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SOVIET COMMUNISM: A NEW CIVILIZATION?¹

The Webbs — the name by which the authors will ever be remembered — have produced, on the threshold of their ninth decade, an astonishing book. The volumes are a most helpful survey of a vast body of literature, the sifting of which has been done with a care that makes the process more than merely one of scissors and paste. While confessing to a bias, the authors strive conscientiously to achieve objectivity. The foundation of their favorable bias may be said to be their belief in the unlimited possibilities of changing the masses of mankind, a belief which makes their fine vision of the new society less remote and less spectral than would otherwise be the case. Loyalty to their vision, however, sometimes makes them strain to show existing social forms in Russia to be superior to capitalist institutions. This affects the broad contours; the sympathetic reader can easily make the necessary qualifications.

There are, however, defects of a different kind. The investigators are not skilled in the Russian language, nor could they be expected to be; and in spite of the care with which they have chosen their collaborators, the fact remains that the raw material in Russian has not been milled in the minds of the authors. This handicap has also inevitably affected that indefinable thing, the “background” which they acquired in Russia. It is because of this lacuna that scissors and paste are as discernible as they are; and here is to be found the reason for some questions being left, as the authors frankly confess, unanswered. There is still another source of weakness which prevents questions from being even raised. The technical economic equipment which the Webbs bring to their investigation is not adequate to their purposes. For the economist, at least, this defect is more serious; and those parts of the volumes which are most closely affected by it will be concentrated upon in this review.

1. By Sidney and Beatrice Webb. 2 vols., pp. xix and 1174. Longmans, Green & Co. 1935.

In describing the structure and functioning of the social body, the authors distinguish between the political machinery ("Man as a Citizen"), the organization of production ("Man as a Producer"), the organization of distribution ("Man as a Consumer"), and the Communist Party organ ("Man in the Vocation of Leadership"). These different facets of man's social activity are closely connected because of the nature of the Russian system. The nine hundred pages which the authors say that they devote to describing the political and social organization of this vast area contain much besides mere description: critical appraisal intermingles at every stage; and the last four chapters (pp. 944-1143), which deliberately profess to evaluate, differ only in degree from most of the preceding chapters.

On the political side, great emphasis is laid on the complexity of the organization with its vast hierarchy of councils. The complexity is due not only to the long series of bodies through which, in this indirect method of representation, the decisions of voters must be carried (nearly half a million villages elect members to the seventy thousand village soviets which constitute the base of the pyramid of electoral colleges), but also to the great number of more or less autonomous administrative units which constitute the U. S. S. R. Two features of the Federal Constitution that welds the diverse units together are stressed by the Webbs: the large measure of autonomy given to the members, which causes the authors to call it an "unnational" state; and the "democratic centralism," by which they mean the concentration of power in the Central Executive Committee (TSIK) of the All-Union Congress of Soviets. The local autonomy is reflected in the eighty different languages used in the schools, the centralism in the complete control of the federal authorities over foreign relations, the armed forces, transport, and the production and distribution of commodities. The Webbs see no inherent incompatibility between these two features, altho they do not maintain that the problem of the degree of local autonomy to be aimed at has been solved for ever. In fact they emphasize the growth of the constitution in the light of experience,

and cite, as evidence of a developing political order, the Molotov decree, issued since the Webbs began to describe the electoral system, which provides for direct instead of the existing indirect method of representation.

This same decree is referred to in support of their judgment that the U. S. S. R. is a democracy and not a dictatorship. They show that there are no well-defined legal powers given to the Communist Party in the constitution, yet they do not deny that *de facto* it is all-powerful. According to their interpretation the Party provides leadership, not only in the administrative bodies but in educating the people at large in all their political and economic activities by the example which it sets. They admit that "directives" from the Party inspire all political and economic decisions; that the three million Party members control the administration to an extent which "it would be hard to exaggerate" (p. 429). Yet the Webbs will not allow the Bolsheviki their own term "dictatorship," not even when Stalin himself interprets the dark phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" to mean dictation by the Communist Party. The argument that no personal dictatorship is invested in Stalin may be sound enough, but the authors surely go too far in refusing to allow that there is a dictatorship of the Party, even in this admittedly transitional period. They emphasize the freedom of discussion in arriving at decisions, but they confess (p. 42) that "counter-revolutionary" suggestions would not be tolerated, without attempting to show how much is embraced by this term.² They admit that unlimited power of veto is

2. In justice to an author who displayed a relatively early interest in Russia a difference of opinion between the Webbs and W. R. Batsell (*Soviet Rule in Russia*, 1929) should be noted. Extensive use is made of Mr. Batsell's book (and acknowledged, e.g., p. 462 note). But he is accused (p. 92 note) of an "obviously incorrect interpretation of the statute," which the Webbs accept as the Fundamental Law of the U. S. S. R., governing the right of secession by constituent parts of the Union. Mr. Batsell's point is that it is an empty right because the consent of other members of the federation is necessary (*Soviet Rule in Russia*, pp. 297-298). The only evidence given by the Webbs that Mr. Batsell is wrong is their change — by omission and by inserting extra words — in the translated text of the Fundamental Law adopted by TSIK in July, 1923 (which by a misprint has become 1932 in the

possessed by the higher over the lower administrative bodies throughout the hierarchy, and that it is seldom exercised because the inferior bodies err "by default rather than by excess of zeal" (p. 66); but they do not consider to what extent this fact makes the soviets merely educational forums or safety valves. They confess that criticism of policy is allowed only before a Party decision has been made and not afterwards; but they do not ask to what extent this inhibits healthy criticism of existing policy and hence the rapid changes in the light of experience of which the Russians boast. All of these doubts must be disposed of before it can be asserted that there is no dictatorship. It is unfortunate that the authors should gloss over such doubts in praising the new regime; by doing so they simply provide ammunition for critics who have a much more irrational bias against the U. S. S. R. than the Webbs show in its favor.

As the Webbs see it, the novelty in the industrial organization lies in the purpose rather than in the method. Their own description, however, proves this to be a doubtful generalization. In spite of superficial similarity there are important underlying differences in the working of institutions in the U. S. S. R. as compared with those of the western world. The authors themselves stress, for example, the difference between the trade unions and those in capitalist countries. It might be argued that the retention of the name gives rise to a misleading analogy with trade unions as we know them. Not only have the trade unions in Russia important functions, such as the provision of housing or the issue of theatre tickets, which really make them consumer organizations, but they are also an integral part of the machinery of government. Again, man as a consumer must for all practical purposes be a member of a coöperative society. The retention of the word "coöperative," however, introduces a false analogy with coöperation of the kind that has hitherto been given that name. The Webbs forget this when they explain the increase—first footnote to page 92). It is a pity that in such a case the Russian text was not cited. Evidence from such provisions as the right of the Central Authorities to appoint representatives on the local governing bodies supports Mr. Batsell against the Webbs.

ing inefficiency of the system for retailing commodities after 1929 by the unparalleled and unexpected increase in the membership of the Coöperatives. To say that the great increase in the membership increased the difficulties of organization is to misunderstand the situation. Whatever the legal fiction may be, membership in a Coöperative is absolutely compulsory in practice. When private enterprise in the retail trade was annihilated after 1929 the Coöperatives were made into a national system for distributing commodities. The difficulties that were encountered did not arise from an unexpected increase in membership; they are inherent in such a vast organization as was set up. Perhaps the difficulties are soluble, but it is well to understand their source.³ Looked at in this way it is a mistake to write of the "rivals" of the Coöperative in retail distribution (p. 327) in describing the distribution of commodities by "commercial shops" which the Commissariats of Supplies and of Internal Trade have opened in order to facilitate the flow of products from factory to consumer. These organizations are supplementary or even complementary to the Coöperatives: the old principle of the division of function is applied to retail trading, and specialized organizations, coördinate in function with the Coöperatives, are set up to do the enormously complicated job of distributing finished products among one hundred and seventy million people.

The examination in these volumes of the entire system of distribution and production suggests further questions. Imperfections in the selling organization are not overlooked by the Webbs: on the contrary they blame them rather than the shortage of supplies for the queues that have been such a feature of soviet life. This, however, is a hazardous generalization, for observers who have lived much more closely to the lives of the people than the Webbs can vouch for the

3. The authors admit that it is "almost necessary for every member of the family over fourteen years of age to be separately enrolled in order to be eligible to share in the distribution of the commodities from time to time in short supply" (p. 309). They do not, however, state that membership is absolutely necessary in order to buy any commodities at all.

great importance of short supplies. It would be a very difficult matter indeed to apportion the blame for queues between the productive and the distributive causes. Production and distribution have both been affected by the fiat or caprice of the State. The open question is how much the changes have been dictated by a blind adherence to dogma. It is certainly a dogmatic esteem for unskilled and skilled factory labor that leads to the contempt or disdain shown for shop assistants (p. 307). And time may show that it is a slavish adherence to the dogma which denounces speculation (defined as resale in order to make a profit) and exploitation (defined as any private employment of labor) as social evils, that has impeded progress in production and in the distributive services. The Webbs point with satisfaction to the wisdom shown in allowing certain personal services to be provided by private enterprise, not under the incentive of profit but of "price in the market" (pp. 721-722). But they do not ask whether the field of private enterprise could be expediently extended. Profit making they accept as the great evil, in its two forms of "speculation" and "exploitation"; it is the eradication of this which constitutes the new morality in the U. S. S. R. A moral judgment regarding profit making was frankly the basis of opposition to the New Economic Policy. It was felt that any resale or employment of others for personal gain undermined the new ideology, according to which no individual was to exercise power over another except within the framework of a political and economic constitution, and no individual was to live without working except by virtue of qualifications which might not be acquired by privilege. Whatever the rational basis of this new morality, the Webbs are right that it has had far-reaching economic effects. The ban on "speculation" has obstructed the improvement of marketing between the parochial peasants and the distant Coöperatives. The elimination of even the single-employee manufactory has obliterated a vast amount of spontaneous and useful organization which no amount of central planning is likely to replace. However sympathetic one may be to the ideals of the new society, observation of the U. S. S. R. over

the period of the Five Year Plans makes it doubtful whether the main ends — even in morals — could be achieved only through this ruthless annihilation of the old types of organization. There is no reason to believe that the moral effects of selling commodities by a middleman for gain are worse than those of being tempted to strive to become a foreman by the bait of one thousand roubles a month instead of the one hundred roubles earned by an unskilled worker. Middlemen with any considerable turnover need employees, and both “speculation” and “exploitation” could have been controlled if the State had arbitrarily limited (say to ten) the number of employees that a private business might employ, thus leaving a large field to private initiative without affecting the main objectives of socialized industry. And even the remaining private employers could have been put in a socialist straight-jacket with less cost in organization than the loss due to their elimination.

In the vexed question of agricultural reorganization the Webbs no longer make any pretense that the novelty lies in the purpose rather than in the method of organization. While the aim is to achieve the same kind of agricultural technique as that obtaining in capitalist countries, the method of organization — collective farms — is totally different. They regard the decision taken to reorganize agricultural production as of supreme importance, constituting in their view an agrarian revolution analogous in magnitude and in ruthlessness to the enclosure movement in Great Britain. No attempt is made to minimize the unpleasant side of the process, altho the reader detects a wry face behind the admission that “something very like compulsion” was exerted on the hesitating peasants to join the collective farms (p. 246). The liquidation of the Kulaki was simply a painful incident in the necessary process of improving the rudimentary agricultural technique in the face of obstacles rooted in the stubbornness, ignorance and vested interests of the tenants cultivating the nationalized land. Such famine as occurred during the reorganization (1931–33) they call a man-made famine (pp. 264–265, 282, note), thereby emphasizing the recalci-

trance and truculence of the peasants; tho they question the high estimates of the death roll that have come from some quarters. Unfortunately, as they readily confess, no reliable information has issued from an official or other source concerning either mortality from starvation or the process of ejecting peasants. Not even the relative numbers of the Kulaki and of the poor peasants who for one reason or another were not absorbed by the collective farms are known. No consecutive account has been written of the voluntary or compulsory migration that inevitably accompanied the upheaval in agriculture. The authors believe that even if more information were available no computation could be made of the sum of human suffering involved, any more than in the case of other great historical transformations (p. 596). They wisely refrain from arguing that two wrongs make a right and content themselves with the judgment that "future generations will estimate the worthwhileness of national conquests or internal revolutions, not so much by the temporary misery that they inevitably create, but largely according to the relative social value . . . of the new order in comparison with the old" (p. 601). The weakness in this view is its fatalism. The present generation *must* reflect upon the means to achieve the indefinitely remote end. Sometimes the Webbs realize this, as when they stress the way in which the fear of war is a force driving the U. S. S. R. to increase its self-sufficiency. In general it is a weakness in their social philosophy that they neglect the costs of change. If the Webbs were to look at capitalism from this standpoint of "future generations" what would the verdict be? Impatience with the slowness of development in the capitalist system and intolerance of the objective and subjective costs involved play a great part in the revolt against it; the socialist state cannot consistently be treated with greater patience or tolerance than the capitalist.

The narrower problem which admittedly lies within the scope of economics, that of the measurement of changes in the national dividend—for which agricultural production is so important in Russia—is not seriously considered in these

volumes. Probably it would not have been possible for the Webbs to achieve much if they had dealt with it. They do not grasp the importance of a unit of account for this purpose. On the one hand they assert that the rouble "has now, it is claimed, attained a new status of its own superior to that of the dollar and the pound" (p. 118); on the other hand they point to the defects in the "valuation in money that the statisticians of other countries usually content themselves [with] in their measurement of aggregate production and consumption" (p. 1077). In what respect the rouble is superior is not made clear. As a yardstick it is very much inferior to the unit of account in capitalist countries, because to inequalities of money incomes and other difficulties is added authoritative control over the distribution of commodities which makes the rouble something quite different in the hands of different individuals with identical money incomes. The system of "closed coöperatives," whereby individuals in a certain factory buy in a special shop commodities that are available exclusively to them, destroys the universality of the purchasing power of the rouble. This is only one striking manifestation of the consequences of a system where prices and therefore the distribution of commodities are not determined in a free market. Much is made of the fact that the trade unions no longer struggle for high wages because they now realize (after ten years experience) that a big total product is the important thing; but the Webbs do not see that an analogous fight for shares of the national dividend may occur through the agency of the seven sections of *Centrosoyus*, each of which "specializes on a particular set of workers, as to whom it is deemed of particular importance that their supplies should be without interruption maintained at a high level" (p. 315). Perhaps the consequences are no greater than those resulting from differences in the strength of trade unions in England: there is no presumption that they are less.

It is not possible to give a trustworthy account of the actual increase in the national dividend by simply enumerating specific increases in one or another physical product. Still

less is it possible by this procedure to draw inferences regarding the relative industrial efficiency of the U. S. S. R. and of other countries. A given proportionate increase in agricultural or industrial efficiency means something altogether different in a country like Russia where the base line was so low, from what it does in a country like England. The technique of statistical analysis must be used in problems as intricate as those of measuring economic changes. A critical scrutiny of the bare figures is necessary at every stage in order to avoid gross misrepresentation.

A few examples will illustrate the point. It is true that the great increase in the number of doctors in the U. S. S. R. in the last decade points *ceteris paribus* to an addition to economic welfare, but the significance of it compared with a standstill or a decline in other countries depends upon the base line, upon the relative earnings of doctors, and upon the rates of growth in other directions, all of which are not considered by the Webbs (p. 837). Again, the significance of the increase of "benefits in respect of permanent disability" (p. 877) from 204 million roubles in 1927-28 to 480 million in 1932 depends upon the changes in money wages and prices and in the system of rationing that occurred during the period.⁴ Finally the statement that a new city was built at Magnitogorsk during 1926-30 calls for a great deal of reflection before it can be used to answer the query: a new civilization? I visited this mushroom growth on the edge of the Siberian plain in 1932. It is an astounding combination of the work of man and of nature, with its high-grade iron mountains rising out of the barren steppe; its artificial lake constructed by damming a small stream, flanked by huge blast furnaces; and most of all with its motley assortment of dwellings and human beings, constituting an indescribable poverty and squalor. Most of the "houses" were squatters' shacks or hovels made largely from turf and earth dug on the site. A few blocks of flats were finished or under construction.

4. Cf. page 349, note, where salaries of members of the Communist Party are admitted to have doubled because of the "rise in both wages and prices."

The actual and potential output of iron were a great achievement; the seething mass of humanity even in its relatively favorable summer conditions was a depressing spectacle. This spectacle is not an indictment of the U. S. S. R.; it is an inevitable accompaniment of feverishly rapid industrial development. Comparison with similar developments in England in the nineteenth century is instructive. The industrial towns which were then built so rapidly by capitalist employers were and remain offensive — yet not so by comparison with Magnitogorsk. A century ago their relative merit was incomparably greater. In England the towns were built too solidly: in Magnitogorsk the planning of a future ideal city can proceed without obstacle from the existing structures. Does the greater freedom in Russia result from conscious design? An affirmative answer is difficult in the face of the impression of groping left by the amorphous mass that the Webbs dignify by the name of a new city.

On the question of differences in remuneration — and on the whole problem of the distribution of the Russian national dividend — the volumes are thin. This may not be the fault of the authors because it is doubtful how much accurate information is yet available.⁵ Reliance upon casual inquiry into relatively few cases is unavoidable. The Webbs, however, seem to strive to minimize the importance of such differences in earnings as they find. Members of the Communist Party are paid in accordance with the principle that their “income should not be substantially greater than that of a skilled and zealous manual worker” (p. 349). The maximum is 600 roubles a month, with exceptions reaching 900 roubles — the exceptions affecting “only a tiny proportion of the Party members.” They do not ask how many “manual workers” earn 600 roubles a month. Nor do they ask how the proportion of all workers earning over 600 roubles a month compares with the proportion earning say £1,000 a

5. In 1932 I found it impossible to get any satisfactory information about wages and salaries, and changes in them, over the preceding three years from the Institute of Statistics in Moscow; and I was told that no wage indexes existed.

year in England. In 1929 I found that unskilled labor was paid from 60 to 90 roubles a month. In 1932 the average seemed to be near 100 roubles according to a few figures provided by the Institute of Statistics in Moscow. Members of the Party were then certainly getting as much as 800 a month as compared with 250 in 1929; and Russian skilled mechanics, working with their hands, could earn 1,200 roubles a month. The discovery had been made that it was necessary to pay for work according to "social value" (pp. 687 and 713), the new name for relative scarcity. It would be fair to say that the range of incomes in the U. S. S. R. is as 10:1. Most of the problems subsumed under the phrase "inequality of opportunity" are included within the same range of incomes in a country like England.

The difficulty in making use of a fact of this kind, however, is that money incomes do not mean the same in England and in the U. S. S. R. The Webbs do not consider this point at all. In fact they make a crude use of figures for the distribution of income in capitalist countries which distorts the comparison with the U. S. S. R. They maintain that in Great Britain or any other capitalist country the wage earners who comprise two-thirds of the population get no more than one-third of the national income; and that "at least one-half in exchange value — it might even be said three-fourths — of all commodities and services brought to the market are designed for sale to a minority of the community, less than one-fourth of the whole" (p. 691 and note). It is incomprehensible that such statements — neglecting as they do the deduction from income *received* of the amounts for taxation and for additions to capital, and all consideration of the definition of a wage earner — should be made in the light of the work done on the distribution of income in England by Professor Bowley, Sir Josiah Stamp and Mr. Colin Clark. If the same range of incomes in England as in the U. S. S. R. were considered to be "justifiable" (abstracting from the problem of unearned income) this would mean a maximum of about £1,000 per annum. Income receivers up to this amount include 98.4 per cent of the total number and receive

77 per cent of the total income.⁶ From the 23 per cent or £836 millions received by the upper 309,000, deductions must be made of £192 millions for income tax,⁷ and a considerable amount for local rates and savings. The total of these deductions would probably not be far short of £300 millions. In addition there are contributions to charity. The remainder may still be repulsive despite its lessened magnitude; but it is essential that the facts should be kept in mind. It is confusing to inveigh against the distributive conditions of the capitalist system when the real argument against it is the dogma that "speculation" and "exploitation" are wrong.

Of all the new trends in the U. S. S. R. the Webbs consider that the planning of production and distribution is the most significant (p. 602). They do not make the mistake of exaggerating the centralization, the length of range, or the perfection of the planning. On the contrary they realize that within the Five Year Plan the planning was only for one year ahead, that the "plan" emerged from simultaneous decisions made all over the country, and that continual revision in the light of experience was taking place. They do not indeed say that the process is one of trial and error within a flimsy framework of predetermined plan, analogous to the trial and error of the capitalist system; but probably the analogy would not be denied by them. Theoretical arguments for and against planning as a substitute for the system of private enterprise the authors discount heavily (pp. 648-649). They rest their case on the appeal to experience which shows in their view that the effects of planning, far from being calamitous, are substantial and beneficial because it is possible to point to great increases in the rate of output in numerous industries and to the development of the social services on a large scale. Against such statements as "Practically all observers seem to agree that even compared with pre-war

6. Cf. A. C. Pigou and Colin Clark, *The Economic Position of Great Britain* (Royal Economic Society, Memorandum No. 60, 1936), p. 42, Table XIX.

7. Cf. *Taxation under Capitalism: a report of a committee of the New Fabian Research Bureau under the chairmanship of Barbara Wootton*, p. 19, note.

Russia the position of the great masses has deteriorated”⁸ this kind of rejoinder is effective. But the main charge against central planning in the socialist state, if the purpose is to guide the productive resources into the directions where they yield the greatest return, is that no substitute can be provided for the pricing system in a free market. The authors “decline to be intimidated by the confident assumption that there can be no useful substitute . . . for the passionless arbitrament of a ‘free market’” (p. 649). Unfortunately it is at this point that the weakness of their technical economic tools shows itself: they may or may not understand the substance of the criticism; they certainly give no effective answer to it.

The Webbs make a valid criticism when they say that many economists who urge the relative merits of free enterprise assume a degree of competition greater than exists; but economists do at least try to show the workings of a system which contains monopolistic and imperfectly competitive elements. In any case the criticism is beside the main point. The main charge against the socialist state must be regarded as a challenge calling for the construction of a body of theory to explain the working of the economic mechanism there, similar to the equilibrium analysis that economists have constructed to explain the working of the system of free enterprise. This the Webbs do not attempt to do. They describe the organizations which do the price-fixing and the rationing; they emphasize the importance of universal cost accounting in a system where the “profit motive” is absent; but they give no account at all of the process by which the price structure is determined. This is not surprising, for as far as I know no one in Russia has begun to reconstruct the rationale of the price-fixing activities. The Webbs comment significantly on the absence of research in social science (p. 989). Until Russian economists begin to think and write systematically about planning from the price-fixing aspect it will be difficult for western economists to express themselves intelligently

8. F. A. von Hayek, “The Present State of the Debate,” in *Collective Economic Planning*, 1935, p. 205.

about the new system. In the "reciprocal ignoring of each other's studies and the reciprocal contempt for each other's arguments" by economists in Russia and other countries of which the Webbs complain (p. 675, note), the Russian economists may be said to be the more culpable because western economists have not been provided with a body of theory to attack. Quite apart from the language difficulty — which is not so very great for young people — the economist has not found it easy in the past to visit Russia, and in the present state of economic theory among Russian economists has found it still less easy to play any part in explaining the workings of the economic mechanism.⁹ Yet this is the task which must be done if those who take a scientific interest in the U. S. S. R. are ever to decide whether the system has anything in the nature of an economic mechanism or whether economically it is fumbling chaos.

9. Perhaps I may be allowed to say something about my own visits to the U. S. S. R., in so far as they bear on this question of intercourse with the west. In 1929 I found it easy to go independently to Russia, to live my own life in Moscow and to travel about. It was possible to talk to economists attached to Vesenha (Supreme Economic Council) and to other bodies who understood the kind of problem that an economist is interested in. They took the view quite frankly that the existing price structure had to be taken over and built upon by a process of trial and error, but they had not begun to think about the criteria which ultimately would be the guiding ones. I could find no theoretical literature to help me, but only descriptive studies of the various trusts and administrative organs. Soon after 1929 the economists to whom I had talked disappeared from the scene. When I returned to Russia in 1932 it was in quite different conditions. It was easier tho not absolutely necessary to go under the wing of Intourist. Every facility was given to me (and to my companions) to talk with Commissars and with leading members of administrative and academic bodies. My interest was centered on this problem of pricing and I put my questions *ad nauseam*. I did not meet a single person who understood what I was driving at nor did I find any literature dealing with the subject. I became convinced that the kind of study of the Russian system that professional economists can usefully make would have to await the building up of a tradition of scholarship in which foreigners may share. Any useful participation by foreigners is dependent upon the possibility of visiting Russia with the same ease and freedom, and of living there in the same conditions conducive to scholarship, as prevail in other countries. Until this is possible the complaint that "western economists" are not actively interested in Russia is not legitimate.

Even in this long review it is difficult to do justice to a book that covers so much ground; and it is still more difficult to give a final judgment of it. For all except the very well informed on Russia there is a great deal to be learned from it. The level of the descriptive matter remains high throughout. For a work of its size it is remarkably free from misprints.¹ The indexing — there are three indexes, which is a nuisance — leaves something to be desired; and a glossary of the abbreviated names of the multifarious bodies (which are not included in the index) would have been useful. Yet on the whole the volumes are easy to use. The authors modestly anticipate the question whether the job was worth doing. For them the answer is given by their manifest enjoyment in doing it. For most readers I believe that the same answer will be given by their own enjoyment in reading the volumes. The authors playfully call it a work of supererogation: such it is if that theological term may be interpreted to mean that the Webbs have atoned, by their excess of kindness toward the greatest experiment ever made in social organization, for the indifference and ignorant condemnation which for two decades have characterized the attitude of so many economists and politicians. Yet the hope may be expressed that this will be the last book on Russia of its kind. The time has come when more expert and more detailed studies of the Russian economic structure should be made. To this end the Webbs have labored nobly and effectively in stimulating the interest of western economists. It is now for the Russians to play their part.

REDVERS OPIE

MAGDALEN COLLEGE
Oxford

1. "*Praviletstvo*" (p. 240) is a misprint for "*pravitelstvo*." The reference to Lenin's Works (p. 443, note) does not fit my Russian edition altho references elsewhere do; the edition used is not always specified.