

SIDNEY
&
BEATRICE

Webb

Is SOVIET
COMMUNISM

*a New
Civilisation?*

SOVIET COMMUNISM

by SIDNEY & BEATRICE WEBB

A DETAILED description—analytic and critical—of the whole social structure, activities and principles of the USSR as it exists to-day, including Trade Unionism and all forms of co-operation in agriculture and manufacture, as well as a full analysis of the Communist Party as an organised Vocation of Leadership; with an epilogue showing in what sense it amounts to a New Civilisation, and an answer to the enquiry, WILL IT SPREAD?

Two Volumes

1200 pp.

35s.

LONGMANS, GREEN & Co. Ltd.

The present pamphlet is the Epilogue to this monumental work, reprinted by courtesy of Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd.

LEFT REVIEW PAMPHLET

IS
SOVIET COMMUNISM
A NEW
CIVILISATION?

By

Sidney &
Beatrice
WEBB

November 1936

Published by

THE LEFT REVIEW
2 Parton Street, London, W.C.1

CONTENTS

I. A New Civilisation ?	<i>page</i> 3
II. The Abolition of Profit-making	6
III. The Planning of Production for Community Consumption	7
IV. Social Equality and Universalism	10
V. A Novel Representative System	13
VI. The Vocation of Leadership	15
VII. The Cult of Science	18
VIII. "Anti-Godism "	20
IX. The New Communist Conscience	21
X. A New Way of Living	24
XI. Disintegrating Capitalism	25
XII. Will Soviet Communism Endure ?	28
XIII. Will it Spread ?	30

SOVIET COMMUNISM

I

A NEW CIVILISATION?

THE Bolsheviks consider that what they are doing among the 170 millions of people of the USSR is much more than introducing them to newspapers and books, the theatre and the opera ; or improving their health, and increasing their wealth production. What they believe themselves to be establishing in the world is nothing less than a new civilisation.

Now there is no generally accepted definition of what amount or kind of change in the manner of living among a whole people constitutes a different civilisation. Nevertheless it is commonly recognised that certain contemporary communities are, in the aggregate, sufficiently unlike to warrant us in speaking of them as distinct civilisations. Thus, there is substantial agreement that the Chinese, the Hindus, the Moslems and the Christianised white Europeans (including their descendants in other continents) belong to different civilisations. Moreover, within historic times, other civilisations have existed and passed away. We need only instance the Sumerian and the Egyptian ; to which some would add, as equally distinctive, the civilisations of Troy and of Tyre, of Etruria and of Carthage, and doubtless those of other defunct communities that further archaeological researches may uncover.

It is plain that many different factors may enter into the making of a distinctive civilisation.* To some the most important seems the nature and character of its particular religion. Those communities in which Christianity has been dominant stand out from the rest. In other instances, as in China, racial characteristics afford the most noticeable difference. What may be called the political organisation of a community has sometimes—for instance, in feudalism—served as the mark of a distinct civilisation. Even more distinctive of different manners of life may be the economic organisation, as in the contrast between communities living mainly by hunting or fishing, or by rearing cattle, or by cultivating the soil ; and those engaging extensively in commerce, or, with the constantly increasing use of power-driven machinery, in mining and manufacturing. Or we may notice whether the several families of a community habitually work for themselves ; or whether, as slaves, serfs or wage-labourers, the majority serve the owners of the means of production.

For our present purpose there is no need to discuss all known or possible civilisations. It will suffice to start from the common division of the three thousand years' history of Europe since the days of Homer into the three successive civilisations that are covered respectively by the story of Greece and Rome ; by the widespread adoption of Christianity and feudalism ;

* The word "civilisation" is sometimes used in the singular to denote the progress of human society from primitive to civilised ; and sometimes in the plural in order to distinguish one civilisation from another. Thus Professor Arnold Toynbee in his brilliant and erudite *Study of History*, vols. i-iii, enumerates (after dismissing the 600-odd primitive societies) 27 distinct civilisations within historic times, of which 5 survive to-day. These are : Western Civilisation, which, as he observes, has succeeded in embracing within its system not only Europe and North America, but also all navigable seas, and all the ports of the world ; and four other extant civilisations, the Islamic, Hindu, Far Eastern and "Orthodox" Christianity. This last example of an extant civilisation is difficult to identify to-day, as the Greek Orthodox Church, as distinct from the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, which characterise what he calls Western Civilisation, barely exists now that the vast Eurasian continent has rejected its creed and code of conduct. Perhaps Professor Toynbee sees a survival of Christianity in the communist's aim of "from each according to his faculty, and to each according to his need".

and by the modern world from 1492 down to our own day. Everyone is familiar with the characteristics of contemporary civilisation of this specifically European kind, which has undoubtedly resulted in great progress and has been carried by white settlers, traders or travellers, all over the world. It will suffice to emphasise its four main features. First in date stands the Christian religion, with the code of conduct that it inculcates. Then, increasingly after the fifteenth century, comes the so-called capitalist system of the private ownership of property, notably in the means of production, to be utilised, under the direction of the owners, upon the incentive of the making of profit either by the employment of workers at wages or by trading in goods ; or latterly, by the manipulation of money and credit by the financiers. Further we notice, continuously during the past two centuries, even if apparently momentarily arrested, a widespread trend towards government on the system of parliamentary democracy. Finally we have to note during the past hundred years, as peculiar to this particular civilisation, an unprecedented increase, through knowledge, of man's command over Nature, along with an increasing application of science, under the influence of humane feeling, to the amelioration of the lot of some sections of the poor. Such being the starting-point, the question that is asked is whether what is developing in the USSR since 1917 is so markedly different from the manner of life in the England or the France or the United States of the past three or four centuries as to justify calling it a new civilisation. Let us try to set out the features in which Soviet Communism differs essentially from the characteristic civilisation of the western world of to-day.*

* All references in this pamphlet are to *Soviet Communism*.

II

THE ABOLITION OF PROFIT-MAKING

WE place first in far-reaching importance the complete discarding, as the incentive to production, of the very mainspring of the western social order, the motive of profit-making. Instead of admiring those who successfully purchase commodities in order to sell them again at a higher price (whether as merchant or trader, wholesale dealer or retailer), Soviet Communism punishes such persons as criminals, guilty of the crime of "speculation". Instead of rewarding or honouring those (the capitalist employers or entrepreneurs) who engage others at wages in order to make a profit out of the product of their labour, Soviet Communism punishes them as criminals, guilty, irrespective of the amount of the wages that they pay, of the crime of "exploitation". It would be difficult to exaggerate the difference that this one change in ideology (in current views of morality as well as in criminal law) has made in the manner of life within the USSR. No one can adequately realise, without a wide study of the facts of soviet life, what this fundamental transformation of economic relationships has meant, alike to the vast majority of the poor and to the relatively small minority who formerly "lived by owning", or by employing others for profit.

The change has not had the particular results anticipated by our capitalist reasoning. It has not meant compulsion to take service under the government as the only employer.* It has not prevented millions of individuals from working independently, or in voluntary partnerships, for their own or their family's subsistence. It does not forbid either the independent producers or the producing partnerships to sell the product of their own labour in the public market, or by contract, for any price they can get. It has not involved the abolition of personal property, or any compulsion to have all things in common. It has not prevented inequality of possessions, or of incomes,

* See Chapter III in Part I, "Man as a Producer", and Chapter IX in Part II, "In Place of Profit".

or even differences of earnings. The payment of interest on government loans, and the receipt of interest on deposits in the savings bank, have not ceased. But the habit of able-bodied persons living without work has become disgraceful, however great may be their savings or their other possessions; and the class of wealthy families, whether as owners of land, employers of labour or rentiers and financiers, has ceased to exist. More important still is that the control of the instruments of wealth production by individuals seeking to enrich themselves, and the power of the landlord and the capitalist over those whom they can employ at wages, or from whom they can exact rent, has passed away.

III

THE PLANNING OF PRODUCTION FOR COMMUNITY CONSUMPTION

THE abolition of profit-making as the incentive to the capitalist entrepreneur, together with the transfer to collective ownership of the principal means of production thereby involved, made indispensable the deliberate planning of the production of commodities and services. Instead of the individual capitalists producing what they severally thought they could make profit out of, and incidentally vying with each other to satisfy the desires of such consumers as could, by having the means to pay the price, make their demand "effective", some national authority had to work out statistically and communicate to each factory or mine its own particular share of exactly what the whole community of consumers, irrespective of their means, needed and desired. For this purpose every factory or mine, every farm or oil-field, every institute or office, and indeed every enterprise, whether industrial or cultural, now makes a return showing what machinery and materials it is using, and what commodities and services it has been and expects to be producing, to be compared with next year's aggregate needs

and desires of the whole community. This enormous calculation, which was, in every other country, thought to be beyond human capacity, is, as we have described,* actually performed in the USSR by the State Planning Commission (Gosplan), in incessant consultation with the powerful All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions, the highly organised Consumers' Cooperative Movement, and the several People's Commissars directing the tens of thousands of separately administered factories, mines, oil-fields, state farms, warehouses, ships, railways and what not. We cannot discuss again whether or to what extent this gigantic planning is successful in ensuring that every person in the USSR gets the commodities and services that he needs or desires.† But if we notice that the work of Gosplan does, in fact, relieve the USSR from the alternation of booms and slumps that characterise the capitalist world—still more if we realise that this deliberate planning of all production for community consumption ensures the complete abolition of involuntary mass unemployment, whether "technological" or "cyclical"—we can hardly deny that the new system effects a startling transformation in the economic relationships of the whole community, which has changed the very mentality of the producers, whether administrators, technicians or manual workers. The highly organised trade unions of the USSR, containing over 18 million members, are not only whole-heartedly in favour of increasing the productivity of labour by such devices as piece-work rates, cost-accounting, and competing among themselves as to who can make the greatest output at the lowest labour-cost, but are also constantly pressing for the adoption of more and more labour-saving inventions, in order that the machine may increasingly become the slave of mankind. This is because there is no longer any conflict of interests in production. Whether between enterprises or between grades or kinds of workers or producers, there is, as is commonly said in the USSR, no enemy party ;

* In Chapter VIII in Part II, "Planned Production for Community Consumption".

† See Chapter VIII in Part II.

no person's gain is rooted in another person's loss. Every individual engaged in production, whether of commodities or of services, benefits materially by increased or improved production, and by the zealous and efficient service of every other producer. When it is realised that everybody's share of the aggregate net product is made actually greater by any increase or improvement of that product, it is actually and visibly to everybody's pecuniary interest that no one should be inefficient, no one idle, no one negligent, no one sick. There is a universal and continuous incentive to every producer, whether manual worker or technician, to improve his qualifications, and to render the utmost service, in order to increase the common wage fund, which is wholly divided without any tribute to landlord or capitalist, among the whole body of producers, according to the sharing arrangements that the whole body of producers themselves make. Hence the eager zeal and devotion of the "shock brigades" (udarniki) to do more work than is customary, and the public honours that are accorded to them. Hence the unpaid service of the "Saturdayers" (subbotniki), who give up their free time to clearing off arrears in any enterprise that lags behind its programme. Hence the "socialist competitions" in which shifts or brigades, factories or oil-fields, ships or state farms, and even municipalities and republics, enter into formal agreements to vie with one another as to which can achieve the greatest output or create the least "scrap", or build the greatest number of new schools, or establish the most technical classes, or erect the most new dwellings over a given period. And most remarkable of all, from the angle of western competitive sportsmanship, it is from the same unity of interest that springs the custom of the winning team in these competitions making it a matter of honour immediately to proceed to the assistance of the losing team, in order to teach those who have failed in the competition how they can improve their production so as not again to fall behind that of the winners. The unity of pecuniary interest extends, in fact, to all the various enterprises in the USSR. Each becomes eager to help every other enterprise, whether of the same or of any different kind, to attain the

greatest possible product, because it is the aggregate net product of all the enterprises in the USSR that provides not only all the social services (the socialised wage) but also the wage-fund to be shared among the producers (the personal wage); so that not only the divisible income of each enterprise, but also that of the other enterprises, and thus the share of all the producers of all kinds and grades in all the enterprises, ultimately depends upon the total net output of the whole of them.

IV

SOCIAL EQUALITY AND UNIVERSALISM

It is claimed that the whole social organisation of Soviet Communism is based upon a social equality that is more genuine and more universal than has existed in any other community. To engage in socially useful work, according to capacity, is a universal duty. It is a distinct novelty in social life that there should be no exemption from this duty in favour of the possessors of wealth or the owners of land, the holders of high offices, or those having exceptional intellectual or artistic gifts or attainments, the geniuses or the popular favourites. Work, like leisure, has to be shared by all able to join in social service. There is only a single social grade in the USSR, that of a producer by hand or by brain; including, however, those so young that they can only prepare themselves for becoming producers, and those so aged or so infirm as only to be able to look back on the work they did in their strength. This is what is meant by the "classless society", in which each serves in accordance with his ability, and is provided for appropriately to his needs.

The depth of the difference between this manner of living and that of capitalist states is scarcely to be fathomed. But it involves the very opposite of uniformity or identity among all men. It not only allows, but even actively encourages and

promotes, the utmost development of individuality in social service. Nor does it produce an exact equality of earnings or other income ; although the prohibition of profit-making by "speculation", or "exploitation", and the collective ownership of all the principal means of production, coupled with drastically progressive income taxes and death duties on exceptional individual fortunes, effectively prevent the gross inequalities which threaten the stability of states in which millionairism is not only tolerated but allowed to become a plutocracy.

But the principle of social equality goes much further than community in work and leisure, common schooling and games, with a constant approximation to substantial equality of standards of income and expenditure. It extends, in a manner and to a degree unknown elsewhere, to the relations between the sexes, and within the family group. Husbands and wives, parents and children, teachers and scholars, like friends of different sexes, or of not too unequal incomes, like managers and factory operatives, administrators and typists, and even army officers and the rank and file, live in an atmosphere of social equality and of freedom from servility or "inferiority complex" that is unknown elsewhere. What is still more unique is the absence of prejudice as to colour or race. The hundred or more different races and language groups of the USSR of nearly all shades of colour, including the wildest nomads and the most rooted townsmen, the most urbane diplomatists and the most primitive barbarians, enjoy not only complete identity of legal and political rights, but also the fullest equality of freedom in economic and social relations. Wherever schools exist at all, those living within reach are educated in common ; they work together at wage-rates differentiated only by differences in the tasks ; they use the same public conveyances, the same hotels and holiday homes, the same public utilities ; they join the same trade unions and other voluntary associations ; they sit side by side in the lecture-rooms, libraries, theatres and cinemas. They form mutual friendships irrespective of race or colour, and intermarry freely. Again, there is no imposition of a central pattern. On the contrary, the cardinal bond of the Soviet Union is the

guarantee to each "national minority" of its own "cultural autonomy". Each maintains its own vernacular, its own schools, its own newspapers, its own publishing houses, its own theatres; and they are all specially assisted to do so out of federal funds. What is more, each of the dozens of constituent or autonomous republics making up the USSR freely elects or appoints, if it chooses, its own people to the local representative bodies and to the local offices, and is vigorously incited and encouraged to do so by the Government at Moscow. It would be hard to overestimate the sense of freedom and equality—far exceeding that of the corresponding arrangements as to "natives" in analogous dependencies of other states—produced by this effective cultural autonomy and local government by officials of one's own race.

There is yet another feature in the social equality of the civilisation of the Soviet Union which we term "universalism". Other communities have willingly acquiesced in the fact that the advantages and amenities which their civilisation provides, including most of the luxuries of life, do not reach the poorest or weakest, or least developed, or least thrifty or least well-conducted members of the community. The current economic and social arrangements do not enable these unfortunates to reach the same standard of health and education, or to attain the same longevity or intellectual development, or even to procure the amount of food, clothing and shelter, that is deemed necessary and normal among the more favoured classes. A few such communities are, in the twentieth century, just beginning to realise these features of the inequality in which their social life is rooted. It is a distinctive feature of the social arrangements of the Soviet Union* that, to a degree unparalleled elsewhere, they provide for every person, irrespective of wealth or position, sex or race, the poorest and weakest as well as those who are "better off", in all cases equality of opportunity for the children and adolescents, and, increasingly, also a common and ever-rising standard of living for the whole population. This is well seen in the sphere of education. Other communities, especially during the past

* See Chapter X in Part II, "The Remaking of Man".

century or two, have striven to create educated, and even cultivated classes within the nation. The Soviet Union is the first to strive, without discrimination of sex or race, affluence or position, to produce not merely an intelligentsia but a cultivated nation.

V

A NOVEL REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM

IN every community of any magnitude, social organisation has to include a system by means of which the desires and the common will of the population can be expressed. In contrast with every other community, the USSR has evolved a complex and multiform representative system of complete originality, based upon the principle of universal participation in public affairs, under the guidance of a highly organised leadership of a unique kind. As we have described,* man is represented in three separate capacities, as a citizen, as a producer and as a consumer. In each case the franchise is the widest in the world, though with peculiar and steadily dwindling disqualifications, whilst the extent to which the entire population actually participates in elections is without parallel. The representative system has hitherto been, above the 70,000 village or city soviets, one of indirect election; but it was in 1935 decided to replace this by direct election upon a franchise uniform among both sexes, all races, and every kind of occupation, throughout the USSR.

It is impossible to enumerate all the channels, and it would be difficult to exaggerate the extent, of the participation in the public affairs of the Soviet electorate of over 90 millions of men and women. The characteristic multiformity of every kind of soviet organisation, economic or political, together with its

* See Chapter II, "Man as a Citizen"; Chapter III, "Man as a Producer"; Chapter IV, "Man as a Consumer", all in Part I; also Chapter IX in Part II, "In Place of Profit".

threefold system of representation, and the omnicompetence, as regards powers and functions, of each tier of councils in its ubiquitous local government, are in vivid contrast with the dominance of the parliamentary systems of the western world. To begin with, the universal electorate in the USSR does a great deal more than elect. At its incessant meetings it debates and passes resolutions by the hundred thousand, in which it expresses its desires on great matters and on small; by way of instructions or suggestions to the "deputies" whom it chooses and can at any time withdraw by a vote of "recall", and who habitually take notice of these popular requirements, even when it is not found immediately practicable to carry them into effect. Nor does the participation in public affairs end with the perpetual discussions in which the Russian delights. In every village, as in every city, a large part of the detailed work of public administration is actually performed, not as in France or Great Britain or the United States, by paid officials, and not even, as in small or primitive communities, by the elected deputies or councillors, but by a far larger number of the adult inhabitants themselves, as part of the universally expected voluntary social service.

The same characteristic multiformity and popular participation prevails also in the extensive and highly organised trade unionism, in which are voluntarily included five-sixths of all the persons employed at wages or salaries, whatever their occupations or grade or remuneration. The trade unions by no means confine themselves to their extensive collective bargaining over wages and hours, and other conditions of employment, which far exceeds that of the trade unions elsewhere, together with their active share in the administration of the factory or the mine.* For instance, it is to the trade union organisation that is now committed not only the control but also the actual administration of the colossal services of social insurance, which are more extensive and costly than those in any other country, and to which the workers make no individual contribution. This huge administration is carried on, not wholly or even mainly by the paid officials whom the trade unions

* See Chapter III in Part I, "Man as a Producer".

appoint, or by the committees which they elect, but personally, without remuneration, by something like 100,000 "activists" among the trade unionists themselves as part of their social service.

The Consumers' Cooperative Movement, which numbers over 70 million members, displays a like multiformity of organisation, and a similar personal participation by its vast membership, in the complicated business of distributing over the huge area of the USSR the greater part of its food and other commodities.

Yet another variety is exhibited by the immense and highly differentiated voluntary associations, sometimes numbering even millions of members apiece. These multifarious self-governing associations, which often enjoy financial subventions, undertake public service of one or other kind; partly educational, partly propagandist, including also sports and games of every description, along with music, painting, dancing and acting, as well as active cooperation with various branches of government service, from the promotion of science and art up to the assistance of the defence forces.

VI

THE VOCATION OF LEADERSHIP

ALL the diversity of participation in the universal multiformity of organisation which distinguishes the USSR from every other country makes more than usually indispensable that leadership without which democracy, in any of its forms, is but a mob. It is on this point that the actual constitution of the Soviet Union, which is not completely written in any statute, differs most substantially from every other known to political science. In the USSR the function of affording to the population the necessary guidance of public affairs is assumed by a voluntary but highly organised and strictly disciplined Vocation of Leadership, which calls itself the Communist

Party. It is, as we have explained,* unlike anything that the western world understands by the term "party" in the political sense. Far from seeking to enrol everyone professing agreement with its policy or "voting its ticket" or subscribing to its funds, the Communist Party of the USSR has a strictly limited membership, amounting to less than 3 per cent of the electorate, or less than 2 per cent. of the census population, recruited exclusively by cooption, after prolonged probation, on qualifications of character, ability and zeal coupled with ungrudging acceptance of the existing régime. We need not repeat our description of the way in which this peculiar companionship is organised on the common pattern of indirect election; nor yet that of the higher standard of personal conduct than is expected from the ordinary citizen to which its members are held. Perhaps its most significant difference from the political parties of western politics may be found in the manner in which it maintains this standard by incessant corporate supervision, supplemented every few years by a systematic public examination of the entire vocation, and the drastic "purging" out of all backsliders and offenders, even to the extent of a fifth of the membership at a time. With its voluntarily assumed special obligations of "poverty" (limitation of salary by a common maximum) and "obedience" (willingness to undertake any service imposed by its own corporate authority), as well as in its enforcement of discipline only by the penalties of reprimand and expulsion, the Communist Party of the USSR may be thought to resemble in structure the typical religious order of the Roman Catholic or the Greek Orthodox Church. But unlike the monastic orders, the Communist Party employs its members exclusively in the secular occupations of citizenship; more than half of them continuing their work at the bench or in the mine, and some 40 per cent filling the administrative or other offices to which they get elected or appointed. There is, however, a spiritual difference. It is an absolute condition of membership that the candidates must be free from any vestige of belief in supernaturalism, and that they must continue to adhere to

* Chapter VI in Part I, "The Vocation of Leadership".

"Marxism", as from time to time authoritatively determined.* Since the offering of guidance in public affairs by political leaders is an inevitable feature of civilised society, we may classify the Communist Party of the USSR as a professional association voluntarily qualifying itself specially for the exercise of this function, analogous to any other organised scientific profession.† For in the Soviet Union it is claimed that political science takes the place of the electioneering ballyhoo called politics in our western states.

Such an assumption of leadership and guidance in public affairs by a carefully selected, deliberately organised and strictly disciplined vocation plainly constitutes a fundamental difference between the USSR and every other community. Elsewhere this function of leadership and guidance is assumed, often without avowal, by monarchs, aristocracies, churches, military castes or, more recently, by the shifting juntas or groups, termed cabinets or parliaments, composed mostly of landowners, capitalist employers, financiers, merchants, bureaucrats, lawyers or mere accumulators of wealth, with more or less pretence of ascertaining and understanding the desires of the people at large, but to the habitual exclusion of more than a handful of the small peasants and manual working wage-earners who make up two-thirds of the population.

We need not here attempt to measure the success or to estimate the value of this exceptional Vocation of Leadership, which may well be deemed the dominant political feature of Soviet Communism. The student of the past couple of decades of the USSR will not go far wrong if he ascribes to

* Moreover, the Communist Party in the USSR is unlike the religious order in not being subject to any chief imposed upon it from without, and being democratically governed by its own membership, dispersed in some 130,000 Primary Party organs, which elect a pyramid of tiers of committees, rising up to an All-Union Conference, with its central committee and sub-committees; Stalin, whom foreigners are apt to think of as a dictator, being merely the principal secretary to the organisation, a post from which he could at any moment be dismissed by the highest committee.

† It is interesting to recall that essentially such a Vocation of Leadership, termed the Order of the Samurai, was suggested by Mr. H. G. Wells in 1905 in his book entitled *A Modern Utopia*.

the outstanding members of the Communist Party the initiative and the decision issuing in nearly all the achievements, as well as some of the shortcomings, of the administration since the Revolution of 1917. Nor do we undervalue the passionate zeal and devotion of the far-flung membership when we suggest that it is the peculiar form of organisation of this Vocation of Leadership, which seems to have been devised and principally worked out by Lenin and Stalin themselves, that is responsible for much of the amazing degree of success against immense difficulties which in *Soviet Communism* we have had to recount. Nevertheless, as we have described in *Soviet Communism*, this concentration of authority in a highly disciplined Vocation has had its drawbacks ; there has been an atmosphere of fear among the intelligentsia, a succession, within the Party, of accusations and counter-accusations, a denial to dissentient leaders of freedom of combination for the promotion of their views, and among the less intelligent of the rank and file, no small amount of the chronic disease of orthodoxy.

VII

THE CULT OF SCIENCE

ONE of the differences between the soviet civilisation and that of other countries is the way in which science is regarded. Unlike the groups of landed proprietors, lawyers, merchants, bureaucrats, soldiers and journalists in command of most other states, the administrators in the Moscow Kremlin genuinely believe in their professed faith. And their professed faith is in science. No vested interests hinder them from basing their decisions and their policy upon the best science they can obtain. Moreover, under the guidance of the Communist Party, public opinion in the Soviet Union has come, to an extent unparalleled elsewhere, to be overwhelmingly in favour of making the utmost use of science as manifested in labour-saving and wealth-producing machines and invention.

The whole community is eager for new knowledge. There is no country, we imagine, in which so large and so varied an amount of scientific research is being carried on at the public expense, alike in the realm of abstract theory and in that of technology. There is certainly none in which there is so little chance of that frustration of science by the profit-making instinct of which the British and American scientists are now complaining.

This intense preoccupation, and even obsession, with science in the USSR has steadily increased during the past six years of the successive Five-Year Plans—significantly enough, just at the time when even the United States has shut down much of its scientific activity. Nor is this contrast surprising. In the USSR the dominant purpose of everyone who takes part in public affairs is concentrated on increasing the aggregate wealth production, as the first condition of raising the cultural level of all the 170 millions of people. The instrument by which this universal levelling-up can be effected is, as is widely believed, science itself. As we have described in *Soviet Communism*,* science is more and more dominating the schooling and the college training, and more and more enrolling in its service the most energetic and capable of the young. The continuous application of science to agriculture as well as to manufacture; to the discovery and utilisation of new substances, plants or animals, as well as to the improvement of those already known; to the development without limit of electric power and its use, not only in the various forms of communication and transport, but also in altogether novel transformations of the processes of mining and metallurgy, opens up a bright vista of what may amount to a new “Industrial Revolution” in which, if only a parallel development in sociology and ethics enables it to avoid the mistakes of the previous centuries, the population of the USSR may give a practical example of what was meant by the old stipulation “unless you be born again”.

* Chapter XI in Part II, “Science the Salvation of Mankind”.

VIII

“ANTI-GODISM”

THE feature in Soviet Communism that has most scandalised the western world is undoubtedly the widespread “anti-godism” which is common to the Soviet Government and a large and apparently a steadily increasing proportion of the whole population. An aggressively dogmatic atheism denies the existence, and the possibility of the existence, of anything supernatural behind or beyond what science can apprehend or demonstrate. This sweeping denial has, it is claimed, the merit of a public and persistent repudiation of the equivocal hypocrisy in which the governments and churches of other countries, together with hosts of merely conventional Christians, are to-day implicated. That is, for the remaking of man, no small matter. It is not with impunity that nations or individuals, outgrowing any genuine faith in a personal deity who hears their prayers and governs alike the ocean and the earthquake, the harvest and the hearts of men, can continue to practise rites and accept religious institutions as if they were still believers. No code of conduct professedly based on the supposed commands of an all-powerful ruler will outlast the discovery that it has, in fact, no such foundation. One result of this widely spread equivocation is seen in the practical abandonment at the present time by millions of young persons in Europe and America, not only of Christianity, but also, along with it, of nearly all the commandments by which their parents were guided, without acquiring any substitute. Another result is the actual retrogression, in principles and in acts, of this or that nominally Christian country, if not of many of them, to the characteristics not of civilisation but of barbarism—the blood-lust and sadism accompanying the worship of a tribal god—out of which they seemed to have emerged centuries ago. All this is noticeably increasing the number of those who think that there is something to be said for the paradoxical claim of Soviet Communism that it is, in morals as well as in economics and political science, actually leading the world.

The spokesmen of Soviet Communism defend their attitude towards religion also on other grounds. They are engaged in the colossal task of raising to a higher level of civilisation, not only the workers in the cities, but also the huge mass of barbarian and even savage peoples of the backward regions of the USSR—the entirely unlettered races of the Arctic Circle or the Central Asian mountains, the nomadic tribes, the scattered hunters and fishers of northern and eastern Siberia, and with all these, the slow-moving and stubborn peasantry of the remote “ deaf villages ” of the great plain. So strongly does primitive man cling to the superstition and magic derived from his barbarous ancestry that there is still a great deal to be done in the USSR to eradicate from the minds of these backward peoples such of their traditional and proverbial beliefs and practices as obstruct the adoption of scientific methods of production, and hinder the extension of hygienic measures for the prevention and cure of disease. The Vocation of Leadership in the USSR feels therefore justified in advising, and the People’s Commissars in commanding, the exclusion from the schools and the newspapers of any approval of supernaturalism, and in substituting for it the complete inculcation of science in all the relations of life, together with the encouragement of and assistance to the research from which advances in science are to be expected. And all this applies, as we have elsewhere suggested, not only to the study of physical and biological facts, but also to the scientific study of social institutions and to that of the important part of the universe which we term human behaviour.

IX

THE NEW COMMUNIST CONSCIENCE

BUT science, whether in the discovery of truth about the universe or in the dismissal of untruth, is not, by itself, enough for the salvation of mankind. If scientific knowledge is to be brought to the service of humanity, there must be added a

purpose in man's effort involving a conception of right and wrong to be embodied in the Good Life. We need not repeat our description* of the purpose, or our analysis of the code of conduct, emerging, as a new conscience, from the actual experience of life under Soviet Communism. The feature in this new morality which stands out in sharpest contrast with the morality of capitalist societies is the recognition of a universal individual indebtedness. No human being reaches manhood without having incurred a considerable personal debt to the community in which he has been born and bred for the expense of his nurture and training. That debt he is held bound to repay by actual personal service by hand or by brain. Moreover, he is required throughout his able-bodied life to employ in the service of the community the faculties which he has derived from it. Any person who neglects or refuses to pay this debt by contributing, according to his ability, to satisfying the needs of the present or future generations, is held to be a thief, and will be dealt with as such. He will, to begin with, be faced everywhere and at all times with the manifest disapproval of his mates. If his idleness or slackness continues, or if his example proves contagious, or if it is accompanied by negligence causing breakage of machinery or wastage of material, he may have to be isolated for appropriate remedial treatment. But in mental no less than in physical diseases prevention is better than cure. The encouragement of good habits is deemed even more effective in producing virtuous conduct than the discouragement of bad ones. Hence what the governing classes of the West consider an almost recklessly extravagant development of educational work in the Soviet Union from the crèche to the scientific research institute. Hence the adoption of schemes of remuneration according to social value, and constant promotion from grade to grade. Hence, too, the incitement to extra effort in the shock brigades, constantly intensified by socialist competition, and the manifestations of public honour, public ridicule and public disgrace ; along with the helpful patronage of the weak or untrained by the strong and skilful.

* In *Soviet Communism*.

All this deliberate creation of virtuous behaviour is combined with a continuous application of the principles of measurement and publicity which are thus used to foster the habits of the Good Life.

The insistence on the liquidation of individual indebtedness, as the basis of virtue, is balanced by an equal insistence on the fulfilment of its corporate obligation as a social institution by every group or organisation. Whether a village soviet or the All-Union Congress, whether a factory committee or an industrial trust, whether a village cooperative society or the great Centrosoyus, whether the smallest collective farm or the office directing the entire foreign trade of the USSR, the group of individuals concerned is always made conscious of the necessity of fulfilling the obligations to the community for which, rather than for the purpose of enforcing its own rights, the corporate entity has been called into existence. It is interesting to find, among these corporate obligations of every social institution in the USSR, not only the fulfilment to the utmost of its particular technical purpose but also the adoption and maintenance of universal principles of Soviet Communism. We need only name the widest practicable participation of all the citizens in every service, and in all corporate functions; the development of multiformity of structure according to circumstances instead of clinging to a rigidly prescribed uniformity; and the whole-hearted acceptance of the rule of universalism, irrespective of sex or race, affluence or official position.

It is these outstanding features of the emergent morality of Soviet Communism that seem to us to mark it off from that of all other civilisations. In particular, it is just these features that enable communist morality to embrace more than the exaction of the performance of duty. Within its sphere is also the positive provision not only of universal opportunity for the enjoyment of life but also of equal provision of leisure for individual disposal. It is an essential part of the Good Life in the USSR that every person should actually have the opportunity of working at the job that he finds within his capacity and chooses as that which he likes best. Labour, the

Bolsheviks declare, is to cease to be merely continuous drudgery of an inferior class or race, and is to be made a matter of honour and a joy for every member of the community. It was for this even more than for exacting the performance of duty that Lenin based the Good Life on social equality in the midst of plenty. If this idea seems fantastically utopian, that little fact itself marks the gap between the two civilisations.

X

A NEW WAY OF LIVING

THE foregoing summaries of the principal features of Soviet Communism demonstrate at least its contrast with western civilisation. But do these separate characteristics constitute a synthesis which can properly be considered a new way of living, distinct from that pursued by other civilised societies? We suggest that they do.

The characteristics of Soviet Communism, which we have summarised one by one, exhibit, when we take them together, a distinct unity, itself in striking contrast with the disunity of western civilisation. The code of conduct based on service to the community in social equality, and on the maximum development of health and capacity in every individual, is in harmony with the exclusion of exploitation and the profit-making motive, and with the deliberate planning of production for community consumption; whilst both are in full accord with that universal participation in a multiform administration which characterises the soviet system. The economic and the political organisations, and with them the ethical code, are alike staked on a whole-hearted reliance on the beneficial effect of making known to every citizen all that is known of the facts of the universe, including human nature itself; that is to say, on science as interpreted dialectically, to the exclusion of any miraculous supernaturalism or mystical faith in the persistence of personal life after death. The Worship of God is replaced by the Service of Man.

We may note in passing that the synthetic unity of the new civilisation of the USSR, whether or not it can be said to be in any degree due to geographical or racial factors, is at least in harmony with them. The vast monotonous and apparently boundless steppe, sparsely peopled and only patchily brought under cultivation, with its prolonged winter cold and darkness, certainly influences its various inhabitants towards a common unity ; to this or that form of collectivism ; to mutual help in voluntary cooperation ; to incessant discussion in village meetings and to the acceptance of centralised guidance from a Vocation of Leadership.

XI

DISINTEGRATING CAPITALISM

THIS synthetic unity of the various features of Soviet Communism is clearly very different from the warring "contradictions" that continually disillusion contemporary western civilisation. Why the striking increase in the productivity of labour arising from the application of modern science in industry and agriculture should have led, in all capitalist countries, to the paradoxical result of destitution continuing in the midst of plenty ; why inventions should be simultaneously encouraged and not applied ; why science should be at one and the same time promoted and frustrated ; why the capitalist-producing organisation should close factories, shut down mines, stop building operations and habitually destroy the undue abundance of its harvests, whilst millions of people go under-fed, under-clothed and under-housed, and are yet refused employment at wages, and so cannot make their demand for commodities "effective" ; all these contradictions immanent in the latter developments of capitalism insult reason and yet seem to defy reform. These contradictions are perceived by those who are unaffected by communist propaganda. It is no less a person than the Chief

Medical Officer of the British Government who has just told the nation that "*Unemployment, under-nourishment and preventable malady and accident seem to be the unavoidable concomitants of current civilisation in Western Europe of the present day*".* It is an American technologist who declares that "A new machine which can lighten the human burden is not a thing of evil, but a blessing to mankind. An idea which increases efficiency in an office or factory—enables one person to do the work of two without greater effort—is not in itself harmful to society. *It is the utilisation of these machines without regard to human needs that has led us into our present ghastly predicament*".†

Nor is this the only form taken by the contradictions. The capitalist employer or trader or financier usually supports the church and even attends its services ; but his common sense and business experience forbid any attempt on his part to square his profit-making, which competition makes ruthless and even nationally destructive, with the denunciations of the prophets and the exhortations to mercy and compassion, and brotherly love toward all men, to which he piously listens on Sundays, and to which the statesmen whom he supports continue to pay what is, necessarily, in many, perhaps even a majority of them, an insincere homage. "Compromise is as impossible", to quote the words of Professor Tawney, "between the Church of Christ and the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and the state idolatry of the Roman Empire. . . . It is that whole system of appetites and values, with its deification of the life of snatching to hoard, and hoarding to snatch, which now, in the hour of its triumph, while the plaudits of the crowd still ring in the ears of the gladiators, and the laurels are still unfaded on their brows, seems sometimes to leave a taste as of ashes on the

* Annual Report for 1933 of the Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health and Board of Education, entitled *On the State of the Public Health*, by Sir George Newman, K.C.B. (Stationery Office, 1934), p. 254. See also *Public Ill-Health*, by C. E. McNally (1935).

† "The Problem of Technological Unemployment in the United States", by Irving H. Flamm, in *International Labour Review* (March 1935), p. 347.

lips of a civilisation which has brought to the conquest of its material environment resources unknown to earlier ages, but which has not yet learned to master itself.”* Moreover, the autocratic position attained by the owners of the means of production, whether employers or landlords or financiers, with the growing inequalities of wealth and enjoyment, becomes daily less compatible with the exigencies of parliamentary democracy, just as both parliamentary democracy and Christianity are severally discovered to be incompatible with the imperialism manifesting itself in the exploitation of subject races to which capitalism is increasingly driven; whilst statesmen, capitalists and clergy are alike becoming aware that their countries are drifting, as it seems owing to the very disunity characterising their common civilisation, helplessly towards another world war. “The growth of civilisation hitherto known to history”, it has been said by an acute student of both the past and the present,† “has . . . always followed a curve. The vigour and constructiveness cause what seems to us an upward movement in human society until a point is reached at which no further movement in that direction is possible unless the small civilised minority are prepared to share both the material products and the psychology of civilisation with the mass below them. No civilised minority has yet been found willing to make the necessary sacrifices, and the result has always been a struggle in the heart of civilisation and society; the upward movement immediately stops; the gates are once more opened to the barbarians; the curve descends and civilisation fades and dies. . . . *We are living through one of these periods of struggle and decivilisation.*”

Let us end this rapid summary of the contradictions inherent in the civilisation of western Europe by the less pessimistic prediction of an American thinker regarding the coming revolution in his own country.‡ “It would be pleasant to be

* *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, by R. H. Tawney (1926), pp. 286-287.

† *Quack Quack!* by Leonard Woolf (1935), pp. 165-166.

‡ *The Coming American Revolution*, by George Soule (1934), p. 303.

able to predict that those who accede to power will be at once wise, efficient and resolute, that the old ruling classes will gracefully bow to the inevitable, that neither violence nor civil war will follow, that a system of socialised planning will smoothly come into being, which almost at once will realise all the beneficent possibilities of a technical civilisation. If all this does occur so painlessly, it will be the first time in history that a social revolution has been completed with neatness and dispatch. What is much more likely is that there will be a prolonged period of turmoil and uncertainty, the moderates will ingloriously fail, and there will be fighting, swings to the left and reaction. It will be a period of terrible discomfort, of mingled heroism and meanness, of the clumsy effort of human beings slowly to adjust themselves to the new conditions of life. Eventually the outcome will be the final disappearance of government by private profit-makers over the means of production, a chance for social management to learn its task by experience. This will not be Utopia. The perfect society has never yet resulted from a revolution. The process will simply be the adjustment of mankind to a new phase, made necessary by its own evolution. The new society will consist of men and women in a new bond of comradeship setting forth on still another voyage to the unknown."

XII

WILL SOVIET COMMUNISM ENDURE?

FOR the first four or five years of the soviet revolution, during the period of civil war and famine, all the governments of the world assumed that the Bolshevik rule would pass away, and be superseded either by the return of tsardom or by one or more parliamentary republics. Even seven years ago, after the formal recognition of the Soviet Union by many of the governments of the world, the predominant opinion of those who

thought they knew about Russia was that Soviet Communism would presently be liquidated. It was held that the Five-Year Plan would be a hideous failure, that the great dams and power stations, like the gigantic new factories, were destined to stand as silent and motionless on the steppe as the pyramids of the Egyptian deserts ; that the debts contracted abroad for production goods would never be paid ; and that the foreign specialists would troop away as their salaries ceased. To-day not even the most embittered enemy denies that Soviet industry is a going and even a steadily increasing concern ; or that more and more factories and power stations, schools and technical institutes, new cities and cultivated areas, are being opened up on both sides of the Urals, all the way from the Baltic to the Pacific. It is admitted that roads and canals and new lines of railway are extending in all directions from the Arctic Circle to the Central Asian mountains and the Black Sea, whilst civil aviation is already as prominent in Siberia as in Western Europe. About the complete success of collectivised and mechanised agriculture there may be, in certain quarters, still some doubt. But the experience of the last three harvests seems to justify the claim of the Soviet Government that the initial difficulties of this gigantic transformation have been overcome. There is, indeed, little reason to doubt that the aggregate output of foodstuffs, and of such specialised crops as cotton, tea, flax and sugar-beet, is being increased at a great rate. Already every soviet citizen may have as much food as he can pay for—for the Russian a great thing—and that he can also pay for much else than food is demonstrated both by the total absence of involuntary unemployment and by the rapidly increasing sales of popular luxuries. Even the bankers of London and New York are impressed by soviet debts being for the first time paid in native gold, whilst purchases are increasingly made for cash on delivery rather than on onerous credit terms. Besides these pacific activities, the very enemies of Soviet Communism warn us that, notwithstanding its supposed inefficiency, it has somehow built up a well-armed, highly disciplined and extensively mechanised Red Army a million strong ; and,

above all, the largest bombing air force in the world. The change in governmental opinion about the USSR is shown by the successive arrivals in Moscow of the foreign minister of state after state, bent on concluding pacts of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union ; and by its admission, on a practically unanimous invitation, into the League of Nations. What would happen to any government in Europe or Asia in the event of a great war no one can foresee. The Bolshevik Government evinces an insistent eagerness to ensure world peace ; and this might rashly be taken as sign of weakness. On the other hand, it is becoming evident that the rulers of huge territories, possessed of great air fleets, such as the USSR and the U.S.A., stand at an advantage in conflict with smaller and more densely populated countries such as Japan and Great Britain, Germany and Poland, and other European states. In short, the survival-value of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, whether in peace or in war, is to-day estimated at least as highly as that of any other of the Great Powers.

XIII

WILL IT SPREAD ?

AT this point we hear an interested reader asking " Will it spread ? " Will this new civilisation, with its abandonment of the incentive of profit-making, its extinction of unemployment, its planned production for community consumption, and the consequent liquidation of the landlord and the capitalist, spread to other countries ? Our own reply is : " Yes, it will." But how, when, where, with what modifications, and whether through violent revolution or by peaceful penetration, or even by conscious imitation, are questions we cannot answer.

★ THE LEFT REVIEW

is a most attractive monthly magazine, under the general editorship of Edgell Rickword. It is particularly strong on the literary side. The Topic of the Month is now contributed by C. Day Lewis; and it has an important Book Review section, Poetry and Literary Criticism being covered by Stephen Spender. Other contributors include Hamilton Fyfe, Storm Jameson, Ralph Bates, James Hanley, Herbert Read, John Strachey, W. H. Auden, Ralph Fox, Pearl Binder, James Barke, Douglas Garman.

A People's Front in Britain

is the subject of a series of leading articles now appearing.

Each issue contains 64 pages, and is illustrated by cartoons and drawings. Price **6d.** monthly.

USE THE ORDER FORM OVERLEAF

POST THIS ORDER NOW

Either to your
BOOKSELLER
or
NEWSAGENT

Messrs

Or to The Publisher
THE LEFT REVIEW
2 Parton Street, London, W.C.1

Please send me :

1. **THE LEFT REVIEW** regularly for 12 months, price 6d. monthly. (Postal subscription, 7/6 per annum.)
2. **SOVIET COMMUNISM :** *Dictatorship or Democracy?* by Mr. & Mrs. WEBB. 3d. (by post 4d.).
3. **IT'S UP TO US!** 6d. (by post 7d.).
4. **We're not going to do NOTHING,** by C. DAY LEWIS. 6d. (by post 7d.).

Cross out whatever not required

I encloses.d.

Name

Address

Date.....

"What are you going to do about it?"

asks **ALDOUS HUXLEY**

C. DAY LEWIS

replies :

"Pacifism is not enough..."

in a pamphlet just published by *The Left Review*

"We are not going to do NOTHING"

Price 6d. (by post 7d.)

**"it's up
to us"**

D. N. PRITT, K.C., M.P.

writes :

"This new publication, a well-balanced combination of pictures and writing—direct, stimulating, challenging—will reach and convince thousands who are not yet thinking as actively about politics as the dangers of the times demand that they should."

HAMILTON FYFE
writes in Reynolds's:

"If there has ever been a more forcible effort of Peace propaganda, Socialist propaganda, common-sense propaganda than this pamphlet it has not come my way. . . . It contains magnificent material for argument and exposition. As 'Speaker's Notes' it should be very useful. Its entertainment value is high."

(6d.)

★ Ask your local newsagent
or bookseller to obtain them
for you.

Order Your Pamphlets Now!

Published by

THE LEFT REVIEW

2 PARTON STREET, LONDON, W.C.1

COMPLEMENT TO THIS PAMPHLET

**SOVIET
COMMUNISM:
DICTATORSHIP
or
DEMOCRACY?**

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

32 pages

3^{d.}

PUBLISHED BY LEFT REVIEW