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THROUGH A GAP IN THE CURTAIN

I MAKE no claim to a full or intimate knowledge of Russian life. We were there for only just over a month, and our main contacts were union officials, factory directors and the like. We didn't speak or understand Russian. . . We visited only four cities. . . But in general I believe we were shown an average picture of industry, and of those other phases of Russian life that we did see. . . I walked the streets, on my own, morning, afternoon and evening, and after midnight. . . I used my camera as long as my film lasted, although occasionally, without any apparent reason, I was prevented from using it.

I VISITED factories in many Russian industries, and in general I was most impressed with what I saw being done for workers' well-being, and in the attitude of both management and union towards it. Conditions in some factories were better than in others, but not in any marked degree except in one or two real show places. Factories and workshops were, in general, clean, spacious, well lit, well ventilated and well heated. Machinery needing protection was

NORRIS COLLINS, a Christchurch railway worker, who visited Russia as one of a party of trade unionists, recently gave his impressions of his visit in seven talks broadcast from Main National stations. On this page and the next we print some extracts from his talks.



always well guarded in all types of factories. . . Facilities for attention to workers' health were most impressive. . . One thing I did not like was the standard of sanitation.

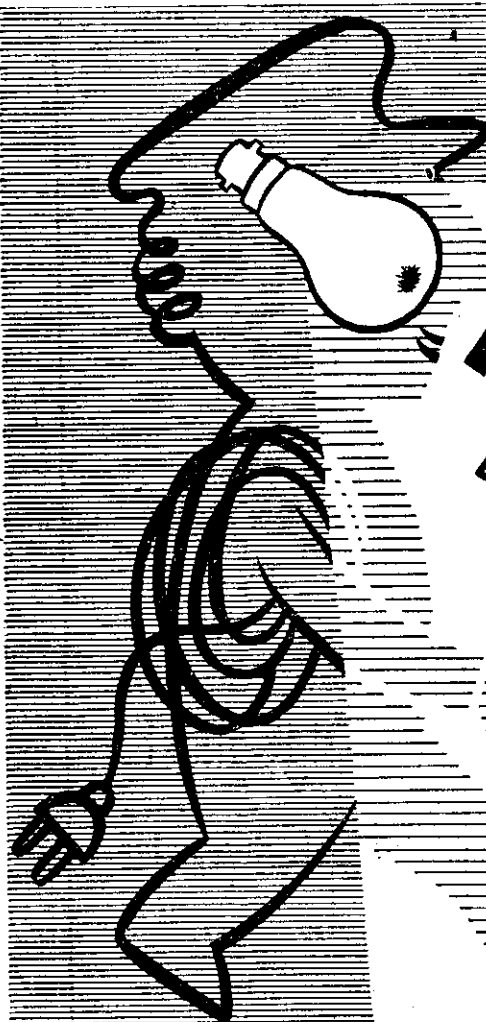
THE palaces of culture . . . were among the most interesting and impressive features of modern Russia that I saw, and, like so many other things, they were provided in many cases by the factory, and run by the factory trade union. . . In Leningrad we visited a regional trade union palace . . . [which] cost about £900,000 to build, and now the unions maintain and control it. The population it served was

larger than that of the city of Wellington, but within the area there were other factory palaces as well. . . We saw most of the adult activities in the course of a long evening: dances, films, newsreels, lectures in Marxism, politics and science, opera and ballet, musical circles of all kinds, a gymnasium, printing plant, painting and sculpture. The library had 150,000 books, of which 10,000 were by foreign authors.

There was one disturbing feature for me. I asked the director if there were any books which might not be favourable to the Soviet system. This drew a very heated reply. A tall man, he drew himself up to his full height and let go. He was more than a little annoyed and for a minute or so seemed quite carried away by his hostility to such a question. My ears were burning, and I felt as though I was sinking through my chair. . . He said: Why should they have books which insult their people. . . It is the people's government and system. They only have books of noble, high purpose, and he quoted Dickens and Shakespeare. So there you have it—the attitude of a highly-educated man in a very responsible position, in charge of the cultural and political education of thousands of people: Why should the minds of their people be poisoned with such things?

OUR visit began in Leningrad, and for the most part I found the city depressing. . . Then a train journey to Moscow gave little further encouragement. . . But Moscow was a different story. It was like a new world in comparison. Almost everywhere one turned, it seemed, on the skyline towered several cranes above a new building under construction. . . I must mention briefly the new Moscow University. It took about four years to build, and employed 35,000 workers. It stands on the outer fringe of Moscow in 410 acres of grounds. Russians claim it to be the largest and most beautiful building in the world. When finally completed its 50 buildings will house 22,000 rooms and 6000 students for living and study. Only the main building, half the total size, is yet completed, 36 stories high and down to wings of nine and 16 stories for student accommodation and a 12-story wing for lecturers. They certainly put their best into these buildings. . . The entrance halls even have heated floors to dry your shoes as you walk in.

CHURCHES were full, packed to the doors with hundreds, and on one occasion, thousands, of worshippers. Worship is free to those who wish to attend. But there are very few churches. . . Every congregation consisted almost entirely of middle-aged to elderly women. When I visited the Baptist Church in Moscow on a Sunday morning it was packed tight with 2500 people. Some stood outside in the snow, unable to get in. I was there for an hour, and could see every face in the congregation. I saw one child, two or three young men, some young women, not many older men, and no youth at all. . . There is no children's or youth instruction outside of the usual church services. One priest said: "Children up to 16 years of age are instructed by



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