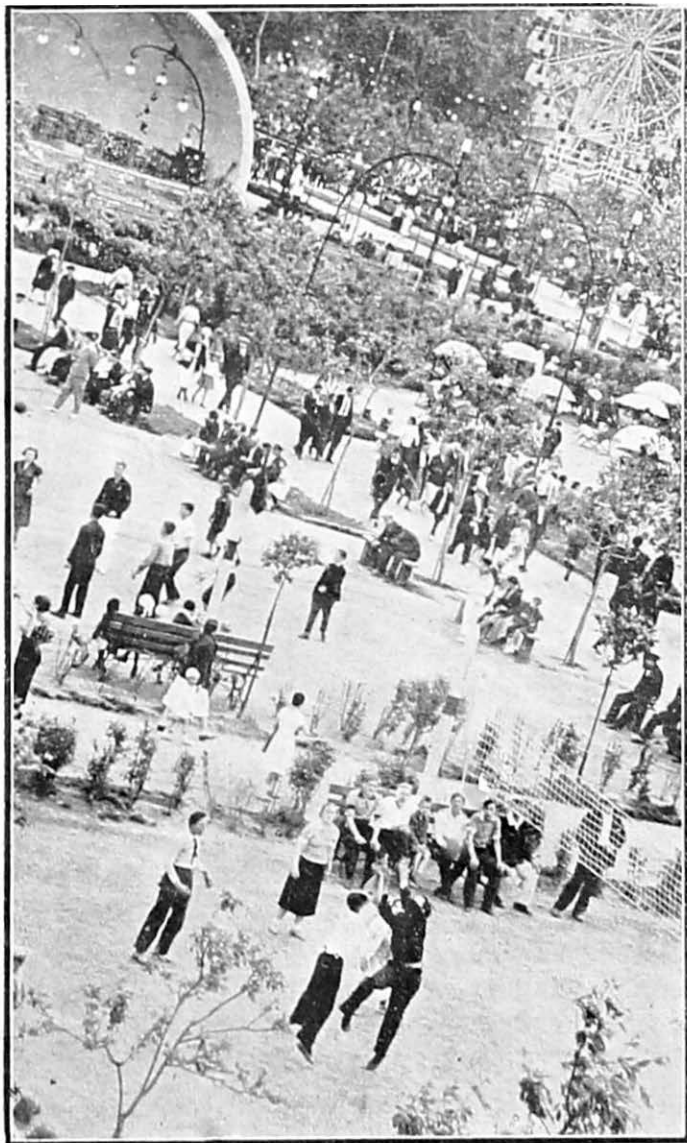
In 1913, 2.7 million newspapers were sold; in 1933, 36 millions. Every year now, 53800 new books are printed in 90 languages, because, like India, the Soviet Union is a country of many races and

languages. Sidney Webb estimates that the issues of the press and literature generally are greater in the U. S. S. R., than in England, Germany and the U.S.A. put together. This, it will be remembered, in a country which was two-thirds illiterate only eighteen years ago!

It is any wonder then, that since the Revolution Russia has produced a new *intelligentsia* drawn from the workers, that a Renaissance in the realm of the arts, of music, of drama and the cinema has commenced?

With material and cultural advancement has come physical regeneration. Sports are encouraged. Parks of Culture and Rest are full. It was after seeing the wonderful Park in Moscow that Mr. H. G. Wells remarked that if he were to die and return to Earth once more he knew of no other place where he would rather be born than in the Moscow Park of Culture and Rest!

Along with men, women and children have come into their own. Woman has ceased to be a chattel and has attained all the rights of free humanity. The laws of marriage and divorce make that abundantly clear. The successful abolition of prostitution is one of the significant indications of that change. The child has become the special responsibility of the State in the U.S.S.R., It is a criminal offence to strike a child, whether the offender be the parent or the teacher.



A glimpse at the Moscow Park of Culture and Rest.

That does not mean that the home is broken up or that, as the anti-socialist propagandist would put it, "Socialism means barracks". The family and the home still exist but it is a home which depends for its existence on the completest free will.

Indeed, there are some who like Mr. C. E. M. Joad feel that the Communist leaders of Russia are going back on their dreams of a new society where marriage, family and the home were to be no more. To them it seems that the Russians are treading the path back to conventional morality which the Revolution seemed to have shaken to its foundations.

There is undoubtedly a tendency to discourage too free a use of the newly-won sexual and social liberties. But here again, the characterisation of this tendency as a return to conventional morality would be as sweepingly inaccurate a generalization as the assertion that the Soviet Union is returning to Capitalism.

There remains an item on the debit side to add before the balance can be struck. That is the lack of individual and political liberty. The peoples of the Soviet Union are undoubtedly living to-day under a dictatorship described by that Marxist euphemism, "democratic centralism." Is it a dictatorship of Stalin or of the Communist Party with its three and a half million members? I should say, both. It is certainly the dominance of a disci-

plined and determined Party based on an ideology and a record of service. At the same time the fact cannot be ignored that even within the Party the right to oppose the official line of the Party, which means that of its "great leader and teacher Stalin," is denied. Trotsky, not to mention many a smaller man, is a living testimony to that fact.

It is easy, however, to lose one's sense of proportion on this question. Mr. Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union estimates that there are between 5000 bourgeois and 1000 socialist political prisoners and about fifteen times that number in the U.S.S.R., In 1908, it is estimated there were 70,000 Russian politicals banished to Siberia and 180,000 in exile.

But is even this much of political coercion necessary? Are the censorship and the denial of political rights really necessitated by the danger to the stability of the regime? To judge by appearances, as one must, it seems that the Soviet regime is strong enough to relax its grip on political and individual freedom even more than it has done in the last few years. It was certainly unnecessary, for instance, as a measure of retaliation for the murder of Kirov to execute 117 persons and to send into exile 50,000 who, whatever their other offences may have been, could not possibly have been guilty of Kirov's murder. It was an act based on contempt of what Trotsky once called "the Kantian, priestly, vegetarian—

Quaker prattle about the sacredness of human life."

"To me, Marxism means intolerance," an Indian Communist is reported to have admitted in an outburst of candour. It is that unscientific, dogmatic spirit that has been responsible for some of the blemishes in the Soviet regime. Recent indications of the mind of the Soviet Government and the Comintern reveal a more elastic outlook. There is no doubt that the violence and intolerance of the "continuing revolution" have lessened in the last few years, but they have not lessened nearly enough.

The justification for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, or rather, that of the Communist Party, will be justified on the day when that dictatorship abdicates in favour of a political, social and economic democracy. Every effort should be made to hasten the day. In that light, the proposals to introduce adult suffrage, direct elections and the secret ballot in the constitution of the U.S.S.R. are most welcome.

More striking to a visitor from an Eastern land than any other single achievement of the Russian Communists is the emancipation of the "backward" peoples of the Tsar's Empire. The "national" policy of the Communists has amply justified itself. Its essence lay in the use made of national forms in language and culture for the purpose of reaching those backward peoples with the socialist message.

There can be no mistaking the moral of that achievement for a country like India. If Socialism can mean political emancipation and rehabilitation, —physical, economic and cultural, —for the Turk and the Tartar, the Uzbek and the Mongol, it can mean nothing else for the Indian.