

### "Love Books"

The great Soviet writer Maxim Gorky told his people: "Love books, a source of knowledge." When we visited the Lenin State Library in Moscow we were able to gauge to some extent how the Soviet people were carrying out his command. The Lenin Library is the largest library in the Soviet Union, though there are, of course, several other libraries in Moscow alone and every town, every village, every collective farm and factory has its own library. The Lenin Library is a general lending library, and you can borrow from it fiction and non-fiction, poetry and prose, out of a total of 17 million books, magazines and pamphlets published in 160 languages, 85 of them the languages of the Soviet people themselves. The library also houses 270,000 original manuscripts and has all the microfilm facilities necessary for the study of precious or rare documents which cannot be lent out.

There are 13 reading halls, with nearly 2,000 seats, in this library. We passed through these reading halls and found them all crowded, with even a queue of people waiting for the chance of taking an empty seat. An average of 6,000 people visit the library every day, and 20,000 books are taken out every day. In addition the staff has to deal with 125,000 written queries in the course of a year. Membership of the library is free, and so great is the pressure from the public that a staff of 1,800 is required to handle them and a huge building expansion programme is under way. There is also a special children's section in the library, visited by close on 1,000 children every day.

As another example of the popular interest in the arts let us take the Tretyakov Gallery of Russian Art which we visited one Sunday. This gallery contains 50 halls devoted to the various periods and painters in the history of Russian art. (There are, of course, other galleries in Moscow devoted to non-Russian art.) The gallery on the day we went was absolutely crammed to the doors. The guide who took us round had to clear a way for us through the throng and ask people to step aside from the pictures so that we could view them. We have visited art galleries in other countries, for instance the Tate and National Galleries in London, and in these galleries, unless there is a special exhibition on, there are not very many people to be seen. At any rate, we have never before seen such a mass of people in an art gallery — again the ordinary working people of Moscow, soldiers, children etc. — and not merely the intellectuals and specialists. Ten thousand people visit the gallery on a Sunday and about 7,000 to 8,000 on weekdays. Such is the new mass audience which has been developed in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet people do not only look on, however. They also produce great new works of art. And the creative art-



ists of the Soviet Union keep in closest touch with the Soviet people, discuss their work with them, subject themselves to their criticism. Factory workers, for example, may wish to discuss a certain novel in their discussion club. It is a common practice on such occasions to invite the author to attend and take part in the discussion of his work. This contact between writer and reader may also take place before, as well as after, a book is published. We visited a Children's Publishing House in Moscow which in 1953 had produced 485 different titles of books for children with a total of one billion copies. Frequently before a book is published the publisher and author will call together a group of children and discuss the project with them in order to test their reactions. In these and other ways do Soviet authors live and learn with the people, and produce works geared to the needs and aspirations of the people.

Recently there was held in Moscow the second Congress of Soviet Writers, attended by authors not only from the Soviet Union but also abroad. At the first Congress, the young Soviet literature was sent off on its way by Maxim Gorky, who spoke on the need for "creating the powerful literature which is necessary not only to our country, to the peoples of our country, but I dare say, is necessary to the whole world . . . ." Twenty years later the second Congress was given figures to show the great advances which had been made in Soviet literature since then. I don't want to bore you with statistics, but suffice it to mention that the number of members of the Union of Soviet Writers has grown from 1,500 to 3,695 in that period.

A correspondent who attended the Congress wrote: "The strongest impression from the Soviet Writers' Congress was the bond between the writers and the people. The public followed the congress with unflagging interest. Its proceedings were reported in detail in the newspapers and over the radio, and the sittings were invariably attended by many visitors. Messages of greetings poured in from all parts of the country . . . Telegrams and letters were received from seamen on ships in distant waters, from school children, from scientists, from collective farmers. These messages were from people who regarded the congress as an important event in the Country's cultural life . . .

"Soviet people love their literature for its optimism and humanism, for its impassioned support of peace and friendship among nations, for its exaltation of labour, of constructive endeavour."

This spirit permeates the whole of Soviet culture, and makes it an indestructible weapon in the struggle of the Soviet people, indeed of all mankind, for a better and fuller life.



# Jewry in the Soviet Union

by SAM KAHN

I detest the loathsome doctrines and practice of anti-semitism as much as I hate any form of race or colour prejudice. As a Jew, I was anxious to try and see how the Jews lived in the Soviet Union, while seeing as much of the life of all the people as I could. I cannot claim that I was able to see everything in the time at my disposal but I did devote much of my time to an investigation of Jewish affairs.



In Moscow I asked to meet the Chief Rabbi and almost at once by arrangement I visited Rabbi Moishe Schlieffer, who gave me a very friendly reception. With him were other prominent members of the Jewish community, including the committee of the Moscow Choral Synagogue, one of the largest and oldest there.

On a Saturday morning I attended the Sabbath Service at this Synagogue and saw the people at prayer. The Cantor paid me the honour of calling me up to the Bima (pulpit) and I was given a piece to say in Hebrew (Aliyoh) from the reading of the Scroll of the Law. The following Saturday evening was the night of the Passover and on the invitation of the Chief Rabbi I attended the Passover Service, after which I partook of Matzah (unleavened bread) at the Seder (ceremonial feast). The Synagogue was jammed full with well-dressed worshippers and the service was conducted on the same orthodox lines to which I was accustomed as a youth and former choir boy in Cape Town.

By religious heads and a number of other Jewish people I came across in different walks of life, I was assured that there was no anti-Semitism. On the contrary: the Government and peoples of the Soviet Union had freed the Jews from religious persecution for the first time after centuries of pogroms and prejudice.

Every citizen has the same rights regardless of his religion or colour and as in all the Socialist countries of Europe, racialism and anti-Semitism is a criminal offence. Article 123 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. provides:—

“Equal rights for citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, shall be an irrevocable law.



Any direct or indirect limitation of these rights, or conversely, any establishment of direct or indirect privileges for citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any propagation of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt shall be punishable by law."

Article 124 states:—

"In order to ensure the citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the U.S.S.R. shall be separated from the State, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda shall be recognised for all citizens."

### Basic Practices

The general system obtaining is that the State provides the building, i.e. the Synagogue, and is responsible for its maintenance and upkeep. The Jewish congregation makes itself responsible for everything else connected with their place of worship. All the usual religious and traditional celebrations associated with the Synagogue take place there, such as weddings and barmitzvahs. The rites of Jewish circumcision are practised and provision is made for Kosher meat by ritual slaughter of animals at the abattoirs.

The Jews whom I met were indignant and resentful of the accusation made by the ignorant outside their country that Jews were the victims of anti-Semitism. Apart from the presence of Jewish Ministers (not of religion) in the Cabinet of the U.S.S.R., thousands of Jews occupy leading positions in the sphere of politics, industry, farming, science and culture, etc. The large number of Jews to receive awards as Stalin Prize winners in science, technology and the arts provides a crushing reply to the slanderous allegations of anti-Jewish prejudice.

In one year alone 114 awards in science and technology and 31 prizes in literature and arts were made to Jews — not because they are Jews or because of any racial preference but because they earned them on their merits by their competence.

To guard against any religious discrimination, statistics are not taken in the census or for any other purpose of persons' religious beliefs. Naturally I visited many churches and mosques as well as synagogues, and all I saw satisfied me that people are both guaranteed and given the right to profess and practise any religion they choose (as well as the right to combat religion by argument if they choose). The Russian Orthodox Church has been deprived of its privileged position as a State Church and of the power to persecute other religions which it exercised in the days of the Tsar.



The Russian Orthodox Church, which I saw had many devout worshippers, is no longer looked upon as a refuge for those who would rather profess Christianity than live up to it.

To return to the Jews, not only do they freely practise religious worship but they receive full equality, social, political and economic, for the first time in 2,000 years.

### Some Changes

That the character of the Jewish youth and the Jewish people has changed seems to me to be evident. I met an architect, whom I asked if he was Jewish. "Yes," he answered, "but why do you ask?" The change in character has occurred entirely by a social process without any outside pressure or imposition, and it consists of a complete linguistic and cultural integration in the general national life. Jews had the same contented, happy look, the same gay, carefree bearing of the people everywhere in the People's Democracies. They were friendly, talkative, exchanged questions and answers freely. Women, too, enjoyed absolute equality in pay, status and opportunity, although in the synagogues they still occupy separate positions upstairs.

Two things I asked about in particular. I said that I had had many reports (mostly hearsay, it is true) from Jews in South Africa who complained that they did not receive letters from their relatives in Eastern Europe. They answered that there was no reason at all why Jews in their countries should not write freely to their relatives abroad or receive mail from them. The other question, of immigration to Israel, met with the reply that there is no reason why people should wish to leave their countries. Jews in the past fled from persecution and discrimination, but since the days of the Tsars and of Hitler discrimination exists no more.

### "Peace is All"

One last word about the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, with whom I conversed in an amalgam of Yiddish and German. "What kind of sermons," he asked me, "does your Chief Rabbi preach in the synagogue?" I told him I could not answer, as I did not go to synagogue. "Commend to your rabbis," he urged, "the great messages of peace to be found in the holy writings of the Jews, in the Bible, in the Sayings of the Fathers, in the Mishna 'Therefore love the truth and peace!' 'The universe must be upheld by the three pillars of truth, justice and peace among men.' 'Peace is all; without peace there is chaos'."

From all the rabbis I met in the Soviet Union I was given a message of greetings to convey to their colleagues and their Jewish brothers in South Africa. "May your country," they prayed, "be as free from racialism and anti-Semitism as ours is."



# Building the Future

by RUTH FIRST

Critics of the Soviet Union — and there are many who are well-paid by the glossy magazines — try to tell us that Soviet citizens are dispirited and dejected; that the Soviet system has destroyed individual initiative and that life in the cities and villages is humdrum, drab and bleak.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and from the first evening of my arrival in Moscow, when I went to the ballet, strolled down Pushkin street where the fountains play, and looked into the crowded, and tumultuously busy shops, open till late at night and crowded with goods, I was impressed by the buoyant and alive atmosphere.



That first impression was borne out by my experiences in the following weeks.

People are busy working and it is true that Soviet citizens work hard. (Though they also play hard and study hard.) But theirs is not the grind of a people struggling to make ends meet, to feed hungry families, to hold down their jobs at all costs, and to stave off the menace of unemployment.

Labour in the Soviet Union has acquired a new meaning.

In the early thirties an American journalist called Knickerbocker visiting the Soviet Union decided to look into reports of forced labour, current then as now, and decide if there was any basis to them.

After months in the Soviet Union, visiting different regional factories and plants, he recorded his impressions of Soviet workers. "They are a cocky lot," he wrote. "You would think they owned the country. Maybe they do, and maybe they don't, but they think so, and I have never seen a slave who thought he was boss!"

I wouldn't choose the same way of writing about the Soviet people, but Knickerbocker — back in 1931 — made an important point about the Soviet people — their vitality and spirit, their sense of ownership of their country, and their pride in their achievements.



## Five Year Plans

I was not one of those who went to the Soviet Union expecting to find there a paradise on earth. I tried to bear in mind the background to the building of the Soviet State: the state of poverty and backwardness from which it started, the eleven years, of war and intervention, the fact that the old Russia was among the most backward in Europe, and that the new stood alone and surrounded by enemies. Huge strides forward were taken in the years of the first Five Year Plans, only for the Third Plan to be interrupted by the outbreak of the war. The country suffered a double setback: not only had years to be spent repairing the war damage, but the war and reconstruction years also interrupted the country's industrial progress. Yet by 1951 and the commencement of the Fifth Five Year Plan the standard of living was already two and a half times higher than it had been in 1940, and there had been seven drops in prices since the end of the war.

To those who knew the backwardness of the old Russia, plans for industrialisation and electrification, on the scale the young Soviet government embarked on, seemed sheer impossibility. Yet from the beginning the course was clearly charted. Soviet rule alone was not enough for the advance to the new society. To ensure this advance the country had to be raised from the depths of poverty, its industry developed, its productive capacity raised.

Before the first Five Year Plans of the thirties, the Soviet Union occupied fifteenth place among the world's electricity producers. Today it has risen to first place in Europe, and second in the world. Soviet power plants are today producing more power than the plants of Great Britain and France, among the earliest industrialised countries, taken together. In Stalingrad I was shown the power station that singly, when completed next year, will produce five times more power than the whole of Tsarist Russia did in 1913.

The Soviet people have built cities with record-shattering swiftness; constructed canals and inland seas to irrigate dry land and provide new transport waterways; started on the cultivation of huge tracts of virgin soil. They are using the most advanced mechanised labour processes. The standard of living is soaring.

The Five Years Plans have been the kingpin of all this advance and so it is not surprising that the Soviet people are entirely absorbed in these plans.

During my stay I had the opportunity to see some of the stupendous projects of the Fifth Plan, and to hear discussions on the Sixth, for which preparations had already started.



## Volga-Don Canal

My first visit outside Moscow was to Stalingrad, as much to see the Volga-Don Canal as the re-built city itself.

A few hours after our 'plane had landed at Stalingrad's airport, we were seated — just the two of us, my interpreter and myself — in a large cinema, watching a film of the construction of the Canal.

This new waterway, formed by the joining of Russia's two best-known rivers, the Volga and the Don, is part of a system of five canals which will change the geography of the Soviet Union, creating artificial rivers and man-made seas.

The climate in the Stalingrad area is, as I can testify after having been there in the scorching heat of mid-summer, hot and arid, and a great part of the steppes could formerly not be cultivated. The Volga-Don Canal project includes a network of irrigation canals which will water these lands. Shelter belts of trees are being planted as a protection from the hot winds, so not only is the soil being made fertile, but the climate is being changed too.

The film showed something of the scope of the project and the impressive techniques used in the building of the Canal. Whole villages had to be evacuated to new areas to make way for reservoirs. We saw shots of Cossack families watching their homes being transplanted to new sites, and then, in a street named "Sea Street" before there was any water in sight, standing by as, with the opening of the great new reservoir, the new sea was brought to their doorsteps. A row of hills was in the way of the Canal, so some of the engineers of the Moscow Metro were called in to build underground tunnels.

New excavators, giant caterpillar cranes, suction dredges and other machines of a new type were devised. While in Stalingrad I saw one of the great walking excavators, which can scoop out 25 tons of earth at a time, and do the work of 7,000 pick-and-shovel workers.

The following day, when we sailed down the Canal by river-steamer, I was impressed by the fact that the Canal was not only an engineering feat, but also a thing of beauty to look upon.

The city of Stalingrad stretches along the banks of the river, and as our steamer moved off from the river-port we watched the white buildings fade into the distance. The canal is lined on both sides by sloping embankments and boulevards. Sculptured lamp-posts along the banks light the way at night and statues and triumphal arches celebrate the triumph of man over nature. There are nine locks and pumping stations along the Canal for the Volga and Don are at dif-



ferent levels and had to be raised in a river staircase to allow the rivers to meet.

Our journey by steamer took us through the first three locks. Then we left the boat and found a young fisherman to row us to a little island where we had a picnic lunch and a swim in the river. But which river I couldn't say, because our guides and interpreters couldn't agree whether at that point it was the Volga or the Don. So we compromised by calling it a swim in the Canal!

Down the new waterway there is a constant stream of traffic: pleasure steamers and holiday boats, as well as strings of barges carrying all types of cargo. This Canal, and the one joining the Moscow and the Volga Rivers, have turned Moscow in the interior into a port. Along the water route goes timber from the north to the woodless regions of the south; oil from the Caspian Sea region to the Donbas and the Black Sea ports; wheat and coal from the Don basin; fish from the Asov Sea to Moscow.

Stalingrad itself I found a very lovely city. By the end of the war — and remember that it changed hands twelve times in the critical autumn of 1942 — it was a gigantic rubble heap. Today three ruins still stand, and they are there as a reminder of what the war did to the city. Rebuilding started even before the war was quite over. From a height on Stalingrad's railway station stands a beautiful sculptured figure of a woman, holding a laurel wreath over the city stretched before her, for Stalingrad is one of the Soviet Union's four hero cities.

### Seeing Change

Life seems to change before one's eyes in the cities of the Soviet Union. In the weeks I was in Moscow two hundred new buildings were going up, and the skyline in certain parts of the city was pierced by tall tower cranes. Indeed, tower cranes and television aerials are almost as dominant a feature of Moscow's skyline as the famed cupolas on the cathedrals within the Kremlin walls.

When I was in Moscow in June everyone was looking forward to the opening of the Agricultural Exhibition. Two months later, when I returned to Moscow in August, the permanent exhibition was open and with its squares and gardens, and pavilions of different architectural styles, it seemed that an additional city had flown in to Moscow from somewhere else.

Building is rapid, but it is by no means make-shift or economy-type. Five-storey blocks of flats go up in five months, altering the appearance of streets from year to year. Old building methods have become obsolete for these building tasks and so the building industry has been revolutionised and entirely new methods devised.



At an Exhibition of Construction in Moscow I saw models of some of these techniques, and in a giant hangar nearby, some of the cranes, excavators and bull-dozer that do so much of the work performed by human hands in other countries.

I must confess that at this Exhibition of Construction I found myself swamped in a sea of statistics and technical terms until the Exhibition Director, himself an engineer but with a sympathy for the struggling layman, rescued us from an over-conscientious guide, and explained in simple terms.

The secret of advanced Soviet building seemed to me to be planning and pre-fabrication. Many operations, like concrete-mixing and pouring and even bricklaying are no longer done on the building site, but slabs of foundations, and portions of walls, even whole staircases, are made in factories, brought to the building site and lifted bodily into position by giant cranes.

Mechanised labour processes are far advanced in the Soviet Union. Automatic control is being introduced on a wide scale at power plants, and some hydro-electric stations are completely operated by remote control.

Mechanisation has also been carried into the field of agriculture. By this year and next, I was told, ploughing and sowing of fields in the Soviet Union will be 90 to 95 per cent mechanised.

### Trail-blazers

Critics of the Soviet Union talk of the dull existence in that country, of the monotonous, grinding labour exacted from its peoples. Yet there are countless examples of trail-blazing in Soviet society, of new endeavours and fresh achievements.

I found one of the most exciting in the story of the cultivation of large tracts of virgin soil.

In Siberia and Kazakstan, the vast steppes of rich, black soil, ideal for wheat cultivation, were largely uninhabited and uncultivated. Here grain can be grown to swell the country's granaries, to meet the rising standards of the people and transform plenty into abundance, to supply additional cattle fodder, to increase exports.

The plan to cultivate these virgin lands was launched in characteristic Soviet manner.

A call for volunteers went out. Needed to pioneer the new areas were 140,000 young people. In all, 500,000 volunteered. They came from every corner in the Soviet Union, were young farmers, tractor-drivers and mechanics, teachers and doctors, all volunteering to join the self-sufficient communities that would pioneer the new territories.

Within two months the volunteers were not only selected, and the teams organised, but trainloads of brigades had moved off to the East. Each brigade was equipped with a lib-



rary, a radio, free subscriptions to eight different newspapers and journals (to keep them in touch), and had medical and cultural services attached to them.

In Moscow this project was described to me by an agricultural expert who had just returned from Kazakstan. "Life out there is very gay", he said. "Those young people are in the mood to turn their lives into a grand adventure!"

I had the constant feeling in the Soviet Union that it was not only the trail-blazers farming the virgin soils who found life a grand adventure.

The people give one the impression of being confident, alert and happy.

The crowds in the streets are animated; the audiences at ballet and opera performances or at concerts like the outdoor ones in the Parks of Culture and Rest are attentive and, when they decide they like something, warmly enthusiastic.

People are friendly and more than willing to talk to visitors from other countries. During visits to a sanatorium, to a worker's club I was bombarded with questions. "What did I think about this — about that?" "How much longer would I be in the Soviet Union? What had I seen? What were my impressions?" "What were conditions like in my country?"

The people seemed to me to have a great zest and joy for life.

Let me say again, though, that life is still far from perfect in the Soviet Union. There is still much to be done, and there are still many shortages, and nobody is better aware of these things than the Soviet people.

There is still a housing shortage and many families are on waiting-lists for larger apartments. Footwear struck me as still below standard (largely, probably, because half of the Soviet Union's livestock was destroyed in the war). There is not a great range of luxury goods in the shops. Household appliances like washing machines, vacuum cleaners, even refrigerators are still in short supply.

But the important thing is that whatever is lacking or in short supply or below standard today is only a temporary deficiency. Standards are soaring, not dropping.

In the coming decade life in the Soviet Union will glitter with a new brightness. The Soviet people know this is so because by their own efforts they have broken all records in social and economic progress and there is no reason — except war — why they should not continue to do so.

On my last day in the Armenian Republic, the novelist Sevuns said: "Give us five years of peace and we'll turn our Republic into a Heaven." That applies to all the republics and to the entire Soviet Union. Peace in the world is vital to the Soviet people, for on it the Soviet system of the future depends.



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