

RUSSIA TO-DAY TO-MORROW

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I LOOKING AT SOVIET RUSSIA	7
II THE FACE OF EVENTS	13
III THE ESSENCE OF RUSSIA'S ECONOMIC POLICY.	17
IV THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION	20
V THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN	27
VI THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION	34

RUSSIA TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

I

To draw a picture of a complex situation requires the use not so much of facts which are true as of facts which are typical. This is especially so when the situation is a rapidly moving one. Then, for one's picture to convey any meaning, the 'typical' that one seeks must bear relation, not merely to the 'typical' of to-day, but to the 'typical' of yesterday and the 'typical' of to-morrow as well. And the more various the facts, the less significance one can attach to the word 'typical' save in relation to what is passed and what is likely to come.

That is why there is so much misleading chatter about Russia even among those who confine themselves to what is true. Much of such chatter may be accurate, but it affords a false perspective and is unrelated to the *movement* of the kaleidoscope of events. On the other hand, everyone who attempts to generalize about Russia is faced with the difficulty that almost any generalization he makes is capable of being proved wrong in some particular. 'Russia is a large country', as the saying is. Yet, failure to generalize is false still: it leaves the room swept and garnished for Riga correspondents.

Russia is fascinating as a country precisely because it is a canvas of such richly discordant tones. In the past people have likened Russia to a mosaic. But to-day, this

gives too tidy an impression, too static. One needs, rather, to liken it to a film, fashioned by an Eisenstein or a Pudovkin, or to a very modern symphony. There is a pattern to it ; but this does not greet the eye immediately. There is rhythm to it and contrapuntal movement, but not of an accustomed kind. Moscow, with its intriguing blend of East and West, reflects these vivid contradictions on the very surface of its life as a city. Cobbled streets, seas of water and mud when the snows melt in April. Bearded peasant figures in sheepskin coats and hats, and sharp-boned Tartar faces. Street-peddlers of fruit and toys and sweetmeats. The crowded Sukharevsky market on a Sunday morning with the clamour and variety of an Asiatic bazaar. And then—new tramcars and Leyland motor-buses and the asphalted Tverskaia ; smart official automobiles, Rolls-Royces, Fiats and Mercedes. In the hotel one's change is reckoned on an abacus. Across the way, perhaps, is the hum of lifts and typewriters in a six-storey building where the electrification of the whole of Russia is being planned. Elsewhere a Soviet assembly or a trade union conference discusses the seven-hour day and the continuous-working five-day-week, the building of new factories, new technical inventions and rationalization. The Kremlin at the heart of the city with its exotic Italian towers and battlements and its frescoed Byzantine cathedrals. Moscow in the slanting evening light—a Utrillo ballet-setting, with its lead roofs more motley than the pavements, above them the glint of gold and green minarets, below in the mauve shadows the orange and green façades of the eighteenth century buildings. And then—large blocks, whole suburbs, of new workers' flats out beyond the *sadovaia* ; new post office, telegraph and office buildings, fashioned with an ascetic devotion to simple line and proportion in the manner of Mendelssohn or Gropius or Corbusier.

Outside urban Russia, in the countryside, the contradiction is still more striking. Here one meets huddled

villages of peasant log-huts, where cattle inhabit the living-room and soup is eaten by dipping into a single communal bowl. Here cultivation is still on the mediaeval open-field system, and illiterate peasants sprinkle holy-water on their fields as the surest means of improving their crop. And as one looks eastward through the forest of fir trees and silver birch one realizes that a few miles beyond this village is another clearing in the forest with its decrepit log-huts and rachitic children, and beyond that yet another, and so across the Urals to the Mongolian *taiga* and the Pacific Ocean. Across a continent—priests and superstition, vodka, drunkenness, sordid filth and illiteracy. At the same time perhaps an electric globe shines in each peasant hut. Somewhere in that forest a new central power-station is being erected to electrify a whole region of neighbouring provinces. In this village, or its neighbour, there is a village reading-room or library, with its radio-set relaying classical music from the Moscow opera or conservatoire or propagandist lectures about building a new world; a government 'agronom' patiently speaking to the peasants of deeper ploughing, rotation of crops, tractors, co-operative production; a keen-eyed peasant Young Communist, spitting at the name of God and talking of education, science, machinery, electrification and culture.

There is a further reason why generalization about Russia is so difficult—a subjective one. One can only describe a novel phenomenon in terms of what is already known; and precisely here one is involved in a paradox and a dilemma. On the one hand, any judgement of Moscow in terms of the standards of Berlin or London is clearly futile. All judgements of Russia must start from the fact that Russia is part of Eastern Europe, that her pre-war national income per head was only a quarter that of Britain, and that her standard of life and of communal development must be compared with those prevailing in East and South-east Europe rather than with

the more prosperous West, nurtured in industrialism for half a century or more. Many a Mrs. Ethel Snowden has gone to Russia with a pink parasol and returned with scorn and indignation because lavatories are dirty and there are beggars on the streets. Russia has its cradle in the peasant log-hut ; Moscow to-day is still at heart a big sprawling village ; and the average Muscovite has to be scratched very little to find the peasant of Gorki's autobiography.

But when one has made this reservation one must straightway supplement it with another ; namely that life in Russia is surprisingly normal and that one must judge it as such.

Most people in the West undoubtedly think of Russia as a strange place where the unexpected is to be expected and to find the normal is to be surprised. And more bourgeois visitors than are ready to admit it probably go to Russia in this ' Alice-Through-the-Looking-Glass ' mood, ready not to be alarmed to turn a corner upon a priest hanging from a lamp-post and Cheka machine-guns picking off white collars in the street, and to raise their eyebrows at trains running punctually, complete with restaurant-cars and *wagon-lits*, at boys walking out with girls on the boulevard in the evening, and people generally eating and drinking and riding in tramcars and busied with other preoccupations of ordinary life. So easily do our minds run to melodrama ! Between these two extremes one is never completely sure of one's standards of judgement—whether one's surprise at Russia's normality is producing too uncritical an appraisal of her virtues, or whether in judging her by the standards of the West one is being too mawkishly sensitive to her shortcomings. And I know of no system of averaging that yields a satisfactory result.

Actually, however, one has only to face this dilemma to be able to surmount it ; and the contradiction itself presses one towards a higher wisdom. It demonstrates

the worthlessness of 90 per cent of the subjective-‘impressions’ of foreign visitors to Soviet Russia—the whole gamut of them from Arnold Bennett’s four days to Theodore Dreiser’s striving after a less cursory acquaintance. The effect of Russian food on the stomach may be as potent an influence on these impressions as anything else. And I believe that nobody can begin to understand Soviet Russia until he has lost interest in his own individual reactions to the situation and purposely discounts them; until he has discarded all attempts to make judgements about events in terms of an *a priori* scale of values. Until he has done this he is like the top-hatted gentry at a picture gallery who demand that an artist should use pretty colours and paint comfortable subjects and who consequently deplore a Picasso because his colours and forms are ‘odd’, a Matisse or a Gauguin because their subjects are disturbing or ‘bizarre’. If one has sensed anything of the significance of present-day Russia, I believe one immediately loses all desire to approve or condemn: one realizes how pigmy, how futile and irrelevant, such personal valuations are. The mastering desire becomes to record facts nakedly, bare of moral ‘highlights’. When placed thus upon the canvas they have a significance that is all their own. This mood of humility before the process of history is not quickly learned by an imperial race. But the younger writers in Russia have learned it, children of raw experience and a new breed. And it is this quality of objectivity, startling at times in its cold detachment, which causes the spirit of Soviet Russia to vibrate in their work and enables them to convey to us so much that is significant and real. In Babel’s *Red Cavalry*,¹ for instance, in the crude savage passion of Cossack horsemen lies the stuff out of which the new Russia is being forged. No pretty tales, no author’s attitudinizing: a stark realism which turned the stomach of most of our sensitive literary critics but holds a sublime beauty

¹ Published in an English translation by Messrs. Knopf, 1929.

of its own. Or Gladkov's *Cement* and Panferov's *Bruski*.¹ No gay colours to make a Bolshevik paradise : primitive chaos groping forward to something new by the logic, not of Tolstoy, but of history which is its own epic. It is not the new generation in Russia which feels the need to 'justify' the revolution. It is the old intellectuals, shuffling their feet uneasily among the strange values of a changed world who grope for moral criteria. Most of these, of course, condemn, and write sonnets in Paris. A few justify and approve, like Alexander Blok with his famous poem of 'The Twelve'² who march across the steppe, blaspheming, raping, burning, at their heels a mangy cur, but with the figure of Christ at their head.

¹ Published in English translations by Messrs. Martin Lawrence, 1929 and 1930.

² A translation of part of the poem appears in *Russian Poetry*, edited by Babette Deutsch and I. Yarmolinsky (Martin Lawrence and International Publishers, 1929).

II

FIRST to consider the movement that is visible on the surface of events. What tendencies do these indicate ?

To one visiting Russia 4 years ago and again to-day important changes are noticeable ; but the changes are not simple and they baffle by their apparent contradictions. In the summer of 1925 when I was first in Russia Moscow was optimistic under the smile of a bumper harvest. It had been a year of rapid reconstruction, when the ravages of civil war and famine had been healed and the stitches finally removed from the wounds. People measured the outward and visible changes at that time in weeks. Many buildings were being repainted for the first time since the war. Clothing shops were beginning to stock their windows with a few lines of shoddy, ready-made suits. People promenaded in the boulevards at twilight, with the haunting fear of starvation no longer in their eyes. To relieve the seriously overcrowded tramcars a few, but only a few, Leyland motor-buses had begun to appear on the streets ; and one or two extortionate private taxis stood beside the *droschkies* in the central squares of Moscow but seemed never to be used. In the suburbs a beginning was being made with new housing schemes. In Lenin-grad the worst streets were being repaired ; in Moscow the cobble-stones were here and there being reset.

Since then Russia has had four moderately good harvests. But the supply of agricultural produce, and especially grain, has not kept pace with an expanding urban demand, so that in the summer of 1928, in place of an export of grain of over two million tons, an import of some quarter of a million tons was required ; in con-

sequence of which Russia in that year had a negative trade balance of some £20,000,000. By strenuous efforts to prune imports and to stimulate alternative exports this negative balance was removed in the ensuing year. But as a result both grain and imported articles were scarce. Most of the latter are very expensive or unobtainable. When I was in Russia in 1929 I did not see a banana, and lemons were very expensive (though apples and pears and peaches from South Russia abounded). Coffee, apart from coffee substitutes, seemed virtually unobtainable. Certain drugs, like quinine, could only be obtained by a doctor's order. Bread had begun to be rationed by a card system, under which a manual worker was entitled to receive 1½lb. per day per person of his family, and non-manual workers 1lb. Outside Moscow the ration was rather smaller, and in villages I visited the peasants were mixing their rye with a considerable proportion of potato-flour. Later, other commodities were also brought within the rationed category, including butter and sugar and tea, the allowance of the latter amounting at that time to no more than about 2 ounces per person per month. Meat at that time was plentiful; but since then a meat shortage has also developed, and meat supplies in 1930 are also scarce. Such rations applied to the amount one was entitled to buy from the co-operative at co-operative prices: if one was lucky and could obtain more from a private shop or a street hawker, there was nothing to prevent it, save that the article in this case would probably cost three times as much.

At the same time, of other articles there was no such scarcity; and in most respects shops were vastly better stocked than four years ago. Shops selling boots and hats and clothing presented a very normal appearance, like the windows, perhaps, in an English provincial town, or in London south of the Thames. Large universal stores abounded in fruit and groceries and vegetables and on Saturdays were as thronged as an English Woolworth's.

Sweetmeats were everywhere in evidence ; bookshops exceeded in interest those in London outside the Charing Cross Road ; I found *conditorei* shops which provided cakes and pastries to rival the *torte* and *kuchen* of Vienna ; street-sellers crowded at every corner with baskets of fruit, with wooden toys, even with the familiar sight of coloured toy-balloons. To-day there are no longer a few, but quite a large number of motor-buses on a variety of routes. New tramcars, I should guess, amount at least to one in every five. A fleet of fairly cheap municipally-owned Renault taxis ply for hire and are in constant use. Four years previous a Moscow policeman directing traffic was not a convincing sight. To-day at busy corners traffic is controlled by a traffic-signalling apparatus, which the Russian chauffeur, intrigued always by a new gadget, seems instinctively to obey. The average citizen though drably, even shabbily dressed by Western standards (one need hardly say that the bowler-hat is never seen and an ordinary trilby hat is rare) is distinctly better dressed and more preoccupied with the ordinary details of a *petit-bourgeois* existence—perhaps with sex-problems, with the coming holidays, with the prospects of getting a flat through a building co-operative next year.

Most striking of all is the large amount of constructional work that is everywhere in evidence. The housing schemes on the outskirts of Moscow have become whole suburbs. In the centre of the town a variety of buildings, completed or in process of erection, much of it of very considerable architectural interest : the Lenin Institute, for instance, a superb study in formal balance ; the *Izvestia* newspaper offices, having the lines and angles of a battleship ; the *Gostorg* trading company offices, a most pleasing utilitarian treatment of glass and cement, shorn of the least suspicion of spurious decorative effects. The transmitting station on the south bank of the river which supplies the city with electric current seemed nearly to have doubled its size since 1925 ; and sections of the

suburban railway line have this year been electrified. Nor, is this construction work confined to Moscow. The small provincial town of Rostov the Great proudly displayed a new electrical bakery. In Yaroslav there were acres of housing construction in progress, a new factory producing large motor-lorries, and across the Volga on the edge of the peat-bogs a new power-station, part-working and in process of extension, designed in a year or two to electrify the industry of the two textile provinces of Yaroslav and Vladimir. In the south large projects are in progress such as the great Dniepostroy dam scheme, a giant tractor-plant at Stalingrad, irrigation work in the cotton area of Turkestan ; beyond the Urals the epic of the Turkestan-Siberian railway, 1,000 miles in length, employing 40,000 workers in its construction, originally planned to be completed in 1931, but now forging the final link in the spring of 1930.

III

How then explain this contradiction of rapid industrial progress combined with a rationing of staple articles of food? Is it a lop-sided development of the economic system which must speedily end in collapse? Or is it the tilt inevitable to turning a sharp corner at a high speed?

The answer seems to be that the contradiction is an essential symptom of the new phase of revolution through which Russia is now passing. The agony of 1917-1920 represented the political revolution by which class power was transferred from the old ruling class into the hands of organs of the unpropertied masses, by which the economic basis of the propertied class was undermined and swept away and the new Soviet State was established and entrenched against counter-attack. The years that followed, the period of NEP, represented a transitional halt for economic reconstruction, a breathing-space for consolidation before the next advance. In particular it represented a compromise with the village—with the individualist peasant—to resuscitate agriculture after the ravages of famine and civil war and the hunger-years. To-day the transitional respite is over. The new advance, the gigantic task of a more narrowly economic revolution has begun.

People in the West, particularly in England, seem scarcely to have begun to appreciate the dimensions of this new task. But it would be difficult to find an adequate parallel to it at any other period of social history. We all know, of course, the common view about the Russian Revolution as the product of a band of utopians who tried

to inaugurate a fairy-land of their imagination and have ever since been beating an ignominious retreat. Persons who obstinately repeat such chatter should be allowed to talk about nothing but golf. If our memory were not so short, we should long since have lost patience with the "wolf" cries of journalists who each year prophesy Soviet Russia's approaching final (positively final) crisis, as regularly as our bank chairmen have each year prophesied for England an imminent trade boom. But even intelligent and informed persons seem to have little appreciation of the full novel significance of what Russia is now doing.

Pre-war Russia was a semi-Asiatic agrarian country of 140 million inhabitants, of which no more than 18 per cent lived in towns; while factory wage-earners numbered only 2 million, and domestic handicraft production employed twice as many hands as factory industry and accounted for 30 per cent of industrial production. Her railway system represented no more than one kilometre per 100 square kilometres of area as against 12 in Britain and Germany, or 5 kilometres per 10,000 inhabitants, the lowest of any country in Europe except Serbia. Outside the principal towns roads were merely unmetalled tracks across the snow in winter or impassable seas of mud during the thaw in spring. Pre-war Russia could only be said to have made a beginning with the Industrial Revolution, a beginning itself largely due to a large influx of foreign capital and of foreign managerial and technical personnel. The present policy of the Russian Government is to carry through this Industrial Revolution and complete it, transforming the face of Russia as completely as Germany was transformed two-thirds to half a century ago; and it plans to carry through this industrialization programme at a quite unprecedented speed. At the same time, this transformation is to be effected, not as hitherto in history (in England, for instance, a century ago) on the basis of *laissez-faire*, to "come by itself" through the play of the market, but on

the basis of conscious organization and planning from the centre. Still further, in the past such developments have always taken place under the initiative of men of capital, spurred on by the hope of enriching themselves from the gains which would fall into the lap of those who were first in the race. The policy in Russia to-day intends to dispense with this aid, to reconcile rapid industrialization with the Communist goal of a classless society, where the economic polarity between those who live by their property and those who have no property live by working for those who have, shall be no more, and all, instead, shall figure as workers, communally owning the means of production with which they work. The combination of these three elements in one policy, rapid *industrialization* on the basis of socialist *planned economy*, and *classlessness*, is what makes this new Russian Revolution of to-day unique in history. And some idea of the stupendous character of this effort as applied to Russia can be gained if one remembers that the old open-field system prevails over the major part of Russian agriculture; that 60 per cent of the pre-war population were illiterate; that some 60 different languages are spoken within the Soviet Union, some yet not possessing a script; that, for instance, the major part of the people of one republic, Kazakstan, is nomad, and that in parts of Turkestan women still wear the veil and (until the present government prohibited it) were sold in marriage like chattel-slaves. What, after all, are the lives of a few of an effete ruling class, compared with historical tasks such as these?

IV

THIS transformation of a country from primitive to modern methods of production has its keynote in one word: machinery. Industrialization means increasing the proportion of mechanical power to human power—what Marx called raising ‘the organic composition of capital’, what Americans call putting more ‘power behind the elbow’. To do this means, while the process continues, using a *smaller* amount of limited supplies of materials and labour on the production of goods for immediate consumption and a *larger* amount for constructional work—less labour for making boots and shoes and shirts and pots and pans, and more for building power-stations and railways and tractors and machinery, and then for building factories and machinery to make the factories and machinery. Someone or other has got to ‘tighten his belt’—at any rate to be temporarily less well off than he might have been if the rate of industrial construction had been slower.

Russia is at present forcing this rate of industrial construction at an extraordinary speed. She is doing so, first on the ground that a country lit by electric light is higher in the scale of social evolution than a country lit by smoky kerosene burners, and that the factory-worker tuned to the rhythm of the machine is potentially more of a socialist than the peasant who harnesses his wife to a wooden plough, while the more large-scale industry develops the stronger and wider the sphere of socialist economy and the narrower the sphere open to the private capitalist; second, in the desire that Russia shall be as little dependent on capitalist countries and as self-sufficient

as possible in the event of a war with the surrounding capitalist world that she has so profoundly disturbed. To this end she is devoting enormous resources to long-period constructional work such as the Turkestan-Siberian railway, electrification, and irrigation-work in Turkestan, which can only yield fruit several years ahead. Of her import-programme some 85 per cent consists of industrial raw materials or machinery and constructional materials, and less than 15 per cent consists of finished consumable goods. That is why tea and lemons and coffee and bananas are hard to obtain and gramophone records and razor blades are of poor quality : new Diesel engines are preferred in their stead.

Hitherto the industrial worker, particularly in Moscow and Leningrad, has not been allowed to bear much of the brunt of this stinting. His wages have been steadily advanced ; he has been well served by his co-operative which has probably had the pick of supplies ; and the workers' standard of life, including various free State services, is probably some 30 or 40 per cent above the pre-war norm, while his hours of work are some 25 per cent shorter. But precisely to the extent that the town-worker has shifted the burden the peasant in the village has felt the shortage of finished manufactured goods. The 'scissors', or the gap between what the peasant receives for his produce and what he has to pay for manufactured wares, is not as wide as in the acute crisis of 1923,¹ but is still open fairly wide : probably nearly 2 to 1 as compared with pre-war. Moreover, not only are manufactured goods in the village relatively expensive, but the peasant often lacks sufficient supplies or the assortment and quality he desires. The result is that he has less inducement to market his grain and to extend his sowing, and often prefers to hoard his produce in barns rather than part with

¹ I have described this in my *Russian Economic Development since the Revolution*, (Routledge, 1928), Chapters 8 and 9; also more briefly in my article on Russia in the new edition of the *Encycl. Britannica*.

it to the State buying organs, or at least to hold it speculatively till a private trader appears and offers him a higher price.

But while the peasant is in a sense exploited through the relative prices of agricultural and industrial goods, the burden of rent, mortgage and tax-charges which falls on the village is distinctly less than before the war. And this means that the peasant is still less under pressure to market his produce and is free to consume a larger proportion of it himself. Before the war the existence of a rural proletariat and the impoverishment of large sections of the peasantry was an important factor in swelling the grain surplus available for the towns and for export. The poor peasant had to stint his own consumption and sell his grain in order to meet his mortgage obligations or the Tsarist taxpayer ; while the *batrak*, or landless peasant, having no means of livelihood, had to labour on the landlord's estate or the rich peasant farm to produce grain for market. With the greater equalization in the village which the agrarian revolution has brought the average consumption of its own produce by the village has probably increased. Before the war over a half of the marketed surplus of the village came from the landlords' estates or the rich *kulak* farm. Now the landlord's estate is no more and the *kulak* farms are fewer and smaller. Consequently, while the total agricultural yield has attained the pre-war level, and in certain crops exceeded it, the *surplus which is placed on urban markets* is only three-quarters of the pre-war amount, while in the case of grain it is no more than half the pre-war amount. Hence, the deficiency of grain for export and the need to ration urban consumption. It is a symptom of the fact that urban industry, and its need for food and raw materials, is expanding faster than the agricultural surplus ; and the advance of industry is being retarded because agriculture has reached the limit of expansion (save at a relatively tardy rate of growth) on the basis of small-scale peasant production.

Such a situation could be immediately eased in several obvious ways ; but all of them would involve some sacrifice either of the industrial or of the socialist revolution, probably in part of both : they would involve either a less vigorous programme of industrialization or else a certain revival of class differentiation—the growth of the rich peasant, on the one hand, making profit out of land-leases, hired labour and money-lending, and of an exploitable landless proletariat on the other hand, as in pre-war times. The Soviet Government, for instance, might import more finished goods and less machinery, send a sort of travelling Woolworth's round the villages and extort from them more grain in return. It might devote more resources to expanding the textile industry more rapidly instead of to developing the basic metal and machine-making trades. In the village it might encourage the growth of the rich *kulak* farm, cultivating a surplus for market with the aid of the hired labour of the *batrak*, or landless man.

This, indeed, was the gist of the proposals of the 'Right-wing' inside the Communist Party and of many economists in State institutions two years ago. Already 4 years ago Sokolnikov, then Commissary of Finance, was proposing that Russia should not try to make herself self-sufficient in the basic metal trades, but should continue to rely on imported constructional materials, concentrating capital investments instead on finishing industries such as textiles ; and on this point he came out in opposition to the official policy at the 14th Party Congress. But at this time attention was being focused on the opposition criticism from the 'Left'—the Trotsky-Kamenev-Zinoviev opposition which declared that industrialization was not being pressed fast enough and that too much rein was being given in the village to the *kulak*.¹ But at the beginning of 1928, when difficulties in grain collections had occurred that autumn and winter, 'Right-wing' criticism

¹ This I have described in some detail in my *Russian Economic Development since the Revolution*, Chapters 9 and 11.

again came to the fore. In the December 1927 issue of its *Economic Bulletin* a semi-official body known as the Con-juncture Institute, officered by old-régime economists, made a survey of the economic situation which amounted to a severe criticism of the official policy, on the ground that the investments being made were in excess of what was objectively possible and that agriculture was being disas-trously hampered by the measures adopted to restrain the growth of the rich peasant (*kulak*). A year later Frumkin, Assistant Commissary of Finance, came out with an Open Letter to the Party in which he formulated a definite alternative line of policy. The existing difficulties, he declared, were due to a too rapid pace of industrializa-tion combined with too severe measures taken against the well-to-do peasantry. He advocated a slackening of the offensive against the *kulak* and a reduced capital invest-ment in the basic metal trades and in large constructional schemes, such as electrification, which would only yield fruit a long time ahead. Bukharin, Tomsy, and Rykov, members of the inner Political Bureau of the Party, though they were less outspoken, were known to espouse similar 'Right-wing' views.

These counsels would have amounted to halting the pace, if not postponing, the new economic policy and tolerating and nursing the *kulak* a little longer, embryo-capitalist though he might be. But the majority decision of the Party in no uncertain voice declared against them and in favour of industrialization at the maximum speed. And since riding dangerously requires unwavering vision and nerves and hands of steel, it sharply ordered the 'Right-wing' with its 'warnings' henceforth to hold its tongue. Marxists have a saying that 'every action produces its counter-action'. Hence, they regarded the emergence of this Right-wing as the inevitable resist-ance which the new economic revolution would provoke against itself by its very movement. Foreign journalists delight to depict such controversies in the primary colours

of personal rivalries. The communist seeks a more subtle interpretation : for him such conflicts are the product of rival tendencies in the social maelstrom, reflecting themselves inside the Party, as they should if the Party keeps close to the mass—the necessary accompaniment of movement and growth.

To surmount the agricultural *impasse*, the new policy placed reliance on a rapid development of State and collective farms (*Sovhoze* and *Colhoz*) to enable these in a few years to take the place of the old landlords' estates in producing a surplus for the market. Two years ago emphasis was primarily laid on the former ; and large tracts of uncultivated land in Siberia and North Caucasus were cleared and brought under the plough for the creation of giant *Sovhoze*, some of them 100,000 to 200,000 acres in extent. Since then the emphasis has somewhat shifted to the *Colhoz*, which is formed by a voluntary agreement among a group of peasants to throw their holdings together and to cultivate them as a co-operative producing group¹. These yield fruit more quickly than

¹ Collective farms are of three main types. *First*, where cultivation is done in common, but cattle and implements are still individually owned. *Second*, the *artel*, where land, cattle and implements are made the common property of the group. Members of the group retain their own houses, gardens, small cattle and poultry and perhaps a cow, and get paid according to the amount of work they do. *Third* is the complete agricultural commune where the members live in communal quarters and share out the total proceeds of the group. The second type is the most common at present in the new collectivization movement ; and it is to this type that the ' Model Statutes for a Collective Farm ' issued by the Soviet Government refer. (An English translation of these appeared in *The Labour Monthly* for April, 1930). A member withdrawing from a collective farm receives the equivalent of his ' share ' in the capital of the farm. But the land of the farm cannot be alienated ; the new land allotted to him must be ' free ' land elsewhere in the village. In the same issue of *The Labour Monthly* appeared the translation of Stalin's important article in *Prawda*, ' Many are Made Dizzy by Successes ',

the *Sovhoze*, since they consist of already cultivated land ; and they have shown unexpected possibilities of development, largely through the successful experiment in 'tractor-stations', formed to hire out machinery to the surrounding peasantry. In this way the peasantry come to see the advantages of machine and collective-methods of tillage and harvesting and become more rapidly converted to the *Colhoz* idea as a result. A recent writer in *The Economist* (4. 1. 30), in fact, stated that this experiment in 'tractor-stations' in Russia was likely to prove as important a landmark in productive co-operation as Holyoke's invention of the 'divi' in the English consumers' co-operative store.

in which he sternly denounced all departures from the voluntary principle in the formation of *Colhoz*. For an interesting brief description of life in an agricultural commune, cf. article by Mrs. Williams-Ellis in *The Spectator*, 29-3-30; also Anna Louise Strong, *Modern Farming : Soviet Method* (Modern Books Ltd.)

V

IN Russia to-day the *Piatiletka*, or the Five Year Plan, has as great a hold on the popular imagination (and more permanent) as the Boat Race in London or Wall Street speculation in New York.

In this Five-Year Plan of Industrialization, drawn up by the State Economic Planning Commission (Gosplan) the policy of the new economic revolution is given concrete application. As the planning department of an American trust may draw up a programme of reorganization for the works under its control, so Gosplan here presents a programme for the economic life of half a continent over the period from October 1928 to October 1933.¹ Originally the plan was prepared in two variants: one a minimum variant based on a more conservative estimate of potentialities, the other a maximum variant embodying more ambitious aims. This programme, in both its forms, was itself the result of an upward revision of an earlier and more conservative provisional plan prepared in 1927. When this revised plan, however, was submitted to the Soviet Congress for ratification, the Congress adopted the maximum variant and declared that this was to be the official programme by which State economic policy was to be governed over the ensuing five years.

The corner-stone of this Plan consists in the very large volume of investments which it provides to finance constructional work: still further, the large proportion of these investments to be devoted to the basic metal trades and to long-period constructional work such as electrifica-

¹ The Russian economic and financial year is from October to October.

tion. This volume of capital accumulation, as a proportion of the national income, is at least double the rate of accumulation of new 'savings' in Britain in normal times. Over the five-year period, 1928-9 to 1932-3, capital investments are provided for to the extent of 64.6 milliard roubles,¹ as against 26.5 milliard in the preceding 5 years. Of this, 16.4 milliard represents investment in industry, 23.2 in agriculture, 10 in transport, and 5.9 milliard in housing. Thereby, it is estimated, the total fixed capital of the economic system will be increased by some 80 per cent, that of industry being nearly trebled, that of agriculture increasing by some 35 per cent. On this basis it is anticipated that by 1933 35 per cent of industrial production will come from new factories (as distinct from reconstructed existing plants). In agriculture State and collective farms are planned by 1933 to account for a fifth of the total grain harvest and for 43 per cent of the marketed surplus of grain, and collective farms to include about a fifth of the peasant households. The railway mileage, which at 77,000 kilometres already considerably exceeds the 1913 level, is to be extended to 94,000; while electrification is to be increased by the erection of 42 large regional power-stations, raising the capacity of such stations from 520,000 to 3,000,000 kilowatts by 1933 and increasing the total output of electrical power in the country from 5 milliard kilowatt-hours to 22 milliard per annum.

Estimating that this extensive constructional work can achieve a lowering of industrial costs by about a third, the programme provides for a doubling of the total national

¹ At the par of exchange, 10 roubles = £1. On the basis of the internal purchasing power of the rouble and the £, however, a calculation of about 15 roubles to £1 is a closer basis for a comparison of figures in terms of their real values. The figures in the text are taken from the official outline of the Five-Year Plan issued by Gosplan, and issued in an English translation as *The Soviet Union Looks Ahead* (Allen & Unwin, 1930).

income over the five-year period, the output of industry to increase 135 per cent (producers' goods by 200 per cent, consumers' goods by 100 per cent), the yield of agriculture to increase by 50 per cent and the marketed surplus of agriculture by over 80 per cent. Such a rate of increase of the national income would be at least 3 times as great as the rate of increase in pre-war Russia and three times as great as that of the leading industrial countries of the West. If achieved, it would raise the national income *per head* in Russia by 1933 to about 70 per cent above 1913.

Pre-war Russia was continually afflicted with the problem of rural over-population, leading to a constant migration from the village to the town ; and this problem still remains. In recent years the death-rate, particularly the infant death-rate, has fallen, with improvements in public health, while the birth-rate has remained very high. As a result, Russia to-day has by far the largest natural rate of increase of population of any European country, namely 23 per 1,000 per annum ; while her urban population is increasing at the enormous rate of 5 per cent per annum, as a result of the influx from the countryside. To this is attributable the serious unemployment problem which exists in the towns. Since industrialization has its keynote in raising the proportion of mechanical to human power in production, employment under the Five-Year Plan cannot increase so rapidly as industry itself will expand. Indeed, while the output of industry is planned to be more than doubled and the use of mechanical power in industry to be raised from 1 to 2 horse-power per worker (or to nearly half the level of U.S.A.), the number employed in industry is planned to increase by only a third. Nevertheless, this rate of increase of employment is more than twice as great as the natural rate of increase of population, and sufficiently greater than the increase of urban population (it is estimated) to reduce the volume of urban unemployment by 1930 to a relatively small amount.

The common reaction to such figures in Western countries is to dismiss them as mere 'Utopia-spinning' or as 'window-dressing' to save the faces of a bankrupt firm. But such an ostrich-view can, I think, no longer be tolerated by reasonable persons. Whether this Five-Year Plan is likely to be realized one cannot, of course, say dogmatically, either in affirmation or denial. One can only take such signs as there are to see. Three years ago, influenced by this common scepticism, I made a cautious estimate of the rate of progress which Russian industry in the next few years was likely to achieve.¹ Actual events have proved me to have been too cautious by at least a half. And such results as are to hand of the first year (1928-9) of the Plan do not suggest the programme unattainable: quite the contrary. The volume of state industrial production over the year increased 23 per cent as compared with a provision of 21 per cent in the Plan; while figures for the first quarter of 1929-30 show an increase of 27 per cent over the same period of the previous year. Indeed, the programme for the ensuing year has been drastically revised again in an upward direction, and makes the amazing demand for a 30 per cent increase of output over the second year. As a result, Russia to-day is busy talking about 'achieving the Five-Year Plan in four years'. In agriculture the collectivization movement has far exceeded expectations. In the spring of 1930 it was announced that 50 per cent of peasant households were already organized in collective farms. In the two months succeeding Stalin's famous letter this proportion fell somewhat sharply, peasants who had been 'collectivized' under pressure leaving the collective farms and reverting to their individual holdings. Even so, however, the area of collective cultivation in the middle of the summer represented one-third of the total agricultural area, or more than double that provided in the Five-Year Plan, while the number of peasant households

¹In *Russian Economic Development*, Chapter 12.

organized in collective farms remained at a figure higher than the Five-Year Plan provided for by 1933.

Four years ago it was still possible to attribute this rapid increase of industrial output to the use of reserves of unused capital capacity which had been under-exploited during the civil war and ensuing years. But to-day such an explanation is certainly no longer possible when it is a question, not of using existing plant to full capacity, but of building new plants. Unlike Germany who fed her 'rationalization boom' of 1925-8 on imported capital, Soviet Russia has had insignificant aid from borrowing abroad. Over recent years there has been a certain measure of inflation, but not sufficient to account for an industrial 'boom' of this size. There remains the suggestion that the economies of rationalization on the basis of a socialist planned economy are not only greater than the economies to be obtained on the basis of individualist *laissez-faire*, but are of quite a different order of magnitude. If this be the true explanation, as I believe it to be, it is sufficient to revolutionize economic theory; and it may well mean that Russia's dream of 'reaching and surpassing the level of the capitalist countries' of the West may not remain a dream for very long.

How, it will be asked, even if she can raise the capital, can Russia find the technical and administrative personnel to handle tasks on so stupendous a scale? It is true that, next to agriculture, the supply of technical skill is the second 'tight place' of the Five-Year Plan. The Plan indicates that some 5,000 new engineers each year will be required over the period of the *Piatiletka*, whereas at present only 4,000 graduate annually from the universities and technical institutes. But it is pointed out that, since no more than 8 per cent of all students in higher technical institutes graduate annually, there seems to be room for accelerating the period of study, at least so as to permit 12 per cent to graduate each year. Of the general administrative staff a good number still consist of per-

sonnel carried over from pre-revolution days. But to an increasing extent posts are being filled from the new generation of graduates or from a steady stream of younger workers and peasants promoted through the Soviet or Party apparatus and the trade unions. And at this point any picture of Soviet Russia would be entirely misleading if it did not mention the peculiar rôle of the Party and its relation to the mass. It is certainly true that the operation of the *Piatiletka* would be inconceivable without the Party, playing the dual rôle of governing party in the legislature, deciding policy, and furnishing the leading personnel of the executive machine ; just as the revolution itself and the civil war period would have been inconceivable and also the subsequent period of reconstruction in 1921-3. Only through its means is there unity of policy, swiftness and flexibility in its execution over a country of 140 million persons of sixty different tongues. In Britain, for instance, unity of policy, coupled with wide delegation of responsibility, can be achieved because the leading ranks of the civil service are recruited from a few leading public schools, closely uniform in their ideology and tradition ; while 'continuity' of bourgeois policy (on essentials such as property questions and imperial issues) is guaranteed in the legislature, because it needs capital, and hence capitalists, to run a press, to formulate public opinion and to finance an electoral campaign. In Russia the tradition and discipline of the Party play a similar rôle. But while the Party may have certain resemblances to a *samurai* or a Jesuit order, such parallels miss the essential fact that the Party in Russia is not simply a caste of officials, imposing the *Piatiletka* by mechanical orders from above. The leading posts in the administration, it is true, are filled by members of the Party ; but at the same time, over a half the Party personnel consists of workers at the bench or peasants at the plough. These latter fulfil quite as proud a rôle as the former in leading and guiding the activities of their

fellow-workers in trade union or factory committee or village soviet or collective farm ; and no rigid demarcation separates the Party from the non-Party-man. It is, indeed, one of the main planks of Communist theory that what is achieved must be done, not simply with the passive consent of the masses, but through their initiative and active co-operation. Party policy continually undergoes adaptation as it senses the feeling of the masses through the Soviets and the trade unions ; and it is considered to be the rôle of the Party, while guiding and unifying this mass activity, to lead and stimulate it at the same time. Hence, we get Stalin's recent stern denunciation of 'sergeant-major' methods of organizing the peasantry into collective farms. And this fact that the masses in Russia are really being spurred into taking initiative, that they devote to the *Piatiletka* the interest which in other countries goes to betting or gambling or the contemplation of the Prince of Wales, provides a deep reservoir of new administrative capacity for the future and is a novel factor in history which must be borne in mind if we wish to understand.

Maurice Hindus speaks¹ of the Communist as 'a terrible destroyer, who has this to his credit—he has infused a new will into the Russian man, a new energy and impudence. He is hardening the very fibre of the Russian soul.' The second decade of his sway seems destined to show him a great constructor as well. This construction is being done, not by hard-faced individualists, 'not by the Kerensky's and Miliukov's "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought"', but by a new race of men, disciplined by the machine and by labour, sometimes crude and always ruthless, but having vision and devotion and concerned surprisingly little about their own souls.

¹ In his *Humanity Uprooted* (Jonathan Cape).

VI

ALONGSIDE the slogans of the industrial and socialist revolution goes the slogan of the 'cultural revolution' in Russia to-day. And by this is signified a number of things, some clearly formulated, others still in the realm of 'becoming' and as yet only dimly seen.

It should be unnecessary, after twelve years of Soviet government, to say that the Russian revolution has been almost entirely lacking in that vandalism towards art and culture which has characterized most of the epoch-making revolutions in history. We have Sir Martin Conway's word for that.¹ In some respects it has been surprisingly classical in its preservation of the heritage of the past. Lunacharsky, who consistently for twelve years held the post of Commissar of Education, would fit perfectly a Bloomsbury *salon* : a dilettante *litterateur*, distinctly classical in his literary tastes, and probably more at home in Renaissance Italy than in a world of Meyerholds and Eisensteins. He it was who was always insisting on the preservation of the 'cultural heritage'—that 'the proletariat must use all the nutriment of the soil tilled and dressed by a long line of ancestors'. Clara Zetkin tells us how Lenin in the early days of the revolution admitted his inability to appreciate the then fashionable and iconoclastic futurists, declaring his resolute preference for the old masters. Art treasures of palaces and nobles' houses have been preserved and concentrated in museums and made accessible to the public where they were inaccessible before. All church property of historic interest

¹ Cf. his *Art Treasures in Soviet Russia*.

comes under the charge of a special section of the Education Commissariat ; and many churches of special historic and artistic interest in Moscow and the provinces—the cathedrals of the Kremlin for instance—are kept open as museums ; and much church-restoration work and cleaning of frescoes has been done. To prevent a traffic in *ikons* and works of art, export of these things is prohibited, save by special permit ; and Moscow and other towns possess several very rich museums of *ikons* and religious treasures.

Certainly Moscow to-day is as rich a centre of art for the visitor as any other capital city. In painting it presents a distinctly catholic selection of traditional and modern. The Museum of Fine Arts has a very interesting, though not entirely representative, collection of French, German, Flemish and Dutch paintings from the Primitives to the nineteenth century, including Botticelli, Tintoretto, Rafael, Van Dyck, Rubens, Cranach, Rembrandt, Ruysdael, Poussin and Corot. When I visited it last year it also had a special exhibition of war-time drawings of Brangwyn and Kata Kollwitz. Much richer than this is the superb collection of the Hermitage in Leningrad. Quite the finest single collection of modern French painting, I believe, in the world exists in Moscow in the Museum of Modern Western Art, which has its nucleus in two nationalized private collections. Here is a large room of Matisse, of Gauguin, of Manet, two rooms of Cézanne, a room and a half of Picasso, several Degas, *douanier* Rousseau, Derain, Van Gogh, Vlaminck, as well as a few recently acquired examples of painters like Franz Marc, Max Pechstein, Chirico, Othon Friesz, Léger, Modigliani, Braque, and sculpture of Rodin, Maillol and Zadkin. The Tretyakovsky, the national gallery, contains a whole wing of modern Russian painters, certainly not so powerful or so numerous as the young Berlin school, but many of them—Kontchalovsky, Kustodiev, Serebriakova, Mashkov, Petrov-Vodkin, Pimenov and Deineka, for instance—I

think, quite as interesting from a purely formal standpoint as our own London Group or Camden Town Group.

Of music there is much more to say than I am competent to say. In Moscow in the winter there are always several first-class concert seasons, of no less a quality (probably better) than the promenade concerts of the Queen's Hall. Moscow possesses two quite first-class orchestras : the *Persimphans*, the famous conductorless orchestra of the Moscow Soviet, and the orchestra of the Grand Opera Theatre, and at least two first-class quartets, the Stradivarius and the Conservatorium. Last year I attended a Schubert evening of the first of these orchestras and a chamber concert of Brahms, Beethoven and Debussy given by the second with Klemperer conducting ; and in technical execution and synchronization they were well up to the best standard of Munich, Vienna or Berlin.¹ Of the theatre too much has already been written to require repeating ; and here again there is surprising catholicity of taste. The Opera Theatre still performs the classical operas in the traditional style of massed choruses and elaborate realistic *décor* ; and the old ballet continues to perform to proletarian audiences in the old Imperial tradition, much more classical and to my mind much duller than the *émigré* Diaghilev ballet that we know : they do *Petroushka*, for instance, but they have not done, I believe, *Le Pas d'Acier* or *Les Noces*. The Moscow Art Theatre still maintains its old acting tradition, with such superb actors as Moskvín and Katchalov and its entirely naturalistic methods of production. Stanislavsky, meanwhile, is experimenting with an attempt to produce opera in new forms. While I was there this new theatre was doing *Boris Goudonov* and Tchaikovsky's *Onegin*. There is the Kamerny Theatre with Tairov as its *régisiseur* ; there are three experimental

¹ For interesting facts about music in Russia, *cf.* Wicksteed, *Life Under the Soviets* (Lane) and Sabanayeff, *Modern Russian Composers* (Martin Lawrence).

studios of the Art Theatre working along modern lines ; there are two superb Jewish theatres, one of which, the *Gabima*, recently toured Europe (excluding England) and America. On the extreme left is Meyerhold, with his 'Constructivist' methods, and the Proletcult Theatre, with its use of the circus atmosphere—continual movement on the stage, emotion expressed by movement rather than contortion and grease-paint, ladders, levels, clowning, vaulting over walls being used continually to heighten the dramatic *tempo* of the play. Influenced by this latter are theatres like the Theatre of the Revolution and the Trade Union Studio, which are mainly concerned with plays dealing with problems of contemporary life and employing a revolving stage and different levels, and also the 'Blue Blouse' troupes which tour workers' clubs with a variety programme of satire and commentary on current events, half cabaret shows, half *Chauve-Souris*. Moscow is a theatrical paradise, at any rate, compared to London with its pyjama comedies and salacious revues. Of the cinema I will not speak : the Russian film so indisputably holds the artistic lead in the cinema world as to need no enumeration. And its supremacy is not confined to the two pioneers, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, of whom we all have now heard. A whole second generation of film producers follows in the footsteps of these giants : Vertov, Turin, Ermler and Dovjenko, to instance only four.

But the 'cultural revolution' is intended to mean something more than the teaching of illiterates, the installation of radio sets in the village, the opening of museums and the allocation of cheap opera tickets to the trade unions. It implies also creation. It implies the creation of a new culture in all its branches, which, like the final term of a Hegelian triad, shall include what has gone before but at the same time be born from conflict with it. And while there is a wide tolerance, even encouragement of differing tendencies in literature and

art, the Communist attitude is not one of *laissez-faire*. It recognizes that a new culture does not arise spontaneously by some mystic process, but has to be created—that its emergence and the forms in which it emerges depend upon environment and nurture. The official Government censor is only concerned with what he considers to be ‘counter-revolutionary’—to be propagandist for the institutions or values of the past. But Marxist critics in Party journals and newspapers are concerned with a narrower criterion of judgement: like all critics, only in this case more unanimously, they seek to encourage tendencies which they regard as progressive and to discourage other tendencies with their frown. This criterion of judgement is based on two main principles.

First is a question of historical interpretation. Culture is regarded as the product, not of an Idea which falls from heaven or is given *a priori* in the soul of man, but of an historical epoch. It is a reflection of that epoch—not a simple mechanical mirror, it is true, but an emotive expression which follows the complex laws of human psychology. And, according to the Marxist philosophy of history, an epoch is fashioned from its economic and material basis, as the character of a man is fashioned from his instincts and environment. Art results from the emotional experience of the artist, and this in turn results from his concrete experience in the world and in a given society. At the same time, the communicative value of his art depends on the emotional experience of those around him—on the common symbolism of artist and audience. Hence, just as one so frequently hears of national or racial characteristics in culture, so Marxists speak of what is for them the much more important *class* characteristics of culture: the culture nurtured in monasteries and feudal palaces will differ essentially, both in form and content, from that which flourishes amid nascent bourgeois industrialism, and this in turn, from the culture bred among a socialist working-proletariat.

The second principle concerns a criterion of aesthetic value, and seems to be an extension of the modern psychological theory of literary criticism. To the Marxist art is a social phenomenon, not merely an individual one. Just as some writers regard literary value as consisting in the power to give emotional systematization, as it were, to the psychology of the individual, yielding a greater emotional harmony and richness than existed before, so the Marxist regards value in art as consisting in its power to give emotional systematization to social life as a whole—to the emotions of collective experience. On the one hand, art will be the product of social experience ; on the other hand, its value in any particular case will depend on the generality and the social significance of the emotional experiences which it symbolizes.

From this it follows that the art appropriate to a bourgeois epoch can have little more than an historic interest in a proletarian society in the birth-throes of socialism. If the emotional experience of men is different, the symbols appropriate to it, or at least their arrangement, will be different, as well as the ' content ' or ' subject ' of art. Certainly the creation of a new art of this kind cannot follow formulated rules : it cannot be taught by textbooks, it cannot be built according to a Five-Year Plan. But it is possible to have sufficient sense of tendency and direction to pass judgement as to what is nearer and what is further away ; and to this extent it is possible for criticism to guide the creation of a new culture along the way which history is urging it to go.

From this it must not be imagined that everything which has a revolutionary hero and ends with the *Internationale* is praised, while everything otherwise is condemned. Examples of this naïve attitude can, of course, be found, and not infrequently. But it is not consistent Marxism. Rather is it the manner in which the old régime interprets what the Communists would like. When the old theatres and ballet, for instance, try to

adapt themselves to their new proletarian audiences, they usually do so by ringing down the curtain on a quotation from Lenin, and produce, as a result, such a disappointing product as the new political ballet, *The Red Poppy*, which ran at the opera theatre last year and with its theme reversed might almost have come out of Drury Lane. A middle-aged Russian artist said to me : ' I get on quite well with the Communists, who appreciate my art and value it. It is non-Party persons, seeking to toady to the authorities, who are always worrying me to adopt more revolutionary subjects in my painting.' When Russians talk about art and ' propaganda ', they do not necessarily mean anything so crude as this. Eisenstein says : ' Art must be propaganda ; it always has been ; only, we are conscious of the fact, whereas the past was unconscious of it '. And straightway literary persons who worship a shrine of their own image purse their lips in contempt. But Eisenstein is right, if one stays to catch his meaning. In a work of art that is not concerned solely with ' pure ' formal problems of arrangement an idea, or system of ideas, (emotional it is true, rather than intellectual) constitutes the *structure* of the work. What is a novel, a poem, a symphony, a play or a film without a theme ? Hence it expresses this ideology which is its origin, and influences *feeling* and *attitudes* in a certain *direction*. And here one cannot arbitrarily separate ' content ' from ' form ', since the form itself arises from, and is adapted to, the structure of the work. In the practical application of these ideas there is no close unanimity among Communists. But one of the most interesting artistic associations, the ' Left Front ', which numbers Meyerhold, Eisenstein and the late Mayakovsky in its ranks, while it declares that ' all art is propaganda ', is primarily interested in the development of form. To its view, beauty of form is essentially appropriateness to function—the pattern of a machine, the lines of a ship or an aeroplane. It is from concrete problems—from seeking new ways of expressing new

ideas—that the development of artistic forms takes place. Beauty pursued as something extraneous to purpose and function degenerates into spurious decoration, into eclectic ‘prettification’—the hallmark of vulgar bourgeois art.

What, then, will become of cultural values as we know them? How much of them will survive? Will the new culture seem as barbarian to the old as the old seems pedantic to the new? Doubtless, much that the ‘remote and ineffectual don’ and fine-fingered literary folk hold precious will disappear. Those qualities of erudition, style and wistful obscurity which are valued so much in Oxford and Cambridge and Bloomsbury as a sort of intellectual ‘coat-of-arms’ in Russia are already being thrown on the dustheap. Much of the gentle pursuit of learning that is prized in university-extension circles, as one may prize an aspidistra or a stiff collar on Sunday, will be worshipped no more. Gone, too, will be the creations of leisured, cloistered introspection: the ‘psychological novel’, the mystical poetry of a Blake, the chase after ‘significant form’ for form’s sake. As the triangular sex drama gives place to the drama of history as the structural principle of Russian films, so in art generally bourgeois themes confined to the individual and the family are likely to give place to wider social themes and the artist to deal in symbolism appropriate to the emotions of collective experience. Perhaps it may be that the novel, the poem, the picture, the theatre will prove inadequate to the employment of this newer symbolism, as Eisenstein suggests, and the film and other art forms yet to be invented may oust them from the stage. If so, may not lands be opened for the artist to conquer wider than any he has so far known? It will hardly be art in any sense that a Victorian drawing-room would recognize. But does it very much matter if it is not?

One concrete element of the cultural revolution will influence the future profoundly, namely the attempt to

dig up the roots of the old intelligentsia so that they do not grow again—the old intelligentsia of Chekhov and Dostoievsky, with its dilettantism, its introversion and self-questioning, its irresolute ‘Oblamovism’. And in this uprooting the Communists have been almost entirely successful. Seventy to eighty per cent of the places in the universities are now virtually reserved for children of workers and peasants, and it is distinctly harder for the child of a bourgeois family to gain admission than the child of a labourer or mechanic. A considerable number of students are recruited direct from the *Rabfacs*—part-time continuation-courses for workers at the bench, extending over three or four years as a preparatory course for the university. These new students, different in origin and social roots, are also widely different in psychology and way of life from the students of old; Kostya Riabtsov of the schoolboy diary¹ is fairly typical of them as a whole. Through their clubs and through their trade unions they tend to maintain continual contact with the mass from which they come. When they have graduated they do not proceed to a new social plane and a large salary: their earnings as doctor or teacher or engineer is little higher than that of a skilled artisan, and the former probably rubs shoulders with the latter in the same trade union and the same club. To have a university education is no longer to pass across a social gulf, plastered with insignia of class superiority and prestige. The result of this is a much smaller degree of individualism and the desire to ‘get on’ among students and a greater sense of collective duties: Kostya Riabtsov’s continual talk, for instance, of the ‘ideology’ and of ‘growing into the working class’. At the same time, there is a greater specialization in study, a greater devotion to the practical, a heightened scientific interest and outlook, and a somewhat greater crudity at present owing to the more

¹ *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy* and *The Diary of a Communist Undergraduate*, published in an English translation by Messrs. Gollancz.

primitive home environment in which they have spent their early years. A lecturer in history at the university, who graduated before the revolution, told me that the average student to-day was more serious-minded and hard-working than his forebears, but his all-round knowledge was often markedly inferior: he would make an excellent technician in his own subject, be it mathematics or engineering, but the old 'general culture'—the intellectual with an all-round knowledge of a multitude of things—was fast disappearing. And this is the real tragedy of the old intellectual, greater than the tragedy of his poverty—the tragedy of 'Nikpetosh' in *The Diary of a Communist Undergraduate*—that he has no roots, that he is isolated and can evoke no sympathetic response from a strange environment, that he knows he will not reproduce his kind.

In the intellectual realm the cultural revolution means the penetration of Marxist philosophy into every department of thought. Here there is less *laissez-faire* than in the literary sphere; and the official attitude is as dogmatic as would be that of a group of biologists charged with overhauling the educational system of a Fundamentalist Middle West State. While Dialectical Materialism claims to be a complete philosophy, it is an attitude to life and to action rather than a system of dogmas and final truths; and, contrary to current opinion of it, it is actually a more flexible philosophy than most. Its Materialism consists in the belief that there is no influence on events (no God or Idea, 'thing-in-itself' or *élan vital*) other than what can be apprehended in sense-experience. But, unlike old-fashioned eighteenth and nineteenth century materialism which it attacks, it denies that intellectual knowledge, framed in propositions of formal logic, can apprehend the whole of reality, which is characterized by movement—by 'becoming' as well as 'being'. 'Absolute truth' is approached, but never reached, as concrete experience unfolds through the dialectical process

of conflict and contradiction. In strictly scientific subjects this viewpoint makes little difference to their curriculum or personnel, save to shine upon science and scientists an added reverence. Nor does it appreciably affect purely formal, mathematical studies. But in philosophy and the social sciences the leading personnel in the universities has been recruited as rapidly as possible from a new generation of Marxists, and non-Marxist Professors have mostly been relegated to purely research institutions or to specialized branches of their subject. A Professor of history or sociology who is not a Marxist is thought in Russia as great an anomaly as a pre-Darwinian Professor of biology would be regarded in the West. This does not mean that the leading academic posts are filled by Communists—far from it. The Rector of a university is usually a Party member ; but quite 80 per cent of the teaching staff are probably not. As for Soviet ‘dons’ in general : superficially they seem not unlike the English ‘don’, poorer and less cloistered, but sometimes equally pedantic.

How far will this talk of a cultural revolution really be clothed in flesh? What chance is there of Russia being the home of a new Renaissance, as Italy cradled the Renaissance at the dawn of the bourgeois epoch? Of course, one cannot tell : one can only fly straws in the wind and search the sky. There has certainly been a very big democratization of culture in Russia since 1917. Workers and peasants can freely gain access to higher educational institutions from which they were debarred before. Trade union art schools, musical and dramatic circles throb with vitality as an integral part of the life of the mass, not as precious ornaments on pedestals or gifts from the gods above. Literary works in Russia are published in editions, not of thousands, but of three, five, and ten thousands. The Marx-Engels Institute recently published complete editions of the works of Hegel and of Ricardo, and sold 8,000 of one (if my memory serves me)

and 5,000 of the other on advance-orders alone. Gorki sells his 50,000 or even 100,000 in cheap editions. Wells is popular and also Galsworthy, especially his *Forsyte Saga*. Translations of Proust and James Joyce are published by *Gosizdat* (the State Publishing House), as also large volumes of erudite textual criticism of the classics, to say nothing of a legion of books on pure and applied science of all kinds. In literature the post-revolutionary years saw a burst of literary creation, much of it of considerable interest, some of it of permanent value, but little of it equal in stature to the greater figures of Russian literature in the past. Most of it was quite traditional in its method, and little has been created that is novel in the way of literary forms. Poetry has had Alexander Blok, on the one hand, and Mayakovsky, on the other, but has produced little of any considerable interest. Of painting and the theatre I have already spoken. In stagecraft and methods of production Russia has certainly continued her rôle as pioneer. Nevertheless, this work seems to have been hardly more than a continuation of pre-revolutionary trends, and at present, at least, seems to have exhausted its possibilities of inventions; while in respect of play-writing almost nothing new has been achieved, presumably because of the shifted focus of interest from the spoken word to the arts of stagecraft and production as determinants of dramatic *tempo*. But while in literature and in the theatre there may be signs of a lull—of the post-revolutionary blaze of creation now being spent—there are two spheres where significant work is only beginning, and where what has already appeared may well be epoch-making. These two spheres are architecture and the cinema: both, significantly enough, collective, rather than individual, forms of art. And the signs to hand seem to confirm an *a priori* presumption that these are the spheres in which the new Socialist culture of Soviet Russia may achieve great things.

There are some who argue that all revolutions, all

periods of conflict and upheaval, stimulate artistic creation, but when things settle down to normal, the fervour of creation tends to die away. So, it is asked, will not Soviet Russia drift towards cultural stagnation rather than a new culture, as men busy themselves progressively with the humdrum tasks of ordinary life? But this view seems to rely too closely on analogy with bourgeois society in the past, and to take into account too little the new factor in Soviet Russia of collective endeavour and the initiative, not solely of individuals *qua* individuals as heretofore, but of the mass. The artist who is born of the mass and shares its experience will have a richer inspiration and his work is unlikely to evoke response only from a coterie. The bourgeois, it is true, as he grows successful, withdraws within himself, narrows his vision within the circle of his family and focuses his pride primarily, not on the future, but on his own past. In such an atmosphere vision is likely to cool into contentment, inspiration to run to fat. The greatest enemy of art, undoubtedly, is the petit-bourgeois suburban dweller with his nose in a flower-bed or his cucumber-frames; and close to him the bigger bourgeois who measures beauty by the sparkle of champagne or the arresting qualities of a coat-of-arms. Probably not far distant in enmity is the villa in Chelsea or Hampstead with Cézanne prints on the walls, a copper tea-tray and silver tea-pot and a silent maidservant in apron and cap.

If Russia should breed again these gems of individualism cultural stagnation might well set in—a cultural stagnation the more serious by the loss of wide lawns and cherry orchards where the sensitive soul can withdraw from the Babbitts of this world and feed upon the odours of the past. On my second visit to Soviet Russia I certainly thought I noticed (if so casual an observation is worth anything) a certain revival of petit-bourgeois traits: a greater concern with a narrow, limited range of detail, a congealing of the interest, as it were, and its fixation on

static, isolated facts. For instance, some of the plays which deal with contemporary life by taking a particular problem—the sex problem or student morality or labour-discipline in the factory—and writing a moral tract about it divided into acts and scenes. The banality of these attempts is not (as apostles of ‘significant form’ would rush to conclude) because of the author’s interest in contemporary history. It is by reason of his naïve approach, his inability to paint a wood because of his exclusive interest in single trees. It is because his art does not extract the essence of experience, but only mirrors isolated bits of it photographically, haphazard—does not represent experience dynamically in appropriate symbolism, but picks bits of experience statically without relation to the whole of which the bits are part. I understand that in painting in the last few years the constructivist fashion is passing and a certain return to realism has taken place. What precisely this signifies I am not qualified to judge ; and it might mean a variety of things. But if it means a tendency to place undue emphasis on content or subject, then I think it may be definitely a reactionary, a petit-bourgeois trait.

Perhaps it is inevitable that as the civil war recedes into the background the average Russian will again become interested in his flower-beds rather than in the epic of history. The good Communist will tend to be the administrator who keeps a slick and tidy office rather than the *Cheka* officer who could conduct executions and keep his nerves under control. The average citizen in Moscow a year ago was thinking more of the prospects of securing a new flat through a building co-operative and less about world revolution than he was in 1925 ; and the Soviet typist probably thought more of silk stockings and less of being a new woman than she did four years before, with a tendency to read translations of Olive Wadsley, Edgar Wallace and Ethel M. Dell as a result. But that was a year ago, after eight years of NEP, since when the new

economic revolution has got definitely under way. If the Communist works his will, the Russian will not be allowed to get a fixation on his flower-beds for very long. Moreover, they will progressively cease to be his individual flower-beds. The present campaign against bureaucracy which marches with the industrialization 'drive' is only half to make the Soviet administrator slicker : the other half is to make him raise his eyes beyond the horizon and see both his creaking waggon and the star. And with her new economic revolution Russia is likely to be mobilized to great historical tasks for fully a generation. So epoch-making a transformation in the soul and face of Russia is bound, while in process, to have a powerful influence in the emotional and cultural sphere, kindling new inspiration, fashioning new forms. An artist may be shot or die of starvation, but while he lives hunger or battle are not likely to silence his voice ; and when a world is being turned upside down culture is not likely to be barren or to confine itself to the re-telling of an old tale.

DAY TO DAY PAMPHLETS

- NO. 1. RUSSIA TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW. By Maurice Dobb.
- NO. 2. UNEMPLOYMENT: ITS CAUSES AND THEIR REMEDIES. By Rupert Trouton. With a foreword by J. M. Keynes.
- NO. 3. THE HORRORS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE. By C. E. M. Joad.
- NO. 4. WHAT WE SAW IN RUSSIA. By Aneurin Bevan, M.P., E. J. Strachey, M.P., and George Strauss, M.P.