

RUSSIA'S MORAL BALANCE-SHEET

They Did In 20 Years What Took Us 150



PROFESSOR JULIUS STONE was Dean of the Law Faculty at Auckland University College until a few months ago. Now he is a Professor of Law in Sydney. His talk on Russia, which is printed here, was broadcast in the ABC series, "Free Nations In Arms."

WHEN we first heard the news that Germany had declared war on the Soviet Union, what was our reaction? Most of us were bewildered! All of us were glad of the new strength to our cause. But there were some, and among them responsible statesmen, who said, in effect, that we had nothing in common with the new ally, save the fact that we were all engaged in killing Nazis; that every Nazi the Russians killed was one less for us to fight; that in all other things we hated the Soviet Government and all its works.

And many people have been thinking that way since, and have been profoundly unhappy because of it.

Everybody agrees that the war resources of Soviet Russia are playing a profoundly important part in the defeat of Fascism. This is confirmed by the odd bits of news that we read day by day; it is confirmed too by the bitter complaints of the German propagandists about Russian resistance. Their complaint is this: That Soviet Russia is a very wicked animal; when you attack it it defends itself! What is worse, it has the means to defend itself.

But is that all we can say—that the Soviet ideal for society gave it the power to defend itself? Clearly not. This most ambitious attempt at economic planning had as its primary aim the raising of 166 million people from illiteracy, backwardness, economic destitution, and political repression to what was for them a new level of social life.

Mistakes Inevitable

Mistakes and cruelties accompanied the process of emancipation—all the graver because of the urgency the Soviet rulers felt in preparing for emergency.

Despite these, however, in a period of only 20 years the great expanses of Russia were brought to an advanced stage of economic development. This opened the way for the sort of living standard which more fortunate peoples like ourselves take for granted.

A workable constitution approaching our own ideas of political organisation was put into operation. The world was given an example from which it will be wise to learn, of what careful planning can do in meeting scourges such as unemployment and destitution. And that same principle of social planning produced spectacular results in making increasingly available to 166 million people the blessings which medicine, science, and the arts ought properly to be conferring not on the few but on the many.

All this has involved the dislocation of old entrenched ideas. It has involved riding roughshod over interests, prejudices, and ignorances, and even over many legitimate human rights. It has involved calling on the mass of people to make present sacrifices for future good.

Yet despite all that, when the supreme test came these 166 million people stood firm as a rock—peasant and factory worker, civilian and soldier, official and citizen, every race and nationality, man, woman and child.

Firm as a rock—not merely as Nazi Germany was under the impetus of victory after victory from Munich onwards. But firm under stark tragedy and looming defeat, as England stood firm after Dunkirk, firm as we should be even after further heavy reverses.

There Was Cruelty

But still you may say—even then how can we forget the methods which the Soviet Union had to use to achieve these things? How can we forget the suffer-

ings it inflicted, and its denials of the political and moral liberties of the individual?

The charge of cruelty cannot be denied when you remember things like these—the Revolution itself, the liquidation of small traders, of kulaks (or landed farmers) during collectivisation, of factory employees, engineers, generals, and politicians in periodic purges.

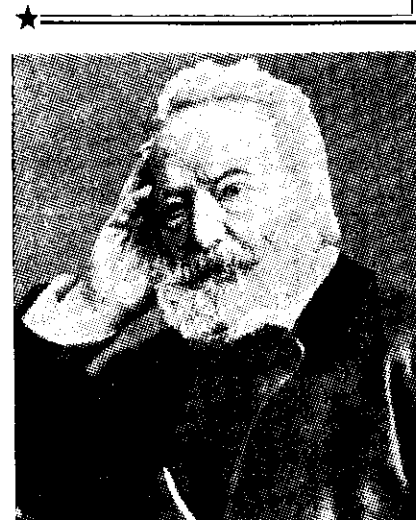
But let us look a little more closely. You agree, I suppose, that Russia has now shown that she has industrial and military equipment, technique, and resources second to none? Yet 20 years ago she had virtually nothing. In 20 years she planned herself through a change which in the United States took a century, and in England longer.

We called our change a revolution, too—the Industrial Revolution. Have you thought what suffering went with that? Even our most rosy-spectacled historians now admit the horrors of five-year-old children on 12-hour shifts in factories, and women pushing trucks in mines under conditions now forbidden for pit ponies. And the slums of that period still have survived the air raids. We may not forget these things. But we realise that out of their horror came an economic change which made better and more humane society possible.

The Final Judgment

We took 150 years. The Russians took 20. Perhaps when overwhelming necessity compels a change in 20 years which ordinarily should take 150, we can understand that the Soviet Government should have regarded sabotage and even inefficiency as the gravest crime against the State. For the Russians, as for ourselves, the final judgment must be in the results that the next generation show.

My next point is rather different. Do you remember the conversation imagined by the humane Victor Hugo between the



VICTOR HUGO
As in France, so in Russia

Royalist priest and the French Revolutionary leader on his deathbed? It is in *Les Misérables*. Reproached for the innocents who suffered by the Revolution, the dying man cried out: "Yes, count the innocents. But in that case you must go back and count those who for generations suffered by the tyranny we overthrew."

And then, with his last breath, that unforgettable metaphor: "Yes, we tore the cloth from the altar, but we used it to bind the wounds of the people."

Who is there who can weigh the cruelties, the oppressions, the injustices, and the deprivations of the Russians under the Tsar with those under the Soviets? Certainly not I!

Race Against Time

My third point is that from the start the Soviet rulers have felt that attack from inside and outside was imminent. I used to think they had delusions. I'm not so sure now. They raced ruthlessly against time, brushing aside all obstacles, human or other, innocent or not. As with ourselves after Singapore, so they throughout subordinated individual liberty to public safety. And their success? Where is the Fifth Column which Hitler undoubtedly thought he had in Russia? Where are the Russian Quislings?

But when all is said, it remains that constitutional liberties in Soviet Russia have been hamstrung at two points. First, at any point where the slightest challenge to the new social and economic ideas began; and second, at any point where sabotage, non co-operation, or even inefficiency interfered in the slightest degree with plans for defence against the external foe.

Soviet Russia has much to learn from us in this respect. But let us remember that her short and strenuous life has thus far given her little opportunity for normal living. And let us remember that she, too, has something to teach us. No words on this could be more forceful than a recent leader in the conservative *London Times*:

(Continued on next page)



DEBIT OR CREDIT?—This striking portrayal of Lenin was given by an actor named K. Myuffke in the Russian film "The Great Dawn"