ON UNDERSTANDING SOVIET RUSSIA

By CORLISS LAMONT

SINCE returning from a two month's trip to Soviet Russia I have had occasion to discuss with many different types of Americans the situation in that country. Accordingly I have had the opportunity to discover what seem to be the most common misunderstandings concerning the Soviet Union in the American mind. These misunderstandings I have tried to clear up in a positive manner by formulating five bases or standards of judgment which seem necessary to me for anyone who wishes adequately to comprehend what is going on in Russia today. In view of America's recent recognition of the Soviet Union and the increasingly close relations between the two nations, more and more Americans are feeling the need for some such intellectual measuring rod as I have in mind. The five standards of judgment, then, which I would suggest can be summarized as follows:

I

First of all, we should take into constant consideration Russia's geography, cultural background, and history.

The Soviet Union covers a vast and sprawling territory, representing between a sixth and a seventh of the entire
world’s surface. It is larger in area than all of North and Central America and two and a half times as big as the United States. From the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Black Sea in the south, from the Baltic in the west to the Pacific in the east, the Red flag flies; and over a total population of almost 170,000,000. While these continental proportions entail certain advantages in the scope and variety of natural resources, they create a sheer problem of administration which is breath-taking and which in itself explains many of the troubles that the Soviet Government has encountered.

This problem of administration is made much more difficult by the fact that in this huge domain live about 150 different races, each with its own language, its own customs, and its own culture. The Tsars oppressed the national minorities to an extreme degree, forcing upon them a policy of strict Russification and attempting to stamp out their native cultures. When the Bolsheviks came into power in the fall of 1917 about 80 per cent of the population were peasants engaged in agricultural pursuits and using, for the most part, decidedly primitive methods. They had been living under a Tsarist absolutism in which real democratic institutions were unknown, political persecutions an everyday occurrence, and economic misery a widespread and accepted fact. Their general cultural and technical backwardness was appalling, upwards of 70 per cent of them actually being illiterate. Russia had always been more of an eastern than a western country and had never experienced the invigorating influences of a Renaissance and Reformation, an Enlightenment and Bourgeois Revolution.

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When Lenin and his colleagues seized the state in October of 1917, Russia had already been through the March revolution which resulted in the abdication of the Tsar and the establishment of the Provisional Government. The country was in an even worse state of disorganization than in March, with the transportation system in collapse, the fields denuded of working hands, and the bread lines in the cities growing longer and longer. The nation had endured more than three years of disastrous warfare and had suffered therein more than 9,000,000 casualties, including approximately 4,000,000 dead. The prospect was not a happy one for the Bolsheviks.

Within a few months the Germans had invaded the country, seized a large part of the rich grain-producing Ukraine, and forced the humiliating Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on the Soviet Government. But the troubles of the Communists were just beginning. For in the sprang of 1918 the first Allied intervention took place and continued for several years, long after the defeat of the Central Powers had done away with the shadowy excuse of trying to re-establish the eastern front. During this period of intervention the armies of no less than sixteen foreign powers, including those of the United States, invaded the Soviet Union. The aim seems to have been, as one English general frankly put it, "to throttle in its infancy the noisome beast of Bolshevism."

There can be little doubt that had it not been for the aid in men, munitions, and money which the Allies gave to the White counter-revolutionaries, the civil war in Russia would have come to an end in rather short order. As it was, it lasted in extreme form three terrible years
during which 2,000,000 people were killed, approximately $6,000,000,000 worth of property destroyed, and indirect losses suffered amounting to some $20,000,000,000 more. For instance, the Allies and the Whites demolished altogether some 4,000 bridges. To a country of great distances whose transportation system was never highly developed this was a tremendous blow. Industrial production was reduced to less than 25 per cent of the pre-war level, while the stringent economic blockade of the Allies practically eliminated foreign commerce. *When the Communists actually took power in 1917 they did so with comparatively small loss in life and property. That the revolution later resulted in such havoc and bloodshed was not of their choosing.*

It is illuminating to quote in this connection from Bruce Lockhart's recent book, *British Agent.* Lockhart, who neither was nor is a Soviet sympathizer, writes, as of March, 1918, that the Communists "had not yet embarked on their own campaign of suppression. I mention this comparative tolerance of the Bolsheviks, because the cruelties which followed later were the result of the intensification of the civil war. For the intensification of that bloody struggle Allied intervention, with the false hopes it raised, was largely responsible. . . . It sent thousands of Russians to their death. Indirectly it was responsible for the terror." The "red terror", incidentally, so played up by foreign commentators, did not go into effect until the fall of 1918 after the all but successful attempt on Lenin's life and after Allied intervention had gotten well under way. Thus it becomes perfectly clear that the Bolsheviks, so often portrayed as bloodthirsty sadists, re-
sorted to extreme measures only when internal and external violence forced them to do so in order to save the Soviet regime.

In 1920, the Allied intervention was supplemented by a totally unjustifiable Polish invasion of the Ukraine. The Red armies finally drove out the Poles, and, indeed carried their counter-offensive to the very gates of Warsaw; but the added strain on the Soviet Union was very great. Then, in the autumn and winter of 1921-1922, came a fearful drought and famine, aggravated by the shattered state of transportation and the general war-weariness of the peasantry. During this time well over a million persons perished. And it was not until the autumn of 1922 that the last White and foreign troops (Japanese as it happened) left Vladivostok in the far east of Siberia. Thus we see that the Communists have really had, not seventeen, but twelve peaceful and normal years for their work of reconstruction and construction.

When one reflects upon this five-year period of civil conflict, foreign invasion, and famine following hard upon three calamitous years of the Great War and two far-reaching revolutions, it seems something like a miracle that the Communists came through with their heads up and their colors flying. It was an epic triumph of sheer will-power and intellect. And when on this background I paint the picture of the Soviets' progress during the last decade, I cannot help concluding that their achievement has been perhaps the greatest and most heroic in human history.
In the second place, in making comparisons between the Soviet Union and other countries, we must do so on a relative and not on an absolute basis.

It is common knowledge that in 1917 Russia was primarily an agricultural country with, generally speaking, one of the lowest standards of living in the world. In regard to industrial and technical development it was a century or so behind the more advanced nations of the West. It had hardly reached the point that England had attained in 1800. And as we indicated in the first section, cultural backwardness was one of the chief characteristics of its predominantly peasant population. It is obviously absurd to expect that Russia could completely catch up in a short 17 years with countries like England, Germany, and the United States. It is unfair, then, to talk of the Soviet Union as if that expectation were a rational one and to condemn it because, in absolute terms, it does not yet measure up in certain fundamental ways to the most highly evolved industrial nations. The real question is: How much have conditions in Russia improved since the time of the Tsars?

Yet even this question cannot be asked without one important qualification: the new Russia is a good deal smaller in territory and population than the old Russia. It lost all of the western provinces at the end of the war: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Bessarabia, this last rich region being seized by force of arms by Rumania. In the south the Soviet Union ceded the Kars region to Turkey. The total extent of the land lost
is equal to the combined area of France and England, and has a population of about 25,000,000. In these regions, especially in the Polish coal and textile centers and in the Finnish pulp and paper centers, were many of the most highly developed industries of the Tsar's empire. Their loss entailed a far-reaching reorientation of Russian economy. These districts were on the whole considerably more advanced in a western European sense than the rest of pre-revolutionary Russia. Hence it will not do, without keeping this point continually in mind, to draw comparisons between these former parts of the Russian Empire and the present-day Soviet Union.

To give an example of what we mean by a relative comparison, let us take the matter of shoes. In 1913 there were 20,000,000 pairs of shoes produced in Russia which were distributed mainly in the cities and among the upper classes. The great majority of the peasants went barefoot in the summer, and in the winter fashioned themselves straw footwear. Today, though more than 80,000,000 pairs of shoes are being manufactured annually, it is evident that the Soviet masses are still in need of more and better footgear and that it will be some time before they overtake the people of the U.S.A. in this respect. But the important point to remember is that the Soviet Union is producing four times as many shoes as in pre-war days and is distributing them, moreover, to all sections of the population and not just to a privileged group of urban dwellers. Or take the matter of beggars. In the old Russia begging was one of the great professions with a million persons devoted to its devious means and needs. In 1924 this startling number had been reduced to 140,000 and in
1934 to less than 50,000. This constitutes a really considerable achievement, despite the fact that tourists are still shocked by meeting beggars in the Soviet Union.

If only relative comparisons are fair, then it is plainly irrelevant to judge the Soviet Union in terms of American cleanliness, conveniences, and mechanical gadgets. Any one familiar with traveling in Russia before the war knows that conditions were unclean, uncomfortable, and generally unsatisfactory. The last edition of Karl Baedeker's guidebook, published in 1914, makes this very clear. It is not to be expected that the Communists, who have had world-shaking and world-making problems on their hands, could have turned the Soviet Union into a tourists' paradise overnight. Yet tourists are continually returning from Russia disgruntled and disgusted with the whole Soviet enterprise because sheets and blankets were sometimes lacking on the night trains, because the eggs for breakfast were occasionally none too fresh, and because they could buy only drugs in the drug stores and not milk shakes and fountain pens. I was mud-bound in a Ford bus without chains for an entire wet and chilly night near Rostov-on-Don. The next day the other Americans who went through this somewhat tiring experience were deducing from it that the Five-Year Plan was a failure, that Socialism was doomed to collapse, and that the Russians were all a bunch of boobs. The first chapter of Will Durant's anti-Soviet book, *The Tragedy of Russia*, is simply one long series of lamentations over the inconveniences which he and his wife experienced in their trip through Siberia. I have renamed this volume, *The Tragedy of Will Durant*; for I cannot help feeling that Mr.
Durant missed the really big things going on in Russia primarily because he became so irritated over the lack of taxicabs in Omsk, the backward state of sanitation in Siberia, and the fact that his train for Moscow was three hours late. The same may be said of Carveth Wells, who has written a very malicious book on Russia called Kapoot, in which he interprets his petty, personal discomforts as constituting the greatest of crimes against humanity.

Americans, I think, are especially prone to misjudge the Soviet Union in the way I have been suggesting. For most of them who go to Russia are middle-class in status or origin and have been used to a relatively high degree of comfort in the United States. Having lived rather well and rather narrowly back home, they get their first experience of low standards of living in the U.S.S.R., without realizing that comparable conditions are to be found in all European countries and in many sections of America. They have probably come into contact scarcely at all with the masses of unskilled American workers, who, even when employed, live near the subsistence level. And they are apt to forget the far from pleasant existence of the many millions of jobless Americans and their families. American living standards, however, for employed persons, are admittedly on the whole superior not only to those of Russia, but also to those of any capitalist country in Europe or the rest of the world. For this reason it is more unjust to compare the Soviet Union on an absolute basis with the U.S.A. than with any other nation.

Yet it is remarkable to note that already, even on an absolute scale, the Soviet Union is superior to the United
States (not to mention other capitalist lands) in a number of ways. For instance, there is no unemployment there; the theory and practice of central economic planning has made notable headway; legislation on behalf of women and children and workers has attained new and very high levels; the excellent system of public health services constitutes a challenge to medical authorities everywhere else; prostitution has been practically eliminated; science is in the saddle in place of superstition throughout the land; an enthusiasm exists for education and the things of culture unknown elsewhere in the world; the attitude towards sex and marriage is frank and healthy; race prejudice has all but disappeared; the art and culture of national minorities is manifesting a veritable renaissance; and a true international spirit holds sway.

Nor would it be correct to deduce from Russia's former backwardness that what is going on there today provides no lessons for the rest of the world. Mr. Walter Lippmann has said, referring to the Soviet Union, that "what they may be able to do in a nation which has no capitalistic inheritance certainly provides no analogy for the United States, where the most highly developed capitalism the world has ever seen is a going concern". And he asks: "Who that has any instinct for reality supposes that a system of control which may work in the simple and relatively primitive Russian economy among a people habituated to political absolutism could be initiated in the United States?" Of course Russia did have some capitalist inheritance. And the industrial and agricultural achievements of the last decade, especially those of the
first Five-Year Plan, have resulted in an economy no longer exactly "simple" and "primitive". In fact, the U.S.S.R. in industrial production now ranks second among the countries of the world.

Furthermore, it would appear that the success of socialist planning in Russia has been due primarily to the abolition of private property rather than to "political absolutism", as Mr. Lippmann implies. It is also to be remembered that efficient socio-economic planning in the modern world depends to a great extent on the cultural and technical level of the people concerned. For this reason socialist planning, far from being inapplicable to the highly developed United States, might well make even more rapid progress here than in Russia. Such planning would, of course, differ according to the varying conditions in each country where it was adopted, but the main outlines, centering around the elimination of the profit system, would be the same.

III

In the third place, we ought to bear carefully in mind the extra-economic and cultural achievements of the Soviet Union.

Publicity abroad about the Soviet Union has stressed the Herculean economic accomplishments of the new regime. And there is a tendency to forget that cultural progress has paralleled the material and has been just as great. There was a Five-Year Plan in art as well as industry: and the Central Planning Commission (or Gosplan) has an entire section devoted to culture and education, and another to science. We have given passing men-
tion above to some of the cultural gains. Without in any sense trying to cover the entire cultural enterprise, we shall take up a few outstanding examples of the forward march on this broad sector of Soviet activity.

Perhaps the most striking advance of all has taken place in educational affairs. Some of the statistics here are enlightening. Illiteracy is close to complete liquidation with the pre-war figure of more than 70 per cent now reduced to less than 7 per cent; the number of children in primary and secondary schools has increased from eight to 26,000,000; and the number of students in higher educational institutions has grown four times over. There are 620 professional theatres in the country compared with 150 before the revolution. At the same time the masses of the people have become voracious readers. There are 2,000 magazines in the U.S.S.R. with an annual circulation of 391,000,000 copies; there are 7,000 newspapers in 83 different languages, nine times the pre-war number with a circulation sixteen times as great. As to books and pamphlets, during 1932 more than 53,000 titles were published totalling 1,300,000,000 copies, this last figure being ten times that of 1913. No wonder there is a constant paper shortage in the Soviet Union!

The spread of education has gone on, not just in the cities, but throughout the agricultural regions as well. In fact, the awakening of millions and millions of formerly ignorant and illiterate peasants to the new cultural life is probably the most remarkable thing of all. The young people with whom I talked on a big Commune some 500 miles of southeast of Moscow seemed just as intelligent and alert as the students whom I met in the urban centers.
Certain aspects of the old peasant life, such as the communal attitude towards land in the village mir, have actually been of aid to the Communist program. But on the whole, peasant customs and psychology have been the most difficult of all obstacles for the Communists. To this problem education is the only adequate answer. For example, part of the old agricultural technique in Russia was for the peasants to march through a field led by a priest who sprinkled holy water on the sprouting crops and uttered holy incantations against the mice, reptiles, and insects that might do harm. To uproot such time-hallowed practices the Soviet Government has had to carry on a most strenuous campaign of enlightenment. Incidentally, 90 per cent of the anti-religious propaganda in Russia is directed against superstitions equally absurd.

The educational program has also extended to the many national and racial minorities throughout the U.S.S.R. In some cases new alphabets have been created for the benefit of backward minority groups. And, exactly reversing the policy of the Tsars, the Soviet Government has not only permitted but has encouraged these minorities to develop their own languages, their own theatres, their own schools, and their own institutions in general. The result has been a flowering of various minority arts and cultures such as Russia has never seen before. There can be no doubt, either, that racial prejudice has all but disappeared, both because the public ownership and operation of business in the U.S.S.R. has removed economic jealousies and because the different groups feel a new sense of unity in their common endeavor to achieve the great ideals set up by the present regime. In view of
the recent events in Germany it is interesting to note that
in the Soviet Union anti-Semitism is considered a crime.
Joseph Stalin, himself a native of once oppressed Georgia
risen to highest leadership, calls persecution of the Jews
"a remnant of the era of cannibalism".

Another group which has especially benefited from the
remodeling of Russia is the women. They have experi-
enced a veritable emancipation; and now are on a plane
of full equality with the men, both legally and otherwise.
In the extensive Mohammedan districts the women have
gained through the abolition of the good old custom of
polygamy by the Soviet Government, often portrayed as
encouraging lax sex relations. In these localities they
have also won freedom from wearing the veil. Lenin said
that no nation can be free when half its population, the
women, are enslaved in the kitchen. This saying has be-
come a basic principle in the U.S.S.R. The Communists
are not, in my opinion, breaking up the home; what they
are breaking up is family drudgery and also family ego-
ism. They want people's ambitions and interests to ex-
tend beyond the family to the country at large.

From the foregoing it seems plain enough that, far from
discouraging individuality, the Communists aim to give
every member of the community—man or woman, Rus-
sian or non-Russian—the greatest possible opportunity for
development. They insist, however, that economic free-
dom is the basis of all others; and that through a planned
control of economic activity they can free everyone from
the chaotic control of the market and its blind forces. The
whole issue of individuality versus collectivism is a totally
false one. The truth is that in the industrialized and
mechanized world of the twentieth century some sort of collectivism is necessary in order that individuality may flourish. Marx himself in *Das Kapital* wrote of Socialism as a "higher type of society whose fundamental principle is the full and free development of every individual".

Along with the educational and cultural revolution in Russia there has also occurred what may legitimately be called a spiritual revolution. It may be asserted that the Communists have changed human nature, but it is more accurate to say that they have *channeled* it. That is, they have taken the raw materials of human impulse and set them going in certain specific directions good for society as a whole. There is, for instance, more ambition in Russia than ever before; but this ambition instead of fulfilling itself in trying to make a million rubles, fulfils itself in doing a good Job for the community and climbing the ladder of achievement in socially useful ways. In the same manner competition is encouraged, but it is "Socialist" competition in building the new society, in carrying through the Five-Year Plan, not in trying to win a business or financial advantage over the other fellow. This far-reaching change in motives is being effected not only through education and propaganda, but also through the establishment of economic security for everyone, which makes it *unnecessary* for a man to carry on a bitter struggle with others to maintain himself and his family.

While the Soviet Union is first and foremost a workers' republic, it is trying to bring into actuality certain universal ideals which ought to appeal to every intelligent and humane person. The American Declaration of Independence, for example, declares that all men have the
right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This happens to define in general the aim of the founders of the new Russia. Or take other great and moving human ideals such as equality of opportunity, international peace and understanding, the abolition of race prejudice, and the creation of a great art and culture. These are all objectives constantly in the minds of the Russian people and their leaders. And the Communists argue that if the people of other countries are really serious and sincere about the achievement of such ideals, then they must establish a social and economic system similar in general to that of Soviet Russia's, though of course differing according to the particular characteristics of each nation.

In their devotion to the great ends of Socialism the citizens of the Soviet Union are literally forgetting themselves. In their adherence to the new, invigorating loyalties they are being released from age-long and century-long economic fears, sexual repressions, and religious feelings of guilt. Their personal problems and Freudian complexes are being driven into the background. These considerations help to explain why mental hygiene cases in Russia are so decidedly on the decline. And while it would be a misuse of terms to say that the Communists have set up a new *religion*, it is true that they have given the Russian people an all-inclusive and integrated way of life that unifies the country as a whole and also the individual personalities within it. Of course, the high purpose and enthusiasm of the Russians in their drive toward the goal of a free and classless society has had its analogies in other countries. During the Great War some of the belligerent powers produced a somewhat similar mass
spirit, thus bearing out Marx's statement that "The highest heroic effort of which old society is still capable is national war". But the Soviet Union is the first nation in history to harness the inspired imagination and devoted energies of an entire people to the constructive works of peace instead of to the destructive works of war. And this is a most important difference.

It is appropriate to mention here the very striking and solid contributions of the Soviet Union to the goal of international peace. From the earliest days of the October Revolution, when Lenin proposed, without avail, peace negotiations to the chief belligerent powers, the new Russia, in spite of constant provocations, has pursued a consistent policy of amity towards the other nations of the earth. A most important element here is the fact that there are in Russia no private interests, either manufacturers of munitions or of anything else, that could profit from a war or from war-provoking measures like heavy armaments and tariffs. Again and again the Soviet Union has shown its sincere desire to bring about real disarmament and has continually embarrassed the various imperialist countries in the conferences at Geneva by its far-reaching proposals towards this end. The Soviet Union signed the Kellogg Peace Pact and since that time has initiated and concluded many supplementary treaties with its neighbors. Early in the summer of 1933, while the London Economic Conference was in process of collapsing, non-aggression pacts marking a new stage in clarity and strictness of definition were signed with no less than eleven countries. The U.S.S.R. now has such pacts with all the bordering states, except China and Japan, both of
which have rebuffed the Soviet Government on its proposals. Finally, in September of 1934, the Soviet Union became a member of the League of Nations. This it did, not with any illusions that the League is an adequate instrument to abolish war in a mainly capitalist world, but in order to reduce the chances of immediate conflict by working through the League. In all of these peace negotiations, and in many others beside, Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, whose trip to Washington really brought about American recognition, has played a leading part.

IV

In the fourth place, it is necessary to grasp the significance of the various compromises and shifts in policy that occur in the Soviet Union from time to time.

The basic principle to keep in mind here is that no competent Marxist ever dreamed that it would be possible for Socialism in any country to leap up full-fledged all at once from the chaos of the old order. Especially does this principle apply to a nation which was as far behind as Russia. There the building of Socialism obviously entails a long hard struggle both in setting up the necessary industro-mechanical foundations of the new society and in eradicating the habits and psychology of the former feudal-capitalist state. In this struggle there are bound to be bad years as well as good, failures as well as triumphs, detours as well as marches straight ahead. And it is essential to distinguish temporary setbacks from permanent defeats.

Since the Soviet Union is the first nation in the history
of the world to attempt the construction of a socialist order, it is inevitable that serious and unforeseen problems should arise. The Communist leaders have had practically no precedents on which to draw. They have made, on occasion, serious mistakes; but when they themselves have been at fault, they have recognized the fact and have not resorted to the easy (though often just) excuse that the Tsarist inheritance is to blame. Far from attempting to cover up their blunders, the Soviet officials and workers have set them forth in detail in the press throughout the land. Their frank self-criticism has become a veritable institution, and has been exceedingly effective in combatting bureaucracy and inefficiency. At the same time, thanks to it, foreign detractors have obtained some of their most potent ammunition.

External as well as internal difficulties suddenly arise to confront the U.S.S.R. For instance, who could have predicted the eruption of the Japanese volcano in Manchuria three years ago? Yet nothing has done more to disrupt the carefully laid plans of the Soviet Union than the war-breeding Japanese adventures upon the mainland of Asia. In order to defend themselves from possible aggression in the Far East the Russians have had to strengthen their defensive forces in Siberia, to back these forces up with a big food reserve drawn from other and needy sections of the country, and to allocate to the manufacture of munitions and other army supplies materials that could be ill spared from normal productive operations. All of this happened during the last year of the first Five-Year Plan and did much to handicap its fulfillment.
Japan, however, is not the only enemy of the Soviet Union; and the Soviet Government has had to maintain a vigilant watch on the western as well as the eastern border, especially since Hitler's rise to power in Germany. Indeed, the existence of the Soviet Union in a denied for sixteen years by America, the strongest capital-

ist power, has constituted a problem which presumably the next Socialist commonwealth will not have to face. Forced to import a large proportion of its machinery and industrial equipment from the outside world, Russia has suffered heavily from the hard credit terms and, in some cases, financial boycott imposed by foreign capitalists.

These are some of the reasons why Lenin's formula of "one step backward, if necessary, in order to take two steps forward" has seemed to be just plain common sense in the Soviet Union. What temporary compromises or changes in policy indicate is not failure, as hostile critics claim, but a willingness on the part of the supposedly dogmatic Bolsheviks to face the facts and to exercise an intelligent flexibility in carrying out their program. Certainly no recent shift compares in importance with the N.E.P. (New Economic Policy) introduced by Lenin himself in 1921. Yet this far-reaching but transitory compromise towards capitalist principles did not result, as the outer world predicted, in the abandonment of Socialism in Russia.

An excellent example of Communist procedure is to be found in the handling of the 1932-33 food crisis. In the fall of 1932 a growing food shortage due to various causes, particularly to inefficiency on the collective farms and to sabotage by the kulak class opposed to collectiviza-

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tion, was creating a rather black outlook. In November, 1932, the New York Herald Tribune published an editorial entitled "The Retreat from Marx", in which it said that the Soviet agrarian problem could be solved "only by such a swift retreat from Marxian first principles as will leave no doubt in any Russian or foreign mind of the collapse of the Communist experiment under the relentless pressure of faulty but unalterable human nature". But what actually happened?

At the end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933 the Soviet Government issued several new decrees dealing with the agricultural situation. One of these made concessions to the individualistic tendencies among the peasants by allowing them to sell on the open market the surplus grain above the set amount turned over to the government as a tax. The other measures, such as the establishment of special political departments in the machine-tractor stations and the dispatch of 50,000 picked Communist workers to the crucial North Caucasus region, were designed to stimulate and deepen the whole collective movement. The new program had remarkable success. Not only was the 1933 harvest the biggest in the history of Russia, but the collective idea, which means socialism in agriculture, won a great and lasting victory. The socialized area now amounts to over 90 per cent of the total farm land. The tremendously improved food situation has reflected itself on the industrial front, where the labor turnover has greatly decreased and production has gone up with marked rapidity. The 1934 harvest, in spite of a severe and extensive drought, was even greater than the record one of 1933 and has resulted in the ending of the bread card system in effect during the past few years.
One wonders whether the staff of the *Herald Tribune*, with the invincible faith of Seventh Day Adventists foretelling the end of the world, will continue to predict the collapse of Sovietism.

There remains to be mentioned those supposed compromises which the Soviet Union makes, but which are not real compromises at all because they have never been part of the Communist program. Some critics assert that the new regime has failed in Russia because it has been unable to establish equality in wages. But equality in wages during the transition period to socialism has never been part of the Soviet program. And, indeed, *absolute* equality of wages is not even an eventual aim. For Marx's own ideal formula was: "From every one according to his capacities, to every one according to his needs." And this allows for a certain amount of variation in wages, though there will be an approximate equality. In his speech at the 17th Congress of the Communist Party in January, 1934, Stalin took special pains to make this point clear. "Equalization of needs and personal living conditions," he said, "is a reactionary, petty-bourgeois absurdity, worthy of a primitive sect of ascetics, and not of a socialist society organized on Marxist lines, because we cannot demand that everyone have similar needs and tastes, that everybody in personal life live according to one model."

Then other critics complain because the Soviet Government has not yet nationalized clothes and bicycles. They have the curious idea that true Socialism precludes the owning of personal property. But in a socialist society, be it in the Soviet Union or anywhere else, there is no reason why an individual should not own a bicycle, an automo-
bile, a clock, a library, a suit of clothes, or indeed six suits of clothes. *One of the chief aims of Socialism is that every citizen should have an abundance of personal possessions, including so-called luxuries.* The point is that personal wealth must be for consumption, for use, for enjoyment. It must not become capital. All property entailing production or distribution or the possible exploitation of workers is, under Socialism, collectively owned; intimate personal property is not and never will be.

V

*In the fifth place, any proper evaluation of the Soviet Union must take the future into account.*

The Soviet Union is certainly no Utopia as yet: the point is that no sensible person could have expected it to be. Complete Socialism has not been attained in Russia and will not be attained for some while. The very good reasons for this we have already pointed out. At the same time it can hardly be doubted that the direction of the Soviet Union from both the material and cultural standpoint, is steadily and on the whole upward. The problems are those of growth, not decay. And the serious stresses and strains that still exist seem justified in the light of the great goal ahead. The Soviet masses have been making what may be called *constructive* sacrifices, with a splendid purpose held consciously and continually in mind. In the rest of the world, too, millions and millions of people have been making sacrifices; but these sacrifices are chaotic, purposeless, and to a large extent useless. There is no plan behind them. They are not leading anywhere, unless to a new world war and economic crisis. What gains, for example, leave resulted from the sufferings of the fifty
million unemployed in the capitalist world during five years of depression? And does it not seem probable that the sacrifices of these millions and their families—and of other millions and their families—will continue indefinitely under the present system?

The fundamental aim of the first Five-Year Plan, which came to a successful close at the end of 1932, was to lay a basis of heavy industry and of collectivized, mechanized agriculture which would both provide the groundwork of Socialism and make the U.S.S.R., in case of need, independent of the capitalist world. Accordingly producers' goods were given the right of way over consumers' goods; and huge quantities of foodstuffs, which could easily have been used at home, were exported in face of declining depression prices to pay for the import of machinery and technicians. The vast pace of the Five-Year Plan was set in the first instance through fear of foreign aggression. The Soviet Union has not forgotten the capitalist intervention of the early twenties and proceeds on the theory that what has happened once may happen again.

While the revised and final schedules of the first Five-Year Plan were not 100 per cent fulfilled in the four and a quarter years allotted, the main objectives were achieved. And of course the original 1928 estimates, allowing for five full years, were greatly surpassed. Under the second Five-Year Plan, there is a much greater emphasis on the output of consumers' goods. And with the Plan now entering its third year, clothes, furniture, kitchen utensils, etc., are pouring out of the factories in vast quantities, resulting in an enormous turnover of goods in stores throughout the country. The tempo of things has also
been considerably moderated. The slower rate of construction will make easier the task, emphasized by Stalin, of completely mastering technique. That this is being accomplished is shown by the recent gains in quality as well as quantity of production; and by such feats as the world record-breaking flights of the Soviet balloons into the stratosphere. The Soviet workers have proved that they can not only build big industrial plants under the supervision of foreign engineers, but that they can also learn to operate them. Furthermore, the institutes of technical education are graduating in increasing numbers Soviet engineers who are freeing the U.S.S.R. from dependence of imported technicians. It would seem that the future in Russia has more than hope, indeed that it has promise, of a steady and almost indefinite rise in material and cultural standards. It looks very much as if the new world which has been built over there were about to come fully into its own.

In one sense the greatest achievement of all during the first Five-Year Plan was the establishment on a firm basis of the concept of long-range central economic and social planning. This planning concept, which I regard as the very heart of the Soviet system, has yet before it a long period of development and experimentation. But the Soviet Union has already demonstrated that the basic idea works. With control over production and distribution in both industry and agriculture, over all capital and investment, over exports and imports, over finance and currency, over wages, prices and hours of work, the Central Planning Commission in Russia can make provisions for the well-being of the people as a whole in a way not possible in any other country. In the rest of the world today the blame for the depression is often laid
on what is known as *over-production*. But this so-called over-production is primarily that of what people can *buy*, not of what they *need*. In short, the real trouble is *under-consumption*. But this state of things can never occur in the Soviet Union. For the wage-scale throughout the nation rises as the production of goods rises, and it is inconceivable that the workers should ever find themselves in the unhappy position of not being able to buy back the goods they produce. And if on some infinitely distant day absolute over-production actually does threaten, in foodstuffs, for example, it will be simple in the U.S.S.R. to solve the problem by reducing the hours of work on a large scale and by giving the people more time for the pursuits of leisure. So far, then, as we can look into the future, Soviet Russia will in all probability not be subject to economic depression and crisis.

It is its system of socialist planning that makes the Soviet Union so completely reliable to deal with in the sphere of international commerce. Since 1920 it has imported $4,500,000,000 worth of goods without defaulting on a single penny. In a world where private and governmental defaults, stand-still agreements, and bankruptcies are familiar and widespread phenomena the record of the U.S.S.R. is striking and enviable. Central planning has meant that behind every obligation of the Soviet Union, whether small or large, stands the entire resources of the country. It seems most unfortunate that the United States, after its belated recognition of Russia, has done so little to stimulate trade relations with such an excellent customer. The Export Import Bank, specially created to finance commerce between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., has so far taken pains to defeat its own pur-
pose by raising technicalities over the old question of Russian debts.

No estimate of the future of the Soviet Union would be complete without some mention of the probable development of governmental institutions and methods. In Marxist theory the dictatorship of the proletariat is a temporary phase for a transitional period; as the need for it gradually disappears the dictatorship itself disappears. The eventual aim is a more real and complete democracy than has ever been known in the world before. This constitutes one of the most important differences between a Fascist and Communist dictatorship. People have the habit of lumping the two together as if they were in essence the same, but with Fascism the dictatorship has a very different purpose and apparently is to be eternal; there is no thought of or provision for an ultimate transition to democracy.

Of course, it is theoretically possible that those who hold the power in the Soviet Government will never willingly give it up. If so, the ruling group will be betraying a fundamental tenet of Marxism. But the signs certainly point in the opposite direction. Several recent measures well indicate to what an extent the dictatorship is already relaxing. In 1931 Stalin, in his famous "six-point" speech, initiated a new and more friendly attitude toward the old bourgeois intellectuals and engineers. He welcomed them into the service of the cause of Socialism and declared that if they showed themselves sincere workers in that enterprise, they should have the same privileges as other workers. One of Stalin's closest aides, Rudzutak, explained the new policy further by saying: "All those who work for the Socialist State are comrades, including those
who have joined the working class in that work as well as those born in it."

In 1932 RAPP (The Association of Proletarian Writers), official watchdog and censor of Soviet literature was disbanded by the order of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In the place of RAPP, which consisted entirely of party members, a non-partisan association was formed including all Russian authors who in general support the Soviet program. Far greater freedom for Soviet writers has been the result. Then early in 1933, came the edict transferring the functions of the Commissariat of Labor to the All-Union Council of Trade Unions. This means that control of the social-insurance fund (amounting at present to over $2,000,000,000), the rest homes, the workers' medical services, and the protection of labor becomes a trade union instead of government function.

In July of 1934 the famous Ogpu or Gay-Pay-Oo, the Soviet secret police organization, was abolished. In its place was set up a new department of the government, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. This department has taken over the chief function of the Ogpu, namely, the preservation of the security of the State. But it will operate in the direction of liberalized procedures with regular court trials and the right of appeal. Perhaps even more important in showing the progress towards a classless society and the easing of tension within the Soviet Union were the citizenship restoration decrees in the fall of 1934. These decrees restored full privileges of citizenship to all children of kulaks "provided they are engaged in socially useful labor"; and to adult kulaks, to former disenfranchised members of the old bourgeois class, and even to officials of the hated Tsarist police
"provided they have performed five years of socially useful labor." This period of probation may be reduced to three years or even waived entirely at the discretion of local officials. Through these decrees some 10,000,000 new voters have already been added to the electorate.

There are other grounds, too, in the normal processes of Soviet life which show that the trend is towards Socialist democracy. In the trade unions, the co-operatives, and the Soviets, democratic procedures have been highly developed in the form of frequent elections, of public meetings in which elected officials and delegates give an account of themselves and answer questions, and of constant criticisms and suggestions by workers in regard to the operation of the factories and the Five-Year Plans. Critics like Walter Lippman talk about "centralized initiative" in the Soviet Union as if the planned economy of the country were something handed down from above by a committee of supermen sitting in Moscow. But as a matter of fact the final plans go into effect only after careful analysis and discussion by hundreds and thousands of workers in farm and factory, in village and city and district and republic. Again and again the workers propose and have accepted a counter-plan as an improvement on the original project. For these various reasons the Communists themselves maintain that, in spite of the dictatorship, the U.S.S.R. is even today the most completely democratic of all the communities of any magnitude in the world.

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This finishes my account of the five standards of judgment which seem to me most pertinent in comprehending
what is going on in Soviet Russia at the present time. These are, to summarize, first, that we should take into constant consideration Russia's geography, cultural background, and history; second, that in making comparisons between the Soviet Union and other countries, we must do so on a relative and not on an absolute basis; third, that we ought to bear carefully in mind the extra-economic and cultural achievements of the Soviet Union; fourth, that it is necessary to grasp the significance of the various compromises and shifts in policy that occur in the U.S.S.R. from time to time; and, fifth, that any proper evaluation of Soviet Russia must take the future into account.

In conclusion I should like to make one suggestion which I believe to be appropriate. This is that we Americans should remember that in the first seventeen years of the American Revolution the new republic went through a very difficult period. In 1793, seventeen years after the Declaration of Independence, the youthful United States was still experiencing grave troubles. The constitution had been in effect only four years; the country was in a turbulent state, chaotic, disunited, and poor; European observers were predicting failure; and foreign powers loomed menacingly on the horizon. Paradoxically enough, the most reactionary of the old world nations, Tsarist Russia, refused to recognize the revolutionary American government for 33 years after the break with England. It is well to recall that the Americans of our own revolutionary era, like the Russians of today, had a rather hard time of it for a while.
Who Are The FRIENDS OF THE SOVIET UNION?

The Friends of the Soviet Union in the United States was formed in 1929 by a group of persons for the purpose of uniting within it workers, farmers and other elements of the population on the program of spreading accurate information about what is going on in the Soviet Union and mobilizing the American masses for the struggle against imperialist war upon the Soviet Union. The organizing group included persons of varying political affiliations, but all of them were agreed on the proposition that it was important to build a broad mass organization for the carrying out of these aims.

Every worker, farmer, professional, or person in any walk of life, irrespective of color, creed, sex or political affiliation, who wants to help the F.S.U. to spread accurate information concerning Socialist construction in the Soviet Union, to answer the lies and slanders of its enemies and to mobilize the American masses for its defense, is welcome to join the F.S.U. Whoever sympathizes with the Soviet Union because of its peace policy, is welcome to join the F.S.U. and help agitate in support of that peace policy; anyone who endorses the Soviet Union's policy of giving freedom and equality to national minorities is also welcome to our membership.

The tasks of the F. S. U. are:

To spread the truth about the Soviet Union; to answer the slanders of its enemies; to support the Soviet peace policy and defend the right of Soviet workers and farmers to continue socialist construction without interference.

APPLICATION

☐ I wish to become a member of the Friends of the Soviet Union. Dues for active members, 15c a month for employed, 5c for unemployed. Employed pay an initiation fee of 25c. Associate members who cannot be active, $1.50 per year which includes a year's subscription to SOVIET RUSSIA TODAY.

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