

R U S S I A

Then and Now

RUSSIA, THEN AND NOW

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL

The Experiences of a Military Attaché.

PRIVATE AND PERSONAL.

Further Experiences of a Military Attaché.

Translator of The German Official Account
of the War in South Africa.

RUSSIA THEN AND NOW

BY BRIGADIER-GENERAL W. H.-H. WATERS
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PREFACE

“**YOU** ALONE CAN POINT TO” the contrast between the old Russia and the new. This remarkably flattering remark was written to me by the B.B.C. after my return from Russia in the year 1934. Readers will decide whether I live up to it! So far as was known nobody, acquainted with the Russian language, had visited the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), who had had my advantages of having known imperial Russia intimately from the Court to the hovel, and who had travelled all over the empire in pre-war days.

When I took leave of the unfortunate Emperor Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna in 1916, at his General Headquarters, for, as we believed, a few weeks, it could not be foreseen that my next visit to Russia would be delayed for eighteen years and take place in such utterly different circumstances. When I met Marie Rasputin (I forget her married name), the daughter of the

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starets, later and said something about Russia, she replied at once :

“ Ah, what used to be Russia.”

That great country has always attracted me strongly ever since my first visit in 1888 to learn the language, which earned for me the Civil Service Commission's certificate as a first-class interpreter. Afterwards, official and private sojourns in Russia, together with reading, and listening occasionally to broadcasts from Moscow, kept up my knowledge of the language. Circumstances had prevented me from going earlier to the U.S.S.R. after 1916 ; but I had always hoped, in a more or less vague way, to see the people again.

When, in the early summer of 1934, I asked about a visa to enable me to enter the country, I stipulated that I should be allowed to select my routes at random after arriving in Lenin-grad. If I had not been permitted to do this I would, of course, say so in this volume.

My impressions are recorded in it, and I have endeavoured to contrast the new with the old Russia, necessarily briefly and without wearying the reader with statistics. It will be seen that any comparison between the conditions in our own country and those obtaining in the U.S.S.R. is impossible, because there is no common denominator. In spite of

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some social evils England is, in my opinion, the most advanced nation in the world, whereas the Russian people are, on the whole, still very backward.

As the system is the same everywhere, with here and there slight modifications due to local causes, it was wiser, in my view, to concentrate on a few places instead of rushing about a country which covers one-sixth of the earth's surface in a ring fence.

The U.S.S.R. presents an extraordinary paradox. Lenin realized, before it was too late, that human nature is a factor which even he could not with impunity ignore. To-day, of course, the younger generation has never known different conditions or standards of living. Nevertheless, human nature shows itself in, for example, the lazy temperament of the average Russian. He will usually take as many holidays as he can get, whereas the Communist generally spends his leisure in some kind of social work. A high standard of duty is expected from him, and failure to attain it may cause him to be expelled from the Communist Party. The paradox is that the Russian also is a social and co-operative being, while at the same time he has his own individuality. In other words, he cannot escape competition. To put it briefly the U.S.S.R. is nominally

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Communist while strongly encouraging competition by the system of piece-work.

I went to Soviet Russia with a perfectly open mind. But I would indeed be a striking example of the basest ingratitude if my heart had not been with the Society of imperial Russia, which had for years lavished such boundless hospitality on me, while I have been almost powerless to aid its members in their misery and destitution.

Nevertheless, in common with some American capitalists of Russian extraction, there are, some of us think, certain aspects of the Soviet system which could advantageously be adopted in countries more advanced than Russia. Indeed, on January 26, 1935, Mr. Hore Belisha, the Minister of Transport, announced a *Five Years' Plan* for his Department! His bitterest enemy would not term him a Bolshevik.

This volume is about the Russia of to-day. Undoubtedly horrible things happened there during the last few years. The most ardent Communist would not wish to condone them, and I am not a Communist. An impartial traveller might spend years in the U.S.S.R. and he would still find something new in that land of surprises. I have written only of that which is actually in existence in the hope that these pages may help to give some idea of a great

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nation which is bound to exercise increasingly immense influence on the world.

The ample stocks of grain enabled bread cards to be abolished as from January 1 last. This is striking evidence of material progress. In new dwellings the ground floor is to be reserved for shops.

Excluding peasantry there were in 1928 11,000,000 employees and workers as against some 23,000,000 to-day.

Three-quarters of the population are 33 years old or younger ; most Russians, therefore, did not know the imperial system.

Recent concessions to the peasantry support my statements on pages 30, 185 and 280, that the Soviet system is capitalist in a sense. *But communal (State) ownership of the means of production stands on an apparently impregnable base as opposed to private ownership.

W. H.-H. WATERS.

OTTERY ST. MARY.

March, 1935.

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