

“Our Leaders, They Know; They Read Pamphlets and Books”

MARK GRAUBARD

A BEAUTIFUL sunbathed seashore resort is on many an occasion engulfed by a sudden avalanche of a thick brown, penetrating, oppressive fog that transforms its world and blackens its spirit. It may linger on or pass away within hours, but the now, the current, is so dominant in man's life that the fog's ugly presence can be oppressive while it lasts. A similar transition is what a tourist experienced on a larger scale in the 1930's on arriving in Soviet Russia, no matter where he came from. The shock was rendered more virulent by the fact that the tourists, unlike the inhabitants of seaside resorts, came to that country as pilgrims, with visions of heaven in their heads and miniature emotional volcanoes in their hearts.

It took no more than a few minutes for a visitor to Russia in those years to realize that he was suddenly submerged in a strange, bewildering human society. One sees the differences in people's faces, in their clothes, in the empty or semi-empty bags they always tote, in the looks they give any foreigner, rich or poor, be he from Madras, Abu Dhabi, New York, or Paris. And what one saw in those years was not only depressing but debilitating.

A capitalist traveler to the USSR paid in advance for the entire tour, received a package of meal tickets valid only at the specified hotel he was to stay in, and was charged exorbitantly. Since the vast majority of the tourists were sympathetic to the land of socialist dawn they were happy to pay in the knowledge that the money does not go for profits but for dams, tractors, and schools, all worthy causes.

I myself was neither a pilgrim nor a neutral, having been raised in a socialist family. Our group was composed of teachers, students, scientists, physicians and a few laymen, most of them highly sympathetic to the socialist exper-

iment and sneakily indifferent to its human cost. The famous adage, “You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs,” suited them well and was frequently iterated in the heated long discussions held aboard the Soviet ship that carried us from London to Leningrad via the Scandinavian capitals. It was summertime and the sun malingered sassily in the northwest before sinking out of sight along a short unseen arc, thus stretching the twilight into dilated hours, much as relativity does to time at high velocities. The talk frequently stretched into dawn, the ardent and invariably erudite and articulate pilgrims parrying cleverly all doubts, synthesizing all contradictions, quenching the cynics, and invigorating the committed.

After some impatient halts at Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki, the group finally docked at Leningrad. Every pilgrim was on deck hanging all atremble over the ship's rail, right arm raised in the ritualistic fist, singing the *Internationale*. This was done in honor of the fifty or so Soviet laborers plainly seen scattered over the wharf, sweeping, fixing cobblestones, cleaning the few battered benches, or doing odd jobs here and there. What no doubt shocked every chanting tourist was the look of derision and amusement we received from these saluted but bewildered workers.

Our group was huddled into a shack on the wharf from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. A charming guide, Catherine, who met us at the pier, was doing everything possible to alleviate all discomfort and stem the growing rebellion. The bus that was to take us to the hotel would be here any moment, she kept assuring us, and continued to make phone calls. By 9 p.m. all patience and our guide's unquestioned charm and eloquence had run their course, and the

group being told the hotel was only two miles away, set out to walk it. On the way we saw about fifty old women swinging pickaxes with Amazon skill, tearing up tracks and loading them onto trucks. What added to the strangeness of the scene was the large number of extremely bright electric torches and double that number of soldiers carrying guns topped by ominous bayonets about eighteen inches long. Two members of the group actually mustered enough courage to ask the guide the meaning of this scenario. Our guide, who was never at a loss for clever and specious answers, was as prepared as ever. "You see, in the Soviet Union we do not retire workers just because they reach a certain age, say seventy or seventy-two. If they are still strong then, our people demand that they continue their labor for socialist construction rather than live like parasites at home and suffer unbearable boredom. On the other hand, if at the age of sixty or sixty-five they are weak and incapable of continuing the hard work they had been doing, they are given easier jobs, such as street sweeping, or are even retired altogether at full salaries." A few of the enthusiasts shook their heads in warm approbation. Others seemed less happy about it; but then, it is literally impossible to please everyone in a crowd. "Why the soldiers with these scary bayonets?" "There is much theft in the country and all public property belongs to the people and as such must be protected." Stealing worn-out streetcar tracks is not common under decadent capitalism, but things must certainly be different under socialism.

By ten thirty we were seated in the lobby of our hotel and given beef, for sandwiches we were told, bread, cookies and hot tea. Just before midnight we were finally ensconced in our assigned rooms. A few clamored for plumbers to fix their rebellious toilet bowls and, wonder of wonders, two mechanics armed with wrenches and screwdrivers actually did show up quickly enough by Soviet standards. Knowing Russian, I watched them at work and engaged them in modest conversation and finally was told that if we ever came again during the Second Five Year Plan, they could assure us that everything would function properly. At present, people had better share the few toilets

that were functioning and enjoy a good rest.

We pursued the usual course neatly carved out for Soviet visitors. Misery and poverty are so ubiquitous, they never need be visited. We were therefore taken to museums and whatever structures of the old regime that had escaped devastation. As is commonly known, the Hermitage of Leningrad is extremely rich in works of art, much of which is packed away in cellars. Some of these derive from government, or public collections, others through confiscation of privately owned art, wherever found. The new "Socialist realism" could be seen everywhere with a few classical works interspersed among them. Considering the art level of most American tourists, the Soviet guides were doing a thriving business in spreading loose talk on art and fashions with utter abandon and Marxist certainty. In addition to such "realism" and visages of Stalin, we were also shown steel factories where we saw the most modest women in the world, the Russian, standing half naked and stoking open caverns of enormous fiery monsters, a disturbing sight. Speaking of women at hard labor, we saw a few days later, thousands upon thousands of peasant women (where were the men?) building the Dnieprostroy dam near Pietropetrovsk. There too we saw a soul-crushing sight, small enough in itself but leaving behind an unforgettable horror. Every now and then a woman removed herself a step or two from her normal place of work, took her pick or shovel to lean on, and without crouching, spread her legs to the smallest extent and urinated. Without so much as turning her head or looking around, she promptly returned to her labors. Besides, she was under the unrelenting stare of a soldier shouldering the ubiquitous bayoneted gun. The women, I learned without benefit of the guide, were peasant deportees caught in the collectivization drive.

My visits of 1932 and 1936 are interlaced in my mind because the differences in what met the eye and reached one's ears from people's mouths during those two episodes were not significant. Those were years of the onset of collectivization, of more than the usual shortages of goods and most basic necessities, of regional hungers, of tyranny and bitterness.

In 1932, the many largely abandoned villages and their unimaginable misery made the stronger impression, while in 1936, the intensified political terror was added to it. The incidents recorded in what follows transpired in 1936 on a trainride from Rostov-on-Don to Kharkov, to Kiev, a long dusty journey.

II

IT WAS the return journey of our group. Not only had all its early enthusiasm vanished, but dreary cynicism took its place, emerging in silly, repetitious, thorny comments where common sense did not even justify it. Perhaps it might be best to say that a sickly, spiky apathy prevailed. Many of our group sat like unpolished statues in their seats, napped, read, or just stared; even the few who knew a little Russian and at first had practiced it right and left to the delight of their neighbors, even they were now as mute as clams, fossilized clams at that. And they surely had reasons for feeling sick at heart and morose in spirit by virtue of the facts of life as they appeared during those fateful last few weeks.

That day began at the railroad station when our guide finally had us seated in the special lounge car, since no foreign visitor, be he skeptic or fanatical Stalin worshiper, would dare enter any ordinary car occupied by Russians. Only a Russian who had been through the mill of communism for seventeen years by then could endure the packing, the odors, the irritations, the anger. The lounge car had assigned seats in one half of the car, a pair of seats on either side of an aisle, with benches and tables at the other end where a strange-tasting warm beer was served.

I was assigned an aisle seat next to one of the handsomest intellectual Russian types I ever encountered. He was of medium height, had most refined features, a dark goatee beard, friendly understanding eyes, and wore a suit that he had obviously bought abroad, not expensive but well-tailored. He introduced himself to me at once in polite and perfect English and we promptly fell into a most absorbing conversation on a variety of topics which made the hours pass with incredible speed.

His name was Nikolai Feodorovitch Golas-

tov. He was the son of a Czarist official in the Caucasus and an ex-member of the lower nobility. Born in 1890, he became a radical early in life, at the age of fourteen, during the Russo-Japanese War and had remained a revolutionary ever since. He was a prominent leader of the student body of the University of Moscow when it went out on strike in 1912 and never returned to classes till after the Revolution. He later studied agronomy at some agricultural college, served in World War I for a while, and during the Kerensky regime was assistant Secretary of Agriculture. In May 1917, a month after the U.S. entered the war on the side of the Allies, he was sent to Washington to obtain grain for Russia which President Wilson had promised the new Socialist-Liberal government. He was then a Menshevik and had proved a capable diplomat so that he managed to obtain much food from the U.S., all of which was shipped to Vladivostock. He admitted that there was no question that had Russia stayed in the war it would have naturally been on the winning side and evolve into a great, advancing capitalist democracy. But of what good would that be to anyone if it remained capitalist? Better a struggling society that builds socialism and aims at liberating man from the shackles of poverty, ignorance, hate, greed and all other evils capitalism imposes upon him, and prove thereby the possibility of a "new man," than all the afflictions and few boons of capitalist society with its oppression of the human spirit and personality.

Because this was his confirmed faith he had to do what he did. No sooner did Lenin come to power in November 1917, than he switched his allegiance to the Bolsheviks and is now happy to serve so great a leader as Joseph Stalin. He was in America when the Revolution broke out and could easily have remained there, as many of his colleagues did. But his conscience and his faith in communism could not possibly allow him to harbor such an idea for a minute. He returned home at once and remained a servant of the state within the Department of Agriculture ever since, and at the moment held the job of Assistant Commissar of Agriculture. He was chairman of the Committee on Collectivization and grew enthusiastic as he ex-

plained to me how rich, how beautiful, how efficient collectivized Russian agriculture will be in a few years, and how it will put to shame private land operations even in Canada, the United States, and Australia.

Having met before devout believers like him, men of deep and ardent faith, his impassioned language in no way astonished me or elicited in me any skeptical revulsion. I knew there were such people just as I knew there were Einsteins and idiots and drunks and Casanovas in God's chaotic world. Also, I shared the liberal faith at the time which was the prevailing creed of the vast majority of intellectuals and labor leaders in America, England, France and the entire democratic world, which looked with hope toward socialism and showed vast tolerance to the excesses of any of its militant sects. That same faith caused my sentiments to be confluent to a high degree with his noble vistas and half believe them. It was only because he spoke with such high-tension piety, cockiness and harshest contempt for anyone questioning the slightest item of his faith, that I would interject a semi-quizzical question here and there and seek to dilute the claimed evils of American capitalism or the marshaled brutalities of British imperialism. History had been my favorite subject since childhood and though imbued with minorititis by tradition, meaning hostility to "them," the majority, the oppressors, the rich, the exploiters etc., I tended by nature toward a congenial sense of fairness in distributing human sin and cruelty evenhandedly rather than along the dictates of the "progressive" philosophy of the "Me Virtue—Thou Sinner" formula, which remains to this day the basic credo of liberalism and radicalism. He took all my objections or hesitations quite seriously, and answered them all with wonderful speciousness and logic, seldom showing signs of irritation, perhaps because he had been abroad a good deal and had much experience with agnostics, or fools, or innocents, like me.

We discussed conditions in America for some time. Nikolai Feodorovitch proved thoroughly familiar with the works of Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and of course Jack Lon-

don, Erskine Caldwell, and above all Upton Sinclair, whom he regarded as quite a genius. Like most Europeans and North Americans he was horrified by public segregation in the South, by the failure of the country to raise the cultural level of the Negro, and was saddened by the total absence of a Negro intelligentsia as a base for revolutionary activity, which absence he ascribed, like most liberals, to forceful prohibition or exclusion of any cultural activity among the Negro people. Again we were in full agreement on all points. He also mentioned trusts as a menace to prosperity, which assertion I questioned because I prefer to buy in big department stores where one can return goods and exchange them freely, rather than in small stores where the customer is treated with miserly politeness, and goods cannot be returned or exchanged. He finally agreed that trusts may be a mixed blessing since, come the revolution, they will be easily nationalized and thus facilitate nationalization of all industry with little need for consolidation.

Our conversation was most pleasant and stimulating. He knew music, was expert in Russian literature, science, and ancient history into which he frequently injected the weirdest Marxist interpretations, which bothered me little enough so as never to contradict him. He was a truly intellectual person and had even published a volume of poetry in his student days, dealing with barricades, starvation, poverty, the villainy of the rich and the rest of the gospel which to this day constitute the daily recitations of revolutionary orators. In a word, within three hours or so there was established between us a spiritual rapport that could well match the bonds of friendship between Damon and Pythias or at least Castor and Pollux.

We were both tired and needed a rest when fortune came to our rescue. Our most amiable and attractive guide, Catherine, having completed arrangements for our packed lunches and hot tea with the proper train functionaries, passed by and exchanged a few words with my neighbor, the Commissar. Class distinctions in the Soviet Union are to this day as deeply rooted in the population as are castes in India, and as a rule go with far more concrete material and social privileges. Being fully aware of this,

and seeing Catherine's spirited expression and glowing eyes as she carried on the initial repartee with my friend, I quickly found an excuse for leaving my seat for ostensible purposes of my own. She gladly sat down, shared her lunch with the Commissar, and the two had an entertaining time for two hours or so. And I did in fact have my own reasons for changing my seat as well.

The conductor of the train was a woman of seemingly uncertain age around the upper thirties, who collected some tickets, punched others and even sold some. After every halt at any depot, large or small, she was quite busy. She was obviously a peasant girl whose features, like those of most Russians at that time, showed the welts and scars of the Revolution on every part of their facial anatomy. Her mouth hung slightly open, showing an amazingly healthy set of teeth, and her eyes looked hard and somewhat bewildered. And yet she had an earthy attractiveness despite her tattered skirt which barely covered her knees. Above the skirt her loose blouse clearly had been white some time ago. Withal, she had an interesting, sexy peasantish look, robust, tough but on occasion capable of meting out a skinny, skeptical smile which had a charm all its own. Like all Russians, she was intrigued by foreigners, especially Americans, and I had previously exchanged a few words in Russian with her. Wonder of wonders, in spite of her severe look, she had responded pleasantly. When Catherine began conversing with my seatmate, the lady conductor sat alone on a little bench at the very end of the car, looking dreamily out of the window. There was a toilet beyond the wall that held the bench but its condition was so awesome that even the Soviet passengers were seized with horror on opening the door to look in and quickly tried equivalent spots in other cars. Undaunted I walked over and occupied the seat next to her on the narrow wooden bench. She did not seem to mind, responded to my questions, and entered into conversation with apparent alacrity.

She stemmed from a Crimean village and had worked as a maid in Odessa in the home of some official. She became pregnant at seventeen by a member of the household who did

not marry her, and has been on her own since. She lived in a cave with old relatives who cared for her daughter whom she saw only a few times a month on her days off. Housing was so impossible to come by that all the caves in the region were occupied. She worked most of the time seven days a week but did get off a few days a month every now and then. Her salary was extremely low and because of the nature of her work she could seldom have the luxury of a cooked meal. Needless to say she got no assistance from the child's father. She had gone to school for three or four years as a very young girl and could read and write. After we were kidding around a bit with my paying her a few none too far-fetched compliments, she asked me how old I thought she was. Soviet women who are not wives of high officials, hence who go to work, and Soviet women must work because few working husbands can support a family, look as a rule between ten and twenty years older than their American counterparts. After looking at her with the air of a man of the world, I figured she looked thirty-eight and therefore said with an authoritative tone she was twenty-eight years old, feeling that I would please her no end. Well, my guess was not a bull's eye. She was twenty-five.

We got on very pleasantly until a friendly and jovial Chicago physician who, whenever possible, helped our guide Catherine with any technical assistance he could offer, and was very sweet on her in general, came around distributing our packed lunches. Packaging in the Soviet Union was still then in a crude stage of development, and usually consisted of a strip of paper the width of an inch for toting a herring out of a store or a fish home from the market. Our sandwiches were packed in just such a fashion so that a thick slab of meat was clearly seen between two pieces of white bread, a most luxurious package on both accounts.

My lady friend smiled as she scanned the sandwich and commented: "Yes, foreigners are treated well in this country because we need valuta to build socialism for our children's children." She had spoken out against the regime before, but always in half sentences, hints, allusions, never openly or firmly. Her cynical comment did not therefore surprise me.

I asked her whether she had had her lunch and she said grimly, "Yes, I had a piece of black bread and a carrot. Meat I have not eaten in about ten months." Without a second's thought I extended to her my sandwich, knowing full well that I could easily get another one from the group's supply because we had a few faddists with us who bought "real Russian food" from peasant vendors who shouted their wares as they walked rapidly past car after car at every station.

As I extended my hand to offer her the sandwich, her face of a sudden acquired a wild, almost animal expression by which she seemed to come with the same facility as her occasional most pleasant smile. Her eyes filled with tears, her usually open mouth shut tight and she looked enraged. She grabbed the sandwich and threw it out the window and would not look at me nor answer when I asked her why she had done it. Fortunately, the train just then pulled into a station. All stations seemed alike and the train would linger in small depots as well as in those of large cities for at least half an hour or more. She got up to attend to business and I stepped out to buy some food perhaps or just to look around. I do not particularly like cold boiled or roast beef sandwiches and so I had good reason for looking for some other food. There were however few appetizing things for sale.

A Russian station platform resembled in those years a madhouse with a touch of a concentration camp atmosphere. It was a field with a solid stand of human misery. Where were all these shabbily dressed, pain-worn, drab and dreary peasants, women, children and infants going? Wherever the train halted en route, its cars were already so packed that walking through them was an impossibility. But new passengers seemed to squeeze in despite the overcrowding. At each stop a few, very few people would get off, but invariably a mob would rush toward each car entrance with the power of a massive wave. And they all managed to get in somehow, mostly on the two platforms between cars and the high steps of the wide-gage Russian railroad cars. I dared leave my own seat because foreigners had special privileges and no Russian was admitted to the

car reserved for them and the few privileged officials.

Each railroad station had a low building for ticket sales, telegraph, military guard and offices. The outside was a paved platform for the train to halt at. The entire platform which stretched alongside the low building was covered with outstretched bodies of sleeping peasant families, many of them cooking, baking, sewing, delousing their clothes, or just squatting. Children were running all over the place, which was nice and lively, but the real terror were the *bezprizornies*, or homeless kids, genuine orphans, Stalin's own orphans created by the deportation of a few million peasant families, mostly from the Ukraine, whose youngsters, aged six to sixteen or so, were smart enough to escape the deportation nets. They constituted the wildest degradation of mankind ever attained. I was told by a Russian that the Tartar hordes, the conquerors of Kiev, whose leaders laid platforms over the living bodies of the Kievan ruling families and feasted on benches built into these platforms, were gentlemen by comparison. The same informant assured me that these youths were cowards as individuals so that when caught alone, could be beaten up by anyone, but they were never alone. In gangs they would, in midwinter, attack people on the street, strip them naked for their clothes and underwear; in summer no couple was safe in parks, nor anyone in dark streets, of which there were many. Their sheer cruelty was indescribable. And they swarmed all over every railroad station.

Because of them one would frequently see a peasant woman rush aimlessly along a platform wailing and screaming that her bundle had been stolen or snatched from her hand by these wild homeless beasts, her only good petticoat and blouse and her blanket, and how will she sleep while waiting a day or two for a ticket? One nice-looking woman who had erstwhile stalked proudly back and forth on the station awaiting someone, and seemed proud of a cheap fur coat despite the season, suddenly ran around like a wounded tigress. Two *bezprizornies* innocently engaged her in conversation while a third cut out the back of her fur coat with a fine blade and the three vanished with

the piece of fur before she realized what had happened.

For some unknown reason these young thugs did not molest foreigners so that I actually enjoyed taking a walk at each stop, inspecting the fruit and skimpy vegetables sold by the piece, good sunflower and melon seeds, slabs of boiled beef or chicken, and watched above all the lines for hot water, each station being provided with one or two boilers. It was as much fun as an Indian bazaar, except for the heartbreaking aspects. But the place was full of life and even an occasional burst of gaiety. While some babies cried, others were playful, some people kidded around and laughed uproariously, in a word, life went on in all its phases. I shopped some apples and a quarter of a chicken for about two dollars in Russian money, which portions women and girls carried in the open on small leaves to tempt potential customers.

My purchase did not turn out to be a success. I took a seat next to a pro-Stalin high school teacher from New Hampshire who was rather pleased, he told me, to see so much food sold by peasants, contrary to stories of hunger he had read about in the "capitalist press." To share his triumph I casually examined the chicken as I placed it between two slices of bread our guide had given me with a glass of hot tea. To my surprise the meat was crawling with thousands of larvae of houseflies, fruit flies, horseflies and other to me unknown species. The train being in motion, I wrapped the entire sandwich in toilet paper which the instructions from the Intourist office in New York had wisely counseled each one of us to take along, and threw it out the open window. I'm sure it was made good use of by some of God's creatures inhabiting the open fields. Our guide vacated my seat just then and asked me to retake it because she had to attend to some official on the train. The Commissar was glad to welcome me back although we had little occasion to continue our conversation because just as I sat down two Russians who sat at table in the lounge part of the car beckoned to me to join them, which I was pleased to do.

They were two typical Russian workers of the kind one sees in Soviet revolutionary

movies partaking in militant strikes or fighting on barricades. Husky of build with bony face structure carrying traces of hard labor since childhood, yet commonsensical and capable of laughter, they were dressed as laborers in conventional high collared shirts buttoned on the side, and circled by big-buckled wide belts. They introduced themselves, one, a miner, the other a pipe-layer. No, they were not old friends, they had met on the train and were drinking beer together because they are both plain workmen. Moreover they are both doomed men with only a few weeks of life ahead of them. How so? "First have a beer on me," said the taller of the two, the miner, "and then I'll explain. I'm sure you've heard a lot of charming fairy tales from that fine-looking bearded comrade over there," meaning my neighbor the Commissar, "so you might as well hear a true life story from us." The other injected here: "Two true life stories, dear brother, why should we lie? We don't have to sell socialism and Five Year Plans. We have both been working since the age of twelve and both served in the army. We have no need to lie." The first worker then resumed: "I am a coal miner and come from the same town as the great hero of labor, the world-famous Stakhanov.* But let me tell you that man will not dare walk out of his house alone at night because he'll be killed as sure as my name is Vladimir Mikhailovitch. He works like a horse and is a horse and on account of him they raised our norms and many of us just can't keep up. So you can imagine how the older men feel. The GPU watchdogs never let him out of sight, and I assure you I wouldn't want to be in his boots."

It seems that he himself was a pretty good miner, steady and reliable, which turned out to be the cause of his tragic plight. There was a mine somewhere up north which messed up its Five Year Plan assignment something awful. It was so bad that the Comrade Director was shot and he, Vladimir Mikhailovitch, was selected to take his place. He left his family behind though they offered to transport them free and give them a home at the new location, probably the dead man's home. "But, I said, 'No, thank you,' because it is no secret, how long do you think I will last there before . . ." here he

indicated a cut across his throat. "I won't last more than a few months at the most because it is clear to me that the mine can't yield what the planners want from it."

The other man was more reserved, more morose. He too was being sent as foreman to a gang laying oil pipes in the Urals where a number of managers and workers had either been liquidated or exiled to Siberia. They met in this lounge car quite by accident because both traveled on special tickets in this special car and both said they kissed their mourning families goodbye. They were sure I had been told a cock-and-bull story about socialism and government of peasants and workers and they felt like letting me know just a piece of truth because so many foreigners are fooled, or do not speak Russian.

Just then there broke out some commotion at the rear platform between the cars. Russians from the second car behind ours gathered there, and there issued much agitated talk. We had previously seen my bare-legged ladyfriend conductor running past us to the first car back and forth several times until finally she was followed by two uniformed KGB men who stalked calmly behind her showing not a trace of emotion. Nobody in our car stirred from his seat since its occupants were either tourists or officials. My two friends looked at the two uniformed men and advised me to stay put and leave well enough alone, and continued sipping their beer, urging me to do the same. My Commissar friend also kept his seat and continued to read a large volume of agricultural papers full of data.

But the crowd on the platform grew, as did the talk and excitement. Finally the Commissar got up and approached the crowd at the door. I excused myself to my drinking mates, who refused to budge, and followed him. I soon found out what the fuss was about because, while new people kept coming, others were leaving, thus making room for curious newcomers. Here was the situation.

An old peasant sat on the steps of our car and held on to the iron railing with his two large craggy, gnarled hands. He had a face never to be forgotten. His skin was leathery and weather-beaten though covered with a short gray but

sparse beard. His deep-set blue eyes were tearing, his nose was bony and long, his lips were muttering and mumbling, but now and then spoke up. He had come onto the steps at the previous station and had no ticket. The woman-conductor had already asked him where he was going and the onlookers kept asking him the same question when I arrived. "I don't know", he said, "I am going to the city. They say there is bread there. There is none in my village, besides I have no more village. My three sons and their families were deported together with the others. My cows are gone and my mare too." He began to cry and sob out loud. "Her beautiful foal, her dear, dear *zherebyonok* (foal) turned around to suckle and the KGB man kicked him in the rear and he fell dead. Oh glorious mother of God, why didn't he kill me, a useless old man, why did he have to kill such a dear creature of a foal from my dearest mare that I raised since she was a foal?" He could not stop sobbing and talking. "They came and took away our corn, then forced us to collectivize. Nobody wanted to give up their cows, horses, wagons, and they packed the people on wagons, took them to trains and away they went. Three sons, their families—gone. I was left alone, useless like a sick old nag, with no bread. But they say there is bread in the cities and there is where I'm going. You can take a big knife, a sickle, hone it and hone it and cut off both hands and throw my body in the ditch, but I will not budge on my own. The village is dead."

Surprisingly the crowd seemed sympathetic to the old man. The woman conductor simply turned from one side to another in the packed group repeating, "He has no ticket," and no one said a word. The two uniformed KGB giants were also as silent as the large pistols in their holsters. Suddenly my friend the Commissar stepped forward and bent down to the peasant in a friendly manner. "Comrade peasant. We are building a new society and have many enemies who do not want to lose their estates, their wealth, their factories, their power. They hate to see the poor, the workers, the peasants take over the land and the factories. Each one of us must stay at his job and do his assigned task, like a sentry on duty, else

we will have chaos and will lose.” “I lost all, I have nothing else to lose,” sobbed the peasant loud and clear. “We will lose our chance to build socialism,” began the Commissar. “I spit on your socialism and your killing my foal,” sobbed the peasant. “I want my farm, my sons, my village, my church. I don’t want your socialism.” “But comrade, we are all like soldiers, each must hold his post like a sentry and work our utmost, especially in these critical times.”

“Like a sentry,” moaned the peasant. “I served the Czar, I did my sentry duty. Let me see your hands. Let me see your hands.” The Commissar straightened up, bewildered, as if stung. He looked around first, then extended two delicate graceful hands to the peasant’s view. “Here are my hands,” said the peasant, showing his scrubby, leathery paws. He did not let go the railing but showed his hands with one arm around it. “These hands have pushed a plow for sixty-seven years, since I was six years old, laid stones and bricks, chopped wood, built barns, milked cows, curried horses and spread manure. And you want me to build socialism. I spit on your socialism, and you are all killers.” And here he used many other abusive terms that were too sophisticated for me to understand. The Commissar got angrier and angrier and apparently felt that he owed it to the crowd to do something. He grabbed the peasant by the collar of his ragged coat and began shaking him violently. Finally he gave him a kick in the ribs that made the old man scream with pain. Here the crowd objected; the two KGB men remained as mute as before. The Commissar turned around and quickly returned to his seat. Not having anything else to do and not seeing my two workers at their table, I too returned to my seat at his side.

The Commissar felt he owed me an explanation. “We would have a socialist society right now if it were not that we have to deal with such hopeless human cattle. I am chairman of the Five Year Plan for grain in the Ukraine.” He held up the government publication he had been reading and said, “Our figures as shown

here are sound and if the plan were carried out its success could never be doubted and the peasant would now be prosperous and happy. But what can you do when you face a stone wall of superstition, obstinacy and blindness? Only force and determination as shown by our great leader, Comrade Stalin, can win out. We must be ruthless, exterminate the kulak as a class, or we shall return to the misery and tyranny of the past. Sentiment and pleas are useless.” I let silence linger awhile because the entire situation was too painful for words. Finally I said, “But do you realize that that human cattle is about seventy per cent of the Russian population and that no hand of God or voice of nature appointed you the manager or shepherd of their cattle?” He too let silence speak. “I wonder,” I finally said, seeing that he looked far from happy, “whether you ever heard of another shepherd of men who lived on the stony hillocks of Judea and is frequently portrayed as carrying a lamb that is too weak to walk. He did not deport his sheep nor kick his cattle in the ribs.” We continued our journey in silence. At the next station he went to the forward car leaving his book on the Five Year Plan in Agriculture in his seat. I later saw him walk across the platform with the two KGB train guards. They lingered in the station office building some ten minutes or so and then emerged with a sergeant and three station guards in uniform. Soon thereafter I saw all of them march, with the peasant dragged or carried by two men holding him under each arm, into a black Ford that somehow showed up at the far end of the station. The Commissar returned to his seat and continued to read the report of his committee on the affluence in agriculture that would befall the Soviet Union in a few years.

*Alexei G. Stakhanov was publicly praised by Stalin, in 1935, for his more than doubling the officially prescribed daily quota of coal output per miner. He was declared a national hero, and daily norms were raised as a result not only in coal but in all industries. Wages were thereby depressed and much misery and grumbling ensued. A worker who emulated him was called a Stakhanovite, and duly rewarded by the authorities.

INDEX TO REVIEWS

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------|
| 300 | “ ‘Bustin’ Loose’ ”
John LeBoutillier, <i>Harvard Hates America: The Odyssey of a Born-Again American</i> | George A. Panichas |
| 305 | “Generalissimo”
William Manchester, <i>American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964</i> | Francis Russell |
| 308 | “G. K. C.”
Margaret Canovan, <i>G. K. Chesterton: Radical Populist</i> | Frederick D. Wilhelmsen |
| 310 | “In Search of Identity”
Theodore H. White, <i>In Search of History: A Personal Adventure</i> | Ralph de Toledano |
| 311 | “Medieval History and the Modern Imagination”
Barbara W. Tuchman, <i>A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century</i> | J. David Hoeveler, Jr. |
| 314 | “Prophets and Heretics”
Harry V. Jaffa, <i>How to Think About the American Revolution: A Bicentennial Cerebration</i> | George Anastaplo |
| 318 | “A Commemoration of James Gould Cozzens”
Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., <i>Just Representations: A James Gould Cozzens Reader</i> | Francis X. Duggan |
| 320 | “Flat European”
C. P. Snow, <i>The Realists: Eight Portraits (Stendhal, Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Galdos, Henry James, Proust)</i> | Ian Robinson |
| 322 | “Russian Notes in Review: A Notable Feast”
Harrison E. Salisbury, <i>Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions, 1905-1917</i> | Anthony Kerrigan |
| 325 | “The Berlin Problem”
James M. Gavin, <i>On to Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander, 1943-1946</i> | Thomas H. Etzold |
| 327 | “ ‘Vous Suffrirez’ ”
Alistair Horne, <i>A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962</i> | Samuel T. Francis |
| 329 | “Reflective Reminiscing”
Alfred Kazin, <i>New York Jew</i> | Milton Birnbaum |
| 331 | “Reforming Conservatism”
Craig Schiller, <i>The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative</i> | Norman R. Phillips |
| 333 | “Aesthetic Hooliganism”
John Smith, <i>The Arts Betrayed</i> | R. D. Stock |

“Bustin’ Loose”

GEORGE A. PANICHAS

Harvard Hates America: The Odyssey of a Born-Again American, by John LeBoutillier, *South Bend, Indiana: Gateway Editions, Ltd., 1978. 161 pp. \$7.95.*

“No, I could not recommend your society in its present state as an ideal for the transformation of ours.”

—*Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn*

JOHN LEBOUTILLIER'S BOOK, if small in size and length, is intense and angry in tone, and filled with significance. In its immediate contexts it is an indictment of Harvard University, where he studied for four years (1972-1976) and where he now continues his education at the Business School. Mr. LeBoutillier's remarks about the Harvard faculty, curriculum, and students are disquieting and should raise questions and doubts not only about educational conditions at Harvard but also about the educational situation on a national level. LeBoutillier is still a very young man, but he possesses a moral seriousness that many of his contemporaries and teachers lack. A discriminating, judging mind is much at work in this book, which is essentially a long essay. It is heartening to see how a student, who can respond to and be impelled by the intrinsic idea of value, scrutinizes educational problems, as well as related social and political issues. The diagnostic dimension of this book is especially pertinent since it forces one to confront matters of urgent importance that are often ignored or not

stressed. The plain fact is that LeBoutillier does not have pleasant things to say about his sense of the way things are going. Unlike the contemporary *Kulturträger* or the apostle of a new enlightenment, he does not make any grand promises. When so much that is mindless characterizes so much in American education, and culture, what LeBoutillier observes, in terms of consequences and concomitants, demands diligent attention. It is the central strength of this book, then, to remind us that mindlessness is now a representative quality of life; that we are unable any longer to locate a center of values; that, in the absence of a positive critical and cultural tradition, we seem more and more to be torn between anarchy and nihilism.

That educators and educational leaders themselves are much at fault for the decline of higher learning in America is one of LeBoutillier's implicit charges. Of course, this is hardly an original observation, and any number of eminent commentators can be cited for their prophetic delineation of educational desuetude in the twentieth century, including Irving Babbitt, Gordon Keith Chalmers, Lionel Trilling, Arthur Bestor, Russell Kirk. The fact remains that educational decline has been a steady one since 1918, accelerating with the end of World War II and becoming especially alarming since the 1960's, with the flagrant radicalization of the curriculum, the deterioration of standards, and the further exaggeration of the absolutes of liberty and equality in all sectors of life. What LeBoutillier does in the special contexts of his