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PROPAGANDA IN SOVIET RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

Two years ago the writer found plenty of evidence. Red flags, censored newspapers, directed excursions, indoctrinated schools, motivated plays, didactic pictures, and continuous radio messages preach communism. Appeals to the need for security and class loyalty, dogmatic assertion of Marxian philosophy, the example of leaders, and calls to participation are used as incentives to action. The results are a new orthodoxy, rigid partizanship, and a mechanical order of life. This policy was necessary to move ignorant masses to accomplish results within a short time. Although similar methods are used in other countries, the divergent aim of Soviet propaganda arouses our antagonism.

Upon arrival in the soviet republic, a visitor is struck by the extensive use of streamers, posters, and signs announcing some proclamation or program of the government. Public buildings and club headquarters are decorated with red flags and banners. Open meeting places are draped in bunting. Processions bear the national emblem and group standards. These set forth communistic mottoes and slogans. Perhaps such publicity is more marked in the chief cities than elsewhere, and may be regarded merely as an exuberant display of local pride in their contribution to the new order. It may, however, be considered as a particular means of attracting attention, and of fixing it upon the domination of the proletariat.

A clear instance of propaganda is confronted when the visitor asks for a newspaper. Only officially indorsed journals are permitted to circulate. These organs of the government or party distribute approved information to the people. For instance, there are papers for soldiers which explain the reasons for the campaign in Manchuria. Foreign news is strictly censored, and press correspondents can dispatch items only upon approval by the authorities. The one "outside" paper the writer was able to find in Moscow was a German communist sheet. The *Moscow News*, a publication in English for foreigners, is heavily impregnated with Bolshevist flavor. No other kind could exist. Although peasant journals and wall sheets contain caustic comments upon official conduct, fundamental criticism or items unfavorable to the policy of the administration cannot be published. A foreign correspondent told me that he succeeded in

getting out statements of unpleasant facts by distributing them among paragraphs commending the government for its efficiency. This constant presentation of only one aspect of life may fairly be called systematic deception. Although not peculiar to Russia, it is not the avowed policy of many so-called popular governments. The Bolsheviki believe this is necessary to maintain morale. That is characteristic of the psychology of conflict.

An impressive means of propagating communist beliefs is the use of museums and exhibits, which are numerous in the old capital and the new. The Museum of the Revolution in Moscow is particularly interesting in its method of presenting historic data. Popular uprisings, from the time of early peasant revolts to the triumph of Bolshevism under Lenin, are traced in sequence by means of pictures, documents, personal mementos, and schematic charts. The effect of such arrangement is to give a visitor the impression that the Revolution was not a sudden eruption, but the inevitable result of expansive social forces, hitherto systematically repressed. Thus the explosion is traced to profound historic causes, and is represented as a natural reaction to tyranny. This conclusion may be correct; but the method of demonstration leaves no place for exceptions.

Another example of the same motivation is shown in the parallel exhibits of proletarian and bourgeois culture in the Ethnographic Museum of Leningrad. On the one hand is traced the hard lot of peasants and industrial workers until their liberation by the Revolution. On the other side the growing wealth and power of landlords, merchants, and manufacturers is illustrated by the furnishings of their homes at different periods until their downfall. The logic of this skilful contrast is inescapable. It states more clearly than words the fundamental text of Bolshevism—the exploiters must be dispossessed if the workers are to live.

The effect of such exhibits is greatly increased by means of trained guides who conduct groups of visitors through the rooms and point out the meaning of what is displayed. In the Tsar's winter palace classes of school children are shown the wanton luxury of the old régime. In the anti-religious museums bands of working people listen to a leader's exposition of the frauds of priests and miracle mongers.

Directed excursions play an important part in the policy of enlightenment fostered by the new administration. Visits to factories, monuments, and public places are preceded and followed by discussion within the school and shop. Moscow is a permanent exhibit for bands of peasants who come to see with their own eyes the wonders of the People's government, and return to confirm their fellows in promoting the new order. This type of instruction is an excellent pedagogical device.

The soviet schools are regarded as the "third front" in the drive for communism. They are all under government control, and are frankly used to promote officially indorsed political and economic programs. The study of labor and revolutionary movements is an important part of the curriculum. Party members are detailed to spread "political literacy" among the pupils. Working men are favored as candidates for higher education; and young students are urged to aid in practical tasks of social organization. The schools thus become recognized means for training class-conscious revolutionaries.

The prevailing theory of Russian education is that a society must foster a type of culture fitted to meet the basic needs of its people. At present, the reorganization of industry and agriculture appears to be the outstanding need. Consequently, great emphasis is now laid upon technology. Since improved methods of production can be achieved only through wide co-operation, social organization is also stressed. Classes, clubs, and occupational groups reiterate Marxian precepts concerning proletarian leadership until the ideas become fixed in the minds of members. Still further ahead looms the possibility of spreading these ideas among the toilers of other nations, and of establishing a universal commonwealth of labor. So the Russian youth today is trained to be a worker, a citizen, and a soldier in the new order. How this ideology is impressed in the schools may be illustrated from personal observations.

In a primary school in Moscow we were shown the work in social education. Among other exhibits, we remarked two maps of the world hung on opposite sides of a classroom. One chart was dotted with small red flags; the other with blue. We were told that wherever a strike or revolutionary movement was successful a red marker

was stuck in the first map. Lockouts or repressive political actions were shown on the other by blue. Our guide informed us that the children are keen on this posting of scores and search the papers for instances to report. Here is a suggestion of ways to interest youth in bigger games than football.

In subsequent conversation with the school principal, we asked, "What is the basis of training for citizenship?" She promptly replied "Understanding of Marxian economics." That answer might be compared with statements of ethical ideals by pedagogues in this country. Apparently social education in Russia has objectives and methods rather different from ours. That naturally makes us doubt its soundness.

The Assistant Professor of Economics in the Communist University of Leningrad explained the work in his field. It is primarily the preparation and discussion of papers, after the fashion of our seminars. The students are young party members. Most of them have been employed in industry, and all worked during academic vacations.¹ Their research is field study in the application of the new economic system. The best reports are criticized and revised for publication.

When asked, "What is the major premise of economic teaching?" the professor replied, "Dialectic materialism." He then proceeded to warn me against certain inadequate treatments of this approach to social science. When I inquired what studies were under way, he told me they were investigating the relative effectiveness of individual and collective incentives in production. Asked what they expected to discover, the instructor shook his head. How such studies can be scientifically controlled under the present order was not made clear. Perhaps the recent change in wage policy may be a concession to a lag in training workmen.

The use of the stage for projecting social reactions is well understood. The work of the Meyerhold Theatre in dramatizing revolutionary incidents has been described so fully as to require no further discussion.² Even classic opera and ballet, as presented by the Academic State Theatre in Moscow, have been affected by prole-

¹ Schools now operate continuously.

² See Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, chap. vi.

tarian tendencies. We attended a performance there in which the heroine was a street sweeper. Her pursuer was the proprietor of a department store. His crude intentions were ignominiously foiled by a dashing young workman, who portrayed a modernistic Harlequin. At the climax, the stage was filled with Little Octobrists, who danced and drilled with red flags; while the chorus, dressed like factory hands, swooped about exultantly. It was a triumph for the "Poor Working Girl."

You have all doubtless seen modern Russian films. So we need not point out the extent to which many of them seek to convey a revolutionary message. The impression made by pictures of stampeding crowds, charging battalions and whirring machinery is one of relentless driving power. But the effect of portraying continuous mass movement is to tire the observer and to arouse desire for relief in lighter rhythms. Some of the soviet pictures have been so overloaded with minute details and detached incidents as to bore the bewildered spectator. Perhaps the official cinema has been too didactic. A self-conscious portrait does not make the happiest impression.

From Constantinople to Stockholm the air throbs with a barrage of soviet radio messages. Our hotel room in Leningrad faced upon an open square, where a loud speaker functioned from six in the morning until eleven at night. Occasionally a song or dialogue was transmitted. For the most part it was a continuous flow of oratory. The porter said it had to do with labor and politics. We changed our room, remarking that this constant repetition of communist doctrine must either fix its phraseology subconsciously, or else develop a strong negative reaction.

With these bits of evidence before us, let us consider briefly the psychology of conditioning used by the communists. The process begins with an appeal to fundamental desires—to "hunger for life," if you will. After years of privation and futile warfare, workingmen, soldiers, and peasants were starved and frozen and sore. About them, landlords, merchants, and officials enjoyed leisure, luxury, and license. Agitators urged the people to rise and overthrow their oppressors. The tension snapped, and the Revolution was under way. But workmen did not yet enjoy the goods they made; farmers did not possess the ground they tilled; nor could the people control

their officers. Soon Lenin appeared and roused the workers to seize authority. "Peace—Land—Bread," was the slogan of the October uprising. The proletariat swept into power, with the Bolsheviki as their leaders.

Then began a period of bitter class struggle. The organized proletariat was only a minority. The masses must be brought to accept its dictatorship. How were people attached to the new order? Primarily by emotional appeal. The "pathos of revolution" was effectively used among those who had suffered during the tsarist régime and had struggled to win release. Many of these persons gained security and status. Such instances served to rouse a sentiment of loyalty to the leaders. Among those who hesitated to follow, fear of exposure and punishment was a powerful incentive to compliance. The danger of foreign intervention, with the prolonged horror of continued fighting, was sufficient to keep most citizens in line.

Having banished the foreign specter for a time, the victorious Bolsheviki next turned to consolidate their gains within the soviets. The people must be organized to produce wealth. Fighting enthusiasm was not enough. A generation must be taught to think in economic terms. For this purpose, Marxian philosophy, as interpreted by Lenin, was accepted without salient criticism. Economic determinism, leadership of the proletariat, and industrial organization were preached as articles of faith. Whether or not these dogmatic statements are correct, they were asserted so impressively that they became controlling principles in the lives of nearly 8 per cent of the world's population within less than ten years. There was no time to educate the masses. They had to be thrown into action by the promise of a better order. This is a program of evangelization without parallel in history.

Mere assent to socialist principles would not suffice, however. Dramatic instances were used to drive home their meaning in action. Lenin, who embodied the spirit of the new order, was exalted to the position of a legendary hero. His picture is everywhere. His words have authority well-nigh pontifical. His tomb is visited by thousands. Such personal example of devotion to the people's cause convinces multitudes of its merit, and furnishes incentive to carry on the work.

The Five-Year Plan, with its requirements of redoubled industry,

was held up as a great national undertaking. Enthusiasm for its completion was kindled among the workers. Rivalry was stimulated by posting the scores of competing plants. Premiums were given to the most efficient departments. Public recognition was awarded to successful managers. Whole regions were engaged in a peace-time contest against want. This was a remarkable campaign for government control. More recently, the drive for collective farming has been promoted. Thus the communists have progressed from inciting revolt to directing programs of public work. The "propaganda of deeds" has become a constructive policy in the hands of clever bosses.

What has been the collective response to this stirring appeal? First, a new orthodoxy has been established. Marx is the Moses of Communism, and Lenin is his mouthpiece. Historic materialism, class warfare, and proletarian leadership are assumed as foundations of common thought and action. This attitude is held to be the only realistic and scientific way to approach problems of modern life. Idealism, romanticism, bourgeois morality are scorned as antiquated and absurd modes of thought. "Man is a product of his environment. Institutions are forms maintained by those in authority. Opinion reflects the economy of the group." Such is the latest revelation of truth. All other statements are dangerous errors. We seem to hear a muezzin calling the faithful to worship.

The new discipleship entails acceptance of rigorous conditions. Submission to decisions of party councils is required of all members. A proletarian background, a period of probation, exemplary conduct, and active participation are demanded of candidates for political preferment. Even high officials are not exempt from severe discipline. The exile of Trotsky for persistently criticizing Stalin's executive policy is a familiar example of such stern regulation. Discussion of administrative details is general; but no one is free to oppose the government. Political offenders are still punished by banishment and confiscation of property. Spying is encouraged. The methods of Jesuitry persist in Russia.

A further result of constant regulation is a certain mechanization of life. Travelers complain of detailed requirements for obtaining visas. Sometimes days must be spent waiting for a bureau to issue

a formal permit. Older residents chafe under excessive supervision and restriction. Standing in line for a chance to buy food, petitioning authorities for a change of domicile, following minutely prescribed forms in the conduct of business consume energy and check initiative. In fact, personal freedom, in our loose interpretation of the term, does not exist in soviet Russia.

The communist idea of personal rights is quite different from that announced in the Declaration of Independence. A compact of free individuals to secure justice is not assumed as the origin of the state. It developed rather, we are told, from domination by the strong. Civil rights were gained by those able to win them from the group. Arbitrary free will is a childish delusion, since man's behavior is determined by reflexes conditioned in society. Such views of human nature make personal preferences much less important than we are accustomed to regard them. An individual must fit into his social environment and carry on the work of his group. Otherwise, he is like a loose cog in a machine. Indeed the machine is regarded as a lofty symbol of human endeavor, and those who serve it are respected as priests of progress.

Even artists are regarded with suspicion when they do not turn out work as required. A gifted portrait painter of my acquaintance was commissioned to copy the likeness of Lenin in court rooms throughout a province. Half humorously, he calls himself "an automatic stencil." The repressed bitterness of that characterization indicates a real menace in the rapid spread of communism. Should the collective struggle for power reduce men to function as robots, the outcome might not be worth the effort to attain it. There are some indications in Russia that the automatic stencil has branded many persons with the same fixed design.

What is the connection between stereotyped responses and propaganda? Consider the stencil. Materialist philosophy, leadership of the proletariat, and national organization of industry have been impressed upon the thought of millions of ignorant workmen and peasants within ten years. Now we must assume either that their minds contained the germs of such large ideas, ready to sprout upon fertilization; or else that rudimentary notions of these matters were

swiftly implanted by means of propaganda. To an outsider, the latter explanation appears more reasonable.

Since socialist ideas are of recent growth, they had to be protected from weeds of doubt by vigorous assertion and trained to early fruitage by prescribing simple lines of expression. That is why popular treatises present a series of brief, direct statements and urge a sequence of definite certified steps toward the new order. Communist leaders admit that the co-operative commonwealth cannot be attained until the masses have had a longer course of training in collective action. Meanwhile, they promote the movement by the arts of propaganda. That may explain certain limitations of argument and activity within the soviets at present.

As we turn from examining the Russian futurist sketch to the familiar outlines of our own national portrait, we are struck by a haunting likeness beneath contrasting features. Our pattern of life includes theistic philosophy, financial control, and individual enterprise. Apparently these traits are directly opposed to corresponding elements in the communist design. But are they different in kind, or essentially the same lines produced in opposite directions? Perhaps we should consider them as complementary arrangements. Without laboring the point, if we admit a resemblance in the composition of these two pictures, we are led to ask how far propaganda is responsible for spreading strong colors over the drawing of both.

If time permitted, we might inquire how many Americans accept their religious faith in childhood upon the basis of recommended authority. We might consider why financial gain is believed to be the greatest personal incentive. We might even question the basis for assuming that the competitive system yields the largest social return. Should we do so, I suspect we might discover that the rudiments of these ideas were implanted in our tender minds by persons in authority, and that their growth was fostered by claims of expediency. Perhaps that is why we fear communism. It disturbs our easy assumptions. So we oppose it with our own political, economic, and religious propaganda.