

Science in the Soviet Union

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managed to get along, but with difficulty. But the Russians are so jolly and so ready to be friendly if they have permission that you find yourself getting along somehow with your halting language. For instance, I went up to Murmansk—1500 or more miles from Moscow—a four-day train journey. I found myself in a carriage with three men, two of them government officials, and we had a lot of fun. We slept on palliasses on the boards and ate together and, most of all, we sang together. They sang dozens of Russian folk songs."

"And did you sing *Waltzing Matilda*?"

"Yes, I did. As a matter of fact I sang *Waltzing Matilda*, right through, every verse; quite an achievement and they loved it. We had plenty of time—you always have plenty of time on Russian train journeys—to get to know each other."

"Time, because the distances are so vast?"

Women Drive the Trains

"No, not really—of course it's partly that. But the trains go so slowly, stop so often, are so leisurely. They load up with birch wood at all the small

stations; whenever they run out of wood they stop and collect a new load. And here's where the flowers come into the picture again; the trains are mostly driven by women and you'll see them in their overalls getting out of their engine cabin and going to the flower stalls on the stations to buy flowers. A quaint sight—the smudged engine driver in her black cabin with a vase of violets stuck up in front. They probably need renewing at every second station."

"Do they get enough power from wood?"

"Well, those trains don't travel fast and maybe that's partly why. But they've had to run on birch wood—they've got plenty of it and it's handy to the lines—and they have been extremely short of coal in many districts."

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PROFESSOR ASHBY has just finished a book on his experiences in Russia; this will be published in the Penguin series very soon. He has written several books on different aspects of botany and one in collaboration with his wife on German-English terminology in botany. And there has just been issued in Australia a collection of his addresses and

the various articles he wrote on education in general during the last eight years in Australia.

He called at *The Listener* office the day he left Auckland and told me a few more things he had done in Auckland to fill in time; he had, for instance, listened to many good gramophone records and had taken part in chamber music ashore and practised his violin—with the mute on—on the ship; and he had been to a student performance of *Macbeth*—which he described as the best amateur performance he had seen anywhere.

"Now, if you're ever in Manchester do come and look me up—in the fog," he said. "And then I'll tell you what I think of Auckland."

—J.

Heard on a Tram

Red Blazer: He's far too impetuous.

Blue Blazer: Yes, I know; I tried twice to kill him. And then I saw him lying there.

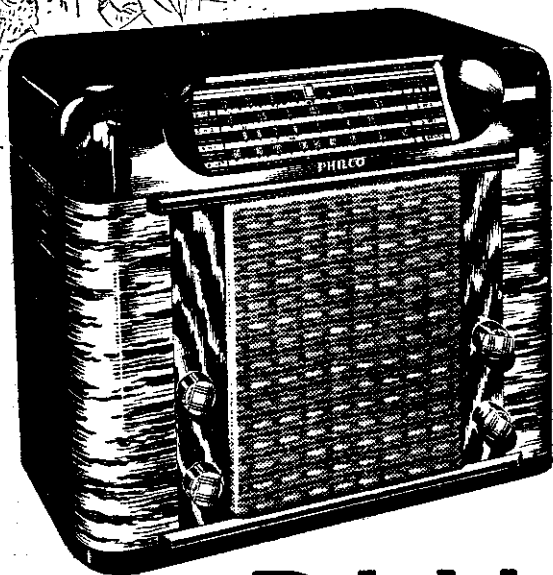
R.B.: Was he out?

B.B.: Oh, quite. But I drove again.

R.B.: Yes? . . .

B.B.: That was the end. We all packed up.

R.B.: There's nothing like bowls to keep a chap fit.



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