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*A Short View of  
Russia*

JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES



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# A SHORT VIEW OF RUSSIA

JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES



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## PREFACE

THESE chapters are the fruit of a brief visit to Russia in September 1925 by one ignorant of the language and of the country, but not without experience of the people, and in the company of an interpreter. The occasion was found in the bicentenary celebrations of the Academy of Sciences, once the Imperial Academy of Petersburg, now of Leningrad, at which I represented the University of Cambridge.

They are not based on intimate knowledge or close experience, and claim no authority as such. They are merely the impressions, for what they are worth, of an observer, whose prejudices were not specially calculated to distort his sight, endeavouring to convey, as best he can, how Russia struck him.

I use not infrequently in what follows the epithet *religious* as applicable to the disciples of Lenin. Judging from letters which I received when these chapters were appearing in the *Nation*, I believe that Englishmen will see what I mean; but in Russia there will be few, I gather, who will approve or understand this use of language. To the Bolsheviks themselves the word will sound as stupid and offensive, mere vulgar abuse—as though I were to call the Archbishop of Canterbury a bolshevist (which, however, he may indeed deserve, if he seriously pursues the Gospel precepts); for they claim to be just the opposite. Religion, mysticism, idealism—it is part of the Leninist's creed that all such matters are trumpery and trash, whereas they themselves are materialists, realists, of the earth earthy. Have they not,

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but the other day, ordained that in the libraries of the proletarian clubs "the section on religion must contain solely anti-religious literature"?

There may be good reasons out of the past why religion should have a nasty taste in Russian mouths. There may be a consistent and intelligible use of language by which High Church mystics are alone religious and those who try to find a better path on earth are irreligious, by which the cries of dancing dervishes are religious and the Sermon on the Mount irreligious, by which Rasputin was religious and Tolstoy irreligious. Let me, therefore, explain in advance that, when I say that Leninism may be inspired with religious fervour, I do not suggest that the Commissars are High Church mystics, dancing dervishes, or Rasputins in mufti.

To English readers these explanations are probably not needed. For here we have long recognised that there are two branches of religion—high and low, mystical sleep-walkers and practical idealists. There are two distinct sublimations of materialistic egotism—one in which the ego is merged in the nameless mystic union, another in which it is merged in the pursuit of an ideal life for the whole community of men. The participants of the first may neglect or ignore the second; many followers of the second condemn what seems to them the idle indulgence or self-deceptions of the first. It has been the peculiarity of some great religious leaders that they have belonged to both classes at once. At any rate, when I speak of religion I include both, and not the former only.

Some instances from our latter-day celebrities may illustrate my explanation. Certain of the politicians of France, M. Poincaré, for example, followed hard by some of the politicians of the United States, seem to me to be amongst the most irreligious men now in the world; Trotsky, Mr Bernard Shaw, and Mr Baldwin, each in his

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way, amongst the most religious. I do not forget that Trotsky has written :

"To accept the Workers' Revolution in the name of a high ideal means not only to reject it, but to slander it. All the social illusions which mankind has raved about in religion, poetry, morals, or philosophy, served only the purpose of deceiving and blinding the oppressed. The Socialist Revolution tears the cover off 'illusions,' off 'elevating,' as well as off humiliating deceptions, and washes off in blood reality's make-up. The Revolution is strong to the extent to which it is realistic, rational, strategic, and mathematical. Can it be that the Revolution, the same one which is now before us, the first since the earth began, needs the seasoning of romantic outbursts, as a cat ragout needs hare sauce ?"

For he has also looked forward to "a society which will have thrown off the pinching and stultifying worry about one's daily bread . . . in which the liberated egotism of man—a mighty force!—will be directed wholly towards the understanding, the transformation, and the betterment of the Universe." Trotsky himself does not confuse the means with the end :

"The Revolution itself is not yet the Kingdom of Freedom. On the contrary, it is developing the features of 'necessity' to the greatest degree. . . . Revolutionary literature cannot but be imbued with a spirit of social hatred, which is a creative historic factor in the epoch of proletarian dictatorship. But under Socialism solidarity will be the basis of society. Literature and Art will be tuned to a different key. All the emotions which we revolutionaries, at the present time, feel apprehensive of naming—so much have they been worn thin by hypocrites and vulgarians—such as disinterested friendship, love for one's neighbour, sympathy, will be the mighty ringing chords of Socialist poetry."

One has a feeling that such sentiments would not come with equal sincerity or seriousness or emotional force

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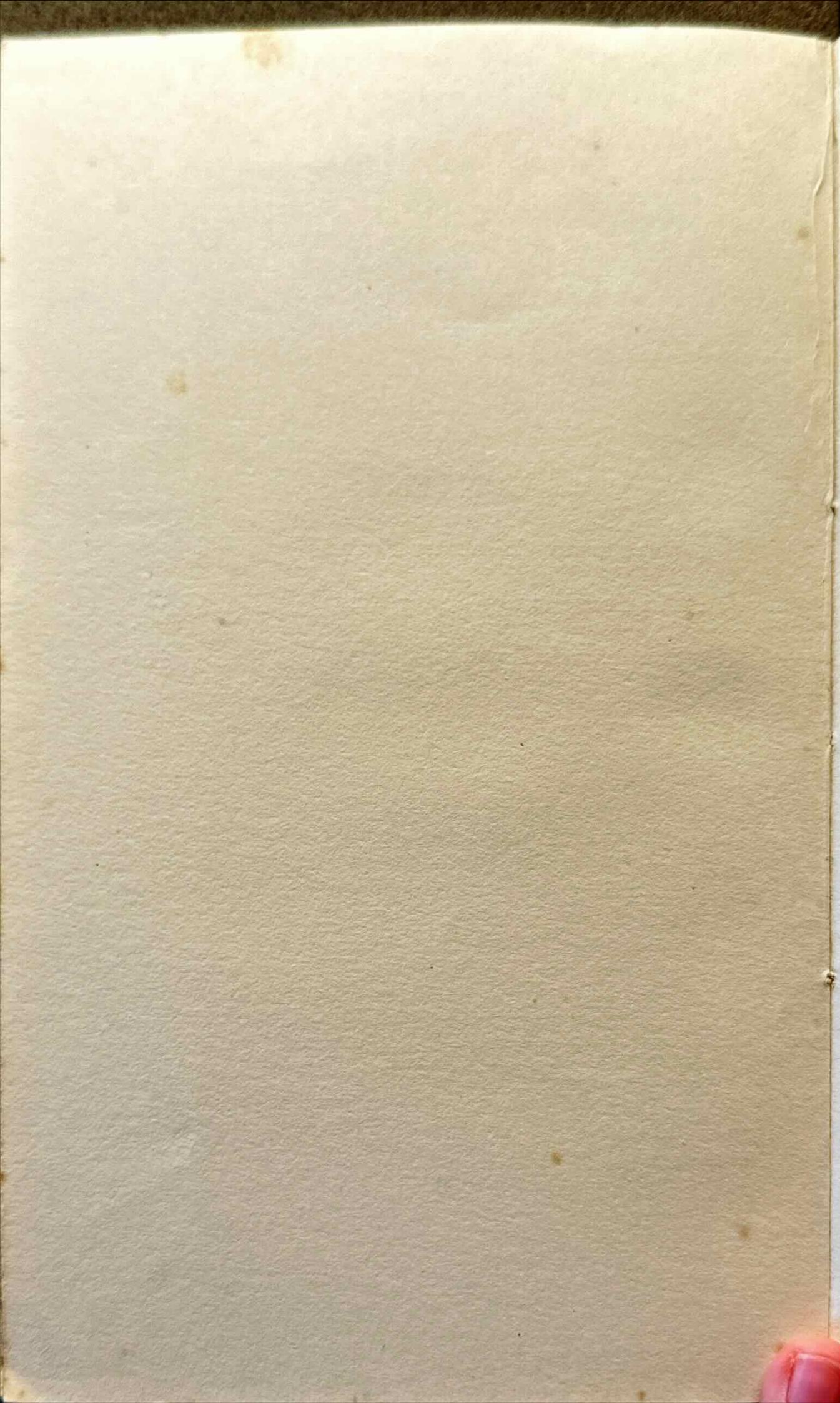
from the lips, for example, of Signor Mussolini or of President Calvin Coolidge. The Duce may be a rake susceptible of being reformed, and the President a respectable person whose salvation is out of the question. What are they really ? I cannot certainly say ;—these matters, which are often palpable at close quarters, are hard to distinguish at a distance. Before I went to Russia I was in similar doubts about the Communists. What I thought I learnt on the spot and could not have learnt elsewhere, is a partial answer.

J. M. KEYNES.

*November 1925.*

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# A SHORT VIEW OF RUSSIA

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS THE COMMUNIST FAITH ?

IT is extraordinarily difficult to be fair-minded about Russia. And even with fair-mindedness, how is a true impression to be conveyed of something so unfamiliar, shifting, and contradictory, of which no one in England has a background of knowledge or experience? No English newspaper has a regular correspondent resident in Russia. We rightly attach small credence to what the Soviet authorities say about themselves. Most of our news is from prejudiced Labour deputations or from prejudiced *émigrés*. Thus a belt of fog separates us from what goes on in the other world where the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics rules and experiments and evolves a kind of order. Russia is suffering the penalty of years of "propaganda," which, by taking away credence from words, almost destroys, in the end, the means of communication at a distance.

Leninism is a combination of two things which Europeans have kept for some centuries in different compartments of the soul—religion and business. We are shocked because the religion is new, and contemptuous because the business, being subordinated to the religion instead of the other way round, is highly inefficient.

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Like other new religions, Leninism derives its power not from the multitude but from a small minority of enthusiastic converts, whose zeal and intolerance make each one the equal in strength of a hundred indifferentists. Like other new religions, it is led by those who can combine the new spirit, perhaps sincerely, with seeing a good deal more than their followers, politicians with at least an average dose of political cynicism, who can smile as well as frown, volatile experimentalists, released by religion from truth and mercy but not blinded to facts and expediency, and open therefore to the charge (superficial and useless though it is where politicians, lay or ecclesiastical, are concerned) of hypocrisy. Like other new religions, it seems to take the colour and gaiety and freedom out of everyday life and to offer a drab substitute in the square wooden faces of its devotees. Like other new religions, it persecutes without justice or pity those who actively resist it. Like other new religions, it is unscrupulous. Like other new religions, it is filled with missionary ardour and ecumenical ambitions. But to say that Leninism is the faith of a persecuting and propagating minority of fanatics led by hypocrites is, after all, to say no more nor less than that it is a religion and not merely a party, and Lenin a Mahomet, not a Bismarck. If we want to frighten ourselves in our capitalist easy-chairs, we can picture the Communists of Russia as though the early Christians led by Attila were using the equipment of the Holy Inquisition and the Jesuit missions to enforce the literal economics of the New Testament; but when we want to comfort ourselves in the same chairs, can we hopefully repeat that these economics are fortunately so contrary to human nature that they cannot finance either missionaries or armies and will surely end in defeat?

There are three questions to answer. Is the new religion partly true, or sympathetic to the souls of

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modern men? Is it on the material side so inefficient as to render it incapable to survive? Will it, in the course of time, with sufficient dilution and added impurity, catch the multitude?

As for the first question, those who are completely satisfied by Christian capitalism or by egotistic capitalism untempered by subterfuge will not hesitate how to answer it; for they either have a religion or need none. But many, in this age without religion, are bound to feel a strong emotional curiosity towards any religion which is really new and not merely a recrudescence of old ones and has proved its motive force; and all the more when the new thing comes out of Russia, the beautiful and foolish youngest son of the European family, with hair on his head, nearer both to the earth and to heaven than his bald brothers in the West—who, having been born two centuries later, has been able to pick up the middle-aged disillusionment of the rest of the family before he has lost the genius of youth or become addicted to comfort and to habits. I sympathise with those who seek for something good in Soviet Russia.

But when we come to the actual thing, what is one to say? For me, brought up in a free air undarkened by the horrors of religion, with nothing to be afraid of, Red Russia holds too much which is detestable. Comfort and habits let us be ready to forgo, but I am not ready for a creed which does not care how much it destroys the liberty and security of daily life, which uses deliberately the weapons of persecution, destruction, and international strife. How can I admire a policy which finds a characteristic expression in spending millions to suborn spies in every family and group at home, and to stir up trouble abroad? Perhaps this is no worse and has more purpose than the greedy, warlike, and imperialist propensities of other Governments; but it must be far better than these to shift me out of my rut. How can

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I accept a doctrine which sets up as its bible, above and beyond criticism, an obsolete economic textbook which I know to be not only scientifically erroneous but without interest or application for the modern world ? How can I adopt a creed which, preferring the mud to the fish, exalts the boorish proletariat above the bourgeois and the intelligentsia who, with whatever faults, are the quality in life and surely carry the seeds of all human advancement ? Even if we need a religion, how can we find it in the turbid rubbish of the red bookshops ? It is hard for an educated, decent, intelligent son of Western Europe to find his ideals here, unless he has first suffered some strange and horrid process of conversion which has changed all his values.

Yet we shall miss the essence of the new religion if we stop at this point. The Communist may justly reply that all these things belong not to his ultimate Faith but to the tactics of Revolution. For he believes in two things : the introduction of a New Order upon earth, and the *method* of the Revolution as the *only* means thereto.<sup>1</sup> The New Order must not be judged either by the horrors of the Revolution or by the privations of the transitional period. The Revolution is to be a supreme example of the means justified by the end. The soldier of the Revolution must crucify his own human nature, becoming unscrupulous and ruthless, and suffering himself a life without security or joy—but as the means to his purpose and not its end.

What, then, is the essence of the new religion as a New Order upon earth ? Looking from outside, I do not clearly know. Sometimes its mouthpieces speak as though it was purely materialistic and technical in just the same sense that modern capitalism is—as though,

<sup>1</sup> In these chapters I use the term “Communism” to mean the New Order, and not, as is the practice in British Labour politics, to mean the Revolution as a means thereto.

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that is to say, Communism merely claimed to be in the long run a superior technical instrument for obtaining the same materialistic economic benefits as capitalism offers, that in time it will cause the fields to yield more and the forces of Nature to be more straitly harnessed. In this case there is no religion after all, nothing but a bluff to facilitate a change to what may or may not be a better economic technique. But I suspect that, in fact, such talk is largely a reaction against the charges of economic inefficiency which we on our side launch, and that at the heart of Russian Communism there is something else of more concern to mankind.

In one respect Communism but follows other famous religions. It exalts the common man and makes him everything. Here there is nothing new. But there is another factor in it which also is not new but which may, nevertheless, in a changed form and a new setting, contribute something to the true religion of the future, if there be any true religion. *Leninism is absolutely, defiantly non-supernatural, and its emotional and ethical essence centres about the individual's and the community's attitude towards the Love of Money.*

I do not mean that Russian Communism alters, or even seeks to alter, human nature, that it makes Jews less avaricious or Russians less extravagant than they were before. I do not merely mean that it sets up a new ideal. I mean that it tries to construct a framework of society in which pecuniary motives as influencing action shall have a changed relative importance, in which social approbations shall be differently distributed, and where behaviour, which previously was normal and respectable, ceases to be either the one or the other.

In England to-day a talented and virtuous youth, about to enter the world, will balance the advantages of entering the Civil Service and of seeking a fortune in business; and public opinion will esteem him not less

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if he prefers the second. Money-making, as such, on as large a scale as possible, is not less respectable socially, perhaps more so, than a life devoted to the service of the State or of Religion, Education, Learning, or Art. But in the Russia of the future it is intended that the career of money-making, as such, will simply not occur to a respectable young man as a possible opening, any more than the career of a gentleman burglar or acquiring skill in forgery and embezzlement. Even the most admirable aspects of the love of money in our existing society, such as thrift and saving, and the attainment of financial security and independence for one's self and one's family, whilst not deemed morally wrong, will be rendered so difficult and impracticable as to be not worth while. Everyone should work for the community—the new creed runs—and, if he does his duty, the community will uphold him.

This system does not mean a complete levelling down of incomes—at least at the present stage. A clever and successful person in Soviet Russia has a bigger income and a better time than other people. The commissar with £5 a week (*plus* sundry free services, a motor-car, a flat, a box at the ballet, etc., etc.) lives well enough, but not *in the least* like a rich man in London. The successful professor or civil servant with £6 or £7 a week (*minus* sundry impositions) has, perhaps, a real income three times those of the proletarian workers and six times those of the poorer peasants. Some peasants are three or four times richer than others. A man who is out of work receives part pay, not full pay. But no one can afford on these incomes, with high Russian prices and stiff progressive taxes, to save anything worth saving; it is hard enough to live day by day. The progressive taxation and the mode of assessing rents and other charges are such that it is actually disadvantageous to have an acknowledged income exceeding £8 to £10 a week.

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Nor is there any possibility of large gains except by taking the same sort of risks as attach to bribery and embezzlement elsewhere—not that bribery and embezzlement have disappeared in Russia or are even rare, but anyone whose extravagance or whose instincts drive him to such courses runs serious risk of detection and penalties which include death.

Nor, at the present stage, does the system involve the actual prohibition of buying and selling at a profit. The policy is not to forbid these professions, but to render them precarious and disgraceful. The private trader is a sort of permitted outlaw, without privileges or protection, like the Jew in the Middle Ages—an outlet for those who have overwhelming instincts in this direction, but not a natural or agreeable job for the normal man.

The effect of these social changes has been, I think, to make a real change in the predominant attitude towards money, and will probably make a far greater change when a new generation has grown up which has known nothing else. People in Russia, if only because of their poverty, are very greedy for money—at least as greedy as elsewhere. But money-making and money-accumulating cannot enter into the life-calculations of a rational man who accepts the Soviet rule in the way in which they enter into ours. A Society, of which this is even partially true, is a tremendous innovation.

Now all this may prove Utopian, or destructive of true welfare, though, perhaps, not so Utopian, pursued in an intense religious spirit, as it would be if it were pursued in a matter-of-fact way. But is it appropriate to assume, as most of us have assumed hitherto, that it is insincere or wicked?

## CHAPTER II

### THE ECONOMICS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

WE shall not understand Leninism unless we view it as being at the same time a persecuting and missionary religion and an experimental economic technique. What of the second aspect—Is the economic technique so inefficient that it courts disaster?

The economic system of Soviet Russia has undergone and is undergoing such rapid changes that it is impossible to obtain a precise and accurate account of it. The method of trial-and-error is unreservedly employed. No one has ever been more frankly experimentalist than Lenin was in everything which did not touch the central truths of his Faith. At first there was much confusion as to what was essential and what not. For example, the doctrine held at the outset that money must be abolished for most purposes is now seen to be erroneous, there being nothing inconsistent with the essence of Communism in continuing to use money as an instrument of distribution and calculation. The Government has also come round to the view that it is wiser to combine a policy of limited toleration with intermittent teasing and harrying towards (for example) the old intelligentsia who have stuck to their country, towards private traders, and even towards foreign capitalists, rather than to attempt to crush out these elements altogether—trusting on the one hand to the complete control of the educational machine and the upbringing of the young, and on the other hand to the gradual improvement of the technique of State trading and to the growth of State capital, to dispense with these

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pagan auxiliaries in course of time. Thus almost all the members of the non-Communist intelligentsia with pre-war educations are now in the service of the Government, often in important and responsible posts with relatively high salaries; private trade is again lawful, though precarious and difficult; and foreign capitalists, who grant short-period trade credits against Government imports into Russia, can reckon for the present with some certainty, in my opinion, that they will see their money back in due course. The fluctuating pursuits of these expediencies make it difficult to generalise about anything in Soviet Russia. Almost everything one can say about the country is true and false at the same time—which is the reason why friendly and hostile critics can each in good faith produce totally different pictures of the same thing.

A further difficulty in estimating the efficiency of the economic system is caused by the hard material conditions attending its earlier years, which would have tried severely any economic system. The material losses and disorganisation of the Great War were followed by those of a succession of civil wars, by outlawry from the rest of the world, and by several bad harvests. The bad harvests were partly due to bad management as well as to bad luck. Nevertheless the Soviet experimentalists can fairly claim, I think, that at least five years of peace and fair weather must elapse before they can be judged merely by results.

If one is to make any generalisation in present conditions, it must be this—that at a low level of efficiency the system does function and possesses elements of permanence. I estimate the truth about the economic condition of Russia in its present phase to be roughly as follows.

Russia is now a country of about 140,000,000 inhabitants, of whom six-sevenths are rural and agricultural

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in their life and one-seventh is urban and industrial. The urban and industrial population, which is what the casual visitor sees, is not self-supporting—it lives, that is to say, at a standard of life which is higher than its output justifies. This excess expenditure on the part of the town population is covered by the exploitation of the peasant, which is only practicable because the town population is a numerically small proportion of the whole country. Thus the Communist Government is able to pamper (comparatively speaking) the proletarian worker, who is of course its especial care, by exploiting the peasant; whilst the peasant, in spite of this exploitation, desires no change of Government, because he has been given his land. In this way a certain equilibrium has been established both in the economic sphere and in the political, which gives the Soviet Government a breathing space in which to try its hand at a serious economic reorganisation.

The official method of exploiting the peasants is not so much by taxation—though the land tax is an important item in the budget—as by price policy. The monopoly of import and export trade and the virtual control of industrial output enable the authorities to maintain relative prices at levels highly disadvantageous to the peasant. They buy his wheat from him much below the world price, and they sell to him textile and other manufactured goods appreciably above the world price,<sup>1</sup> the difference providing a fund out of which can be financed their high overhead costs and the general inefficiency of

<sup>1</sup> The National Commissariat for Inland Trade for Northern Caucasia reported in September that the peasantry were refraining from offering as much corn as they could because of the unfavourable position with regard to manufactured goods. Peasants were declaring that "grain prices were good but the costs of wearing apparel incredible." The Commissariat considered that the peasants should obtain about three yards of cloth for a pood (36 lbs.) of grain, whereas in fact they receive less than a yard.

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manufacture and distribution. The monopoly of import and export trade, by permitting a divorce between the internal and external price-levels, can be operated in such a way as to maintain the parity of foreign exchange in spite of a depreciation in the purchasing power of the money. The real value of the rouble inside Russia is, admittedly, much depreciated compared with its external value as measured by the current exchange.

These devices, though effective for their purpose at present, and perhaps inevitable for a time, involve two disastrous factors of inefficiency. The low value of agricultural products in terms of industrial products is a serious deterrent to the output of the former, which is the real wealth of the country. The fundamental problem of the Soviet Government is to get itself into a sufficiently strong financial position to be able to pay the peasant more nearly the real value of his produce—which would surely have the effect of giving him both the means and the incentive to a far higher output. Meanwhile the pampering of the proletarian workers of the towns, whose real incomes are something like double those of the peasants, and are said to have reached, allowing for everything, nearly 80 per cent. of their pre-war level, renders town life far too attractive in comparison with country life. The stimulus to migration from the country to the town is much greater than is justified by the power of industry, with its impaired equipment and deficiency of working capital, to absorb new workers. Nothing would stop the migration, if it were not for the housing difficulties and the lack of employment now offering in the towns—a peasant arriving at Moscow is notified at the station that he can find neither work nor lodging. But these deterrents are only effective after the towns have become overcrowded and unemployment has reached unheard-of proportions. For two years unemployment has been severe and increasing, and I believe that by now from 20 to 25 per cent.

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of the industrial workers of Russia are unemployed—say 1,500,000 men out of a total of 6,000,000. Some but not all of these men receive from their trade a dole representing about a third of their normal wages, which, even so, is not much inferior to the working income of the poorer peasants, with the result that this vast army of unemployed is a heavy burden on the financial resources of the State establishments. This condition of affairs serves but to enforce a lesson of bourgeois economics as being equally applicable in a Communist State, namely, that it impairs wealth to interfere with the normal levels of relative prices or with the normal levels of relative wages so as to make some occupations unduly attractive as compared with others. But it also teaches that similar evils can arise in totally different conditions from totally different causes ; for the Russian problem of relative wages and relative prices out-of-gear is partly the same as ours.

Thus the real income of the Russian peasant is not much more than half what it used to be, whilst the Russian industrial worker suffers overcrowding and unemployment as never before. Nevertheless there is, beyond doubt, a certain measure of political and economic stability. The Soviet State is *not* so inefficient as to be unable to survive. It has lived through much worse times than the present. It has established an organisation, covering all the activities of economic life, which is inefficient on normal standards, but which has been evolved out of chaos and the void, yet does exist and function. It has set up a standard of life, which is low compared with ours, but which has been evolved out of starvation and death, yet does provide some comforts. Everyone agrees that the improvement in the last year is enormous. This year's harvest is tolerably good. Conditions are manifestly on the up-grade. Some of the grandiose schemes of the new régime are beginning to

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take actual shape. Leningrad will soon be supplied with power and light from one of the largest and most modern generating stations in the world. The plant-breeding establishments, which are to supply the peasant with better seeds on the latest Mendelian lines, are extensive and well-equipped.

After a long debate with Zinovieff, two Communist iron-sides who attended him stepped forward to speak to me a last word with the full faith of fanaticism in their eyes. "We make you a prophecy," they said. "Ten years hence the level of life in Russia will be higher than it was before the war, and in the rest of Europe it will be lower than it was before the war." Having regard to the natural wealth of Russia and to the inefficiency of the old *régime*, having regard also to the problems of Western Europe and our apparent inability to handle them, can we feel confident that the comrades will not prove right?

## CHAPTER III

### COMMUNISM'S POWER TO SURVIVE

MY third question is not yet answered. Can Communism in the course of time, with sufficient dilution and added impurity, catch the multitude?

I cannot answer what only time will show. But I feel confident of one conclusion—that if Communism achieves a certain success, it will achieve it, not as an improved economic technique, but as a religion. The tendency of our conventional criticisms is to make two opposed mistakes. We hate Communism so much, regarded as a religion, that we exaggerate its economic inefficiency; and we are so much impressed by its economic inefficiency that we underestimate it as a religion.

On the economic side I cannot perceive that Russian Communism has made any contribution to our economic problems of intellectual interest or scientific value. I do not think that it contains, or is likely to contain, any piece of useful economic technique which we could not apply, if we chose, with equal or greater success in a society which retained all the marks, I will not say of nineteenth-century individualistic capitalism, but of British bourgeois ideals. Theoretically at least, I do not believe that there is any economic improvement for which Revolution is a necessary instrument. On the other hand, we have everything to lose by the methods of violent change. In Western industrial conditions the tactics of Red Revolution would throw the whole population into a pit of poverty and death.

But as a religion what are its forces? Perhaps they

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are considerable. The exaltation of the common man is a dogma which has caught the multitude before now. *Any* religion and the bond which unites co-religionists have power against the egotistic atomism of the irreligious.

For modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious, without internal union, without much public spirit, often, though not always, a mere congeries of possessors and pursuers. Such a system has to be immensely, not merely moderately, successful to survive. In the nineteenth century it was in a certain sense idealistic ; at any rate it was a united and self-confident system. It was not only immensely successful, but held out hopes of a continuing crescendo of prospective successes. To-day it is only moderately successful. If irreligious Capitalism is ultimately to defeat religious Communism it is not enough that it should be economically more efficient—it must be many times as efficient.

We used to believe that modern capitalism was capable, not merely of maintaining the existing standards of life, but of leading us gradually into an economic paradise where we should be comparatively free from economic cares. Now we doubt whether the business man is leading us to a destination far better than our present place. Regarded as a means he is tolerable ; regarded as an end he is not so satisfactory. One begins to wonder whether the material advantages of keeping business and religion in different compartments are sufficient to balance the moral disadvantages. The Protestant and Puritan could separate them comfortably because the first activity pertained to earth and the second to heaven, which was elsewhere. The believer in progress could separate them comfortably because he regarded the first as the means to the establishment of heaven upon earth hereafter. But there is a third state of mind, in which we do not fully believe either in a heaven which is elsewhere or in progress as a sure means towards a heaven upon earth hereafter ; and if heaven is not elsewhere and not hereafter, it must

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be here and now or not at all. If there is no moral objective in economic progress, then it follows that we must not sacrifice, even for a day, moral to material advantage—in other words, that we may no longer keep business and religion in separate compartments of the soul. In so far as a man's thoughts are capable of straying along these paths, he will be ready to search with curiosity for something at the heart of Communism quite different from the picture of its outward parts which our Press paints.

At any rate to me it seems clearer every day that the moral problem of our age is concerned with the love of money, with the habitual appeal to the money motive in nine-tenths of the activities of life, with the universal striving after individual economic security as the prime object of endeavour, with the social approbation of money as the measure of constructive success, and with the social appeal to the hoarding instinct as the foundation of the necessary provision for the family and for the future. The decaying religions around us, which have less and less interest for most people unless it be as an agreeable form of magical ceremonial or of social observance, have lost their moral significance just because—unlike some of their earlier versions—they do not touch in the least degree on these essential matters. A revolution in our ways of thinking and feeling about money may become the growing purpose of contemporary embodiments of the ideal. Perhaps, therefore, Russian Communism does represent the first confused stirrings of a great religion.

The visitor to Russia from the outside, who tries without prejudice to catch the atmosphere, must alternate, I think, between two moods—oppression and elation. Sir Martin Conway, in his true and sincere volume on *Art Treasures in Soviet Russia*, writes thus of his departure out of the country :

“ . . . After a very long halt the train moved on about half a mile to the Finnish frontier, where passports, visas, and luggage

## COMMUNISM'S POWER TO SURVIVE

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were again examined much less meticulously. The station was new built, a pleasant place, simple, clean, and convenient, and served with much courtesy. It has a charming refreshment room, where simple but nicely cooked food was supplied in an atmosphere of hospitality.

"It seems a churlish thing for me to say, after all the kindness shown to me in Russia, but if I am to tell the whole truth I must here put on record that in this frontier station of Finland I experienced a sense as of the removal of a great weight which had been oppressing me. I cannot explain just how this weight had been felt. I did not experience the imposition of it on entering Russia, but as the days passed it seemed slowly to accumulate. The sense of freedom gradually disappeared. Though everyone was kind one felt the presence of an oppression, not on oneself, but all-pervading. Never have I felt so completely a stranger in a strange land ; with successive days what at first was a dim feeling took more definite shape and condensed into an ever-increasingly conscious oppression. I imagine one might have passed through the same experience in the Russia of the Tsars. Americans often praise what they call the 'air of liberty' which they claim as characteristic of their country. They possess it in common with all the English-speaking dominions. The moral atmosphere of Russia is a very different compound of emotional chemistry.

"The part of Finland through which our train now bore us was not different in physical character from the lands across the frontier, but we found ourselves passing 'nice little properties' and the signs of comfort and even prosperity. . . ."

The mood of oppression could not be better conveyed. In part, no doubt, it is the fruit of Red Revolution—there is much in Russia to make one pray that one's own country may achieve its goal not in that way. In part, perhaps, it is the fruit of some beastliness in the Russian nature—or in the Russian and Jewish natures when, as now, they are allied together. But in part it is one face of the superb earnestness of Red Russia, of the high seriousness, which in its other aspect appears as the Spirit of Elation. There never was anyone so *serious* as the Russian of the Revolution, serious even in his gaiety and

## A SHORT VIEW OF RUSSIA

abandon of spirit—so serious that sometimes he can forget to-morrow and sometimes he can forget to-day. Often this seriousness is crude and stupid and boring in the extreme. The average Communist is *discoloured* just as the Methodists of every age have been. The tenseness of the atmosphere is more than one is used to support, and a longing comes for the frivolous ease of London.

Yet the elation, when that is felt, is very great. Here—one feels at moments—in spite of poverty, stupidity, and oppression, is the Laboratory of Life. Here the chemicals are being mixed in new combinations, and stink and explode. Something—there is just a chance—might come out. And even a chance gives to what is happening in Russia more importance than what is happening (let us say) in the United States of America.

I think that it is partly reasonable to be afraid of Russia, like the gentlemen who write to the *Times*. But if Russia is going to be a force in the outside world, it will not be the result of Mr Zinovieff's money. Russia will never matter seriously to the rest of us, unless it be as a moral force. So, now the deeds are done and there is no going back, I should like to give Russia her chance ; to help and not to hinder. For how much rather, even after allowing for everything, if I were a Russian, would I contribute my quota of activity to Soviet Russia than to Tsarist Russia ! I could not subscribe to the new official faith any more than to the old. I should detest the actions of the new tyrants not less than those of the old. But I should feel that my eyes were turned towards, and no longer away from, the possibilities of things ; that out of the cruelty and stupidity of Old Russia nothing could ever emerge, but that beneath the cruelty and stupidity of New Russia some speck of the ideal may lie hid.

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