



BROOKS ATKINSON
"Untalented calumniator"

REPORT ON RUSSIA

American's Survey Draws Fire from Moscow

THERE is nothing the rest of the world wants to know more than the home truth about Russia. But Russia does not want it to be known. Its Government will neither tell the story itself nor allow anyone else to tell it. Though foreign correspondents are admitted, they are not admitted freely enough to cover such a vast country, and they are not given free enough access to the news they most want to know. The result is that most reports from Russia are incomplete and most of the comment guess-work. However, the "New York Times" was able recently to print a report by Brooks Atkinson, one of its correspondents, who had spent ten months in Moscow, accompanied by his wife. It was not a sensational report, except in its implications, and most of the readers of the "Times" would regard it as not unfriendly. But it gave deep offence in Russia. Here are some extracts:



DAVID ZASLAVSKY
Ceremonies no longer

IN the attempt to establish workable relations with the Government of the Soviet Union we have to abandon the familiar concepts of friendship. Friendship in the sense of intimate association and political compromise is not wanted, is not possible and is not involved. . . . The Russian people are admirable people. . . . But between us and the Russian people stands the Soviet Government. Despite its use of the word "democracy" it is a totalitarian Government. The familiar dictatorship of the proletariat is actually the dictatorship of the 13 members of the Politburo of the Communist Party.

There are no freedoms inside the Soviet Union. As far as I know, the Government is not imposed on the people against their will, nor is it a corrupt Government that puts the personal interests of any one group ahead of what are regarded as the true interests of the State. Despite many internal disorders and disloyalties . . . the people of the Soviet Union generally trust and respect the wisdom and integrity of their leaders . . .

Not Enemies, Not Friends

But, by nature, the Government is a machine for generating power inside the Soviet Union and as far outside as the power can be made to extend; and all attempts to deal with it in terms of friendship are doomed to failure. Although we are not enemies, we are not friends; and the most we can hope for is an armed peace for the next few years.

Where our interests lie, we have to apply equal power in the opposite direction. This is the most reactionary method of arranging world affairs. But the spirit of the Soviet Government is fundamentally reactionary, as its attitude toward defeated nations and the behaviour of the Red Army in Manchuria suggest.

Although the most violent period of the Soviet revolution has probably passed, a streak of violence persists. No one knows how many million political prisoners are now living in jail or in exile. The estimates run all the way from 10,000,000 to 15,000,000 . . .

To survive (the Soviet Government) believes that it must be free to conduct its affairs in secret and act swiftly, by force if necessary.

As far as a foreigner can tell, the Soviet leaders are in a strong position.

They have led their people to a remarkable victory over an efficient, modern foe; and the Communist Party is naturally taking full credit for winning the war—in various degrees ignoring the contributions the other allies made to the defeat of Germany, and taking credit for the knockout blow against Japan . . . But it is not in the nature of men like members of the Politburo to feel secure. As leaders of a backward, poorly fed, loosely organised country that is trying to lift itself by its bootstraps in a hurry, they have many unpleasant duties to perform and many labours to lay on the backs of their people. No doubt they feel that the circumstances require that they have freedom to act at the top without criticism, opposition or observation. Although their motives may be above suspicion, they behave instinctively like conspirators . . .

The spirit of the Soviet Government is anti-foreign. Ever since the bloody purges of 1936 there has been a nameless terror about foreigners, who are regarded as spies and enemies. The leaders imagine that every man's hand is against them; they imagine that they are surrounded. And, of course, there is no more certain way of arousing first the bewilderment, then the contempt, and finally the enmity of other nations. In view of the size, strength, courage and inexhaustible resources of the Soviet Union, this phobia about being trapped and cramped would be hilarious, if it were not so troublesome to foreigners who want to find some way of getting on with the Soviet Union . . .

Socialism v. Capitalism

The most formidable impediment to amicable international relations is the basic fact that the Soviet Union is a socialist state developing and expanding in a capitalist world. According to the Communist party line, the Soviet is not secure from aggression so long as capitalist countries like the U.S. and Great Britain also hold dominant positions in the world . . .

In my opinion, socialism in itself is not the source of the trouble between the Soviet Union and the U.S. and Great Britain. Other things being equal, the two Western democracies could get on with the Soviet Union more profitably than Nazi Germany did during the period of the fraudulent pact of friendship. Indeed, I expect that they will.

But that is not the point of view of the Soviet leaders. They regard themselves as custodians of the future of

the world. In their opinion, everything is going their way, as leaders of a socialist state with a Communist goal, they regard themselves as the advance agents of manifest destiny.

The Law and the Prophets

For Communism is not only a political science but a religion, and its conduct is governed by dogmas as well as by reason . . . The modern icons are the heroic statues and portraits of Lenin and Stalin in every public building and the huge portraits of the minor prophets carried by the believing multitudes on holidays . . . The parish letters to the faithful, which are the leaders on the front pages of the newspapers, solemnly declare that the Soviet Union is the most blessed nation in the world because it has embraced the one and only true faith, and that the future will overflow with love, joy and singing.

When the Soviet representatives meet ours at the conference table they are in effect meeting the last tottering princes of original sin; and yet they cannot give way to us without yielding divine principle. That is one reason why the Russians are so difficult to get on with in pagan assemblies that do not worship Marx, Lenin and Stalin . . .

Despite all these impediments to pleasant and easy relations, the Russians really do not want to lose friends throughout the world, nor build up resistance. They do not want to defy world opinion . . . The Russian people are sincere and good-hearted. It is a pity, perhaps it will be a tragedy, that as a nation we have to live with the Russian nation in an atmosphere of bitterness and tension. But we have to. There is no other way."

State — or State of Mind?

FOR an unusual American reaction here is some comment by "The New Yorker":

"Between us and the Russian people," writes Brooks Atkinson, "stands the Soviet Government." That is half the story. Between us and the Russian people stand both our governments—not as deliberate and evil barriers between man and man but as conscientious guardians, each of its own. With the very best intentions (and in the very best tradition), the government of every nation stands,

wall-fashion, shutting out the sun, breaking the force of the wind. The people, accustomed to the shadow, jealous of their yards, tend the wall—repairing, admiring, grooming, rebuilding, enlarging, saving. Within the last year, the shadow has grown suddenly; the gloom is almost impenetrable.

There are, of course, more things standing between peoples than their governments. There are the oceans and the seas, the languages and the dialects, the economies, the pigmentations, the memories of old feuds. Most formidable of all, there is the human instinct to settle into groups and clubs, and to find stimulus in the assumption of the other club's hostility, wrong-headedness, and foxiness. But quite apart from these obvious and by no means irremovable barriers between peoples is government. Mr. Atkinson's report on the Russian people was rather favourable. He described them as "admirable . . . genuine, hard-working, and practical." But they are admirable-on-the-other-side-of-the-wall, genuine - *trans-murum*, hard - working - on - the - other - side - of - the-fence. We call the Russian wall the "iron curtain." Our own is probably more of a plastic curtain, fitted with chromium louvres, automatic peephole adjustments, and electric eyes, and sprayed with DDT against the beetles that crawl on all walls.

Neither the Russian people nor the American people nor any people have as yet seen the essentially fictitious character of the nation. The nation still persists in people's minds as a tangible, solid, living and breathing thing, capable of doing and thinking, feeling and believing, having and enjoying. But the nation is not that at all. A nation is a state of mind. (For "state" read "state of mind" and you will understand the day's news better). The *Times* headlined Mr. Atkinson's able report "RUSSIA BARS AMITY WITH U.S." But nobody knows what that means, because in truth there is no such thing as Russia—unless you are satisfied with a bear. A bear that bars amity. There is no such thing as the U.S.—unless you are satisfied with an uncle. The uncle and the bear, without amity, without reality.

In an essay on nationalism in the book *If Men Want Peace*, Professors Mander and Harrison wrote this excellent definition: "A nation is a group of

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