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THE NEW CIVILISATION?

Assessments of the Soviet Union in Britain, 1929-1941

RISUBMISSION

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London PhD Thesis 19 January 2003



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Abstract

THIS thesis is concerned with assessments of the Soviet Union that were published in Britain during 1929-41, the period in which the Soviet socio-economic formation — the command economy under the rule of a single hypercentralised party — was established, and with the impact of the Soviet experience upon intellectual and political discourse in Britain, with particular reference to the questions of economic planning and the relationship between socialism and democracy.

It investigates the various analyses and conceptions of the Soviet Union produced by commentators of differing viewpoints: the traditional anti-communists' rejection of the Soviet experience; the endorsement of the Soviet regime by the pro-Soviet lobby, that is, the Communist Party of Great Britain and the fellow-travellers; the appreciation of certain aspects of Soviet society alongside a rejection of its political norms on the part of a centre ground of opinion incorporating moderate conservatives, liberals and right-wing social democrats; and the far left's ideas of Stalin's regime representing the betrayal of the October Revolution.

It notes how the coincidence of the implementation of the First Five Year Plan in the Soviet Union and the economic crisis in the capitalist world following the Wall Street Crash led to a rapid popularisation of pro-Soviet sentiments in Britain, with the burgeoning pro-Soviet lobby viewing the Soviet Union as a new civilisation that was in the process of overcoming the economic and social problems affecting the West, and with the endorsement by the centre ground of Soviet policies in respect of economic planning and social measures that was predicated upon the growing feeling that similar schemes were essential to reverse the economic crisis and overcome poverty in the capitalist world. It notes how Hitler's victory in Germany in 1933 and Franco's military coup in Spain in 1936 popularised the idea that the Soviet regime was a guarantor of democracy and stability in the West, or at least a positive factor in international affairs.

It notes the responses of a wide range of commentators to key events within the Soviet Union and those outwith the country in which the Soviet regime was involved. These include the progress of the first three Five Year Plans, including changes in industry, agriculture and cultural, educational and welfare measures, etc; political events, including the 1936 Constitution, the show trials and the Great Terror; and international affairs, including the rise of Nazi Germany and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Spanish Civil War and the Communist International.

It shows the conditional nature of pro-Soviet sentiments during the 1930s by noting their rapid decline after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939, and shows that the disenchantment of many people with the Soviet Union after 1939 was an adumbration of the prevailing anti-communist atmosphere of the Cold War, which represented the convergence of their feelings of disillusionment with the consistent rejection of the Soviet experience on the part of traditional anti-communism.

The thesis concludes by declaring that the impact of the Soviet Union in Britain upon the debate over economic policy was largely catalytic, in that it accelerated and intensified the already developing sentiments in favour of state economic planning; and that its impact upon the socialist movement was largely negative, as it did much to marginalise the idea of socialism as a democratic transformational process. The thesis finally considers the marginalisation in the postwar era of the idea that was fairly commonplace in the 1930s that the Soviet leadership was no longer interested in world revolution, and was intent on coexisting with capitalism rather than trying to overthrow it.

Contents

Intro	duction	5
Chap	ter One: Assessing the Assessors	25
I: II: III: IV: V:	Precursors, 1917-28 There is a Happy Land, Far Far Away Socialism and Democracy The Centre Ground Problems of Interpretation	25 36 46
Chap	ter Two: The Great Change, 1929-34	62
l: II: III: IV: V:	Looking at the Land of the Plan, 1929-32 Drawing a Balance Sheet, 1933-34 Foreign Affairs Analysing Bolshevism Conclusion	78 90 96
Chap	ter Three: Terror and Consolidation, 1935-39	105
I: II: III: IV: V:	The False Dawn The Planned Economy: Results and Prospects Trial and Terror Back on the World Stage Conclusion	130 137 146
Chap	ter Four: The Road to War, 1939-41	166
I: II: III: IV:	The New Alignment The Totalitarian Enemy? Going With Joe Conclusion	176 190
Chap	ter Five: Conclusion: Planning, Socialism and Democrac	y 195
l: 11: 111:	The Lure of the Plan The Fate of Socialism Looking Back	198
Biblio	paraphy	209

Introduction

To Moscow, to Moscow To have a quick look. Home again, home again Write a fat book.

Samuel Selwell, 'Bloomsbury-Bolshie Ballads', Adelphi, March 1933

HESE lines are cynical, but they are not too much of an exaggeration. The 1930s were marked by a veritable flood of books and magazine and journal articles on the Soviet Union. Some were bitterly hostile, some were utterly uncritical, others took a less partisan standpoint. Some were thoughtful and objective, others were hopelessly biased, others besides were just workaday hackery. But whatever the viewpoint, and whatever the quality, one cannot deny that there was an unprecedented interest in what was occurring in that country. This thesis is concerned with how the Soviet Union was understood in Britain from the final endorsement of the First Five Year Plan in 1929 until the country became involved in the Second World War in 1941. It presents, in a deeper and broader manner than any previous study, an assessment of the analyses, assertions and observations that were published in Britain during that period. It shows the degree to which the experience of the Soviet Union influenced political and intellectual trends in Britain at the time, with particular reference to the idea of state economic planning and to the relationship between socialism and democracy. It goes beyond the commonplace image that presents the discussion in Britain of the Soviet Union during the period under review as a clash between an uncritical pro-Soviet lobby and a staunch anti-communist tendency, and shows that there was a broad swathe of people, a centre ground consisting mainly of moderate conservatives, liberals and moderate social democrats, who matched their appreciation of certain aspects of Soviet society, most notably economic planning and social and welfare measures, with a strong repudiation of Stalin's authoritarian and arbitrary political practices.

*** * ***

The Bolsheviks' seizure of state power in October 1917 was a direct challenge to the existing world order. For the first time, the socialist movement, or at least one wing of it, was putting its theory into practice. Taking place as the First World War, the most destructive conflict that had so far been experienced in the history of humanity, was in the fourth month of its fourth year, the October Revolution was intended by its lead-

ers to be the first blow in a revolutionary wave that would sweep aside capitalism, and usher in the transition to a world socialist society, one which would offer peace, abundance, equality and freedom, in short, the liberation of humanity. Such an agenda would inevitably attract strong responses. For many left-wing people around the world, it was a ray of hope in the darkness of war. Those in power in the metropolitan centres shuddered involuntarily as they understood that they too could share the fate of their Russian counterparts. In between these two opposing standpoints, there were all manner of views. The October Revolution and the Soviet regime which issued from it were to evoke strong feelings from 1917 until the latter's demise in 1991.

The period of 1929-41 was a crucial time in the history of the Soviet Union. It opened with the year in which Josef Stalin, the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, and his faction defeated the opposition organised around Nikolai Bukharin, which had two years previously helped Stalin to defeat the Left Opposition around Leon Trotsky, and thereby permitted him to assume the leadership of the party and the country as a whole. This year also saw the party's sixteenth conference endorse a great acceleration of the pace of the First Five Year Plan, a project which had commenced in the previous autumn and which envisaged a course of tremendous economic development, and the start of the crash collectivisation of agriculture.

The great changes that took place during this period enabled the Soviet Union to become an immensely powerful state, one which was able during 1941 to start to take on the might of Nazi Germany and within four years to play a major part in its defeat, and subsequently to be for four decades a global power, second only in strength to the United States of America. These changes also established the Soviet Union as a peculiar socio-economic formation, the command economy ruled by a single hypercentralised nationalistic party, which was soon to be known as a Stalinist or a totalitarian society, with the étatised economy established under the First Five Year Plan providing a solid social base for the new ruling élite that had been emerging from within the Soviet party-state apparatus.

It is clear now, as it was to some back then, that the society which emerged during this period was a far cry from what the Bolsheviks had intended to create. It was not merely failing to fulfil the promises made by its founders in 1917, it was steadily mutating into the very opposite of what they had intended — an extremely repressive state ruled by a nationalist élite. Nonetheless, the public image of the Soviet regime — its

1. Apropos my use of the terms 'official communism' and 'Stalinism' for the Moscow regime and its international movement after the mid-1920s, I use the former term to distinguish it from other communist currents; as for the latter, I need but quote Johnny Campbell, a leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 'Stalinists — a name we are proud to bear.' See JR Campbell, 'The Trotskyist Danger', in Communist Party of Great Britain (1938), 94.

self-proclaimed mission to lead the fight against capitalism in favour of a new form of civilisation, both within its own borders and elsewhere through its sponsoring of the Communist International, or, at the very least, its ability to stand as an alternative to capitalism — was taken very seriously, for good or evil, by most observers. Moscow's controversial image was not the only reason why the Soviet Union could not be ignored: the start of the tremendous growth of the Soviet economy under the Five Year Plans coincided with the onset of the Great Depression in the West; and secondly, after having for some years laid little emphasis upon foreign affairs, in the second half of the 1930s Moscow started to intervene to a far greater extent on the world stage.



The novelty of the Soviet experience led large numbers of commentators to attempt to answer the various questions that it inevitably raised. What was the Soviet Union? How did its economy work, and did it have any lessons for the West in the economic arena? Was the Soviet regime a new and vibrant form of democracy, or was it a tyranny of unprecedented magnitude? Were Stalin and his entourage a new ruling élite or world revolutionaries, or indeed a combination of the two? Was the Soviet Union a force for peace and democracy, or was it a threat to the West? Did Stalinism represent the logical consequences of Bolshevism, or did it represent its betrayal? This thesis presents both the questions that were asked and the manner in which a broad range of observers attempted to answer them.

The literature on the Soviet Union was broad in extent, and even broader in opinion and quality. The mere size of a book is no guarantee of its worth; one house-brick-sized tome covered in Chapter Three, Sidney and Beatrice Webb's Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation, is valuable only in that it showed the gullibility of its authors and of those who took it seriously.² A relatively brief pamphlet can sometimes provide more valuable insights than a thick book, as can a single chapter on the Soviet Union in a book of broader scope, or a piece of serious journalism. Similarly with authors; a journalist's account can sometimes provide more valuable insights than the solid presentation of an acclaimed academic. One major problem here is establishing the boundaries of investigation. This thesis does not deal with day-to-day journalism, not because this is an unimportant topic of study, but because it is a big enough subject to merit a major work of its own — I draw attention to Steffanie Nanson's PhD thesis on the subject³ — but draws on serious articles and commentaries in journals and magazines. Nor, and for the same reason, does it deal with those other worthy subjects of investigation, popular opinion and internal government material.

- 2. Webb (1937).
- 3. Nanson (1996).

This thesis does not deal exclusively with material produced by British commentators. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, there was a lack of proficient indigenous observers. There were a few 'Russia Hands', individuals who were knowledgeable in Russian affairs and who spoke the language fluently, sometimes through an academic or personal interest, and sometimes through the mere fact of spending some time in Russia. 'Russia Hands' included Sir Bernard Pares, one of the tiny number of pioneers of Slavic studies in Britain, Stephen Graham, a prolific writer on all manner of Russian subjects, Harold Williams, who was married to the prominent Russian Liberal Adriana Tyrkova, Lancelot Lawton, a conservative journalist who was rightly described as 'a hard-working amateur', the Belgian-born Edinburgh-based Charles Sarolea, with his vast collection of books on Russia, and Robert Wilton, the St Petersburg correspondent of The Times who had grown up in Russia.5 However, their qualities as authorities varied, and Wilton became notorious for inflicting his anti-Semitic prejudices upon his readers.6 The traditional 'Russia Hands' were subsequently augmented by people with a more academic orientation, such as EH Carr, whose lifelong interest in Soviet affairs was kindled by his work in the Foreign Office, Leonard Hubbard and Margaret Miller, two early students of the Russian/Soviet economy, and the Irish-born Violet Conolly, who subsequently worked for the Foreign Office, but their numbers were similarly few. The Russian Revolution and the Soviet regime were subjects of immensely heated and partisan debate, and a vast number of pages were devoted to them from people at all points of the political spectrum, from left-wing enthusiasts to right-wing detractors. A large number of these commentators, probably the majority of them, had no specialised knowledge of the country, nor any command of the Russian language, and so they relied more upon their political knowledge and instincts to try and understand what was going on. Nonetheless, these commentators' analyses and prognoses were often of no better or worse quality and accuracy than those produced by people with more knowledge and linguistic abilities.

Secondly, although British commentators, whether 'Russia Hands', academics or general writers, were capable of producing good works, were this study limited to them, it would nonetheless be a thin brew, as a great deal of worthwhile material was produced by people from beyond these shores, and their writings added greatly to the knowledge of British readers. Many of them were émigrés from the Soviet Union at various stages of its development after 1917, with at first the outflow of conservatives,

^{4.} John Heath, 'USSR', International Affairs, 12 (1), January 1933, 129.

^{5.} Russia had long been an object of fascination in the West, and many of the prevailing ideas about it were carried into the discussion of the Soviet Union. For Western concepts of pre-1917 Russia, see Laqueur (1967), 1-19; Naarden (1992), 7-39; Northedge and Wells (1982), 3ff, 137ff.

^{6.} Kadish (1992), 10-38.

liberals and non-Bolshevik socialists, and, from the late 1920s, of oppositional communists. Hence, the reader in Britain soon had access to books and articles by prominent Russian political figures, such as Paul Miliukov and Alexander Kerensky, plus many other lesser-known people, who had fled the Soviet regime, and subsequently those, like Trotsky, who had fallen foul of the regime's mutation into Stalinism. To this must be added the large number of books and articles by academics, politicians, journalists and other authorities from Germany, France, the USA and many other countries. The Nazis' victory in January 1933 led to many German and subsequently Austrian writers finding sanctuary in Britain, and not a few of them found a ready demand for their material. Intellectual life in Britain did not exist in isolation from that in other countries.

The shortage of indigenous observers of the Soviet scene is indicated by the fact that many British magazines and journals, including the Slavonic and East European Review, the sole academic journal of its type published in Britain at this time, and prestigious institutions such as Chatham House, regularly drew upon foreign commentators, such as the US journalists William Henry Chamberlin, HR Knickerbocker and Louis Fischer. Similarly, a large number of British publishers went to the bother of producing substantial books on the Soviet Union by non-British observers, and not merely those from the USA, but also those whose works had to be translated into English, because they felt that these authors had something important to say. Introducing a devastating critique of Stalinism by the dissident communist Victor Serge, the rightwing historian Arthur Bryant declared that he was publishing the work of 'an unrepentant communist' because he was 'no superficial visitant describing the impressions of a fortnight's conducted tour in the USSR', and wrote 'with burning sincerity' of what he knew. However, foreign commentators were no less capable than their indigenous counterparts of imposing their prejudices upon their readers and producing lamentable material, and on one notable occasion in 1930 the Spectator, a moderate conservative weekly, felt obliged to dissociate itself from the increasingly pro-Soviet reportage of its Moscow correspondent, Walter Duranty, who subsequently earned the justified reputation as a rank apologist for Stalinism.8 Whatever the quality, however, the material published in Britain by foreign commentators was not only taken very seriously,9 but contributed to the intellectual climate here. If we take the example of

- 7. Arthur Bryant, 'Editorial Note', insert in Serge (1937).
- 8. See the editorial disclaimer above Duranty's 'Letter From Moscow', Spectator, 20 December 1930, 916. Duranty was born in Britain, but seldom visited these shores in his adult life, during much of which he worked for the New York Times.
- 9. To take just one example, see the lengthy review by Arthur Shadwell of books by, amongst others, Karl Kautsky, Calvin Hoover, HR Knickerbocker, Ethan Colton and 'Panaït Istrati' (actually Boris Souvarine), 'The Five Year Plan', Times Literary Supplement, 21 May 1931, 397-8, handily repro-

George Orwell, who never actually visited the Soviet Union and thus obtained all his information about it at second-hand, it is clear to me, after having perused works on the Soviet Union that were written by foreigners and which Orwell read, and his own writings, that his knowledge of Stalinism and the Soviet Union was at least in part informed by reading their works.¹⁰

The whole history of the Soviet Union in all its phases from the October Revolution in 1917 to its ignominious implosion in 1991 was such that its study required an investigation of often unfamiliar ideas, policies and events. Not a little of the material published on the Soviet Union during the period under review was guesswork of both an inspired and uninspired nature, not least when bizarre phenomena exploded into view, most notably the three Moscow Trials of Old Bolsheviks in 1936-38, and the purge of the Soviet military leaders in 1937. Faced with an unfamiliar set of processes in the economic, political and social fields, parallels were often drawn with roughly analogous if still only nascent trends in Western countries, such as state intervention in the economy and the establishment of welfare schemes, or with other new phenomena, such as fascism in Italy and Germany. Any discussion of the Soviet Union was inevitably laden with profound political implications, and although authors often professed their impartiality, personal opinions continually intruded, and debates were invariably heated as people brought their prejudices, beliefs and hopes into the discussion.11 Those committed to the free market considered that the Soviet socio-economic formation could not last, or, conversely, was a dire foretaste of a collectivised world. Some socialists felt that the Soviet Union represented the realisation of their dreams of an egalitarian society, whilst others felt that by 1929 the Soviet regime had betrayed the libertarian promises of the October Revolution. Others, of various political persuasions, saw the Soviet Union as a gigantic pick'n'mix, appreciating some of its features, usually economic planning and social provisions, whilst rejecting the repressive political aspects. Most people who were committed to liberal democratic norms rejected Soviet political procedures as a negation of their ideals, whilst some saw, or thought they saw, corners being turned, particularly with the Stalin Constitution of 1936, or averted their gaze from transgressions of their principles. The varied qualities of the reporting and analyses of the Soviet Union during the period under discussion crossed all political and professional boundaries. Journalists, writers, travellers, the 'Russia Hands' and

duced in Mount (1992), 49-57.

^{10.} Orwell read many works on the Soviet Union, and reviewed books by Eugene Lyons, Nicholas de Basily and Franz Borkenau, see Orwell (1984a), 368-71, 416-9; (1984b), 40-2.

^{11.} As one commentator put it: '... the conclusions of supporters and opponents of the Soviet regime still usually differ so widely that it is difficult to believe that they relate to the same country.' ('Soviet Economics', Spectator, 1 October 1932, 405)

the younger Slavic students, social scientists and commentators at all points of the political spectrum and from all countries were all capable of howlers, misrepresentations and duff predictions of a sometimes monumental nature, yet there were often brilliant flashes of insight and understanding amidst acres of uninspiring hackery.

A crucial question is the degree to which the experience of the Soviet Union impinged upon people's thinking in Britain during this period. Apart from those few individuals interested in Slavic affairs and left-wingers who viewed the October Revolution and the Soviet regime as crucially important historical factors, it is clear that it did play an important part in political, social and economic discourse, but it was only one of many subjects under discussion in Britain at the time. This is illustrated by the following table, which gives data for material on Germany, France, Spain and the Soviet Union.

Topic/Date	Apr-Jun 32	Jan-Mar 34	Apr-Jun 38	Total
Articles on Germany	11	20	10	41
Articles mentioning Germany	78	111	154	343
Reviews dealing with Germany	6	14	4	24
Total	95	145	168	408
Articles on France	9	7	11	27
Articles mentioning France	69	77	76	222
Reviews dealing with France	4	1	0	5
Total	82	85	87	254
Articles on Spain	1	2	4	7
Articles mentioning Spain	5	6	87	98
Reviews dealing with Spain	0	2	4	6
Total	6	10	95	111
Articles on the Soviet Union	7	3	_	10
Articles mentioning the SU	27	44	70	141
Reviews dealing with the SU	10	4	7	21
Total	44	51	77	172

Calculated from *New Statesman*, *Spectator* and *Contemporary Review* for April-June 1932, January-March 1934 and April-June 1938. These periods were chosen to avoid particularly newsworthy events, such as Moscow Trials, Hitler's electoral victory, etc, and thus to provide reasonably balanced equivalents in the coverage.

Even the Slavonic and East European Review was not overly oriented in favour of material on the Soviet Union, and through the stormy days of mass collectivisation and the Moscow Trials it still found plenty of room for all manner of inconsequential items. Personal diaries of important figures in the diplomatic world indicate that whilst they held strong views on the Soviet Union and its involvement in the world, they nonetheless devoted only a relatively small amount of their time to this topic.¹²

Compared to the post-1945 period, when the Cold War confrontation imposed

^{12.} See, for example, Nicolson (1969); James (1970).

to a considerable degree a straitjacket upon the political and analytical discourse in respect of the Soviet Union, the debate during the period under discussion was often more open and fluid. Some of the insights into the Soviet Union that were made during 1929-41 played a significant role in Soviet studies after 1945. The dominant theory of the Cold War, the concept of totalitarianism, was first presented to a British readership in the early 1930s, and elements of it even earlier. The interminable debate amongst sections of the left about the nature of the Soviet Union, a discussion which still rages today, was already well under way by 1929. On the other hand, there were also insights and assessments which, for various reasons, fell by the wayside, and were forgotten. But as the validity of an insight or theory is not determined by its popularity in the political or academic field, some of the neglected writings of this period could be profitably looked at again, in the light of the collapse of the entire Soviet system.



There are three problems that have to be confronted when writing this kind of study. The first is that of the author's own outlook. Irrespective of the obligation upon any doctoral student to aspire to a detached approach, it is inevitable that these views will influence both the underlying framework of the project, and the manner in which the project manifests itself. My own views on the evolution of the Soviet regime are based upon those elaborated by Trotsky, in that the originators of the Soviet republic were sincere in their quest for a new and better world, and that there was a deeply democratic thrust to Bolshevism during 1917 which was steadily eroded during the post-revolutionary period due to a wide range of objective and subjective factors until, by the late 1920s, the Soviet leadership was rapidly transforming itself into a self-conscious ruling élite that wished to coexist with the capitalist world, and was as equally intent as the governing circles of the capitalist world on preventing the advent of communism. Unfashionable as such ideas may have been then, and still are today, I consider that they provide a better understanding of the development, or degeneration as Trotsky suitably put it, of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution than other theories.¹³ Similarly, my ideas in respect of the nature of the Soviet socio-economic formation have been influenced by the writings of Hillel Ticktin, whom I consider has been able to understand better than anyone else its laws of motion and the processes which governed its development and decline. 14 However, I am confident that I have not permitted my views unduly to influence this thesis. I cannot pretend to be impartial, but I do aim to be objective

- 13. I deal with the works of Trotsky that were published in Britain during 1929-41 in Chapters Two and Three. I am more prepared than most others who follow Trotsky's analysis, and indeed Trotsky himself, to subject the early years of the Soviet republic to a critical appraisal. See Flewers (1994), 29-36; (1995), 32-39; (1997), 26-34; (1997-98), 11-13; (2001), 6-7, and (2003b).
- 14. Ticktin (1992).

within the bounds of my viewpoint. I intend to be fair to the various commentators whom I analyse, and present their views honestly and without distortion.

The second problem in attempting to assess observations of the Soviet Union is that the whole evolution of the country, culminating in its collapse in 1991, encourages a present-day observer to consider it with the benefit of hindsight, that is to say, through the prism of knowing that the system has come to an end. Hence, the issue of the viability of the Soviet Union, something that was not widely questioned, say, three or even two decades ago, cannot be avoided now that the Soviet socio-economic system as it evolved from 1929 has been shown to be historically unviable. Nonetheless, I have attempted to keep the advantages of hindsight at bay, and I only comment upon the demise of the Soviet Union at the very end of the thesis.

A third problem in this venture is the question of the theoretical constructs of some of the writers who are cited in this thesis. The study of the Soviet Union was necessarily contentious, and it brought forth a wide range of theories about Marxism, Bolshevism and modern society in general. Some of these ideas, particularly the theory of totalitarianism, which became a guiding principle for many analysts and commentators during the Cold War and which still remains popular today, are discussed in this thesis. However, to have analysed in depth some of them, such as the more arcane ideas about the intellectual origins of Bolshevism, or the rather weird and wonderful interpretations of Marxism and other political theories that were bandied around during the period under discussion, would have made this thesis too unwieldy.

*** * ***

There have been attempts at appraising appraisals of the Soviet Union, but these have nearly all been far wider in scope than this study, looking across a much broader range of time, or far more narrowly focussed, looking at particular organisations and the views held within them, or at personalities and their works.

An account of Anglo-Soviet relations written by William and Zelda Coates in the closing stages of the Second World War described the conflicting attitudes towards the Soviet Union expressed in Britain up to 1942. It was an extensive work containing much information, but any possibility of objectivity was written off by the staunch Stalinist sympathies of the authors. Indeed, their indignant rejection of the accusations levelled against the Soviet regime in respect of the use of forced labour and the staging of show trials started to seem a little forced in the light of Khrushchev's revelations in 1956, and looks utterly threadbare today.¹⁵

A fair amount of Walter Laqueur's The Fate of the Revolution was devoted to assessments of the Soviet Union. Although it contained much useful information, I do

not accept all of Laqueur's premises. He claimed that a classification of opinions was impossible to assemble, firstly, because of the sheer number of differing views, and secondly, because people's outlooks were likely to change over the years. This is wrong on both counts. To be sure, there were a large number of differing opinions, not to mention plenty of anomalies, but there were also certain trends of thought into which people could with some accuracy be located. Similarly, changes of opinion would mean that people could shift from one trend to another. Indeed, Laqueur undermined his own assertion by taking as an example Bernard Pares, who shifted from a strong anti-communist viewpoint to become for all intents and purposes a fellow-traveller, and who, far from prohibiting classification, actually demonstrated its viability. Although Laqueur wrote of 'the many shades in between' opposition to and endorsement of the Soviet regime, he tended to view the discussion of the Soviet Union in the 1930s as a debate between the opposite poles of pro-Sovietism and anti-communism, overlooking the centre ground between them. Laqueur, however, was by no means the only commentator to ignore this centre ground. Indeed, his omission is typical of most writers on the subject.16

Steffanie Nanson's thesis concentrated mainly upon issues that related directly to Anglo-Soviet relations, such as the Metrovick trial, the Spanish Civil War and the debates around the virtues and vices of collective security. It included a chapter on responses in the British press to the Moscow Trials, but it did not touch upon the Five Year Plans, the famine and the 1936 constitution. The lack of any coverage of responses to the Five Year Plans is unfortunate, for, as this thesis shows, the economic changes in the Soviet Union were an important factor in political and intellectual discussion in Britain during the period under review. Nanson made no reference to the Soviet Union's counter-revolutionary activities in the Spanish Civil War that so debilitated the fight against Franco, nor did she more than cursorily comment upon the debate on the socio-economic nature of the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Abbott Gleason's excellent history of the theory of totalitarianism looked at the way that various commentators from the late 1920s considered that Italy and the Soviet Union, and subsequently Nazi Germany, represented a new form of society. Describing some of the literature of the time, Gleason noted that Waldemar Gurian's Bolshevism: Theory and Practice, which appeared in an English translation in 1932, was an important early exposition of totalitarian theory. Laqueur also noted it, yet failed to mention its pioneering status in what became the dominant explanation of the So-

^{16.} Laqueur (1967), 158-9.

^{17.} Nanson (1997), especially vii, 99ff. Nanson's thesis would have been considerably more coherent had it concentrated purely upon Anglo-Soviet relations.

^{18.} Gleason (1995), 226.

viet experience after 1945.¹⁹ Even more surprising is that Simon Tormey's book on totalitarian theory failed to mention Gurian's work at all, and compounded this omission by stating that the theory was not brought to a British audience until the late 1930s.²⁰ In respect of other analyses of Soviet society, writers who have investigated the discussion that has long engaged the non-Stalinist Marxist left have tended to give the erroneous impression that those involved in it were developing their particular theories of state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism in isolation from the general trends of discussion about étatism that existed at the time, and that the debate about the nature of Stalinism and the Soviet Union was a purely left-wing phenomenon.²¹

Many accounts of Western political trends have noted the hostility towards the Soviet Union that blew up after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and, especially, the Soviet attack upon Finland at the end of November 1939.²² Gleason pointed to the widespread popularisation of the term 'totalitarian' in respect of the Soviet regime.²³ However, whilst this outburst of enmity has been noted in accounts of the Labour Party in Britain,²⁴ what was so often omitted was the important factor that this was not so much an intensification of the existing critical feelings within the party towards Soviet political norms, but the adoption of the traditional anti-communism of the conservative right, which had always seen the Soviet Union as an expansionist, totalitarian threat to Western civilisation. This is not a minor historical point, as the anti-communist sentiments that erupted in the Labour Party leadership in late 1939 were to become the dominant trend in mainstream British politics after 1945. Many writers who have cited the Labour Party's intemperate statements on this issue have not recognised the significance of this shift in opinion. One can excuse GDH Cole, who was writing in 1948, when the Cold War was only just getting into its stride,25 but not subsequent commentators.²⁶

Attitudes in Britain towards the Soviet Union during the period under discussion in this thesis have also been outlined, albeit usually only in passing, in broader-focussed works, particularly in general accounts of British history,²⁷ Soviet espionage²⁸

- 19. Laqueur (1967), 162.
- 20. Tormey (1995), 9.
- 21. Bellis (1979), passim; Westoby (1985), 1-33; Matgamna (1998), 1-156.
- 22. See, for example, Clark (1966), 34ff; Taylor (1977), 570-2.
- 23. Gleason (1995), 48.
- 24. See, for example, Brand (1965), 217-8; Thorpe (2001), 90-1.
- 25 Cole (1948), 376.
- 26. Clark (1966), 40-2; Bell (1990), 34-5; Burridge (1976), 36-7; Miliband (1979), 269-70. Geoff Foote's account of political trends within the Labour Party did recognise the adumbration of Cold War anti-communism at this juncture, but did not associate it with the Finnish War, see Foote (1987), 193.
- 27. For example, AJP Taylor, who restricted his coverage of the pro-Soviet atmosphere to a brief re-

and British foreign policy,29 and, of course, in histories of the now-defunct Communist Party of Great Britain.30 Robert Conquest devoted some pages of his works on the Ukrainian famine and the Great Terror to the differing attitudes expressed towards them in Western countries, including Britain.31 FS Northedge and Audrey Wells' Britain and Soviet Communism covered the impact of the Soviet Union on British political and intellectual life from 1917 to the early 1980s.³² Bill Jones' The Russia Complex covered the way in which the various wings of the Labour Party dealt with the Soviet Union from 1917 to the early 1950s.33 David Blaazer's account of the struggle for left-wing unity in Britain touched on opinions on the Soviet Union in the Labour Party in the 1930s.³⁴ Because of the specific scopes of these books, they were obliged to deal with the subject matter of this thesis within a relatively short space, as it was only one issue amongst many others. Andrew Williams' Labour and Russia discussed in some detail the varying attitudes towards the Soviet Union that were held in the Labour Party from 1924, the year of the first Labour government, but cut off for no apparent reason in 1934.35 The characteristic 1930s phenomenon of fellow-travelling has been dealt with at considerable length by David Caute, Lewis Coser, Paul Hollander and others, 36 and was analysed at the time, not least by disillusioned former fellow-travellers like Eugene Lyons and Malcolm Muggeridge.³⁷ However, the preoccupation with what Jones called the 'enchantment' of many people with the Soviet Union during the 1930s has led most commentators to downplay or overlook the existence of the centre ground of opinion between the pro-Soviet lobby and the anti-communists, and this is something that this thesis goes a long way to put right.³⁸

- mark; Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, official communists who took it very seriously; and Ronald Blythe, who rather cynically wrote it off as a passing fad. See Taylor (1977), 431; Branson and Heinemann (1971), 5-6, 257-60; Blythe (1963), 103ff.
- 28. For example, Koch (1996), 149-204. Unfortunately, Koch tended to see nearly all Soviet sympathisers as agents of the Kremlin, thus giving a misleading portrayal of many of them.
- 29. This is usually in respect of the refusal of the British government to forge a collective security agreement with Moscow. See, for example, Gannon (1971), 23ff, 278ff; McElwee (1979), 267ff; Middlemass (1972), 27ff; Naylor (1969), 297; LeRoi (1997), 153; Thompson (1971), passim.
- 30. This is discussed in Chapter One, Section Three.
- 31. Conquest (1986), 308-21; (1990), 463-76.
- 32. Northedge and Wells (1982).
- 33. Jones (1977).
- 34. Blazer (1992), 122-6.
- 35. Williams (1989). FM Leventhal investigated the reports of radical visitors to the Soviet Union during the 1920s, but only touched upon those of the 1930s. See Leventhal (1987), 209-27.
- 36. Caute (1973); Coser (1965); Hollander (1981). This is discussed in Chapter One, Section Two.
- 37. Lyons (1941a); Muggeridge (1934 and 1940).
- 38. Jones (1977), 11. This is discussed in Chapter One, Section Four.

Autobiographies and biographies of people whose works are cited in this thesis are often useful in understanding their motives, outlooks and consequent attitudes towards the Soviet Union, even if in some cases only a few paragraphs or sentences were devoted to the subject. Autobiographical works by Malcolm Muggeridge, André Gide and Louis Fischer described at some length their enchantment and subsequent alienation from the Soviet Union.39 An informative collection of reminiscences of Moscow newspaper correspondents, including Morgan Philips Price, William Henry Chamberlin and Eugene Lyons, was published in 1968,40 and useful studies of Walter Duranty and Louis Fischer investigated why they were attracted to Stalinism.⁴¹ Short but illuminating passages on their attitudes towards the Soviet Union can be found in the autobiographies of Margaret McCarthy, Freda Utley (both former members of the Communist Party), Harold Macmillan and Hugh Dalton, all of whom visited the country during the 1930s, 42 whilst Ben Pimlott's biography of Dalton revealed that the Labour leader's ideas about economic planning and state intervention in the economy were influenced not only by virtue of his Soviet tour in 1932, but by a visit to Mussolini's Italy in the same year.43

Nevertheless, care has to be taken with autobiographical and biographical material, as it is inevitably subjective, and issues that the people concerned or their biographers think were important may differ from those which I feel are of significance, or differing conclusions may be reached. Jonathan Haslam complained that EH Carr adhered to 'the illusion that the Soviet Union would rapidly shed its messianic mission in favour of a purely state-oriented approach to international relations',⁴⁴ although it is clear to me that Carr was correct in insisting that the guiding principle of Stalin's foreign policy was *realpolitik* and not any commitment to world revolution. Of the two major biographies of George Orwell, one failed to deal adequately with his inability to address in a convincing manner the problem of collectivism, socialism and democracy that the Soviet experience at least in part raised,⁴⁵ and the other did not raise the question at all,⁴⁶ although, as I have shown, this shortcoming on Orwell's part led, amongst

- 41. Crowl (1982); Taylor (1990).
- 42. McCarthy (1953), 218; Utley (1949), 1; Macmillan (1966), 324, 355; Dalton (1957), 29-30.
- 43. Pimlott (1985), 206ff.

^{39.} Muggeridge (1972), 208ff; André Gide and Louis Fischer, contributions to Crossman (1959), 147-207.

^{40. &#}x27;The Moscow Correspondent: A Symposium' (1968), 118-35.

^{44.} Haslam (1999), 105. In his investigation of Carr's writings on the Soviet Union of the 1930s, RW Davies made no mention of Carr's incisive analysis of Soviet foreign policy. See Davies (2000), 91-108.

^{45.} Crick (1982), 405, 496.

^{46.} Sheldon (1992).

other things, to his *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being championed by his political enemies.⁴⁷ Robert Skidelsky's mammoth biography of Oswald Mosley failed to mention the intriguing fact that the British fascist leader openly pondered whether Stalin had become a national revolutionary — in other words, a fascist — after his pact with Nazi Germany in August 1939.⁴⁸

An autobiography can be unduly coloured by the writer's feelings,⁴⁹ and a biography can be limited to some extent by the very opacity of its subject.⁵⁰ Awkward or embarrassing bits can be nuanced or omitted, and not all the truth may be told, although this is not necessarily due to deliberate chicanery. For instance, three biographies of GDH Cole failed to show how his ideas on the socialist forms of industrial management led him to adopt a positive attitude towards Stalinism that contradicted his democratic principles.⁵¹ Both Kingsley Martin and his biographer managed to forget that he accepted the allegations made in the first Moscow Trial in 1936, and that in late 1939 the New Statesman, which Martin edited, equated the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany.⁵² Martin's biography of Harold Laski similarly omitted to mention Laski's alarmingly inconsistent attitude towards Stalinism in the late 1930s, even though the worst examples of it were in Martin's own magazine, although a later biographer has drawn attention to it.53 In his reminiscences, Stephen Spender asserted that an article of his in the CPGB's Daily Worker was a criticism of the party, whilst in reality it was written both to demonstrate his new-found belief in the validity of the Moscow Trials, and to repudiate his previous mild doubts about them.⁵⁴ One would not know from four biographies of HG Wells that he was not overly impressed by Stalin's regime, and felt that it did not measure up to his stringent specifications for an enlightened élite of 'samurai'.55

- 47. Flewers (2000).
- 48. Skidelsky (1975). See Chapter Four, page 170.
- 49. Not least the memoirs of various embittered former members of the CPGB. See Hyde (1952); McCarthy (1953); Utley (1949).
- 50. Not least in respect of the CPGB's main theoretician, Rajani Palme Dutt. See Callaghan (1993).
- 51. Cole (1971); Houseman (1979); Wright (1979). See Chapter Two, page 73; Chapter Five, pages 1989.
- 52. Martin (1968); Rolph (1973). See Chapter Three, page 73; Chapter Five, pages 179, 185. Peter Deli has noted Martin's inconsistent attitude towards the trials, see Deli (1985), 261-82.
- 53. Martin (1953); Newman (1993), 193. See Chapter Three, page 140.
- 54. See Spender's contribution to Crossman (1959), 210; Dewar (1976), 122-3, 153. See Chapter Three, page 139. The offending article can be found in Spender (1978), 80-2. In reproducing it here, Spender was obliged to reveal its real content, but he failed to explain why he had previously misrepresented it.
- 55. Costa (1967); Dickson (1969); Smith (1986); Wagar (1961). Misrepresentations abound; Costa presented Wells as a disillusioned fellow-traveller, whilst Martin Amis recently accused him of being an apologist for Stalinism. See Costa (1967), 138-9; Amis (2002), 21. For a critique of Amis'

The inveterate élitism and étatism of Sidney and Beatrice Webb and their corresponding haughty disdain for the working class, which underpinned their endorsement of Stalin's regime during the 1930s, have been investigated at some length, 56 and were confirmed with the publication of their correspondence and in Beatrice Webb's diaries and her incomplete autobiography.⁵⁷ Yet their élitism has also been overlooked,58 and one recent biography tried to argue it away with a sleight of hand.59 Another historian did not deny the fatuousness of the Webbs' Soviet Communism, yet excused it by promptly adding that to criticise it gave 'the inevitable impression of cats biting lions' ankles'.60 It is much the same with that other élitist champion of Stalinism, George Bernard Shaw. Some writers carefully analysed his élitism, 61 yet the most extensive biography of the man, by Michael Holroyd, left it unexplained, 62 and Eric Hobsbawm criticised Shaw's authoritarian predilections whilst neglecting to ask whether his attraction to Stalin's Soviet Union was a result of these traits.⁶³ In their biographies of John Strachey, Michael Newman, Hugh Thomas and Noel Thompson all noted Strachey's élitism, impatience for action and appreciation of strong leadership, but whereas Thomas and Thompson recognised that they played a key part in his subsequent conversion to Stalinism and his uncritical attitude towards the Soviet Union through much of the 1930s,64 Newman did not so much leave the question unanswered as failed to ask it. For obvious reasons, biographies can be part of the battle of ideas in respect of controversial doctrines and characters. For instance, critics of Trotsky have attempted to undermine the legitimacy of his critique of Stalinism in the 1930s by declaring that his authoritarian policies in respect of the relationship between the working class and the Soviet Communist Party during the Civil War anticipated those of Stalin after 1929.65 Trotsky's sympathetic biographer Isaac Deutscher

ignorant foray into Soviet history, see Flewers (2002-03), 21-5.

- 56. Austrin (1995), 21-53; Liebman (1962), 58-74; Flewers (2003a). See also Thorpe (1998b), 621.
- 57. MacKenzie (1978, 1984 and 1985); Cole and Drake (1948).
- 58. Hamilton (1932).
- 59. Radice (1984), 8.
- 60. Williams (1989), 242.
- 61. Strauss (1942); Irvine (1949).
- 62. Holroyd (1993).
- 63. Hobsbawm (1947), 305-26.
- 64. Newman (1989), 46-7; Thomas (1973), 111; Thompson (1993), 67.
- 65. See, for example, Knei-Paz (1978), 431ff. The former Soviet military education officer turned Yeltsinite historian Dmitri Volkogonov was so enthusiastic about the idea that Trotsky had no right to complain about Stalinism because he had helped to set up the Soviet system in the first place, that he not only made the point in the introduction of his biography, see Volkogonov (1997), xxxii, but on pages 217, 220, 234-5, 250, 318-9, 336, 383, 415, 421-2, 461, 467, 472-3 and 485-6 as if repetition conferred authenticity upon an assertion.

did tackle with some discomfort the relationship between their respective policies,⁶⁶ whereas Ernest Mandel, the most prominent post-1945 Trotskyist theoretician, although critical of Trotsky's Civil War policies, somewhat unconvincingly denied that they had any connection with those later implemented by Stalin.⁶⁷

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Massive though it was, the material published on the Soviet Union during the 1930s has been greatly overshadowed by the truly vast amount released under the rubric of Soviet studies since 1945, and especially with the opening of the Soviet archives under glasnost and following the demise of the Soviet regime in 1991. Here, I look with extreme brevity at the available material, as anything more would require a thesis in itself.

As this thesis shows, the study of the Soviet Union has always been an extremely politicised subject, with all manner of strongly-held beliefs influencing the published material. It was rarely a matter of impartial commentary, as the political views of the commentators almost always emerged in their narratives, whether overtly or implicitly, and many of the trends of thought that existed during the period under discussion appeared in the histories of the Soviet Union that have proliferated since the demise of the country in 1991.

On the right, Martin Malia was uncompromising in his promotion of the idea that the whole Soviet experience was an utter waste of time, a gigantic totalitarian, inhumane and wasteful folly that resulted from the attempt to implement the impossible doctrine of socialism. ⁶⁸ On the left, Ted Grant contended that the October Revolution could have represented the dawn of a brilliant future for humanity had it not been restricted to one backward country, and although Stalin betrayed the socialist cause with his adoption in the mid-1920s of a counter-revolutionary, undemocratic and nationalist course, the fact that, despite the blundering of Stalin and his successors, the Soviet Union experienced remarkable economic development demonstrated the potential of a post-capitalist economy. ⁶⁹ In between, there has been much material, such as the work of Robert Service, which, although critical of the entire Soviet experience, was of a less partisan nature than Malia's and did not accept the theory of totalitarianism. ⁷⁰ In a similar vein was Alec Nove's solid account of the Soviet economy from 1917

^{66.} Deutscher (1979), 515.

^{67.} Mandel (1995), 133. See my critique of Mandel in Flewers (2001), 6-7.

^{68.} Malia (1999).

^{69.} Grant (1997).

^{70.} Service (1998). For critical and favourable assessments of the theory of totalitarianism, see Cohen (1986a) and Laqueur (1994) respectively.

to 1991.71 It was, however, necessarily heavily reliant upon Soviet statistics, which were not always particularly reliable.72

Much of the historical debate has revolved around the nature of the October Revolution, and so will only be touched upon here. In short, the conservative lobby has continued with the claim that it has promulgated since 1917 that the establishment of the Soviet regime was an underhand illegitimate coup d'état on the part of a proto-totalitarian clique of professional revolutionaries taking advantage of a chaotic situation and manipulating the Russian masses,73 whilst a heterodox group of historians have denied this, and have considered that the issues are considerably more complex. Whilst promoting assessments of Bolshevism that have ranged from outright rejection⁷⁴ to forthright approval,⁷⁵ through all views in between,⁷⁶ they have rejected the traditional anti-communist interpretation, and have been much more inclined to see purposeful activity on the part of the Russian masses, and to have considered that the Bolsheviks enjoyed a fruitful and close relationship with the working class and with the democratic institutions that the workers and peasants built during 1917. The more recent studies have also tended to expand the scope of investigation from the previous concentration upon 'high politics' towards observing different social groups and more localised activities, thus helping further to undermine the ideas of the totalitarian school, which has customarily seen events as being controlled from the top.77

The period under discussion in this thesis has, of course, been covered in the general histories of the Soviet Union,⁷⁸ and has also been the subject of an extensive range of more narrowly focused works. Space prevents more than a quick look at some of the latter. Robert Tucker's *Stalin in Power* remains an excellent account of high politics during 1928-41,⁷⁹ and Deutscher's biography of Stalin, first published in 1948, is still worth reading.⁸⁰ Moshe Lewin has provided many interesting pieces on the nature of Stalinism.⁸¹ Several authorities have investigated the development of the Commu-

- 71. Nove (1992).
- 72. Wheatcroft and Davies (1994), 24-37.
- 73. Keep (1976); Pipes (1990 and 1995).
- 74. Service (1991 and 1995).
- 75. Deutscher (1979); Mandel (1983).
- 76. Rabinowitch (1979); Cohen (1980). EH Carr's writings on the revolutionary period were consciously audessus de la mêlée, but ultimately took the side of the Bolsheviks for having set up what seemed like a viable state. See Carr (1950-53).
- 77. For an overview of the historiographical debate, see Acton (1992).
- 78. For instance, Service (1998), 169ff.
- 79. Tucker (1990). My only major disagreement with Tucker is with his insistence that Stalin was still interested in proletarian revolutions occurring in the capitalist world after 1930.
- 80. Deutscher (1966).
- 81. Lewin (1985 and 1995).

nist International under Stalin, showing how the parties of the Comintern were increasingly subordinated to the diplomatic requirements of the Soviet Union.⁸² In a study that still remains valuable, Max Beloff detailed the intricacies of Soviet foreign policy during the Stalin era,⁸³ and Geoffrey Roberts described the fraught period leading up to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.⁸⁴ RW Davies has so far produced two of a series of greatly detailed accounts of the tremendous changes in the Soviet economy under the Five Year Plans that show the rough-and-ready manner in which the plans were implemented.⁸⁵ Lynn Viola's account of the role of urban activists in the collectivisation of the agricultural sector also detailed the impact of the changes upon the peasantry and the chaotic nature of the entire operation.⁸⁶ These are just a few of the works that present a background to the events described in this thesis.

In many respects, the customary political differences in Soviet studies have been less marked in the postwar accounts of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Regardless of their outlooks, it has been accepted by most commentators that this period was one of great advances alongside gross inhumanity, even if disagreements continue as to whether Stalin's terror was implicit in Bolshevism, or represented a perversion of it.⁸⁷ Only a marginal few have continued to promote an unblemished view of the Stalin era.⁸⁸ However, a new factor arose when certain historians attempted to impose the non-totalitarian model of analysis of 1917 upon the mid-1930s, and sought to detect some form of democratic thrust behind the purges, and sometimes to minimise both Stalin's role and the number of deaths during this period.⁸⁹ Here, the usual political divisions became confused, as various historians who rejected the totalitarian model dissociated themselves from these writers, and effectively stood closer to the traditional conservative historians on this issue.⁹⁰

Three recent books which have considerable relevance to this thesis by way of their provision of valuable insights into aspects of the Soviet Union during the initial Five Year Plans are Don Filtzer's work on the working class, Sheila Fitzpatrick's study

- 82. Carr (1986); Claudín (1975); McDermott and Agnew (1996).
- 83. Beloff (1947-49).
- 84. Roberts (1989).
- 85. Davies (1989 and 1996).
- 86. Viola (1989).
- 87. Compare the classic works on the purges and terror of Robert Conquest, the right-wing Sovietologist, and Roy Medvedev, the left-wing former Soviet dissident, Conquest (1990); Medvedev (1989).
- 88. See the work of Harpal Brar, a mainstay of the Stalin Society, Brar (1992).
- 89. Getty (1985); Thurston (1996). Getty has of late moved towards a more conventional stance, see Getty and Naumov (2002).
- 90. Cohen (1986b), 378-84; Filtzer (1998), 30. For a sharp right-wing critique of Thurston, see Conquest (1996), 3-5.

of everyday life, and Stephen Kotkin's account of the Magnitogorsk project. Filtzer drew upon a wide range of sources not merely to describe the specific problems that Soviet workers faced and the ways in which they attempted to come to terms with the strictures of the regime, but, through an investigation of the peculiar social relations of the Soviet socio-economic formation, to demonstrate how and why the problems of poor workmanship, shoddy product quality, labour shortage and mobility and ineffective management were endemic to the system. 91 Fitzpatrick made use of newly-opened Soviet archives to probe the major and minor details of Soviet life, the day-to-day problems that Soviet citizens encountered, the opportunities that opened up for some of them, and the impact of industrialisation, collectivisation and the purges upon the population.92 Kotkin also used a broad array of sources to show how the mammoth iron and steel complex of Magnitogorsk was built, not merely describing its physical construction with all its advances and problems and the manifold experiences and outlooks of those involved at all levels in the process, but the way in which the entire project symbolised the Stalinist project of modernisation.93 The value of these books is manifested in the manner in which their findings have coincided with and amplified many of the observations made during the period under discussion by the more objective visitors to the Soviet Union, and in particular have given a very good illustration of the gulf between the reality of Soviet society and the claims of the Soviet regime in respect of democracy, egalitarianism and class relations, efficiency in industry and public services, and the rights of workers and women.



Chapter One of this thesis, 'Assessing the Assessors', starts by introducing the different schools of opinion in respect of the Soviet Union by briefly assessing the literature published between 1917 and 1928. It then looks at the phenomenon of fellow-travelling, the relationship between socialism and democracy, the rise of the idea of planning and the emergence of the centre ground of opinion, and the problems of investigation that faced observers of the Soviet scene at the time.

Chapter Two, 'The Great Change, 1929-34', looks at responses to Stalin's victory and the First Five Year Plan, in particular in respect of industrialisation, collectivisation and the notion of large-scale economic planning. It investigates responses to the image of the Soviet Union as a new form of democracy, and to Soviet foreign policy initiatives and events in the Comintern. This chapter concludes at the assassination of Kirov.

- 91. Filtzer (1986).
- 92. Fitzpatrick (2000).
- 93. Kotkin (1995).

Chapter Three, 'Terror and Consolidation, 1935-39', continues the investigation into responses to economic and political factors, in particular the Great Terror and the Moscow Trials, and to foreign policy and Comintern matters, in particular the Popular Front and the Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

Chapter Four, 'The Road to War, 1939-41', looks at responses to the final period before the Soviet Union was involved in the Second World War, in particular the growing hostility to the Soviet regime in response to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the invasion of Finland, and the adumbration of the Cold War anti-communist consensus. It ends with a short look at the revival of pro-Soviet sentiments during the war after June 1941.

Chapter Five concludes the thesis by looking at the effects of the Soviet experience upon British intellectual and political life, concentrating upon the issues of economic planning and the nature of socialism. It investigates the degree to which non-Stalinist thinking was influenced by the experience of the Five Year Plans, and the degree to which the idea of socialism as a democratic transformational process was affected by the Soviet experience. It concludes by briefly assessing the validity of view-points expressed in the thesis in the light of the historical experience and ultimate demise of the Soviet Union.

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18 January 2003

Chapter One

Assessing the Assessors

THIS chapter opens with a brief overview of impressions of the Soviet Union published in Britain from 1917 to 1928. It continues with theoretical expositions on the phenomenon of fellow-travelling, the manner in which many people adopted a highly appreciative attitude towards the Soviet Union during the 1930s; the effect of the Soviet experience upon the relationship between socialism and democracy; and the growing acceptance in Britain of the idea of state intervention and the rise of the centre ground of opinion. It then looks at the serious methodological problem that arose as a result of the Soviet regime's monopoly over the dissemination of information.

I: Precursors, 1917-28

One of the most notable aspects of the period of 1929-39 was the sheer volume of literature published in Britain on the Soviet Union. As early as June 1930, an exasperated reviewer lamented:

Every man or woman who has had the opportunity of setting foot in the Soviet paradise feels called upon to pronounce judgement in book form on the Soviet experiment, and for some years now a spate of clouded literature has been let loose on a bewildered and still ignorant public. It is safe to say that, during this period, the number of really valuable books on Soviet Russia can be counted on the fingers of one hand.²

Before we look at this literature, however, it is necessary briefly to consider the material that was published on the Soviet Union before 1929, as the different schools of thought of the period under discussion did not emerge *ex nihilis* with the launch of the First Five Year Plan, and many of the ideas expressed after that date first came to light during the first 12 years of the Soviet regime.

The tumultuous events in Russia in 1917 could not have failed to have provoked controversy, and the cannon on the *Aurora* had barely cooled before a wide range of opinions started being expressed on the subjects of Bolshevism, the October Revolution and the ensuing Soviet regime.

Conservatives tended to view the events of 1917 as a confirmation of their preconceptions of a revolution being nothing but chaos and mayhem, 'mob rule and mob

- 1. Philip Grierson's exhaustive bibliography shows this well, see Grierson (1943).
- 2. 'New Light on Russia', New Statesman, 14 June 1930, 314.

law', engulfing a society that had fallen out of control, with a small number of unscrupulous revolutionary agitators taking advantage of a social crisis in order to whip a normally simple and docile people into a destructive frenzy, and thus be able to seize power.³ Few expected the Soviet regime to endure.⁴ Some right-wing commentators phrased their analyses in decidedly anti-Semitic terms.⁵ On the other hand, liberal and moderate socialist commentators hailed the demise of the *ancien régime*, and, although they condemned 'extremist enemies of democracy' on both the left and the right and deplored the Bolsheviks for having, in their view, hijacked and perverted the revolution, they were far more inclined to view the revolutionary period as an expression of the legitimate aspirations of the Russian masses.⁶

The Entente's blockade and undeclared war against the Soviet republic and the Civil War made travel to the Soviet republic very difficult, and of the British press only the Manchester Guardian maintained a presence there in its early days. Two of its reporters, Morgan Philips Price, at first a liberal critic of Bolshevism, and the largely apolitical Arthur Ransome, became quite enamoured with the Soviet regime, although they never let their enthusiasm dull their sense of criticism. Both vividly described the difficult conditions that the population was enduring, made sure that they spoke to oppositional political forces, asked probing questions of the Bolshevik leaders, and were deeply concerned about the powers of the Cheka and with what Philips Price termed the 'deplorable excesses' committed by the Reds as well as by the Whites during the Civil War.⁸

Despite his apolitical character, Ransome had an acute understanding of the relationship between the Soviet regime and the working class. Reporting on visits to the Soviet republic in 1919 and 1920, his accounts show that although the regime was trying hard to satisfy the needs of the workers, he sensed that many workers were becoming disillusioned with the regime, and the disintegration of the working class and the sheer struggle for survival was causing the regime to become increasingly bureaucratised and authoritarian, resulting in political apathy and the decay of the constitutional machinery. Both Ransome and Philips Price accepted the political monopoly of

- 3. Wilton (1918), 251. See also Price (1919), 200.
- 4. Wilton (1918), 327; 'Notes of the Week', Spectator, 24 November 1917, 586.
- 5. Wilton (1918), 56ff, 137-8, 174; Pollock (1919), 104.
- 6. Arthur Henderson, 'A World Safe for Democracy', Athenæum, December 1917, 648-9; 'How to Help Russia', Nation, 24 November 1917, 263; Williams (1919), 25.
- 7. Most British newspapers relied upon details gleaned in Riga and Berlin, and much of the information about the Soviet regime during this period was of a luridly fanciful nature, see Laqueur (1967), 8-10.
- 8. Philips Price (1921), 242, 310ff, 336; Ransome (1919), 9, 22, 33, 52, 126ff.
- 9. Ransome (1919), 42; Ransome (1921), 10, 33, 38-9, 44ff.

the Russian Communist Party on the grounds that it was the only force capable of holding the country together. The former claimed that its rule eschewed the 'compulsory obedience' of military discipline, and its methods tended 'towards the awakening of a political consciousness', which, when normal conditions returned, would 'make dictatorship of any kind almost impossible'. The latter declared that the unruly nature of the rural population forced the Soviet regime to rest upon 'the industrially organised proletariat in town and country, together with the technicians, specialists and political commissars', a minority of the population to be sure, but 'the most intelligent, conscious and disciplined section of it'. 11

Left-wing appraisals of the Soviet regime varied considerably. Apart from the relatively small numbers of radical socialists in Britain who hailed the October Revolution and of whom many were to form the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920 with the intent of emulating the Bolsheviks at home, 12 most socialists took a less enthusiastic view of the new Soviet republic. It is significant that the first major work on the subject that was produced by a left-wing organisation in Britain was an extremely critical work by the noted German socialist theoretician Karl Kautsky. Published by the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in early 1919, it claimed that the absence in Russia of the prerequisites for a socialist society - a highly-developed capitalist economy, a democratic political system and a large politically mature working class meant that the Soviet regime would be based on a proletariat – and, indeed, on only a portion of it, as workers also supported other socialist parties - which was but a tiny fraction of the population. The Bolsheviks would necessarily abjure the democratic institutions emerging from the February Revolution, and restrict representation in the soviets to those who supported them, with the result that civil war would become 'the method of adjusting political and social antagonisms'. Kautsky saw no future for the Soviet regime; the Bolsheviks would soon come into conflict with the peasants, who were hostile to their intentions to collectivise agriculture, and the regime was doomed to founder.13

Kautsky's verdict was more categorical than many of the opinions expressed by Britain's mainstream labour leaders. Some, whilst critical of its methods, felt that Bolshevism suited backward, illiterate Russia, whilst others nuanced their feelings or withheld criticism because they opposed the war being waged by the Entente countries

- 10. Ransome (1921), 52-3.
- 11. Philips Price (1921), 379, 381.
- 12. It is significant that one prominent CPGB member warned the newly-formed party against regarding the Soviet republic in the way that 'a pious Mohammedan' would face Mecca. See Pelling (1975), 11.
- 13. Kautsky (1919), 15-20, 29, 50-2, 74, 115-6, 134-5.

against the Soviet republic.¹⁴ Nevertheless, they saw Bolshevism as quite inappropriate to Britain, and on one occasion a prominent union leader went so far as to write it off as the product of 'the Asiatic mind', a sharp insult in those days.¹⁵

Once the Civil War, foreign intervention and the Entente's blockade started to wind down, travel to the Soviet republic became steadily easier, and various individuals and a Labour Party and Trades Union Congress fact-finding delegation made their way east and commented on what they saw. Whilst the delegation's report of its visit in June 1920 revealed the ambiguities of mainstream labour opinion towards the Bolsheviks and their regime, in that it was uneasy about the Bolsheviks' political monopoly but placed the blame for the problems that they were facing upon the hostile activities of Western governments, the accounts of some members of the delegation were much more critical. Ethel Snowden stood on the right wing of the Labour Party, and, although she appreciated the social and cultural measures being introduced, she felt that there was 'not an ounce of democratic control' in the Soviet republic, the dictatorship of the proletariat was an attempt by a few men to enforce on the people of Russia what they felt was good for them, and the regime was doomed to fail. 17

Also on the delegation was the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell. Although a left-winger, his report was probably the most incisive critique of Bolshevism to be published in Britain during this initial period, and as such is worth describing in depth. He claimed that the regime exerted an 'iron discipline' over the workers, there was neither a free press nor political freedom, and people lived in fear of the Cheka. He rooted the Bolsheviks' authoritarianism in their religious attitude towards Marxism, which they treated as 'a panacea for all human ills', and which led them to 'become impervious to scientific evidence' and to reject the notion of free intellect. Being Marxists, they did not understand that the 'love of power' was as strong a motive and as great a source of injustice as the 'love of money', and he felt that they would become accustomed to wielding power, develop a consciousness and interests that would be 'quite distinct' from those of the workers, and become an oppressive 'bureaucratic aristocracy'.¹8

On the practical side, Russell claimed that the method of violent revolution and the exercising of power under the conditions existing within the Soviet republic would lead to the 'heritage of civilisation' being lost. Relations amongst people would be marked by 'hatred, suspicion and cruelty', and 'habits of despotism... would survive

^{14.} See Macintyre (1986), 221-3; Graubard (1956), passim.

^{15.} Cited in Beckett (1995), 22.

^{16.} See Graubard (1956), 216.

^{17.} Snowden (1920), 11, 141, 150.

^{18.} Russell (1920), 75, 79, 92, 96, 114, 154.

the crisis by which they were generated'. The 'natural and instinctive' forces of nationalism were already undermining the Bolsheviks' internationalism. Even if they managed to stay in power, they would lose their communist ideals, and the regime would 'increasingly resemble any other Asian government'. Bolshevism, therefore, was unable to build a 'stable or durable form of socialism'.¹⁹

However, not all visitors maintained their critical faculties in working order when they crossed into Soviet territory. The prominent left-wing Labour MP George Lansbury assured his readers that he did not intend to look for trouble when he made a visit in February 1920, and, sure enough, his glowing and naïve account is clear evidence of a carefully shepherded tour. His only qualms, and they were mild, were over the Cheka. Perhaps the most vivid precursor of the uncritical writings of the 1930s was the account by Sylvia Pankhurst, at this juncture a forthright supporter of Bolshevism, of her journey to Moscow in the summer of 1920 to attend the second congress of the Communist International:

From Russia... I brought away with me a prevailing memory of beautiful, well-grown children and healthy people. It appears that a happy contentment and buoyant, confident enthusiasm is radiating from the active makers of the revolution and builders of the proletarian state, to wider and wider sections of people... If it is not the exaltation of revolutionary fervour which produces this evident mental and physical well-being, it must be the freedom from individual anxiety, which the absolute assurance of even a low minimum scale of food, clothing and other necessaries provides.²¹

Pankhurst's paean serves to remind us that there were those whose allegiance to a cause blinded them to phenomena that were all too clear to the more careful observer.²²

Some observers were critical of the Bolsheviks, or voiced their disquiet about some of their methods, but considered that the Soviet government was the only barrier to a complete social breakdown in the former Russian Empire. Although HG Wells, the Fabian socialist and author of utopian fantasies, was never to find his brave new world in the Soviet republic, he warned Western governments not to attempt to overthrow the Bolsheviks, as they represented 'the only possible backbone now to a renascent Russia', and if they fell, Russia would decline until it was nothing but 'a country of peasants', the worst fate that Wells could envisage happening to a country.²³ The

- 19. Ibid, 6, 33-5, 136.
- 20. Lansbury (1920), xiii-xiv, 46, 68, 77, 91ff, 114-5. A very similar account was produced by a Manchester Guardian correspondent. See Goode (1920).
- 21. Pankhurst (1921), 170.
- 22. Compare her account with the descriptions of John S Clarke, another British delegate to the second Comintern congress. See Clarke (1921), 40, 93.
- 23. Wells (1920), 88, 146. Wells was just one of many who considered that regular contact with the

ILP leader Henry Brailsford was critical of the Bolsheviks' authoritarian measures, but considered that they were a regretful necessity for a difficult period. Conversant in Russian, he spent two months touring the Soviet republic in late 1920, and noted that the soviets and the trade unions were dominated by the Communist Party, and were therefore not representative organs. The Cheka's activities encouraged 'meanness and ruthlessness', and were 'crushing civic courage'. Nonetheless, the dictatorship was 'preparing its own eventual disappearance' through educating the entire population in the spirit of self-initiative and activity. The political monopoly of the Communist Party would exist — and would have to exist — so long as the country was struggling through stormy times, and until the population was sufficiently educated to participate intelligently in administrative tasks. Brailsford hoped that soviet democracy would in time revive, but one can sense that doubts lurked beneath his quiet optimism.²⁴

A number of observers, including the conservative 'Russia Hands' Lancelot Lawton and Charles Sarolea, attempted to analyse the social roots of Bolshevism, and to try to understand what factors in Russian society favoured the rise and accession to power of this political current. Their findings often paralleled those of Russian and Eastern European observers whose analyses were made available by British publishers. Lawton averred that the peculiar development of Russia had led to a heady intellectual outlook that combined the vision of an imminent cataclysm facing the decadent West with the feeling that the manifest destiny of the Russian people was to save the world, and this 'almost mystic belief in Russian destiny' was 'inherited by the Bolsheviks', hills Sarolea declared that the 'peculiar Russian conditions', the erratic, allornothing, amoral characteristics of a decidedly un-Western people, were combined with Marxism, which he saw as an utterly amoral philosophy devised and controlled by 'Jews, Poles, Germans and Frenchmen'. The liberal 'Russia Hand' Harold Williams detected the sinister hand of German socialism behind the Bolsheviks.

Because Bolshevism appeared to its detractors to be simultaneously impossible and threatening, they faced a problem in assessing its prospects. Bolshevism was, on the one hand, a failure — a utopian vision that could never work at home in Russia,

West would housetrain the Bolsheviks. See also Ransome (1921), 151-2; Snowden (1920), 186-7; Lansbury (1920), 61.

- 24. Brailsford (1921), 42, 78, 95-6, 113-4, 117-8.
- 25. See Thomas Masaryk, 'The Slavs After the War', Slavonic Review, 1 (1), June 1922, 2-23; Peter Struve, 'Russia', Slavonic Review, 1 (1), June 1922, 24-39; Miliukov (1920), 5-6, 22ff; Fülöp-Miller (1927), 7-8, 15, 71-88.
- 26. Lawton (1927), 10, 25.
- 27. Sarolea (1924), 200, 241.
- 28. Williams (1919), 24. This, however, may have been more a residue of wartime anti-German sentiments than a seriously argued point.

and would never catch on anywhere else — whilst on the other, it threatened the entire world.²⁹ And yet it survived; moreover, it gained adherents in one country after another. The contradiction was overcome through an almost unconscious process which introduced a third factor that could transcend the irreconcilability of the first two factors, and so the idea of the Bolsheviks' 'fanaticism' was brought in to explain how the advocates of an outlandish and impossible doctrine could be holding a knife to the jugular of Western civilisation.³⁰ The triumph of the will, one can say, long before it became a Nazi watchword, and a refrain that would regularly crop up in analyses of the Soviet regime and the Communist International.

An interesting convergence occurred between some conservative and left-wing observers in respect of the idea that the Russian people needed strong leadership, and that the Soviet regime suited the Russian people. On the right, Lawton stated that the Russian masses had 'no idea of discipline, no definite standards of honesty, [and] no conception of duty either to the state or the individual'. He drew the only logical conclusion: 'The Russian masses have certainly got the government they deserve.'31 On the left, Brailsford and Philips Price implied that the Russian masses were as yet too immature to acquire a generalised socialist culture, the workers were unable to run the factories in a collective manner, and an overall 'directing hand' was therefore required to steer industry 'in the public interest'. Moreover, the Soviet authorities were justified in engaging in 'a relentless struggle' in order to instil a sense of socialist discipline and order amongst the unruly peasantry.³²

Faced with insurmountable economic problems and mounting urban and especially rural unrest, in 1921 the Soviet regime reintroduced market measures, particularly in agriculture and minor industries, under what was known as the New Economic Policy (NEP), and attempted to forge trade and diplomatic links with foreign states. It also clamped down upon the remnants of political opposition and, gradually, dissent within the Communist Party itself. Some left-wingers, including Pankhurst, observed the imposition of one-man management in industry, the return to the market, Moscow's diplomatic horsetrading and the suppression of dissident revolutionary currents, and began to repudiate the Soviet regime as a revolutionary force. Small groups of critical communists and anarchists emerged in many countries, including Britain, and concluded that the Soviet regime had degenerated into a dictatorship over the proletariat.³³ Brailsford soon concluded that the 'long evolutionary period' that the Bolsheviks

^{29.} See, for example, Graham (1925), 243.

^{30.} See, for example, Williams (1919), 24; Price (1919), 200.

^{31.} Lawton (1927), 201-2. See also McCullagh (1921), 94, 217-8; Sarolea (1924), 262.

^{32.} Brailsford (1921), 166; Philips Price (1921), 40, 212, 259-60.

^{33.} See Shipway (1988), 42ff.

envisaged under the NEP validated his conviction that a peaceful road to socialism was preferable to violent revolution. He also feared that democratic rights in the Soviet Union were being suppressed permanently. He warned that a party that restricted them, even for valid reasons, might not dare to reinstate them, and that any form of socialism produced by such means would have been 'bought at the price of the nation's soul'.³⁴

The Bolsheviks announced the NEP as a necessary retreat, but some Western critics considered that they had finally seen sense and abandoned their hare-brained utopianism,³⁵ as they had been 'beaten by the peasantry' and their 'revolutionary fever' and 'fanatic fervour' had burnt themselves out.³⁶ Although the Soviet regime was still viewed as a revolutionary threat,³⁷ there was also a feeling that the Bolsheviks were becoming far more interested in their administrative work and personal interests than in communism, and consequently had little desire to become involved too deeply in the revolutionary upheavals in Germany in 1923.³⁸

Opinions varied over whether the NEP would save the Soviet Union (as the republic was officially known from December 1922). Some observers felt that the NEP sounded the knell of the Soviet regime.³⁹ Michael Farbman, a fairly sympathetic journalist, visited the Soviet Union in early 1924, and concluded that the regime would survive, but at the cost of a further retreat from its stated goals, as the originally limited return to market measures was rapidly becoming a headlong and irreversible flight into a full-blown capitalist economy.⁴⁰ The liberal economist John Maynard Keynes' visit to the Soviet Union in 1925 evoked mixed feelings. He considered that although the condition of the Soviet economy was improving, it would take another five years of peaceful development before any accurate measure could be made of its progress, yet he also pondered whether the boasts he had heard in the Soviet Union about its being able eventually to raise living standards above Western European levels could simply be discounted.⁴¹

The continuing concessions to capitalism made under the NEP was to lead by the mid-1920s to the point of view that claimed that the Soviet Union was reverting to

- 34. Brailsford (1925), 63-5.
- 35. 'Chronicle', Slavonic Review, 1 (2), December 1922, 450-2. The 'Chronicle' was assembled by the staff of the Slavonic Review from surveys of the Soviet press.
- 36. Sarolea (1924), 27, 48.
- 37. 'Soviet Foreign Policy', Slavonic Review, 5 (14), December 1926, 298-304.
- 38. 'Chronicle', Slavonic Review, 2 (4), June 1923, 165-8; 'Chronicle', Slavonic Review, 2 (5), December 1923, 428-30.
- 39. Sarolea (1924), 265-7; Makeev and O'Hara (1925), 317ff.
- 40. Farbman (1924), 3, 271.
- 41. JM Keynes, 'Soviet Russia', Nation and Athenæum, 10, 17 and 24 October 1925, 39, 107, 139. He also denied that the Bolsheviks' ideas had any 'scientific value' for the West.

normality, and that the red flags were little more than a façade to fool gullible foreigners. ⁴² Nevertheless, because such tasks would fall to any modernising regime in Russia, many commentators, including anti-communists, appreciated to varying degrees the social, educational and cultural measures which were being introduced, ⁴³ even if some felt that these could have been achieved without the mayhem of the revolution and Civil War. ⁴⁴ However, critical observers continued to view the single-party regime and compulsory state ideology with distaste. In an early adumbration of a key component of totalitarian theory, Lawton asserted that the Bolsheviks not merely wished to recreate society politically and economically, but to force it to think in all matters as they thought, which would necessitate a police state. ⁴⁵

The latter half of the decade saw two main trends of thought emerging. On the one hand, there were those who viewed the Soviet Union as the new civilisation. Some managed to blinker themselves against its negative features with all manner of rationalisations. Alexander Wicksteed was a member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, who had spent five years from 1923 in Moscow. He told his readers that religion was not persecuted and censorship existed to fight 'false assumptions', not 'false doctrines', and warned against believing reports about political prisoners. The Soviet Union was the only free country he had ever lived in, as his daily life was not interfered with. He was not talking about the ability to make political speeches; he had no desire to do so himself, so he cared little if one was forbidden to do so in Moscow. 46 Rather more hard-nosed, but equally impressionable, the CPGB was as strongly committed to the Soviet Union, and was among the most loyal of all the parties of the Comintern. ⁴⁷ A substantial book on the Soviet economy published in 1928 by Maurice Dobb, the party's chief economist, did admit to shortcomings, but was optimistic about the future. The 'new spirit of collective unity' would overcome managerial problems. The possibility of a 'new official caste' of experts and managers arising was prevented by the steady promotion of workers into senior posts. The projected industrial growth rates of eight to nine per cent per annum demonstrated that 'the planning of production by a central body' could assure superior results than a system of laissez-faire. 48

- 42. Béraud (1926), 58, 62-3.
- 43. Lawton (1927), 220; Robert Boothby, 'My Visit to Russia', Spectator, 17 July 1926, 84.
- 44. McWilliams (1927), 125; London (1928), 179. Farbman considered that the revolution had been a freak event in the general dynamic of Russian development, see Farbman (1924), 12.
- 45. Lawton (1927), 127, 130. See also Kautsky (1925), 186.
- 46. Wicksteed (1928), 78, 139, 180-1, 193-4. His fellow Quaker Dorothy Buxton was equally impressed, see Buxton (1928).
- 47. As early as January 1925, the party's leadership was proclaiming its 'implicit faith' in the Soviet Communist Party, see McIlroy (2001a), 41.
- 48. Dobb (1928), 377-85.

On the other hand, there were those who considered that the Soviet Union had reached the end of its revolutionary road. Some considered that because the recovery of the agrarian sector under the NEP had outstripped that of the industrial sector, the peasantry was either in a position to pose a serious threat to the regime,⁴⁹ or, conversely, had become its social base.⁵⁰ Lawton considered that the Soviet regime would be unable to develop its industrial capacity, as the process of getting existing plant back into operation was complete, and the impoverished private sector could not withstand increased taxation to pay for industrial growth. The strength of the rich peasants precluded any return to War Communism. The ruling party was divided, the peasantry and the working class were gaining self-confidence, nationalist ideas were arising within the intelligentsia and army, and an almost certainly anti-Bolshevik public opinion was being formed.⁵¹ Critical commentators contended that the general tendencies of the Soviet regime were 'away from communism and socialism' and 'toward the establishment of capitalism',52 and one strongly anti-socialist writer could not contain his glee at the sight of the Soviet regime being 'driven back towards the old economic order by the inexorable pressure of reality'.53 The prominent economist James Mavor was in a far more serious mood, claiming that the Soviet regime had put the future of the country deeply in jeopardy by having driven out the intelligentsia, and leaving the population spiritually and economically exhausted. Russia was in danger of national extinction.⁵⁴ Although Mavor's pessimism was singularly deep, many observers of the Soviet scene felt as the 1920s drew towards a close - and, ironically, as the Soviet Union stood on the eve of momentous changes - that the Soviet leadership lacked any sense of political and economic direction, and that Soviet society was either in a deep impasse or on a course of reintegration into the capitalist world.

The very nature of the Bolsheviks' theory and practice inevitably provoked a wide range of strong feelings once they had seized power in the vast territory of the former Russian Empire. Many of the patterns of thought that emerged during this early period formed the basis of the various analyses of Bolshevism and the Soviet regime which were subsequently developed, and which remain a topic of debate to this day.

Many of the aspects of conservatism's opposition to Bolshevism repeated its longheld ideas, not least the idea that revolutions are largely due to small groups of un-

- 49. Béraud (1926), 168; McWilliams (1927), 122, 127.
- 50. 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 14 January 1928, 56.
- 51. Lawton (1927), 464, 490ff.
- 52. Lee (1927), 101, 104-5. The Economist welcomed Stalin's ousting of the Left Opposition, and expected that the Soviet regime would be able to forge a peaceful and profitable relationship with the West ('Notes of the Week', Economist, 14 January 1928, 56).
- 53. Shadwell (1926), 81-2.
- 54. Mayor (1928), 436-7.

scrupulous agitators taking advantage of crises in order to manipulate the masses for their own political ends, an élitist standpoint that implies that the lower orders are incapable of intelligent political thinking and action. The conservatives' conviction that socialism is impossible led them to assume that the Soviet regime would rapidly fall. The survival of the regime confounded their predictions, but the return to capitalist measures under the NEP enabled them to assert the idea of the necessity of the market. Liberal observers, whilst eschewing the more élitist features of conservative thought and accepting that the tumult in 1917 was not mindless mob violence, shared the idea of the necessity of a market economy, and put more emphasis upon the issue of democracy, which they felt the Bolsheviks had betrayed. Whatever their differences, however, by the mid to late 1920s, few non-socialist commentators considered that the Soviet Union had much of a future as a new form of society.

Those who saw the Russian masses as an unruly mob lacking any concept of democracy were obliged to disregard the highly democratic essence of the soviets, factory committees and the other bodies that were thrown up during 1917, which, despite their rough-and-ready nature and the fact that many participants in their proceedings were poorly educated and new to political activity, nonetheless showed considerably more vitality than standard parliamentary structures. Similarly, those who insisted that the Bolsheviks were essentially authoritarian and undemocratic were obliged to dismiss the highly democratic core within Bolshevism during the revolution, particularly Lenin's State and Revolution, as insincere demagogy or at best naïveté.

Conversely, socialists who welcomed the Soviet regime as a new form of democracy were confronted with the fact that the Bolsheviks had within a year of taking power established a tight political monopoly. Various observers, including some whose closest counterparts in the Russian socialist movement were being suppressed by the Bolsheviks, excused this by claiming that it was a temporary measure that would be relaxed once the Civil War ended, or steered around the question. Some socialists accepted the Bolsheviks' assertions that their rivals were counter-revolutionary. Some became more critical of the Soviet regime when it did not democratise, or even considered that the Bolsheviks had betrayed the Russian Revolution. Other radicals sided with subsequent tendencies that arose within the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s which claimed that the party leadership was degenerating into a bureaucratic élite. Moderate social democrats, who never endorsed the Bolsheviks' political methods, nonetheless looked favourably upon their economic and social policies. The arguments amongst socialists over the Bolsheviks' intentions, and how, when and, in some cases, if they became a new ruling élite, continue to this day. As the 1920s drew to a close, socialists, with the exception of the adherents of the official communist movement, had to confront the awkward fact that the Soviet regime was starting to implement a

broad programme of modernisation that superficially resembled the general socialist project, under conditions of extreme coercion and in a thoroughly undemocratic manner.

What distinguishes the sympathetic visitors to the Soviet republic in the early years to those who went later, particularly in the 1930s, is that the former were far less inclined to overlook the more negative aspects of Soviet society. There were visitors who were lost in a reverie, and didn't ask themselves whether the nicely turned-out factories, farms and sanatoria they saw were typical examples. Yet many sympathetic observers openly expressed their concern about certain features of the regime, especially the Cheka, described the dreadful hardships they saw, asked awkward questions of Soviet leaders, and sought out oppositional figures for their opinions. In one sense, it was easier. Access to Soviet leaders right up to Lenin was not too difficult, Communist Party members were more inclined to speak their minds, and oppositionists could be found, unlike during the 1930s, when Soviet society was far more tightly controlled. But more importantly, the minds and critical faculties of many visitors to the Soviet Union seemed to have become atrophied at about the same time that the Soviet leadership launched into the great transformation of society under the First Five Year Plan. What at first had been the preserve of a relatively small number of over-enthusiastic or naïve individuals was to become de rigueur for a much wider range of people, a broad but easily definable and recognisable pro-Soviet lobby, for whom the Soviet Union of the 1930s was indeed the new civilisation.

II: There is a Happy Land, Far Far Away

Although a broad range of critical accounts of the Soviet Union continued to appear, the years following 1929 constituted the classic period of fellow-travelling, the 'Red Decade', the time when a wide variety of people became enamoured with the Soviet regime, and when many of them were willing not so much to give the regime the benefit of the doubt as to forgo any real sense of objectivity. It was a decade during which the Soviet Union underwent a remarkable process of economic transformation under a series of Five Year Plans, being forcibly and rapidly transformed by the regime from a largely rural society into a major industrial power. It was also a decade during which the country endured a period of tremendous hardship, frightful terror and gross inhumanity.

The Soviet leadership had long intended to develop industry and agriculture both quantitatively and qualitatively, and from the mid-1920s Soviet economists had been drawing up ideas for a Five Year Plan of economic modernisation. The victory of Stalin's faction in the Soviet Communist Party in 1929 was accompanied by a dramatic intensification of the process of industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation, as

the regime attempted once and for all to solve the problems it had been facing for several years in respect of grain collection and low growth rates in the industrial sector. The originally fairly modest proposals for economic development had been increased, and the ambitious growth targets for a Five Year Plan that was to run from October 1928 were rejected at the party's sixteenth conference in March 1929 in favour of a vastly accelerated programme.

The year of 1929 also saw the start of the Great Depression in the West, an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Most capitalist countries had started the year in reasonable economic trim, but by the end of the year, following from the Wall Street Crash, the entire capitalist world had tipped into a crisis which lasted for three years, and from which recovery was by no means rapid. Although the crisis was not as severe in Britain as it was in the USA and Germany, unemployment here stood at two million in July 1930, and peaked at 2.8 million in July 1931.⁵⁵

The contrasting images of, on the one hand, the West in the throes of a terrible economic crisis, with one administration after another — not least Ramsay Mac-Donald's Labour Government — singularly failing to deal effectively with the slump and the social distress resulting from it, along with the rise of viciously authoritarian and socially retrogressive movements like Hitler's National Socialists, and, on the other, the Soviet Union, headed by a confident and determined government, thrusting forward with a massive modernisation programme, could not fail to have had a resonance throughout the capitalist world. A process of radicalisation occurred in many Western countries, particularly amongst intellectuals. In one relatively recent estimation, this process encompassed as many as one million people in Britain during the 1930s, ⁵⁶ although the degree of radicalisation has been challenged at various times. ⁵⁷ The contention of FS Northedge and Audrey Wells that the 'prominent British Russophiles' constituted 'the brightest and the best' of Britain's intellectual cadre, and that 'it was almost impossible to be well educated in Britain of the 1930s without be-

- 55. World production (excluding the Soviet Union), indexed at 100 for 1929, stood at 86 in 1930, 75 in 1931 and 63 in 1932. It did not reach the 1929 level until 1937. See 'Trade Supplement', Economist, 30 October 1937, 7; 'Trade Supplement', Economist, 26 August 1939, 15.
- 56. Symons (1990), 38-40. Symons stated that the driving force behind this radicalisation was 50 000 or so mainly professional middle-class people, often academics, teachers, doctors, scientists, economists, lawyers, etc, who played a leading role both in the development of radical ideas and in terms of organising and practical abilities, although the most articulate members of the radical intelligentsia were a small number of artists, especially poets.
- 57. Neal Wood claimed that the 'political awakening' and 'great radicalisation' amongst intellectuals was mainly restricted to London universities and to those involved in arts subjects and certain sciences, such as biology and physics. Robert Skidelsky insisted that the radicals constituted 'a small minority of young middle-class intellectuals'. See Wood (1959), 37, 53; Skidelsky (1993), 287.

ing, at the very least, an admirer of Russia',58 has to be treated with considerable caution, as has Arthur Marwick's assertion that intellectuals in the 1930s tended 'to see the world situation in the simplified terms of absolute German evil and absolutely Russian purity'. 59 Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that it was amongst these radicalised people that the Soviet Union became an object of fascination and, with some of them, fanaticism. It has been pointed out that few had previously shown much sympathy towards Bolshevism, or at least towards its methods; of indeed, few had shown any interest in politics at all.⁶¹ And yet within a few years, and particularly in the latter half of the decade, the Soviet Union became an object of great interest, respect and even worship. This upsurge in interest was accompanied by a large and often uncritical conference and publishing industry, with life being breathed into existing fellow-travelling organisations such as the Friends of the Soviet Union (later the Russia Today Society), and new ones being born, such as the Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR⁶² and the highly successful Left Book Club, which, set up under the auspices of Victor Gollancz in 1936, was the biggest purveyor of pro-Soviet material, and was notorious at the time for being a conduit for Stalinist propaganda.63

The new-found friends of the Soviet Union presented an easy target to critics of the Soviet regime, and they were subjected to sharp barbs throughout this period by less impressionable observers. The Russian liberal exile George Soloveytchik, a regular contributor to the British press during this period, did not mince his words:

It is an insult to intelligence that these trippers to Soviet Russia should be given the opportunity of publishing their ineptitudes when the sole qualification of such authors is their ignorance of Russia and the impertinence with which they talk of that country.⁶⁴

EH Carr, at this point establishing his reputation as an authority on Soviet affairs,

- 58. Northedge and Wells (1982), 150. See also Jones (1977), 14.
- 59. Marwick (1963), 83.
- 60. Margaret Cole, 'The New Economic Revolution', Fact, April 1937, 14-15.
- 61. Fyvel (1968), 33.
- 62. The latter, sponsored by MPs of all parties, assorted intellectuals, notables, union leaders and media and entertainment stars, a gaggle of clerics and a handful of Air Commodores and Brigadier Generals, organised pro-Soviet events aimed at an audience way beyond the usual crowd. See 'The Second National Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR', undated flyer advertising a conference on 13-14 March 1937.
- 63. HA Mason, 'Education by Book Club?', Scrutiny, December 1937, 246. Even John Lewis' sanitised account of the LBC recognised that its books on the Soviet Union were 'insufficiently tempered by a critical attitude', see Lewis (1970), 113. For the extent of Stalinist influence upon and interference in the LBC, see Dudley Edwards (1987), 234ff.
- 64. George Soloveytchik, 'The Moscow Trials and the Five Year Plan', The Nineteenth Century and After, May 1933, 556.

warned that 'no serious critical work' could be done by writers who were either Soviet citizens 'bound by the canons of Soviet orthodoxy' or foreigners 'ignorant of Russian conditions' and dependent upon what they were shown by Soviet guides and experts.⁶⁵ Another careful observer, Violet Conolly, accused the 'professional friends' of the Soviet Union of being naïve and having double standards: 'The same people who are stark realists at home become as credulous as babes and visionaries when they have to deal with officialdom and its doings in Russia.'66

Fellow-travellers were often accused of hypocrisy. The pioneers of Slavonic studies in Britain, Bernard Pares and Robert Seton-Watson, condemned them for supporting a despotic regime whose principles were 'incompatible with the whole fabric of ideas' upon which Western civilisation had been built, and which represented 'the violation of all those moral laws, human or divine', upon which they modelled 'their own sheltered and ordered lives'.⁶⁷ Fellow-travellers were condemned for praising official communism as 'the champion of democracy' whilst overlooking its 'contempt for every principle of democratic government',⁶⁸ for professing 'the keenest admiration for Soviet institutions and doctrines' whilst 'carefully abstaining from facing any of the miseries and hardships' endured by the Soviet population,⁶⁹ for condemning 'comparatively slight infringements' of democratic rights in Europe, whilst keeping silent about 'outrages on the grand scale' occurring in the Soviet Union,⁷⁰ and for seeing the Soviet Union as an interesting social experiment in which the deaths of millions of people were presumably justified.⁷¹

Others dismissed them with contempt,¹² or took malicious delight in poking fun at them. Reviewing one assemblage of speeches delivered at a fellow-travelling jamboree in late 1935, Carr wondered if some of the speakers might experience the embarrassment which most people would feel if compelled to read their 'after-dinner oratory

- 65. EH Carr, 'All About Soviet Russia', *Spectator*, 26 March 1937, 588. Carr was also dismissive of those who preferred to condemn the Soviet Union through the prism of their own prejudices, rather than develop an objective appraisal of it.
- 66. Conolly (1938), x.
- 67. Bernard Pares and Robert Seton-Watson, 'The Crisis of Democracy and the Slavonic World', Slavonic and East European Review, 9 (27), March 1931, 516-7, 520. Pares also condemned businessmen who saw the Soviet Union as an opportunity for profitable trade ('English News on Russia', Contemporary Review, September 1932, 290).
- 68. Lunn (1939), 20.
- 69. Ashmead-Bartlett (1929), 40.
- 70. Seibert (1932), 398. This was prior to Hitler's victory, but the magnitude of the Nazis' crimes against humanity merely made fellow-travellers even less keen to condemn those committed by Stalin's regime.
- 71. George Soloveytchik, 'Whither Stalin?', Contemporary Review, January 1938, 149.
- 72. AL Rowse, 'Industry in the Transition to Socialism', in Where Socialism Stands Today (1933), 89.

in cold blood next morning'. Malcolm Muggeridge worked in the Soviet Union from November 1932 to March 1933 as a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*, and his comments about what he called the 'imbecilic foreign admirers... playing and gambolling together for the first time in their lives in a real fairyland' are worth quoting:

I treasure as a blessed memory the spectacle of them going with radiant optimism through a famished countryside; wandering in happy bands about squalid, overcrowded towns; listening with unshakeable faith to the fatuous outpourings of obsequious Intourist guides; repeating, like schoolchildren a multiplication table, the bogus statistics and dreary slogans that roll continuously — a dry melancholy wind — over the fairyland's emptiness.⁷⁴

But what caused this adulation? Writing shortly after the great flowering of fellow-travelling had started to wilt in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, Eugene Lyons, himself a disillusioned US fellow-traveller who had spent six years as a journalist in the Soviet Union, made a lengthy study of the US fellow-travelling scene. His observations are useful, as most of them applied with equal force to Britain, and many of his comments were echoed by other writers.

Lyons considered that the most profound response to the Wall Street Crash in 1929 was amongst the middle classes, as the workers and farmers were too traumatised to act. Disoriented by the economic crisis and faced with the threat of social instability, they looked for easy answers: 'Having lost their sense of security and self-reliance, they gambled in panic at the nearest formulae of reassurance or revenge. Planning and collective enterprise... seemed wonder-working gadgets to steady a reeling economic world.' Some of them looked to the extreme right, but many found that the faith that they needed was being fulfilled in the Soviet Union, materially in the Five Year Plans, industrialisation and statistics, and spiritually in objects of adoration and devils to hate. It 'offered a convenient gateway to hope' to those thrown into confusion and doubt by the failings of Western society. 15 Lyons added that fellow-travelling also offered the opportunity of personal advancement at home through the gaining of social prestige and getting books published. 16

Other commentators gave their opinions. Keynes explained that 'Cambridge un-

- 73. EH Carr, 'USSR', International Affairs, 15 (4), July 1936, 626. Some extracts from the speeches to which Carr was referring can be found in Chapter Three, page 108.
- 74. Muggeridge (1934), viii. See also Muggeridge (1940), 64-7, and the similarly dismissive comments in Delafield (1937), 98, and Durant (1933), 26-7.
- 75. Lyons (1941a), 73, 113. The contrast between the proletariat and the middle class in the capitalist world as a whole was noted at the time, with the former being in a 'coma' and the latter 'in a St Vitus dance' (A Newsome, 'To Your Tents, Oh Intelligentsia', New English Weekly, 18 August 1932, 417).
- 76. Lyons (1941a), 93. See also 'Changing Russia', Socialist Standard, September 1934, 1; Trotsky (1937a), 366.

dergraduates' delighted in the 'dreadfully uncomfortable' conditions experienced during their 'inevitable trip to Bolshiedom', as the hardships appealed to their sense of asceticism.⁷⁷ Lancelot Lawton pointed to the *frisson* of the vicarious sense of danger that middle-class sympathisers felt when they visited the Soviet Union, 'to live for a while in perfect safety' in a country where 'revolutionary terror' was still in being.⁷⁸ The staunch liberal JA Spender added that for some the fact that the victims were 'numbered by the million' added to the interest.⁷⁹

Denis Brogan, a Scottish historian who commented regularly on current affairs during this period, was perhaps a little more understanding of them when he noted that the ostensible aims of the Soviet regime were attractive to anyone who was 'not soaked in the English religion of inequality' or complacent about the problems of Western society. The visitor to the Soviet Union went 'hopefully, ready to make allowances, ready to take the word for the deed since he liked the word'. In 1940, George Orwell felt that the allegiance of many intellectuals to the Soviet Union was a substitute for the traditional religious beliefs and domestic patriotism in which they had lost confidence, with the provision of 'a church, an army, an orthodoxy, a discipline... a Fatherland', and, he added ominously, 'at any rate since 1935 or thereabouts — a Führer'. In the society of the socie

Following a sharp decline after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, pro-Soviet sentiments revived with a vengeance once the Soviet Union joined the Allies during the Second World War after the German invasion in June 1941. The anti-communist atmosphere of the Cold War reduced fellow-travelling to a few stalwarts, and interest in the phenomenon declined correspondingly. However, fellow-travelling subsequently underwent a slight revival in the 1960s when the more impressionable members of a new generation of radicals repeated the experience of the 1930s pro-Soviet lobby in relation to China, Cuba and other postwar Stalinist states. This resurgence encouraged some analysts to investigate it, both drawing on the observations made at the time, and developing their own analyses.

The three main analyses of fellow-travelling were by David Caute, Lewis Coser and Paul Hollander.⁸² Despite coming from different political traditions — Caute and Coser stood on the left, whilst Hollander stood on the right — and writing over a span of nearly two decades, their analyses were remarkably similar. All three convincingly

^{77.} Keynes, contribution to Stalin-Wells Talk (1934), 36.

^{78.} Lancelot Lawton, 'The Results of the Russian Revolution', The Realist, November 1929, 234.

^{79.} Spender (1934), 72-3.

^{80.} Brogan (1941), 70.

^{81.} Orwell (1940), 168.

^{82.} Caute (1973); Coser (1965); Hollander (1981).

emphasised the feeling of estrangement from Western society that gripped many intellectuals in the crisis-ridden period after 1929. In Coser's words, they felt that the slump represented the 'shipwreck of Western assumptions and values', and that liberalism's claims of democracy and freedom meant little in times of mass unemployment, waste and despair.⁸³ Caute contended that they were dismayed by the inability of Western society to live up to its ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, as capitalism had led to unemployment, poverty, inequality, war and colonial oppression.84 The answer could be found elsewhere. Hollander explained the attraction of the Soviet Union. Recoiling from the crisis in the West, intellectuals would often project their hopes onto places where they felt the inhabitants were offered some sense of purpose and meaning. The Soviet Union, then embarking on its massive modernisation project, seemed to show a real sense of purpose to many people who were often not previously politically committed. It was not just a technical matter; the Soviet Union was also a model society with a new set of positive values, whereas in the West, formal equalitarian values were rendered meaningless by inequality, and any sense of community was fatally corroded by the drive for profit. The great economic advance testified to the 'paramount achievement' of the Soviet experience, 'the creation of a society permeated by cohesive and sustaining values and a sense of purpose without which... the great material strides would have been impossible'. The Soviet Union was able to resolve the problematic relationship between the promotion of social ideals and their practical realisation.85

Another crucial factor behind the growing popularity of the Soviet Union during the 1930s, one which was also a product of the instability caused by the great depression, was the rise of authoritarian and violent right-wing movements and their steady encroachment upon parliamentary democracy in many European countries, and, in particular, the victory of Hitler's National Socialists in Germany in 1933 and Franco's assault upon the Spanish republican government in 1936. The accession to government in modern, civilised Germany of a violent, intolerant movement with an irrational ideology, whose ranting leader openly declared his warlike intentions, particularly towards the Soviet Union, came to many intellectuals as what Symons called the 'greatest single shock' of the time, shattering the feeling 'that reason was slowly replacing force in the conduct of human affairs'. In these circumstances, 'the creation of the

^{83.} Coser (1965), 235-6.

^{84.} Caute (1973), 5-6.

^{85.} Hollander (1981), 99, 121, 124. And if there were problems, the fellow-travellers thought that unlike those back home, they were 'ephemeral, transient pains of growth rather than the diseases of decline and disintegration', which would wither away (ibid, 96).

Soviet Union seemed the one certain progressive achievement in 20 years'. 86 Hollander considered that the feeble response of the democratic powers to the threat that the authoritarian and fascist regimes posed, plus the continued economic difficulties in the West, 'contributed to an enfeebled, decadent image of Western democracies', thus intensifying both the sense of domestic estrangement and the popularity of the Soviet Union, especially in the second half of the decade, when the Soviet regime appeared to be in the van of the anti-Hitler forces. 87

The main analysts of fellow-travelling disagreed on the antecedents of the fellowtravellers. Caute and Coser considered that they were the spiritual heirs of the Enlightenment thinkers, with the former stating that they felt that, with the Five Year Plans, the Enlightenment project itself - 'the eighteenth-century vision of a rational, educated and scientific society based on the maximisation of resources and the steady improvement (if not perfection) of human nature as visualised by objective, unprejudiced brains' - was being implemented.88 Coser considered that the appeal of the Soviet Union was a modern variant of the Enlightenment thought that appreciated societies making progress under enlightened despotisms, with radical thinkers echoing those two centuries previously who reckoned that the domestic problems of legal and administrative fragmentation, lack of political will and central direction to society, and, of course, a lack of respect for intellectuals had been overcome in China and Russia, whose rulers respected men of letters, and raised people to their entourages on the basis of ability rather than birth.89 Hollander, on the other hand, disagreed and claimed that the fellow-travellers were more influenced by nineteenth-century romanticism. 90 It is true that there was, as Hollander stated, some element of romanticist seeking of the 'noble savage' in the Soviet 'robust proletarian',91 but if one is to consider nineteenth-century roots for fellow-travelling, Krishnan Kumar's statement in his extensive study of utopian thinking, that the pro-Soviet stance of many intellectuals was an 'heir to the intense utopian expectations of nineteenth-century socialism', was more

^{86.} Symons (1990), 86.

^{87.} Hollander (1981), 80. It should not, however, be thought that an appreciation of an apparently virile society abroad necessarily meant that every discontented intellectual championed the Soviet Union. Whilst aiming brickbats at each other, fascist sympathisers and fellow-travellers both felt that their chosen countries provided a positive alternative to the effete, directionless and corrupt liberal democracies, and described them in strikingly similar terms. For glowing accounts of Nazi Germany, see Ward Price (1937), and Yeats-Brown (1939).

^{88.} Caute (1973), 250.

^{89.} Coser (1965), 227-33.

^{90.} Hollander (1981), 28.

^{91.} Ibid, 35.

convincing.⁹² However, favourable attitudes towards the Soviet experiment went well beyond the bounds of the socialist movement, and it would be more accurate to view fellow-travelling as the last if nonetheless intense gasp of both the Victorian idea of progress, with its faith in human rationality and the inexorable rise of democracy, culture and social well-being, and utopian thinking, with its customary concept of a rationally-planned and ordered society under the aegis of an enlightened élite that ruled in the interests of the population as a whole.⁹³ And this is not peculiar to the Victorian idea of progress and utopian thinking, but can be found in the ideas of many Enlightenment thinkers; indeed, it is a constant thread running from Voltaire and his contemporaries through to many of the pro-Soviet intellectuals of the 'Red Decade'.

So what made the fellow-travellers tick? Why did intelligent people become apologists for Stalinism, or at least mute their criticisms of the Soviet regime? Here, postwar observers have been more inclined to disagree amongst themselves. Some commentators have implicitly endorsed Orwell's idea that pro-Soviet feelings were an ersatz religious belief and patriotism.94 Hollander considered that they permitted themselves to be deceived. A combination of pampering and judicious shepherding by the regime, the preconception that the Soviet Union was a force for good in the world, the rejection of the notion that the Soviet regime could possibly try to fool them (and – heaven forbid - that they themselves could be fooled), and ignorance about the country that they were visiting led them to accept the regime's public image.95 Alfred Sherman, who habituated these circles in the 1930s, stated that they were 'projecting their own aspirations and frustrations onto the Soviet scene and then using the image they created as a vindication of their own beliefs and hopes'. And so 'it was not so much that they were deceived by Soviet propaganda as that they deceived themselves with the aid of Soviet propaganda'. Symons added that in repeating the Stalinist line, 'the deceived became the deceivers'.97 As it was, most fellow-travellers, despite the high opinion that many intellectuals have of their critical faculties, proved a pretty credulous and politically naïve bunch.98 One popular view amongst some postwar commentators, there-

- 92. Kumar (1987), 382.
- 93. And, as the US social democrat Sidney Hook put it back in 1949, unlike previous utopias, this was no 'otherworldly ideal', but 'an historical fact with a definite locus in space and time', see Hook (1960), 358.
- 94. Northedge and Wells (1982), 146; Hyde (1952), 68.
- 95. Hollander (1981), 1534, 359ff, 372ff, 423. See also Margulies (1968), 115ff.
- 96. Sherman (1962), 76.
- 97. Symons (1990), 108.
- 98. Bornstein and Richardson (1983), 20. In his account of radical scientists, Gary Werskey tried to shift the image of a 1930s radical intellectual away from that of 'a politically inexperienced poet who naïvely opted for communism' towards the more rationally-minded scientists, but failed to

fore, is that fellow-travellers were by and large politically naïve and well-meaning, but puffed up with bloated egos, and peculiarly lacking in that sense of critical scepticism with which intellectuals are customarily considered to be endowed.

Others have detected a more self-serving or sinister rationale. The academic and writer Goronwy Rees, who knew at first-hand several upper-class Soviet devotees, made the perceptive observation that such people were not inspired by any sympathy for the working class, but were attracted to the Soviet Union because of 'the defects and inadequacies of their own class', and saw in this 'new world' the means to establish themselves as the new élite in Britain.99 In 1946, Orwell hinted heavily at the appeal of authoritarianism to intellectuals when he noted that 'it was only after the Soviet regime became unmistakably totalitarian that English intellectuals, in large numbers, began to show an interest in it'. 100 Coser declared that Western intellectuals were drawn towards Soviet officialdom on the grounds that its apparent efficiency was due to its freedom from the 'encrusted prejudices, traditions and checks and balances' that held back progress in the West, adding that, through 'force and cunning, coercion and manipulation', they too aimed to 'achieve control' and 'plan for everyone' in an enlightened despotism. 101 The right-wing writers George Watson and Geoffrey Wheatcroft dismissed the claims that fellow-travellers were ignorant of the facts or were victims of self-deception, and bluntly declared that these people were attracted to the Soviet Union precisely because of its violent and repressive nature. 102

These verdicts are a little too sweeping. The pro-Soviet lobby was not an homogeneous conglomerate. There were without doubt hopeful élitists, power-seekers and authoritarians within its ranks — it is not being unfair to assume that if Hitler's regime had not been so vulgarly violent, irrational and retrogressive, some of them might well have fellow-travelled the Third Reich rather than the Soviet Union — and some of the most prominent fellow-travellers were hard-line Stalinists without a Communist Party card. For much of the 1930s, John Strachey acted as the party's main proponent of Stalinised Marxism in Britain, although he never officially joined it. The lawyer DN Pritt was a Labour MP, but always kept faithfully to the Stalinist line. 103 Some adher-

emphasise that they could be equally credulous when it came to accepting the Stalinist myth. See Werskey (1978), 14.

- 99. Rees (1972), 225.
- 100. Orwell (1946), 18. See also Jones (1977), 14.
- 101. Coser (1965), 238-40. Utopian thought has always been suspect in respect of democracy, and its adherents have often visualised their ideal societies being run by an enlightened dictatorship, see Walsh (1972), 61ff. The anarchist Marie Louise Berneri understood the link between utopianism and dictatorship, see Berneri (1987), 309-10.
- 102. Watson (1977), 70; Wheatcroft (1988), 17-18.
- 103. Nina Fishman's portrayal of Pritt as a mere 'left-wing Labour MP' was quite misleading, see

ents were dedicated followers of fashion, as it was *de rigueur* to praise all things Soviet during this period, and intellectuals are no less susceptible to leaping upon fashionable bandwagons than those of a lesser sophistication. But for others, there were genuine feelings of compassion beneath the naïveté and blind trust, which made their support for Stalinism all the more incongruous. It is not as if there was a dearth of critical material on the Soviet Union, far from it. But it was not what they wanted to read; nor would much of it have made sense had they done so. Moreover, the fact that authors of critical works tended to be aligned with political trends that were neither well-disposed towards the Soviet leadership nor effective at home — conservatives and liberals were *ipso facto* hostile to socialism, and, together with social democrats, had been singularly unsuccessful in overcoming domestic difficulties, and the small groups of anti-Stalinist leftists were churlish Jeremiahs — made them suspect in the eyes of the fellow-travellers, and sympathisers who recoiled at the negative aspects of official communism were written off as renegades.¹⁰⁴

The widely promoted and accepted idea that the Soviet Union was organised in accordance with a rationally-devised plan for social progress and human need, thus offering a positive alternative to the very evident chaos and irrationality of slump-ridden capitalism, made it an extremely compelling vision for a large number of people who were looking for an answer. Having found this spark of hope amidst the economic and political decay in the West, the fellow-travellers were loath to take into their hands anything that could possibly extinguish it. Self-deception born of both despair and hope, rather than any sadistic streak, was the main force behind their belief in Stalinism.

III: Socialism and Democracy

The pro-Soviet lobby was not restricted to political naïve intellectuals, as within its ranks were those who considered themselves to be highly sophisticated Marxists, for whom the Soviet Union represented the socialist future.

Whilst socialism has customarily been posited as the replacement of capitalism by a system that is to be more efficient and democratic, the relationship between democracy and socialism on both a theoretical and practical level has been fraught with difficulties, and was greatly complicated by the experience of the Soviet Union. Long before the October Revolution, let alone the rise of Stalinism, not only had right-wingers been warning that socialism 'would drill and brigade us into a kind of barrack-yard ex-

Fishman (1995), 271. His reputation as an 'unremitting apologist' for Stalinism, see Caute (1973), 126, has been reinforced by the revelation that Moscow actually ordered the CPGB to commission him to write a defence of the second Moscow Trial for the British press, see Chase (2001), 195.

^{104.} See, for example, Pat Sloan's attack upon André Gide in Sloan (1938), 238.

istence', 'an intolerable official despotism', with the population becoming 'mere automata moved by the all-absorbing and all-directing power of the state', 105 but similar fears had also been expressed within the socialist movement itself. In late Victorian Britain, the Fabians' vision of socialism that combined a parliamentary democracy with an étatised society under the benevolent rule of an enlightened administrative élite struck fear in the hearts of many socialists, who felt that it would lead to a bureaucratic nightmare, with the replacement of the capitalist ruling class by a new class of officials. The Independent Labour Party was divided between those who favoured the Fabians' programme and those who felt that their étatism and circumscribed view of democracy had sinister overtones. This latter outlook was shared by the ostensibly Marxist Social Democratic Federation, but this organisation's favouring of a centralised state under socialism was seen by some socialists as smacking of authoritarianism. The early years of the twentieth century saw the rise of syndicalism and guild socialism, which also viewed étatism and centralisation with great suspicion, and which championed the need for working-class control of the work process. However, although an exhaustive study of this subject fairly concludes that strong democratic ideas were 'of major importance' in the British labour movement prior to the Russian Revolution, 106 there remained much ambiguity on this subject within the international socialist movement as a whole, not least on the question of how power would be exercised in a socialist society, 107 and the impact of the Soviet experience on the relationship between socialism and democracy was not a particularly edifying one.

One key consequence of the October Revolution in Britain was the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. The CPGB assembled into one organisation the majority of revolutionaries in Britain, and its initial membership was largely drawn from the British Socialist Party (the successor to the SDF), the Socialist Labour Party, a left-wing faction of the ILP, and various syndicalist currents. Britain's communists hailed the October Revolution on the grounds that the Bolsheviks were leading the way to a genuinely free society. Whatever one makes of the Bolsheviks' intentions, honesty and realism, and however one may interpret the course of Soviet history, few today would demur from the view that by the time the CPGB was established, the Bolsheviks had restricted soviet democracy, and had substituted themselves for the Russian working class and were ruling in its name. It is an irony of history that the CPGB was formed by a large proportion of Britain's leading revolutionaries on the

^{105.} Nemo (1895), 107. See also Herbert Spencer, 'The Coming Slavery', Contemporary Review, April 1884, 480-1.

^{106.} Barrow and Bullock (1996), 303.

^{107.} See Sassoon (1996), 20.

^{108.} Trotsky effectively admitted this at the time, see Trotsky (1935), 101.

grounds that the Soviet republic meant precisely that — a society based upon workers' councils — at a time when those conditions no longer applied in that country. The anti-bureaucratic forces within the British labour movement that identified with the October Revolution thus only adopted an organisational identification it after the process of bureaucratisation had taken off, and, like other communist parties, the CPGB could not avoid being contaminated by this process as it consolidated itself during the 1920s.¹⁰⁹

The success of the Bolsheviks in holding onto power in difficult circumstances through monopolising power and building up a vast state machine validated their tactics in the eyes of many revolutionaries, and Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country' had the effect of sanctifying all the short-cuts and administrative moves that the Bolsheviks had taken in their desperate fight for survival during the Civil War. Once the link between the Soviet republic and a European revolution was broken, then the tendency towards the universalisation of the Russian experience within the Comintern was solidified, and if socialism could be built within one country, then the entire experience of the Soviet Union was valid in and of itself, and all preceding and succeeding Soviet practice was effectively validated as a model – indeed, the universal model – for the transition to socialism. Rather than being considered as emergency measures intended to enable the Soviet regime to survive in temporary isolation in a backward country, the undemocratic, étatist and bureaucratic features of the Soviet regime became a permanent part of the domestic system, and the great intensification and expansion of these practices under Stalin was accompanied by a slavish imitation of them throughout the Comintern.

Few today would demur from the view that by the end of the 1920s, with Stalin's victory over his party opponents and with the building of a gigantic étatised economic structure that finally gave it the solid social foundation which it previously lacked, the Soviet party-state apparatus was transforming itself into a fully-fledged ruling élite with decidedly nationalist tendencies. Opinions differ, however, in respect of whether it had betrayed its origins and had become a consciously anti-communist force, or was merely changing in form within the parameters of its declared intentions of world revolution. It is this writer's contention that by the end of the 1920, when the infatuation with all things Soviet was becoming the vogue, the Soviet party-state apparatus was mutating into a self-conscious ruling élite, conscious of the fact that its interests were opposed to those of the masses, and therefore conscious of its need to oppose and to prevent communism at the same time as it promoted an albeit bastardised form of

^{109.} This acceptance of the party-state apparatus presenting its rule as synonymous with the dictatorship of the proletariat was extended by some British communists into a guiding principle. See Paul (1921), 132-3.

Marxism.¹¹⁰ By the time the Soviet Union was widely hailed as the new civilisation, the egalitarian and internationalist core of Bolshevism had degenerated into the élitist, nationalist, étatist and bureaucratic essence of Stalinism. Official communism was a product of Bolshevism, but a negative one; the result of its defeat, not of its victory.¹¹¹ However, this was not a portrayal of the Soviet Union that members of the CPGB could tolerate, for they took the pronouncements of the Soviet regime at their word, and viewed Moscow as the centre of the new civilisation.

Although the CPGB was at the end of the 1920s undergoing a period of self-isolation as a result of the Communist International's stridently sectarian Third Period approach, its membership and influence were to grow considerably as the 1930s drew by, and this growth should be seen as part of the general radicalisation of the time. For obvious reasons, attitudes towards the Soviet Union have often been outlined in accounts of the CPGB and biographies of its leading figures, and our understanding has been considerably enhanced by the opening of the archives in Moscow and of the CPGB itself.

The attraction of the Soviet Union to CPGB members in the 1930s has been described by Noreen Branson, the party's official historian, and by the more critical Willie Thompson, who summed it up:

The workers there had overthrown the power of landlords, bankers and bosses, and the workers ruled. The longing for a different order of things, which underpinned the original socialist vision, grew all the more fervent when it was transformed into admiration for the state where that was thought to have been accomplished.¹¹²

At a time when capitalism appeared to be failing, one can hardly be surprised that intellectuals and workers alike started to look favourably towards official communism. To this should be added the impact of Hitler's victory in 1933, the anti-fascist image of official communism, and the humane manner in which the Soviet regime had apparently 'solved its Jewish question'.¹¹³

Various commentators, including Kevin Morgan and Francis Beckett, have noted

- 110. My analysis is based upon that elaborated by Trotsky during the 1930s, in particular Trotsky (1937b).
- 111. The popular image during the 'Red Decade' of the 'proletarian' nature of the Stalinist regime was a deception. What we had was a situation in which the working class enjoyed a privileged subservient social position compared to the old intellectuals and the peasantry. There were many opportunities for aspiring proletarians to rise within Soviet society, but this did not mean that the Soviet Union was a workers' state, but rather that the élite recruited its new cadres within and therefore pulled them out of the working class.
- 112 Thompson (1992), 58; Branson (1985), 105-8.
- 113. Pelling (1975), 82.



that the allegiance to the Soviet Union of the party's General Secretary Harry Pollitt, a skilled workman, was based upon his class consciousness, that for him the October Revolution and the ensuing Soviet regime represented the victory of the working class over the capitalists, the people who both in Britain and elsewhere had oppressed him, his family and the rest of his class.114 As for Rajani Palme Dutt, the party's Vice Chairman and leading theoretician, Douglas Hyde's portrayal of him as a monstrous, inhuman but logical manifestation of Marxism verges on caricature, and says more about Hyde's emotional disavowal of his former Stalinist views than about his subject. 115 Our understanding of this rather opaque man has been taken some way further by John Callaghan's recent biography. Callaghan noted that 'dazzled' by the October Revolution, Dutt and his colleagues 'felt a personal indebtedness' to the Soviet leadership, and it became 'psychologically impossible' for those at the head of a small and inexperienced party to challenge the Soviet leaders on questions with which the latter had far more experience. This sense of inferiority was accentuated by the lack of progress that Dutt's own party was making, which made the lure of the Soviet Union all the more stronger. These factors made Dutt a 'true believer' in the Soviet Union, leaving him bereft of any 'spirit of scepticism' when it came to Soviet affairs.¹¹⁶

Perhaps the most revealing manifestation of the British Stalinists' attitude towards the Soviet Union came from the party's senior philosopher, Maurice Cornforth, whose feelings were revealed when the minutes of the dramatic Central Committee meetings in the autumn of 1939, at which Dutt badgered his mainly reluctant colleagues into turning against supporting Britain in the Second World War in accordance with the Comintern's new line, were published half-a-century later:

Perhaps it sounds rather silly in some ways to have oneself in the position where when the Soviet Union does something one is willing constantly at first, while thinking it over, to follow what the Soviet Union is doing, but I must say that I personally have got that sort of faith in the Soviet Union, to be willing to do that, because I believe that if one loses anything of that faith in the Soviet Union, one is done for as a communist and a socialist.¹¹⁷

This pathetic admission vividly indicates the manner in which party members could voluntarily put themselves in a position of political and emotional subordination to Moscow.

Some observers have considered that the fealty towards Moscow on the part of certain party leaders was a product not merely of their political convictions, but of their personal ambitions, that they recognised that a careful adherence to Moscow's

^{114.} Morgan (1993), 174-8; Beckett (1995), 71-2, 126-8.

^{115.} Hyde (1952), 153-5.

^{116.} Callaghan (1993), 34, 39, 62, 67, 171, 233.

^{117.} King and Matthews (1990), 130-1. See also Morgan (1989).

policies would guarantee and hopefully enhance their place in the party hierarchy. This is particularly the case with William Rust, who edited the party's newspaper for many years. Loud, bumptious, vain and manipulative at home, according to Morgan, 'his ambition was bound up with a sort of political sycophancy' towards Moscow. Andrew Flinn concurred, adding that Rust typified the sort of youngster who was inspired by events in the Soviet Union, and, 'isolated from real life in Britain... embraced the sectarian politics espoused by the Comintern', learning that 'ruthlessness and lack of sentiment were cherished revolutionary virtues'. One can add that Rust was a classic example of those party members whose early political evolution paralleled the bureaucratisation of the Soviet state and the Comintern, and who had no experience of the British labour movement prior to the advent of Moscow's influence upon it.

Like other communist parties, the CPGB publicly endorsed every feature of Stalin's regime, and stoutly defended the Soviet Union against its critics. Branson noted that party members would not countenance the idea that 'the new socialist society, in which classes and the class struggle had been eliminated, could itself generate new forms of oppression', and that they were unwilling to believe the bourgeois press, which had frequently spread lies about both the Soviet Union and issues with which they were familiar. 120 This defensiveness included justifying the more questionable features of the regime. Thompson stated that the desire of party members to defend the country in which so much hope had been invested led them to reject 'the slightest or most discreetly phrased reservation' about the Moscow Trials.121 Nowadays, we know that there were concerns about Stalin's terror of the late 1930s amongst the top echelons of the CPGB. Andrew Thorpe has stated that Pollitt was troubled by certain aspects of Soviet society, including the purges, which led to the disappearance of his friend Rose Cohen, but his 'essential faith' in the Soviet Union 'remained largely unshaken'. He added that another party leader, Johnny Campbell, was 'a good deal more equivocal' towards Soviet reality than the image that he presented in his book Soviet Policy and Its Critics, but both Campbell and Pollitt carefully kept their doubts from public view.¹²² Dutt's sense of inferiority before Moscow could lead to the most cynical abandonment of party comrades who fell foul of the Soviet secret police during the purges, on the grounds that the British party's miserable showing invalidated any criti-

^{118.} Morgan (1993), 149.

^{119.} Flinn (2001), 97-8.

^{120.} Branson (1985), 247-8.

^{121.} Thompson (1992), 58. Brian Pearce showed how the CPGB's allegiance to the Soviet regime wrought havoc on its press during the Moscow Trials, as heroes became traitors overnight. See Pearce (1975), 21940.

^{122.} Thorpe (2000), 229, 241.

cisms members may have had of Stalin's actions. 123 As for the rank-and-file membership, Thompson stated that the veteran members he interviewed related that they accepted the validity of the trials and purges, but were more concerned with other political issues. This, Thompson declared, was 'a form of collective amnesia', as it was 'unimaginable' that party members were unaware of the controversy that the Moscow Trials provoked in Britain.¹²⁴ Although one may assume that the relationship between a communist party and the Soviet state would be of prime importance for historians investigating the CPGB, Nina Fishman's extensive account of party trade union activities during 1933-45 made no reference to the manner in which party activists in the factories dealt with the Moscow Trials. 125 In ignoring this question, Fishman was drawing to an illogical conclusion the premise of the revisionist school of thought which, polemicising against the traditional viewpoint that — correctly, in the opinion of this writer has emphasised the predominant presence of Moscow in the life of communist parties, 126 has placed much more emphasis upon indigenous factors. 127 As if to confirm Moscow's predominant position vis-à-vis the CPGB, Branson noted that official communists were 'forced' to challenge their idealised portrayal of Stalin's Soviet Union in 1956, although she refrained from probing the paradox that a more critical attitude on the part of Britain's Stalinists towards Stalin was prompted by the Soviet leadership, and not by some independent venture within the CPGB. 128 Stephen Woodhams, who is generally sympathetic to the CPGB's political approach, was nonetheless of the opinion that the development of the party was retarded by its dependence on Moscow, 129 as was the party historian Monty Johnstone, who stated that the CPGB should have followed Pollitt in opposing the new anti-war line in 1939. 130 This is unrealistic, as

- 123. Morgan (1993),175.
- 124. Thompson (1992), 61-2. In his account of three working-class areas where the CPGB had a strong influence, Stuart Macintyre stated that there was no disquiet when news of the trials and terror first came through, although doubts subsequently grew and were exacerbated by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. See Macintyre (1980), 186-7.
- 125. Fishman (1995).
- 126. Pelling (1975); Kendall (1979), 145-56; Eaden and Renton (2002).
- 127. In particular, Fishman (2001), 7-16. Not all revisionists have gone as far as Fishman in this matter, yet although Andrew Thorpe felt obliged to dissociate himself from the more excessive examples of 'realism' (as Fishman called this outlook), and even admitted that Moscow's influence upon the CPGB was 'arguably the most important', he still claimed that domestic pressures 'all played their part in *determining* party strategy'. See Thorpe (1998a), 662, my emphasis. This writer considers that a more accurate view would be that domestic pressures influenced the party's *implementation* of policies elaborated by the Comintern's leaders.
- 128. Branson (1985), 248.
- 129. Woodhams (2001), passim.
- 130. Johnstone (1984), 42.

not only was the party utterly devoted to the Soviet Union — Pollitt soon knuckled under and issued a grovelling self-criticism — but any significant dissension from the Comintern's line would have immediately resulted in Moscow revoking the party's franchise.¹³¹

To sum up, for the bulk of CPGB members, the regime said it was a new and higher form of democracy — so it had to be true. Those who criticised Moscow only did so because they were hostile to this new civilisation. Much in the same way as the fellow-travellers, for party members democracy within the Soviet Union was an act of faith — and, as we have seen some argue, not always good faith — or of self-deception. It is fair to endorse Walter Kendall's statement that the party was divided between 'an élite who *knew* the truth about Soviet Russia from personal experience' and 'a periphery, whose view was one of exaggerated hopes and dreams', and that those who knew of the harsh conditions in the Soviet Union responded by 'pledging a renewed allegiance'. ¹³² It is a sign of the immaturity of the British revolutionary left that for all its tradition of opposition to bureaucratism and the state, the CPGB had within a decade of its foundation become notorious for its uncritical attitude towards the Soviet bureaucratic state, ¹³³ and those who took an anti-Stalinist course remained a marginal political force throughout the period under discussion. ¹³⁴

IV: The Centre Ground

It is erroneous to view the discussion of the Soviet Union in Britain during this period merely as an exchange between an uncritical pro-Soviet lobby on the one side, and a mirror-image anti-communist bloc on the other. There was a broad swathe of opinion between these two poles that praised the various social and economic measures being implemented by the Soviet regime, and which saw the Soviet Union as at least a potentially beneficial factor in international affairs, whilst maintaining a firm opposition to its authoritarian political norms.

The rise of this centre ground, encompassing moderate conservatives, liberals and moderate social democrats, was very much a response to one of the key factors that lay behind the rise of the pro-Soviet lobby, namely, the contrast between the crisis in the West following the Wall Street Crash and the tremendous expansion of the Soviet economy under the First Five Year Plan. Nevertheless, this broad appreciation of certain Soviet policies would not have occurred had there not existed in Britain and other

^{131.} For a sustained critique of the 'realist' school, see McIlroy (2001b), 195-226.

^{132.} Kendall (1969), 433.

^{133.} This has been admitted by such sympathetic commentators as Thompson (1992), 43, and Thorpe (2000), 229.

^{134.} For the non-Stalinist left, see Bornstein and Richardson (1986); Jupp (1982); Shipway (1988).

Western countries a growing intellectual trend favouring state intervention into the economy and social life. Sections of the British reformist left had long recommended the nationalisation of major industries, particularly coal-mining and the railways, under some form or another of state administration. Even in Britain, the concepts of *lais-sez-faire* had never been fully put into practice, and the much-vaunted 'night-watchman' state, playing a very limited social role, was never a total reality. By the mid-nineteenth century, calls were being made in Britain by some capitalist spokesmen for the state regulation of certain infrastructural industries, most notably the railways, on the basis that the limiting of untrammelled competition amongst them served the interests of capitalism in general. A combination of popular concern and the recognition of the overall needs of capital had led to rudimentary welfare measures being introduced in Britain by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

The mobilisation by the British state of the national economy during the First World War represented a major turning point. The sheer magnitude of the war effort forced the government to intervene deeply in the economic life of the country, and in a process which one historian later called 'a strange lesson in state socialism', 135 shipping was requisitioned, railways were put under state control, and by 1917 essential industries were also being controlled by the state. Although during the war and for a while afterwards, laissez-faire remained the ideological norm, as state intervention was seen largely as a short-term or emergency matter, rather than a long-term or permanent policy, and most of the wartime measures were dismantled soon after hostilities ceased, a crucial step had been taken. As Trevor Smith put it, government initiatives during the war had been an 'object lesson' in showing how the state could intervene into the economy, and a 'mortal blow' had been struck against the concepts of a 'nightwatchman' state and laissez-faire economics. 136 The experience of wartime measures of state intervention started to have some impact, and Jose Harris' assertion that there was 'no corresponding change in ideas about state legitimacy' has to be treated with caution. 137 Although interwar governments were rather wary about implementing state interventionist measures, various welfare reforms were put into practice, and certain important state concerns were established both before and after the crash of 1929. 138

Altogether, a substantial shift in opinion on the issue of state intervention took place in Britain between the two world wars. A leading advocate of managed capital-

^{135.} Elie Halévy, 'Socialism and the Problem of Democratic Parliamentarianism', *International Affairs*, 13 (4), July 1934, 491.

^{136.} Smith (1975), 6.

^{137.} Harris (1986), 236.

^{138.} These included the Central Electricity Board and the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1926, and the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933.

ism, John Maynard Keynes, found a growing audience and a champion in David Lloyd George, whose accession as the leader of the Liberal Party in 1926 signified the replacement of *laissez-faire* by state intervention as a leading Liberal ethos. Similar if more limited moves started within the Conservative Party, as such young Turks as Harold Macmillan and Robert Boothby started to call for state intervention and an economic 'general staff'. ¹³⁹ Of particular interest here are the comments by the electrical engineer Allan Monkhouse, who, despite having no sympathy whatsoever for Bolshevism, had nonetheless gone to the Soviet Union as early as the mid-1920s to help develop its industrial infrastructure:

I genuinely wanted to see a system of national economic planning prove successful, because I believe that some form of control, by state-appointed control boards working in accordance with a national economic planning scheme, will ultimately prove necessary and beneficial — both in Western Europe and America — in connection with all public services, transport and the supply of fuels, essential raw materials and foodstuffs. 140

Monkhouse represented the outlook common not merely to many members of the new stratum of middle-class managers and technicians, but also to a growing number of political and economic thinkers, in that he had no time for Soviet politics, but saw its economic operations as an indication of the direction in which the world as a whole was heading.¹⁴¹

If at first the idea of the necessity of state intervention was very much the property of a minority trend within British political and economic circles, it became more generally accepted through 'the necessary psychological snap'¹⁴² of the great crash of 1929 and the ensuing slump. This was the point at which the call for planning started to be heard at practically all points of the political spectrum.¹⁴³ And if the acceptance of such ideas was uneven — for instance, Oswald Mosley's call in 1930 for a thoroughgoing programme of state intervention under a committee of experts was rejected by the Labour Party¹⁴⁴ — within a short time various ginger groups, including the Socialist League, the New Fabian Research Bureau and the Society for Socialist Inquiry and

- 139. Boothby was a precursor of the centre ground, see his appreciation of Soviet social facilities in 'My Visit to Russia', Spectator, 17 July 1926, 84.
- 140. Monkhouse (1933), 10.
- 141. For the appeal of étatisation to such people, see 'The Revolutionary Middle Class', *New Statesman*, 5 May 1934, 664.
- 142. Marwick (1963), 75.
- 143. Advocates of planning later noted with pleasure its all-class appeal. See Lord Elton, 'The Decay of Opposition', Fortnightly, January 1938, 3; W Horsfall-Carter, 'Reconnaissance on the Home Front', Fortnightly, July 1938, 20.
- 144. Sassoon (1996), 61, states that the Liberal Party was quicker than the Labour Party to adopt Keynesian ideas.

Propaganda, appeared within the Labour Party, all calling for a wide range of interventionist policies. By the mid-1930s, Labour's official manifestos called for economic planning, thus taking in some of these groups' ideas, and, ironically, elements of Mosley's programme, although by now he was busy advocating a fascist brand of collectivism. Other pro-planning groups appeared during the early 1930s, including the Industrial Reorganisation League, formed by various industrialists, and the Next Five Years Group, which incorporated Macmillan and other prominent thinkers, and Political and Economic Planning, which published an extensive series of monographs on the subject.¹⁴⁵

At a time when sober commentators were saying that capitalism had 'nearly ceased to function as an efficiently working machine', 146 planning was regarded as the means to save it;147 indeed, John Stevenson considered that 'the most significant feature of the interwar years was the acceptance by "middle opinion" of the need for planning without the destruction of the capitalist system'. 148 It can thus be easily understood, when the efficacy of laissez-faire was being widely questioned even by supporters of economic individualism, 149 how many people whose commitment to liberal democracy led them forthrightly to reject the Soviet political system, nonetheless considered that there were important lessons that Western governments could learn from studying the economic and social policies of the Soviet regime, even if they may not have fully endorsed the New Statesman's plaintive cry of 'When shall we have a Five Years Plan for Great Britain?'. 150 The conditional nature of this endorsement must be emphasised. In recognising that state intervention was here to stay and to oppose it was 'folly', the Spectator warned against the lure of Stalinist and fascist brands of collectivism, and posed its programme of 'ordered progress' as 'the only effective defence against the far more revolutionary proposals of extreme right and extreme left alike',151 a view that was heartily endorsed by the Economist and Macmillan. 152

- 145. For the political ramifications of the planning debate of the 1930s and the relationship between the pro-planning bodies and political parties and currents, see Pimlott (1986), 59-67, 145-7.
- 146. GR Stirling Taylor, 'The New National Planning', Fortnightly Review, August 1933, 132.
- 147. See LF Easterbrook, 'Pigs and Planning', Nineteenth Century and After, December 1932, 711; Macmillan (1934), passim.
- 148. Stevenson (1984), 326.
- 149. Hence Sir Andrew McFadyean could declare: 'The system under which we have lived seems to be breaking down; if private initiative has led us into a morass, perhaps public effort can dig us out.' ('The State and Economic Life', *International Affairs*, 11 (1), January 1932, 2-6)
- 150. 'Comment', New Statesman, 13 June 1931, 566.
- 151. 'Democracy and Liberty', Spectator, 5 October 1934, 472.
- 152. 'Russia's Planned Economy', *Economist*, 15 September 1934, 489-80; Macmillan (1934), 126ff. Hence the largely favourable response amongst British commentators, economists and politicians to the New Deal in the USA, see Wood (1959), 72-3.

Andrew Thorpe has made the important point that the fellow-travellers did not represent mainstream labour movement opinion, and 'in no sense' were they 'typical of the non-communist left'. 153 Still less did they represent non-socialist opinion. Nevertheless, whilst one of the key features of the centre ground – economic planning – has been sufficiently covered in historical literature, the attitude of this trend towards the Soviet Union has not received a fraction of the attention of that of the fellowtravellers. 154 The few references that do exist are little more than passing remarks, albeit sometimes illuminating. Curtis Keeble, a former British ambassador to the Soviet Union, noted 'a broad cross-section of opinion' in the 1930s 'between the zealots of right and left' who were 'prepared to examine seriously and impartially the great Russian experiment', and were 'certainly not disposed to ignore the new Soviet state as a factor in the march of European politics'. 155 Most right-wing Labour leaders were very critical of Soviet political norms, and had more in common with many non-socialists on this subject than with the strongly pro-Soviet currents on the left of their party. Thus Bill Jones' assertions of the 'pro-Soviet euphoria' and the 'intense admiration' for and the 'revered position' of the Soviet Union in the Labour Party in the 1930s were clear overstatements, 156 and Douglas Clark's estimation of the attitude of Britain's moderate social democrats towards the Soviet Union was woefully inaccurate. They did not have a 'plaster-saint image' of Stalin, they did not view the Soviet Union as 'the great hope and example for the future'.157 Looking wider, Northedge and Wells mentioned the 'men of affairs, technicians, engineers, construction workers, businessmen and traders' who did not 'scorn the Red Empire', but it is wrong to consider that they were necessarily joining 'the pilgrimage to Utopia', as they were often less interested in the Soviet Union as a new form of society than they were in its technical advances and the lessons of those achievements for Western countries. 158

There was no concurrent opinion amongst the centre ground to the effect that Nazi Germany contained features from which Britain could learn. There were fellow-travellers of Hitler, who often resembled a mirror-image of the pro-Soviet lobby, and it is true, as Richard Griffiths has shown, that there were people at various points of the

- 153. Thorpe (1998b), 627.
- 154. Marwick's fascinating article on pro-planning individuals and groups of the 1930s made no reference to the impact of the Soviet Union upon them, see Marwick (1964).
- 155. Keeble (1990), 118.
- 156. Jones (1977), 23, 210, 217.
- 157. Clark (1966), 40-2. Andrew Williams went some way to counter these misconceptions. See Williams (1989), 206-7.
- 158. Northedge and Wells (1982), 147. They stated (ibid, 190) that many people who looked favourably at Soviet economic and social policies during the Second World War were by no means enamoured with Soviet political norms, but this applies with equal strength to the 1930s.

political spectrum who made appreciative remarks about aspects of Nazi policies, ¹⁵⁹ and one could hear a desperate and, in retrospect, ludicrous call during the Second World War for the British government to 'pay tribute to the Nazis' amazing organising abilities in the economic and industrial organisation of Germany'. ¹⁶⁰ However, in no sense could these disparate individuals be equated with the centre ground which looked with interest at the Soviet Union. The dominant feeling within the centre ground towards Nazi Germany was one of disgust and alarm. Whilst Stalinism was seen by the centre ground as a progressive force wrenching a society up from backwardness into modernity, Hitlerism was seen as a reactionary force dragging a modern society down into barbarism. And whilst the Soviet Union was considered by many outwith the pro-Soviet lobby to be a potentially stabilising factor in international affairs, Nazi Germany was widely viewed as a dire threat to European stability.

We are not talking about a 'blank spot' in British historiography, as some writers have cast a glance at the influence of the Five Year Plans upon economic and political discourse in Britain during the 1930s. Nonetheless, there has been a marked and surprising reluctance to investigate in any depth the centre ground and its attitude towards the Soviet Union. It is true that the literature and activities of the pro-Soviet lobby make a more exciting and exotic topic of study than the more prosaic outlook of the centre ground, yet the dry exterior of a phenomenon should not — and usually does not — deter historians from investigating it. This thesis breaks new ground by presenting an in-depth look at this current.

V: Problems of Interpretation

There was a major methodological problem that confronted observers of the Soviet Union during the period under discussion, and which still raises difficulties today when one assesses their observations in the light of the limitations of the knowledge that was available at the time.

During the first decade or so of the Soviet republic, and especially during its first few years, sufficient evidence could be obtained for an objective study; one need only peruse the works of Russell, Brailsford and Ransome. Despite the official control of information, the interested observer was able to ascertain to a fair degree what was occurring. Sympathetic observers of the Soviet regime tended to be candid about the reality of the situation. The rise and victory of Stalin's faction was accompanied by an

^{159.} Griffiths (1983), passim.

^{160.} FL Kerran, 'The Nazis Plan – What Is Ours?', Plebs, June 1940, 143. See also Guillebaud (1941), passim; RA Scott-James, 'The Planning of War', Spectator, 21 June 1940, 831-2; Barbara Wootton, 'Who Shall Pay for the War?', Political Quarterly, 11 (2), April 1940, 154.

^{161.} There is a worthy investigation of the 'centre ground' in the USA, see Warren (1993).

ever-increasing control of information by the regime. As the party leadership tightened its grip over society, the ability of observers to obtain trustworthy information declined, as not only were oppositional voices both within and outwith the party stifled, but in a process that continued in an intensified form during the 1930s, the party-state apparatus strictly controlled both the media outlets and the assembling of the information which it broadcast. Visits to the Soviet Union were far more carefully controlled, and the opportunities to go beyond the restrictions imposed by the regime's representatives had decreased enormously. More importantly, for reasons described above, the minds of the sympathetic Western observers were closing.

How was the Western observer to obtain information? One could take at face value the publicity issued by the regime. One could look at the shreds of information emerging from the Soviet Union by unofficial means. But how could one vouch for their veracity? One could try and obtain information in the Soviet Union by one's own efforts. 163 But how could one get people to believe one's own word? The study of the Soviet Union was never a matter of unbiased observation and assessment. Even though under Stalin the Soviet regime was to forsake the essence of Bolshevism communism in the Marxist sense - the very fact that it had emerged from an anticapitalist revolution and had not returned to capitalism meant that it stood in opposition to the capitalist world, and was obliged to promote anti-capitalism as an official ideology, which was treated as genuine by the vast majority of observers, friendly or hostile. This made dispassionate observation very difficult. The critical observer's account could be attacked by a supporter of the regime in the words later made famous in a notorious court case - 'He would say that, wouldn't he?' - whether he or she be a Russian exile, a pro-capitalist Western observer or a non-Stalinist left-winger. The motives of the critical observer would be put into question, and any assessments would be written off as a product of his or her bad faith and prejudices.

Linguistic knowledge was seen by some as essential. The exiled Russian economist Paul Haensel recommended that people visit the place properly and learn the language, and not think that a short trip 'in the hands of specially trained guides' who were 'responsible to the political police' gave them the right to consider themselves experts on the country, 164 whilst one visitor made an interesting point: 'The lightning glimpse of a novel political experiment in the working leaves the observer with the

^{162.} Pares stated that after 1928, journalistic freedom was so restricted that only the 'carpet baggers' who acted as apologists for the regime remained ('English News on Russia', Contemporary Review, September 1932, 284).

^{163.} It seems that the staunch right-winger Ernest Benn was actually being serious when he asserted that one had a better chance of understanding the Soviet Union by *not* going there. See Benn (1930), 7.

^{164.} Haensel (1930), 44.

conviction that only a foreigner knowing Russian perfectly, and with the ability to conceal that fact, can get at the truth.'165 One method by which people with the requisite linguistic skills could acquire considerable amounts of information about conditions in the Soviet Union was by reading the official press, because Soviet publications regularly brought to light examples of poor housing and working conditions, inefficiency and waste in industry and agriculture, corruption and abuse of official sanction. This was recommended by, of all people, the CPGB's economist Maurice Dobb, who readily admitted that 'the compiler of criticisms of Soviet Russia' had 'not had to search outside official statements for his material', as the official press often brought shortcomings to light. 166 The range of problems exposed in the official Soviet press permitted a Western observer who could read Russian to create a picture that ran against the image that the Soviet regime and its apologists wished to promote, as the separate shortcomings and irregularities could be presented in such a way as to enable a coherent critique of the system to be at least partially drawn up. 167 Nevertheless, as one's observations were restricted to the problems which the regime, for its own purposes, was willing to publicise, there were limits to any analysis of the Soviet system that could be obtained in this way.

The Soviet authorities issued detailed statistics throughout the decade, but critical observers tended to be cautious. Leonard Hubbard, an authority on Soviet economic matters, considered that although one could not tell if Soviet statistics were 'deliberately falsified', they were presented in a manner that gave 'a far too optimistic picture', and the official conclusions that were drawn from them were 'in no way justified'. ¹⁶⁸ Nicholas de Basily, a well-informed Russian exile, added that Soviet statistics were often exaggerated in order to boost the image of the country's development, but could nevertheless reveal 'the main outlines of the real situation', and conclusions could be drawn from them that contradicted the official claims. ¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, in his pioneering study of Soviet statistics, the left-wing economist Colin Clark felt that whilst genuine comparisons between Soviet and Western economic performance were extremely difficult to establish, he doubted that Soviet figures were deliberately falsified, as the authorities had not attempted to disguise some extremely telling problems, such as the catastrophic decline in livestock between 1929 and 1932. ¹⁷⁰

^{165.} EDWC, 'Three Days in Russia', Spectator, 11 October 1930, 487.

^{166.} Dobb (1928), 388.

^{167.} The same point was made by three fluent Russian-speaking critics of the regime. See George Soloveytchik, 'The Moscow Trials and the Five Year Plan', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, May 1933, 556-7; Baikaloff (1929), 6; Istrati (1931), 36.

^{168.} Hubbard (1938), 369.

^{169.} De Basily (1938), 6.

^{170.} Clark (1939), 1, 46.

One particular problem was that of the exercising of power. Soviet constitutional arrangements gave the impression of a functioning democracy. Although there was only one political party, its structure and the parallel structure of government were nominally democratic. Those who claimed that the Soviet regime represented a dictatorship over the proletariat had to assert it, or attempt to prove it through partial details which could easily be contradicted if not actually disproved. In respect of the crucial issue of the overall relationship between the regime and the mass of the population in whose name it ruled, the study of individual transgressions in the Soviet press, even if cohered into a picture of systematic abuses of power, could not help that much.

In short, the discussion around the nature of the Soviet Union in the 1930s tended to be one in which the participants threw assertions and accusations at and, more often than not, past each other. There could be little or no meeting of minds. The critical observer and the fellow-traveller could accuse each other of using tainted and biased sources, and of having interests that would influence or even determine his or her perceptions, and, of course, there were people of all persuasions whose writings were more influenced by their particular prejudices than by the facts.¹⁷¹ And what would be a difficult enough task of disentangling the wheat from the chaff within the framework of an impartial academic debate was made immeasurably more difficult in the superheated atmosphere of the Wall Street Crash, the depression, Hitler's victory, the Soviet Five Year Plans and the Moscow Trials.¹⁷²

^{171.} In 1935, Margaret Miller, an economist dealing with Soviet affairs, stated that the combination of the official control of information and scholarship in the Soviet Union and the various prejudices and lack of information in the West had so far precluded an appraisal of Soviet economics that presented both the theoretical and practical aspects of planning, and the relationship between them (Margaret Miller, 'USSR', *International Affairs*, 14 (3), May 1935, 439).

^{172.} One reviewer declared that he was amazed at the failure to use in the political field 'the principles of judgement which would be applied elsewhere' ('Books on Russia', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 May 1932, 340).

Chapter Two

The Great Change, 1929-34

THIS chapter investigates the wide range of responses in Britain to the developments that occurred in the Soviet Union during 1929-34, in respect of economic changes taking place under the Five Year Plans, political matters and changes in foreign policy orientations. It shows how events in the Soviet Union not only encouraged both the rise of a definable pro-Soviet lobby and the continuance of traditional anti-communism, but also caused many people critical of Soviet political norms to endorse certain aspects of Soviet economic, social and diplomatic policies.

I: Looking at the Land of the Plan, 1929-32

Even as the Soviet regime launched the First Five Year Plan, some observers insisted that any attempt on its part to overthrow the market was doomed to fail. The openly anti-socialist writer Arthur Shadwell declared that every time the Bolsheviks had attempted to eradicate the market, it rapidly wrought its revenge by reasserting itself upon them. And although he doubted whether the regime would take his advice, his verdict was clear: 'There is no way out of their difficulty, no way to increase production but the encouragement of free enterprise.' Shadwell's feelings and doubts were echoed by the conservative journalist Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett after his visit to the Soviet Union in mid-1929.²

Not surprisingly, the rapid course of events rendered many prognoses obsolete. Just as the Soviet regime was entering into a full-scale war against capitalist elements, Shadwell insisted that the attacks on the kulaks had finished,³ Morgan Philips Price assured his readers that the regime had rejected the Left Opposition's call for the 'extermination' of urban middle-men and kulaks,⁴ and it was also claimed that the Soviet Union would 'in practice... settle down to something like stability without further

- 1. Shadwell (1929), 38ff, 54.
- 2. Ashmead-Bartlett (1929), 52-3, 251, 259.
- 3. Shadwell (1929), 53.
- 4. Morgan Philips Price, 'Russian History and the Revolution', Slavonic and East European Review, 7 (20), January 1929, 337.

catastrophic changes'. On the other hand, some observers recognised that a significant change had occurred, and readers were now informed by both friends and foes of the system that the NEP had only ever been a temporary measure, an enforced respite in the now-resumed trajectory of Bolshevism towards a planned society, and that Stalin had taken over the programme of the Left Opposition.

Some critical observers were convinced that the Five Year Plan could not possibly work. A detailed critique by the exiled Menshevik leader Aaron Yugov was published in Britain in 1930. He claimed that the meagre resources of the Soviet Union precluded the intended development of industry and agriculture. No account had been taken of the condition of machinery, the availability of raw materials and the skill levels of either managers or workers, and this was leading to disproportional advances, convulsive policy shifts and chronic bureaucratism, which were all damaging the national economy. The only way forward was through intensifying the labour process, 'forcing the Russian worker to produce more with the aid of rattletrap machinery and worn-out tools', resulting in more wear and tear, speed-ups and an increased rate of industrial injuries. The government's agrarian plans were utopian, as the resources did not exist to build the necessary infrastructure for genuine collective farming. Ultimately, the limited development of the forces of production in the Soviet Union ruled out a leap into socialism. What we had was 'a bureaucratic and badly-functioning state capitalism'. A return to private capitalist production was 'imminent', and Yugov predicted that the regime was 'foredoomed to perish'.8 Many of the points made by Yugov were echoed by Karl Kautsky. The veteran socialist considered that the plan could only result in 'the wholesale pauperisation and degradation of the Russian people'. The lack of modern machinery, properly trained technicians and managers and educated workers consigned the rapid collectivisation of agriculture to an early demise, the working class lacked skills and was inefficient, and the plan's concentration on producer goods would upset the balance amongst the various branches of production. The plan was doomed to fail, and Russia could only be saved through a 'democratic revolution' bringing into power a combination of socialist and democratic parties that would implement a new NEP.9

- 5. HOS Wright, 'The Mellowing Process in Russia', Contemporary Review, March 1929, 340.
- 6. 'Russia', Economist, 9 February 1929, 276; Hindus (1929), 54. Isaac Don Levine, however, noted that the launch of the Five Year Plan had not been a planned move, but had emerged from a situation of emergency caused by the shortage of grain, manufactured goods and military matériel, see Levine (1931), 304-6.
- 7. Both the *Economist* and Ashmead-Bartlett claimed that there was no real policy differences between Trotsky and Stalin. See 'Russia', *Economist* 9 February 1929, 276; Ashmead-Bartlett (1929), 159. Note the sharp contrast with the *Economist*'s previous statement on the matter (Chapter One, page 34).
- 8. Yugoff (1930), 18, 50ff, 70ff, 159ff, 288, 304, 336, 349.
- 9. Kautsky (1931), 13, 16, 36, 40, 173. Kautsky still retained some credibility on the British left. Al-

The 'Chronicle' in the Slavonic and East European Review doubted that the plan could succeed. The higher output, improved efficiency and lower production costs demanded by the plan would be impossible to achieve, as material resources were inadequate, plant and machinery were worn out and obsolete, and components and raw materials were often of a poor quality and available in insufficient quantities. In agriculture, the deportation of kulaks, deplorable conditions on collective farms, poor organisation of labour, shortage of seeds and machinery and lack of prepared plans would lead 'almost inevitably' to crop failures 'and a new famine'. Soloveytchik agreed, and added that the plan was already 'breaking down'.

For supporters of the Soviet regime, however, there could be no doubt of the success of the plan. In late 1929, Rajani Palme Dutt, the Communist Party's main theoretician, compared the 'pitiful' reforms of Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government, 'a medley of minor and unrelated oddments', with 'the gigantic purposeful offensive in every field of the Five Years Plan in the Soviet Republic', '2 whilst one of his lieutenants had already explained that the plan was 'an object lesson to the world' of how socialism could beat capitalism. Maurice Dobb provided an optimistic assessment. He declared that through 'conscious organisation and planning from the centre', and with the 'initiative and active cooperation' of the masses, including the voluntary collectivisation of the peasants, the Soviet regime was completing Russia's industrial revolution 'at a quite unprecedented speed'. Consumer goods were available in much greater quantities, although for some undisclosed reason meat was in short supply. Indeed, the Five Year Plan was doing so well in showing the superiority of planning that it was now to be completed in just four years. 14

Emile Burns, a fellow British Stalinist, provided an altogether more bland picture with his extremely abstract description of the new Soviet economic structure. The absence of any portrayal of how the Soviet institutions were actually working in practice — somewhat conveniently, the means of transition to a fully planned economy lay 'outside the scope of this book' — was accompanied by an array of platitudes about rising living standards and wages, improved social services, 'the rush of the peasantry towards collective

- though critical of this book, one socialist declared that 'coming from Kautsky', it was 'at least deserving of respect', see H Wynn Cuthbert, 'Is the Five Year Plan Failing?', Plebs, June 1931, 124.
- 10. 'Chronicle', Slavonic and East European Review, 8 (24), March 1930, 708-11.
- 11. George Soloveytchik, 'The Moscow Trials and the Five Year Plan', The Nineteenth Century and After, April 1931, 446.
- 12. Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', Labour Monthly, December 1929, 709-10.
- 13. Andrew Rothstein, 'Preparing War on Soviet Russia', Labour Monthly, September 1929, 533.
- 14. Dobb (1930), 19-20, 25, 30, 33. He could drop the odd injudicious remark; for instance, he declared that workers may be forced to make sacrifices as their living standards were too high and working hours too short under the NEP.

working', and so on. The barriers to the consummation of the plan lay almost entirely outwith the Soviet Union, taking the form of military or trade warfare with capitalist states, and the only possible internal danger was the unlikely threat of a drought.¹⁵

Not all those who refused uncritically to support the Soviet system automatically wrote off the Five Year Plan as a non-starter, although some would not be drawn on the matter at this juncture. In 1929, Maurice Hindus, a regular visitor to the Soviet Union and at this point a critical sympathiser of the regime, averred that to succeed the Soviet economy would have to surpass both Europe and the USA in economic achievement, and asked rhetorically whether the Soviet Union had any equals of Krupp, Ford or General Electric. What did it have in its favour?

Its chief asset is an audacious engineering idea, tried out in a number of lands in a limited manner and in a feverish mood during the past war and having the theoretical endorsement of no small gallery of renowned bourgeois engineers and economists. The substance of this idea is not that the collectivist method of property control will breed superior engineers, executives, workers... but that the integrated planning and operation upon which such control is based, will eliminate wastes incident to a system of uninterrupted individual control of property. Wastes in production, in distribution, in consumption.¹⁶

Despite his enthusiasm, Hindus stopped short at predicting its success, which at this early moment was perhaps not too cautious a choice.

As time went by, however, more people were willing to accept that the Five Year Plan had some chance of succeeding. In mid-1932, Ethan Colton, a staunch critic of the Soviet regime, revised his 'hasty and sweeping' expectation of failure, although he was unwilling to give a judgement at such an early stage on the potential of the Soviet system as a whole.¹⁷ Walter Rukeyser, a US engineer who played a major role in the Ural asbestos industry in the early 1930s, was more broadly optimistic. He informed his British audience that the problems besetting Soviet industry would be solved, and, in a couple of decades, 'a new standard of efficient, planned and coordinated production' would come into being.¹⁸

- 15. Burns (1930), 214, 223, 250ff. Rather artlessly, Dobb stated that his colleague's book was 'unencumbered with anything to prove, unless it be that a planned economy is a practicable system with much to be said in its favour' ('Information About the Soviet Union', Spectator, 8 November 1930, 683). Actually, it didn't even prove that.
- 16. Hindus (1929), 66-7.
- 17. Ethan Colton, 'The Test of Communist Economic Resource', Slavonic and East European Review, 11 (21), July 1932, 37-8. He was not the only cautious observer. In a curious coincidence, the conclusions of two biographies of Lenin, a hostile one by FJP Veale and a friendly one by ILP leader James Maxton, both declared that great progress had been made, but only time would tell if the experiment would ultimately be a success. See Veale (1932), 279-80; Maxton (1932), 169-71.
- 18. Rukeyser (1932), 143. See also Knickerbocker (1931), 240ff.

The Economist kept its readers in touch with the progress of the plan. In late 1930, it noted that during the first year of the plan's operation, there had been a remarkable increase of 23.4 per cent in industrial production, two per cent above schedule. Oil, electrification and agricultural engineering production were all above plan targets, whereas, despite a considerable quantitative rise, construction, iron and steel production, and coal and ore extraction had fallen well behind. There were serious problems in respect of product quality, particularly of consumer goods, and food was strictly rationed. The overall feeling was that the plan would not be completed within the allotted time. Two years later, it noted that despite the massive increase in production, which was 'a curious antithesis' to what was happening in the capitalist world, there were still chronic problems in respect of product quality and transportation, and iron, steel and coal production were well behind their targets. 20

Some of the best descriptions published in Britain of the working of the Five Year Plan were provided by engineers and journalists who were in the thick of it. Although Rukeyser warned people not to generalise from their particular experiences,²¹ there is a considerable concordance amongst those who saw the plan being implemented on the ground. Rukeyser and two US journalists, HR Knickerbocker and Ellery Walter, were acutely aware of poor workmanship and the resulting low quality of manufactured products, and that this resulted in Soviet enterprises being considerably less efficient than those in the West. Walter visited a wide range of new factories, including the Kuznets and Magnitogorsk steel works, the tractor plants at Cheliabinsk and Kharkov, the motor plant at Nizhni-Novgorod, the Dnieprostroi dam, and the Selmash agricultural implement factory at Rostov. The general impression he had was of hurried construction, with quality being sacrificed in favour of speed, but that the projects were nonetheless taking shape. Living conditions and food were often but not always poor, and management varied from efficient to inept.²² Rukeyser found many instances of mismanagement and incompetence. Wrong plant and tools were ordered, or were delivered in an incomplete form. Russian engineers had not kept up with the advances made in the West. Many Russians had had too little practical training, and their work was inefficient and shoddy. The railways were in an appalling state. On the other hand, definite improvements were being made at work, and Soviet pure scientific, research and experimental work was the best he had ever seen.²³ Despite the fact that his

- 19. 'Russian Supplement', Economist, 1 November 1930, 7-9.
- 20. 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 2 January 1932, 16; 'Russian Impressions', Economist, 1 October 1932, 584-5; 'Soviet Russia', Economist, 22 October 1932, 737.
- 21. Rukeyser (1932), 152.
- 22. Walter (1932), 75ff.
- 23. Rukeyser (1932), 169, 219-20, 223, 255-6. Rukeyser's comments about the parlous state of the railways were made elsewhere, see Frank Owen, 'Transport', in *The New Russia* (1931), 102.

observations often coincided with those of Knickerbocker and Rukeyser, Walter's conclusions were pessimistic, and he felt that a series of factors — the reluctance of people to use their initiative for fear of subsequently being accused of sabotage, a lack of skilled labour and managers, poor cooperation between Soviet managers and foreign engineers, a shortage of investment funds, and subtle sabotage and passive resistance on the part of Soviet workers — would ultimately preclude the plan from succeeding.²⁴

During this period, the Soviet regime staged a number of show trials at which various experts and specialists confessed that they had attempted to sabotage the Five Year Plan on behalf of foreign governments and hostile Russian émigrés. Apart from those in and around the official communist movement - one prominent British Stalinist claimed that the trials proved that there was 'a dastardly plot against the first workers' state' involving exiled Russian capitalists, the French general staff, Mensheviks, Kerensky, Miliukov, Kautsky and 'the whole of the Second International' to boot,25 whilst another reckoned that the accused had engaged in the novel crime of 'planned wrecking', deliberately planning the country's economic activities in ways that would undermine the economy and thereby put the regime in grave danger²⁶ – the charges were broadly dismissed as fraudulent and as an attempt to 'explain' difficulties by persecuting scapegoats.²⁷ The exiled Russian journalist Maksim Ganfman told his British audience that problems in industry were not due to malicious action, 'but were the fruit of the general system under which even the most conscientious specialists were unable to combat the fantastic "disproportions" of the piatiletka, the extravagance of the programme for industrialisation'. The specialists were working with plans which they felt were impossible to implement, and were thus in 'a really tragic situation', for any criticism they expressed would be considered as sabotage.28 Rukeyser noted how the Soviet leaders used the trials. They 'killed about five birds with one stone' in that they explained industrial breakdowns, accounted for shortages, pointed to an external

Rukeyser wrote of the need of the Russians to overcome 'psychological difficulties' and 'racial characteristics' in order to inculcate 'a mass-production state of mind', see Rukeyser (1932), 256. A British businessman with some three decades of experience of Russia claimed, however, that 'the old slothfulness and indifference to everything that really mattered' was 'visibly disappearing'. See Stafford Talbot, 'The Five Year Plan: How It Works in Industry', in *The New Russia* (1931), 95.

- 24. Walter (1932), 267-8.
- 25. G Allen Hutt, 'The Final Stage of Karl Kautsky', Labour Monthly, August 1931, 524.
- 26. Rothstein (1931), v.
- 27. See, for example, Tiltman (1931), 39; 'Comments', New Statesman, 7 March 1931, 51; 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 13 December 1930, 1107.
- 28. Maksim Ganfman, 'Behind the Moscow Trial', Fortnightly Review, January 1931, 47-9. He pointed to the fraudulent nature of the Industrial Trial by noting that two of the émigrés with whom the defendants were accused of conspiring had died before they had 'contacted' them! See also George Soloveytchik, 'The Moscow Trials and the Five Year Plan', The Nineteenth Century and After, April 1931, 441ff.

threat, showed how sabotage was hindering prosperity (commodities suddenly appeared in Moscow after the trials), and proved the regime's magnanimity (by commuting death sentences).²⁹

The collectivisation of agriculture was a more controversial affair than the industrialisation drive. Although some critical observers were in favour of the introduction of collective agriculture,³⁰ others saw a more significant and sinister aspect to the abolition of private property. An embittered former Russian landowner described it as 'a crucial experiment of militant communism aimed at vivisecting Russia and eradicating some of her fundamental national and historical principles and beliefs'.³¹ In a perceptive piece, Ganfman considered that the results of collectivisation were 'much more profound' in their social importance than the October Revolution, because until they were collectivised the peasantry had decided the fate of every regime and revolution in Russia, and the changes that had occurred under the Five Year Plan would fundamentally alter the social significance of the peasantry in the Soviet Union.³²

Reports of the manner in which collectivisation took place varied tremendously. Stalinists wrote of the 'voluntary' nature of collectivisation, 33 or, perhaps showing a glimmer of unease, informed readers that it was 'unnecessary to go into the details of this reorganisation', whilst warning us to ignore 'the fantastic stories about peasants gathering the grain at the point of Red Army bayonets'. 34 However, Hindus recognised that the peasantry was being squeezed, scolded and harassed 'into a new social mould'. He had no illusions in the 'voluntary' nature of collectivisation, and was upset that the necessary modernisation was being accompanied by so much violence. 35 The expropriation and subsequent 'liquidation' of the kulaks was widely deplored as inhumane — although Alexander Wicksteed typically justified their treatment by saying that the rich peasant was being dealt with 'qua kulak', rather than 'the kulak qua individual' 46— and it was also seen as a deliberate policy in order to obtain cheap labour for, in particular, the lumber industry. The 'Chronicle' reckoned that despite the government's coer-

- 29. Rukeyser (1932), 258.
- 30. 'Reconstruction in Russia', Economist, 4 January 1930, 7-8. This article, however, envisaged a gradual process of collectivisation, with individual farming remaining predominant 'for some years'.
- 31. NV Tcharykow, 'The Russian Peasant and His Masters', Contemporary Review, April 1931, 464.
- 32. Maksim Ganfman, 'The War Upon Peasants', Fortnightly Review, August 1930, 211.
- 33. Dobb (1930), 25.
- 34. Joan Beauchamp, 'The Soviet Farm Worker', *Labour Monthly*, December 1930, 727. Elsewhere, Dobb was not so coy: 'To carry through such a policy needs iron nerves and hands of steel; and that explains much of the Russian "intolerance" at which we softer folk in the West wince.' ('The Agrarian Crisis in Russia', *Spectator*, 28 December 1929, 975)
- 35. Hindus (1929), 152-3, 166ff.
- 36. Alexander Wicksteed, 'Timber Labour in Russia', New Statesman, 11 July 1931, 42.
- 37. Atholl (1931), 58. Stalin's famous 'Dizzy with Success' speech was seen as a disingenuous reproach

cive measures, the poor peasants and landless labourers had much to gain from 'amalgamating with their more well-to-do fellow-villagers and sharing the latter's property', and that the collectivisation drive could key into the 'Russian's innate passion for levelling and equality'.³⁸

For supporters of the regime, the collectivisation of agriculture was a grand success. Visiting farm after farm in 1930, Joan Beauchamp was enchanted by the marvel-lous living conditions, educational facilities and cultural events available to the farmworkers, their enthusiasm for the work — even voluntarily increasing the working day in many places — and their high spirits, with the woods resounding 'with laughter and music'.³⁹ Unlike Beauchamp, neither Walter nor Knickerbocker were impressed with the Gigant state farm, seeing it as poorly-managed and weed-ridden, with machinery badly used and maintained, factors which seemed to have escaped her notice.⁴⁰ Walter also noticed considerable discontent amongst the peasants on the collective farms, 'GPU militia were everywhere', and 'the atmosphere seemed tense and bristling with the spirit of revolt'.⁴¹ Moreover, many observers were convinced that the dislocation of agriculture caused by the expulsion of the kulaks, the widespread slaughter of livestock, the shortage of machinery, and general discontent and slackness amongst the peasantry, who did not believe in the permanency of the new system, would lead to a severe food shortage, and even a famine.⁴²

Notwithstanding such dire if accurate predictions, within a year or so of collectivisation, many observers had reckoned on collective farming being there to stay. The prediction by a former Russian landowner that it would meet defeat in the face of the peasants' resistance was more a reflection of his desires than of his observational abilities,⁴³ whereas the declaration by a former Tsarist land and food department official that a 'wholesale restoration of peasant household agriculture' was 'hardly possible', and that the country had 'started on new paths, new grooves, in its agrarian relations', was very much the norm.⁴⁴

- to officials who were merely obeying orders, see MI Ganfman, 'The War Upon Peasants', Fortnightly Review, August 1930, 223.
- 38. 'Chronicle', Slavonic and East European Review, 8 (23), December 1929, 425.
- 39. Joan Beauchamp, 'The Soviet Farm Worker', Labour Monthly, December 1930, 727-32.
- 40. Knickerbocker (1931), 108ff; Walter (1932), 193. Other visitors agreed, see 'Russian Supplement', Economist, 1 November 1930, 14. Knickerbocker also visited the Verblud state farm, which gave a much better impression.
- 41. Walter (1932), 193.
- 42. Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'The Russian Agricultural Crisis', New Statesman, 15 February 1930, 595-6; Maksim Ganfman, 'The War Upon Peasants', Fortnightly Review, August 1930, 224.
- 43. NV Tcharykow, 'The Russian Peasant and His Masters', Contemporary Review, April 1931, 476.
- 44. Cyril Zaitsev, 'The Russian Agrarian Revolution', Slavonic and East European Review, 9 (27), March 1931, 566. Stephen Graham declared that collective farming was the strongest aspect of the Soviet

Although careful observers were aware of the many problems that the Soviet government was encountering, the tremendous growth rates under the First Five Year Plan made a noticeable impression on a wide range of commentators. One can easily understand why a believer in the collectivist future of the world like HG Wells or a moderate socialist journal like the *New Statesman* would endorse the principle of planning, and, despite their misgivings about the Soviet political regime, recognise the wider significance of its plan. A sign of the times, however, was that a similar viewpoint was expressed by the liberals Bernard Pares and Vernon Bartlett, and Britain's leading business magazine, the *Economist*, thought that the plan was of incalculable value to economists and administrators all over the world', although its opinion, as we shall see, was by no means so unequivocal.

Nonetheless, some observers denied that the Soviet economy was planned in any real sense. Yugov declared that even though statistical information and economic knowledge had advanced, there were too many unknown quantities, and what was called planning was no more than 'state regulation... stocktaking and rationalisation', purposeful, to be sure, but not a 'thoroughly purposive economic system', it was no more planned than the measures of economic intervention by the state in capitalist countries. Real planning required the involvement of 'the self-governing organisations of the active workers', but in the Soviet Union it was 'carried on by a bureaucratic state apparatus'. The economist Margaret Miller considered that Soviet planning should be recognised not so much as a new economic system than as 'a mobilising and coordinating force', a means to direct 'national energies' towards the fulfilment of an ambitious construction programme. The exiled Russian economist Paul Haensel claimed that the praise for overfulfilment of targets showed that Soviet planning was no more than a means to increase production, and he considered that the experience of the

- economy, see Graham (1931), 142.
- 45. HG Wells, 'Summing Up', in *The New Russia* (1931), 119; 'Comment', *New Statesman*, 13 June 1931, 566. See also Arthur Woodburn, 'Russia and British Backwardness', *Plebs*, September 1932, 212. In practice, however, Wells did not think that the West had much to learn from the Soviet leaders, with their 'fundamental blunderings': 'They still believe', he snorted, 'that they can teach our Western world everything that is necessary for the salvation of mankind.' See Wells (1932), 179.
- 46. Bernard Pares, 'Russia: The Old and the New', in *The New Russia* (1931), 44; Vernon Bartlett, 'Turning Ideas into Facts', *Listener*, 1 June 1932, 782.
- 47. 'Bolshevism Examined', Economist, 27 April 1929, 928.
- 48. Yugoff (1930), 310-1, 324. Another Menshevik exile stated that the disparity between the plan targets and results refuted the claims that the economy was planned, see Sergius Prokopovich, 'The Crisis of the Five Year Plan', Slavonic and East European Review, 10 (29), December 1931, 321-2.
- 49. Margaret Miller, 'Planning System in Soviet Russia', Slavonic and East European Review, 9 (26), December 1930, 456.

Five Year Plan had not shown that planning was superior to capitalist methods.⁵⁰ And in late 1932, the *Economist* expressed its disappointment that Soviet planning differed 'only in scale from the machinery used by any large company with a centralised organisation in planning its yearly output', and that the government had no way of dealing with discrepancies between plan targets and actual performance.⁵¹

The conservative writer Waldemar Gurian denied that planning could ever work effectively. He claimed that although the Soviet economic system could ensure a rapid process of industrialisation because 'traditional obstacles' had been removed and the state enjoyed unprecedented powers over the population and production process, the growth under the First Five Year Plan was not so great when compared with the economic development of the USA and Western Europe. The problem facing the Soviet regime was that socialism was inherently bureaucratic, and that the 'alleged economic chaos of capitalism' appeared in the Soviet system 'in the control and guidance of production and distribution'. Failure at any point in the production process would endanger the entire plan. As making mistakes would cost managers their jobs (or worse), a culture of lying and misrepresentation would arise, and efforts to counter it would merely lead to more bureaucratic interference. Under conditions of a political monopoly, opposition would manifest itself through disruptive conflicts amongst different departments of state and through the implementation of plans in a distorted manner, or not at all.⁵²

Certain observers tended to downplay the novelty of the Five Year Plan. Miller considered that the plan was 'a brief step in a lengthy historical process' of development in Russia that had been continuing since the turn of the century, albeit under differing economic and political conditions,⁵³ whilst others extended the scope of the process to include all the major nations.⁵⁴ The US commentator Isaac Don Levine claimed Western roots for the plan in the US Federal Reserve System and the War Industries Board and Food Administration, and in the theories and practices of regulated production in Germany.⁵⁵ A leading British military analyst stated that the power of Russia did not depend upon its political system, but upon 'the possession of vast undeveloped resources, which would make any country formidable under any sys-

- 50. Haensel (1930), 118-9.
- 51. 'Russian Impressions', Economist, 15 October 1932, 676.
- 52. Gurian (1932), 87, 146-8. His reference to 'alleged' chaos after the Wall Street Crash indicates that we do not have an unbiased observer here.
- 53. Margaret Miller, 'The Five Year Plan', in *The New Russia* (1931), 64-5. See also Laurance Lyon, 'The Riddle of Russia', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, December 1930, 737.
- 54. Alexander Hoyos, 'The World Crisis', Contemporary Review, May 1932, 576.
- 55. Levine (1931), 289-90.

tem'. ⁵⁶ Various right-wingers claimed that the progress that had been made in the Soviet Union would have been achieved with a lot less waste and bother under any other form of regime. ⁵⁷

The enthusiasm of the members of the Soviet Communist Party and of the youth both within and outwith the Young Communist League as they engaged in the huge task of construction was widely noted. Dobb positively viewed the party cadres as modern-day Jesuits or samurai, 'a new race of men, disciplined by the machine and by labour, sometimes crude and always ruthless, but having vision and devotion and concerned surprisingly little about their own souls'.58 Whilst some found their 'energy and sincerity' at work 'most inspiring', as they tolerated hardships stoically,59 others saw such relentless zeal as fanaticism.60

Hindus' enthusiasm for the Soviet system did not prevent him from uneasily describing the party cadres as 'flamingly intolerant' of rival ideas, with closed minds and a 'double standard of morality', 61 and others asked how long this enthusiasm and fanaticism might last. 62 Walter's observations of young Soviet workers left him with the impression that they were both dangerously unskilled and 'politically minded to the point of fanaticism'. 63 John Wynne Hird, a long-standing resident in Russia who had just returned to his native Britain, could only see the next generation of Soviet leaders 'as a race of monsters'. 64 Needless to say, the refrain that had been regularly aired since 1917 that Bolshevism was a form of religion was given a reprise in the fervid atmosphere of the First Five Year Plan, and not just from hostile observers. 65 Claiming that

- 56. Thomas Montgomery Cunninghame, 'Disarmament', The Nineteenth Century and After, January 1932, 55.
- 57. Haensel (1930), 123; Quisling (1931), 16; Francis Yeats-Brown, 'Russia as I Saw It', Spectator, 29 October 1932, 572-3.
- 58. Dobb (1930), 33. Or anyone else's, one might add.
- 59. EK Wright, 'Russia 1931', Contemporary Review, February 1932, 221-8. HG Wells wrote of the 'savage harshness' of young Soviet citizens, see his 'Summing Up', in *The New Russia* (1931), 120.
- 60. Knickerbocker (1931), 172; Seibert (1932), 142.
- 61. Hindus (1929), 195-6.
- 62. RPF, 'Can the Leopard...?', Spectator, 9 April 1932, 515; 'Russian Impressions', Economist, 15 October 1932, 676.
- 63. Walter (1932), 130-1. Opinions varied on whether the regime would retain the allegiance of the youth. Some felt that the next generation of Soviet leaders would be thoroughly moulded by the system, see Laurance Lyon, 'The Riddle of Russia', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, December 1930, 739; Rukeyser (1932), 278; whilst others felt that the regime could not guarantee the support of a younger, better-educated generation, see Seibert (1932), 384; Baikaloff (1929), 169.
- 64. Hird (1932), 221.
- 65. Hindus felt that the regime was hoping to replace existing religions by a faith in science, see Hindus (1929), 40. One not unfriendly visitor considered that the moral climate of the Soviet Union was like 'a highly-charged religious revival meeting', see Owen Tweedy, 'A Tourist in Russia', Fort-

the Soviet Union was 'probably the most fundamentalist country in the world', the prominent US journalist Dorothy Thompson informed her British readers that its fundamentalism was 'rather more modern than that of Tennessee', but 'not less rigid'. The regime's ideology incorporated a 'power-impulse' which could not be measured either by the truth or fallacy of the doctrine, or by 'its immediate efficiency in practice'. But that did not matter. Leninism was a 'messianic, missionary movement', one which could mobilise millions for the almost sacred task of 'world salvation'. Nevertheless, she felt that there were signs that the fanaticism was wearing off, and that a new stratum of administrators, who were much more interested in national development than world revolution, was coming to the fore. ⁶⁶

There were, of course, widely differing assessments of the nature of the Soviet regime. Only its most ardent supporters fully endorsed it as a paragon of democracy, although they could, like John Strachey, openly deprecate democratic notions whilst doing so. He sarcastically asked a detractor to explain 'the vital importance' of civil liberties to a man who had just had his dole halved by the Means Test, and proceeded both to justify and minimise the lack of democracy under Stalinism:

Well, of course, when Russia is richer and safer the workers will be able to relax to some extent that discipline which is today an essential condition of their survival in the real world. Moreover, of course, even the high degree of government discipline and compulsion which the Russians impose upon themselves today... is a far less onerous burden on the worker than the enormous day-to-day, hour-to-hour and minute-to-minute economic compulsion which British capitalism exerts on every British citizen who is not possessed of that prerequisite of 'civil liberty', a private income.⁶⁷

Some sympathetic observers accepted the élitist nature of the Soviet regime. GDH Cole, by now repudiating the democratic traditions of guild socialism, averred that the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union, if not elsewhere, required 'in practice' the control of the entire system by the Communist Party, and real authority to rest with its executive committee.⁶⁸ There were other peculiar rationalisations. The so-

nightly Review, October 1930, 482.

^{66.} Thompson (1929), 90, 96, 108-9, 255, 315-7.

^{67.} John Strachey, 'The Isolation of Russia: A Reply', Adelphi, February 1932, 317. This dismissal of democratic values was expressed in a slightly different manner by the prominent Labour Party left-winger Ellen Wilkinson. Although by this time she had left the CPGB, she was still enthralled by the Soviet planners, who, she averred, resembled scientists who were 'completely indifferent' to the fate of their test-tubes: 'Of course, when the test-tubes contain human lives and happiness, the methods at times seem somewhat cavalier, but a Rhondda miner might think them an improvement on the blessings which capitalism has bestowed upon him.' (Ellen Wilkinson, 'The Russian Object-Lesson', Plebs, July 1930, 152) In Chapter Three, we will see the responses of workers from the capitalist world who actually took up employment in the Soviet Union.

^{68.} Cole (1932), 601.

cialist academic and writer Charles Mostyn Lloyd simultaneously considered that the regime was really a dictatorship *over* the proletariat, whilst the Soviet workers were able to 'enjoy forms of social and industrial freedom' that were 'uncommon in capitalist lands'.⁶⁹ Another radical writer, RD Charques, described the 'celebrated paradox' that despite the party dictatorship, the secular, internationalist and egalitarian ethos made democracy 'a major business of life': 'Nowhere else are the signs of democracy so visible; nowhere else are men so conscious of their equality with one another.'⁷⁰

Others, however, drew comparisons between the Soviet regime and fascism,⁷¹ and, as we shall see below, this period saw the rise of a school of thought that considered fascism and official communism as variants of a new, totalitarian society. Critics wrote of the creation of 'the slave soul' under the Five Year Plan, the 'wholesale system of spies, and the consequent degeneration of all human relations and of human character'.⁷² Some observers who had gone to the Soviet Union with a sympathetic view of the new society came away disillusioned. Walter drew the gloomy conclusion that the regime's leaders were not altruists, but mere power-seekers 'interested in their own comforts and in a class snobbery equal to that of Romanov Russia'.⁷³

Rukeyser equated membership of the Soviet Communist Party with that of a Masonic lodge. Without using the term, the French dissident communist Boris Souvarine developed the theory. He considered that by the end of the 1920s, there were very few genuine communists in the party – they had the choice of 'silence, prison or Siberia' – and most members were in it purely for the access that membership permitted to privileges, such as housing, rest homes and special allowances. Non-party 'sympathisers' who ingratiated themselves with the party could benefit too, albeit to a lesser extent. Not only was careerism rife, but so was the abuse of power, and party members had been deeply mired in scandals involving corruption, anti-Semitism and sexual harassment. The party itself was very hierarchical, with a rank-and-file 'proletariat' doing menial work, a 'medium class' doing less laborious tasks, a 'bourgeoisie' in relatively important jobs, an 'aristocracy' in more responsible posts, and an 'oligarchy' of party leaders at the apex. The whole party structure was run downwards from the top, as were all other Soviet institutions, whether or not they were formally democratic. Any opposition to the party leadership was discouraged by the very real threat of the sack,

^{69.} CM Lloyd, 'Russian Notes', New Statesman, 28 November 1931, 655-6; 'Russia Today', New Statesman, 14 May 1932, 635-6.

^{70.} Charques (1932a), 45.

^{71.} See, for example, 'Gipsy Politics', Spectator, 30 March 1929, 513; FA Voigt, 'The German Socialist Crisis', New Statesman, 25 October 1930, 75; Kautsky (1931), 139; Seibert (1932), 97.

^{72.} Bernard Pares, 'Russia: The Old and the New', in The New Russia (1931), 49.

^{73.} Walter (1932), 266.

^{74.} Rukeyser (1932), 40.

imprisonment or deportation. However, he gave no reasons as to how the egalitarian ethos of the October Revolution had become submerged beneath a hierarchical structure.⁷⁵

One writer who attempted to explain this process was Trotsky. Unceremoniously expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929, he devoted a considerable amount of the rest of his life to this issue. Although the expulsion of the second-in-command of the October Revolution was met with a certain amount of *schadenfreude* on the part of some hostile observers, and, as a founder of the Soviet system, his criticisms of the bureaucratic nature of Stalinism were seen by some as disingenuous, ⁷⁶ he was widely respected in Britain, even by many who openly rejected his politics, as a serious thinker whose works were worth reading.⁷⁷

Trotsky probed the causes of what he considered to be the degeneration of the Soviet regime and the growing conservatism of the Soviet leadership. He rooted the rise of the new ruling bureaucracy in the exercising of power within the Soviet state. Many Bolsheviks working in the party-state apparatus had been burnt out by the experience of the revolution and the Civil War, become separated from the masses, and their proletarian class consciousness had dissipated. With the Civil War over and prospect of revolutions in other countries fading, increasing numbers of Bolsheviks were being absorbed in the 'everyday routine' and were adopting 'the sympathies and tastes of self-satisfied officials'. Moreover, 'independent and gifted men' were being replaced by 'mediocrities who owed their posts entirely to the apparatus'. The essence of the Communist Party was changing, and it was moving away from its revolutionary past. Stalin, strong-willed but 'stubbornly empirical and devoid of creative imagination', personified this process 'as the supreme expression of the mediocrity of the apparatus'. A key aspect in the rise of the bureaucracy was the exhaustion of the working class, which was 'ready to give the bureaucracy the broadest powers', if it would restore order, revive the factories, and provide the necessities of life. With the masses physically exhausted and politically quiescent, it was relatively easy for the party-state apparatus to develop its own interests as a social group. Furthermore, this atmosphere of 'political backsliding' made it easy for the bureaucracy to isolate and finally to expel the revolutionary wing of the Communist Party, and to consolidate itself as a new ruling stratum.78

- 75. Istrati (1931), 181ff.
- 'The Life of Trotsky', Times Literary Supplement, 31 July 1930, 618; MB Reckitt, 'All Power to the Soviets', New English Weekly, 25 May 1933, 136-7.
- 77. See, for example, Leonard Woolf, 'A Revolutionary', Nation and Athenæum, 12 July 1930, 474; EH Carr, 'Trotskyism and Bolshevism', Spectator, 2 July 1932, 17; Kingsley Martin, 'Trotsky on Revolution', New Statesman, 2 July 1932, 15-16.
- 78. Trotsky (1930), 345, 427-32; LD Trotsky, 'Is Stalin Weakening Or the Soviets?', Political Quarterly,

There were aspects of Soviet society which were almost universally appreciated, chiefly because they were part of the process of modernisation that any post-Tsarist regime would have implemented. The vast expansion of social services was widely praised, although some friendly observers were disconcerted by the 'intolerant and prejudiced' political elements in educational programmes. ⁷⁹ Similarly, the Soviet approach to the national question was by and large appreciated, even by right-wing commentators,80 although one observer insisted that genuine political and economic sovereignty was not being granted to the republics,81 and the occasional exile felt that the regime was giving too many concessions to non-Russians.82 Little agreement, however, could be found on certain other aspects of Soviet social policies. Hostile critics continued to accuse the Soviet regime of wishing 'to destroy the family as a union', and official attempts to discourage church weddings were seen as an attack on a fundamental foundation of family life.83 Those more sympathetic to the regime claimed that this was not so, the family was 'indispensable to the maintenance of social stability', and the regime was, on the one hand, trying to remove monetary and property factors from personal relationships, and, on the other, through nurseries, easier divorces and the introduction of women to the world of work, helping to create a full life beyond the family home.84 Two liberally-minded people, Will Durant and Dorothy Thompson, felt that the Soviet marriage laws encouraged promiscuity amongst women, and the latter added that they encouraged women to file dodgy alimony claims, and freed marriages from restrictions only to rob relationships of 'the sentimental and emotional associations which helped to make the old marriage system tolerable'.85 The concerted attack on religion that accompanied the Five Year Plan was condemned as an attempt to destroy the peasants' 'only real organisation' and 'only spiritual comfort' during the collectivisation campaign.86 Those more sympathetic to the Soviet Union were sometimes discomforted. The New Statesman hoped that the

- 3 (3), July-September 1932, 316.
- 79. B Mouat Jones, 'Technical Education in Russia', in *The New Russia* (1931), 78. See also Charques (1932a), 41-2.
- 80. Wilfred Hindle, 'Moscow Trials and "War Psychosis", The Nineteenth Century and After, February 1931, 166. See also Quisling (1931), 52.
- 81. Levine (1931), 133.
- 82. Haensel complained that Russian would 'hardly be understood in a few years' in Ukraine, as it would be replaced by the 'somewhat artificially' created and 'rather poor' Ukrainian language, see Haensel (1930), 9.
- 83. Maksim Ganfman, 'Religious Persecution in Russia', Fortnightly Review, April 1930, 461. See also Atholl (1931), 1.
- 84. Hindus (1929), 101ff, 119ff.
- 85. Durant (1933), 71-3; Thompson (1929), 259-61.
- 86. Maksim Ganfman, 'Religious Persecution in Russia', Fortnightly Review, April 1930, 463.

reports were exaggerated,⁸⁷ then wheeled out Wicksteed, who justified the regime's actions by claiming that the Orthodox Church had 'persistently obstructed' the Communist Party's 'vigorous — if you like, ruthless — campaign to realise their ideals in this world'.⁸⁸

Because the political system of the Soviet Union was ostensibly a dictatorship of the proletariat, the position and consciousness of the working class came under scrutiny, and, once again, assessments showed sharp contrasts. Although Hindus declared that the communist was 'the real ruler', the worker was 'the most privileged man in Russia'. Despite problems with housing, low pay and alcohol, he had 'more ample security than others', and was 'garnering an ever-increasing measure of comfort': 'The best in the land in education, amusement, living quarters, above all in social prestige, is his.' Whatever else happened, he would 'remain one of the supreme masters of Russia's destiny'.89 One critical observer felt that the worker's superior position was a handy fiction spread by the regime, as he was 'made to believe' that he was 'the most important person in the state', but he added that the Soviet masses saw the Five Year Plan as their salvation, and warned against overestimating the level of discontent.⁹⁰ Rukeyser spoke of the 'fanatical pride' of the workers in their enterprise, noting that they really felt that it was 'theirs', yet also, drawing from his own observations and those of other foreign engineers, mentioned that there was 'a great deal of premeditated sabotage' in Soviet industry by disgruntled workers.91

Others took an altogether dimmer view. Drawing on exposés in the Soviet press and his own experiences in the Soviet Union, Souvarine presented a dismal vista of overcrowding, poor housing, insufficient sanitary arrangements both at home and work, unsafe working conditions, long working hours, hidden taxation, corruption in allocating work, sexual harassment of women, abuse of power by superiors, drunkenness, a lack of culture due to poor education, and so on. Worst of all was the moral corruption of the brutalised and politically manipulated proletariat. Baikalov added that rank-and-file workers who had risen through the administrative structures had 'learned to issue orders and not to accept them', and had 'ceased to be members of the working class'.

- 87. 'Comments', New Statesman, 15 February 1930, 589.
- 88. Alexander Wicksteed, 'Bolshevism and Religion', New Statesman, 15 March 1930, 735.
- 89. Hindus (1929), 183, 187.
- 90. Laurance Lyon, 'The Riddle of Russia', The Nineteenth Century and After, December 1930, 736, 740.
- 91. Rukeyser (1932), 210, 233. Unfortunately, the normally perceptive Rukeyser did not attempt to explain this paradox.
- 92. Istrati (1931), 66ff, 109ff, 140ff, 173.
- 93. Baikaloff (1929), 197. See also Kautsky (1930), 98. Lancelot Lawton claimed that the privileged

Tempers rose over the question of forced labour. Some people denied that it existed,⁹⁴ whilst those who claimed it did cited Soviet admissions that it was used.⁹⁵ Knickerbocker stated that it was hard to tell from one's own observations, but there was very little evidence of it in areas that were accessible,⁹⁶ whereas Walter claimed that of the 35 000 workers at Kuznets, 11 000 were prison labourers who were kept in a camp, and prison labourers were also used at Magnitogorsk because ordinary workers were hard to recruit.⁹⁷ As for other restrictions upon workers, from afar the Duchess of Atholl made much of the decrees which aimed to reduce the turnover of labour by restricting the mobility of the workers,⁹⁸ but Knickerbocker, with his first-hand experience, insisted that the severe labour shortage would merely lead to their being circumvented.⁹⁹

II: Drawing a Balance Sheet, 1933-34

The First Five Year Plan drew to a close at the end of 1932. The official statistics presented an impressive picture. The plan had been carried out in four-and-a-quarter years. According to the Soviet data published at the time, heavy industrial production in 1932 stood at 218.5 per cent of the 1928 level, and 334.5 per cent of that of 1913; light industrial production stood at 187.3 and 273.5 per cent respectively. The number of paid employees in all branches of the national economy almost doubled during 1928-32, rising from 11.59 million to 22.6 million. Existing industrial enterprises were expanded, and many new ones were started, including in such areas as Siberia, Central Asia, the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia where there had previously been little industry. In the agrarian sector, the sown area in 1932 stood at 134.43 million hectares, up from 112.99 million in 1928, and 105.5 million in 1913; and whereas in 1928 state and collective farms accounted for only 3.11 million hectares, by 1932 state farms accounted for 13.56 million, and collective farms accounted for 91.58 million. Not only had the Soviet government established vast industrial and collectivised agricultural sectors, its modernisation programme also greatly expanded social services and education, particularly of an occupational nature, with some 4.5 million people attending training in work skills in 1932 alone. 100

position of the workers had led them to imitate the psychology of the defeated bourgeoisie (Lancelot Lawton, 'The Results of the Russian Revolution', *The Realist*, November 1929, 243).

- 94. Michael Farbman, 'The Anti-Bolshevik Creed', New Statesman, 21 March 1931, 137; Forced Labour In Russia? (1931).
- 95. Atholl cited Radek's statement in Izvestia to that effect, see Atholl (1931), 79.
- 96. Knickerbocker (1931), 100-2.
- 97. Walter (1932), 75ff, 95ff.
- 98. Atholl (1931), 11748.
- 99. Knickerbocker (1931), 104.
- 100. Coates (1934), 5, 20-1.

Such a vast transformation could not be ignored in the outside world. Many observers who were critical of aspects of the Soviet political system nonetheless applauded the tremendous changes that had taken place. Herbert Morrison, a leading member of the Labour Party and a stern opponent of Bolshevism, enthused over the results of the plan:

The efforts of Soviet Russia... to evolve a plan of economy on a collectivist basis is one of the most interesting and important contributions to the practical handling of modern industrial problems. The Soviet government, in applying the principles of public ownership and management to the extent it considers to be practicable, is conducting the greatest economic experiment of our time over a vast territory inhabited by a huge population.¹⁰¹

Morrison's colleague Hugh Dalton called it 'a most astonishing Industrial Revolution' that had been implemented with an eagerness, faith and drive that put the West to shame. ¹⁰² The Fabian economist Barbara Wootton declared that the progress made so far had given the Soviet regime the opportunity of establishing 'an efficient economic system in the setting of a just and humane social order'. ¹⁰³ Supporters of the Soviet system could barely contain their excitement. Hindus had thrown aside his earlier reluctance to wager on the success of the plan, and he now had no doubts about not merely the plan, but the system as a whole:

Leaders may come and go, famine may fall in the land, a breakdown there may be in the steel or coal industry, policies may change, but, unless a war comes and imposes a foreign rule on Russia, the Revolution will march on. It has gathered such momentum in the years of its existence that it cannot halt.¹⁰⁴

Margaret Miller stated that unlike during the early days of the plan, when it was often viewed contemptuously as 'a fantastic dream, impossible of achievement', it was now 'the object of earnest and persistent study'. Outright detractors were relatively few. Lancelot Lawton did not deny that there had been a great expansion since 1929, but was adamant that the Russian economy would have grown under any economic system. He and JA Spender added that planning merely led to chaos, as there were too many unknown or variable factors in the production process for planners to be able to ascertain production costs, and without that knowledge the planning process would lose all touch with reality. 106

- 101. Herbert Morrison, 'Preface', in Coates (1934), v.
- 102. Hugh Dalton, 'Financial Institutions in the Transition', in Where Socialism Stands Today? (1933), 61.
- 103. Wootton (1934), 256.
- 104. Hindus (1933), 7.
- 105. Margaret Miller, 'Report From Russia', Listener, 8 March 1933, 389.
- 106. Spender (1934), 16; Lancelot Lawton, 'Russian Economic Realities', Fortnightly Review, August

William Henry Chamberlin, the Moscow correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor and a seasoned observer of the Soviet Union, balanced the success of the plan with the continuing problems facing the country. Whilst the Soviet economy had proved its 'vitality and workability', he noted that it suffered from serious labour turnover, wastage due to careless handling, high production costs, transport problems and underfulfilment of plan targets. A real comparison with capitalism could only be made when the everyday needs of the population were met, and living standards had declined during the duration of the plan. The question of product quality was recognised as an important issue. A critical German observer, Heinrich Pöppelmann, asked whether the production figures were merely 'the eloquent expression of wasted human and material energy', and added that the quality rather than the quantity of production would be the factor determining whether 'the rapidly-built skyscrapers of Soviet industry' would ultimately succeed. Such problems besetting the Soviet economy might merely be growing pains, but they nonetheless needed to be overcome. 108

The *Economist* also balanced the positive and negative sides of the plan. New industrial sectors had been established, the country's total industrial capacity had expanded, educational opportunities had increased, and unemployment had disappeared. But real wages and living standards had fallen, livestock numbers had dropped, the kulaks had been terrorised, there were problems with food and housing, production costs had soared, and there were disparities between plan targets and actual production.¹⁰⁹

Elisha Friedman, a US businessman who had just returned from an extensive visit to the Soviet Union, informed his British readers that the First Five Year Plan had established a vast industrial sector and large-scale agriculture which could, if successfully developed, lay the basis for the mass production of producer and consumer goods and foodstuffs. However, he pointed to a range of negative factors in the operation of the plan. The plan itself was too great in scope, and its high growth rates could not be maintained over a long period. The complexity of an industrial society was not understood by the Soviet authorities, the planners lacked any mechanism that could ascertain consumer demand, and the very process of the implementation of the plan militated against its being implemented in the desired form; indeed, he even talked of 'the planlessness of the Five Year Plan'. Shortages in raw materials led to enterprises over-

^{1934, 171-3.}

^{107.} WH Chamberlin, 'Planned Economy', in Dobbert (1933), 14-18. See also his 'Impending Change in Russia', Fortnightly Review, January 1933, 3-6, and Jules Menken, 'Reflections on Russia', The Nineteenth Century and After, January 1933, 47-61.

^{108.} Heinrich Pöppelmann, 'Captains of Soviet Industry', in Dobbert (1933), 81, 86.

^{109. &#}x27;Russia's Planned Economy', Economist, 8 September 1934, 434-5.

ordering supplies, thus leading to more dislocations. The workers lacked skills, suffered from a poor diet, and had little sense of labour discipline, which resulted in severe quality problems, even with raw and semi-finished material, vast amounts of waste, and defective maintenance and store-keeping. Poor working conditions led to a great deal of labour turnover. Labour productivity had risen by 10 per cent instead of the 25 per cent that had been predicted, and as the workforce had increased far more than expected, the average productivity of the individual worker was well below the plan target. Key sectors, including basic metals, coal and light industry, were lagging behind schedule.¹¹⁰

Even the most enthusiastic observers were obliged to admit that there were problems. Hindus recognised that living standards had deteriorated under the plan, there were shortages of clothing and food, especially meat, rations were at their lowest since the Civil War, and the Soviet Union had a long way to go to catch up with the West, particularly in respect of consumer goods. He also condemned the impatient and coercive manner in which agriculture was collectivised, and hinted at there being a famine in Ukraine in 1932.111 William and Zelda Coates noted that coal production in 1932 had not reached its target of 75 million tons by a margin of 10.68 million tons, but refrained from giving the underfulfilment figures for pig iron and steel production. Similarly, whilst noting the increase in the number of tractors and area of sowed land and the rising proportion of publicly cultivated land, they were reluctant to give crop production or livestock data. 112 They also made a minus into a plus by cheering the fact that the target for the increase of the workforce was overfulfilled by 44.5 per cent. 113 Meanwhile, Louis Segal, the manager of the Soviet trade office in London, mumbled vaguely about shortfalls in iron and steel production, a 'considerable reduction' in livestock numbers, and light industry being 'comparatively neglected', without giving either figures or reasons.114

With the first round of construction completed and with many Soviet citizens receiving technical education, there was less opportunity for Western workers and technicians to be involved in Soviet industry. Nonetheless, reports from the front line, as it were, were still being written, and a perceptive visitor could provide many valuable observations. It must, however, be emphasised that the mere fact that someone had

^{110.} Friedman (1933), 86-7, 92, 100, 117ff, 236, 283, 419ff.

^{111.} Hindus (1933), 19, 101, 108.

^{112.} Coates (1934), 9, 12, 20-1, 26.

^{113.} Ibid, 26. Friedman showed the reality of the relationship between the size of the workforce and labour productivity, see Friedman (1933), 119.

^{114.} Segal (1933). Branded by Carr as unreadable (see 'The Truths About Russia', Spectator, 28 July 1933, 132), this book was an unofficial puff for the regime, and the sections on education, culture and welfare read like official Soviet publicity.

worked in the Soviet Union could not guarantee that he or she would produce a worthwhile account.¹¹⁵

Allan Monkhouse, a British engineer who had been working in the Soviet Union for nearly a decade, considered that the overtly politicised atmosphere was harmful to industry. 'Socialist competition', the attempts by individuals and groups to exceed plan targets, led to machines being damaged, results falsified and poor product quality. The hounding of technical experts needlessly alienated them from the regime, and the constant political interference in industry by party officials led to chaos. Framed in the Metrovick 'wreckers' trial in 1933,¹¹⁶ Monkhouse had no hesitation in blaming these factors for the problems facing Soviet industry, and was convinced that the official scapegoating of bourgeois experts did far more damage than any actual instances of sabotage. He also made the important point that the building and equipping of factories was far easier than the organisation of production and the training of the workforce to the levels attained in capitalist countries, and that the authorities were only now appreciating the difficulties involved.¹¹⁷

The Soviet transport system came in for heavy criticism from those who experienced it. Friedman called transport the 'Achilles' heel' of the First Five Year Plan. Water transport was being revived, aviation had taken off, but the planned expansion of roads and motor vehicles was still in its infancy. The huge increase in rail traffic had not been sufficiently compensated by new rolling stock, and this had led to more wear-and-tear, congestion, overcrowding and accidents. The director of the German State Railways considered that the plan estimates failed to grasp the importance of transport and the backwardness of the railway system. He, like Friedman, noted the poor quality of the permanent way; the rails were light, and the sleepers were broadly-spaced, rarely treated with preservative, and rested on sand instead of ballast. Safety equipment was primitive. 119

John Morgan, a British farmer, was dismayed at the condition of Soviet agricul-

- 115. John Westgarth preferred to pen a fanciful anti-communist rant than to describe his experience of Soviet industry; whilst Lili Körber's 'jolly hockey-sticks' account of her days in a Leningrad factory provides unintentional comic relief but little else. See Westgarth (1934); Körber (1933).
- 116. His account of the affair is most illuminating. See Monkhouse (1933), 293ff. It is certainly more instructive than the eyewitness account of the trial by the British journalist AJ Cumming, who was far too willing to take at face value the charges and the court proceedings, and underestimated the political purposes of such trials, see Cumming (1933). The reaction in Britain to this trial was very similar to responses to previous ones. See, for example, 'The Moscow Trial', Spectator, 7 April 1933, 488.
- 117. Monkhouse (1933), 198, 262, 283, 333. Friedman made the same point about the persecution of specialists, see Friedman (1933), 15.
- 118. Friedman (1933), 292.
- 119. H Saller, 'Transportation in the Soviet Union', in Dobbert (1933), 2014.

ture. Yields per acre were low, scarcely a tractor could be seen at work on the land, and the Verblud state farm had 'a melancholy air' about it as the weeds ousted the cereals. The replacement of the livestock slaughtered during collectivisation would take some time. The peasants had to be sure about their future before they would work well, and to miss one sowing meant that next year's harvest would be lost. The only way he felt that agriculture could revive was through a humane collective policy, with economic and cultural inducements to attract peasants to the collective farms, the provision of good breeding stock, efficient machinery and tractors, and a proper form of exchange between the towns and the countryside. Another critical observer noticed that collective farms lacked skilled managers, which resulted in labour being wasted, equipment and livestock being treated in a slovenly manner, and the peasants lacking interest in their work. He made the interesting point that light industry had been badly affected by the étatisation of agriculture, which had 'practically annihilated' traditional homecraft industries. 121

An even more gloomy picture of the countryside was provided by Malcolm Muggeridge. He had seen starving peasants during his trip to Ukraine and the North Caucasus in the spring of 1933. There was a food shortage even in urban areas, 70 per cent of the livestock was dead, and the soil was impoverished and choked with weeds. He considered that the agrarian crisis put the future of the regime in jeopardy, and it was responding with 'hysterical propaganda and brutal coercion'. Having been denied access to these areas earlier in 1933, Chamberlin made a visit in the autumn of that year, and, after noting the weed-ridden fields and gardens, abandoned farms and food shortages, and having talked to peasants and officials, he was convinced of the reality of the famine. He claimed that famine had been 'deliberately employed as an instrument of national policy, as the last means of breaking the resistance of the peasantry to the new system of collective farming'. What also upset Chamberlin was the refusal of many 'friends of the Soviet Union' to see the famine as anything more than 'a little hardship and destitution' brought on by either kulaks or peasants 'who were too stupid to appreciate the advantages of collective farming'. ¹²³ Not that all fellow-travellers

- 120. John Morgan, 'Agriculture', in Cole (1933), 111-20.
- 121. Nikolaus Basseches, 'Industry', in Dobbert (1933), 110, 135.
- 122. Malcolm Muggeridge, 'The Soviet's War on the Peasants', Fortnightly Review, May 1933, 55.
- 123. WH Chamberlin, 'Russia Through Coloured Glasses', Fortnightly Review, October 1934, 387, 390-1. The Economist declared that Soviet officials did not deny the existence of a famine, but blamed it on the kulaks ('Russia Revisited', Economist, 3 June 1933, 1179). The Spectator downplayed the issue, saying that at the most 'a good deal' of the population was going hungry, and that as the Russians had an 'almost infinite' capacity for suffering, the regime would not be threatened ('Notes of the Week', Spectator, 6 January 1933, 2). This idea that the Russian people were inured to suffering was commonplace. See, for example, Nikolaus Basseches, 'Industry', in Dobbert

ignored the hardships. Sherwood Eddy, an American enthusiast who regularly visited the Soviet Union, stated that up to September 1932 he 'saw nothing that could legitimately be called "famine", but after then in Ukraine bread was scarce, crops were poor and there was much evidence of malnutrition, particularly amongst children. He added that Soviet agriculture presented a remarkable contrast between 'widespread present misery and distress' and 'enthusiastic, perhaps almost reckless planning for the future', and 'incredible poverty in the individual villages' and 'some well-organised, efficient and happy collective farms'. John Hoyland demonstrated the strange kind of relativism common amongst enthusiasts when he admitted that Soviet citizens did 'starve physically', but they did not 'starve spiritually'. But no worry: 'They have willed their own privations; and therefore they seem to be happy in the midst of them.' Walter Duranty, a particularly cynical apologist for the Soviet regime, called on his readers to ignore the 'famine stories' circulating in Berlin, Riga and Vienna, 'where elements hostile to the Soviet Union were making an eleventh-hour attempt to avert American recognition by picturing the Soviet Union as a land of ruin and despair'. Je

The relevance of the First Five Year Plan and the Soviet economic system in general for the capitalist world was widely discussed. An American academic informed his British audience that the Soviet Union had 'given an impetus to state control' that was 'being felt in every corner of the globe'.¹²⁷ Hindus was much more open in his appreciation:

If the Soviets were to fall today, the one idea that would be sure to survive them is that of national planning. It is not an original idea with them... But they have given the idea colour and drama. They have endowed it with a fresh importance and a new hope... Not an economist or industrialist of note but has pondered over its meaning and possibilities.¹²⁸

Others were more restrained in their appreciation of the principle of planning. Friedman considered that whilst the idea of economic planning was not new and had long been implemented under capitalism, the Soviet example showed how it could be applied 'to the complete economic life of the nation'. He foresaw the 'unconscious adoption' by capitalist countries of the 'benefits and achievements' of the Soviet regime that

- 124. Eddy (1933), 147-8.
- 125. Hoyland (1933), 61.

- 127. Stephen Duggan, 'Russia Revisited', Listener, 4 July 1934, 6.
- 128. Hindus (1933), 51.

^{(1933), 127;} Patrick (1933), 6; Stephen Gwynne, 'Ebb and Flow', Fortnightly Review, November 1934, 612.

^{126.} Duranty (1934), 360. Reviewing this collection of Duranty's reports, Muggeridge noted that he omitted one he sent from Rostov in September 1933 that referred to 'plump babies', 'fat calves' and 'village markets flowing with eggs, fruit, poultry, vegetables, milk and butter' (Malcolm Muggeridge, 'Bob Boy and Cossack Girl', Listener, 27 June 1934, 1106).

survived the test of time, although the latter, with its 'erratic, blundering method of trial and error', had much to learn from the West, not least in workshop and technical management.¹²⁹ Durant hoped that the 'individualist societies periodically disabled by the maladjustments of supply and demand' would study the Soviet example, whilst also emphasising that the Soviet regime had much to learn from the West about democracy, individual liberty and business efficiency.¹³⁰

Supporters of free enterprise were rather reserved when debating the relevance of the plan. The somewhat awkward words of the *Spectator* betrayed its disquiet about the contrast between the booming Soviet Union and the slump-ridden system at home:

But the conviction has grown that communism in Russia has come to stay, and along with that conviction a sporting, or — should we say? — philosophic desire to see the best that the Russians can make out of the system they have adopted — a desire to keep the ring and give her the opportunity to try out her big experiment and show the world how it works. We have not made so big a success of our own affairs that we can afford to ignore what is being done in a different way elsewhere; and a country which has dared to take the dangerous chance may surely have stumbled upon some discoveries which might be applicable even to our own so different system.¹³¹

Compared to its earlier tentative approval, the *Economist* now downplayed somewhat the significance of the Soviet experiment. It claimed that economic planning was now commonplace in the world at large, and emphasised that a state-controlled economy substituted its own problems for those peculiar to free enterprise. An authoritarian state able to control labour and resources could 'achieve remarkable results in certain fields of industrial construction and development', but could not provide consistent increases in living standards, nor 'banish the elements of crisis and maladjustment from the national economic life'.¹³²

Some commentators felt that the Soviet economic experience was of no relevance to the modern capitalist world. Mark Patrick, a Conservative MP who had served in the Diplomatic Service in Moscow, declared that the First Five Year Plan paid 'no regard whatever to any necessity for a carefully considered limitation, distribution and balance of the productive forces', and merely constituted a scheme to industrialise at any cost an agrarian country.¹³³ More surprisingly, considering his pioneering of economic regulation, Keynes still adhered to his previous stance, brusquely writing off Moscow's economic policies as 'an insult to our intelligence'.¹³⁴

- 129. Friedman (1933), 17, 25, 416, 477.
- 130. Durant (1933), 59, 163.
- 131. 'Britain and Russia A New Start', Spectator, 23 February 1934, 261.
- 132. 'Russia's Planned Economy', Economist, 8 and 15 September 1934, 434-5, 478-80.
- 133. Patrick (1933), 99.
- 134. JM Keynes, contribution to Stalin-Wells Talk (1934), 35.

Critical observers noted the reintroduction in the Soviet Union from 1932 of certain market measures, and sometimes saw them as a precursor of major social changes. Chamberlin felt that there would be no return to capitalism, but there was both a revival of bourgeois norms like piecework, and the rise of inequality based upon an individual's position within the state structures. 135 John Brown, a left-wing Ruskin College student sent on a visit to the Soviet Union by Lord Nuffield, concluded that Soviet industrial management practice differed little from that in the West. 136 The concentration upon personal incentives, especially piecework, in industry and the concessions made to the peasants in respect of selling surplus produce were seen by Patrick as signs that the regime was encouraging 'differentiated standards of living', thus opening the door 'to the formation of new classes'. He saw the possibility of a situation in which the Communist Party would be 'ruling a Russia in which there was nothing communist'. 137 Friedman noted the reintroduction of capitalist norms, but discounted the idea of any return to private capitalism. However, he felt that the regime was by now more interested in industrialisation than communism, its fanaticism would eventually mellow, and ultimately a new bourgeoisie would arise from the amongst the state and party officials and employees and the skilled workers, with the regime becoming a parliamentary democracy. 138

The battle of opinions over the democratic credentials of the Soviet Union raged on. As we have seen, many of those who admired its economic advances criticised the undemocratic aspects of its political system. Hitler's victory in 1933 broadened the scope of critical observers who equated the Soviet regime with fascism.¹³⁹ Others, often recoiling from the horrors of the Nazi regime, discovered a new democratic dawn in the Soviet Union. One could read of 'the gradual disappearance of the tenseness, the narrowness, and the highly-coloured political propaganda', and that just as 'unreason and suppression of freedom' were 'becoming the fashion' around the world, in the Soviet Union 'reason and freedom' were 'coming into favour'.¹⁴⁰ Those supporters of the regime who sensed that it suffered from a democratic deficit provided convoluted justifications for its rule. Hoyland felt that the regime was not democratic in the Western sense, but nonetheless denied that it was undemocratic, on the basis that the ruling

- 135. WH Chamberlin, 'Impending Change in Russia', Fortnightly Review, January 1933, 9.
- 136. J Brown and C Hamilton, 'Daily Life in Russia', Listener, 21 November 1934, 843.
- 137. Patrick (1933), 44, 213.
- 138. Friedman (1933), 25, 27, 447, 476-7.
- 139. It was a broad range, from the Fabian socialist Leonard Woolf through the prominent Liberal Sir Ernest Simon to the Catholic conservative GK Chesterton. See Leonard Woolf, 'Labour's Foreign Policy', Political Quarterly, 4 (4), October 1933, 515; Ernest Simon, 'Education for Democracy', Political Quarterly, 5 (3), July 1934, 313; GK Chesterton, 'Prophets True and False', Spectator, 27 October 1933, 581.
- 140. Beatrice King, 'The Latest Revolution in Soviet Russia', New Statesman, 28 July 1934, 1134.

party was 'constantly inviting and receiving fresh recruits from the proletariat', and that power was 'concentrated in the hands of a body of men and women wholly consecrated to the service of the community', rather like the Guardians in Plato's *Republic* — which, incidentally, was meant as a compliment.¹⁴¹ The radical sociologist HL Beales justified the party dictatorship on the grounds that it was the 'unifying agent' in national life, making the decisions and ensuring that they were carried out without question. The government's 'direct and immediate' links to the population ensured that problems could be avoided, thus showing 'the superiority of dictatorship to parliamentary democracy'. The regime was perhaps a tyranny, but there was no 'divergence of interest' between the workers and the leadership which exercised power 'on their behalf', nor was there any sign of the party-state apparatus becoming a ruling élite. His warning against a 'crude transference' of Soviet methods to Britain implied that what was good for the people of the Soviet Union might not suit the more sophisticated population here.¹⁴²

Even more bizarre justifications for the Soviet regime could be found. To this day, there is something very chilling about George Bernard Shaw's talk of 'the political necessity of killing people', and his applauding the fact that 'the extermination of whole races and classes' had been 'not only advocated but actually attempted' in the Soviet Union. To be sure, he attempted to qualify this alarming phrase by saying that the 'extermination' of the peasants meant raising their children 'to be scientifically mechanised farmers and to live a collegiate life in cultivated society', but at a time of rural famine this was no time to play with words. But then he saw no 'underfed people' there, and 'the children were remarkably plump'...¹⁴³

If Shaw, whose commitment to democracy was decidedly suspect, saw the Soviet Union as a country which was ruled by 'a hierarchy democratic at its base and voluntary all through', and that Stalin was 'subject to dismissal at five minutes notice' if he failed to give satisfaction, 144 Duranty was happy to promote the regime's authoritarian nature: 'It [Stalinism] has re-established the semi-divine, supreme autocracy of the imperial idea and has placed itself on the Kremlin throne as a ruler whose lightest word is all in all and whose frown spells death.' It was not, of course, suitable for Western countries: 'But it suits the Russians and is as familiar, natural and right to the Russian mind as it is abominable and wrong to Western nations.'145

^{141.} Hoyland (1933), 35.

^{142.} HL Beales, 'The Political System', in Cole (1933), 129, 135-6, 144.

^{143.} GB Shaw, Preface to 'On the Rocks', in Shaw (1934), 143, 145, 163-4. Shaw also felt that the penal code should be extended beyond specific crimes, as it was necessary to ensure that people were pulling their weight 'in the social boat'. The GPU would not abuse its power, as it 'had no interest in liquidating anybody who could be made publicly useful' (ibid, 156).

^{144.} GB Shaw, contribution to Stalin-Wells Talk (1934), 26, 40.

^{145.} Duranty (1934), 239.

The discussion around the position of the working class raged on as well. Supporters of the system made much of the claim that Soviet workers, in Segal's words, knew that they were 'the master of the country', a member of 'the ruling class of a great state', even though many of them showed a regrettable lack of the 'spirit of socialist competition'. 146 In a flight of romanticism, the US fellow-traveller Ella Winter declared that the Soviet worker was 'not a slave to the machine', and that the factories were 'his... to get happiness and freedom out of', and were 'making for the workman the kind of life artists enjoy'. 147 Another sympathiser, GR Mitchison, a member of the Socialist League and a future Labour MP, justified the sanctions against workers who insisted on changing their jobs, and applauded the branding of slackers on workshop blackboards. The workers must approve of the idea, he added, as the slate would otherwise be left blank. 148 Critical observers wrote about 'industrial serfdom', 149 or noted that the workers had only the illusion, or at best a very limited opportunity, of participation in running the system. 150 Arthur Rosenberg, a German Marxist critic of Bolshevism by this time resident in Britain, denied that the elevation of workers into administrative posts meant that the working class was in charge, declaring that unlike a genuine socialist system where officials would 'be subject to a continuous democratic control exercised by the masses', here the former worker 'on entering the service of the governmental machine, ceased psychologically and actually to be a member of the working class'. 151 However, some observers considered that, through the application of judicious propaganda that gave the impression that the regime was working in their favour even when it violated their interests, 152 or that they 'found compensation... in an exhilarating sense of being part of a country in process of creation', 153 the workers largely accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet system, and identified with it.

The social and cultural policies and achievements of the Soviet regime continued to be widely appreciated. Supporters waxed lyrical at the advances made, with Hindus

- 146. Segal (1933), 156, 158, 160-1.
- 147. Winter (1933), 72, 81.
- 148. GR Mitchison, 'The Russian Worker', in Cole (1933), 80, 84. Hoyland declared that 'under an authoritarian government', the wall newspaper was 'an invaluable means of expressing public opinion, of criticising administrative shortcomings, and of ventilating grievances'. See Hoyland (1933), 67.
- 149. Durant (1931), ix.
- 150. Patrick (1933), 71; Friedman (1933), 231-2. Chamberlin noted that workers had presented counterplans that proposed 'exceeding the minimum' plan targets, but refrained from venturing what might happen if such alternative plans reduced what workers thought were unrealistically high expectations. See WH Chamberlin, 'Planned Economy', in *The New Russia* (1931), 7.
- 151. Rosenberg (1934), 196.
- 152. Pietro Sessa, 'Social Problems', in Dobbert (1933), 290.
- 153. 'Russia's Planned Economy', Economist, 8 September 1934, 435.

praising the new freedoms in 'sexual selection' [sic!], racial equality, the treatment of common criminals, prostitutes and soldiers, improvements in literacy, hygiene and manners; in all 'the reconstruction of the human personality'. Eddy added his praise for the 'almost unbelievable advance in education' and in the 'tremendous release of enthusiasm, of creative energy, of courage and confidence in life'. Soviet youngsters showed none of that 'cynicism or boredom' of the West's 'sophisticated youth': 'All seemed joyous, spontaneous, friendly, optimistic, enthusiastic and indomitable, with a deep undercurrent of serious purpose.' Winter added: 'In many fundamental ways human beings behave, think and feel differently than in other countries...'

Fellow-travellers took great delight in describing the holiday camp atmosphere at the showcase prisons for common criminals, ¹⁵⁷ whilst those who had been involuntary guests of the Soviet penal system took an understandably less appreciative view. ¹⁵⁸ Friedman felt that the Soviet nationalities policy could 'be a model for Europe and the whole world', ¹⁵⁹ although Muggeridge's unpleasant jibes about the number of Jewish officials showed that he thought it was conceding too much to one particular minority. ¹⁶⁰ Even those bitterly opposed to the regime could still praise its cultural achievements, ¹⁶¹ although the incessant propaganda was sometimes seen as a blot on an otherwise positive social policy, ¹⁶² and Monkhouse felt that the images he found in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which had just been published, were a bit too reminiscent of the cultural aspects of the Soviet Union. ¹⁶³

The Second Five Year Plan, the next stage of the Soviet modernisation programme, commenced with rather less clamour than its predecessor, even though its targets were ambitious, and its ostensible aims remarkable — a classless society by the end of 1937, purged of all capitalist elements and habits. Opinions were varied. On the one hand, supporters of the regime were sure of its success; short of an armed assault upon the Soviet Union, there could be 'no doubt' that it would be 'successfully

^{154.} Hindus (1933), 48-9.

^{155.} Eddy (1933), 158, 163.

^{156.} Winter (1933), 12.

^{157.} Ibid, 199; DN Pritt, 'Bolshevo: A Russian Labour Colony for Criminals', *The Howard Journal*, 3 (4), 1933, 78-82.

^{158.} Vladimir Chernavin, 'Life in Concentration Camps in USSR', Slavonic and East European Review, 12 (35), January 1934, 387-408.

^{159.} Friedman (1933), 424.

^{160.} Muggeridge (1934), vii, ix, 107. This murky side of the saintly Muggeridge was noted at the time by EH Carr, see 'John Hallett', 'Bolshevism and Menshevism', Spectator, 9 March 1934, 378.

^{161.} Patrick (1933), 88; Westgarth (1934), 42.

^{162.} John Hoyland, 'Women and Children in Soviet Russia', Political Quarterly, 5 (2), April 1934, 249.

^{163.} Monkhouse (1933), 183.

completed'.¹⁶⁴ Louis Fischer, a prominent US fellow-traveller and regular contributor to the British press, was ecstatic:

The Soviet Union is overflowing with energy. The Bolsheviks have split the social atom and released unlimited units of energy which are being directed into the channel of national upbuilding... Those who took an optimistic view of Soviet prospects have been more than vindicated and the sceptics should soon discover that their emotions are warping their judgement... There is no evidence that the revolution is being institutionalised or 'sober' or conservative. On the contrary, the success which has crowned earlier daring projects encourages even braver assaults on the forces of nature and backwardness. ¹⁶⁵

By contrast, Muggeridge's disillusioning encounter with the Soviet system left him with the impression that nothing positive could ever emerge from it:

Horror piled on horror. Abomination of desolation. Jerry-built immensity made and inhabited by slaves. Everything most bestial and most vulgar — barbarian arrogance and salesman servility; humanitarian sentimentality and hypocrisy; rotarian big business and prosperity; *nacht kultur* and pretentious lechery — collected into a heap, an enormous pyramid of filth, in honour of... the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. ¹⁶⁶

On 1 December 1934, Sergei Kirov, the most senior Soviet leader after Stalin, was assassinated in his office in Leningrad. The *New Statesman* expected a ruthless response, and added: 'But it will be deplorable if this murder results in the return of all the old methods of fear and terror from which the Soviet state was beginning to emerge.' Kirov's death was rapidly followed by the trial and execution of over 100 alleged White Guard agents. The response to Kirov's assassination was indeed an ominous sign for the future of the Soviet Union.

III: Foreign Affairs, 1929-34

During this period, a surprising number of commentators were convinced that the Soviet government was incapable or not even desirous of creating much mischief abroad, and that the parties of the Communist International posed little threat. This was despite the sense of insecurity in the capitalist world as its leading figures and institutions struggled to come to terms with the slump, the confidence of the Soviet government as the First and then the Second Five Year Plans were implemented, and the fact that the Comintern was issuing strident propaganda that loudly proclaimed the imminence of revolutions.

- 164. Coates (1934), 103.
- 165. Louis Fischer, 'Russia's Problems', New Statesman, 29 September 1934, 385.
- 166. Muggeridge (1934), 108. See also George Soloveytchik, 'The International Position of Soviet Russia', Contemporary Review, February 1934, 172.
- 167. 'Comments', New Statesman, 8 December 1934, 814.

The sentiments that informed the anti-Soviet actions of the Conservative administration, which included the severing of diplomatic relations in 1927, were clearly visible. Die-hard anti-communists continued to view Moscow and the official communist movement as a deadly threat to Western civilisation. Hence we could read:

The fact is that the Soviet system is, both politically and economically, alien to the rest of the world; and their faith compels them to be perpetually trying to convert the rest of the world, either directly or indirectly through the Comintern, it does not matter which.¹⁶⁸

One could read that the Soviet Union was 'the most crudely and aggressively militaristic power of modern times', ¹⁶⁹ and that the Red Army, 'the largest standing army in Europe', was 'at the disposal of a body of fanatics' who desired 'world revolution by any means'. ¹⁷⁰ One could also read of the Soviet designs to invade India to satisfy the eternal Russian desire for an 'ice-free littoral', ¹⁷¹ and of the 'Soviet subterranean network, radiating from the China treaty ports'. ¹⁷² The Soviet government was reviving Tsarist Russia's imperialist programme of expansion. ¹⁷³ Moscow was also accused of wishing to take advantage of unrest and war in Europe 'to further her policy of world revolution'. ¹⁷⁴ The regime's continual promotion of a war psychosis, militarism and nationalism, combined with the ignorance on the part of Soviet citizens, particularly the youth, of the outside world, were seen as posing a threat to peace. ¹⁷⁵

The Soviet government was widely accused in the early 1930s of 'dumping' cheaply-priced goods in the West, and, as much of its exports consisted of timber, the question was raised of the use of forced labour in lumber camps. There were worries that nothing could prevent the Soviet Union, with its cheap labour and inexhaustible resources, from, as a prominent Conservative put it, 'flooding foreign markets' with goods at prices that other countries could not match, and that its only limit was the degree to which its citizens could 'be starved in order to subsidise such an export

- 169. Patrick (1933), 4.
- 170. 'The Creation of Peace', Quarterly Review, October 1932, 335.
- 171. T Comyn-Platt, 'Afghanistan and the Soviet', The Nineteenth Century and After, March 1929, 298.
- 172. G Kuangson Young, 'China Under the Nationalists', Contemporary Review, March 1931, 334.
- 173. Moscow was accused of aiming to take over China, Mongolia and Manchuria (KK Kawakami, 'Japan Looks at the Russo-Chinese Dispute', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, September 1929, 328-9), and of posing a threat to Europe, see Quisling (1931), 212ff.
- 174. EW Polson-Newman, 'Europe: 1933', The Nineteenth Century and After, January 1933; see also Charles Petrie, 'The Bases of International Policy', The Nineteenth Century and After, October 1932, 440.
- 175. Paul Olberg, 'The Komsomol', Contemporary Review, August 1932, 211; Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'Bolshevism and World Revolution', New Statesman, 17 August 1929, 571-2.

^{168. &#}x27;Relations With Russia', Times Literary Supplement, 25 September 1930, 742. See also Graham (1931), 138; Hird (1932), 110.

trade'.¹⁷⁶ Fears were expressed that if the Five Year Plans were successful, the Soviet Union would pose a dire economic threat to the West, and capitalists who invested in the Soviet Union were warned that they were digging their own graves.¹⁷⁷

Some people, such as Gurian and Keynes, claimed that Bolshevism posed a threat to the world through its appeal as a religion of salvation, able to provide ready solutions for the problems of the day.¹⁷⁸

Beneath this clamour, however, were less strident voices from those who, in many instances, could not be accused of partiality towards Bolshevism. Knickerbocker considered that world revolution was definitely on the back-burner, at least for the time being. HG Wells and Ashmead-Bartlett went further, assuring us, in the latter's words, that 'in reality', the Soviet politbureau had 'abandoned all hope of bringing about a world revolution'. EF Wise, a Labour MP, was concerned about the possibility of a recrudescence of Russo-British friction in Asia, but blamed this on the aggressive stance adopted by the Conservative government in the late 1920s. As a consultant to the Soviet cooperative organisation, he was hardly an enemy of Moscow, but he dismissed the idea of a 'communist threat', asking if anyone was really afraid of 'communist propaganda' in Britain or of revolution in Europe and the Near and Far East. He concluded that the best way to defuse problems with Moscow was for Western governments to establish sound links with the Soviet Union. 181

The influence of the Communist International was often seen as relatively insignificant. Although the German commentator Theodor Seibert considered that Moscow still wanted a world revolution, he noted that it did little for its cause by purging the International of all its independently-minded people, and only subsidies from Moscow prevented its parties from degenerating into little sects. The revival of the Chinese Communist Party in the rural areas of China in the 1930s was often down-played. The spectacle of millions of 'starving men' calling themselves communists was seen as signifying nothing but 'anarchy and despair', as the 'conditions for a communist revolution' did not exist in the East. The Chinese communists had failed in the urban areas, and whilst they were steadily recruiting peasants, the party's support could

^{176.} Arthur Steel-Maitland, 'Rationalisation and the Future of Industry', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, April 1931, 401. See also Atholl (1931), passim.

^{177.} George Soloveytchik, 'The Moscow Trials and the Five Year Plan', The Nineteenth Century and After, May 1933, 566; Stephen Gwynne, 'Ebb and Flow', Fortnightly Review, December 1930, 834.

^{178.} Gurian (1932), 240; Keynes, contribution to Stalin-Wells Talk (1934), 36.

^{179.} Knickerbocker (1931), 243.

^{180.} Ashmead-Bartlett (1929), 164; HG Wells, 'Summing Up', in The New Russia (1931), 122.

^{181.} EF Wise, 'Russo-British Relations', Contemporary Review, May 1929, 580.

^{182.} Seibert (1932), 394.

^{183.} GL Dickinson, 'Russian Foreign Policy', Political Quarterly, 2 (2), April 1931, 282-3.

easily be undermined if the government were to introduce social reforms and reduce military oppression in the rural areas. ¹⁸⁴ Some people refused to take official communism seriously. George Glasgow, the well-informed foreign affairs writer and a staunch critic of socialism, chided both Labour and Conservative MPs for their fear of Bolshevism: 'Is it not time that the Third International were taken less seriously by Westminster?' ¹⁸⁵ In a very cutting piece written in the wake of the ignominious collapse of the German Communist Party, Denis Brogan blithely wrote off the Comintern as 'the most incompetent body of practising revolutionaries since the tailors of Tooley Street', and added that so long as communist parties relied on instructions from Moscow that were not merely dogmatic but recipes for disaster, the Comintern's 'farcical character' would remain. ¹⁸⁶

Some observers treated the verbose proclamations emanating from the Soviet foreign ministry as little more than a joke. Glasgow declared that Soviet delegations to international conferences could 'nearly always be depended on to supply the comic relief'.¹⁸⁷ CM Lloyd considered that the leaders in Moscow were 'intelligent enough', but felt obliged to indulge in 'silly' behaviour 'for the edification of the masses or the maniacs of the Third International'.¹⁸⁸

Perhaps the most significant indication of a less abrasive stance towards the Soviet Union was the editorial standpoint of two broadly anti-socialist journals, the *Spectator* and the *Economist*. They both criticised the Conservative government's hostility to the Soviet Union, and considered that stability in Europe would be better served by improved East-West relations, with the *Economist* forthrightly demanding the reestablishment of diplomatic links with Moscow. The *Economist* also thought that the furore over dumping was excessive, as the economic effect of cheap Soviet goods was negligible. And despite having previously been uneasy about the Soviet regime adopting aspects of Tsarist imperialist policies, its sympathies were more with the Soviet Union in its disputes with Japan over Manchuria, and with China over the Chinese Eastern Railway. 191

- 184. GE Hubbard, 'The Progress of China', International Affairs, 12 (3), September 1933, 655.
- 185. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, August 1929, 237, 242.
- 186. Denis Brogan, 'The Mirage of Moscow', Fortnightly Review, May 1934, 525, 529.
- 187. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, March 1930, 387.
- 188. CM Lloyd, 'Russian Credits', New Statesman, 13 April 1929, 5. See also EF Wise, 'Russo-British Relations', Contemporary Review, May 1929, 580.
- 189. 'Great Britain and Russia', Spectator, 23 February 1929, 260-1; 'Britain and Russia', Economist, 9 November 1929, 800-1. The Labour government that took office in 1929 re-established diplomatic relations with Moscow.
- 190. 'Some Notes on Russia', Economist, 5 September 1931, 425.
- 191. 'The Russo-Chinese Crisis in Manchuria', Economist, 20 July 1929, 94; 'Russia and Japan', Econo-

Along with the pro-Soviet lobby, which saw Soviet foreign policy as 'an unceasing and resolute struggle for peace, for the liberation of tortured humanity from the horrors of military catastrophes', 192 certain less obsequious and even hostile observers saw the Soviet Union as more threatened than threatening. In 1932, RD Charques considered that it faced aggressive moves from Japan in the Far East, and Poland, backed by France, had designs on Byelorussia and Ukraine. He felt that the Soviet Union was not seeking war, as it had nothing to gain from it, and, for the time being at least, was showing little interest in the idea of world revolution. 193 In early 1934, Soloveytchik claimed that over the past year the Soviet Union had returned to the world stage, forced by internal difficulties and external threats, particularly from Japan and Nazi Germany, to forge closer links with capitalist states at the expense of its world revolutionary desires. 194

Few people who saw Soviet industry at first hand felt that it posed a threat to the capitalist world. Addressing Chatham House in March 1933, Chamberlin declared that the development of the Soviet economy could actually be beneficial to world trade. He showed the interconnection between economic growth in the Soviet Union and the world at large:

It is paradoxical, yet true, that one of the most favourable things that could happen for the Soviet Union would be a capitalist revival in the rest of the world to push up the price level and relieve the strain for Russian industrialisation. The converse is also true; any improvement in Russian conditions that would make Russia a larger participant in world trade would be a beneficial factor in the revival of the rest of the world.¹⁹⁵

The Comintern had 'very ineffectively used' the 'marvellous opportunity' presented by the slump. Its propaganda had negligible effects, and many non-Soviet communists had fallen foul of Moscow.¹⁹⁶

- mist, 6 May 1932, 1168-9; 'Manchuria Supplement', Economist, 5 November 1932, 5.
- 192. Henri Barbusse, 'Introduction', in The Soviet Union and Peace (1929), 20.
- 193. Charques (1932b), 21, 37, 44, 50, 61ff, 78ff.
- 194. George Soloveytchik, 'The International Position of Soviet Russia', Contemporary Review, February 1934, 176. See also Bruce Hopper, 'A New Chapter in Soviet Foreign Relations', Spectator, 14 July 1933, 40-1.
- 195. WH Chamberlin, 'What Is Happening in Russia?', *International Affairs*, 12 (2), March 1933, 195. Walter felt that the idea of the Soviet Union posing an industrial threat to the USA was 'ridiculous', and even a political threat was 'doubtful'. See Walter (1932), 269. The Soviet Union had a long way to go to put its own house in order before it could pose as a positive example to other countries. Knickerbocker considered that the Soviet government had tied the First Five Year Plan too closely to the world economy, and that its own economy was 'threatened by the disorganisation of the capitalist system'. See Knickerbocker, 'Foreign Trade', in Dobbert (1933), 329.
- 196. WH Chamberlin, 'What Is Happening in Russia?', *International Affairs*, 12 (2), March 1933, 201-2. Friedman noticed that Moscow had 'remained passive' rather than take advantage of the political

In the increasingly uncertain atmosphere that followed Hitler's victory in 1933, many commentators at different points of the political spectrum welcomed the Soviet Union into the League of Nations in September 1934. The *New Statesman*, which had long called for it to join, felt that the quest for peace had taken a step forward.¹⁹⁷ Henry Wickham Steed, a noted authority on international affairs, stated that its joining might have a sobering effect on both Poland and Germany.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the *Spectator* considered that however valid criticisms of the Soviet Union's internal affairs may be, they were not relevant here, as the League dealt purely with external matters.¹⁹⁹

Although some disgruntled leftists felt that the Soviet regime had shifted to a nationalist orientation even prior to Stalin's ascendancy, 200 by now certain mainstream commentators were perceiving a fundamental change in Soviet foreign policy. In 1934, the Fabian socialist George Catlin claimed that the Soviet Union had 'a profound interest, on principle and in practice, in the guarantees of collective security', and that its former championing of the class war was an 'infantile deviation' that had been rejected in favour of 'appeals to love of the fatherland'. 201 The most startling conclusions were those drawn by the exiled Russian historian Michael Florinsky. He declared that the adoption of the theory of 'socialism in one country' had signified that Moscow sincerely wanted peace and economic cooperation with capitalism, and therefore had become strongly opposed to the idea of world revolution. The Comintern had effectively become an international body whose 'chief and immediate goal' was 'the defence of the Soviet Union', and its public image was of little importance.202 Marxism had been 'sacrificed... on the altar of expediency and realpolitik': 'The shell of phraseology of the Communist Manifesto remains, but its revolutionary content is gone. World revolution is now something of a communist dogma to which one merely pays lip service.'203

So, alongside the shrill reminders of the menace posed by the Soviet Union, here was a proposition that the Soviet regime had forsaken one of its founding revolutionary principles. At least in respect of its foreign policy, it could perhaps enter the civilised world.

- crises in Germany in the early 1930s, see Friedman (1933), 27.
- 197. 'Comments', New Statesman, 22 September 1934, 345.
- 198. Henry Wickham Steed, 'A Quaking World', Contemporary Review, November 1934, 513-22.
- 199. 'Russia at Geneva', Spectator, 21 September 1934, 388-9. The strongly anti-communist Stephen Gwynne thought that Soviet involvement in the League would help European security, and might even encourage the Soviet regime to 'abstain from subversive propaganda' ('Ebb and Flow', Fortnightly Review, October 1934, 486).
- 200. For example, Rosenberg (1934), 161, 179.
- 201. George Catlin, '1914-1934', Fortnightly Review, August 1934, 132, 138.
- 202. Florinsky (1933), 100, 228, 239.
- 203. Michael Florinsky, 'Soviet Foreign Policy', Slavonic and East European Review, 12 (36), April 1934, 544, 550-2.

IV: Analysing Bolshevism

The discussion in the 1920s of the philosophical and political roots of Bolshevism continued into the following decade. Many of the familiar themes were raised and developed, and others were introduced.

Nicholas Berdyaev, a former Russian Marxist who had drifted into a mystical Christian socialist outlook, informed his British audience that Bolshevism was the most extreme product of the trends of thought that had emerged within the Russian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century. The Russian intelligentsia had been utterly alienated from Tsarist society, and, drawing upon modern Western ideas in a vulgarised, religious form, developed a nihilistic outlook, rejecting any gradualist approach, and projecting a strong utilitarian ethos which repudiated the value of the individual. Bolshevism, drawing on the messianic streak of both the Russian intelligentsia and Marxism, promoted the working class as a power-wielding, aggressive and domineering force, rather than a 'suffering victim'. Russian and Marxian messianism fused during the Russian Revolution, and this new messianic combination was projected through the Comintern. All that Bolshevism could achieve was this new, persecuting, false religion, promising a bright future, but delivering 'a grey, dull earthly paradise, a realm of bureaucracy', and Russia was 'passing from one medieval period into another'. 205

Another reference point in Russian history was indicated when the Five Year Plan evoked comparisons between Stalin's programme and the modernisation schemes initiated by Peter I. One reviewer pointed to the 'striking likeness' between them, with the exalted state acting as a taskmaster, classes being set obligatory duties, and the 'virtual slavery' of the population, ²⁰⁶ whilst Arthur Toynbee felt that the Bolsheviks resembled that Tsar in what he saw as their attempts forcibly to impose Western ideas upon Russia. ²⁰⁷ Chamberlin considered that much Soviet practice was highly reminiscent of Tsarist norms, not least the secrecy in respect of inconvenient factors, the 'absolutist character of the state', the secret police and the 'utter contempt and disregard for the rights and interests of the individual' in relation to the state. ²⁰⁸

Writing from a idiosyncratic Marxist position, which did not prevent his book from being well received, 209 Rosenberg provided a novel analysis of the development of

- 204. Berdyaev (1931), 3-26, 37-8, 75-6. This theme was developed by Basil Matthews, another Christian writer, see Matthews (1931), 77. We have already seen that Dorothy Thompson saw Bolshevism as a messianic religion, see Thompson (1929), 108-9.
- 205. Berdyaev (1931), 40, 87.
- 206. 'An Imperial Revolutionary', Times Literary Supplement, 3 October 1929, 755.
- 207. Arthur Toynbee, 'The Russian Revolution and Lenin', Listener, 8 February 1933, 205.
- 208. WH Chamberlin, 'Unchanging Russia', Spectator, 21 September 1934, 391-2.
- 209. See, for instance, John Hallett, 'All About Russia', Spectator, 11 May 1934, 744; John Heath,

Bolshevism. He saw it as a recrudescence of what he claimed was the revolutionary approach elaborated by Marx during the revolutions of 1848, a strategy that was suitable for a backward country in which the population, especially the working class, 'was politically ignorant' and incapable of political activity without being led by a 'close, strongly disciplined party of professional revolutionaries', in order to carry out a bourgeois revolution. Lenin saw the soviets in 1917 as the means to concentrate the militancy of the masses in order to seize power, but 'he did not give a thought to the problem of how the centralised and autocratic Bolshevik system was to be reconciled with the federalist and anarchist ideal of the soviets' once power had been taken, and they became 'an unwelcome and extraneous element in Bolshevik doctrine'.210 Furthermore, faced with military incursions, a chaotic situation in industry following an unsuccessful attempt by the workers to impose their control and go beyond state capitalism, and the need to maintain order, the soviets lost any vestige of independence, and the country came under the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. Despite the limits he placed on the revolution at home, Lenin considered that the advanced states could go directly towards socialism, and so set up the Comintern for the purpose of encouraging proletarian revolutions in those countries. However, such was the strength of Soviet influence in the Comintern, and such was the immaturity of the Western European workers, that the former was not established along the lines of the most modern variant of Marxism, but on a basis that could only lead to a state capitalist society, if it worked at all.211

Isolated after the failure of revolutions to occur in Europe, under Stalin the Soviet Union was a state capitalist society under the control of the party apparatus, which, in order to maintain its rule against any political challenge, imposed a 'dog-matic absolutism' on the subject of Marxism and socialism, claiming that it and it alone was its true manifestation. Retreating into a purely Russian orientation, best illustrated by Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country', it maintained the Comintern in order to gain sympathy and protection in the outside world. However, although Bolshevism was of no use to workers in the advanced countries, its doctrines and methods were nevertheless far more progressive in Russia compared to those of Tsarism, and thus represented an historical step forward.²¹²

Various critical observers considered that the Bolsheviks had less in common with traditional Marxism than with revolutionaries who favoured small, conspiratorial or-

^{&#}x27;USSR', International Affairs, 7 (1), January 1933, 128-9.

^{210.} Rosenberg (1934), 23, 26, 90, 123. Rosenberg accepted that the Bolsheviks enjoyed considerable political support during 1917, and he did not see their victory as the product of trickery.

^{211.} Ibid, 118-9, 137.

^{212.} Ibid, 202, 239.

ganisations, such as Blanqui, or with anarchism. Kautsky claimed that Bolshevism was 'from the very beginning a conspiracy after the Blanquist model, built up on the blind obedience of the members towards their autocratic leaders'. 213 Isaac Don Levine agreed, and added to their influences the Russian populist Tkachev and the anarchist Bakunin, not to mention the dubious adventurer Nechaev, who was seen as providing the basis for the Bolsheviks' amoral and violent approach.²¹⁴ Baikalov accused the Bolsheviks of having 'exploited to the fullest possible extent the primitive psychology of the illiterate, mentally and socially backward Russian masses', in order to stage a 'coup d'état'.215 Stephen Graham considered that the Bolsheviks seized power by setting up soviets like 'maggots' in the living organisms of Russia and by riding the 'disgruntled and undisciplined soldiery'. 216 EH Carr brought in a welcome measure of reality in a review of Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, when he pointed out that the book proved that the revolution was not 'the work of a band of fanatics or agitators inciting the mob'.217 So did the liberal Ernest Barker, who stated that Lenin 'was genuinely concerned to make the proletarian state a new form of democracy, with the people (in the limited sense of the proletariat) really controlling their representatives, and really dominant not only in legislation, but also in the executive and judicial spheres'. 218

The 1930s saw the rise of the school of thought which considered that Musso-lini's Italy, Stalin's Soviet Union and, from 1933, Hitler's Germany were a new, totalitarian, type of society. On the left, the Christian socialist John MacMurray claimed that the Bolsheviks had intended to build a society resting upon 'the principle of democratic freedom carried to the stage of economic realisation', but had failed, as their dictatorial methods, which they had hoped to be limited to a transitional period, could not avoid becoming permanent through their attempt to reach the realm of freedom by means of the 'machinery of force' represented by the state.²¹⁹ This was in essence the anarchist analysis that contends that the use of the state machine will corrupt the best of intentions.

On the right, Waldemar Gurian, a Russian-born Jewish convert to Catholicism and at this point living in Germany, developed and cohered themes which had been adumbrated during the 1920s. His extensive study, published in Britain in 1932, was a pioneering exposition of Bolshevism as a totalitarian movement and the Soviet Union

- 213. Kautsky (1930), 81.
- 214. Levine (1931), 24ff.
- 215. Baikaloff (1929), 18, 24.
- 216. Graham (1931), 18, 34.
- 217. EH Carr, 'Trotskyism and Bolshevism', Spectator, 2 July 1932, 17.
- 218. Ernest Barker, 'Democracy Since the War and its Prospects for the Future', *International Affairs*, 13 (6), November 1934, 758.
- 219. MacMurray (1933), 87-9.

as a totalitarian society, and the themes outlined in it were to become familiar as the central features of many of the standard works on Bolshevism and Soviet society in the postwar period. Gurian considered that Bolshevism combined the most extreme manifestations of the militant and authoritarian tendencies of the Russian radical intelligentsia with the supremely utilitarian and amoral philosophy of Marxism. It took the form of an unquestionable religious dogma that permitted 'no doubts or radical criticism', and was thus more or less totalitarian from the start. The Bolsheviks combined traditional Russian forms of political organisation with modern propaganda techniques, and were thus able to key into and represent the passive Russian mentality, and eventually take power.²²⁰

The Bolsheviks intended right from the start to introduce a publicly-owned planned economy, and the NEP was merely a pause during which the Soviet regime could recover its strength. The capitalist elements had at some point to be destroyed. The First Five Year Plan was intended to transform 'the entire social and economic structure' by eliminating reliance on foreign technology, eradicating small-scale farming, and subordinating everything to the plan.²²¹

Developing earlier analyses of Bolshevism, Gurian considered that the Soviet regime could only proceed through the systematic and deliberate suppression of the individual. Life was to be mechanised and totally controlled:

The entire man must be embraced and occupied by Bolshevism. In future there must be no contrast between the individual and society, for the life of the individual must belong completely to society, which is regarded as the goal of history. That alone which promotes this development has any longer the right to exist. This produces an oppression of unparalleled magnitude. All intellectual life that does not serve Bolshevik aims must be annihilated...²²²

Gurian's analysis was not fully formed, as he was unable to make up his mind about the basis and rationale of Bolshevism once it gained power. On the one hand, the dictatorship of the proletariat existed in the Soviet Union, the working class was in power; on the other, Stalin's regime was a 'dictatorship over the proletariat'. Similarly, he swayed between seeing Bolshevism as supremely ideological and predicated upon the ultimate goal of socialism, and as power-seeking pure and simple, with 'the rule of the Bolshevik party, and nothing else' being its raison d'être, adding for good measure that Stalin and his retinue were a bunch of non-intellectual power-wielders, 'a class of adventurers' who attached themselves to the system 'by an outward acceptance of its phraseology without any inward conviction'.²²³

^{220.} Gurian (1932), 5-82, 155.

^{221.} Ibid, 140.

^{222.} Ibid, 246.

^{223.} Ibid, 90, 187, 203, 229-30, 244.

Although Gurian did not forecast an early demise for the regime, and ruled out any hope for its self-democratisation, ultimately, once its economic transformation was complete, it would not be able to justify itself 'by its promise of the future', and socialism would be exposed as impossible, as 'its actual achievement, its despotism', would be confronted with its own claims 'to understand and assist the evolution of human history', and it would 'fall a victim to the very power it has invoked against all its enemies'. In a paraphrase of Marx's contention that capitalism produces its own gravedigger in the form of the proletariat, Gurian implied that once the Soviet regime could not justify itself in the name of modernity, those social forces which evolved in its modernising quest would presumably overthrow it. It was a long-term optimism which did not sit happily with his gloomy forecast of the fostering of 'a distinct human type' leading to 'a new enslavement of the masses' that would 'secure the fetters' of the regime.²²⁴

As we have seen, the socialists Rosenberg and Yugov claimed that the Soviet Union was a state capitalist society. ²²⁵ This was a relatively common analysis, and was adhered to by people of varying political persuasions, from the anti-socialist Russian émigré Haensel and Norway's future führer Vidkun Quisling on the right ²²⁶ to Berdyaev and Wells on the left. ²²⁷ In between, one could find the liberals Bernard Pares and Will Durant, the US businessman Elisha Friedman, and the US journalist HR Knickerbocker. ²²⁸ It is easy to understand why non-Stalinist socialists promoted this analysis, as they would wish to dissociate the Soviet Union from any identification with socialism, but for non-socialist observers, Knickerbocker's explanation — that socialism was impossible and the nearest that the regime could thus get towards it was a planned and étatised form of capitalism — gave a clue to their rationale.

V: Conclusion

The period of 1929-34 was of great importance not merely for the Soviet Union, but for the world as a whole. It was not only the time during which the Soviet Union underwent a massive social transformation, with the establishment of a collectivised agricultural sector, a massive industrial base and the rule of a tightly-controlled party; in short, the establishment of the socio-economic system that was to last until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was also a time of chronic economic and social diffi-

- 224. Ibid, 160, 231.
- 225. Rosenberg (1934), 103; Yugoff (1930), 336.
- 226. Haensel (1930), 128; Quisling (1931), 61, 172.
- 227. Berdyaev (1931), 86; HG Wells, 'Summing Up', in The New Russia (1931), 118.
- 228. Bernard Pares, 'English News on Russia', Contemporary Review, September 1932, 290; Durant (1931), 53; Friedman (1933), 21; Knickerbocker (1931), x.

culties in the capitalist world, a time when even supporters of capitalism expressed doubts about its viability as a system. The contrast between capitalist slump and Soviet expansion could not be ignored, and was to act as a background to many of the assessments that were made of the Soviet system.

Looking at the material on the Soviet Union published in Britain during these years, the commonplace belief of the late 1920s that the Soviet regime had lost its sense of purpose and direction rapidly disappeared. Hostile critics were sceptical at first about the prospects of the First Five Year Plan, but they were soon confronted by evidence that the great transformation was no ephemeral flash in the pan. The few who still insisted that the Soviet experiment was doomed to an early demise were merely substituting their prejudices for more objective prognoses. Between these detractors and the pro-Soviet lobby was a broad range of people who, whilst rejecting the regime's political practice and philosophy, nonetheless considered that positive lessons for the West could be drawn from the Soviet experience. The aspects of the Soviet Union - welfare, literacy, cultural and educational measures - that were appreciated in the 1920s by certain people in Britain who had little or no sympathy for the Soviet political system, were augmented during this period by economic administration. The success of the First Five Year Plan spurred on the development of ideas that had been germinating in the West about the necessity of state intervention in economic matters and social affairs. The simultaneous experience of Soviet growth and capitalist slump forced many people to recognise that laissez-faire policies were unlikely to revive the fortunes of capitalism, and that a programme based upon state intervention was necessary to pull the economy out of stagnation. And whilst many Western thinkers developed their ideas of social and economic planning within the context of a liberal democratic society, defining them against the concept of a étatised society of either a Soviet or fascist variety, the success of the Soviet programme of economic and social modernisation was greatly to increase the attractiveness of the image of the Soviet Union as a force for progress in the eyes of large numbers of people in the capitalist world, not least in Britain.

There was a widespread sense that the Soviet Union was here to stay, even if this was only implicitly or reluctantly expressed. In words reminiscent of their delight when the Bolsheviks abandoned War Communism for the NEP, some right-wingers pointed to the introduction of certain market measures from 1932, but this was only an echo, as if they subconsciously recognised that capitalism was not really being reintroduced. Other critical observers felt that there would be some sort of convergence between a Soviet economy that accepted certain market measures and a capitalist world that accepted a considerable degree of state economic and social administration. This was actually a defence of capitalism, because it was based on the ideas of the inevitability of

the market and the reality of state intervention in the West. The insistence of some observers that Soviet planning was nothing more than extended production targets also downplayed the idea that the Soviet economy was qualitatively different to capitalism. Beneath its official rhetoric, the Soviet economic system was thus perceived as a crude and even barbaric method of catching up with the West, but also as a foretaste of the future world, with the implication that such a method was the means by which — in a more refined manner, of course — the more advanced West could progress further. From this it is clear that not a little of the commentary on the Soviet Union was not merely concerned with that country, but was also related to economic, political and social questions in Britain and other Western countries.

Questions raised by certain assertions were left unanswered. If, as some insisted, the great progress made under the Five Year Plans could have been made under other economic systems, it was legitimate to ask why production under capitalism had not only failed to have grown but had actually slumped badly, and why capitalism was struggling to emerge from a chronic slump. On the other hand, if, as others insisted, a Five Year Plan should have been implemented in the West, it was legitimate to ask whether the terrible sacrifices that were endured by the Soviet population were to be imposed on the people of the capitalist world. And did not those socialists who justified the undemocratic features of the Soviet Union ask themselves why a regime that apparently enjoyed the support of the workers could not trust them with the rights that they had managed to gain in bourgeois democracies?

Although many commentators pointed to the inflammatory statements issued by both Soviet political figures and the Communist International in order to show that Moscow remained a revolutionary menace, the actual conduct of the Soviet regime on the international scene led a growing number of observers to regard the Soviet Union as a stabilising factor in an increasingly uncertain world, particularly after Hitler came to power, and to consider that Moscow was not intending to destabilise the capitalist system. These feelings were reinforced after the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in 1934.

Those who believed in the existence of a process of 'normalisation' in the Soviet Union, that it was evolving domestically towards some sort of economic convergence with the capitalist world, and internationally into a force for stability, were led towards considering that the official ideology of the regime was an obsolete relic from its revolutionary origins, or a device to garner support from radicals in the capitalist world. This put them at odds with the die-hard anti-communists and the pro-Soviet lobby, who both took Moscow at its word. The former continued to view Moscow as they had done ever since 1917 — a fanatical revolutionary threat to Western civilisation that nonetheless remained a utopian venture — and, despite the growth of a more prag-

matic attitude towards the Soviet Union, they still played an important role in Britain and other Western countries, in the media and in political and governmental circles. The pro-Soviet school viewed Moscow as a positive force, implementing a vast modernisation scheme at home, and fighting for human progress and peace throughout the world. Despite the poor showing of the Comintern in the early 1930s, with few communist parties registering any growth for some years, and the flagship German party being crushed by Hitler, the pro-Soviet lobby grew considerably, fuelled by the success of the Five Year Plans, the capitalist slump, and the horrors of the Nazi regime. The official communist movement started to revive once the self-isolating ultra-left madness of the Third Period was moderated and then abandoned in 1934. Here, the Communist Party's membership, which had sunk to 2555 in 1932, slowly revived, with a figure of 5800 being recorded at the end of 1934, ²²⁹ and the new, less abrasive image of official communism was to assist the drawing of increasing numbers of people onto the pro-Soviet bandwagon, now that social democrats were no longer 'social fascists'.

Irrespective of one's views, the Soviet experience could not be ignored, and the deluge of books, pamphlets and articles in Britain on the Soviet Union during this period was motivated by a range of factors, including political allegiances, the quest for a new and better society, the desire to tell of one's experiences, intellectual interest and sheer curiosity. And these factors determined not merely the outlook but also the quality and usefulness of this vast amount of material.

The fact that two observers like Fischer and Muggeridge could visit the country and return with diametrically opposite conclusions — the former barely containing his excitement, the latter feeling nothing but unmitigated gloom — shows that for many the assessing of the Soviet Union was not a question of dispassionate investigation, but was a matter of heartfelt partisanship.

Indeed, there could be little or no meeting of minds on some aspects of the Soviet Union. Was it, as critics strongly averred, a frightful tyranny, a dictatorship over the proletariat, that held little or no hope of democratising itself; or was it, as friends of the Soviet Union insisted with equal vigour, either in actuality or potentiality a new form of democracy? Wishes and opinions influenced observations. Anti-communists did not wish to believe that such a system could ever be democratic; the pro-Soviet lobby did not want to think otherwise. In between, a centre ground of moderate conservatives, liberals and moderate social democrats saw it as a curate's egg, with good parts from which positive lessons could and should be learnt — and with the corollary that other parts were unacceptable. Perhaps strangest of all were the rationalisations that some socialists made in order to justify their support for what they at bottom rec-

ognised to be an undemocratic regime. This represented a turn towards an élitist conception of socialism, an implicit acceptance of the idea that a socialist regime could in practice be less democratic than a parliamentary democracy.

There was sufficient information for an impartial reader in Britain to construct a reasonably objective appraisal of some key aspects of the Soviet Union. It could not be denied that under the First Five Year Plan a huge industrial sector had been set up, agriculture had been collectivised, and extensive social provisions established. Within this positive context, whether they used reports in the Soviet press or relied upon their own observations, a wide range of writers were able to bring to the Western reader a substantial catalogue of negative factors - sloppy labour discipline, lack of skills, shoddy product quality, indifferent management, poor maintenance and storekeeping, reluctance to innovate, waste, dislocations and disproportions - which put a somewhat different light upon the claim of the regime and its supporters that the Soviet economy was properly planned and efficiently run. The regularity with which different writers listed these problems suggested that they were not isolated incidents, but were inherent in the system and had a serious knock-on effect further down the production process, although it was too early to ascertain whether they were teething troubles or permanent features. And yet even here, the supporter of the regime would blithely wave such factors away as early problems that would be overcome, or would question the motives of those who raised them.

Altogether, it is wrong to see the discussion in Britain over the Soviet Union merely as a debate or, to put it more accurately, a shouting match between die-hard anti-communists and an equally fervid pro-Soviet lobby. This period was noteworthy for the emergence of the centre ground of opinion, whose adherents, as they struggled to draw up strategies to deal with the severe economic and social problems at home, cast their eyes eastwards to see if any lessons might be drawn from the great changes taking place in the Soviet Union. It was amongst these people that the social and economic innovations of the Soviet regime were most carefully and sensibly discussed and analysed. The anti-communists could, in more reflective moments, make some incisive points about the Soviet Union, just as the pro-Soviet lobby could provide justified criticisms of capitalism. But generally speaking, the hot-house atmosphere of this period was not conducive to calm, objective study. And things were to get much hotter.

Chapter Three

Terror and Consolidation, 1935-39

THIS chapter covers the period from Kirov's assassination to the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August 1939. It shows how by the late 1930s, developments in the Soviet Union had not only enthused the pro-Soviet lobby, but had broadened the scope of the centre ground of opinion which combined praise for Soviet economic and social policies with grave concerns over the purges and show trials. It then shows the sharp divisions of opinion over the return of the Soviet Union to the world arena and the revival of the Communist International, with particular reference to the Spanish Civil War, noting the wide range of commentators who considered that Moscow had forsaken world revolution and was playing a positive role in international affairs.

I: The False Dawn

Despite the flurry of police activity following the assassination of Kirov, with the arrest, trial and jailing of the disgraced Old Bolsheviks Lev Kamenev and Grigori Zinoviev and the deportation and execution of many other people, many observers felt that the relative calm after the storms of the early 1930s was here to stay, and that the Soviet Union was heading towards some form of democratisation, a feeling that was greatly reinforced with the adoption in 1936 of a constitution that promised all the freedoms offered by a modern democracy. There was also evidence that living standards were improving, and that the desperately hard days of the early 1930s were over. The Soviet regime implemented various changes during this period, some of which could be interpreted as liberalising reforms, and others as a return to more conventional thinking. Peasants were permitted to own some livestock, work their own private plots, and sell their produce. The nuclear family was promoted, abortion was largely outlawed, and homosexuality was definitely beyond the pale. Limited inheritance rights were instituted. Stalin promoted himself much more as a national leader, and the Soviet and

1. Maurice Hindus claimed that a whole new era was coming into being, one which could 'broadly be termed constitutionalism'. See Hindus (1936), 5. See also 'Evolving Russia', Spectator, 1 May 1936, 781.

other communist parties adopted a decidedly patriotic stance. Moscow continued its quest to improve relations with the Western democracies.

The late 1930s were the classic years of fellow-travelling, the time when not merely members and supporters of the official communist movement, but a wide array of intellectuals and notables became interested in the 'socialist sixth of the world'. The New Statesman noted in early 1936 that the 'old hostility' to the Soviet Union was 'vanishing' even amongst Conservatives, within the British Court and from The Times.² The midpoint of the decade was indeed a false dawn, as the Soviet Union was very soon to tip into another bout of state terror, this time aimed not merely at the general population, but also, and indeed more directly, at the party-state apparatus itself, with waves of thoroughgoing purges and three astonishing show trials in Moscow. Nonetheless, the surface appearance was sufficient to draw a wide variety of people, including certain formerly critical observers, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and a very surprising case, the long-term critic of the Soviet Union, Bernard Pares, towards a sympathetic appraisal of Stalin's regime, or at least many aspects of it. Similarly, the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime after its coming to power in 1933 allowed the Soviet Union to reinforce its image as a civilising force in both its internal and foreign policies, thus drawing more people into its orbit.

By now the Soviet Union was presented by its rulers as a socialist state.³ The pro-Soviet lobby was in little less than an ecstatic frame of mind:

Today in the USSR the exploitation of man by man has ended, the enslavement of subject peoples has given way to a free federation of socialist peoples, culture has spread until today it embraces even those who were the most backward of the former subjects of the Tsar. Today there is one land, the Soviet land, whose women enjoy the widest political, economic and social freedom. Unemployment is no more, security has been won for all who labour. In the USSR there flourishes a genuine socialist democracy. The land of the Soviet Union belongs to the people as a whole with the working peasantry holding the right to its use in perpetuity. Alone of all the countries in the world the industry of the USSR belongs to the people and is controlled by them without let or hindrance. Vast as has been the quantitative industrial advance, that is as nothing compared with the qualitative advance. Soviet industry compares with any in the world in its technique. There is no machine so complicated, no technique so modern that it is not to be found in the USSR.⁴

- 2. 'The Shift of the Balance', New Statesman, 8 February 1936, 177.
- 3. See the statements by Manuilsky and Stalin cited in de Basily (1938), 459.
- 4. 'Lenin's Work Lives On...', Russia Today, January 1939, 7. See also the paeans by the Communist Party's General Secretary Harry Pollitt and his colleagues Pat Sloan and Johnny Campbell in Harry Pollitt, 'The Way Forward', in Communist Party of Great Britain (1937), 84-8; Sloan (1937), passim; Campbell (1939), passim.

Stalin was hailed in obsequious terms, whilst in slightly less sycophantic but equally enthusiastic words, praise was heaped on the Soviet regime's claims in respect of rights and facilities for women,6 national minorities7 and, of course, workers.8 Stephen Spender's unfamiliarity with working-class life in Britain could not deter our poet, soon to embark upon his sojourn in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), from expressing a confident opinion on the Soviet proletariat: 'The Soviet worker knows that the factory is his own... The worker in Russia feels that he is a separate individual - although perhaps only in the sense that he is a member of a crusading army - fighting side by side with many other individuals for a new world.'9 The future Soviet analyst Jack Miller demonstrated his youthful enthusiasm when he declared that it was 'not an unreasonable prediction' that 'within the next generation' the Soviet Union would be 'as powerful, industrially, as the rest of the world put together'. 10 Developments in and the application of science in the Soviet Union were also highly praised, 11 as were provisions in respect of education¹² and sport and culture.¹³ The Soviet military machine was seen as standing poised ready to defend the socialist fatherland and to liberate the world from capitalism.14

John Strachey assured his readers that there was no chance of the Soviet leaders or the Communist Party itself becoming separated from the masses and turning into a parasitic oligarchy,¹⁵ whilst the Christian socialist Noreen Blythe declared that Stalin was only 'nominally' a dictator, and that his power 'could never be used in deviation from a policy planned collectively for the general good', or for his own particular ends.¹⁶ Pat Sloan, a leading British Stalinist publicist, was certain that the 'triangle' arrangement in industry amongst the party representatives, factory management and union officials prevented the workers from being exploited by the state.¹⁷

- 5. Barbusse (1935), 289; Strong (1935), 337, 341.
- 6. Coates (1938), 202ff, 243ff.
- 7. Ibid; Vowles (1939), 163ff, 208ff.
- Coates (1938), 169. A Stalinist attempt to demonstrate how well Soviet workers were doing defeated its stated aim when its author refused to make any direct comparisons between workers' living standards in the Soviet Union and those in Germany and Britain. See Kuczynski (1939).
- 9. Spender (1937), 268-9.
- 10. Jack Miller, 'Topic of the Month: Soviet Economic and Military Strength', *Left News*, November 1938, 1042.
- 11. Crowther (1938), 91ff.
- 12. King (1936).
- 13. Griffith (1935).
- 14. Henri (1936).
- 15. Strachey (1936), 163.
- 16. Blythe (1938), 189.
- 17. Sloan (1937), 49.

Friends of the Soviet Union often expressed themselves in words that bordered upon the risible. Hence at the Congress for Peace and Friendship with the USSR, held in London in late 1935, that assembled prominent members of the Conservative, Labour and Communist Parties plus a whole range of fellow-travellers, Sidney Webb spoke of the vim and vigour of Soviet workers - 'They go mad in their desire and determination to turn out more stuff... They cry for piece-work...' - whilst Dr Edith Summerskill waxed eloquently about the Soviet health system, then added that the use of local anaesthetics meant that patients 'having their tummy opened' were 'able to watch another patient have a leg chopped off'. 18 Right through this period, many people matched their zealousness, if not necessarily their laughable language, about many features of Soviet life. The enthusiasm of some took a sinister turn, not least when the ardent fellow-traveller Beatrice King glowingly hailed a schoolboy who openly accused a Soviet newspaper editor, who had been careless enough to run a piece which misdated Pugachev's rebellion, of 'anti-social' and 'anti-communist behaviour';19 and when another enthusiast, Richard Terrell, declared that he had 'no objection to seeing thousands of summary executions' of oppositionists in the Soviet Union.²⁰

The mid-1930s saw some unexpected recruits to the pro-Soviet lobby. One of the more surprising examples was Bernard Pares. At the start of 1935, this 'Russia Hand' and bitter opponent of the Bolsheviks, who was widely known for his full-blown uncompromising anti-communism that owed more to conservatism than to his professed liberalism, was still lambasting the Soviet regime in his customary style.21 Yet within a few months, Pares had made his first authorised trip to the Soviet Union, and his opinion was to change radically. He now considered that the Soviet Union was entering a period of liberalisation. Uneasy after Hitler's victory in 1933, and wishing to maintain the status quo in Europe, the Soviet regime hoped to safeguard its position in a dangerous world by allying with the Western democracies, and having completed the most vigorous stages of construction and with the worst aspects of the upheavals of the early 1930s now over, it was moving towards a more constitutional form of government, as it was 'sincerely anxious to obtain the goodwill of the population as a whole'. Admitting that most of his stay was limited to Moscow and that he was unable to ascertain conditions outwith the capital, Pares was convinced that life was improving for Soviet citizens, and he was greatly impressed by the factory and farm he visited, as he was by the Bolshevo model prison, the nurseries and educational and cultural facilities.

^{18.} Britain and the Soviets (1936), 50, 155.

^{19.} King (1936), 114-5.

^{20.} Terrell (1937), 236.

^{21.} Bernard Pares, 'New Trends in Eastern Policies', Slavonic and East European Review, 13 (39), April 1935, 533, 543-4.

He was cheered that under Stalin 'communism were being absorbed into the other peculiarities of Russia',²² and that the newly-revived Comintern was merely 'an organisation for propaganda behind the fronts of enemy countries... an adjunct of national defence'.²³ Pares still had his complaints. The odd paragraph in his account shows that he did not like the political restrictions upon academic work, and he hinted that there were still some three million people in concentration camps.²⁴ But all in all, the verdict was largely in favour of Moscow. Despite its prickliness over adverse comments, it could be fairly said that Pares was one critic whom the Soviet regime could well admit into its embrace.

Pares' shift in outlook was paralleled by that of the veteran Fabian socialists Beatrice and Sidney Webb. Shaken by the slump and the miserable efforts made by Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government to deal with it, they made a visit to the Soviet Union in 1932, and were so impressed with the changes taking place under the Five Year Plans that they rapidly discarded most of their previous sharp criticisms of the Soviet regime. The fruit of the Webbs' new-found fondness for the Soviet regime was Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?. First published in December 1935, this vast tome was republished with additional text and without the? in 1937.25 It is clear from this book that the Webbs had discovered in the Soviet Union - or at least in its public image, as for all its size Soviet Communism is very superficial - their ideal of a wellordered society advancing steadily under the aegis of a benevolent leadership. Like the other members of the pro-Soviet lobby, they praised the actions of the regime in its quest of 'the complete recasting of the economic and social life of the entire community', not merely in establishing huge new industrial and collectivised agriculture sectors and introducing social and cultural provisions, but, most importantly, in changing the way the population actually thought and behaved.²⁶

The Webbs were at pains to show the democratic credentials of the Soviet Union. They denied that the Soviet Union was ruled by a dictatorship, and certainly not by any single man. There was 'everywhere elaborate provision' for 'collective control' over collegiate decisions and personnel appointments 'at any stage of the [institutional] hierarchy', and 'in any branch of administration'. As for the Communist Party, it could only issue directives to its own members, and it could only influence the public through persuasion. Stalin was no dictator, he was the wrong sort of character for that

- 22. Pares (1936), 11, 20, 34ff, 91.
- 23. Bernard Pares, 'The Isolation of Russia', Listener, 16 December 1936, 1146.
- 24. Pares (1936), 72, 91.
- 25. Webb (1935 and 1937). The text of the first edition was not altered in the second edition, which was aptly distributed by the Left Book Club, and any changes consisted of a new introduction and additional chapters covering events occurring since 1935.
- 26. Webb (1937), 107.

role. A leader, yes, but one who worked carefully with his colleagues, and was loved by the population, as one could tell by the hero-worship he evoked.²⁷

The Webbs were fascinated by the institutional organisation of the Soviet Union, and much of Soviet Communism was devoted to intricate descriptions of the machinery of Soviet bodies at all levels, from the village committees at the base of the great pyramidal structures to the All-Union executives at the summits. The country had 'a government instrumented by all the adult inhabitants, organised in a varied array of collectives', based upon democratic centralism, 'an upward stream of continuously generated power', which was 'transformed at the apex into a downward stream of authoritative laws and decrees'. They emphasised the participation of the general population in the myriad local and factory committees, and in the planning process. However, this support for popular participation was heavily qualified. The Webbs emphasised on several occasions that decisions made in Soviet institutions could always be negated by higher organs, and implicit throughout this book is the supremacy of 'centralism' over 'democratic' in the governmental structure. They repeatedly condemned the concept of workers' control as parochialism, and having judged that consumers and producers were only interested in their own narrow interests, insisted that the organs of planning must be firmly centralised, although they did graciously permit workers to propose their own counter-plans in the factory which would increase — but seemingly never reduce! — local plan targets.²⁸

The technocratic Webbs placed much emphasis upon the replacement of private property in the Soviet Union by a planned state economy. Not only did the overthrow of capitalism permit the ending of vested interest, it would ensure that a greater proportion of the nation's resources, both material and human, could be put into operation and used more efficiently, and the wasteful competition, unemployment and boom-and-slump cycle of capitalism would be overcome. Moreover, as the overthrow of capitalism ended the exploitation of the working class and thus removed the basis for class struggle, there were no reasons for workers to go on strike. The Webbs were certain that the growth of inequalities would not lead to the emergence of new classes, and they assured their readers that the existence of differing social strata (as opposed to 'distinct social classes', which had disappeared) merely showed a functional difference amongst the 'intellectual leaders', lesser post-holders and workers, and were of little importance.²⁹

^{27.} Ibid, 340-1, 429ff. The Webbs' insistence upon leadership was a product of their élitism: for them, a public meeting of any size 'without intellectual leadership' was 'but a mob' (ibid, 417).

^{28.} Ibid, 7, 31, 51, 65-7, 72, 166-9, 301-3, 416-7, 450, 604-8, 645, 689-90, 700-1, 739. With barely disguised glee, they noted no less than four times how the Soviet government wound up the practice of workers' control in the factories (ibid, 166-7, 301-3, 607-8, 701-3).

^{29.} Ibid, 169-73, 630ff, 703, 719, 796.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Webbs, like Pares, were not totally satisfied. Having written at length about the ultra-democratic credentials of the regime, and stated that the only prohibitions on expression were against those opinions which were 'fundamentally in opposition' to the regime, they then proceeded to complain about the 'disease of orthodoxy', the treatment of the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin as a holy writ, and the 'deliberate discouragement and even repression... of independent thinking on fundamental social issues'. As the future progress of humanity relied upon 'the power to think new thoughts, and to formulate even the most unexpected fresh ideas', this 'highly infectious' disease was in danger of cramping people's creative powers. Rooting it within 'the concentration of authority in a highly disciplined vocation', it had led to 'an atmosphere of fear among the intelligentsia, a succession... of accusations and counter-accusations, a denial to dissentient leaders of freedom of combination for the promotion of their views', and it was particularly virulent amongst 'the less intelligent of the rank and file' of the party.³⁰ The striking contradiction between this complaint and their insistence upon the democratic nature of the regime remained neither explained nor acknowledged. Ultimately, the Webbs, with their insistence that workers should be grateful for what they received, were not concerned about democracy in general, and their concern over the 'disease of orthodoxy' had little to do with intellectual freedom and much more to do with freedom for the intellectual.31

Needless to say, such dramatic changes of heart attracted attention. The exiled Russian liberal Adriana Tyrkova-Williams accused Pares of having become 'a veritable troubadour of a new Stalin', 32 whilst Malcolm Muggeridge drew a very unfavourable comparison between his Moscow Admits a Critic and Walter Citrine's much more critical I Search for Truth in Russia. 33 On the other hand, the left-wing journalist CM Lloyd stated that it was 'rather absurd' to see Pares' book as 'the recantation of a converted sinner'. It was sensible to praise the Soviet regime's social achievements, and he added that Pares' 'love of Russia and the Russians' had 'always transcended his dislike of Bolshevik principles and methods', as if this could convincingly explain his change of outlook. 34 Being praised by the hard-line Stalinist Pat Sloan for his stance on the Moscow Trials was not particularly edifying and could not have endeared Pares to his old friends, 35

- 30. Ibid, 42, 913, 997-9, 1132, 1212-3.
- 31. The Webbs arrogantly dismissed critics of the regime, and especially those who compiled their critiques by means of a careful perusal of the Soviet press (ibid, 776).
- 32. Adriana Tyrkova-Williams, contribution to debate in Henry Wickham Steed, 'The Anti-Bolshevist Front', *International Affairs*, 16 (2), March 1937, 195.
- 33. Malcolm Muggeridge, 'When Knights Are Bold', Fortnightly, August 1936, 151-3.
- 34. CM Lloyd, 'Russia Revisited', New Statesman, 25 July 1936, 128.
- 35. Pat Sloan, 'Moscow Trials', Spectator, 26 February 1937, 360.

but it was logical, as he more or less endorsed the Stalinist line on this and many other issues.

As for the Webbs, it was not hard to criticise and poke fun at them. The right-winger Arnold Lunn called them 'decent and kindly folk' living amidst 'a curious blend of uplift, mutual improvement societies, high teas and advanced revolutionary ideals', who would be 'completely happy in heaven' if given 'some population statistics to play with, or a cherubim or two to cross-index'. Striking a more serious note, he stated that they were 'bureaucrats by passionate conviction... fascinated by a state every aspect of which was controlled by an all-powerful bureaucracy'. The Webbs were criticised for being more interested in the plans than in the results — 'nothing is gained by mistaking the word for the deed' — for relying too much on the Moscow Daily News propaganda sheet, and for failing to subject official statements to criticism. They were accused of using 'the most amazing dexterity' to highlight Soviet achievements 'while obscuring the more unseemly developments': 'The result is a great mass of information filtered so thoroughly as to be almost wholly free of the homely tang of reality.' William Beveridge criticised them for failing to show how planning could supplant the price mechanism in an economic system.

EH Carr felt that their 'verbal contortions' to demonstrate the democratic nature of the Soviet Union betrayed 'twinges of an old-fashioned liberal conscience' that would be rejected by official communists as rotten liberalism.⁴⁰ Perhaps they were in private, but, apart from insisting in a somewhat patronising manner that there was much in the book that appeared 'to fall short of complete inner understanding' and which could 'be usefully subjected to critical discussion', Rajani Palme Dutt, the main theoretician of British Stalinism, was well pleased with their work.⁴¹ Praise came from other familiar quarters, including the US fellow-travelling journalist Louis Fischer,⁴² and the *New Statesman* listed it as 'probably... the most important political book' in its 'Best Books of 1935'.⁴³ Moreover, it was also heavily used by writers, as if its size alone made it a work of genuine authority. Hence the leading British Stalinist Johnny Campbell used it to 'prove' the level of popular participation in Soviet institutions,⁴⁴ and the Christian socialist Noreen Blythe plundered it unmercifully to show the won-

- 36. Lunn (1939), 90-1.
- 37. JB Condliffe, 'USSR', International Affairs, 15 (3), May 1936, 464-6.
- 38. Violet Conolly, 'USSR', International Affairs, 17 (5), September 1938, 735.
- 39. William Beveridge, 'Soviet Communism', Political Quarterly, 7 (3), July 1936, 362.
- 40. EH Carr, 'Russia Through Fabian Eyes', Fortnightly, February 1936, 244.
- 41. Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', Labour Monthly, January 1936, 3-26.
- 42. Louis Fischer, 'The Webbs on Russia', New Statesman, 7 December 1935, 895-6.
- 43. 'Best Books of 1935', New Statesman, 25 January 1936, 124.
- 44. Campbell (1939), 153.

ders of Soviet society.⁴⁵ But even friendly reviewers insisted that they naïvely understated the level of 'dragooned uniformity' in their new civilisation.⁴⁶

Fulsome praise for the tremendous changes made in the Soviet Union was not limited to the pro-Soviet lobby. The anti-Stalinist Independent Labour Party congratulated the Soviet workers and peasants for 'the great progress' that they had made 'in industrial, agricultural, social and economic development', and for 'the vast advance in the material and cultural conditions of the people'. 47 A book by the disgraced Trotsky, published in Britain in 1937, that was both a sharp denunciation of the Stalinist regime and an incisive investigation of the economic, political and social problems facing the country, nevertheless opened with a veritable rhapsody to the 'gigantic achievements in industry' and the 'enormously promising beginnings in agriculture', new cities, a bigger proletariat and higher cultural levels. Altogether: 'Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not in the pages of Das Kapital, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the earth's surface - not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity.'48 Clement Attlee, the moderate leader of the Labour Party and otherwise a strong critic of official communism, talked of 'the great experiment in socialist Russia' where a community was 'actually putting into operation the socialist economic system' about which other socialists had only dreamed.⁴⁹ William Mellor, a leading Labour Party left-winger, considered that despite its imperfections, the Soviet Union was 'the most powerful stronghold of the world working class'.50 Even Bertrand Russell was optimistic about the prospects for economic success and democratisation in the Soviet Union.51

People who rejected both the ideology and the repressive sides of the Soviet regime could nonetheless still find praise for many aspects of Soviet life. The Fabian historian AL Rowse considered that the advances in industry and education and 'the extension of a rationalist, scientific culture' represented the 'westernisation of Russia', a 'more audacious and complete drive' to fulfil the progressive trends already in motion in the West.⁵² After making an extensive trip around the Soviet Union in 1935, Walter Citrine, the moderately-minded General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, applauded 'the titanic efforts which had been made by the Soviet government to raise the low economic and cultural standards of their people'. He noted the improvements that

- 45. Blythe (1938), passim.
- 46. AL Rowse, 'Books of the Quarter', Criterion, April 1936, 504.
- 47. Independent Labour Party (1937), 10.
- 48. Trotsky (1937b), 15-16.
- 49. Attlee (1937), 10.
- 50. William Mellor, 'Stalin's Appeal', Tribune, 18 February 1938, 8.
- 51. Bertrand Russell, 'British Foreign Policy', New Statesman, 18 July 1936, 82.
- 52. AL Rowse, 'Books of the Quarter', Criterion, April 1936, 506.

had been made under the Soviet regime. Schools, crèches, medical care, food, transport and clothing were clearly better, and unemployment and most evidence of illiteracy and prostitution had disappeared.⁵³ Robert Boothby, a prominent Conservative MP, praised the 'experiments... in the social, economic and political fields which may prove to be of infinite value to humanity in the future'.54 A Chatham House study group predicted that 'separate national feelings' amongst the various nationalities might lose any political significance.55 Few people rejected the Soviet experience in toto, 56 and, on the left, George Orwell was pretty much on his own when he denounced 'machine-worship' and 'the stupid cult of Russia'.57 Violet Conolly was highly critical of Bolshevism, yet she appreciated the regime's 'solid achievements', including 'the resolute and successful campaign against illiteracy, the care for children, the colossal effort involved in building up a mighty heavy industry from scratch, the many-sided impulse given to the lives of the "dark people" of Russia'.58 Even the fascist Francis Yeats-Brown could grudgingly congratulate the Soviet government for its courage and idealism in developing the country, and he praised it for its industrial and literacy policies, and for having 'given hope' and 'the horizon of a full life' to millions of youngsters.⁵⁹

Although some critical commentators saw — usually from afar — a nascent opposition growing to the regime, and even prophesied its downfall,⁶⁰ other critics who had spent some time there did not agree. Conolly considered that whether one liked it or not, there was 'no denying the existence of millions of exuberantly self-satisfied Soviet citizens, building socialism blithely under the Plan'.⁶¹ The US engineer John Littlepage sensed little sign of revolt on the part of the workers, despite the generally poor conditions they endured;⁶² and another observant visitor, John Brown, reckoned that a free poll would result in a 95 per cent vote in favour of the new system.⁶³

The new Soviet constitution was not only warmly welcomed by the pro-Soviet lobby – the CPGB's General Secretary Harry Pollitt declared that it indicated 'the strength of the Soviet Union, the wide extensions of democracy throughout the coun-

- 53. Citrine (1936), vii, 114ff.
- 54. Britain and the Soviets (1936), 5.
- 55. Royal Institute of International Affairs (1939a), 289.
- 56. See, for example, Lunn (1939); Lazarevski (1935).
- 57. Orwell (1937), 248.
- 58. Conolly (1938), 174-5.
- 59. Yeats-Brown (1939), 29-31.
- 60. Lazarevski (1935), 57, 292ff; de Basily (1938), 476-8.
- 61. Conolly (1938), 174.
- 62. Littlepage and Bess (1939), 85.
- 63. Brown (1935), 269. Other critical observers also considered that Soviet workers accepted the legitimacy of the regime. See Francis (1939), 84, 101, 106; Margaret Miller, 'What Freedom Means in Soviet Russia', *Listener*, 13 February 1935, 264.

try because of this strength'64 — but was praised in wider circles as the coming of age of Soviet democracy, or at least a prefiguration of a democratic revival in the Soviet Union. Some went further. It is worth citing at length George Hicks, a left-wing Labour MP:

This constitution is, indeed, the charter of socialist civilisation. It is the sign of the intelligent progress of humanity through the power of the working class. It embodies the quintessence of the thoughts of our class in respect to the organisation of self-government. It marks the beginning of the New Order not merely in Europe but throughout the world. It is the legislative forerunner of the Constitution of the World Federation of Socialist Republics — the mighty Union of the peoples of the world — in which the men and women of all lands will be joined together, exchanging the products of their soil and manufactures, their ideas on work and play, and making known, one to another, their strivings and plans for a healthier, happier and more cultured life.⁶⁵

Harold Laski, a leading British left-wing intellectual, considered that the constitution represented 'a big step forward from proletarian dictatorship to socialist democracy'. To be sure, it enshrined the dominance of the Communist Party, but that was unavoidable, and anyway the 'gains in individual freedom' it offered were 'politically inconceivable' in fascist countries and 'socially inconceivable' in any capitalist state, and Soviet 'economic success' was 'naturally producing a relaxation of political control'. Even Alexander Kerensky, that great loser of 1917, agreed. In mid-1937, on the very eve of the Great Terror, he talked of the possibility of Russia 'with painful slowness returning to the path of healthy democratisation'. Claiming the existence of 'a sharp conflict' in government circles between traditional Bolsheviks and those of a more nationalist and democratic orientation, he ventured: 'Very tentatively, as if half trying to deceive themselves, while endeavouring at least to preserve the phraseology of Lenin, the Stalinists are seeking salvation on the road to democracy.'67

- 64. Harry Pollitt, 'The Way Forward', in Communist Party of Great Britain (1937), 87. See also Spender (1937), 275.
- 65. George Hicks, 'Foreword', Constitution (1936), 17-18. Others, including Norman Angell, Harold Laski, DN Pritt, Sidney Webb and the inevitable vicar, provided forewords that were only slightly less fulsome. Some were appreciative for other reasons. A particularly die-hard British colonial official was heard to remark that had he been allowed to remain in Egypt, he would have introduced the Soviet electoral system there (Bosworth Goldman, 'Reviews', Slavonic and East European Review, 15 (44), January 1937, 468).
- 66. Harold Laski, 'A London Diary', *New Statesman*, 20 June 1936, 959. Laski veered erratically, sometimes in the space of a single article. For instance, he condemned Barbusse's hagiography of Stalin, then promptly lauded the Soviet leader's 'amazing tenacity' and 'unflinching determination', and praised the 'incomparable significance' of the achievements made under his aegis ('Stalin', *New Statesman*, 2 November 1935, 646).
- 67. Alexander Kerensky, 'The Turn Towards Freedom: Twenty Years of Revolution', Slavonic and East

Nonetheless, visitors and commentators of varying outlooks continued to find much that displeased them. Familiar criticisms of Soviet society continued to be made. Attlee deplored the 'over-regimentation' and 'the attempt to indoctrinate a whole nation with a single point of view'.68 The radical socialist Sally Graves felt that the Stalinist system was 'intended to encourage the active participation of all citizens in the small day-to-day adjustments', but the 'larger initiative' was the preserve of the 'hand-picked aristocracy'.69 Citrine was 'profoundly disturbed by the curtailment of personal liberty and the complete suppression of independent political criticism', and was concerned that this might prevent 'the development of that flexibility of mind, that vivid fearlessness of imagination' which produced 'the great artists, musicians, writers and inventors'. He was not impressed with the Stalinists' explanation that the party dictatorship was temporary, as it seemed no less relaxed than when he was told that in 1925.70 Lord Lothian praised the 'stupendous' changes that had occurred, but asked whether liberty of opinion would always remain 'a conspiracy', and whether the only choice would remain 'fanatical obedience to party dogma' or exclusion from political debate.71 An exiled German liberal informed his British audience of the dangerous consequences of restricting intellectual debate even for a limited period:

Cut off by a harsh censorship from all that invigorates and renews intellectual life, the horrible consequence will follow — a whole society of men and women reduced to a flock of sterile imitators, mere echoes of the state, finally mental deficients.⁷²

Margaret Miller considered that although many improvements had been made for women, the slow implementation of communal services meant that many of them still suffered the 'double burden' of factory and domestic work.⁷³ Lancelot Lawton poured scorn on the Soviet nationalities policies, with particular reference to Ukraine, which he claimed the Soviet authorities oppressed worse than Tsarism ever did.⁷⁴ Victor Serge, an oppositional communist who was lucky enough to be able to leave the Soviet Union for the West in 1936, produced his impressions of the country he had just left. In a sustained polemic against the Stalinist regime, he condemned the growing inequalities and repression, and noted the manner in which the flourishing of culture during the earlier years of the Soviet republic had been forced into a stifling confor-

European Review, 16 (46), July 1937, 87, 92.

- 68. Attlee (1935), 114-5.
- 69. Graves (1939), 178.
- 70. Citrine (1936), vii, 285, 314.
- 71. Lord Lothian, 'A Panegyric of Communism', Listener, 9 October 1935, vii.
- 72. L Schwarzschild, 'Feuchtwanger's Message', Controversy, October 1937, 20.
- 73. Margaret Miller, 'What Freedom Means in Soviet Russia', Listener, 13 February 1935, 264.
- 74. Lancelot Lawton, 'The Ukrainian Nation', Contemporary Review, October 1935, 431-8.

mity, and how science, especially philosophy, political economy and history, was now mutilated by the demands of the ruling élite. Serge's concerns about Soviet culture were echoed by others. Serge also brought to light the prevalence *and necessity* of the corruption that infected Soviet institutions from the lowly employee to the very top: 'All the wheels of the colossal machine are oiled and fouled by it. Its role is as great as that of planning, because without it the plan would never be realised.'

Citrine was not impressed with the much-vaunted concept of the factory 'wall newspaper' in which the Soviet worker could criticise his fellow-worker or manager. Not only was it demeaning publicly to condemn one's workmates, its democratic image was fraudulent: 'No worker could freely express his criticisms of the basic principles of the regime or of the ruling party or its leaders. I could not imagine any of them publicly or privately criticising Stalin, for example, any more than I could imagine a German worker criticising Hitler.' Citrine was also appalled by the inferior quality of some of the factories he visited, and of much of the housing, not merely of the old hovels that still existed in many places, but of the nicely-designed but jerry-built modern workers' houses which would soon degenerate into slums. John Brown felt that the 'triangle' arrangement in industry could not disguise the fact that the managerial personnel in Soviet factories were remarkably similar to their counterparts in Britain. The incessant propaganda and enforced conformity was noted with distaste, as was the growing sycophancy around Stalin and the lesser figures of the Soviet leadership. On the soviet leadership.

Members of the Soviet Communist Party were seen by one independently-minded socialist as being ignorant of the outside world — their impressions of workers' conditions in Britain bore no resemblance to reality — unthinkingly accepting everything they were told by their superiors, and being 'greater snobs than ever were found in lower-grade clerks' clubs in Calcutta or Shanghai',⁸¹ sentiments that were echoed by another visitor, who declared that their 'colossal' ignorance had 'bred a superiority

^{75.} Serge (1937), 48, 54.

^{76.} Brown (1935), 265; Geoffrey Walton, 'The Arts in Totalitarian Russia', Scrutiny, September 1937, 205-7.

^{77.} Serge (1937), 41.

^{78.} Citrine (1936), 32, 85, 144, 157-8, 214. Conolly saw many slums, but also noted that some of the new workers' dwellings were of good quality, see Conolly (1938), 16, 45, 150, 165. The economist Michael Polanyi stated that the great increase in the urban population — from 11 million to 38.7 million — during the First Five Year Plan, together with the shortfall in house-building — only 22 million square metres instead of the planned 42 million — had led to a fall in the average floor space of an urban dwelling from six to five square metres, see Polanyi (1936), 9.

^{79.} Brown (1935), 1934.

^{80.} Conolly (1938), 174ff; Luck (1938), 214-5.

^{81.} Brown (1935), 221, 247.

complex, a sneering self-satisfaction, not so very dissimilar from Junker swagger'.⁸² Chamberlin considered that fanaticism was still rife within the party,⁸³ although his fellow journalist Eugene Lyons noted that popular enthusiasm had largely faded away by the time he departed from Soviet soil in early 1934.⁸⁴ Serge reported that by the mid-1930s, careerism amongst the youth was rife, and a genuine interest in politics — as opposed to the parroting of the official ideology — was declining even amongst the Communist Youth.⁸⁵

There were a few people who had taken the pilgrims' path, and, disappointed with Soviet reality, joined the ranks of the critics. Two members of the US Communist Party, Andrew Smith and Fred Beal, worked in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, and their accounts, both published in Britain in 1937, showed how they became disillusioned with the country to which they had looked with such enthusiasm. In particular, both recoiled at the privileged lifestyle enjoyed by party officials and the pampering of foreign visitors, which compared starkly with the dreadful living and working conditions endured by the workers, and the general deprivation.86 The observations of the popular radical French author André Gide appeared in an English translation in 1937. He had hoped to see a land 'where Utopia was in a process of becoming reality', but all he found was poor food, dreadful consumer goods, laziness, growing inequality and ideological sycophancy, a one-man dictatorship, and an 'autocracy of respectability, of conformity' which within a generation would 'become that of money'. His conclusion was brutal, and certainly consigned him to the outer darkness as far as the pro-Soviet lobby was concerned: 'And I doubt whether in any other country in the world, even Hitler's Germany, thought be less free, more bowed down, more fearful (terrorised), more vassalised.'87

The return to a more conservative framework in respect of the family and education pleased some right-wingers, who, often with more than a hint of satisfaction, felt that a suitably chastened Soviet regime was reverting to a moral stance that, in Arnold Lunn's words, was based on laws that could not be 'defied with impunity'. 88 On the other hand, the popular radical philosopher CEM Joad was doubtful whether much

- 82. Luck (1938), 77.
- 83. Chamberlin (1935b), 18, 37.
- 84. Lyons (1938), 558.
- 85. Serge (1937), 34-8.
- 86. Smith (1937), 42ff, 71, 92, 102ff, 179; Beal (1937), 236, 245, 261. Lyons' recollections of his days as a journalist in Moscow from 1928 to early 1934 are also valuable, see Lyons (1938).
- 87. Gide (1937), 15, 36ff, 58, 62, 71. He was subjected to much abuse from Stalinists and fellow-travellers, see Gide (1938).
- 88. Lunn (1939), 177. See also B Mirkine-Guetzévitch, 'Recent Developments in Laws, Constitutions and Administration', *Political Quarterly*, 8 (2), April 1937, 270.

good, particularly in respect of genuine personal freedom, would come about in this new puritanical atmosphere.89 The banning of abortion in 1936 led to divisions amongst radicals. The most ardent Soviet sympathisers took it in their stride, and Sloan insisted that with no stigma attached to illegitimacy and no unemployment, there was 'no social reason for artificially limiting population', and that Soviet policies were now aimed at enabling every woman to bear 'as many children' as was 'consistent with her health', and 'without... suffering any greater economic or social burden than men'. 90 Beatrice King could also be relied upon to support the ban, 91 whilst the Webbs, after appreciating the regime's abortion facilities in the first edition of Soviet Communism, subsequently justified the official clampdown on abortion in the second edition, not merely neither explaining nor acknowledging the contradiction, but actually publishing the two contradictory texts.92 Others were deeply disturbed. The Abortion Law Reform Association accused the Soviet government of failing to treat women as responsible judges of their own situation, and declared that the prohibition would lead to Soviet women becoming 'conscripted mothers'.93 Even Louis Fischer admitted that the initial proposal to prohibit abortion provoked 'a wave of resentment' and 'widespread opposition'.94

Contrasting views continued to appear in respect of the Soviet penal system. Accounts of the cruel regime in the labour camps were produced by inmates who had managed to escape, 95 whereas supporters of the regime gave a somewhat rosier picture. Sloan described the use of penal labour on the Baltic-White Sea Canal:

An essential feature of such large construction enterprises is that they provide work for people of all specialities. Therefore it is unusual, when serving a sentence in the USSR, for people not to be able to practice their own speciality. And since, on such construction jobs, as on construction jobs all over the USSR, there is a continual need for skilled personnel, the unskilled prisoner may learn a trade during his sentence, and be finally released with considerably higher qualifications than he had when arrested!⁹⁶

Yet beneath this disturbing portrayal of the Gulag as a combined technical college and

- 89. CEM Joad, 'The Reappearance of Sin in Russia', New Statesman, 8 February 1936, 181-2.
- 90. Sloan (1937), 127. Note that Sloan implied that all women wanted to have large families, and that he overlooked the question of the economic pressures that a large number of children would exert on a family.
- 91. Beatrice King, 'Bolshevism and the Family', New Statesman, 10 October 1936, 500-2.
- 92. Webb (1935), 826-33; (1937) 826-33, 1202-6.
- 93. J Chance and A Jenkins, 'Abortion', New Statesman, 17 October 1936, 584. See also Trotsky (1937b), 145.
- 94. Louis Fischer, 'A Reply to Joad', New Statesman, 22 February 1936, 256-7.
- 95. Solonevich (1936).
- 96. Sloan (1937), 112.

employment agency, stood a glimmer of truth. John Littlepage, a US engineer who spent a decade working in the Soviet gold industry, pointed out that when peasants were conscripted to work in mines and factories, their unfamiliarity with industrial technique led initially to a fall in production, but productivity revived after six months as they became accustomed to the work, and kulaks often made good workers once they learnt their jobs. Moreover, he added that as the 1930s drew by, the conditions for forced labourers had improved to the degree that, apart from their being tied to a particular enterprise, they were not treated much differently to ordinary workers.⁹⁷

Chamberlin noted the contrast between the humane treatment of common criminals, particularly in respect of their rehabilitation, and the draconian laws in respect of theft of state property. Critical visitors continued to be impressed by the aspects of the penal system which they were able to observe, although not everyone accepted unquestioningly the much-proclaimed successes in respect of the rehabilitation of criminals. Some pointed to the different treatment meted out to political prisoners, whom, as one observer explained, the regime wanted to have exterminated rather than 'treated', on the basis that whilst individual crime would only affect a few people, political crime could seriously affect the whole system.

Critical commentators were not impressed by the new constitution. The *Spectator* declared that every clause that guaranteed liberty was contradicted in practice, and that any election run under it would be no more than 'a national plebiscite, of the kind invented by Louis Napoleon, imitated by Herr Hitler, and now brought to perfection in the Soviet Union'. The electorate would be registering 'a universal vote of confidence and of adoration' in Stalin and his regime. The elections held in 1937 were seen as a fraud, not least when names on the voting list suddenly disappeared. Carr considered that the constitution merely paid 'lip service... to some of the external forms of democracy', whilst both Chamberlin and Paul Scheffer, a German journalist with much experience of Soviet affairs, added that it was purely for external consumption, in order, as the former put it, 'to win sympathy in the democratic countries'.

The debate over the new constitution keyed into the long-running discussion

- 97. Littlepage and Bess (1939), 81-2, 129-30.
- 98. Chamberlin (1935b), 7.
- 99. Brown (1935), 228.
- 100. Margaret Miller, 'USSR', International Affairs, 15 (3), May 1936, 470.
- 101. HS Marchant, 'Crime and Punishment in Russia', Spectator, 20 August 1937, 303.
- 102. 'Russia Makes Elections', Spectator, 10 December 1937, 1038-9. Serge called the provision of universal suffrage 'a plebiscitory comedy on the Italian or German style', see Serge (1937), 197.
- 103. 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 25 December 1937, 634.
- 104. Carr (1938), 258.
- 105. Chamberlin (1937), 16; Paul Scheffer, 'Stalin's Revenge', Fortnightly, March 1937, 263ff.

about the democratic credentials of the Soviet regime. Some who saw the Soviet Union as undemocratic explained its coercive features by referring to Russia's gloomy past; summed up in the words of the liberal historian GP Gooch: 'Russia is accustomed to autocracy.'106 Robert Seton-Watson talked of 'a country of extremes' with a tradition of 'violent oscillation', and a tendency to solve problems by 'dictatorial methods', 'brute force', and 'riding roughshod over the lives and hopes of the individual man and citizen', all of which he put down to 'a strange lack of balance in the national character'. 107 Others, such as Attlee, felt that the violent road to socialism which the Bolsheviks favoured 'implied the subjugation, if not the extermination', of the classes opposed to socialism, and thus the acceptance of a totalitarian state. Moreover, once the method of terror was adopted, it was 'very difficult to abandon it'. 108 Writing for the Peace Pledge Union, the writer Aldous Huxley claimed that the use of revolutionary violence had 'inevitably' led to the Bolsheviks' intentions being perverted, with the result that the Soviet Union was 'not communistic', but 'an elaborately hierarchical society' ruled by an increasingly bellicose, nationalistic and ruthless élite. The continuing levels of coercion had led to the situation whereby it 'remained natural for Russians to regard the use of violence, both within the country and without, as normal and inevitable'. 109 Chamberlin considered both views to be valid, with the Soviet Union, on the one hand, demonstrating 'the working out of a fanatical theory' which dramatically changed society at the expense of millions of its members, and, on the other, showing 'typically Russian traits' in a new form, most notably 'the absolute right of the state to use individuals and destroy them', as was its wont, 'for the achievement of its ends'.110

Some commentators, however, went from trying to explain the lack of democracy under Stalinism towards justifying it. The Christian socialist John Middleton Murry forsook his insistence on the need for democracy under socialism when it came to the Soviet Union. As the Russians had never known democracy, 'the introduction of an autocratic socialism in place of the old autocratic "feudalism" was a definite *political* advance'. And so: 'For the vast majority of them the change was simple and beneficent, it was a change from arbitrary government in the sole interest of a corrupt ruling class

^{106.} Gooch (1935), 30. See also Lord Noel Buxton, 'Moscow 1935', Contemporary Review, September 1935, 280; Citrine (1936), 323.

^{107.} Seton-Watson (1938), 106-7.

^{108.} Attlee (1937), 115-6.

^{109.} Huxley (1937), 394-5.

^{110.} Chamberlin (1935b), 16. He compared Stalin with Peter I, and stated that the Slavophils' ideas about the 'rotten West' were reappearing in the outlook of Soviet Communist Party members (ibid, 252-3).

to arbitrary government in the interest of the vast mass of the people.'¹¹¹ The US sociologist Bertram Maxwell declared that as Western ideas of liberty had been known only to 'a very few', the Soviet regime eminently suited the Russian people, and: 'Only in a rigid absolutism now called "The Rule of the Proletariat" could Russia with its cultural backwardness progress.'¹¹² Murry and Maxwell had some worries about undemocratic practices, but supporters of the Soviet regime had no such qualms. Lion Feuchtwanger, the noted German radical author and playwright, explained to his British audience why democracy of 'the West European conception' was quite unsuitable for the Soviet Union:

The establishment of socialism would never have been possible with an unrestricted right to abuse. No government, constantly attacked in parliament and in the press and dependent on the result of elections, could ever have been able to impose on the population the hardships which alone made this establishment possible, and, faced with the alternative either of using up a very great part of their strength in parrying foolish and malicious attacks, or of bending the whole of this strength to the completion of the structure, the leaders of the [Soviet] Union decided to restrict the right to abuse.¹¹³

Note how he equated democratic debate with the 'unrestricted right to abuse'. That an exile from Hitlerite Germany could openly express the condescending idea that democracy was 'very precious' for the cultured West European, but quite unnecessary for the rough and vulgar Slav, indicated the double standards of the pro-Soviet lobby.¹¹⁴

Writing in the midst of the Moscow Trials and the terror, Sloan took the discussion about democracy to a most sinister level. He accepted that there were restrictions upon freedom of speech, and admitted that criticising the government was beyond the pale, on the grounds that the 'people as a whole' did not oppose it. Those Old Bolsheviks whom the Soviet regime was dispatching had 'time and again, expressed their views until the whole of the democratic institutions of the country had finally decided by a vast majority that the propagation of such views was not in accordance with the interests of the community'. The fact that they could no longer express themselves was 'because the people no longer wanted to hear them', which showed 'not the undemocratic, but the democratic character of such a prohibition'. Moreover, as the Soviet Union lived under the constant threat of an imperialist attack, the laws of war would

^{111.} John Middleton Murry, 'Russia and the West', Adelphi, December 1935, 137. This overlooked the very democratic organs that were built by workers in 1917. Strachey got around this by declaring that the soviets may have been ultra-democratic, but the workers 'had to learn to use these institutions', with the implication that they were unable to do so and that the rise of an overarching party-state apparatus was thus not only inevitable but beneficial. See Strachey (1936), 166.

^{112.} Maxwell (1935), 189, 213-4.

^{113.} Feuchtwanger (1937), 82-3.

^{114.} Ibid, 77.

be enforced in instances where 'objectively speaking' citizens were 'in collaboration with the avowed enemies of the Soviet state' — in reality, promoting ideas that differed, if only slightly, from those of the Soviet leadership — and they would thus be candidates for the death penalty. And so, the shooting of those who insisted on their right to criticise was both justified and a mark of the democratic nature of the regime. Sloan subsequently justified the restrictions upon Soviet citizens travelling abroad on the grounds that they would be 'liable to be made a cause for a diplomatic incident', and thus become 'a serious liability on the Soviet side'. But it didn't matter, as Soviet workers and peasants 'never did travel abroad anyway'. Sloan accepted the political monopoly of the Soviet Communist Party on the rationale that class conflict no longer existed and thus no rival parties were required. His colleague Ivor Montagu employed an underhand syllogism for the same purpose: the Soviet constitution outlawed exploitation and oppression, the party supported the essence of the constitution; if one opposed the party, one therefore opposed the essence of the constitution, and thus supported exploitation and oppression. 117

The school of thought that drew comparisons between Stalinism and fascism was given additional impetus by the grisly developments in both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. A large number of observers of various political persuasions claimed that the Soviet Union and the fascist states shared many features, including a collectivised economy, the suppression of democratic freedoms and individual rights, the monopolisation of political life by a single ideologically-governed party, and a hypertrophied leader cult, 118 and some claimed that Stalin's regime was more repressive than the fascist ones. 119 Some observers considered that the growing nationalism of the Soviet regime indicated that it was proceeding in a National Bolshevik or Strasserite direction. 120 Others considered that the Soviet regime had encouraged or even engen-

- 115. Sloan (1937), 116, 235.
- 116. Sloan (1938), 208, 254. One could ask, although Sloan and his colleagues never did, whether under these circumstances a party was necessary at all.
- 117. Ivor Montagu, 'The Land of the Free', Left News, July 1936, 48.
- 118. This is the theme of Chamberlin (1937). See also Sisley Huddleston, 'The Clenched Fist in France', Fortnightly, July 1936, 37-8; Malcolm Muggeridge, 'When Knights Are Bold', Fortnightly, August 1936, 158-9; 'Statistics of the Five Year Plan', Times Literary Supplement, 31 July 1937, 550; JA Hobson, 'Thoughts on Our Present Discontents', Political Quarterly, 9 (1), January 1938, 50; George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, March 1938, 358-9; Thompson (1939), 48-50.
- 119. Chamberlin (1937), 47, 59; Barmine (1938), 214.
- 120. 'R-us', 'Russia at the Crossroads', Contemporary Review, December 1937, 685; AS Elwell-Sutton, 'Theory and Practice in the USSR', New English Weekly, 11 February 1937, 347; Fodor (1938), 291-2.

dered fascism by abjuring democracy.¹²¹ The intensification of state intervention in the economy under the Nazis led to the idea that they were dominating big business and implementing an anti-capitalist programme.¹²² In condemning the general lack of freedom in the Soviet and fascist states, some commentators sought out crumbs of comfort. Endorsing the theory of the non-capitalist nature of Nazi Germany, the social democratic theoretician Richard Crossman accepted the validity of the egalitarian image of the Soviet Union when he claimed that the sole difference between it and Hitler's Germany was that the latter was driven by the quest for 'imperial power', and the former by 'the ideal of social equality'.¹²³ Carr argued that although it was as regrettable to see a young Soviet communist reading *Pravda* as it was to see a young Nazi reading *Angriff*, were it not for the Russian Revolution, the former would probably not have been able to read, whilst but for the Nazi takeover, the latter would have been able to read anything he pleased.¹²⁴

The parallels drawn between the fascist states and the Soviet Union, now often grouped as the totalitarian countries, encouraged a viewpoint that considered that the far left and far right shared many historical roots. The conservative historian Alfred Cobban considered that fascism took from syndicalism the promotion of violence and emotional appeals and the abjuration of the humanistic aspects of socialism, and mutated the class struggle into the fight of 'have' versus 'have not' nations, whilst the German variety was also rooted in Bismarckian state socialism, which involved state interference in the religious and economic aspects of life. 125 Diana Spearman, an upand-coming conservative theoretician, claimed that fascism and Bolshevism were heirs to the anti-democratic and anti-intellectual thinkers of the nineteenth century, in whose ranks she rather indiscriminately bundled Sorel, Marx, Bergson and Nietzsche. 126 Gooch considered that Bolshevism and fascism based themselves upon the 'younger generation' which came to age during the brutal years of the First World War. Identifying democracy with the process that led to the war, they repudiated it as inefficient, irresolute and procrastinating.¹²⁷ Spearman and Cobban agreed that both fascism and Bolshevism emphasised the role of strong leadership and violence in politics, and noted that the attempts of the regimes that they established to control the

^{121. &#}x27;Episodes of the Month', National Review, May 1939, 556. See also Chamberlin (1935b), 229; Lunn (1939), xxxii; 'The Truth About the Popular Front', Socialist Standard, September 1936, 136.

^{122.} Drucker (1939), passim; FU Haggnau, 'German Housekeeping', Fortnightly, September 1938, 357.

^{123.} RHS Crossman, 'Is Nazi Germany Capitalistic?', New Statesman, 26 November 1938, 8634.

^{124.} Carr (1937), 13. See also GP Gooch, 'The German Revolution', Contemporary Review, February 1935, 243.

^{125.} Cobban (1939), 120ff. See also Fodor (1938), 103-6.

^{126.} Spearman (1939), 12.

^{127.} Gooch (1935), 7.

economy necessarily led to the suppression of all factors, political and economic, that could pose a focus of opposition to them. 128 Spearman added that totalitarian governments claimed to represent society as a whole, and no disagreement with the government could thus be tolerated, nor any free organisations that might exert leverage upon the government.¹²⁹ Cobban stated that even where the historical antecedents of the two systems differed, such as the Bolsheviks' adoption of the Jacobin ideas of the absolute sovereignty of the people, the end result was much the same, as in Russia the Bolsheviks only temporarily won the support of the peasant majority of the population, and therefore ended up ruling as a dictatorship. 130 Frederick Voigt, the former German correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, promoted a religious variant of the theory of totalitarianism. He considered that Marxism and Nazism were 'fundamentally akin' in that they both worshipped the 'collective man' and intended to 'make man master of his own destiny'. Both required scapegoats, the former in capitalists, the latter in Jews. Both were anti-capitalist. Marxism had no intellectual value whatsoever; like Nazism it was an inhuman, chiliastic, messianic and violent pseudo-religion. There were differences; fascism disavowed Marxism's appeal to reason, Lenin still believed in the nineteenth-century concept of the basic goodness of people, whilst Hitler was contemptuous of humanity - not that this, Voigt insisted, made the slightest difference in practice. 131

Voigt endorsed the concept previously promoted by others, most notably Berdyaev, that Marxism appealed greatly to radical intellectuals in Russia, 'a land of extravagant messianic faiths'. Berdyaev himself developed his analysis of Bolshevism and the Russian revolutionary tradition in the light of the establishment of the Stalinist system, claiming that revolutionaries could become corrupted in a period of transition towards socialism under the rule of a single party, as for many the will to power would become 'satisfying in itself', and they would 'fight for it as an end and not as a means'. By the mid-1930s, this process had resulted in the Soviet Union becoming a state capitalist country tending towards fascism, with a totalitarian regime, a leader cult, nationalism and a militarised youth. Yet ugly as this was, he felt that it suited the Russian people, as it fitted in with their national traditions. They now had a new faith in the worship of the plan and the machine: 'Totalitarianism, the demand for wholeness of faith as the basis of the kingdom, fits in with the deep religious and social in-

^{128.} Spearman (1939), 103-13, 226; Cobban (1939), 116, 211ff.

^{129.} Spearman (1939), 163.

^{130.} Cobban (1939), 61ff, 114.

^{131.} Voigt (1938), 1, 5, 13ff, 35ff, 74, 132.

^{132.} Ibid, 31.

stincts of the people.'133 Berdyaev's ideas about the quest for power were echoed by Bertrand Russell.¹³⁴

The ideas adumbrated by Cobban and Spearman that economic planning led to a totalitarian society were articulated by a small but vociferous free market lobby. By this time living in Britain, the Austrian economist Frederick Hayek saw the repressive nature of the Soviet system as a direct and logical result of the quest for a collectivist society. Centralised planning, he claimed, presupposed complete agreement throughout society upon social aims, and this required an ideological consensus around a detailed code of values, which itself necessitated the dictatorial direction of society, as no alternative ideas could be countenanced. Information had to be controlled, and any government attempting to plan the economy necessarily had to be totalitarian. Moreover, he stated:

Every doubt in the rightness of the ends aimed at or the methods adopted is apt to diminish loyalty and enthusiasm and must therefore be treated as sabotage. The creation and enforcement of the common creed and of the belief in the supreme wisdom of the ruler becomes an indispensable instrument for the success of the planned system. The ruthless use of all potential instruments of propaganda and the suppression of every expression of dissent is not an accidental accompaniment of a centrally-directed system — it is an essential part of it.¹³⁵

From this point of view, collectivism could only represent the road to a totalitarian dystopia. There could never be a democratic form of collectivism.

The evolution of the Soviet Union since 1917 was of great interest to critical left-wingers, who were concerned about the way in which so many of the promises of the October Revolution had not been kept by the Soviet regime. The most extensive treatment of this question was Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, which was written during 1936 and published in an English translation in Britain in 1937. The exiled Bolshevik leader started by elaborating on his previous statements as to why the Bolsheviks' promise of liberation had not been fulfilled in Russia, and why the 'functional differentiation' of the Communist Party from the working class, that is to say, its role as the government of the country, became transformed into a social differentiation,

- 133. Berdyaev (1937), 152-3, 166, 171-2.
- 134. Russell (1938), 10. He added that 'the amalgamation of political and economic power' in the Soviet Union had ensured that the Bolsheviks had gone further in centralising power than previous power-worshipping regimes (ibid, 121). Both Berdyaev and Chamberlin claimed that Lenin was unable to recognise the corrupting influence of power upon his colleagues, see Berdyaev (1937),152-3; Chamberlin (1935a), 375.
- 135. FA von Hayek, 'Freedom and the Economic System', Contemporary Review, April 1938, 435-9. The exiled Russian economist Boris Brutzkus and the liberal US commentator Walter Lippman both took a similar view. See Brutzkus (1935), 49, 233; Lippman (1937), 51.

with 'the wielding of power' becoming 'the speciality of a definite social group', to the extent that it had through the 1920s transformed itself into a ruling élite. 136

Trotsky denied that the Soviet Union was a socialist country. Social inequalities were deepening and becoming institutionalised, and it was now ruled by a privileged, totalitarian élite. The Soviet economy contained contradictory trends, as the means of production were in the hands of the state, and were thus socialised and planned, whereas, because of the relative backwardness of the society, the distribution of everyday goods was carried out through the market. The Soviet Union was thus best defined as 'a *preparatory* regime *transitional* from capitalism to socialism', or 'a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism'. He warned that although this process of transition could go towards socialism, 'a backslide to capitalism' was 'wholly possible'. Moreover, in order to guarantee the future of the Soviet élite, leading bureaucrats would need to pass their privileges on to their children, thus raising the question of the rights of property — and the conversion of state property into private property.¹³⁷

Trotsky insisted that a process of democratisation was necessary if the material and human resources of the Soviet Union were to be used efficiently and humanely. Although Trotsky was not alone in demanding this, 39 what marked him off was his insistence upon the revival of *soviet* rather than liberal democracy, as he was determined to see the Soviet Union return to the road which he had helped it to take in 1917. This required the revival of a socialist consciousness amongst the Soviet population, which, however, was impeded by the limited development of the productive forces, and the consequential use of piece-work, private agricultural plots, the black market, etc, which encouraged a vulgar acquisitiveness, and was made worse by the stifling of independent thought and the right to criticise the regime. Nonetheless, despite this, and without really explaining how these problems might be overcome, he was sure that the Soviet bureaucracy would be overthrown, and that the march towards socialism on a world scale would soon be resumed. 40

What also marked off Trotsky and other oppositional communists from critics of Bolshevism was that the former considered that the October Revolution was an example of revolutionary democracy, and that a government based upon soviets, that is, workers' councils, was of a higher form of democracy than that based upon parliament.

^{136.} Trotsky (1937b), 101.

^{137.} Ibid, 11, 52, 240-2, 284.

^{138.} Ibid, 260-1.

^{139.} See, for instance, WH Chamberlin, 'Russia Today and Tomorrow', *International Affairs*, 14 (2), March 1935, 226; A Kerensky, 'The USSR Between Dictatorship and Democracy', *Contemporary Review*, November 1935, 530.

^{140.} LD Trotsky, 'The Death Agony of Capitalism', Workers International News, Special Issue, 1939, passim; Trotsky (1937b), 119, 128, 168.

Generally speaking, however, critics of Bolshevism denied that it had ever had any democratic credentials, and insisted that the Bolshevik party and the government which it formed were authoritarian, if not actually totalitarian, from the start, 141 or that the Bolsheviks had authoritarian tendencies that were greatly exacerbated by the objective conditions in which they found themselves.¹⁴² Condemning Trotsky as 'one of the destroyers of the short-lived Russian liberty', Seton-Watson railed at his 'effrontery' in demanding the democratisation of the Soviet regime.¹⁴³ It cannot be denied that, even when judged by his own criterion, Trotsky did lay himself open to criticism on this point, for when his Civil War credo Terrorism and Communism was reissued in Britain in 1935, his new introduction made no attempt to provide his audience with a reevaluation of the disconcerting passages that justified his advocacy of labour conscription and the dominance of the Communist Party over the working class on the grounds that the presence of a workers' party in government rendered irrelevant the forms of administration in the workplace. 144 Bolshevism was also assailed on this point by left-wing critics. Orwell by no means disavowed revolutionary violence, but he rooted the rise of authoritarianism in the Soviet Union in what he saw as the Bolsheviks' 'rejection of... the underlying values of democracy'. Once that was decided upon, a Stalin-like figure was 'already on the way'. 145

Trotsky was only one of many observers who noted the institutionalisation of social stratification in the Soviet Union, and the rise of a new ruling group. Chamberlin noted that inequality was now positively encouraged, and the Soviet Union showed 'no indication whatever of developing into a system of communal living and equal sharing', as shock workers were now receiving real privileges in respect of food, housing, health care and cultural matters.¹⁴⁶ He added that beneath the talk of 'a new "classless" society', a 'new governing class of high communist officials and directors of state economic enterprise' was gathering increasing power in its hands.¹⁴⁷ Serge saw a new

- 141. See, in particular, de Basily (1938), 14ff, 100, 119, 171ff, 204.
- 142. Chamberlin (1935b), 362ff.
- 143. Seton-Watson (1938), 129.
- 144. Trotsky (1935), i-xii.
- 145. G Orwell, 'The Russian Regime', New English Weekly, 12 January 1939, 203. See also 'Bolshevism and the Third International', Socialist Standard, February 1936, 25-7.
- 146. Chamberlin (1935b), 272. Ethel Mannin, an independently-minded socialist, agreed ('Equality in the USSR', New Statesman, 7 March 1936, 739-40).
- 147. WH Chamberlin, 'Russia's Red Fascism', Fortnightly, September 1935, 272. See also Carr (1937), 4. De Basily stated that the new ruling élite was composed not merely of political and economic administrators, but scientists, authors, journalists, judges and army and naval officers, see de Basily (1938), 238-9. Leonard Hubbard considered that a new class of administrators was evolving, with a 'bureaucrat-bourgeois élite' of around half-a-million people within the state administrative machine, and allied with between four and five million people who were chairmen and presidents of

élite composed of the cadres of the party and state machinery, those in charge of the military, trade unions, secret services, trade and industry, agriculture, education, justice and culture, totalling about 10 million people, or double that if their families were included. They were the 'rugged arrivistes', tough, hard-fighting types jealous of their positions, privileges and power, and capable of great things, like the Five Year Plans, albeit 'for their own benefit'. 148 Admitting that the latest data available to him were several years out of date and would thus almost certainly underestimate current numbers, Trotsky reckoned on there being at least 400 000 people in the 'commanding upper circles' of the country, the general staffs of the various departments of state and party institutions. Serving them were some two million medium cadres in a 'heavy administrative pyramid', including industrial and agricultural technicians and administrators, military and secret police officers, party functionaries, etc, who, with those in various supervisory and managerial jobs and committee posts, numbered around five or six million. Altogether, taking in all the privileged sectors of Soviet society and their families, he estimated that between 20 and 25 million Soviet citizens enjoyed an aboveaverage lifestyle. Trotsky did not see the bureaucracy as a particularly homogenous social formation, as a great gulf separated a Kremlin dignitary from a president of a rural soviet, and because officials' positions were completely dependent upon their place in the chain of command and were thus potentially insecure. However, a caste solidarity was emerging, based on a fear of the masses, the opportunity for careerism and the defence of their well-being, and this expressed itself in the strangling of all criticism and the 'hypocritically religious kow-towing' to Stalin, who embodied and defended their power and privileges. 149 However, if the Soviet bureaucracy was now a ruling élite with its own independent interests, why should it cling to the old egalitarian slogans? Trotsky explained that so long as the ruling bureaucracy rested upon the foundations laid by the October Revolution — that is, so long as capitalism was not restored – it was obliged to use the language of 1917, thus rendering it the most 'deceitful and hypocritical' regime in history. 150

Those who saw the Soviet Union as a vibrant democracy inevitably begged to differ. Campbell countered Trotsky's theory that the Soviet leadership now constituted a bureaucratic ruling élite by saying that it was 'never proved', but 'merely asserted'. The perennial problem of proof meant that dialogue between these two schools of thought was impossible.

committees and of collective farms, functionaries, deputies in soviet bodies, Stakhanovite workers, etc. However, he saw this new rising class as standing in a potentially antagonistic position to the Soviet élite, rather than part of it. See Hubbard (1938), 338-41.

- 148. Serge (1937), 47, 157-8.
- 149. Trotsky (1937b), 132-5.
- 150. LD Trotsky, 'The Retreat From October', Workers International News, July 1938, 1.
- 151. Campbell (1939), 153.

II: The Planned Economy: Results and Prospects

Considerably less emphasis was placed on the Soviet economy in assessments in Britain during the latter half of the 1930s than in the first half. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the novelty of the great economic experiment had palled somewhat, and the continued existence of an ostensibly planned economy, and indeed the Soviet Union as a whole, was more or less taken for granted, even by hostile observers. The contrast between the fortunes of the Soviet Union and the capitalist world was not now so stark; the very high growth rates in the former had been replaced by a more modest rate of expansion, and the recovery in the latter was reasonably steady. Secondly, directly political factors, most notably foreign policy issues and the constitution, trials and purges, attracted far more attention than the economy.

The economic advances made since 1929 could not be gainsaid, and even the bitterly hostile Boris Brutzkus, for whom the market was an irreplaceable necessity in an industrial society, had to admit that 'complete scepticism, no less than immoderate enthusiasm, was unjustified'. The statistics looked impressive, the production of coal and crude oil had risen from 35.4 and 11.6 million tons respectively in 1928 to 128.0 and 31.0 million tons in 1937, whilst the figures for pig iron and steel stood at 3.3 and 4.2 million tons respectively in 1928 and 10.4 and 9.5 million tons in 1934, and electricity generation had risen from 5007 million kilowatt hours in 1928 to 36 500 million kwh in 1937.

However, despite the praise for Soviet economic advance, which, as we have seen, went far beyond the bounds of the pro-Soviet lobby, critical assessments continued to appear in Britain. Brutzkus noted that most sectors had not reached their targets in 1932, the final year of the First Five Year Plan, and some, such as electricity generation, pig iron, steel, bricks, cement and superphosphates, were well below their plan targets. In the consumer goods sector, cotton and woollen clothes production had not only failed to reach their 1932 targets, but had actually fallen below their 1928 output level. Product quality, particularly of consumer goods, was poor, and thus partly negated increases in production. The increase in the productivity of labour had not reached even 10 per cent of the 110 per cent envisaged, and it remained well below that of Western countries.¹⁵⁵ Much work would have to be done before further techni-

^{152.} Lazarevski was almost alone in prophesying the regime's imminent collapse, see Lazarevski (1935), 57, 292ff.

^{153.} Brutzkus (1935), 135. However, de Basily considered that without the industrial legacy bequeathed by pre-1914 Russia, the Five Year Plans 'would never have had the slightest chance of seeing daylight', see de Basily (1938), 269-71.

^{154.} De Basily (1938), 258; 'Russia's War Potential', Economist, 22 April 1939, 184.

^{155.} Brutzkus (1935), 201-7.

cal progress could be made and the newly-constructed enterprises properly assimilated. Nonetheless, as the chaos that marked the First Five Year Plan was ameliorated, and as less ambitious targets were set, plan fulfilment did improve, and in 1936, many sectors more or less reached their targets. In 1937, heavy industry reached 88.9 per cent of its plan target, whilst light industry reached 92.0 per cent. However, severe problems remained in respect of labour productivity, product quality and transport. In early 1938, the *Economist's Moscow Correspondent noted that the Soviet government had shifted its orientation from pure growth to one based upon solving organisational problems and establishing an 'even-paced coordination'. Many of the targets for 1938 for key heavy industries were barely above, and in some cases level with or even below, those for 1937. 158*

Perhaps the most famous aspect of Soviet industry in the late 1930s was the Stakhanovite movement. Named after a Donbas miner who dug a remarkably large amount of coal during a shift in the summer of 1935, it was hailed by Dutt as 'an obviously higher form of labour', capable of far higher productivity than capitalist forms of wagelabour, 159 and by GDH Cole in much the same terms. 160 Others were not so impressed. Littlepage declared that Soviet industry could well improve by better teamwork, specialisation of work duties and better equipment, but there 'was nothing unique or original' in this, such measures 'were no more and no less than the application to Soviet industry of common-sense methods' which had 'been taken for granted for generations in other industrial countries'. He added that the Stakhanovite system had led to disorganisation when it had been introduced into areas where it was not suitable, and that a widespread shortage of tools militated against its general successful operation.¹⁶¹ Lawton doubted whether the shock workers' boosted output could be maintained for long, and declared that the crucial factor was not the output of individual workers, but the overall output of factories, which lagged behind that of Western industry. 162 Serge added that the Stakhanovite system would lead to higher work norms for all workers,

^{156. &#}x27;Russia Trade and Industry', Economist, 26 January 1935, 168.

^{157.} De Basily (1938), 409-12.

^{158. &#}x27;USSR', Economist, 23 April 1938, 186.

^{159.} Dutt (1936), 287.

^{160.} GDH Cole, 'Russia's Light Years', *Tribune*, 7 May 1937, 8. See also Goronwy Rees, 'Stakhanovism and Its Significance', Spectator, 10 January 1936, 46.

^{161.} Littlepage and Bess (1939), 224-8. See also de Basily (1938), 348. Citrine, although suspicious of the grandiose claims made about the Stakhanovite movement, nonetheless reckoned that it would have 'a generally beneficial effect on the efficiency of Soviet industrial methods', see Citrine (1936), 354.

^{162.} Lancelot Lawton, 'Soviet Russia's Means to Her End', Nineteenth Century and After, October 1936, 434-5.

increased differentials amongst workers, and the development of a privileged stratum within the working class.¹⁶³

The opportunities to go beyond the fairly restrictive bounds to observation set by conducted tours decreased as the 1930s drew by. Nonetheless, there were still some valuable first-hand observations of Soviet industry published in Britain during this period. Littlepage's account of his decade as an engineer in the Soviet goldfields provided a wealth of information about Soviet industry. On his arrival in 1927, he noted that workers' productivity was around 10 per cent of those in the West, and that management was often incompetent. Although with reorganisation and the passage of time, workmanship and especially management improved during his stay, severe problems remained. Transport was a weak link in the system, and industry was plagued by interfering party functionaries whose ignorance was often only exceeded by their arrogance. Workers and management alike had an 'exaggerated impression' of the capabilities of machinery, and had little idea of proper maintenance, with the result that machines wore out very quickly. The planning process was too rigid, and as it was very difficult to predict the performance of the mines, unexpected problems could upset the working of the plan as a whole, and this was exacerbated by the political system, which did not allow for the initiative and originality necessary for the smooth running of modern industry. 164 Many of Littlepage's observations were corroborated by Fred Beal. He noted that quickly-trained Soviet engineers meddled with the work of skilled foreign specialists, 'bringing untold confusion and wrecking the activities of the really able technicians', that good machinery was maltreated, inferior materials were used, and measurements were wrong, with the result that production was repeatedly brought nearly to a standstill. He also noted that working conditions were appalling.¹⁶⁵ Conolly related that US and French technicians she had met in the Soviet Union had told her that Soviet industry was hopelessly inefficient, and would soon be bankrupt if run on a commercial basis. 166

Peter Francis, a former British public schoolboy who went to work in a Soviet factory in 1937 as an adventure holiday, reported that although the Soviet worker was not as incompetent as press reports had suggested, he lacked the British worker's 'instinctive sympathy for machinery', and was heavy-handed to the extent of wielding sledge-hammers in lieu of less heavy tools:

Delicacies like taper bolts or grub screws rarely occurred to him and consequently had an ephemeral life. One-eighth drills and three-sixteenth taps

^{163.} Serge (1937), 22.

^{164.} Littlepage and Bess (1939), 62, 105, 115, 162, 198, 203ff, 276.

^{165.} Beal (1937), 236-42. See also Smith (1937), 42ff, 60ff.

^{166.} Conolly (1938), 45-6, 149-50.

were also lucky if they outlived the proverbial mayfly; but in spite of this heavy-handedness, production carried on, at times limpingly, but always forward.¹⁶⁷

John Brown also noted that 'the tempo and efficiency of production' in the Soviet factories that he visited 'was clearly far below English or German standards', and that 'technicians were in many cases unfitted for their posts'. It would be a long time, at least three decades, before Soviet industry would reach British or American efficiency levels. ¹⁶⁸

In agriculture, collectivisation was an accomplished fact. Soviet figures claimed that whereas on 1 June 1928 there were 416 700 collectivised households, comprising 1.7 per cent of the total number of agricultural households, the figure for 1 June 1929 was 1 007 700, or 3.9 per cent, and for 1 April 1937, 18 535 500, or 93.0 per cent. In 1928, 3.1 million hectares of sown land were in collective or state farms, 2.7 per cent of the total. In 1934, the figure stood at 113.7 million hectares, or 86.1 per cent. ¹⁶⁹ There were other advances. By 1938, sown area had reached 136.9 million hectares, of which 102.4 million hectares were under grain, up from the 1913 figures of 105.0 and 94.4 million hectares respectively. Grain harvests from 1934 were consistently higher than the 1913 figure of 801 million centners, peaking at 1202.9 million centners in 1937. Sugar beet and industrial crops (oil seed, flax, cotton) all showed dramatic increases over the 1913 figure. ¹⁷⁰ The mechanisation of Soviet farming had proceeded briskly, with the number of tractors having risen from 24 500 in 1928 to 210 900 in 1933, and on to 483 500 in 1938. By 1938, there were 153 500 combine harvesters, 130 800 grain threshers and 195 800 lorries on the farms. ¹⁷¹

Assessments of collectivisation varied. Whilst the pro-Soviet lobby praised the operation, blamed ignorant peasants and over-zealous junior officials for any problems, and justified the regime's repressive measures, 172 others were more critical. The hostile Russian exile Ivan Solonevich, who had worked on a collective farm before fleeing, considered that although collectivisation had 'introduced the Russian countryside to a whole world of new technical methods and new technical ideas', the material results had so far been 'largely negative', 173 and it was claimed that after spending vast

- 167. Francis (1939), 51-3.
- 168. Brown (1935), 75, 206.
- 169. De Basily (1938), 285, 328.
- 170. 'Speeding Up Soviet Farming', Economist, 22 April 1939, 197.
- 171. Ibid, 198; de Basily (1938), 290.
- 172. Webb (1937), 258ff, 1171ff; John Maynard, 'The Peasant and Soviet Agriculture', Political Quarterly, 6 (4), October 1935, 554-6.
- 173. Ivan Solonevich, 'Collectivisation in Practice', Slavonic and East European Review, 14 (40), July 1935, 95.

amounts on machinery, the Soviet authorities now harvested nearly 10 million tons less per annum than the Tsarist government did in 1913, and had 30 million more people to feed.¹⁷⁴ De Basily pointed to the catastrophic decline in livestock during the First Five Year Plan. The plan had envisaged an increase of six million horses, 14 million cattle, 12 million pigs and 28 million sheep and goats. In fact, between 1928 and 1932 there was a fall in the number of horses from 33.5 to 19.6 million, cattle from 70.5 to 40.7 million, pigs from 26.0 to 11.6 million, and sheep and goats from 146.7 to 52.1 million, and the subsequent revival was slow. The decline in livestock also seriously hit agricultural efficiency. De Basily claimed that despite the remarkable increase in the number of tractors from 24 500 in 1928 to 276 000 in 1935, the drop in horses during those years resulted in a net loss of 4.34 million horsepower, whilst Brutzkus estimated a net loss of 10.7 million horsepower. De Basily also pointed to the disproportionate contribution made by peasants' private plots to total agricultural production.¹⁷⁵

Chamberlin considered that much damage had been done during collectivisation, particularly in the generally most fertile and productive areas, such as Ukraine and the Volga and North Caucasus regions.¹⁷⁶ Nonetheless, he felt that if the peasants were given conciliatory treatment, agriculture would slowly revive.¹⁷⁷ In 1938, John Russell, a British agronomist who had visited various Soviet agricultural enterprises, gave a brighter assessment, saying that despite the traumas of collectivisation, the peasants were now willing to accept it, and the organisation of Soviet farming represented 'an entirely new approach to the peasant problem', and was 'bound to influence considerably the attempts to reorganise peasant agriculture' in other countries.¹⁷⁸

Commentators continued their discussion over the nature and lessons of the Soviet economy. The advantages and disadvantages of an étatised economic system were weighed up. Leonard Hubbard, a leading authority on the Soviet economy, declared that without the need to heed public opinion and with centralised control and the ability to use coercion, the Soviet regime could make long-term and large-scale investments that would be impossible under a democratic market system, a point also conceded by Brutzkus.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, Hubbard considered that the incompetence

^{174.} M Samuel, 'Famine in Russia?', New Statesman, 6 April 1935, 484. However, another commentator claimed that the 1913 harvest was unusually high, and Soviet harvests compared well with those of other pre-1914 years (EC Willis, 'Famine in Russia?', New Statesman, 13 April 1935, 519-20).

^{175.} De Basily (1938), 289-91, 415; Brutzkus (1935), 212.

^{176.} Chamberlin (1935b), 76-7.

^{177.} WH Chamberlin, 'Russia Today and Tomorrow', International Affairs, 14 (2), March 1935, 221.

^{178.} EJ Russell, 'The Farming Problem in Russia: How it is Being Met', Slavonic and East European Review, 16 (47), January 1938, 321, 339-40.

^{179.} Hubbard (1936), 262; (1938), 318, 326; Brutzkus (1935), 194.

of workers and management had ensured that the great increase in the use of machinery had 'resulted in a very meagre expansion of production in comparison with the amount of capital invested'. Planning was immune from some of the defects of capitalism, but it had its own problems, particularly in respect of shortfalls in one sector leading directly to dislocations in others. Hubbard was not alone in insisting that there were many problems that had to be solved before the Soviet system could justifiably claim supremacy over capitalism.¹⁸⁰

A few commentators continued to deny that the Soviet economy was planned. In 1935, an anonymous, recently-exiled Russian engineer reported that the planning process was chaotic, with so many plans being issued that managers did not know which to follow, and generally 'acted according to their own judgement'. The economist Michael Polanyi considered that Soviet planning was little more than 'a series of loosely connected tasks' centred upon increasing production, rather than a systematic and coordinated plan. Moreover, the prioritisation of sheer output, exemplified by the emphasis upon storming forward and the delight when targets were exceeded, ensured that coordination amongst the different branches of production was severely hindered. Hubbard declared that the Soviet economy was run on 'a compromise between theoretical planning and expediency', the latter being 'old and proved capitalist principles' to which the regime had been forced to resort, but as deviations between plan and practice were never admitted by Soviet officials, they could only be ascertained through 'occasional hints and chance peeps behind the scene'. 183

As in the first half of the decade, some commentators saw the Soviet Union as a state capitalist country, often on the premise that the state owned the means of production,¹⁸⁴ although their definitions of the term varied. Hubbard and Duranty stated that the elimination of the private ownership of capital represented the first stage of the transition to communism, whilst the *Economist* and the anarchist Herbert Read felt that it represented the drift of the Soviet Union away from the goal of an egalitarian society.¹⁸⁵

- 181. 'Industrial Development in Soviet Russia', Quarterly Review, April 1935, 209-10.
- 182. Polanyi (1936), 15.
- 183. Hubbard (1936), vii; (1938), v.
- 184. Chamberlin (1937), 218; de Basily (1938), 462; Hubbard (1938), 260. The left-wing socialist J Allen Skinner claimed that it was state capitalist on the basis that the existence of great inequalities precluded it from being a socialist society ('USSR: Democracy or Bureaucratic Autocracy?', Controversy, June 1937, 60). Some, like Citrine, the eccentric fascist Wyndham Lewis and Sally Graves, merely asserted its state capitalist nature. See Citrine (1936), 131; Wyndham Lewis, 'Left Wingism', New Statesman, 27 June 1936, 1024; Graves (1939), 190.
- 185. Hubbard (1936), xv; Walter Duranty, 'Evolving Russia: Communism by Stages', Spectator, 6 December 1935, 933; 'Russia in the Making', Economist, 10 July 1937, 82; Herbert Read, 'The Neces-

^{180.} Hubbard (1938), 313, 328, 343; Lord Strabogli, 'The Political Scene', Nineteenth Century and After, October 1935, 469.

The idiosyncratic British Marxist Francis Ambrose Ridley considered that whilst the October Revolution was led by communists aiming at a world revolution, the actual low level of development of the Soviet Union precluded the existence of an egalitarian society and presupposed the existence of a ruling class. With the failure of revolutions in advanced countries, the Soviet Communist Party became transformed into a new ruling class, and, in its quest to develop the country, it adopted the general trends of capitalist development, that is, towards state capitalism. As a new ruling class, the Soviet Communist Party was now in the paradoxical position of having a vested interest in both the continuation of state capitalism and in the prevention of communism, as it would not wish to relinquish power and thereby 'cease the desirable business of dictating'.¹⁸⁶

There were those who drew the conclusion that the only lesson to be drawn from the Five Year Plans and collectivism in general was that any attempt to do away with the market would lead to economic chaos and a totalitarian society. 187 Others considered that there was a convergence between the Soviet Union and the West, that the Soviet experience demonstrated a foretaste of a dreadful étatised world, 188 or something more positive, on the grounds that, to cite AL Rowse, despite its 'dragooned uniformity', the Soviet Union shared with the West the 'same trends... towards social equality, the bridging and transcendence of class divisions, the emergence of the whole community into the foreground of political action'. 189 On the left, many of those who rejected Stalinism nonetheless considered that the development of the Soviet economy in the 1930s demonstrated the superiority of economic planning, and that despite its generally negative features, the Soviet bureaucracy was playing a positive role in this field. 190 Some advocates of economic planning felt that the Soviet model had nothing to offer countries like Britain, 191 although, almost certainly with places like India in mind, William Beveridge added the proviso that it would be worth sending administrators and sociologists to the Soviet Union to study the process of modernisation 'to

- sity of Anarchism', Adelphi, September 1937, 94.
- 186. Ridley (1935), 162-3, 185-92.
- 187. Brutzkus (1935), 44, 76. If in 1935 Chamberlin only posed the question of whether collectivism was compatible with democracy, within two years he was convinced that it was not. Compare Chamberlin (1935b), 105-6; (1937), 84ff, 202ff.
- 188. Mary Maxse, 'The Bursting of a Bubble', National Review, September 1937, 406; Fülöp-Miller (1935), 289, 311, 320-5.
- 189. AL Rowse, 'Books of the Quarter', Criterion, April 1936, 504-6. See also King-Hall (1938), 174-5; AC Pigou, 'The Webbs on Soviet Communism', Economic Journal, 46 (1), March 1936, 92.
- 190. See GDH Cole, 'Economic Prospects: 1938 and After', Fact, February 1938, 85; Weisbord (1938), 1032; Independent Labour Party (1938), 13; Trotsky (1937b), 15-16; Serge (1937), 263.
- 191. G Ellis, 'The Planning of Industry', The Nineteenth Century and After, January 1935, 57; C Headlam, 'Planned National Economy', Quarterly Review, April 1939, 283.

enquire how soon and by what methods' it was possible 'to change the aptitudes and ways of thought and living of a population, to turn peasants by masses into craftsmen or machine men'. 192

III: Trial and Terror

The most dramatic feature of the Soviet Union in the late 1930s was the wave of terror, which involved a series of three show trials of disgraced Old Bolsheviks, the decapitation of the Soviet armed forces, and a purge which swept through the Soviet Communist Party, the state administrative machinery and the general population itself.

Although Zinoviev and Kamenev had been jailed in the aftermath of the assassination of Kirov, they were dragged out along with several other Old Bolsheviks in front of prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky in the first of the Moscow Trials in August 1936, where they all confessed their guilt, and were quickly put to death. The second Moscow Trial took place in January 1937, with another bunch of Old Bolsheviks, including Yuri Piatakov and Karl Radek, in the dock. Once again, they all pleaded guilty, and were sentenced to death or to a long prison sentence, which amounted to the same thing. Then in March 1938, the third Moscow Trial was held, with the accused including Nikolai Bukharin, Nikolai Krestinsky, Christian Rakovsky and the former secret police chief Genrikh Yagoda, and with the same outcome. Like a three-ring circus, each trial was more flamboyant than its predecessor, with increasingly lurid accusations and confessions about the defendants forming anti-Soviet terrorist groups and engaging in terror and sabotage, ultimately backdated almost to the October Revolution itself. In between the second and third trials came news that several senior military leaders, including Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, had been executed for treason. All the while, the Soviet press was providing long lists of names of officials who had been purged for their alleged involvement in heinous activities against the Soviet state. 193

A wide range of observers in Britain found the accusations and confessions just too fantastic to be taken seriously. The *Spectator* averred that the confessions at the second trial were 'utterly unconvincing in the absence of other evidence', ¹⁹⁴ whilst the *Economist* referred to the 'utterly unconvincing accusations' at the third one. ¹⁹⁵ Henry Brailsford declared that he had been very sceptical about Soviet justice ever since the Menshevik Trial in 1931, at which it was stated that the Menshevik leader Rafael

^{192.} William Beveridge, 'Soviet Communism', Political Quarterly, 7 (3), July 1936, 348.

^{193. &#}x27;Chronicle', Slavonic and East European Review, 16 (47), January 1938, 474; Judex, 'Report on the Purge', Controversy, February 1938, 104-9.

^{194. &#}x27;News of the Week', Spectator, 29 January 1937, 1534.

^{195. &#}x27;Topics of the Week', Economist, 5 March 1938, 494.

Abramovich had been plotting in Moscow on the very day when he was actually with Brailsford and other socialists in Brussels. 196 EH Carr sarcastically wrote off both DN Pritt, the British apologist for the trials, and the trials themselves, by calling Pritt 'a skilful enough advocate to be able to impart some shreds of plausibility to the most hopeless case'. 197 Writing pungently about the second trial, but with equal relevance to all three, Goronwy Rees, who until then had held a fairly positive attitude towards the Soviet Union, pointed out that the whole case rested upon confessions lacking documentary evidence, that absurdities, contradictions and even impossibilities in the evidence were not challenged, that exact dates were never given, and that confessions were directed by leading questions. He then asked his erstwhile colleagues of the pro-Soviet lobby if this could be anything other than the justice of a police state. 198 Orwell ridiculed the whole grisly process by situating it within familiar British contexts. In a satire that combined delightful whimsy with devastating sharpness, he introduced an exiled Winston Churchill plotting to overthrow the British Empire and introduce communism with a conspiratorial group that incorporated 'members of parliament, factory managers, Roman Catholic bishops and practically the whole of the Primrose League'; Lord Nuffield, 'after a seven-hour interrogation by Mr Norman Birkett', confessing that he had been 'fomenting strikes in his own factories' since 1920; and sundry other malcontents, including a Cotswold village shopkeeper being transported 'for sucking the bull's-eyes and putting them back in the bottle'.199

Awkward questions were asked of the friends of the Soviet Union, particularly as the allegations became ever more lurid and improbable. Soloveytchik declared:

After all, there are only two possibilities: either all these men are guilty, in which case 20 years of 'revolutionary triumphs' and the 'successful building of socialism' are entirely the work of gangsters, and the Soviet élite which is now being exterminated by its chief is the worst kind of scum the world has yet produced, or else the allegations are not true, and then the indictment of this regime which is compelled to invent such ghastly charges is even more devastating.²⁰⁰

The interrogation continued. For instance, once Yagoda was up before the beak, did this not disqualify the trials that took place when he was in charge of the GPU, and should not the executed defendants now be posthumously reinstated as martyrs?²⁰¹

^{196.} HN Brailsford, 'Soviet Trials', New Statesman, 31 July 1937, 181.

^{197.} EH Carr, 'USSR', International Affairs, 16 (2), March 1937, 311.

^{198.} Goronwy Rees, 'The Twilight of Bolshevism', Spectator, 21 May 1937, 956.

^{199.} George Orwell, 'Impenetrable Mystery', New English Weekly, 9 June 1938, 169. See also CAB, 'The Moscow Trials', New Statesman, 12 March 1938, 494.

George Soloveytchik, 'Whither Stalin?', Contemporary Review, February 1938, 153. See also Gibbs (1938), 154.

^{201. &#}x27;Critic' [Kingsley Martin], 'A London Diary', New Statesman, 5 March 1938, 359.

Brailsford asked why the accused had 'plotted scores of murders without ever managing to fire a shot'. ²⁰² Columnists could not resist engaging in a little gallows humour, with one admitting his embarrassment when receiving hospitality from Soviet diplomats on the grounds that it was impossible to suppress his speculations as to whether his host would be shot by this time next year, ²⁰³ another asking whether the preferable punishment for the likes of Zinoviev would be permanent exile to 'some petit-bourgeois retreat' like Surbiton, ²⁰⁴ and yet another asking whether Krestinsky's retraction of his confession at the third trial proved the existence of wreckers in the Commissariat for Justice. ²⁰⁵

The members of the pro-Soviet lobby accepted, at least in public, the allegations and confessions made at the trials. Even here, however, there were a few squeaks in the apparatus, most notably when Spender cast some doubts upon the validity of the first trial. ²⁰⁶ But such public doubts about the veracity of the trials were rare. Not even the discrepancies and howlers in the evidence, the occasional problems with the stage management, or the fact that today's heroes could become tomorrow's traitors, ²⁰⁷ could prod them from insisting that the Moscow Trials were entirely fair and indeed a necessary feature of a socialist society, ²⁰⁸ and the Stalinists and their fellow-travelling friends used all the instruments at their disposal, including the powerful Left Book Club, to demonstrate the virtues of Soviet justice.

The idea that the Moscow Trials were to a large extent genuine went surprisingly further than the usual array of true believers. One might expect Pares, with his new-

- 202. HN Brailsford, 'A Reply to Mr Dutt', New Statesman, 17 July 1937, 106-7. See also 'The Soviet Trials', Economist, 30 January 1937, 224.
- 203. 'A Spectator's Notebook', Spectator, 29 January 1937, 158.
- 204. 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 19 January 1935, 117. Surbiton, an outer London suburb, epitomised English suburban respectability in the 1930s.
- 205. 'Topics of the Week', Economist, 5 March 1938, 494.
- 206. Spender (1937), 206. He was soon straightened out, and publicly confessed that the trial allegations were in fact genuine.
- 207. As Kingsley Martin pointed out. See 'Critic', 'A London Diary', New Statesman, 29 August 1936, 279. This was implicitly accepted by the Stalinists. The English-language edition of Lenin's Selected Works was being compiled at this time, and the Soviet original, prepared in the early 1930s, contained extensive explanatory notes, as did Volumes 1 to 8 of the English translations. However, the preface to Volume 9 stated that 'developments during the past few years' demanded 'a thorough revision' of the notes. As this task was 'taking longer than anticipated' the increasingly large number of Old Bolsheviks being exposed as traitors must have made rewriting history a never-ending task this and the subsequent volumes were published with no notes whatsoever, thus leaving readers to puzzle out for themselves the more obscure references in Lenin's writings. See 'Preface' in Lenin (1937), xi.
- 208. Sloan considered that treason and sabotage and, one can safely assume, show trials would continue so long as the Soviet Union was surrounded by capitalist states, see Sloan (1938), 256.

found sympathy for the Soviet regime, to accept their validity. Despite being a little doubtful about the alleged association of the defendants and Trotsky with the Gestapo - links between Jewish communists and Hitler's secret police were a bit hard to credit! - he was certain that 'there were plots in the Left Opposition aiming at the murder of Stalin and other prominent officials'. 209 As for the general purges, he declared that Stalin had 'put himself forward as the friend of the man in the street, and removed one after another local officials who had grown old in the abuse of their authority', and this brisk taming of the bureaucracy had the positive result in creating 'a real body of national support behind the government'. 210 Harold Laski and Kingsley Martin wobbled alarmingly between believing that the defendants, as the former put it, 'engaged in acts against the government which were objectively counter-revolutionist', and worrying about the level of repression and lack of free expression in the Soviet Union.²¹¹ There were various liberals and conservatives who, in the words of Wickham Steed, considered that beneath the 'highly improbable' confessions stood 'a considerable substratum of truth'. 212 Seton-Watson stated that the defendants, with their 'blood-stained past and moral standards', could easily have intended to kill Stalin and to have resorted to sabotage. Along with Paul Miliukov and the socialist Margaret Cole, he went so far as to endorse the improbable allegation that Trotsky's zeal to overthrow Stalin had led him to conspire with Germany and Japan even at the expense of wishing to cede Soviet territory to them.213

Another view, whilst unequivocally discounting the allegations and confessions about desiring to return to capitalism, plotting sabotage and collaborating with foreign powers, nonetheless considered that there was a possibility of Trotsky conspiring in a *political* manner with the defendants with the aim of unseating Stalin, as this was the only way in which opposition to him could be manifested in a country where there was no opportunity for open political discourse. As John Maynard put it, there could have

- 209. Bernard Pares, 'The Russian Situation', Slavonic and East European Review, 15 (44), January 1937, 347.
- 210. Bernard Pares, 'Russia's Role Today', Listener, 20 April 1939, 818.
- 211. Harold Laski, 'A Record of Achievements', New Statesman, 30 July 1938, 192. Note that word 'objectively'. Typical of Laski in trying to have it both ways, he added: 'How many people have been sentenced to death or imprisonment over doctrinal differences?' Martin, too, wavered between accepting that 'very likely there was a plot', and feeling that there was 'a great deal amiss' in the Soviet Union. All in all, however, the power of the GPU and the bureaucracy was 'historically speaking, of secondary importance' compared to the general progress being made ('The Moscow Purge', New Statesman, 5 September 1936, 307-8).
- 212. Henry Wickham Steed, 'The Anti-Bolshevist Front', International Affairs, 16 (2), March 1937, 185.
- 213. Seton-Watson (1938), 134-6; Paul Miliukov, "Indivisible Peace" and the Two Blocs in Europe', Slavonic and East European Review, 15 (45), April 1937, 585-6; Margaret Cole, 'Trotsky', Fact, September 1937, 87.

been 'a nucleus of truth' in the charges of conspiring with Trotsky, if 'improved out of all recognition'; after all, Trotsky did want a new revolution in the Soviet Union.²¹⁴

Whilst the accusations against the Soviet high command were seen by some as even less believable than those presented in the Moscow Trials,²¹⁵ the idea that the military leaders were planning a coup was accepted by many people. Seton-Watson dismissed the crude allegations of treason made during the military purges, but he was confident that the leading generals had been 'working for the overthrow of the Soviet system, the establishment of a military dictatorship, and the conclusion of a Russo-German alliance based upon close economic cooperation'. Had not the purged military leaders enjoyed close relations with their Reichswehr counterparts? By his swift action, Stalin had prevented the prospect of a reorientation of Soviet foreign policy which would have meant 'a radical change in the balance of European forces'.²¹⁶ Maynard, who rejected the trial allegations as 'nonsense', nonetheless did not discount the possibility of a military coup against the Kremlin having been nipped in the bud.²¹⁷

The Stalinists did, on the face of it, have a reasonable case. Why, they asked, with the Soviet Union doing so well, would Stalin stage a series of fake trials, what possible purpose could it have?²¹⁸ Did not the defendants confess their guilt, unlike Georgi Dimitrov at the Reichstag Fire Trial?²¹⁹ And there is no doubt that observers often presented explanations which gave the impression of their committing ideas to paper as they came into their heads. George Glasgow declared that dictators had to maintain absolute power, as any crumbling of their prestige would immediately lead to the collapse of such regimes, although why Stalin felt obliged physically to destroy his victims was a mystery. He also wondered if the GPU had fallen outwith Stalin's control.²²⁰ Stalin was considered to have 'attained to the last phase of unfettered tyranny, mania or vertigo, that madness of power', and was 'striking right and left at the "tallest pop-

- 214. John Maynard, 'Light on the Trotskyist Trials', *Political Quarterly*, 8 (3), July 1937. See also HC Foxcroft, 'The Revolution Betrayed', *Quarterly Review*, January 1938, 9; Peter Horn, 'The Lesson of the Moscow Trial', Controversy, March 1937, 104.
- 215. For instance, 'The Russian Mystery', Spectator, 18 June 1937, 1132.
- 216. Seton-Watson (1938), 138-9. See also Henry Wickham Steed, 'The "Poised Snow", Spectator, 16 July 1937, 95-6; Voigt (1938), 348; 'R—us', 'Russia at the Crossroads', Contemporary Review, December 1937, 692.
- 217. John Maynard, 'Book Reviews', Political Quarterly, 10 (1), January 1939, 142.
- 218. Campbell (1939), 248-9. The Coateses inadvertently answered their own question, saying that 'only super criminal lunatics could have conceived the idea of removing these men from their posts and making false, fantastic accusations against them'. See Coates (1938), 315.
- 219. John Strachey, 'Topic of the Month: The Soviet Trials', Left News, March 1937, 274.
- 220. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, March 1937, 358-62, 368. See also Brown (1935), 236. The point about the GPU was made elsewhere, see 'Comments', New Statesman, 22 August 1936, 279.

pies".²²¹ Some relied upon clichés, with, for example, the staunch right-winger Charles Petrie proclaiming sagely that the trials proved the adage that revolutions end up devouring their own children,²²² an observation that does little to explain the complex issues of power in post-revolutionary societies, whilst a right-wing conservative journal opined that 'the Russian' had 'a sort of satisfaction in self-abasement' that was unknown in the West.²²³

The rather obvious point was made that the trials indicated a profound crisis within the Soviet regime.²²⁴ But what was behind the crisis? One theory held that Stalin was staging the trials in order to shift the blame for economic mismanagement from his regime onto scapegoats. After outlining many instances of major malfunctions, poor management and general incompetence, the Moscow correspondent of the Economist exclaimed: 'Sabotage explains everything; revelations of gross inefficiency need not cast discredit upon central planning, which, without some such explanation, might come into disrepute.'225 He added that the trials, which were accepted as genuine by most Soviet citizens, could act as a conductor, using the defendants as a focus for popular discontent that might otherwise be directed against the government.²²⁶ The Trotskyist CLR James considered that Stalin was attempting to crush a burgeoning wave of opposition.²²⁷ He added that Stalin was attempting to pre-empt anyone within the party-state apparatus who intended him to meet the same fate as Robespierre, and that by allowing workers to be promoted into jobs vacated by purged managers Stalin could pose as 'the man of the people'. 228 Many observers, including Winston Churchill and EH Carr, maintained that Stalin was clearing out the Old Bolsheviks who maintained a commitment to the cause of world revolution, 229 and others felt that he was purging the bureaucracy in order to reinforce his position by forestalling the rise of any

- 221. 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, July 1937, 8-9.
- 222. Charles Petrie, 'Foreign Affairs', English Review, October 1936, 361. See also 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, July 1937, 8.
- 223. 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, April 1938, 433.
- 224. 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 22 August 1936, 345.
- 225. 'USSR', Economist, 27 February 1937, 466. Even Feuchtwanger reckoned that much of what passed as wrecking was in fact a result of incompetence and mismanagement, see Feuchtwanger (1937), 52-3.
- 226. 'USSR', Economist, 27 February 1937, 466.
- 227. James (1937), 367. See also Paul Scheffer, 'Stalin's Revenge', Fortnightly, March 1937, 263-4.
- 228. CLR James, 'Trotskyism', Controversy, October 1937, 8.
- 229. Churchill (1939), 60-1; Carr (1937), 6; 'R—us', 'Russia at the Crossroads', Contemporary Review, December 1937, 690-1; AS Elwell-Sutton, 'The Russian Terror', New English Weekly, 12 January 1938, 268-9; Borkenau (1939), 423; Fodor (1938), 290; Barmine (1938), 337; Thompson (1939), 50.

potential opposition, and clearing out all but the most servile of his retinue.²³⁰ Hubbard developed the idea of the purges as a means of social control, and considered that the Soviet government was encouraging functionaries to denounce each other in a move to prevent the members of the apparatus from cohering into a definite class and developing their own and potentially antagonistic interests.²³¹ Muggeridge claimed that the trials were not only intended as a warning against anyone considering opposing the regime, but also as a morality play in which a hated ruler used his victims to show that he represented Good versus Evil.²³² Trotsky noted that the countries with which the defendants confessed to having conspired — Germany in the first trial, Germany and Japan in the second, Germany, Japan, Poland and Britain in the third — fitted in well with the changing calculations of Soviet foreign policy, with the inclusion of Britain in 1938 acting as a criticism of its government's refusal to ally with the Soviet Union. He concluded with bitter sarcasm: 'They might try to kill Stalin, but not to maim the politics of Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov.'²³³

So why did the defendants confess? One seasoned observer openly professed his bafflement.²³⁴ Another saw the defendants as broken, exhausted men.²³⁵ Trotsky pointed to the regime's use of psychological chicanery, and to the threats made not merely to the defendants, but also to their families.²³⁶ Maynard considered that Russian traditions played a part, in that to be outwith the congregation means to be outcast. Dissidents in the nineteenth century felt the people to be with them, now, however, they were against them, and opponents sought 'by confession and penance to find their way back to the congregation of the faithful'. Having stated that, he added that although the trials were fair, 'the most important, and immensely the most prolonged, portion of the proceedings was completed outside of the court', a phrase heavy with meaning.²³⁷

- 230. 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 25 December 1937, 634; de Basily (1938), 252; Voigt (1938), 253.
- 231. Hubbard (1938), 341.
- 232. Malcolm Muggeridge, 'Stalin's New Purge', Fortnightly, October 1936, 438, 442. He added that 'Enlightened Opinion' had not objected when the GPU had struck before, as it had 'confined itself to legitimate prey', but now it had hit at some of those who had forged it, 'Enlightened Opinion' was 'alarmed'. This was not true, nor was it true that this was 'the first time' that the New Statesman had showed disapproval (ibid, 444). As most commentators, including the New Statesman, had seen the trials of the early 1930s as fraudulent, Muggeridge's assertion was at best ignorant, and at worst downright deceitful.
- 233. LD Trotsky, 'Moscow's Diplomatic Plans in the Light of the Trials', Workers International News, June 1938, 1.
- 234. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, March 1937, 358-9.
- 235. EH Carr, 'The Twilight of the Bolsheviks', Spectator, 28 August 1936, 333.
- 236. Trotsky (1937a), 393-5.
- 237. John Maynard, 'Light on the Trotskyist Trials', Political Quarterly, 8 (3), July 1937, 410, 415-6.

In a thoughtful piece, the Fabian socialist Leonard Woolf saw the trials as a reversion to pre-Enlightenment thinking in the Soviet Union, the perversion of socialism 'into a Church, complete with Pope and Inquisition'. Late medieval heresy-hunters and witch-burners were 'fanatically convinced' that they held 'the keys to religious salvation or religious damnation' and absolute truth:

So powerful was this communal delusion that they could induce even in their victims the hallucination of guilt and genuine confessions of imaginary crimes. Today Europe has reverted to the same psychology, except that the heresy hunting, the absolute truths, the salvation and damnation are political instead of religious. The witch-hunter's God has become Stalin or Hitler, his Devil Trotsky or a communist. Hence the mass trials in Russia and Germany, and hence the pathological psychology of the confessions.²³⁸

Reports from observers within the Soviet Union shed light upon the atmosphere of the time, and showed their conflicting and confused thoughts as they tried to comprehend the events. Whilst he believed in the overall guilt, if not all the alleged crimes, of the Moscow Trials' defendants and the purged generals, Peter Francis took a contradictory view of the general hysteria about 'wrecking'. On the one hand, he thought that the stories 'might be true', or sufficiently so as to make the authorities place armed guards at factory entrances, yet, on the other, he related with disbelief how he watched a Stakhanovite worker strip the thread of a bolt by tightening the nut too hard, and then excuse his incompetence with the words: 'Rotten bolt. There's a wrecker in the screw-making department.' He added that whilst he found all this talk by party functionaries about 'wreckers' tiresome, the workers believed it and accepted the trial verdicts 'unquestioningly'. 239 Francis' conclusion about the readiness of Soviet citizens to believe what they read in the press was shared by others who had been in the Soviet Union, including Littlepage and Conolly.²⁴⁰ On the other hand, Aleksandr Barmin, a defector who had worked in the Soviet embassy in Athens, insisted that he and his work colleagues did not believe there to be any truth in the accusations.²⁴¹

Littlepage veered erratically in his thoughts about 'wrecking'. On the one hand, he came across 'unquestionable instances of deliberate and malicious wrecking', such as sand found inside equipment and in lubricating oil. This, it is safe to say, was small-scale sabotage on the part of disgruntled individuals, much as other US engineers had previously noticed.²⁴² More problematic were the instances of alleged large-scale sabo-

^{238.} Leonard Woolf, 'A London Diary', New Statesman, 26 December 1936, 1055. See also Adler (1936), 7-9, 35.

^{239.} Francis (1939), 44, 54, 77, 151, 172-4.

^{240.} Littlepage and Bess (1939), 66; Conolly (1938), 58-9, 154-5.

^{241.} Barmine (1938), 315.

^{242.} Littlepage and Bess (1939), 188; see Rukeyser (1932), 233; Beal (1937), 236.

tage. Two competent engineers in responsible posts at the Ridder mine had confessed to sabotage after appalling working practices, about which Littlepage had warned them, had led to serious damage. No engineer, declared Littlepage, would have failed to see the dangers, such blunders could not have been accidental. Elsewhere, however, Littlepage emphasised that party functionaries with no real knowledge of mining forced on production regardless of the long-term effects upon the mines. Qualified people were afraid of taking responsibilities and using their initiatives lest they be accused of sabotage if things went wrong. Apart from a case involving the purchasing of unsuitable mining equipment in Germany, which became used as evidence during the second Moscow Trial (and which seems to be a case of corruption rather than sabotage), on his own admissions the serious incidents which Littlepage ascribes to sabotage can with some certainty be considered as being the result either of incompetence or of arrogant officials forcing the pace of work.²⁴³

Littlepage and Francis differed radically in their impressions of the effects of the purges. The former considered that the Soviet Union 'was turned upside down', men he had known for years 'were disappearing right and left into prison or exile', and such was the 'hysterical' atmosphere, with the spy mania and police raids every night in every area, that he decided to leave.²⁴⁴ Francis, on the other hand, reported that the workers knew of the purges, but did not think that they would affect them. He gave no indication that the people at his factory were worried about the terror, and he did not mention any disappearances.²⁴⁵

Some observers who were sceptical about the trials questioned the suitability of Moscow as an ally of Britain. Commander Stephen King-Hall, a noted commentator on international affairs, declared:

If these trials signified real treachery, inefficiency and corruption throughout the Russian body politic the weight that the Soviet government could exercise in international affairs must be very seriously impaired. If, on the contrary, the whole outbreak of terrorism originated in the brain of a single man ridden with persecution mania, alliance with Russia, that is, with Stalin seemed an even more doubtful proposition.²⁴⁶

Concern was expressed, even by friendly observers, about the possible effects of the

- 243. Littlepage and Bess (1939), 105-6, 112ff, 192-3, 200-1. Campbell and the Coateses both tried to use Littlepage to back up the allegations at the Moscow Trials about 'wrecking', and the Coateses also tried to rope in Rukeyser, overlooking the ambiguities in Littlepage's account, and the fact that Rukeyser was referring to small-scale sabotage, not a major conspiracy. See Campbell (1939), 239-43; Coates (1938), 305-6.
- 244. Littlepage and Bess (1939), 277-8.
- 245. Francis (1939), 183.
- 246. King-Hall (1938), 861. See also 'News of the Week', Spectator, 4 March 1938, 345-6; 'Comments', New Statesman, 12 March 1938, 395.

military purges on the Soviet armed forces.²⁴⁷ Serge was concerned at the damage that the trials, terror and, indeed, the whole experience of Stalinism, would wreak upon the cause of socialism.²⁴⁸

The continued repression caused some people to become very pessimistic. By 1938, Kingsley Martin felt that his hopes of a period of growing liberty in the Soviet Union had been betrayed.²⁴⁹ Even so, some people, and not just the usual suspects, were happy; the military purge had 'dashed the prospect of a Russo-German economic and military alliance',²⁵⁰ and although the Soviet Union's joining the League of Nations had already lessened its revolutionary proclivities, it was now 'much less dangerous... as a result of Stalin's purges'.²⁵¹

The last word in this section should, however, be left to Walter Duranty. He considered that the purges, a 'monstrous "house-cleaning", did much damage to the Soviet Union. The attempt by the new secret police chief Nikolai Yezhov to clear up Yagoda's GPU and other 'places of treason, incompetence, favouritism and graft' had run out of control. They had given the impression that the armed forces and the country itself had been weakened, and had thus given the wrong impression to Nazi Germany during the Munich crisis. They had delayed the implementation of the Third Five Year Plan: 'There could be no more startling commentary on what the purge meant to a country whose whole economic system is predicated upon exact and comprehensive planning in advance.' That such an admission could be made by one of the most abject apologists for Stalinism shows that serious doubts about the Soviet Union could creep into even the most hidebound minds. 253

IV: Back on the World Stage

The mid-1930s marked the return of the Soviet Union to the world stage. It had, of course, not so much left it as taken a back seat for a decade. Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country' had greatly accentuated the existing trends towards *realpolitik* in

- 247. Werner (1939), 65-6. Max Werner was the pen name of the largely pro-Soviet Menshevik Aleksandr Shifrin. See also EW Sheppard, 'The Military Aspect of the Crisis', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, December 1938, 695.
- 248. Serge (1937), 238.
- 249. Kingsley Martin, 'The Pacifists' Dilemma Today', Political Quarterly, 9 (2), April 1938, 167.
- 250. Henry Wickham Steed, 'The "Poised Snow", Spectator, 16 July 1937, 95-6. See also S Grant Duff, 'Czechoslovakia After the Anschluss', Spectator, 25 March 1939, 513. The Labour Party leader Arthur Greenwood considered that the Soviet army was now better off thanks to the 'removal of traitors from its ranks'. See Greenwood (1939), 9.
- 251. Jeremiah Warner, 'Nazi Mirage', Fortnightly, April 1938, 393.
- 252. Walter Duranty, 'Russia Today: Internal', Spectator, 3 March 1939, 339.
- 253. Duranty's acceptance of the official rationale for the trials makes his portrayal of their damaging effects all the more striking.

Soviet foreign policy, and a combination of pressing domestic matters around the implementation of the First Five Year Plan and a relatively less dramatic period in international relations had led to the Soviet regime concentrating predominantly upon internal issues.²⁵⁴ However, with the difficult early days of industrialisation now over and in view of the increasing bellicosity of Nazi Germany and the continued threat posed by Japan in the Far East, the Soviet government renewed its interest in foreign affairs. Having joined the League of Nations in September 1934, in mid-1935 it signed mutual aid agreements with France and Czechoslovakia which pledged the signatories to defend each other militarily were they to be attacked, and which thus tied Moscow far closer than previous international agreements to the fate of major capitalist powers. Moreover, Stalin's theory, itself partly a response to the absence of successful proletarian revolutions in the advanced countries, had led to the imposition of a completely different kind of strategy on the Communist International. By the mid-1930s, the Comintern's calls for world revolution had become a meaningless ritual, and its propaganda concentrated upon the defence of the Soviet Union. The parties of the Comintern had, on the one hand, essentially become agencies of Soviet foreign policy, and, on the other, were gradually to develop a national orientation alongside their strong allegiance to Moscow.

The parties of the Communist International had not fared well over the previous decade, with the crushing of the Chinese party by its erstwhile nationalist allies in 1927, and the important German party by Hitler in 1933, and the almost general isolation caused by the shrill approach of their 'Third Period' tactics. Within the Comintern, both in several of its parties and in its Moscow headquarters, the realisation grew that the 'Third Period' line was self-defeating, and starting in 1934, and sanctified by the Comintern's seventh — and final — congress in 1935, communist parties started to adopt a less sectarian approach to other political forces. This was soon to be known as the Popular Front. Moscow viewed the Popular Front as a means to make use of both the concern, especially in Western Europe, over Nazi Germany, and the growing impression of the Soviet Union as a force that was fighting for progress and against fascism.

This was made clear by Georgi Dimitrov, the General Secretary of the Comintern, who outlined the essence of the Popular Front in November 1937. He declared that the key measure of socialist and democratic politicians was 'their *attitude* toward the great land of socialism'. The fight against fascism and war was inseparable from rendering 'undivided support' to the Soviet Union, and the 'historical dividing line' between the 'forces of fascism, war and capitalism' and the 'forces of peace, democracy and socialism' was now the 'attitude towards the Soviet Union', rather than the 'formal atti-

^{254.} Richard Freund noted that after Trotsky's fall, Soviet foreign policy had become 'inactive', see Freund (1936), 210.

tude toward soviet power and socialism in general'.²⁵⁵ The appeal to democrats as well as socialists, and the shift of the 'historical dividing line' away from the concept of 'soviet power and socialism' — that is to say, proletarian revolution — to the 'attitude toward the Soviet Union' — to be more precise, the interests of the Soviet regime — confirmed that Moscow was aiming to use the parties of the Comintern to bring together anyone from any class who, for whatever reason, favoured an alliance between the democratic capitalist powers and the Soviet Union, in order to forestall any aggression from Nazi Germany.

In Britain, the Communist Party saw both its membership and influence grow considerably during the Popular Front period, as, on the one hand, its praise for the Soviet Union intensified, and, on the other, its propaganda became increasingly patriotic. Addressing the CPGB's congress in 1938, Pollitt demanded 'an honest policy of collective security and cooperation in a Peace Bloc with our Dominions, France and the Soviet Union, the USA and all other democratic states', and called for the 'closest friendship and solidarity... between the people of Britain and the Soviet Union'. He spread his net wide, reaching out beyond the labour movement to the members of the middles class, the Liberal and Conservative Parties and the big churches. Not surprisingly, his all-class appeal was couched in patriotic terminology, and he upbraided Chamberlain's National Government for 'betraying the national interests of the British people', 'surrendering strategic positions to the fascist states, and lowering Britain's prestige in the eyes of the peoples of the world'.256 Nonetheless, although the call for Britain to join the Franco-Czecho-Soviet collective security alliance was to become popular during the late 1930s, particularly amongst the centre ground of opinion, many adherents of the latter remained both dismissive of the CPGB and critical of various aspects of the Soviet regime.

The assessments in Britain of Soviet foreign policy are best investigated through the prism of the discussion around British interests and tasks in Europe and the wider world. Like the shift in Moscow's foreign policy, this discussion was to a considerable degree influenced by the policies of Nazi Germany, which, particularly after Hitler's decisions to rearm and to reclaim the Rhineland, were seen by many as a decidedly destabilising factor in Europe. Here, international relations are studied only insofar as they concern attitudes towards the Soviet Union, but these in themselves can only be understood within the context of Britain's role in European and global affairs, in which the Soviet Union was an important but by no means the determining factor.

^{255.} Georgi Dimitrov, 'The Soviet Union and the Working Classes of the Capitalist Countries', in Dimitrov (1938), 279-80.

^{256.} Harry Pollitt, 'Economic Security, Peace and Democracy', in Communist Party of Great Britain (1938), 26, 37, 40, 55-7, 73. This move towards patriotism within the Comintern was noted by rival left-wingers, see in particular Kenneth Lee, 'Cominternationalism', Controversy, May 1937, 25-8.

Broadly speaking, there was a division in British political circles between those who considered that the Soviet Union had become a *status quo* power and thus could be relied upon as an actual or potential ally against any attempt on the part of Germany and Japan to upset stability in Europe and the Far East, and those who considered that despite its adherence to the League and other symbols of respectability, the Soviet regime was still a revolutionary threat to capitalism and could not be trusted to coexist peacefully with the capitalist world. The fault-line between these two viewpoints ran to a certain extent along a left-right plane, with official communists, social democrats, many liberals and those in the somewhat amorphous sphere of 'progressive' thought being in favour of an alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union, usually in conjunction with the League of Nations, and many on the right being strongly opposed, although there was also a vigorous conservative lobby, including Anthony Eden, Winston Churchill and the *Spectator*, which, irrespective of its attitude towards Soviet internal policies, favoured an Anglo-Soviet alliance, which was a course that the National Government refused to take.

Britain's social democrats, staunch believers in the ethos of the League of Nations and the principle of collective security, were cheered by the new Soviet outlook. Labour leaders Dalton and Attlee both praised Moscow's new line.257 With the Soviet Union in the League, the official communist movement was now able to see advantages in going along with the Geneva system.²⁵⁸ Dutt considered that whilst collective security was 'no permanent solution to the problem of war', it could act as 'a temporary stopgap against the immediate menace of war'. Although all major capitalist states tended towards war with one another, and all favoured crushing the Soviet Union at some point or another, at this juncture, Dutt declared, the 'non-fascist imperialist states' sought 'for the time being to delay the immediate outbreak of war', thus permitting the building up of a 'collective peace front', consisting of the Soviet Union, the smaller states and those imperialist states which sought 'to delay immediate war'. 259 Stripped of Dutt's characteristic terminology, it is clear that the orientation of the official communist movement had become close to that of the social democrats. Astute conservative commentators considered that with Trotsky out of the way, Stalin had 'abandoned the idea of spreading communism by aggression', 260 and welcomed 'the note of practical realism' which had been struck in the Kremlin 'ever since Mr Stalin came to power'.261

^{257.} Dalton (1935), 372; Attlee (1937), 222.

^{258.} In early 1936, Wilfred Hindle cuttingly referred to 'League enthusiasts (their numbers strangely, very strangely, swollen in the past year)' ('Foreign Affairs', English Review, January 1936, 18).

^{259.} Dutt (1936), 170, 341.

^{260. &#}x27;Can Britain Save Europe?', Spectator, 29 March 1935, 520.

^{261.} See Robert Boothby's contribution to Britain and the Soviets (1936), 4.

For friends of the Soviet Union, Moscow's foreign policy was the epitome of responsible power and unimpeachable benevolence, with the country being, in Dutt's words, the champion of disarmament, the friend of small nations, 'the leader in the fight for peace'. However, many observers at various points of the political spectrum, and for whom the Soviet Union was not an object of worship, agreed that it had no designs on neighbouring territory. Richard Freund, an Austro-German authority on international relations based by this time in Britain, declared:

No important interest of the Soviet Union depends at present on the control of any region outside its frontiers. The solution of no internal problem is sought in territorial expansion... The Soviet Union today can live without territorial acquisitions, without expanding foreign trade, and without the conversion to communism of other nations... The Soviet Union has become a comparatively stable, self-contained country which can afford to stand aside from the struggle for world power, for raw materials and markets.²⁶³

During this period, some conservative observers considered that although Stalin's internal policies put the Soviet Union beyond the bounds of decency, it could nonetheless play an important part in maintaining the stability of Europe. Even a paid apologist for Mussolini's regime could now state that there was 'complete harmony' between the Soviet Union and Britain in respect of their interests in European affairs. ²⁶⁴ Seton-Watson considered that Moscow's joining the League brought the Soviet Union into the camp of the *status quo* powers and 'offered an unexpected obstacle to German designs of predominance in Central, or aggression in Eastern, Europe'. ²⁶⁵ Gritting his teeth somewhat, he, along with others who deplored Soviet domestic policies, felt that in order to defend the European *status quo*, the democratic countries would, in the words of the strongly anti-communist Stephen Gwynne, be obliged to form an alliance 'with the most odious and the least civilised of the three dictatorships'. ²⁶⁶ The hysterical anti-communist barrage emanating from Berlin and Tokyo was seen by many observers as a disingenuous façade to cover their expansionist designs. ²⁶⁷

- 262. Dutt (1936), 276, 318, 335.
- 263. Freund (1936), 222. See also Henry Wickham Steed, 'Lost Bearings', Contemporary Review, August 1936, 137. Franz Borkenau, a former member of the German Communist Party, considered that just as 'it was impossible for Russia to transfer its revolution abroad', it would 'prove equally impossible for it to spread its totalitarian regime', see Borkenau (1939), 423.
- 264. EW Polson-Newman, 'Europe and the World', Nineteenth Century and After, May 1935, 567-8, 573.
- 265. Seton-Watson (1938), 5, 103, 121, 414.
- 266. Stephen Gwynne, 'Ebb and Flow', Fortnightly, April 1938, 489. See also '1914 and 1935', Spectator, 5 April 1935, 556; Royal Institute of International Affairs (1939b), 99.
- 267. Henry Wickham Steed, 'British Interests', Contemporary Review, April 1938, 386; 'The Avalanche', Fortnightly, April 1938, 387-9; GE Taylor, 'Japan's "Holy War" on Communism', Fortnightly, February 1937, 209-16.

The most prominent symbol of the new orientation in Soviet foreign policy was the pact signed between the Soviet Union and France in May 1935. As it tied the Soviet Union militarily to a leading capitalist country, this agreement, along with the one signed with Czechoslovakia that June, was seen as much more significant than any it had forged previously, and commentators realised that this would have profound implications for the parties of the Comintern. Chamberlin was quick to note that the Soviet government could not simultaneously propose a mutual aid pact with a capitalist country and sponsor on that country's territory an organisation that would encourage mutinies in the army and provoke social unrest.²⁶⁸

Various observers considered that by the mid-1930s, the Communist International had changed to a considerable degree. Even unsympathetic observers, as Chamberlin was by now, discounted the idea that it posed a revolutionary threat to capitalism, and he wrote it off as 'a lifeless bureaucratised institution' which had expelled all its best people, and acted as 'a cat's-paw of Soviet foreign policy'. Carr agreed, claiming that since the end of the 1920s, Moscow's foreign policy had been subordinated to the quest to build the Soviet economy, and now consisted of 'normal and undisturbed relations with the capitalist world'. The Comintern had been severely demoted:

Once upon a time, the Soviet government had been merely a forerunner of the coming world revolution sponsored by Comintern. Now, Comintern dances to the tune called by the directors of Soviet foreign policy, which is not less opportunistic than that of any capitalist state. Since 1935, Comintern has been no more than a branch of the Soviet government's propaganda department... Today, Comintern is neither communist nor international; it is merely the ghost of world revolution flitting uneasily in the twilight world round the tomb of Lenin in the Red Square.²⁷⁰

He drew the conclusion that Moscow and consequently the Communist International were opposed to revolutions in the capitalist world. Franz Borkenau, a former member of the German Communist Party by this time resident in Britain, considered that if Moscow wished to normalise relations with capitalist states, it would be better off dissolving the Comintern, but it would not do so, as it would not willingly discard an instrument that permitted it to influence the political life of foreign countries, even if this created friction in diplomatic circles.²⁷¹

Non-Stalinist left-wingers also considered that Moscow had given up on the world

^{268.} Chamberlin (1935b), 384.

^{269.} Ibid, 225-7. However, this did not rule out the possibility of Moscow adopting a nationalist expansionary policy, see Chamberlin (1937), 155.

^{270.} EH Carr, 'Twilight of Comintern', Fortnightly, February 1938, 140-1, 147. See also Thompson (1939), 50; AJ Cummings, 'The Soviet Regime', Listener, 16 October 1935, 680; John Heath, 'USSR', International Affairs, 15 (3), May 1936, 467.

^{271.} Borkenau (1939), 389, 428.

revolution, and that Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country' had led to the Soviet leadership attempting to establish a permanent rapprochement with the capitalist world. This, they claimed, would lead — and indeed had led — in those states linked through diplomatic alliances with the Soviet Union to the parties of the Comintern opposing revolution and dampening down the class struggle, as Moscow would not countenance the weakening of its new-found allies, and, with this 'adulterous union with its mortal enemy, patriotism', each communist party would effectively become a bulwark of its national capitalist state.²⁷²

The far left's stance on this issue was echoed to some degree by commentators of quite different outlooks. This was particularly so in respect of France, where the Communist Party, although not at first participating in the Popular Front government under Léon Blum, suddenly became very patriotic, played an important role in demobilising two mammoth strike waves in 1936 and 1938, and was seen as being in danger of being outflanked by Trotskyists and other leftists.²⁷³ In March 1938, the Economist went so far as to suggest that the maintenance of social order was best served by having the Communist Party in government.²⁷⁴ In a particularly astute article, Trotsky considered that alongside the dependency of communist parties upon the Kremlin, the nationalist sentiments leading from the theory of 'socialism in one country' and the growing influence of communist parties in national politics in many countries would lead to the rise of 'centrifugal nationalist tendencies within the Comintern', and the real possibility of their evolving 'a patriotic policy' of their own that might not coincide with the interests of Moscow.²⁷⁵ In China, where, having been forced up country by Chiang Kai-Shek's armies, the Communist Party had established a sizeable base in Sinkiang, adjacent to the Soviet Union, various observers, including the former CPGB member Freda Utley, noted that the party was basically Menshevik or radical 'in the English nineteenth-century meaning of the word' in its outlook, as its bourgeoisdemocratic programme differed little to that of the Guomindang.²⁷⁶ On the other hand, India was perhaps a different matter, and the normally unsensationalist Freund

^{272.} Kenneth Lee, 'Cominternationalism', Controversy, May 1937, 26; Trotsky (1937b), 178ff; James (1937), 373ff; Orwell (1938), 58ff; Brockway (1938), 67-9.

^{273.} Denis Brogan, 'Eyes Left in France', Fortnightly, October 1935, 435-7; Alexander Werth, 'M Blum's Retreat', Fortnightly, April 1937, 450-1; Paul Vaucher, 'The Future in France', International Affairs, 17 (4), July 1938, 516-7.

^{274. &#}x27;France', Economist, 26 March 1938, 154-5.

^{275.} LD Trotsky, 'Labour and War', Workers International News, February 1939, 3.

^{276.} Freda Utley, 'China', New Statesman, 28 January 1938, 131. Others agreed and felt that a Soviet-style society could not be built in China, see Frederick White, 'The Far East in 1935', International Affairs, 14 (3), May 1935, 318; Franz Michael, 'China and Communism', Contemporary Review, July 1938, 75.

stated that although the Indian Communist Party was small and 'powerless in politics', it was still 'capable of stirring up dangerous trouble'.²⁷⁷

Moscow's motives were still viewed with suspicion by many commentators, and various observers voiced opposition to or concerns about an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Traditional anti-communists continued to contend that the aims and objectives of the Soviet Union had not changed since 1917. It remained a revolutionary threat to British interests, and could not therefore be trusted. They sometimes expressed themselves in the most florid language:

Russia is busy in Sinkiang — in China, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Tibet. Communist armies have for long overrun the interior provinces of China: the doctrines of Russian communism have obtained a firm hold in India. More than ever Russia is the power which any British government, one would have said, must regard as the potential enemy. Russia is the power indicated as the next master of India in succession to England... And this is a power to whom we are proposing to throw open the gates of the West, and enable it to establish itself upon 'our frontier', namely, the Rhine.²⁷⁸

Moscow's new turn towards the world and the revival of the Communist International encouraged some people to question the assertion that it had abandoned world revolution, as fiery anti-capitalist manifestos were still regularly appearing. ²⁷⁹ George Glasgow, who had only recently written off both Soviet diplomacy and the Comintern as a sorry joke, was now greatly concerned. In late 1936, he declared that if Spain 'went red', France would almost certainly follow. Moscow was behind the big strike waves in France, and it was using the League of Nations 'as an instrument of the communist cause'. ²⁸⁰ Contradicting their praise for the new orientation in Soviet foreign policy, Britain's social democrats, jealously defending their leading positions in the labour movement and committed to parliamentary democracy, complained about the 'Russian effort through the Communist International to establish and finance revolutionary communist parties in other countries with the object of destroying existing democratic industrial and political labour movements, and of bringing about the overthrow

- 277. Richard Freund, 'India in Transition', Spectator, 17 December 1937, 1094-5. Those promoting an Anglo-Soviet alliance were very quiet on the question of the possibility of Soviet influence in India.
- 278. Lewis (1936), 134. See also Sir Arnold Wilson, 'Germany in May', The Nineteenth Century and After, June 1935, 661-2; Huddleston (1938), 328, 333; Solonevich (1936), 18. Lewis' mentioning of the Rhine is a reference to Bonar Law's quip in 1934 that Britain's eastern frontier stood on that
- 279. Paul Miliukov, "Indivisible Peace" and the Two Blocs in Europe', Slavonic and East European Review, 15 (45), April 1937, 587.
- 280. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, November 1936, 614-5, 622-3. Lunn saw the League as a virtual puppet of Moscow, see Lunn (1939), 112.

of the existing social system by violence'.²⁸¹ Right-wingers saw Moscow's hand behind unrest in various countries, and particularly in China, France and Spain. Alarmism ran riot. In July 1936, the ultra-conservative writer Douglas Jerrold felt that France was 'on the edge of revolution', and Spain was 'already a communist republic',²⁸² whilst nearly three years later Yeats-Brown could detect communist subversion afoot in France and Britain, and saw the presence of the exiled leaderships of the German and Polish Communist Parties in Prague as a real threat.²⁸³

Various people warned against Britain joining the Franco-Soviet alliance. Petrie declared that events in Spain had proved that the 'real threat' to Britain came 'not from Berlin but from Moscow', and, as everyone knew, France was 'the ally of Russia'.²⁸⁴ Some, including the Premier Neville Chamberlain, based their opposition to an Anglo-Soviet orientation on the grounds that, irrespective of its aim of preserving peace, the policy of collective security was likely to lead to a major European war,²⁸⁵ with Oswald Mosley's fascist paper and two erstwhile Soviet sympathisers adding that Moscow actually desired this, as it would lead to the Bolshevisation of Europe.²⁸⁶ Carr appealed to practicality and *realpolitik*, claiming that an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance would incline Germany towards establishing closer relations with Japan and Italy, and harden divisions in Europe and beyond.²⁸⁷

Suspicions and doubts continued to exist about Soviet intentions in Europe, including amongst observers who were not necessarily hostile to Moscow, or at least to its current foreign policy orientation. The ink of the signatures on the agreements with France and Czechoslovakia had barely dried before commentators were expressing sneaking suspicions that Moscow might bilk on its international obligations. Hence Freund declared: 'Her immediate objective in the international field is security from

- 281. 'British Labour and Communism', Labour Party (1936), 296.
- 282. Douglas Jerrold, 'Whither England?', English Review, July 1936, 22. For concerns over the gains made by the Chinese Communist Party, particularly in Sinkiang, see JOP Bland, 'The Outlook in the Far East', National Review, January 1939, 52. The question of Spain is dealt with below.
- 283. Yeats-Brown (1939), 325, 340, 388. He missed the point that, having been exiled, the opportunities for mischief on the part of the Polish and German party leaders were substantially reduced.
- 284. Charles Petrie, 'Foreign Affairs', English Review, September 1936, 249. See also Ward Price (1937), 149.
- 285. Chamberlain (1939), 164, 323; Gibbs (1938), 229; Lunn (1939), xv, xx; Yeats-Brown (1939), 68.
- 286. Robert Gordon-Canning, 'Lucifer or Gabriel?', Action, 26 March 1936, 3; JT Walton Newbold, 'Germany and the Rhineland', *International Affairs*, Special Supplement, April 1936, 66; Malcolm Muggeridge, 'When Knights Are Bold', *Fortnightly*, August 1936, 158-9. Muggeridge had been a fellow-traveller prior to 1933, and Walton Newbold had actually been a member of the Communist Party in the 1920s.
- 287. EH Carr, 'Europe and the Spanish War', Fortnightly, January 1937, 34; see also FA Voigt, 'Friendship Between the Nations', Listener, 2 December 1936, 1046.

attack — so much so that it may be doubted whether the Red Army would march if Russia's allies — France, Czechoslovakia or Turkey — were attacked.'288 Various commentators were concerned that, if spurned by the democracies, Moscow might retreat into isolation, or, noting the periods of close Russo-German relations in the past and sometimes claiming that fascism and Stalinism were closely-related social formations, even attempt a rapprochement with Hitler's regime, were it to its advantage. ²⁸⁹

Several observers, with the distinct hint that Stalin's anti-fascist stance was disingenuous, tactlessly noted that very good diplomatic relations existed between the Soviet Union and Italy, and Citrine had the audacity to mention the Soviet oil sales to Italy that continued throughout Mussolini's assault upon Abyssinia.²⁹⁰ Fears were expressed that Stalin's new nationalist orientation would lead to a recrudescence of Russian interference in Eastern Europe and the Balkans,²⁹¹ and that if Soviet troops entered territory in Eastern Europe to reach Czechoslovakia, they might stay there,²⁹² or that Poland might get carved up should Moscow and Berlin draw together.²⁹³

The deep differences of opinion that emerged in Britain over Soviet foreign policy and the role of the Communist International were at their most intense in respect of the Spanish Civil War. A government of liberals and socialists had been elected in Spain in February 1936, and in July General Franco led a rebellion in an attempt to overthrow it. The civil war, which continued until Franco's victory in March 1939, caused an international stir, as military assistance was given to the Republic by the Soviet Union, and to Franco by Italy and Germany, and thereby deeply divided political opinion in Britain. Many commentators, mostly left-wingers and liberals, but also occasional strands within conservative opinion, gave support to the republican government, whilst a large number of right-wingers backed Franco. The government officially took a neutral stance and professed 'non-intervention', although many people within the governing circles of Britain had little sympathy for the Republic.²⁹⁴

The Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War convinced many right-wing

- 288. Freund (1936), 222. See also CF Melville, 'Germany and the Balkans', The Nineteenth Century and After, December 1936, 743.
- 289. Reed (1939), 321; LM Gelber, 'Britain and the European Balance', Fortnightly, March 1938, 274-8; ABC, 'Russo-German Relations', Slavonic and East European Review, 15 (43), July 1936, 104; Fodor (1938), 291-2. Soloveytchik stated that beneath the shouting, Soviet-German relations remained close ('Germany and Russia', Contemporary Review, December 1936, 665-74).
- 290. Citrine (1936), 200; Freund (1936), 244; Seton-Watson (1938), 181.
- 291. Stefan Litauer, 'The Role of Poland Between Germany and Russia', International Affairs, 14 (5), September 1935, 688.
- 292. CF Melville, 'Mitteleuropa', The Nineteenth Century and After, July 1937, 86.
- 293. 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, April 1938, 432; HPS Matthews, 'Poland's Foreign Relations', Fortnightly, August 1938, 162.
- 294. See Taylor (1977), 484-9, for the effect of the war on British political life.

commentators that the Soviet regime was still intent upon organising revolutionary mayhem around the world. Franco was seen as a saviour of Western civilisation, and was thanked for having saved Europe from a fate worse than death:

If it had not been for General Franco, Stalin would now be the master of Spain and of Portugal, and the Communist International would now be established in Barcelona, conveniently close to the French border. For the object of the manoeuvre in Spain – let there be no doubt about that – was to gain a foothold for starting the conquest of France... France having been brought into line, the Union of Soviet Republics of Western Europe would have become a reality. Great Britain... would have been obliged to throw in her lot with the Western Soviets... That was the plot hatched in Moscow.²⁹⁵

Right-wingers insisted that a revolution was taking place in the Republican sector, although their descriptions of it usually went little further than a catalogue of lurid atrocities committed by Spanish hot-heads on behalf of Moscow.²⁹⁶

The supporters of the Republic usually presented the war as a conflict between democracy and fascism, and at first they emphasised the government's careful programme of reforms, and downplayed the growing grass-roots radicalism.²⁹⁷ The moderating role of official communism was noted with approval.²⁹⁸ Conservatives who favoured an Anglo-Soviet alliance against Germany downplayed the question of Soviet involvement in Spain, and emphasised the danger to British interests that Franco's victory would represent.²⁹⁹

Almost from the start, however, it was noticed that the political centre ground in Republican Spain was rapidly disappearing,³⁰⁰ and far left observers claimed that a genuine social revolution was taking place, with workers and peasants seizing the land and factories, and running them in a democratic collective manner — a phenomenon which, according to one prominent left-winger, 'some left papers' seemed to have wanted 'to conceal'.³⁰¹ Non-Stalinist socialists felt that Moscow's intervention in Spain

- 295. 'Augur', 'The Plot That Failed', *National Review*, May 1938, 620-2. See also Robert Gordon-Canning, 'Blood-Drenched Spain', *Action*, 13 August 1936, 3. It is interesting to note that stripped of its anti-Semitism, the fascist appraisal of Soviet foreign policy was pretty much the same as that of the regular anti-communists.
- 296. See especially Cardozo (1937), 35.
- 297. Edward Goodman, 'Construction and Destruction in Spain', Contemporary Review, October 1936, 416-20; W Horsfall Carter, 'Spain From the Inside', Fortnightly, November 1936, 559. A popular assertion was that Moscow-style communism would never take hold in Spain because of the individualist traditions of that country, see Freund (1936), 110-1; G Young, 'Spain the Irrepressible', Fortnightly, June 1937, 663.
- 298. Kingsley Martin, 'A Letter From a Young to an Old Tory', New Statesman, 25 July 1936, 112.
- 299. See, for example, Seton-Watson (1938), 378, 387.
- 300. Freund (1936), 110.
- 301. JPM Millar, 'Labour and the Dogs of War', Plebs, October 1936, 226. See also Orwell (1938), 58ff;

had nothing to do with altruism or desire for a revolution, but was part of its strategy to establish an equilibrium amongst the big powers, by preventing Spain from falling into the Italo-German orbit. A proletarian revolution in Spain would lead to social upheavals in France and thus upset Moscow's plans, and the official communists would therefore do their utmost to stifle any revolution in Spain, irrespective of the fact that the Spanish masses had embarked upon the revolutionary road.³⁰²

A few observers noted the rapidly rising tensions within the Republican camp. By the end of 1936, the pro-Franco academic and Spain expert Walter Starkie was predicting a war between the Stalinists and the anarchists, 303 and the left-winger Cyril Connolly subsequently noted with concern that the Stalinists were describing the dissident communists of the POUM as 'fascists', and accusing them of counter-revolutionary activity.304 The tensions between the official communists – whom Carr claimed stood on the 'extreme right' of the Republican forces³⁰⁵ – and the moderate socialists on the one hand, and the dissident communists and anarchists on the other, soon erupted into a civil war in its own right. Some commentators praised the former faction, 306 whilst a small number of radicals tried to explain that the Stalinists were suppressing a revolution. George Orwell's accounts of the internecine war within the Republican camp were written shortly after his escape from the Stalinists in Spain. He lamented the fact that so few people in Britain understood that the official communists had allied with the pro-capitalist republican parties, and were trying to roll back the gains that the workers had won during the revolution in 1936. He noted that when he left Spain in-mid 1937 that 'the jails were bulging' with people jailed by the Stalinists because of their left-wing convictions. He recognised that the Stalinists' actions were demoralising the militants, and thus impeding the war effort against Franco.³⁰⁷

- James (1937), 405.
- 302. John Aplin, 'Which Way is Spain Going?', Controversy, June 1937, 50; James (1937), 405-7; Serge (1937), 258-9. Borkenau and Carr also noted the Stalinists' opposition to a revolution in Spain. See Borkenau (1939), 406-7; EH Carr, 'Twilight of Comintern', Fortnightly, February 1938, 146.
- 303. Walter Starkie, 'Spanish Kaleidoscope A Background', Fortnightly, December 1936, 686. This prediction of internecine fighting was rarely made by those within the pro-Franco camp.
- 304. Cyril Connolly, 'A Spanish Diary', New Statesman, 20 February 1937, 278.
- 305. EH Carr, 'Twilight of Comintern', Fortnightly, February 1938, 146.
- 306. Both the Economist and the Spectator backed the Spanish government's crushing of the far left during the Barcelona May Days in 1937, thus implicitly endorsing the Stalinists, who played a major part in defeating the revolt, see 'Notes of the Week', Economist, 15 May 1937, 393; 'News of the Week', Spectator, 14 May 1937, 890.
- 307. Orwell (1938), 68ff; George Orwell, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', New English Weekly, 29 July 1937, 307; John McNair, 'Disunity in Spain', Controversy, February 1938, 99-100. Louis Fischer blithely accepted the repression against the left: 'The truth is that the communists' saving dynamism and discipline can have unpalatable by-products.' ('The War in Spain', New Statesman, 20

But this was not what the bulk of people, left or right, wished to read. Even after it was clear that the Stalinists in Spain had imposed a reign of terror upon other left-wingers, most right-wingers completely ignored the schisms on the left,³⁰⁸ because acknowledging the Stalinists' hostility to revolutionary organisations would have fatally undermined their preconceptions about Moscow's role in Spain and the world at large. On the left, awkward facts were often ignored for the sake of the image of the heroic Republic.³⁰⁹

The fall of the Spanish Republic occurred during a period of increasing international tension and concern about the direction which Soviet foreign policy might take. The lobby for an Anglo-Soviet alliance continued to draw support from across the political spectrum, forming an agglomeration of 'old anti-Germans, new anti-Nazis, old pro-Russians and supporters of collective security', as Carr put it, 'all fervently preaching friendship with Soviet Russia'. Those who maintained their opposition to such an alliance now did so at the risk of sounding bereft of ideas.311 Although at the start of 1939, GP Gooch considered the Soviet-Czech alliance to be dead and the Franco-Soviet one 'in a state of suspended animation', he insisted that there was 'no danger' of Moscow 'being sucked into the Rome-Berlin axis',312 but other commentators continued to express fears about the possibility of Moscow withdrawing into isolation or going so far as to ally with Germany should an Anglo-Soviet alliance fail to materialise, particularly after Stalin dismissed his pro-Western foreign minister Maxim Litvinov, and when Anglo-Soviet negotiations in Moscow in mid-1939 dragged on inconclusively.313 In view of this, it is strange that little notice was taken of Stalin's keynote speech at the Eighteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in March 1939, which discounted the possibility of a German attack on the Soviet Union and omitted any call for an alliance with Britain, and it was left to two minor left-wing journals, one of a Trotskyist group, the other of an obscure current in the Labour Party, to conclude that as a consequence of the uncertainties that had arisen after the Munich debacle in

August 1938, 273)

- 308. Yeats-Brown (1939), 310; Lunn (1939), 23.
- 309. Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* was rejected out of hand by Gollancz, and, even when published by Secker and Warburg, was a decidedly slow seller.
- 310. EH Carr, 'Darkness Over Russia', Spectator, 28 July 1939, 151. Hence, one strongly anti-German right-wing conservative journal finally if very reluctantly accepted the need for some sort of link with Moscow. See 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, July 1939, 9.
- 311. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, June 1939, 740; July 1939, 101.
- 312. GP Gooch, 'Thirty Years of Europe', Contemporary Review, February 1939, 135.
- 313. 'Comments', New Statesman, 17 June 1939, 922; M Wolf, 'The European Situation', The Nineteenth Century and After, June 1939, 647-8; Charlie Van Gelderen, 'Litvinov Sacking and Soviet Pact', Militant, June 1939, 2; 'Wreckers of Europe', Socialist Vanguard, July 1939, 98.

1938, Stalin's speech was intended to signify a shift in Soviet foreign policy and 'his readiness to strike a bargain with Hitler'. The Stalinists hailed it as a complete refutation of the idea that Stalin was speculating upon moving into isolation, whereas the right-wing *National Review* reminded its readers that Stalin had done nothing to defend Czechoslovakia during the Munich crisis, and thus could not be trusted.

On the eve of the Second World War, Stephen Gwynne felt that Stalin might draw a lesson from the USA's conduct in the First World War. Stalin would not want Britain or France defeated, but he might let them fight it out with Germany until a Soviet intervention 'would be welcomed and rewarded', and although Moscow would eventually take the anti-German side, it would not intervene until the arrival of an opportune moment.³¹⁷ Then, in this atmosphere of official prevarication, with negotiations getting nowhere and Chamberlain's government still refusing to forge a collective security agreement, with doubts and suspicions about Soviet intentions growing in the minds of many commentators, and with the Stalinist Pat Sloan insisting that Moscow's foreign policy made a rapprochement with fascism 'impossible', ³¹⁸ on 23 August 1939 Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Soviet and German foreign ministers, signed a non-aggression pact.

V: Conclusion

The latter half of the 1930s saw the Soviet Union held in higher esteem in Britain than at any time since the October Revolution. And although in many ways the observations and analyses published in this country of the Soviet Union after 1935 followed on from those which appeared before then, there were different emphases brought about by new or changing factors both within and outwith the Soviet borders.

In and of itself, the spectrum of ideas, the divisions of opinion amongst observers, had not changed. Members of the official communist movement and the fellow-travellers, their ranks swelling as the 1930s drew by, felt confident that the Soviet Union was forging ahead in implementing its economic and social policies, and that it presented a shining example to the rest of the world. Small numbers of dissident left-wingers considered that the Soviet regime was forsaking, or had already forsaken, any

^{314. &#}x27;Hitler Will March Again – And Soon', Workers International News, April 1939, 2; Allan Flanders, 'Don't Trust Chamberlain', Socialist Vanguard, April 1939, 52. For Stalin's speech, see 'Report of Stalin on Activity of CC of the CPSU(B)', World News and Views, 15 March 1939, 212-4. The New Statesman failed to see anything untoward in Stalin's speech ('Comments', New Statesman, 18 March 1939, 410).

^{315. &#}x27;Britain Needs Russia', Russia Today, April 1939, 7.

^{316. &#}x27;Episodes of the Month', National Review, April 1939, 423.

^{317.} Stephen Gwynne, 'Ebb and Flow', Fortnightly, August 1939, 219-21.

^{318.} Sloan (1939), 111.

claim to be socialist, and had betrayed its revolutionary credentials. The anti-communist current continued to pour scorn upon the claims of the pro-Soviet lobby, and pointed to both the continued negative features of Soviet society, particularly the degree of state repression, and the revolutionary threat that it claimed was posed by official communism. A broad sweep of social democratic and liberal opinion felt that Britain and other Western countries could learn a variety of lessons from the Soviet experience, but refused to endorse the Soviet system as a whole, and continued to criticise those features that it found unacceptable.³¹⁹

There were several reasons for the growing popularity of the Soviet Union in Britain during this period. Firstly, although the worst effects of the economic crisis in the West had been largely overcome, the revival of capitalism had not brought about universal prosperity. The continued advances in welfare, educational and health provisions, the rising living standards as a result of improvements in respect of food, clothing and housing, and the absence of unemployment in the Soviet Union contrasted with the continuing high level of joblessness, poverty and primitive social security provisions which existed in Britain and other capitalist countries.

Secondly, although the Soviet economy was not expanding as dramatically as during the First Five Year Plan, it was still experiencing steady growth, and had overcome the worst dislocations of the early 1930s. The East-West contrast in the economic field may not have been so stark after 1935, but it nonetheless existed, and although less direct attention was paid to Soviet economic affairs by commentators, the advances in the Soviet economy continued to influence the discussion in Britain on economic matters, particularly in respect of planning, and increased the popularity of the perception that planning was necessary if economic crises were to be averted.

Thirdly, the rise of authoritarian regimes in many European countries, and in particular the rising threat to democratic rights and international stability posed by Nazi Germany, enabled the Soviet regime, particularly after the introduction of the 1936 constitution, to promote itself internationally as a bastion of democracy, an image which the official communist movement and the wider pro-Soviet lobby eagerly popularised in the capitalist world. The emergence of the Soviet Union on the world stage as a status quo power in what was an increasingly unstable and threatening global situation was welcomed not merely by the pro-Soviet lobby in Britain, but by quite a few people who were otherwise hostile to official communism and left-wing politics in general.

319. The latter half of the 1930s saw a considerably higher level of political awareness and activity than the first half. The blooming of fellow-travelling organisations during this period has been noted in Chapter One. The membership of the CPGB rose from 5800 in December 1934 to 17 756 in July 1939, and its influence grew at a far greater rate, see Pelling (1975), 192. The non-Stalinist far left remained small.

On the other hand, many issues stood unresolved. Many liberals and social democrats continued to match their praise for Soviet cultural and welfare measures with unease about the repressive features of the Soviet regime, and were concerned that Stalin's deeply authoritarian and terroristic forms of rule were proving far more than just temporary measures limited to a difficult period, and that the provisions of the new constitution were not being implemented. Various observers who had welcomed the political relaxation after the completion of the First Five Year Plan were now having doubts about the possibility of a genuine democratisation. That the most ardent supporters of the Soviet Union implicitly recognised its authoritarian nature was evident in the stark contrast between their effusions over the new constitution and their convoluted defence of undemocratic practices. Hence the Stalinists and their allies hailed the Soviet Union as a paragon of a new and advanced form of democracy, whilst at the same time attempting through a variety of sleights of hand to justify a definite — if never actually acknowledged — democratic deficit compared to bourgeois democracy.

The spectacle of the Moscow Trials and the purging of the generals made a great impression upon observers of all outlooks, and led to unexpected divisions and convergences of opinion in Britain. A large number of commentators were, to say the least, sceptical about the validity of the trials, and seeds of doubts about Stalinism were sown in the minds of certain generally pro-Soviet people. For official communists and fellow-travellers, it was - at least publicly - clearly a case of unquestioning belief, as they maintained an uncritical attitude towards the Soviet regime that verged upon worship (and which was sometimes followed by a deep sense of betrayal when the lure wore off), and the example of Spender showed how doubters' qualms could be overcome through their being persuaded by true believers. Taking into consideration the holes in the evidence and their general implausibility, however, it is surprising and indeed alarming to note that some critical observers were willing to take at least some aspects of the show trials seriously, especially when one considers the almost universal rejection of the validity of the trials of the early 1930s. On the other hand, there were factors which, even if they did not fully convince people that the trials were genuine, nevertheless left nagging feelings that the trials were not entirely a fraud, including the ideas that the defendants may have been conspiring against Stalin, that the now secure Soviet regime had no reason to tear itself apart in internecine quarrels, and that if Dimitrov could loudly proclaim his innocence in the Reichstag Fire Trial, why did the Moscow Trials defendants confess their guilt? The burgeoning pro-Soviet atmosphere in the late 1930s encouraged otherwise sceptical people to give Moscow the benefit of the doubt. Some people who saw the Soviet regime as a potential strategic ally preferred to take the trials seriously, strange and even monstrous though they may have seemed, rather than see them as irrational and criminal actions on the part of the regime and its leader. To have disputed the allegations would have been to question Stalin's judgement and even sanity, and so these people, who did not usually endorse every act of the regime, or, like Wickham Steed and Seton-Watson, were otherwise stern critics of its internal affairs, were thus in the paradoxical position of endorsing what was widely recognised as one of the most repulsive aspects of Stalinism in the late 1930s.

One problem with the Moscow Trials and the purges was that those who did reject their validity were hard pressed to explain why the regime went to such lengths to discover and root out alleged malcontents and traitors. Even if one assumed that Stalin was a paranoid maniac, it might make sense for him to eliminate an actual or potential oppositionist or two as a pre-emptive measure, but to exterminate whole departments of state almost down to the office boy did seem excessive. This was especially the case with the purging of the military. Informed observers knew that Hitler's crushing of the SA in 1934 was brutal, but also that it was limited to a relatively small number of men, and that his own purge of military leaders was similarly limited in size, and was largely bloodless. The dynamics of the Soviet Union, the factors that made the system run, remained very much a mystery to even its most profound analysts.

Not surprisingly, this unfamiliarity encouraged various commentators to look for parallels in the rest of the world. The Five Year Plans and the Soviet Communist Party's political monopoly were sometimes seen as part of a general global tendency towards étatisation and authoritarianism. Some commentators asserted that the Soviet economy was not actually planned, and that aspects of Soviet economic policies, such as Stakhanovism, were neither exceptional nor novel, sometimes with the implication that for all its boasts of establishing a new civilisation, the Soviet Union could not escape from the familiar norms of capitalism.

The fact that the Soviet Union under Stalin had undergone a tremendous period of development could not be ignored, and observers who were critical of Stalinism were in the paradoxical situation of having to accept that the economic and social advances had been implemented by a regime that was politically unacceptable to them. Liberals, right-wing social democrats and non-Stalinist left-wingers often combined their sharp criticisms of the Soviet regime with enthusiastic endorsements of its achievements. A strange duality thus ran through their writings in that whilst rejecting the political regime, they nonetheless considered that other aspects of the Soviet Union were of a progressive and even a socialist nature. However, although only the insignificant free market lobby insisted outright that a collectivist society must by its very nature be totalitarian, the continued extreme authoritarianism of Stalinism posed, albeit sometimes in an implicit manner, the question as to whether the lack of unemployment and the provision of welfare measures were an adequate or acceptable com-

pensation for the absence of political freedoms, or, to put it another way, whether such a society could actually provide not merely the material necessities of life, but an entirely new form of civilisation that was preferable to capitalism.

There was a growing feeling that not only was the Soviet regime encouraging inequality, but that an institutionalised class structure, including a new ruling élite, was establishing itself, although differences existed as to whether this represented a betrayal of Bolshevik principles, or was inherent in the very nature of Bolshevism. This in turn raised the question of what the Soviet Union actually represented. Apart from the idea that it did not really constitute an alternative to capitalism, sometimes expressed in the idea that it was a state capitalist society, an increasingly popular concept was that it, along with Nazi Germany and other similar states, represented a new, collectivised form of society. Various non-Stalinist left-wingers considered that the Soviet Union, at least in respect of its economic system, formed the basis of a socialist country, or was a primitive form of socialism, but that it required a thoroughgoing democratisation, either through reform or a new revolution, although it was possible for the Soviet regime in the meantime to carry out some historically progressive tasks through its stewardship of a non-capitalist economy. Although the far left argued over the nature of the Soviet Union, its adherents agreed that its ruling élite now had a material interest in preventing communism, and pointed to the experience of France and Spain to show that it would sabotage any militant upsurge on the part of the working class.

The insistence of critical observers that a new ruling group had emerged inevitably brought to the fore the perennial problem outlined in Chapter One, namely, that of proof. The pro-Soviet lobby could point to the formally democratic structures and, after 1936, the new constitution in order to bolster their conviction that the regime was a new form of democracy. To be sure, there were hints even amongst the faithful that the Soviet Union suffered from a democratic deficit, but on the crucial questions of genuine democracy and the existence of a ruling élite, there could be no meeting of minds between supporters and critics of the system.

Those who equated Stalinism with fascism, or saw Bolshevism as inherently totalitarian, tended to overlook the democratic core of Bolshevism that existed during the early years of the Soviet republic. Those who championed the Soviet system in the 1930s, either continuing or commencing their allegiance well after the last sparks of soviet democracy had been extinguished, had either to kid themselves that Stalinism was democratic (or at least undergoing a process of democratisation) through taking the regime's statements as fact, or to accept its élitist nature, or — in the case of the Webbs — to do both. Few tried to explain why the promise of liberation of the October Revolution had not come to fruition. Trotsky's analysis was the most profound, but not only did he draw back from a full explanation when it came to his own role in the

process, his audience in Britain was somewhat limited, as his ideas were unacceptable to most of those who rejected Bolshevism and to everyone who supported Stalinism.

Doubts nagged at many of those who favoured the establishment of a full-blown collective security alliance incorporating Britain and the Soviet Union, aimed at forestalling German expansion. They were angered by the refusal of Chamberlain's administration to adopt such a policy, but could not help wondering about the willingness of Moscow to take seriously any international obligations, and the possibility of its retreating into isolation or worse if it felt that such a course was in its own particular interests, although these were the factors, along with outright anti-communism, which deterred the government from allying with Moscow. Nevertheless, apart from the pro-Soviet lobby, for whom Moscow's interventions in the world were of a generally selfless and beneficial nature, a force for peace and a better future, a large swathe of opinion during this period saw the Soviet Union as a stabilising factor in international affairs, or at least potentially of some use against the threat of German expansion. Critics of Soviet interventions in the wider world tended to be either the adherents of the strong anti-communist lobby, whose belief that Moscow and the Communist International were still bent on world revolution was strengthened by the reappearance of the Soviet Union on the world stage and the resurgence of the Comintern, or the marginal forces of the far left, who claimed that official communism was a consciously counterrevolutionary force that would be tray the world-wide fight for socialism.

Unlike in the early years of the 1930s, when forecasts of imminent collapse were relatively common, few people during the second half of the decade expected the Soviet regime to fail. The catastrophism evident during the First Five Year Plan had largely evaporated, even though many critical observers were aware of continuing economic problems, particularly in respect of shortfalls in plan fulfilment, lax labour discipline and poor product quality, and some were led by the purges and trials to question the soundness of the political regime. Although the idea that the Soviet socioeconomic formation was an ultimately unviable form of society was implicit in the writings of certain people amongst the free marketeers, right-wing conservatives and far left revolutionaries, for the majority of observers the ability of the Soviet regime to survive the industrialisation and collectivisation process and the turbulence of the purges was a clear sign of its durability. And so, whether commentators saw the Soviet Union as a force for good or evil, or as an experience from which certain lessons could be learnt, it was increasingly recognised as a permanent factor in world affairs.

The Soviet Union was a major subject of discussion and debate in Britain during the latter half of the 1930s, in respect of both its domestic and international policies. This, however, has to be qualified by the recognition that much of the debate around Moscow's foreign policy was a component of the discussion around the re-emergence

of Germany as a disruptive force within Europe; in other words, the debate around Soviet involvement in Europe was largely predicated upon that concerning Britain's relations with Germany. In respect of its domestic concerns, the debate around Soviet economic policies and social provisions served as a backdrop to the continuing discussions about both the desirability of planning under capitalism in the light of the continuing lack of confidence in laissez-faire policies, and the need for some form of welfare measures in Britain, with the Soviet experience acting as a yardstick against which progress (or lack of it) could be measured at home. Despite the doubts on the part of many people about certain aspects of the Soviet Union, most notably the show trials and state terror, and the continuing harsher criticisms from anti-communists, the Soviet Union appeared to increasing numbers of people in Britain as a place from which Western governments and institutions could learn, a potential ally in an ever more uncertain world, and, for the true believers, the new civilisation itself. However, in the aftermath of the shock provoked by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, these feelings of doubt and outright hostility were to intensify, and many of the faithful were to go through a process of demoralisation, as a strong wave of anti-Soviet sentiments ripped through Britain, and much of the atmosphere of appreciation for the Soviet Union was to dissipate.

Chapter Four

The Road to War, 1939-41

THIS chapter covers assessments of the Soviet Union that were published in Britain during the period from the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August 1939 to the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The first section shows that the new orientation in Soviet foreign policy led to many sympathetic observers adopting traditional anti-communist ideas. The second section notes how this popularised the notion that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were similar if not identical societies. The third section briefly shows how many of these critical views were quickly revised once the Soviet Union joined the Allies in the war.

I: The New Alignment

The overwhelming reaction to the non-aggression pact signed on 23 August 1939 by Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, and Joachim von Ribbentrop, his German counterpart, was one of disbelief. Although, as we have seen in Chapter Three, certain commentators had suggested that a revival of Soviet-German cooperation was decidedly possible, the extent of the sense of shock when news of the pact came through shows that only a few people had actually expected it.¹

The pact was followed by a series of events — most notably the turn of the Communist International from supporting the Allies at the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 to denouncing the war as an imperialist conflict, the occupation by Soviet troops of the eastern regions of Poland, the incorporation of those regions and, later on, Bessarabia and the Baltic states into the Soviet Union, and, most importantly, the assault upon Finland — that was steadily to add to the shock. The pact and its aftermath dealt a severe blow to the pro-Soviet lobby. Many people in Britain who had regarded the Soviet Union as the only reliable force for world peace and so-

- 1. Those who had forecast a Soviet-German rapprochement naturally prided themselves on their powers of prediction. See Fodor (1941), 123; 'Soviet Pact Blow to Workers', *Militant*, September 1939, 1; 'Birds of a Feather: The Russo-German Bombshell', *Socialist Standard*, September 1939, 138
- 2. John Hallett [EH Carr], 'The Bolshevik Dictator', Spectator, 13 October 1939, 512.

cial progress recoiled at the sight of Moscow embracing the very Nazi leaders whom it had only recently branded as the worst enemies of humanity. The Left Book Club went through a severe crisis as Gollancz and Laski immediately denounced the Stalinists' anti-war turn (Strachey followed suit in early 1940), and a civil war raged between pro- and anti-war factions. The Communist Party of Great Britain attracted critical attention when, in line with the Communist International, it switched from supporting to opposing the war against Nazi Germany, and it was warned that its fealty to Moscow might force its members 'to come out as apologists for Hitler's Germany'. And, as we shall see, many others who, whilst not endorsing the Soviet regime per se, considered that Moscow could be a potentially positive factor in world affairs, also felt decidedly let down. On the other hand, Soviet loyalists praised Moscow's ingenuity, whilst conservative opponents of Anglo-Soviet cooperation smugly pointed out how correct they had been to have insisted that Moscow could not be trusted.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact split British opinion along new lines. In a fit of anger, an editorial in the *Economist* accused Moscow of engaging in 'the biggest single piece of perfidy in history', as it had 'betrayed all its principles, encouraged the aggressors and double-crossed those who were trying to be her friends in Western Europe'. It understood why Stalin wanted to avoid being involved in a war, but the pact had put him 'in pawn to Hitler', and was tantamount to provoking a war, particularly as the pact forbade the Soviet Union from acting in defence of Poland, which was under immediate threat from Germany. More in sorrow, the generally sympathetic *New Statesman* also concluded that the pact had made war inevitable, as it had enabled Hitler to avoid 'the nightmare of a prolonged war on two fronts'. Tribune, on the other hand, maintained its pro-Soviet stance. It claimed that the pact would be 'a great reinforcement for peace in Eastern Europe', as Stalin had brought Hitler 'to heel', and added that only 'malicious or ignorant' people could see it as 'an arrangement to give Germany a free hand in Europe'. Stalinists and fellow-travellers called for a supplementary Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement — 'a genuine pact in which the people of Brit-

^{3.} Patrick Gordon-Walker, 'The Attitude of Labour and the Left to the War', *Political Quarterly*, Volume 11, no 1, January 1940, 83.

^{4. &#}x27;Double Cross Roads', Economist, 26 August 1939, 385-6. See also M Wolf, 'The Situation', Nineteenth Century and After, September 1939, 261.

^{5. &#}x27;Peace in the Balance' and 'Ribbentrop in the Kremlin', New Statesman, 26 August 1939, 297-8, 300-1. See also 'On the Verge', Spectator, 25 August 1939, 273.

^{6. &#}x27;Soviet Peace Move Exposes Chamberlain', Tribune, 25 August 1939, 1.

^{7. &#}x27;Your World In Brief', Tribune, 1 September 1939, 3. Despite its criticisms of the pact, the New Statesman nonetheless considered that Stalin held the whip-hand over Hitler, see 'Moscow and the War', New Statesman, 30 September 1939, 445.

^{8. &#}x27;Russia Has Not Given Hitler a Free Hand', Tribune, 1 September 1939, 1.

ain and France would be linked together with the Soviet Union for the checking of aggression and the maintenance of peace' – despite the fact that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact forbade either contracting party from attacking each other 'both singly and also jointly with other powers', or participating 'in any grouping of powers' which was 'directed directly or indirectly against the other party'. This ruled out any idea of a collective security agreement, as, whatever *Tribune* or Pat Sloan claimed to the contrary, there was no doubt that the whole thrust of such an alliance was aimed at forestalling any aggressive move by Germany.

The rationale behind Moscow's sudden shift was probed in detail. A common explanation, even amongst those who criticised the pact, was that Moscow was forced into aligning with Germany because the British government was unwilling to form an Anglo-Soviet alliance due to its strong anti-Soviet outlook, which inclined it towards deflecting German expansion eastwards into an exhausting fight with the Soviet Union. DN Pritt added that Britain only entered into negotiations with Moscow in the hopes that they would fail and that the latter would be seen as responsible. Others considered that the pact was the result of the Soviet regime gradually withdrawing from the quest for a collective security deal in the aftermath of the Munich débâcle. Various commentators considered that the pact marked a definite shift on the part of Moscow into outright non-ideological realpolitik, power politics and narrow self-interest. This included the Stalinists, who, in repudiating their previous contention that Moscow's foreign policy was of a selfless nature, now insisted that one could only expect the Soviet Union to act in its own interests. EH Carr felt that the pact showed

- 9. Reg Bishop, 'Soviet Policy Winning Support', World News and Views, 2 September 1939, 948.
- 10. Cited in Pritt (1939), 105.
- 11. 'Russia Has Not Given Hitler a Free Hand', *Tribune*, 1 September 1939, 1; Pat Sloan, 'German-Soviet Pact', *New Statesman*, 2 September 1939, 343. The incompatibility of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and a collective security arrangement was recognised at the time, see 'On the Verge', *Spectator*, 25 August 1939, 273.
- Laski (1940), 28-9. See also Henry Wickham Steed, 'War for Peace', Contemporary Review, November 1939, 521; 'Peace in the Balance', New Statesman, 26 August 1939, 297; 'Your World In Brief', Tribune, 1 September 1939, 3.
- 13. Pritt (1939), 57.
- 14. Garratt (1940), 278, 289; Fodor (1941), 129.
- 15. 'Peace in the Balance', New Statesman, 26 August 1939, 298; Gregory Bienstock, 'Stalin's Renversement des Alliances', Nineteenth Century and After, October 1939, 414; Winston Churchill, 'The First Month of the War', Listener, 5 October 1939, 647.
- 16. John Strachey, 'Views About the USSR', New Statesman, 30 September 1939, 458. The left-wing scientist Lancelot Hogben reported that he had been vilified in the past by the Stalinists for suggesting that Moscow would not necessarily help Britain in a war ('Stalinism', New Statesman, 7 October 1939, 486). With breathtaking cheek, Pritt claimed that it was 'a measure of their stupidity' that the British authorities did not realise that Moscow 'would make some agreement with Ger-

Moscow's intention to sit on the fence, keep out of any European war, and 'draw such profits as it could from the misfortunes of others'.¹⁷

The pact was also seen as Stalin's revenge upon the democracies that had coldshouldered the Soviet Union for two decades.¹⁸ Louis Fischer, who now concluded that his career as an apologist for Stalinism had been a big mistake, agreed, but added that Stalin signed the pact with Germany when he realised that Britain and France were serious about taking on Germany. An agreement with Britain and France would have meant war with Germany; an agreement with Germany had allowed him to avoid a war and find some pickings in Eastern Europe. 19 Carr felt that the Anglo-French guarantees to Poland enabled Moscow to abstain from a collective security bloc and thus avoid a war, because France and Britain were now pledged to a course 'which would automatically relieve Russia from fear of a German attack'.²⁰ One conservative commentator averred that the Soviet Union 'never proposed to take any active part in upholding the Western democracies'.21 The claim made by Walter Krivitsky, a former leading Soviet military espionage agent, that Stalin had always hankered after a deal with Hitler²² met with some positive endorsement, ²³ although Kingsley Martin considered that Stalin most probably veered between siding with Germany or with Britain and France.24 With the Communist International reverting to a more militant phraseology as it turned to oppose the war, many hostile observers considered that Stalin had revived Lenin's strategy of using a world war for the purpose of sparking off a world revolution, sitting back and waiting for the warring parties to exhaust themselves and for a revolutionary situation to emerge, 25 sometimes seeing the process starting in a de-

many' in the absence of one with Britain, as if Pritt and his friends would have countenanced any suggestion of any such move on Moscow's part previous to 23 August 1939. See Pritt (1939), 107.

- 17. Carr (1939), 191.
- 18. 'Brest-Litovsk Revenged', New Statesman, 23 September 1939, 420.
- Fischer (1940), 7-10, 29-30. See also The Editor [Frederick Voigt], 'The Situation', Nineteenth Century and After, November 1939, 519; Peter Gurney, 'Book Reviews', Nineteenth Century and After, February 1940, 221.
- 20. Carr (1939), 189.
- 21. De Courcy (1940), 253.
- 22. Krivitsky (1939), 17ff.
- 23. HC Foxcroft, 'A Henchman of Stalin: Sidelights on Dictatorship', Quarterly Review, July 1941, 83. It is interesting to note that although Pritt was at pains to claim that Moscow was as staunchly anti-fascist as ever, he also went to some length to demonstrate that Soviet-German relations had often been good, even after Hitler's coming to power. See Pritt (1939), 18-23, 26, 96.
- 24. Kingsley Martin, 'Stalinism', New Statesman, 9 December 1939, 861-2.
- 25. FO Lindley, 'The German-Soviet Agreement', National Review, October 1939, 437; 'The Fate of Europe in the Balance', Free Europe, 17 May 1940, 1; George Soloveytchik, 'Russia and Europe', Contemporary Review, September 1940, 292; Stanislaw Mackiewicz, 'Some Observations on Anglo-Russian Relations', Free Europe, 29 November 1940, 35. The Popular Front period was seen as a

feated Germany,²⁶ or through the Nazi regime somehow mutating into a form of Stalinism.²⁷ He was accused of deliberately triggering the war in his desire for a revolution in Europe.²⁸ Clearly bemused, Britain's would-be führer Oswald Mosley swung between endorsing this theory, and, noting the fall of Litvinov (or 'Litvinov-Finkelstein', as he insisted on calling him) and the number of Jewish victims of the Moscow Trials, toying with the idea that Stalin may have rid himself of 'Jewish control' and decided to 'pursue the course of a national revolution'.²⁹

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was followed by several expansionist moves by the Soviet regime. On 17 September, Soviet troops crossed the eastern border of Poland, and the country was effectively partitioned between the Soviet and German regimes. The pact had barely been signed before rumours about a possible carve-up of Poland started being circulated³⁰ and denied — *Tribune*'s diplomatic correspondent Konni Zilliacus called on his readers to 'dismiss the tales of a secret Nazi-Soviet alliance for the partition of Poland' as 'mere Nazi propaganda'³¹ — and accusations that the division of Poland had been prearranged were heard from right-wing Conservatives to Trotskyists after the Soviet invasion took place.³² Another view held that if Poland's fate as a nation was sealed, it was better that part of it fell to the Soviet Union than all of it to Nazi Germany.³³ Soviet sympathisers naturally considered that the invasion and the subsequent incorporation of the territory into the Soviet Union were both legitimate and desirable, as, in Pritt's words, it had led to 'the liberation of the people of Western White Russia and the Western Ukraine, not only from the horrors of Nazi warfare

ruse on Stalin's part that successfully fooled much of Western opinion into thinking that he had forsaken the Leninist revolutionary tradition, see WJ Oudenyk, 'Stalin's New Policy', Fortnightly, November 1939, 514. For a strong refutation that Moscow had returned to Leninism, see 'The Communist Party Obeys', Workers International News, October 1939, 5.

- Julius Braunthal, 'Germany and European Security', Plebs, April 1940, 94; George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, November 1939, 615.
- 27. The Editor [Frederick Voigt], 'The Situation', Nineteenth Century and After, April 1941, 323. This was based upon the concept of the assumed growing similarity of the Nazi and Soviet regimes.
- 28. Jorian Jenks, 'Russia the Wrecker', Action, 2 September 1939, 5; Baikalov (1940), 125-6; 'The Fate of Europe in the Balance', Free Europe, 17 May 1940, 1.
- 29. Oswald Mosley, 'War Always a Crime, Now an Absurdity', Action, 26 August 1939, 1.
- 30. 'Critic' [Kingsley Martin], 'A London Diary', New Statesman, 2 September 1939, 335.
- 31. Konni Zilliacus, 'Who Is To Blame?', Tribune, 1 September 1939, 8.
- 32. See 'Brest-Litovsk Revenged', New Statesman, 23 September 1939, 420; FJC Hearnshaw, 'Russia, Fickle and False', National Review, May 1940, 566; 'Stalinism Is Not Socialism', Militant, October 1939, 1; de Courcy (1940), 270-5. Others suspected that some deal had been done, but were not sure, see, for instance, George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, November 1939, 618.
- 33. AL Rowse, 'Views About the USSR', New Statesman, 30 September 1939, 456; HH Field, 'The Polish Tragedy', Fortnightly, March 1940, 242.

and domination, but also from their oppression by the Polish bureaucracy and land-lords',³⁴ whilst critics of the Soviet system drew attention to reports of requisitioning of farm produce and livestock, shortages of necessities, price rises, restrictions upon private trade, expropriation of private property, and mass deportations.³⁵

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the annexation of eastern Poland had seriously damaged Moscow's image in Britain, 36 the biggest blow to it was struck by the Soviet assault upon Finland on 30 November 1939. This more than any other act drove many social democrats and liberals into a strongly antagonistic stance towards Moscow, to the extent that a broad critical consensus - an anti-Soviet popular front, no less - rapidly emerged. The Soviet government, as part of the construction of a buffer zone on its western borders, had called on the Finnish government to move the border in the Karelian Isthmus 50 miles north-westwards, to cede to it five islands in the Gulf of Finland and some territory near Petsamo in the north, and to permit Soviet forces to be based on Hangö, in exchange for a sizeable chunk of Soviet Karelia. Faced with a firm Finnish refusal, the atmosphere became threatening, and, following a dubious border incident, Soviet bombers attacked Finnish towns and Soviet troops entered Finnish territory. The Finns mounted a determined defence, but after a few weeks in which they suffered heavy losses, the Soviet forces gained the upper hand, the Finnish government surrendered on 12 March 1940, and acceded to the Soviet demands without receiving any compensation. The assault provoked a veritable storm of protest, not merely from traditional critics of the Soviet regime, but from many who had seen Moscow as at least a potentially positive force in international affairs. This was most striking with Tribune. Reversing their previous support for Soviet foreign policy, its editorial board and diplomatic correspondent issued a thundering declaration against Stalin's attack, equating Stalin's actions in Finland with the foreign adventures of Mussolini and Hitler.37

Such equations were commonplace,³⁸ and were even made by such friends of the Soviet regime as Harold Laski.³⁹ The social democrats leading the British labour

- 34. Pritt (1939), 151-2. In a subsequent book, our King's Counsel dipped into the right-wing's lexicon when he justified the annexation of these areas on the grounds that the inhabitants were of the same 'race' as those in Soviet Ukraine and Byelorussia, see Pritt (1940), 88.
- 35. 'Poland Under Two Yokes', Free Europe, 31 May 1940, 36-7. Another critical report, however, indicated that the Soviet occupation policies were considerably less onerous than those of the Germans ('Critic', 'A London Diary', New Statesman, 16 December 1939, 886).
- 36. See the comments by the former CPGB leader Jack Murphy, 'Confusion on the Left', Nineteenth Century and After, November 1939, 550-9.
- 37. Editorial Board and Vigilans [Konni Zilliacus], 'Russia And Finland', Tribune, 8 December 1939, 1.
- 38. Labour Party (1940), 48, 60; 'The Man of Steel', New Statesman, 9 December 1939, 811.
- 39. Laski (1940), 121.

movement were particularly incensed, and, moving with uncharacteristic speed and vigour, hawked the 'Help Finland's Fight for Freedom' campaign around union and Labour Party branches, whilst TUC General Secretary Sir Walter Citrine and Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker made a fact-finding tour around Finland.⁴⁰ There were calls for Britain to give military assistance to Finland,⁴¹ and some felt that the possibility of getting involved in a war with the Soviet Union was a risk worth taking. The *Economist* averred that if it was right to fight Germany, it couldn't be wrong to fight Russia if the need arose,⁴² whilst others were more openly belligerent.⁴³ One right-wing Conservative journal went so far as to grumble: 'Had we declared war on Russia in September we should be in a better position than we are at present.'⁴⁴

Within this wide condemnation of Stalin's action, some commentators warned against Britain becoming too embroiled in Finland, as this might 'finally cement' the Soviet-German relationship into a full alliance,⁴⁵ or, like the Labour left-winger Aneurin Bevan, asked if *matériel* was being sent to Finland because the British government preferred to fight the Soviet Union rather than Germany.⁴⁶ Others considered that Soviet concerns over its defensive requirements, particularly the approaches to Leningrad, could not be gainsaid.⁴⁷ However, Fischer rejected the Soviet rationale that territorial adjustments were justified because Leningrad was in range of Finnish artillery on the grounds that it made 'a case against the existence of every weak and small country', as every power could claim that its cities were in range of a neighbour's airforce.⁴⁸

The pro-Soviet lobby attempted to justify the Soviet case, but it showed signs of bending under the pressure of the broad chorus of disapproval, as even Hewlett John-

- 40. Citrine (1940).
- 41. Ibid, 191; 'Help Finland Now', Spectator, 9 February 1940, 165; 'Help for Finland', Economist, 24 February 1940, 323.
- 42. 'Two Wars', Economist, 24 February 1940, 365.
- 43. Frederick Voigt was unambiguous, and demanded that the Allies blockade Soviet ports and bomb Batum and Baku (The Editor, 'The Situation', *Nineteenth Century and After*, March 1940, 267).
- 44. 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, January 1940, 11.
- 45. 'Spreading the War', New Statesman, 27 January 1940, 93. See also Vigilans, 'The War in Finland', Tribune, 22 December 1939, 6.
- 46. Aneurin Bevan, 'Stop Sending British Arms to Finland', Tribune, 22 December 1939, 1. The British and French governments supplied considerable quantities of matériel to the Finnish government.
- 47. 'Russia's Patience', New Statesman, 2 December 1939, 777. Geoffrey Cox, who visited Finland during the war, considered that the Soviet territorial demands were legitimate, although he condemned the regime's means of attaining them. See Cox (1941), 275-6.
- 48. Fischer (1940), 46-7. The Labour Party declared that on Moscow's logic, Britain would have to cede the Isle of Wight, Southampton and parts of East Kent to Germany, and allow Berlin to control the Orkney, Shetland and Channel Islands. See Labour Party (1940), 60.

son, the normally reliable 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, found the invasion of Finland 'indefensible' from a 'moral standpoint'.⁴⁹ As if implicitly acknowledging that the justification of Soviet foreign policy now required the employment of a legal mind skilled in arguing in favour of dubious defendants, DN Pritt came to the fore to explain Moscow's actions. Pritt's exegesis spent much of its bulk explaining that the British ruling class had been aiming to overthrow the Soviet regime ever since 1917, that it and its counterparts in other countries had 'developed and brought near to fruition a plan for forming a common front of capitalist nations against the USSR', and that they now aimed at 'switching' the war with Germany into a conflict between the capitalist world and the Soviet Union.⁵⁰

The Stalinists claimed that Finland had never shaken off the legacy of the Civil War of 1918, in which the victory of the right-wing forces had resulted in the deaths of several thousand left-wingers and the imprisonment of many thousands more. Pritt claimed that since then Finland had veered between an ineffectual parliamentary regime that was a mere façade covering the machinations of reactionary state officials and the fascistic Lappo movement and White Guards, and an outright fascist regime that openly suppressed working-class organisations.⁵¹ The Finnish ruling class was irredeemably anti-Soviet, but Pritt was sufficiently astute to reckon that few would buy the idea that the rulers of this little state would declare war on its huge eastern neighbour purely on their own volition, so he proffered the notion that the Finns were encouraged to do so by the major anti-Soviet powers as part of their general drive against the Soviet Union. Pritt was often reduced to special pleading. His lengthy digressions on the lack of ethical standards in international relations, the predilection of the big capitalist powers to dominate and interfere in the affairs of smaller ones, and the deathbed revival of the League of Nations to censure and expel the Soviet Union, echoed the complaints in his earlier book that the Western critics of Moscow's actions were guilty of the very crimes which they accused it of committing. The implication was clear: if the imperialists could play dirty, then why not Moscow?⁵²

- 49. Hewlett Johnson, 'The Invasion of Finland', New Statesman, 16 December 1939, 893.
- 50. Pritt (1940), 9, 167ff. See also Russia Today Society (1939). The Labour Party leader Arthur Greenwood emphatically denied that Britain would join forces with Germany against the Soviet Union, see Greenwood (1940), 84-5.
- 51. Pritt (1940), 96ff. The Stalinists were at pains to demonstrate the 'fascistic' and class-ridden nature of Finland, whilst those favouring Finland wrote rhapsodically of its democratic political life and national solidarity, see Citrine (1940), passim; Philip Noel-Baker, 'Just Back From Finland', Listener, 22 February 1940, 351-2; Langdon-Davis (1940), 79ff, 162ff. This was an interesting reversal of the exchange around the democratic credentials of the Soviet Union, and it too gave the impression of the sparring partners describing two different countries.
- 52. Pritt (1939), 132; (1940), 10, 63ff, 221ff.

Although it only led to limited Soviet gains, the Finnish War was a crucial episode in Britain in that it greatly popularised the image of the Soviet Union as both an expansionist force and a threat to Western civilisation, to the degree that it was taken up by people who would have rejected it but a few months previously. Anticommunists had customarily seen the Soviet Union as wishing to expand and dominate as many countries as it could, on the basis that it was a world revolutionary force, or represented a revival of Tsarist imperialism, or was a combination of both, and thus posed a dire threat to the West. The assault upon Finland was seen in these circles in this light, and Soviet designs were sometimes portrayed in the most lurid terms. One London-based academic asserted:

Outstripping Peter the Great..., Stalin is attempting to crush Finland as the first move in the spreading of world revolution: next in turn will come Sweden and Norway, and safely installed on the North Sea, Russia will face her ultimate intended victim in Great Britain... Like Poland on another front, Finland is fighting the battle of European civilisation as a whole.⁵³

Nonetheless, the fact that Finland, unlike most of Eastern Europe, was a parliamentary democracy encouraged others to adopt this way of thinking. The main statement issued by Britain's labour leaders called upon 'the free nations of the world to give every practicable aid to the Finnish nation in its struggle to preserve its own institutions of civilisation and democracy', ⁵⁴ and the Labour Party National Executive Committee added that the 'extinction of the free Finnish democracy' would be 'an intolerable disaster for civilisation'. ⁵⁵ The *New Statesman* now saw the Soviet Union as an expansionist force, with Stalin not merely aiming at 'reinstating the Tsarist Empire', but hoping to drive a corridor through to Narvik. ⁵⁶ The adoption by social democrats of the vocabulary of traditional anti-communism represented a significant change of feeling on their part towards the Soviet Union and official communism.

The efficacy and durability of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was questioned more or less from the time of its signing, and the concordances of views and analyses that emerged showed little respect for traditional political barriers. Hewlett Johnson claimed that Moscow had 'erected an invincible barrier against Hitler in Eastern Europe', ⁵⁷ a view he shared with Churchill and Henry Wickham Steed. ⁵⁸ Many observ-

- 53. Tancred Borenius, 'Finland and Europe', Free Europe, 15 December 1939, 42. The same idea was also expressed in a less alarmist manner, see George Adamkiewicz, 'The Hammer and Sickle Over Poland', Contemporary Review, July 1940, 69.
- 54. Labour Party (1940), 49.
- 55. Ibid, 91.
- 56. 'The Man of Steel', New Statesman, 9 December 1939, 811. The New Statesman did not, however, endorse the calls for Allied action against the Soviet Union.
- 57. Johnson (1939), 384.

ers considered that the pact was solid. The Stalinists declared that the pact had 'eliminated the danger of war between Germany and the Soviet Union', ⁵⁹ and that it had 'greatly increased' the prospect of the latter's 'being able to remain neutral and at peace throughout the conflict'. ⁶⁰ Laski, however, concluded that although Moscow had strengthened its frontiers and defences and retained its freedom of manoeuvre, these were small gains as its 'mistaken' foreign policy had 'enormously strengthened' anti-Soviet sentiments. ⁶¹ Some commentators based their conclusion that the pact signified more than a mere temporary agreement upon the notion that the two partners did not represent 'two antagonistic types of social regime', but were 'one and the same type', as Franz Borkenau expressed it, both bent on world revolution and global domination, thus making the Second World War a conflict between democracy and totalitarian-ism. ⁶² Indeed, such was the growing popularity of theories of convergence, either of a fundamental socio-economic or of a less profound tactical nature, between Germany and the Soviet Union that they were often considered to have had a common interest in carving up Eastern Europe and even large tracts of Asia and the Middle East. ⁶³

However, not everyone agreed upon the permanence of the pact. George Glasgow wrote of 'Russia's inevitable double-crossing of Germany'. ⁶⁴ The *Economist* felt that the relationship amongst the great European powers was triangular and not bilateral, and that Moscow would shift between the Allies and Germany 'without regard for moral principles', as circumstances dictated. ⁶⁵ A Trotskyist group poured scorn on the Stalinists' boasts that the pact had ensured the safety of the Soviet Union, as capitalist powers would only conclude an agreement with Moscow if it happened to be in their temporary interests to do so, and they were likely to turn upon the Soviet Union when it suited them. ⁶⁶ A former Latvian Foreign Minister informed his British audience that 'a rooted contradiction' existed 'between the political and economic interests' of the So-

- 58. WS Churchill, 'Ten Weeks of War', Listener, 16 November 1939, 948; Henry Wickham Steed, 'War for Peace', Contemporary Review, November 1939, 521.
- 59. William Rust, 'The War Enters a New Phase', World News and Views, 21 October 1939, 1034.
- 60. Pritt (1939), 117.
- 61. Laski (1940), 7, 30-1.
- 62. Borkenau (1940), 11, 13, 17, 233. See also Eastman (1940), 157; de Courcy (1940), 246. Borkenau's reversal of his previous stance towards the possibility of Soviet expansion (Chapter Three, page 150) was neither acknowledged nor explained.
- 63. HC Foxcroft, 'Stalin', Quarterly Review, January 1940, 170; Digamma, 'Russia and Ourselves', National Review, December 1939, 697; The Editor [Frederick Voigt], 'The Situation', Nineteenth Century and After, December 1940, 526.
- 64. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, October 1939, 20. See also W Arnold-Forster, 'After Finland', Political Quarterly, Volume 11, no 2, April 1940, 217.
- 65. 'Russia's Choice', Economist, 7 October 1939, 4.
- 66. 'Soviet Pact Blow to Workers', Militant, September 1939, 2.

viet Union and Germany, and that the latter's designs on Asia would rapidly lead to a clash.⁶⁷ Noting in September 1940 that Hitler had not given up on his plan to dismember the Soviet Union, Paul Einzig, an authority on European affairs, declared that it was 'only a matter of time' before Hitler marched eastwards, and none of Stalin's 'petty cunning' in improving his position by annexing parts of Eastern Europe could save the Red Army from a severe mauling at the hands of Hitler's forces.⁶⁸

Altogether, most observers, including many of those who considered that Germany and the Soviet Union were essentially similar societies with complementary interests, felt that a confrontation between them was likely or even inevitable, but not in the foreseeable future. Were Britain to be defeated, then Hitler would turn eastwards, but Stalin would not turn against Germany on his own volition until the Allies had directed a successful blow against it. May 1941, the *Economist* considered that Moscow expected a war with Germany at some point, but in the meantime it would strengthen its position and do nothing to provoke Hitler. On the other hand, a few observers claimed right to the end that the Soviet-German alliance was based on so solid a foundation that cooperation between them would, as one of them put it on the eve of the German onslaught, become closer. As it was, although a German attack on the Soviet Union was seen as likely at some point or another, the actual assault on 22 June 1941, not unlike the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 22 months before, took a large number of commentators by surprise.

II: The Totalitarian Enemy?

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the events in its aftermath encouraged many people to embark upon an extensive reappraisal of the Soviet regime, and quite a few of them were to join the already growing number of observers who adhered to the theory of the

- 67. Felix Cielens, 'Russia's Collusion and Collision with Germany', Free Europe, 28 June 1940, 68.
- 68. Einzig (1940), 97. See also Wolfram Gottlieb, 'Russia and the Baltic', Contemporary Review, November 1939, 561; 'Political Notebook', Free Europe, 17 November 1939, 11.
- 69. One convergence theorist asserted that should they each reach the position of being able to make a bid for world domination, then but only then would they be likely to come to blows. See Fodor (1941), 192.
- 70. Fyvel (1940), 137-8; Freda Utley, 'Stalinism and Hitlerism', Contemporary Review, January 1940, 46.
- 71. 'From the Editor's Chair', Tribune, 7 March 1941, 1; RAM MacDougall, 'Guilty Men', Free Europe, 6 September 1940, 168.
- 72. 'The Russian Front', Economist, 3 May 1941, 580-1.
- 73. 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, June 1941, 639. See also The Editor [Frederick Voigt], 'The Situation', Nineteenth Century and After, May 1941, 403. Their faith in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact intact, the Stalinists continued to feel that the Soviet Union would be able to keep out of the war, whereas 'most large and many small states' were either engaged in it or 'likely to be brought in', see Pritt (1941), 9.

convergence between Stalinism and fascism. Although some commentators emphasised specific features that they claimed underlay the relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union – political similarities,⁷⁴ complementary economies,⁷⁵ or parallel geopolitical ambitions⁷⁶ – such was the effect of Moscow's sudden *volte face* that within a short space of time the general equation of Stalin's regime with that of Hitler's, and even the idea that Germany and the Soviet Union represented some new sort of collectivist or totalitarian society – that they shared sufficient common internal political and economic features and geopolitical designs to mark them off from the rest of the world⁷⁷ – were almost taken for granted by people of various political persuasions. Although the disillusioned former Communist Party member Freda Utley complained at the end of September 1939 that 'so few people' recognised the similarity between Hitler's and Stalin's regimes,⁷⁸ by the end of the year convergence theorists were tenapenny.

An extreme proponent of this view was Franz Borkenau, the former member of the German Communist Party whom we have encountered in earlier chapters. By 1940, Borkenau was considering that Nazism and Bolshevism not merely shared common economic and political features, but were fanatical world revolutionary forces sharing a parallel messianic and totalitarian ancestry. Looking back, Borkenau claimed that Bolshevism had been 'from the beginning a sort of fascism avant la lettre'. Although Lenin and his comrades were genuinely idealistic revolutionaries, unlike the degenerates who made up the Nazi leadership, this was of little practical importance, as the Bolsheviks had built a mass movement based 'entirely... upon obedience' and implicitly incorporating 'the role of the superman-leader': 'The party of the proletariat was always a dictatorship over the proletariat. And this was not the unintended result of historical events, but the very aim for which the Bolshevik party had been consciously framed.' Based upon no particular class, and certainly not upon the insignificant Russian working class, the Bolshevik leadership was essentially classless - just like Hitler's crew - and the Soviet Five Year Plans were indistinguishable from the Nazis' economic strategies.⁷⁹ MW Fodor, an Hungarian journalist with much experience of

^{74.} HG Wells, 'The Honour and Dignity of the Free Mind', New Statesman, 28 October 1939, 607; Polanyi (1940), 27.

^{75.} S Davidovich, 'The Ukrainian Problem', Nineteenth Century and After, December 1939, 718.

^{76.} Zbigniew Grabowski, 'Thoughts on the German-Polish War', Nineteenth Century and After, December 1939, 691; Stefan Litauer, 'The Fate of Poland', National Review, November 1939, 569.

^{77.} Wilfred Wellock, 'The New Situation', New Statesman, 23 September 1939, 428; Richard Coventry, 'The Illusions of Power', New Statesman, 2 December 1939, 762.

^{78.} Freda Utley, 'Views About the USSR', New Statesman, 30 September 1939, 457.

^{79.} Borkenau (1940), 16-17, 202-9, 225-6. The private capitalist in Germany had not been eradicated, but as he was now 'a bureaucratic subordinate of the Nazi administrative machinery', and as pri-

European affairs as a Manchester Guardian correspondent, took a similar line. He claimed that Bolshevism and Italian fascism, and indirectly through the latter the German variant, were heavily influenced by syndicalism, the essence of which he saw as a revolutionary struggle led by a determined minority against the existing order, using the strength of the masses, whom the leaders held in contempt, and who could not fight for themselves. Bolshevism and fascism were both bent on global domination, elevated the state as supreme, wielded the power of the state to control all forms of social development, including the dispossession of the capitalist class, imposed oneparty rule through sham representative assemblies, and were (or had become, in the instance of the Bolsheviks) extremely nationalistic and anti-egalitarian.80 The socialist Tosco Fyvel rooted the problem in German history, insisting that Marxism and fascism shared common roots in the concept originating with Luther, developed by the Prussian kings and culminating with Hegel that favoured a 'centralised all-powerful, all ordering state' and a 'new and man-made divinity'. Russia had for three centuries been 'spiritually and politically a hinterland of Germany'. Although he stated that the Bolsheviks had had different aims to the fascists, the fact that they were inherently totalitarian and tried to build socialism dictatorially led to their falling back upon traditional Russian authoritarian ways, and there was little or nothing to choose between the end results of the two movements.81

Fodor's insistence that the Bolsheviks' original aims had been perverted was shared by Fyvel, who, jarring somewhat with his critical assessment of Bolshevism, asked people not to forget in the current anti-communist climate the positive example of the early years of the Russian Revolution.⁸² Other observers also looked for flickers of hope in the darkness. Both Stephen Spender and Leonard Woolf equated the exercising of power under Stalinism and in the fascist states, yet drew back from a direct identification between them. Spender argued somewhat feebly that, despite it all, the ultimate aim of the Soviet regime was 'to establish socialism',⁸³ whilst Woolf ventured that as Marx and Engels were firm believers in Western civilisation, the Soviet regime was, willy-nilly, on the same side as well.⁸⁴

The new orientation in Soviet foreign policy sped up some people's drift from fellow-travelling, and even from left-wing politics as a whole. Bidding farewell to his long

vate enterprise had thus been effectively abolished, there was little to choose between Germany and the Soviet Union in the economic field (ibid, 26). See also W Friedmann, 'The Twilight of Neutrality', Fortnightly, January 1940, 30.

- 80. Fodor (1941), 113-4, 144-8, 164-6.
- 81. Fyvel (1940), 40, 115-7, 124-6, 233.
- 82. Ibid, 105.
- 83. Stephen Spender, 'A Look at the Worst', Horizon, September 1940, 108-9.
- 84. Woolf (1939), 181-2, 192.

career as a prominent US radical, Max Eastman had by 1940 come to conclude that the armed seizure of power by any 'highly organised minority', irrespective of its ideology or programme, would lead to the establishment of a totalitarian state. The Stalinists were right — the 'totalitarian state' was 'the political form natural to a collectivised economy', and the name for this phenomenon was socialism. To prove his argument, he presented a 22-point checklist showing the similarities between Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany.⁸⁵ Not everyone who adopted a convergence theory was moving away from a left-wing stance. The *New Statesman*, whose sympathy for Moscow was waning somewhat prior to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact — Stalin's benevolence was a bit hard to accept after *three* Moscow Trials! — remained a socialist journal, but by the end of 1939 it concluded that there was little to choose between Stalinism and Nazism:

By the inexorable laws of its dialectic, Bolshevism brought into being its antithesis, National Socialism. Today the question being asked is whether the ugly thing that now reigns from Vladivostok to Cologne is turning into the inevitable synthesis, National Bolshevism.⁸⁶

Certain commentators also drew the conclusion that Stalinism and fascism were the pioneers of an inexorable collectivist trend in socio-economic development that would sooner or later engulf Europe and even the whole world. The former Labour MP Wilfred Wellock claimed that despite their despotic political systems, Soviet and Nazi collectivism provided 'a basis for a scientific reorganisation on cooperative lines of the economic life of Europe', a view endorsed by Borkenau and Lucien Laurat.⁸⁷ The question facing the world was whether this trend towards collectivism was compatible with the preservation of democracy, either in a liberal sense, as recommended by Borkenau, or in a socialist sense, as recommended by Laurat.⁸⁸

The debate around the question of totalitarianism was given sustenance by the recent events, and the novel aspects of what were considered to be totalitarian societies were explored. In a particularly astute piece, George Orwell pointed to one of the most insidious factors of such societies, that a leadership claiming infallibility required the

- 85. Eastman (1940), 12, 83-92, 156.
- 86. 'The Man of Steel', New Statesman, 9 December 1939, 811. The magazine gave space to the right-wing scientist Professor AV Hill to condemn the 'fraudulent' nature of much Soviet science, and to declare that political interference into science in the Soviet Union was no different to that in Nazi Germany (AV Hill, 'Science and the USSR', New Statesman, 27 January and 17 February 1940, 105-6, 206).
- 87. Wilfred Wellock, 'War Aims', New Statesman, 4 November 1939, 646; Borkenau (1940), 244, 253; Laurat (1940), 196. Lucien Laurat was the pen name of Othon Maschl, a former member of the Austrian Communist Party.
- 88. Borkenau (1940), 253; Laurat (1940), 220.

strict control of thought alongside the total malleability of the ideas that it promoted, as day-to-day events impinged upon its operations, thus leading to the elimination of objective truth, that is to say, the removal of the ability of a person to obtain accurate information and thus be able to interpret and change society. Eastman considered that Stalinism appealed to 'uncritical intelligence', and was 'teaching free and social-minded people the habit of voluntary irrationality and intolerance'. 90

Woolf considered that the barbaric features of Stalinism were part of a general trend towards barbarism. Comparing George Bernard Shaw's outcry over the Denshawi incident in 1906, in which four Egyptians were hanged, two received life sentences and 15 were jailed or flogged in connection with the death of a British officer, and his acceptance of the far greater 'ruthless vindictiveness and savagery' under Stalin's regime, he concluded that there had been 'great changes, both qualitative and quantitative, in those ingredients of European life and society' upon which 'the difference between civilisation and barbarism' was supposed to depend. The general rejection of aspects of civilisation had led socialists to 'betray their own principles' and to 'destroy the basis of civilised life' in the 'false belief' that this was a 'necessary preliminary to or accompaniment of economic equality'.⁹¹

These concerns fed into the continuing discussion of the historical roots of Bolshevism, which were scrutinised by various commentators during this period as they attempted to understand the evolution and current nature of the Soviet regime. Some critics still cast the Bolsheviks in the role of crude and violent intellectual extremists who had lacked any genuine influence in Tsarist Russia, and who had shown no principles or scruples in their quest for power. Others considered that the means employed by Bolshevism doomed them to betray their good intentions. Whilst Woolf accepted that the rule of law, and with it 'the standards of civilised social action', would inevitably be suspended during a revolution, the manner in which the Bolsheviks conflated the corrupt forms of democracy that existed under capitalism with the idea of democracy itself led to their writing off the latter as a bourgeois fraud, and, despite the 'magnificent foundation' for socialism that had been created, their 'contempt for liberty, truth, tolerance and humanity' was incompatible with civilisation, and rendered 'completely impossible' the 'society of free men' which they were trying to build. HG Wells was his usual dismissive self, and declared that the Bolsheviks' strategy of a

^{89.} George Orwell, 'Literature and Totalitarianism', Listener, 19 June 1941, 882.

^{90.} Eastman (1940), 150.

^{91.} Woolf (1939), 33, 170.

^{92.} N Zernov, 'The Changing Face of Russia', Listener, 4 April 1940, 679-80; 'The Last Marxist', Economist, 31 August 1940, 271.

^{93.} Woolf (1939), 174, 184, 195. See also C Lestor, 'The Downfall of Dictatorship', Socialist Standard, April 1940, 53; CEM Joad, 'The Wheel Comes Full Circle', New Statesman, 3 May 1941, 456.

'merely insurrectionary revolution' had led to nothing more than a turn of the historical wheel. Nothing had changed, a lot of people had been liquidated, a lot of others had replaced them, and Russia was returning to its starting point, 'a patriotic absolutism of doubtful efficiency and vague, incalculable aims'. The population had escaped from the Tsar only to end up two decades later worshipping Stalin and his 'quasi-divine autocracy'.⁹⁴

Some socialists rooted the basis of Stalinism in the Bolsheviks' attempt to seize power in a backward country. Laurat considered that the backwardness of Tsarist Russia meant that its proletariat was not merely numerically small, but also politically immature, and that Marxism could only exist in Russia as a 'premature graft', if it could exist at all. Under such conditions, a revolutionary party would necessarily be a throwback to the Jacobin or Blanquist type of organisation that existed during the bourgeois revolutions, an élite of infallible leaders gaining the support of the unenlightened masses. Bolshevism was the ideal form of organisation in a situation in which very militant but politically immature workers were engaged in struggle. It was necessarily élitist and authoritarian, and once in power it would restrict democracy, at first within society as a whole, and then within the ruling party itself. 95 The anti-Leninist Marxists of the Socialist Party of Great Britain concurred with this analysis, and stated that the building of socialism necessitated 'an understanding of socialism by a majority of the working class', a condition which certainly did not apply in Russia.96 The Socialist Clarity Group, a small faction in the Labour Party, claimed that objective conditions governed the Bolsheviks' strategies and behaviour. A backward country with a tiny proletariat and huge peasantry required revolutionaries to build 'a highly disciplined and dictatorial organisation'. Once in power, although the Bolsheviks wanted a workers' democracy, this proved impossible to maintain because of the isolation of the revolution, the low cultural level of the masses, and their fear of the consequences of permitting mass opposition to flourish. Although economic planning was fully compatible with democratic norms, the sacrifices demanded by the breakneck pace of Stalin's industrialisation ensured that the Soviet regime would become totalitarian. This analysis emphasised that the course taken by the Bolsheviks could not be regarded as 'the model to be followed by Western socialism'.97

English translations of two important books by former leading members of the French and Yugoslav Communist Parties appeared during this period, and they show the impact of the Course of the Soviet regime upon their thinking. Both had had con-

^{94.} HG Wells, 'World Order', Fortnightly, November 1939, 495.

^{95.} Laurat (1940), 66-8, 122, 126, 137-8.

^{96.} S Rubin, 'The Death of Trotsky', Socialist Standard, October 1940, 132.

^{97.} Socialist Clarity Group (1940), 3-7, 10, 20-21.

siderable experience of life in the Soviet Union. Boris Souvarine had spent much time in Moscow in the early 1920s as a member of the Comintern's Executive Committee, and thus knew many prominent Bolsheviks, whilst Ante Ciliga had gone to the Soviet Union in 1926, and spent over five years in Soviet jails for his oppositional activities, finally leaving the country in late 1935.98

The disconcerting shifts in Souvarine's book clearly indicate that he was in the process of rethinking many of his ideas. In places, he followed to a large degree Trotsky's analysis in that he presented the transformation of the party-state apparatus in the Soviet republic into a ruling élite as the product of the extremely difficult objective conditions existing during the Civil War. Drawing upon Rosa Luxemburg, he considered that the question of socialism could be posed but not solved in Russia, although he believed that the process of bureaucratisation could still have been reversed and soviet democracy rebuilt until 1923.99 On the other hand, Souvarine also presented explanations that contradicted this analysis, not least in his assertions that the populist terrorists Nechaev and Bakunin were key influences upon Bolshevism, that Lenin's concept of a revolutionary party was a military-style organisation which required 'the habit of blind obedience', that the October Revolution was a 'coup d'état', and that the Bolsheviks reckoned on reaching socialism through the 'evil means of police constraint', thus making a virtue of coercive means and ensuring that 'dictatorial habit became their second nature'. 100 Ciliga's ideas, however, had been clarified by the time he wrote his account, and he shows how, as time drew by, he moved from a fairly conventional Trotskyist outlook concerning the origins and nature of Stalinism to siding with the dissident communists who considered that the rot had set in whilst Lenin and Trotsky were still in charge. 101 Both were moving away from an identification with Bolshevism towards, in Souvarine's case, a classic anti-communist stance, and in Ciliga's case, an idiosyncratic socialist outlook.

Both Ciliga and Souvarine saw the Stalinist socio-economic formation as a despotic form of state capitalism that represented, in the latter's words, 'a return to barbarism with a superficial covering of American modernism which ill concealed its essen-

- 98. Souvarine (1939); Ciliga (1940). Eyewitness accounts of the Soviet Union were by now rare. Like Souvarine and Ciliga, Violet Lansbury had not been on Soviet soil for some time, and her Stalinist account adds little to other uncritical works, see Lansbury (1940). Another autobiographical account published during this period, written by a Soviet defector, consists of largely fanciful tales larded with anti-Semitic bile, see Unishevsky (1940).
- 99. Souvarine (1939), 240ff, 337. Luxemburg's remarks were also cited in Fyvel (1940), 103.
- 100. Souvarine (1939), 22, 3841, 151, 195, 563. The final chapter of this book, a postscript written in early 1939, bluntly asserted that Stalinism was the logical outcome of Bolshevism, as Stalin merely took over the system created by Lenin (ibid, 600).
- 101. Ciliga (1940), 270-3.

tially Asiatic structure'. The bureaucracy's control of the state machinery substituted for the legal ownership of the means of production, thus engendering 'a dominant class of politicians, administrators, intellectuals and technicians', under which the 'exploitation and oppression' of the old Tsarist despotism continued 'under new forms'. ¹⁰² Ciliga felt that the First Five Year Plan paralleled the initial stages of capitalist development, and that it had enabled the bureaucracy to become a fully-fledged ruling élite. ¹⁰³ Souvarine was not optimistic about the country's prospects. He felt that the advances under the Five Year Plans merely represented 'slender material progress, doubtful for future generations, and with very problematical perspectives for economic progress in the present'. The plans actually accentuated the errors, imbalances and disorder that they were supposed to rectify; indeed, the directed economy only existed through 'an infringement of the plans'. ¹⁰⁴

Both Ciliga and Souvarine emphasised the moral decay under Stalinism. The former noted with dismay how many students from working-class backgrounds moved up into the party-state apparatus and lost any empathy with the workers as they adopted the social mores of the bureaucracy, which themselves closely resembled those of the bourgeoisie in capitalist countries. The latter claimed that the purges and terror helped Stalin's regime to stay in power, but at the cost of destroying competence, initiative and respect for human values, and the promotion of the worst scoundrels into commanding positions. Moreover, the future mainstays of the regime, the Soviet youth, were being brought up to be mere imitators of their morally delinquent mentors. The state of the state of

A debate over the precise nature of the Soviet socio-economic formation took place in the British left-wing journal *Left*. Arguing against Trotsky's analysis that held that the nationalised economic base of the Soviet Union defined it as a workers' state despite the harsh rule of the bureaucracy, Ryan Worrall, an author of popular scientific works, considered that the Soviet Union was in fact a state capitalist country. Worrall denied that private ownership of the means of production was a defining feature of capitalism, as joint-stock companies and state control and regulation had be-

^{102.} Souvarine (1939), 540, 564-5.

^{103.} Ciliga (1940), 90-2.

^{104.} Souvarine (1939), 513, 547, 555-6. Souvarine's low opinion of Soviet planning was echoed by Eugene Lyons, who stated that the industrialisation drive 'was vast but inefficient, wasteful, completely out of balance': 'The ostensible "plan" was in truth a gargantuan chaos, without the slightest harmony of its parts.' See Lyons (1941b), 167. The *Economist* claimed that the success of the Five Year Plans was due less to planning than 'the savagely coercive organisation with which the planning was put into force', see 'The Soviet Economy', *Economist*, 6 January 1940, 5.

^{105.} Ciliga (1940), 64-6, 75-6.

^{106.} Souvarine (1939), 585, 648-9.

come the norm. Lenin, he continued, had stated that the establishment of state capitalism in Russia after the October Revolution had been an historical step forwards, but that real progress required the working class to control the Soviet state. As workers' democracy had been steadily eroded away, power now resided in the Soviet bureaucracy, and its social function was identical to that of a capitalist bourgeoisie, 'namely, the accumulation of capital':

And precisely that fact makes the Russian state a capitalist instead of a workers' state. A new type of capitalist state, it is true, since the principle of private property still lies in the dust, but a capitalist state for all that, since the state, *minus workers' democracy*, pursues the aim and compelling motive of capitalism in general.¹⁰⁷

In defending Trotsky's theory, the veteran socialist Henry Sara declared that Worrall had grossly overestimated the degree of state ownership and control in capitalist countries. The Soviet bureaucracy had a different social function to a capitalist class, and there was 'a vast difference' between a state that guarantees capitalist property and one that 'aims to accumulate further means of production for social use' which could 'ultimately lead to the social welfare of the people as a whole', and which could be used for that purpose once the Stalinist regime was overthrown.¹⁰⁸

Although many observers had claimed that the Soviet Union was a state capitalist country, or some other new form of étatised society, it was mainly amongst anti-Stalinist left-wingers that the discussion about the socio-economic nature of the Soviet Union was to be fully developed.

By now, Stalin was regarded by various commentators as a consummate bureaucrat whose overarching interest was maintaining himself in power. The Menshevik Gregory Bienstock told his British audience that Stalin's 'whole political *Weltanschauung*' was predicated upon his belief in 'the absolute power of the administrative order': 'And that is why socialism is to him, at bottom, completely alien.' The only possible end-product of Stalinism could be 'the state devouring society and with it human personality'.¹⁰⁹

The US journalist Eugene Lyons agreed with Souvarine that Stalin personified a primitive Asiatic irruption into Soviet society. Lyons was firmly convinced that Bolshevism imported Western ideas only to twist them in the corrupting Russian atmosphere of 'nihilism and self-righteous terror', and that Stalin, steeped in Caucasian traditions of intrigue, blood feuds and revenge, and Orthodox traditions of hierarchy, infallibil-

^{107.} Ryan Worrall, 'USSR: Proletarian or Capitalist State?', Left, December 1939, 319-24.

^{108.} Henry Sara, 'Not State Capitalism', Left, January 1940, 19-24.

^{109.} Gregory Bienstock, 'Stalin', Nineteenth Century and After, January 1940, 35-7. See also John Hallett [EH Carr], 'The Bolshevik Dictator', Spectator, 13 October 1939, 512.

ity, submission and confession, was the ideal candidate to strip Bolshevism of the remaining vestiges of its European spirit, and to replace it with a brutal Asiatic culture to the degree that the 'ambitious' and 'ignorant' new Soviet leaders who had arisen on the bones of Lenin's old comrades were 'tough upstarts' for whom terror was their 'natural element'. And now, Stalin personified the challenge to the West's 'middle-class morality', 'Judeo-Christian ethics', and 'sentimental emphasis on individual dignity and freedom civilisation' that was posed by the totalitarian bloc centred on Moscow and Berlin: 'In getting closer to a knowledge of Stalin, we are getting closer to the deepest currents of change in the history of mankind at this juncture.'

As we have seen, this image of Stalinism as a threat to Western civilisation became a regular part of the discourse of mainstream social democracy during the Finnish Winter War. Hence in early 1941, Francis Williams, a prominent Labour Party journalist, warned of the 'implacable and dangerous challenge' that the 'altogether alien philosophies' of 'Russian communism, fascism and National Socialism' posed to 'the conscience of the civilised world', which was represented by 'the people of the British Commonwealth and America'. The 'standards of conduct' of official communism, he added, were 'set apart from those of humanity'.¹¹¹ The *New Statesman* was even more categorical, declaring that Germany and the Soviet Union represented 'a new totalitarian idea' that was 'fulfilled at the expense of the Western Empires':

The struggle at the moment is most accurately seen as a joint challenge to the old civilised and conservative empires by totalitarian powers which care nothing for the old order or the moral system that supported it; they may differ in the systems they wish to substitute, but agree in the joyous prospect of destroying established power with fire and bayonet and trampling into the dust the tradition of liberty, law and morality which has been handed down in the West from Greece, Rome and Judea. 112

Although most social democrats had never endorsed the outlook, strategy or tactics of the Bolsheviks, and had looked with horror upon the Stalinist terror of the 1930s, they had generally eschewed this kind of language, which had customarily been the property of the right. A clue to understanding its adoption could be found in a major work of this period by Evan Durbin, a leading right-wing British social democratic theoretician. Durbin went to some length to demonstrate two propositions; firstly, that Marxists and fascists shared a fanatical disposition towards violence in the quest for

^{110.} Lyons (1941b), 19-21, 29-35, 40, 53, 134, 159. William Chamberlin made the same point, see 'Asia Invades Europe', Nineteenth Century and After, May 1940, 549-60.

^{111.} Williams (1941), 13-14, 36.

^{112. &#}x27;Progress and Anarchy', New Statesman, 16 December 1939, 884. GDH Cole considered that the building of a socialist movement that incorporated the democratic advances made under capitalism was the only way that civilisation could be saved from the totalitarian rule of either the Hitlerite or Stalinist brands ('A Socialist Civilisation', Fortnightly, December 1940, 536-7).

their political goals, and, secondly, that those whose political outlook rejected bourgeois democracy placed themselves outwith the bounds of civilised society. ¹¹³ Durbin's fanatical insistence upon the centrality of liberal democracy showed that he saw this institutional framework as the foundation of a civilised society, and, particularly in the aftershock of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the seemingly convergent courses of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, not least in their suppression of parliamentary institutions, encouraged social democrats who shared Durbin's regard for parliamentary democracy to place Stalinism alongside fascism as a dire threat to Western civilisation.

Although the fellow-travelling circus was badly mauled after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, it did not disappear, and there was still a market for pro-Soviet material. One of the prominent fellow-travellers who stayed loyal to Stalinism throughout this period, albeit not without the occasional qualm, was Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury. Already a member of the august brotherhood of radical British clergy when he was appointed to his post in 1931, he was to upset many fellow clerics and lay Christians alike by his almost unswerving faith in the beneficence of Stalin and the Soviet regime. Introducing on 2 November 1939 his *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, he rued that he had not written it six months earlier. His regret was not due to its somewhat anachronistic image in the light of recent events, but, as he explained with typical modesty, that it might 'have served some part, however small, in helping our own country to understand Russia, and, by understanding, to have brought nearer the possibility of Anglo-Russian friendship'.¹¹⁴

Johnson's book ran along familiar fellow-travelling lines. Much of it consisted of the sort of glowing paeans to Soviet policies in respect of constitutional matters, industry, agriculture, social services, national minorities, women, children and foreign affairs that we have encountered in earlier chapters. From the start, Johnson made it clear that he only wanted to show the best in Soviet society, preferring 'to signal out' the 'new and creative elements in Soviet theory and practice', as others had 'in plenty... added the criticisms'. To be sure, the regime was open to criticism 'in a hundred minor points', the 'spy system' was still 'to a certain extent proceeding', there was low productivity in industry, but 'to concentrate on blemishes, or on cruel modes of application in the tumult of revolution', was 'to miss the vital points, like men peering at petty faults in great mosaics'. And just like the Webbs, Johnson made no attempt to counter the complex Western critiques of problematic aspects of Soviet society which were elaborated through the careful study of information gleaned from the Soviet press.

^{113.} Durbin (1940), 190, 273-9.

^{114.} Johnson (1939), 5.

^{115.} Ibid, 87, 101, 111, 216, 346.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Johnson's book was the contrast between his heartfelt criticisms of the evils of capitalism and the practically uncritical manner in which he viewed the Soviet Union. *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, eminently more readable than the Webbs' paralysing tome, yet more risible in its enthusiasm — not least when it claimed that the 1936 constitution, which ranked 'amongst the greatest in all human documents in its love of humanity and its reverence for human dignity', proved that Stalin was no 'oriental despot'¹¹⁶ — was a classic example of an enthusiastic observer able to see the mote in his own eye, but not the beam in someone else's — if that someone else happened to be Stalin. ¹¹⁷ And yet this book did well. Despite the fall-off in fellow-travelling after August 1939 and the ignominy in which Moscow was now held by many people, by the time the Soviet Union was rehabilitated in mid-1941 an astonishing half-a-million copies had been sold. ¹¹⁸

Coverage of domestic matters in the Soviet Union was now heavily overshadowed by material on its foreign policy. Discussion of the Soviet socio-economic system was largely focused during this period upon the ability of the country to engage in a major war, and whether Moscow's close relations with Berlin would help the latter in its fight against the Allies and, in particular, their blockade of Germany.

Basing his assessment upon research carried out by the Imperial Policy Group, the conservative commentator John de Courcy did not think highly of Soviet military capabilities. The army's strength was 'grossly exaggerated'. It could mobilise between four and five million men, its small arms were 'fairly good', but its heavy artillery was poor. Industry did not have the capacity adequately to supply a large army, and maintenance, transport and communications were poor. The Soviet air force had some good fighter planes, but everything else was obsolete. The officer corps had been badly hit in the purges, with 30 000 officers shot, including three marshals, 68 senior generals and 312 junior generals. He concluded that full cooperation with Germany and much staffing with German officers were needed before the Soviet forces would be effective. The Menshevik Anatole Baikalov made much the same point, and added that industrial, agricultural and transport problems severely reduced the forces' capabilities. Industrial productivity was between 25 and 50 per cent of Western levels, product quality was poor, railways were overloaded, and motor roads were quite inadequate. Following on from this, he conjectured that the regime would be unable to sustain a war, and, if it

^{116.} Ibid, 355-6.

^{117.} Nonetheless, he made a valid comparison between literacy rates in the Soviet Union and the British Empire (ibid, 232).

^{118. &#}x27;Anglo-Soviet Relations', New Statesman, 19 July 1941, 94. Although hostile feelings towards the Soviet Union grew after August 1939, they were mitigated by the feeling that Moscow would someday be drawn into the war on Britain's side.

^{119.} De Courcy (1940), 179-86.

tried, domestic discontent was such that 'the people would use the opportunity to revolt against the government'. 120

The Soviet invasions of Poland and Finland gave Western observers their first opportunity to view the Soviet armed forces in action. Few were impressed. Reports from eye-witnesses in Poland uniformly described not merely the general bedraggled appearance of the Soviet troops, but their good behaviour and astonishment at the goods that were available in the shops. 121 The very poor showing of the Soviet army in the first month or so of the Finnish Winter War caused some commentators to write it off as an effective fighting force. John Langdon-Davis, one of the many journalists who travelled to Finland, noted that the Soviet forces were utterly unprepared for the war. They were untrained, poorly fed, badly equipped, lacked accurate field maps and suitable camouflage, and were unfamiliar with the terrain. 122 Sitting in on interrogations of Soviet prisoners-of-war, Citrine noted the poor quality of their uniforms and their low physical condition and intellectual abilities. Finnish officers told him that the quality of Soviet matériel varied, some was poor, whilst aeroplanes, vehicles and tanks were well designed and constructed, but nothing was properly maintained. 123 George Soloveytchik declared that the war showed that whilst the Soviet army might look impressive in Red Square parades, it could not 'sustain a real war', and 'proved once more the hollowness of Stalin's economic and administrative system'. 124 However, Geoffrey Cox, another journalist who toured Finland during the war, was not so dismissive. True, the Soviet army had fared badly at first, its training and reconnaissance were defective, but its matériel was good, and improvements had been made and lessons had been learnt, not least in staff work and supplies. Soviet soldiers were not lacking in courage. Altogether, he insisted that the Soviet army was intended for fighting in the vastly different conditions of the steppes, and warned people against viewing it through the prism of the Finnish War. 125

The *Economist* continued to monitor the economic performance of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, it refused to make any hard-and-fast predictions about the country's economic prospects as the economy was so vast, ramshackle and unevenly developed that what was true about one aspect of it was likely to be false about an-

^{120.} AV Baikalov, 'Soviet War Potential', Free Europe, 27 December 1940, 79; 10 January 1941, 99. See also Alfred Mallory, 'Stalin in No-Man's Land', Free Europe, 16 May 1941, 9.

^{121.} Hollingsworth (1940), 141ff; Polonius (1941), 287ff; Anonymous (1940), 210; 'Poland Under Two Yokes', Free Europe, 1 December 1939, 37-8.

^{122.} Langdon-Davis (1940), 7, 15-16, 28, 63.

^{123.} Citrine (1940), 82ff, 93ff, 111ff.

^{124.} George Soloveytchik, 'Finland's Struggle', Contemporary Review, February 1940, 159. See also WS Churchill, 'The State of the War', Listener, 25 January 1940, 151.

^{125.} Cox (1941), 236-47.

other. 126 Nevertheless, it noted that the projected industrial output increase of 92 per cent during the first three years of the Third Five Year Plan had not been even halfway reached, 127 and that the tremendous rate of agricultural mechanisation over the past decade far outstripped the limited rate of increase in farm produce, as it was clear that peasants spent much of their time working their own plots.¹²⁸ As for the pressing question of Soviet-German economic links and their effect upon Germany's wartime capability, even prior to the outbreak of hostilities the magazine averred that Germany had neither the gold nor foreign exchange to spare, and although it could pay in machinery, this was limited by its own wartime needs. There were substantial transportation difficulties, not least the parlous state of Soviet railways. Moscow could only provide Berlin with any of its industrial and agricultural produce to the detriment of its own war potential.¹²⁹ Although this was a widely accepted view,¹³⁰ the New Statesman's Moscow correspondent nonetheless added that what the Soviet Union could export, most notably iron ore, bauxite, meat and wheat, was 'of tremendous importance to Hitler', 131 and the Economist itself did not rule out the possibility of an improvement in Soviet economic performance raising Germany's chances of countering the blockade, but this was a relatively long-term perspective. 132 However, it was also noted that the centralised control of the economy permitted the regime to reduce domestic consumption if it wished to direct resources to Germany.¹³³ In late 1940, Soloveytchik claimed that Soviet economic aid to Germany was all the more important now that Hitler had recognised that a long war was inevitable: 'If his experts can reorganise and successfully op-

- 126. 'The Soviet Economy', Economist, 6 January 1940, 5.
- 127. 'Commercial History and Review of 1940', Economist, 15 March 1941, 16.
- 128. 'Soviet Agriculture', *Economist*, 13 April 1940, 674. For data in respect of farm produce originating in private plots, see Allen (1940), 365.
- 129. 'Nazi Needs and Russian Resources', Economist, 2 September 1939, 437-8; 'Russian Oil', Economist, 13 January 1940, 48-9.
- 130. CW Guillebaud, 'Germany and the Economic Blockade', Fortnightly, November 1939, 520; LM Fraser, 'Germany, Russia and the Economic War', New Statesman, 11 November 1939, 701-2; EV Francis, 'The Blockade and the New Economic Order', Political Quarterly, Volume 12, no 1, January 1941, 51-2.
- 131. 'Russia's Help to Germany', *New Statesman*, 28 October 1939, 601-2. John Wheeler-Bennett stated in early 1940 that 'it would be foolish to minimise the advantages accruing to Germany from her new agreement with Germany', claiming that 'increasingly close economic collaboration' was 'inevitable' as Germany developed its influence in the Soviet Union. He added, however, that such collaboration would only continue so long as Moscow could obtain gold or concessions in return, or was willing, for its own ends, to prolong the war in Western Europe, see Wheeler-Bennett (1940), 35.
- 132. 'Two Wars', Economist, 24 February 1940, 364. See also GO Gardner, 'The Weapon of Economic Warfare', Contemporary Review, July 1940, 60-2.
- 133. John Hamilton, 'Russia's Value to Germany', Socialist Vanguard, February 1940, 21.

erate Soviet industry and transport, the economic value of Russia may prove as great to him, he hopes, as the support of the USA will be to Britain.' He was not alone with this gloomy analysis. But even here, with a commentator who felt that there was 'not one shred of evidence' to justify believing in the possibility of a Soviet-German clash, there were a lot of difficulties to be overcome before Stalin could really help out the Nazi regime. The study of the Soviet Union always involved a degree of speculation, but at this point, with the precariousness of Britain's situation and the relative lack of hard information, one gets the feeling that educated guesswork and wish-fulfilment were relegating rigorous analysis into second place.

III: Going With Joe

The Second World War entered a new phase after the German assault upon the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. One immediate result was that the Soviet Union rapidly changed in people's perception from being a near-ally of Nazi Germany into a staunch and respected ally of Britain. The rehabilitation of Stalin and the Soviet Union was not so much a return to the fellow-travelling days of the late 1930s, but part of the wartime ideology in Britain. It went much further, with otherwise fiercely anti-communist Conservative MPs publicly praising the Soviet war effort, and with the British government being obliged to give official approval to the Soviet Union, an endorsement which was simultaneously fulsome and uneasy.¹³⁷

Many of the doubts expressed about the Soviet Union during the period of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact evaporated once it joined the war. The *New Statesman* rapidly rehabilitated the Soviet Union as a 'workers' republic'. ¹³⁸ The BBC started broadcasting morale-boosting pieces on the brave Soviet ally, and in contrast to many made prior to June 1941, they were often of a quite uncritical nature, with Bernard Pares being let loose on the wireless as an authority on all things Russian and Soviet. ¹³⁹ Amongst critics of the Soviet Union, hastily-added prefaces and postscripts confided in the strength and popularity of the Soviet regime, cutting an incongruous contrast with

- 134. George Soloveytchik, 'Stalin and Europe', Nineteenth Century and After, December 1940, 588.
- 135. See also John Stevens, 'Whither Russia?', New Statesman, 16 March 1940, 357-8.
- 136. George Soloveytchik, 'Stalin and Europe', Nineteenth Century and After, December 1940, 584. At the same time, another commentator claimed that Germany's hold over much of Europe had reduced its needs for Soviet produce, especially iron ore and oil (Oleg Hoeffding, 'Germany's Economic Hold on USSR', Free Europe, 15 November 1940, 19).
- 137. See Addison (1982), 127-63.
- 138. 'The War on Two Fronts', New Statesman, 12 July 1941, 25.
- 139. Bernard Pares, 'The Peoples of the USSR', Listener, 21 August 1941, 255-6; 'A Great Russian Soldier', Listener, 25 September 1941, 433-4.

the general thrust of the works. ¹⁴⁰ Fierce anti-communists could be found praising the 'heroism of Russia's resistance to aggression', ¹⁴¹ and commentators who had done nicely decrying both the quality of Soviet produce and workmanship and the combat capabilities of the Soviet armed forces were now praising what they had only recently written off. Contradicting everything he had been declaring for a decade, Soloveytchik held forth as the Soviet state reeled precariously in the face of the Wehrmacht's assault:

The Soviet regime has not collapsed, nor has it shown any discernible signs of disintegration. There are no Quislings in Russia or even in the Ukraine (except those resident in Berlin), no Fifth Columnists, no saboteurs and slackers. Indeed, and this is the greatest miracle of all, every day produces fresh evidence of efficiency, preparedness and cohesion.¹⁴²

Whilst respect for the Soviet Union in its fight against Nazi Germany was to a large extent a refracted form of British patriotism — indeed, 'criticism of the USSR became tantamount to treason' ¹⁴³ — it could not avoid being conflated with the idea of the superiority of a planned economy, and even with socialism. ¹⁴⁴ Despite having broken from Stalinism four years earlier in 1940, John Strachey could see the 'socialist' economy of the Soviet Union as the secret of its wartime success:

All arguments as to whether a socialist economic system would work or not are completely out of date since the Russians defeated the Germans. We now know, as a fact, that a socialist economic system can 'deliver the goods'. For remember, the vast industrial and agricultural effort which has supported the Russian armies has been put forth by a socialist economic system.¹⁴⁵

- 140. Hence Erich Strauss' sadly overlooked analysis of the Soviet Union, which considered that it had evolved into an élite society that represented a parallel form of development to capitalism and thus required another revolution to put it back onto the socialist path, sported a postscript that called on the Soviet masses to engage in a union sacrée with their rulers, see Strauss (1941), 329. John Scott's account of his five years of working at Magnitogorsk, which, like similar books covered in previous chapters, described the rough-and-ready way in which Soviet industry developed in the 1930s, contained a stirring preface portraying the key role played by Ural industries in the Soviet war effort, see Scott (1942), 5. See also the preface in Hubbard (1942), v-viii.
- 141. George Glasgow, 'Foreign Affairs', Contemporary Review, September 1941, 198.
- 142. George Soloveytchik, 'Reflections on the Russian War', Nineteenth Century and After, September 1941, 156. See also 'Episodes of the Month', National Review, September 1941, 246.
- 143. Northedge and Wells (1982), 151.
- 144. A symbol of this was the membership of the Communist Party, which rose from 22 783 in December 1941 to 56 000 in December 1942, and was still at an impressive 45 535 in March 1945, see Branson (1997), 252. This growth was not on the basis of radical politics, as the party bitterly opposed any manifestation of class struggle after June 1941.
- 145. Strachey (1944), 78. Although all the major belligerent states, not least the indubitably capitalist USA, could 'deliver the goods', the British government was very worried about this interpretation

There were a few awkward types at various and often obscure points across the political spectrum who refrained from joining in the Stalin-worship. Orwell characteristically wrote *Animal Farm*, a sharp polemic against Britain's wartime ally, and paid for his impudence by experiencing considerable problems in getting it published during the war. Of course, beneath the smiles, some people were loath to forgive Moscow for its pact with Germany, 146 there still remained much tension in Anglo-Soviet relations, and the Cold War which developed after Germany's defeat in 1945 rapidly restricted pro-Soviet feelings to the true believers, whose numbers were to decline greatly in the years to come.

IV: Conclusion

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact marked a turning point in the way that the Soviet Union was perceived in Britain. For those who became estranged from Moscow in the aftermath of the pact, it is clear that their break was based upon a breakdown of trust - Stalin and his regime could not be relied upon to act in the interests of progress and humanity. Like the jilted suitor who now sees only the bad sides of his departed beloved, many of these disappointed observers turned their wrath against the object of their former respect. For critics of the system, Stalin's embracing of Hitler often transformed their existing criticisms and qualms into a full-scale repulsion. Although certain aspects of Soviet society could still meet with favour on the part of many commentators, any appreciation of, say, economic planning or welfare measures was now overlaid with stern criticisms of Moscow's foreign policy directions or political norms. The emphasis had shifted from praising the acceptable sides of the Soviet Union towards condemning the unacceptable. The depleted pro-Soviet lobby had a tough time, and even if its more hardened members merely brazened it out, their praise for all things Soviet sometimes had an implicit apologetic feel to it, with Moscow's actions being measured against the sins of the capitalist states, rather than being promoted on their own merits.

The sudden and dramatic changes in various commentators' attitudes to the Soviet Union after August 1939 brought to light one of the most crucial factors in respect of our comprehension of the manner in which the country was assessed in Britain. How could it be that the country which was seen by many as a force for peace, progress and democracy, or at least a potential ally in an uncertain world, suddenly became a force for evil? The Soviet Union had not changed as a socio-economic system since the inauguration of the First Five Year Plan at the end of the 1920s. If anything, by the summer of 1939, the worst of the dislocations and chaos caused by the indus-

trialisation drive had been cleared up, and the terror of the late 1930s had been considerably wound down. These shifts in perception were not the result of any reassessment of the socio-economic nature of the Soviet Union, but were triggered by changes in Moscow's foreign policy orientation. Moreover, the fact that such changes of heart occurred in the wake of the Soviet Union's rapprochement with the country that was generally understood well before the summer of 1939 to be on a collision course with Britain, indicates that the upsurge of anti-Soviet sentiments after August 1939 was ultimately predicated upon Britain's relationship with Nazi Germany, rather than upon any analysis of the nature of the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, it is clear that many people's assessments of the Soviet Union were based upon superficial observations. Not a few of those who had previously denied that the Soviet regime was expansionist, either in a classic imperialist sense, or as a revolutionary power (or as a combination of the two), based their conclusions upon the fact that Moscow did not appear to wish to expand territorially in the 1930s, rather than upon an analysis which could deduce reasons for the existence, or non-existence, of any expansionist tendencies. Hence, when Stalin started in 1939 to expand his domain, the idea that the Soviet regime had reverted to its original revolutionary orientation, or had adopted a course of traditional Russian imperialism, could spread amongst those who had previously questioned or rejected such a reasoning. Similarly, the idea that Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were manifestations of a new form of totalitarian collectivist society, or the way that for some people the Soviet Union could overnight lurch from being a socialist state into a twin of Nazi Germany and (in the case of the New Statesman) back again, were based upon surface appearances, crude analogies and even emotionally-propelled spasms, rather than upon a rigorous analysis that could go beneath the actual or seemingly common features to investigate the real socio-economic dynamics of both countries.

A new factor in Britain and other countries after August 1939 was the adumbration of the anti-communist consensus that became the *leitmotiv* of mainstream Western politics during the Cold War. Many of the ideas that were commonplace and which often went unchallenged in the West during the postwar period were first widely articulated during the time of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Of course, they did not spring from a void in the latter months of 1939, and many of them had been in circulation since the October Revolution itself. But they had largely been the property of the anti-communist right, or had been subscribed to only partially or implicitly. The months following the pact saw for the first time the popular acceptance of an all-embracing totalitarian theory, one which viewed the Soviet Union as a society that was immanently totalitarian and expansionist, and, in the construct soon to become almost axiomatic, expansionist because it was totalitarian. For the first time, a wide po-

litical consensus, drawing in social democrats, liberals and conservatives, coalesced around the idea that the Soviet Union constituted a deadly threat to people of all classes in Britain and, indeed, to Western civilisation as a whole, and that the official communist movement and the fellow-travellers were Moscow's fifth column, an enemy within the besieged fortress. Although the vivid flash of anger in response to the Soviet attack upon Finland was soon submerged within the drama of the fall of France and the Blitz, and the Soviet Union's entry into the war in June 1941 not merely rehabilitated Moscow's reputation but produced a great wave of pro-Soviet sympathy, the seeds of a broad anti-communist consensus, centred upon the notion of the Soviet Union as a threatening totalitarian force in global affairs, had indubitably taken root.

The sheer intensity of the anger expressed, particularly by social democrats, over Moscow's assault upon Finland, a response that was deeper and more heartfelt than that towards, say, the German invasion of Poland, and the suddenness with which it flared up, shows that something profound was occurring within the confines of British political discourse. Once Germany had been dealt with, and once tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western countries started to rise as the 1940s drew on, the anti-communist consensus that had suddenly emerged after August 1939 was to revive into a full-blown fury in Britain and the Western world in general during the Cold War. The Soviet Union became almost universally accepted as a deadly military and political threat to the West, and anyone holding favourable attitudes towards it was considered at best a fool, and at worst a traitor. The brief furore over Finland showed that, whatever their previous statements in favour of certain aspects of Soviet policies, when it came to any confrontation between liberal democracy - which effectively meant capitalism - and Stalinism, moderate social democrats, liberals and conservatives would now stand four-square together in defence of the former, sharing the vernacular - and the intention - of defending the 'free world' against 'totalitarian communism'.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Planning, Socialism and Democracy

THIS chapter concludes the thesis, drawing out the main lessons of the first four chapters. The first section shows that the impact of the Five Year Plans upon Western economic thinking was largely catalytic, the second shows that the Soviet experience did much to submerge the idea of socialism as a democratic transformational process, and the third assesses the validity of the key insights made during the period under review in the light of the subsequent history of the Soviet Union.

I: The Lure of the Plan

Apart from a small if vociferous group of free marketeers, economic planning became a watchword in Britain for broad swathes of economists, social scientists, politicians and commentators during the period of the initial Five Year Plans. How far did the dramatic events in the Soviet Union influence the debate around planning?

Various authorities have stated that the economic changes in the Soviet Union strongly inspired the British left in the 1930s.¹ Others, including observers at the time, felt that the impact of the Five Year Plans went much further, and, as the economist Michael Polanyi put it, was 'largely responsible for the popularity of planning in the Western countries'.² Writing in 1946, EH Carr declared: 'The economic impact of the Soviet Union on the rest of the world may be summed up in the single word "planning".' He added that many countries had imitated the Soviet idea of set-period economic plans, and concluded: 'Certainly, if "we are all planners now", this is largely the result, conscious or unconscious, of the impact of Soviet practice and Soviet achievement.'³ Yet Carr was not always so convinced of the centrality of Soviet planning to Western economic discourse. In September 1939, he considered that it was 'not any belief in the success of Soviet economics, or any desire to emulate it', that was 'causing such extensive inroads' into the system of private enterprise, as economic develop-

^{1.} Barry (1965), 314; Sassoon (1996), 64; Stevenson (1984), 326; Taylor (1977), 431.

^{2.} Polanyi (1940), 29. See also Brown (1935), 268; Lord Strabolgi (formerly the Labour MP JM Kenworthy), 'The Political Scene', Nineteenth Century and After, October 1935, 469.

^{3.} Carr (1947), 20.

ments in all countries were taking a similar path,⁴ and in 1951 he emphasised that processes at work in the capitalist world, predating the slump of 1929, had made 'the conception of a national economy' and 'by the same token some kind of planning authority' an acceptable part of Western political and economic theory and practice.⁵ Carr's dramatic shifts of opinion indicate that the question of the influence of the Soviet Union upon economic debate in Britain in the 1930s is by no means clear-cut.

The idea of state intervention into the economy and economic planning did not start in Britain as a result of watching Stalin in 1929; as we saw in Chapter One, such ideas had been growing in popularity through the 1920s. The crash of 1929 and the ensuing slump had a great effect upon political and economic thinking in Britain. On the left, socialists had long felt that capitalism was a crisis-ridden system, and the slump merely confirmed their expectations. Whatever qualms many of them had about the methods of the Soviet regime, the vast majority of socialists considered that it had started to implement economic planning and social welfare measures, and was thereby laying the foundations of a socialist society. It appeared as though the Soviet Union had taken definite steps towards socialism precisely at the point when capitalism had demonstrated its bankruptcy. Amongst non-socialists, and particularly within Britain's ruling circles, the crisis forced politicians and economists to recognise that the market in and of itself was incapable of solving the problems facing their system, and that the state was obliged to step in and alter the spontaneous running of the market mechanism. The experience of the First World War had demonstrated the necessity for governments to intervene in economic and social affairs, and the idea that such intervention could benefit capitalism was gaining ground prior to the crash.

Had the Bolsheviks failed in 1917, or had the Soviet republic foundered in the Civil War, there can be little doubt that pro-interventionist sentiments would have emerged in the capitalist world, and would have become intensified and popularised in any period of economic crisis. Conversely, had capitalism been booming in 1929, the First Five Year Plan would not have gone unnoticed, but its impact in the West would have been greatly reduced. Nonetheless, despite there being no causal connection between the two events, the launch of the Five Year Plans coincided with the great crash, and the vivid contrast between capitalist crisis and Soviet growth could not have failed to have had an impact in the West. However, the influence of the plans should not be overestimated. Much of the debate in Britain around planning, irrespective of the political views of those involved, was concerned primarily with indigenous matters and, to a lesser extent, with those of the capitalist world as a whole. References to the Soviet

^{4.} EH Carr, 'Politics and Economics in Russia', Spectator, 1 September 1939, 334.

^{5.} Carr (1951), 26-35.

Union were not particularly common even in left-wing books and articles on planning, and even then were often little more than passing remarks.

This thesis has demonstrated that the Five Year Plans served as a backdrop to the already existing discussion in Britain around the issues that were raised by the general problems facing the economy and which were brought to a head by the crash of 1929. Rather than demonstrating a course of action to be imitated, the Soviet plans acted as a catalyst, spurring on this debate within the centre ground of opinion, presenting a series of innovations which could be profitably studied, and a lurking reminder that the market was not an infallible guarantee of prosperity. Pro-planning conservatives and liberals defined their interventionist plans in opposition to a fully collectivised economy, and posited them within a defence of parliamentary democracy against the 'totalitarian' regimes of Italy, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Their attitude was paralleled by that of the right-wing social democrats, who, despite their calls for the replacement of capitalism with socialism and their feeling that the Soviet Union was some sort of socialist society or contained certain socialist features, did not really intend to go beyond a capitalist economy with sufficient state intervention in the economic and social fields to overcome poverty and overt inequality.6 The critical but not unfriendly welcome to the Five Year Plans on the part of a wide range of British commentators was not based upon any identification with official communism, but arose because the Soviet regime was implementing economic and social schemes from which they thought Western governments could draw important lessons.⁷ In short, this thesis has shown that much of the discussion of Soviet planning and such related issues as state-run education and welfare measures was in reality focussed upon the issue of policy development and implementation in Britain.

However, whilst critical praise for the Five Year Plans was an important reason for the relatively benign attitude that existed towards the Soviet Union beyond the usual pro-Soviet circles during this period, this thesis has also shown that an equally important factor — indeed, one might venture to say the determining factor — in this respect was the manner in which Moscow was by this time often regarded as a stabilising factor in world affairs, and as a potential ally of Britain in an increasingly threatening international situation. This outlook could only last so long as Moscow acted in what appeared to be a positive manner on the international scene, and so long as planning and welfare measures remained rudimentary in capitalist countries. After 1945, with the

- 6. See Sassoon (1996), 42ff.
- 7. Furthermore, noting the manner in which the pro-Soviet lobby was an essentially transitory phenomenon that arose in a period of capitalist crisis during which traditional theories and policies were proving ineffectual, one can conclude that many of those who looked with such enthusiasm at the Soviet Union were also driven primarily by concern about domestic issues.

acceptance of the welfare state and state intervention in mainstream British politics and the domination of the East-West schism in international relations, a strong anticommunist consensus became the driving force on the British political scene, thereby undermining the basis for the existence of the centre ground of opinion of the 1930s, and ensuring that the Soviet brand of planning could no longer expect the appreciation that it had enjoyed within the political mainstream during that decade.

II: The Fate of Socialism

This thesis demonstrates that the Soviet experience did not have a particularly edifying impact upon the understanding of the relationship between socialism and democracy. For some, democracy within the Soviet Union was an act of faith or self-deception, often accompanied by strange rationalisations and sleights of hands that indicated that they recognised, unconsciously or otherwise, that Moscow suffered from a definite democratic deficit. Some who accepted the undemocratic nature of Stalinism felt that it suited the rough Slav (and, by implication, not the sophisticated Westerner), whilst others, not least George Bernard Shaw and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, openly deprecated democratic notions and promoted the idea of a society managed by an enlightened élite. The Communist Party of Great Britain maintained the illusion of the democratic nature of the Soviet regime for many decades, yet it was to discard any commitment to workers' control at home. For Soviet Britain, a manifesto published in 1935, expounded at length on the central role of workers' councils in the fight for and in the running of a socialist Britain, and explained how they would enable the working class, the majority of the population, to run the nation's affairs in a far more democratic manner than under liberal democracy.8 Nonetheless, this manifesto, stirring stuff if one ignores the assertion that this was how the Soviet Union was governed, had rapidly to be put aside once the party started to court Liberals, Tories, clergy and other non-proletarian elements during the Popular Front.9 Such sentiments were never to return. One looks in vain for any mention of workers' democracy in the party's overtly reformist programmatic statement at the end of the Second World War, 10 and even as the party turned to the left in 1947 with the formation of the Cominform, its proposals for an economic plan for Britain scrupulously avoided any reference to the idea of workers' control.11

People on the left of the Labour Party often steered gingerly around the question

- 8. Communist Party of Great Britain (1935), 23-5.
- 9. Harry Pollitt, 'Economic Security, Peace and Democracy', in Communist Party of Great Britain (1938), 55-7.
- 10. Pollitt (1945).
- 11. Communist Party of Great Britain (1947).

of workers' democracy.¹² The example of GDH Cole illustrates how the appeal of étatism could affect socialists who had previously adhered to an anti-bureaucratic stance. At the same time as he demonstrated a growing fondness for Soviet economic administration during the 1930s, he effectively abandoned his long-term guild socialist principles when he discussed the mechanics of transferring the control of industry from the capitalist class to a socialist administration. He called for the 'rapid devolution of a large measure of actual control over working conditions, including the actual direction of industry, upon the workers actually engaged in industry', but added that this could not be done 'for the first few months, or even the first year or two, of socialist administration', as one could not afford 'to risk failure and confusion by trying to be too "democratic" at the very start'. 13 And yet to forbid workers' control, even temporarily, would be a sure-fire way to guarantee that the capitalist class would be replaced by a bureaucratic state apparatus. British capitalism would be supplanted by an indigenous form of Stalinism, no doubt (to paraphrase Orwell) a genteel brand of it, but Stalinism nonetheless. He seemed oblivious to the dangers which étatisation posed, even as a temporary measure, and its far from temporary nature in the Soviet Union should have been clear to him, seeing that by the 1930s the Soviet élite was not going to permit workers to start exercising any control over their work process, or anything else for that matter.

Fears were expressed by various left-wingers of, in the words of George Orwell, 'a world society, economically collectivist — that is, with the profit principle eliminated — but with all political, military and educational power in the hands of a small caste of rulers and their bravos'. ¹⁴ Moderate socialists presented their concerns about the dangers of unlimited state power by declaring against dictatorships of any persuasion, whilst those on the far left insisted upon the need for socialist democracy. The experience of Stalinism and the huge rise in state intervention in wartime Britain caused the Independent Labour Party to declare that the choice was not 'control versus no control', but 'control by whom and control for what' — by and for an élite, or by and for the mass of the population. The Soviet model as it currently stood was 'no solution' to Europe's problems, there had to be democratic control of a socialised economy: 'Selfgovernment in industry must be based on workers' and technicians' councils possessing real power at every level of industry, local, regional and national.'¹⁵

- 12. Note the manner in which GR Mitchison, a prominent member of the Socialist League, devoted but a few pages of his lengthy account of a future socialist society to the subject of workers' control, and mainly defined it as an advisory adjunct to government appointees who would actually manage industry. See Mitchison (1934), 145-7.
- 13. GDH Cole, 'Socialist Control of Industry', in Problems of a Socialist Government (1933), 180-2.
- 14. Orwell (1937), 247-8. See also Fyvel (1940), 108; Patrick Gordon Walker, 'Is Stalinism Socialism?', *Plebs*, November 1940, 237.
- 15. Independent Labour Party (1944), 5, 12.

Moderate social democrats opposed Bolshevism in the name of parliamentary democracy, and they often upbraided the Soviet regime for not basing itself upon such tenets, whilst simultaneously demonstrating an élitist attitude towards their own working class. The Bolsheviks failed in their attempt to break from paternalistic socialism, but at least they made the effort to do so; for the right-wing social democrats, the idea of socialism being the self-emancipation of the working class through its own independent political activity was utterly alien. The Labour Party and trade union leaders were always very hostile to anything that smacked even slightly of workers' control, and recommended no more than minimal degrees of labour movement participation in industrial management, such as union officials sitting on the boards of nationalised concerns, ¹⁶ a fact that was noted with satisfaction by conservative and Fabian observers alike. ¹⁷ Moderate social democratic politicians and thinkers viewed planning in a technocratic manner, ¹⁸ and were insistent that the business of planning belonged solely to the experts, which helps us to understand why they looked favourably at the Five Year Plans. To cite the Fabian economist Barbara Wootton:

The satisfactory course surely is to recognise once and for all that economic administration is a job for experts, and to hand it over to them. Detailed democratic control of economic affairs is at best a hopeless morass, and at worst (and more commonly) a hypocritical pretence. It has nowhere been effectively exercised in the past, and nobody has suggested any passable scheme by which it might be realised hereafter.¹⁹

Wootton graciously conceded that the public could through their elected representatives 'express *general* opinions about the *kind* of results which it would like those plans to achieve', and suggested that the ideal arrangement would be the Soviet planning mechanism combined with a parliamentary political system. But the very idea of workers' control, or even of any input from the workers beyond advice from those directly involved in a particular work process, was anathema; it was simply impracticable 'to conduct modern business after the fashion of a public meeting', and, she was relieved to say, most workers — excluding a 'temperamentally interfering minority' — were not interested in getting involved in managerial functions.²⁰

Across almost the entire left, planning was thus seen as a matter for experts, with

- 16. Barry (1965), 317ff. See also Dahl (1947), 875-900.
- 17. Macmillan (1934), 117; RCK Ensor, 'A Crippsian Utopia', Spectator, 28 September 1934, 446.
- 18. Dalton (1935).
- 19. Wootton (1934), 311.
- 20. Ibid, 311, 345-6. See also Attlee (1937), 191. This attitude informed the practice of Attlee's postwar Labour government, best summed up by that former firebrand Stafford Cripps, who asserted in October 1946: 'I think it would be almost impossible to have worker-controlled industry in Britain, even if it were on the whole desirable.' See 'Dockets for Textiles', *The Times*, 28 October 1946, 2.

any participation by the actual producers and consumers being restricted to no more than the suggestion boxes that any sensible factory owner or shopkeeper fixes to the wall in which his workers or customers can deposit ideas for improvements in the production process or changes in products. The ideas put forward by guild socialists and syndicalists that posited workers' control as a necessary central feature of socialism were either never countenanced or became forgotten in the excitement surrounding the Five Year Plans. By the 1930s, and certainly by the 1940s, the call for workers' control of industry as an essential feature of socialist democracy was more-or-less confined to the largely marginalised far left.²¹

What this thesis demonstrates is that the most profound effect of the Soviet experience upon the left in Britain during the period under discussion was the marginalisation of the idea of socialism as a democratic transformational process, that the replacement of the market by a planned economy must be accompanied by the replacement of parliamentary democracy with a system of workers' councils, an order based on a much higher level of democracy that ensures popular control over society as a whole. Although the October Revolution was carried out under the slogan of soviet — council — power, and for a while the Bolsheviks enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the Russian working class through these institutions, by the 1930s the Soviet Union had mutated into a command economy ruthlessly managed by a hypercentralised ruling élite, with the working class in a definitely subservient position, and the soviets relegated to being merely part of the bureaucratic state.

Moderate social democrats, with their political programme of the reform of capitalism through the working class exercising its social strength via parliamentary procedures, and through a social democratic government gradually introducing social and economic measures benefiting the working class through state administration, never accepted Bolshevism, and, although they felt that lessons could be learned from the Five Year Plans, the continued reliance of Stalin's regime upon extremely repressive and authoritarian methods strengthened both their commitment to liberal democracy, with all its limitations, and their belief that the revolutionary road to socialism could only end in tears. Their paramount commitment to liberal democracy was symbolised by their response to the Soviet invasion of Finland in late 1939, which saw their existing stance combining praise for certain aspects of Soviet society and criticism of the repressive political norms being transformed almost overnight into a full-blown anticommunist standpoint.

21. Such an absence in mainstream circles did not go unnoticed. One aggrieved railwayman asked: 'What has become of that plank in socialist propaganda — workers' control of industry?' (HF Turner, 'These Are Your Pages', *Tribune*, 10 January 1941, 22) For the decline in the call for workers' control, see Ostergaard (1997).

Left-wing social democrats varied in their appraisal of Bolshevism and subsequently Stalinism. Not a few were drawn into the Stalinist orbit, and they variously adapted to or recoiled from the regime on all manner of subjects, sometimes cautiously, sometimes precipitately, sometimes naïvely, often changing their opinions; and in their wavering they tended to lose sight of the centrality of workers' democracy to socialism, as they often saw the Soviet Union as a socialist state in spite of its negative features.

The adherents of the official communist movement, of whom not a few had once fought for a democratic transformational form of socialism, and the fellow-travellers were convinced that the Soviet Union represented the new civilisation, where the problems that faced humanity were being solved and any hardships or unpleasant features were merely birth-pangs of a bright new world. Although Stalinist rule was dressed up in democratic or revolutionary clothing which the pro-Soviet lobby took at its word, the course of history was marked by a continual stripping away of this façade, so that 'the new civilisation' often became 'the god that failed'. Such was the ferocity of this process of disillusionment that for the majority of those who accepted the Stalinist myth, either *in toto* or in part, it did not lead to the discovery of a democratic transformational form of socialism, but a retreat into social democratic reformism, that is, the amelioration of the excesses of capitalism, or a rejection of socialism altogether.

Finally, the sections of the left that adhered to the concept of socialism as a democratic transformational process were a marginal force during the period under discussion. Although they produced many incisive criticisms of Stalinism as they attempted to comprehend the course of the Soviet regime from the October Revolution to the Five Year Plans, the Terror and beyond, they were divided amongst divers small currents, each of which was itself divided into argumentative little groups, and they disagreed over when and how Bolshevism degenerated into the nationalist élitism of Stalinism, how many (if any) features of socialism still existed in the Soviet Union — which itself raised the important question of how features of a socialist society could exist in any meaningful form in the absence of workers' democracy — and over what the path to a genuinely new civilisation would be.

III: Looking Back

To conclude this thesis, I shall assess some of the key points made in Britain about the Soviet Union during 1929-41 in the light of both subsequent events and the main trends of investigation of the postwar period, and provide a few closing thoughts on the various schools of thought during the period under discussion.

Although Soviet studies – to use the term in both the academic and a more broad sense – were by no means monolithic in Britain and other Western countries after

1945, they were constrained, particularly during the first couple of postwar decades, by the prevailing anti-communist atmosphere of the Cold War, which did much to discourage genuinely free discussion as the subject was beaten into the mould of Western political requirements. The postwar period saw a wide range of commentators, politicians and academics, together with not a few disillusioned adherents of the pro-Soviet lobby, accept the outlook that the Soviet Union posed a dire military and political threat to the West, an idea, best exemplified by the theory of totalitarianism, that had previously been largely confined to right-wingers. It is true that this outlook was challenged even at the height of the Cold War, and was subjected to a series of revisionist critiques from the late 1960s, with much of the richness of the discourse of 1929-41 being regained, and with much of the critical literature having the benefit both of being able to avoid repeating the apologetics of the 'Red Decade' and of being able to draw upon far greater amounts of source material.²² Nonetheless, Western political discourse tended to be dominated by the ideas of the Cold War more or less until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, and some of the more prescient insights of the period under discussion which have been described in this thesis were to a large degree overlooked or marginalised.

It would be unfair to blame those observing the first three Five Year Plans for failing to have elaborated fully convincing analyses of the laws of motion of the Soviet socio-economic formation, as it had only just come into existence. Nonetheless, as we have seen, several attempts to do so were published in Britain during that period. Waldemar Gurian produced an investigation of the Soviet Union along the lines of what became known as the theory of totalitarianism, whilst Leon Trotsky produced an at times contradictory but also often brutally incisive work based upon the Marxian method.23 Of the indigenous analysts, Frederick Voigt combined totalitarian theory with an idiosyncratic theological approach, whilst Leonard Hubbard produced some solid work based upon a comparison with the features of capitalism.²⁴ These works were necessarily tentative, but they represented pioneering attempts to understand the inner workings of this new society. It is significant that the theoreticians of the pro-Soviet lobby never attempted to subject the Soviet socio-economic formation to a rigorous analysis, and were seemingly content to provide empirical descriptions - and highly rosy ones at that.25 Nevertheless, despite this relative lack of thoroughgoing analysis, the more perceptive observers in the 1930s managed to provide many probing insights and valuable clues in their books and articles. As this thesis has shown, they

^{22.} The differing schools of thought are described in Cohen (1986a), 3-37.

^{23.} Gurian (1932); Trotsky (1937b).

^{24.} Voigt (1938); Hubbard (1936 and 1938).

^{25.} For instance, Campbell (1939); Coates (1938); Strachey (1936); Webb (1937).

were well aware of serious problems afflicting the Soviet economy, most notably poor management and workmanship, defective product, wastage of resources, reluctance to innovate, disproportions amongst sectors and non-fulfilment of plans, and a few also mooted the idea of the essential *planlessness* of the Soviet economy, that the plans were honoured more in the breach than in their implementation. All this was borne out by the experience of several decades of Soviet economic administration, as these factors turned out not merely to be teething problems, but to be truly systemic, and have been convincingly recognised by some recent analysts as the underlying reason for the failure of the Soviet socio-economic formation.²⁶

A few observers during the period under review considered that the Soviet socioeconomic formation was doomed to fail. Some of them were merely displaying their prejudices, and have been proved correct only in the way that a stopped clock coincidentally tells the right time twice a day. Others made more perceptive analyses. Free marketeers insisted that the Soviet Union could never succeed because the bureaucracy had abolished the market, and thus robbed the country of a rational form of economic regulation. In one sense this is correct; the lack of a rational form of economic regulation was a fatal flaw of the system. Nevertheless, this has to be measured against their insistence that the market is an irreplaceable feature of a modern economy, which led them to assert that any attempt to replace the market would inevitably result in a Stalinist-style society, and to reject out of hand the very idea of a democratic planned economy and the possibility of successfully transcending capitalism. Certain left-wingers criticised Stalinist economic administration on the basis that a thoroughgoing democracy was an absolute necessity if a planned economy were to be run in an efficient and humane manner. Trotsky agreed, and also informed his British audience that in order to maintain itself as a ruling élite the Soviet bureaucracy would eventually attempt to turn state property into its own private property.²⁷ At a time when a wide range of observers saw the Soviet Union as the leading agency in an irreversible process of global étatisation, the idea that Stalinism was a temporary and historically unviable phenomenon was a bold contention, but its accuracy cannot be denied today.²⁸

Perhaps the most prescient observation of the period under review was that as the Soviet leadership became solidified as a social élite during the 1930s, it was no longer interested in world revolution, and that the Soviet Union was thus an essentially stabi-

^{26.} In particular, see Ticktin (1992).

^{27.} Trotsky (1937b), 238-40.

^{28.} It is extremely interesting to note that despite years of hard work and access to a broad range of source material, very few of the large number of Western Soviet analysts managed to foresee with any accuracy the final fate of the Soviet Union, and its demise came as a surprise to most of them. See Cox (1998), 13-31.

lising and conservative factor in international affairs. Because of the non-capitalist nature of the Soviet Union resulted in it acting as a barrier to the expansion of capital, the relationship of the Soviet élite with the West was necessarily antagonistic, yet Moscow's essentially nationalist and conservative outlook meant that it wished to come to an accommodation with capitalism, not overthrow it.

Those commentators who considered in the 1930s that the Soviet Union was not an inherently expansionist power were correct, despite the expansion of Stalinism beyond the Soviet borders from 1939, because, as the more perceptive ones recognised, the Soviet socio-economic system lacked the immanent expansionist tendencies of classic imperialist powers. Although, like the rulers of any big power, Stalin and his successors would try to assert the interests of the Soviet bloc, and in so doing caused consternation and occasional alarm, they never went too far, and always drew back from any truly dangerous confrontation with the West. The expansion of Moscow's rule into Eastern Europe was an attempt to build a defensive buffer zone on its western flank, and was essentially agreed with the West at Yalta. The establishment of Stalinist regimes in China, Cuba and other Third World countries was a product of radical national liberation struggles to which Moscow attached itself as a means of pressurising the West. Indeed, the establishment of Stalinist regimes across the world was almost always in countries where pro-Western regimes and forces were weak, and, moreover, the breaks with Yugoslavia and China showed that these states rapidly developed their own national interests that did not necessarily coincide with those of the Soviet Union, and that Moscow could not hold an 'empire' together. The expansion of Stalinism had nothing to do with any broad imperialist designs, let alone a drive for a world communist state, on the part of Moscow, but were merely limited moves to reinforce its position in a hostile world.

As the Soviet élite was ruling a non-capitalist state that had emerged out of a socialist revolution, it could have no official ideology other than a distorted form of that under which the revolution had been fought. Although its anti-capitalist image caused friction with the capitalist world, it also served a very useful purpose in that it enabled it to promote an international movement that took this image at face value, and proved to be remarkably loyal to it. In maintaining the official communist movement, Moscow had a force under its control that, to varying degrees of effectiveness, could influence political developments in Western countries. The policy of Popular Frontism, an alliance of people from all social classes, that was promulgated by the official communist movement from the mid-1930s was by its very nature a barrier to workers' revolution, but was ideally suited to the purpose of exerting pressure upon capitalist governments in the hope of their adopting policies amenable to Moscow. The manner in which Moscow destroyed the revolutionary forces during the Spanish Civil War,

even at the cost of demoralising the most active Republican elements and ultimately facilitating Franco's victory, demonstrated that Stalin was intent on crushing any genuine communist movement, regardless of the consequences. Stalin's anti-communist instincts were shown at the end of the Second World War when he ensured that the revolutionary upheavals of 1917-23 were not repeated, through his insistence that the official communist movement played a key role in the re-establishment of capitalist regimes across Western Europe. However, although the presentation of the Soviet Union as a deadly menace to the West was challenged, it remained popular even as the country slid into a state of decrepitude in the 1980s,²⁹ and the idea that the Soviet regime represented a consciously anti-communist force was largely restricted to the marginal forces of the far left.

Assuming, as this author does, that communism means a society in which human liberation has been achieved through the maximisation of democracy, the overthrow of exploitative social relations and the rational deployment of the world's resources, it is not only clear that this was not materialising in the Soviet Union during the period under discussion, but that those ruling the country had by now a material interest in preventing such a society from emerging, as was noted by a wide range of observers during that period. Looking back over the six decades of the Soviet socio-economic formation, it is fair to conclude that it had nothing to do with communism, even of a formative stage. Stalinism in power was basically a substitute for a weak or non-existent capitalist class, a nationally-oriented state-building exercise, an attempt to implement a programme of modernisation, an ultimately unsuccessful parallel to capitalism. Stalin's victory over his party rivals in 1929 represented the final victory of the bureaucratic forces, a burgeoning new élite, over the forces of communism. Those who considered that Stalin's Soviet Union was a new élite society, a counter-revolutionary force as determined as any capitalist power to prevent the advent of communism, were indubitably correct, but this insight was largely lost during the postwar period, as it clashed with the parallel Cold War and Stalinist orthodoxies that viewed Stalin and his successors as the leading proponents of socialist revolution.

The rise of the pro-Soviet lobby and the centre ground of opinion during the 1930s was predicated upon the coincidence of the economic crisis in the West and the progress made under the Five Year Plans, and upon the threat to stability and democracy posed, above all, by Nazi Germany and the perception that Moscow could play a positive role on the international scene. Appreciative attitudes towards the Soviet Union were as much based upon what was occurring, or failing to occur, in the West as upon what was happening within that country. In the postwar period, with the absence of major tensions amongst the big capitalist powers, with capitalism experiencing an

^{29.} This was certainly the view of Richard Pipes, a leading conservative analyst, as late as 1984. See Pipes (1992), 26.

unprecedented boom, with state economic administration and welfare measures being implemented under liberal democratic regimes, and with the harsh reality of Stalinism considerably more apparent, the Soviet Union could no longer remain the object of worship or fascination that it had been in the 1930s. Under such conditions, the centre ground withered away, as there were very few positive lessons that moderate conservatives, liberals and right-wing social democrats could now draw from the Soviet Union, and the fellow-travelling scene dwindled into a somewhat bedraggled rump attached to the official communist movement, which itself gradually drew away from its uncritical attitude towards Moscow after the traumatic experience of Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and his subsequent invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Of the writings of the three main trends discussed in this thesis, those of the pro-Soviet lobby have proved the least durable. Time has been least kind to them, and rightly so. They exist today as little more than curiosities, remnants of a strange decade when a comparatively large number of thinking people sought salvation in an actually existing utopia, and one which was soon to be exposed as a cruel deception.

The works most inclined during the period under review to point to the extreme authoritarian nature of Stalin's regime were those of the anti-communists, and nowadays there are few people who would demur from the view that millions of Soviet citizens died in purges, labour camps and the famine during the 1930s. It was the anticommunist viewpoint — that Stalinist totalitarianism was the inevitable and unavoidable consequence of Bolshevism, and that the Soviet regime posed a mortal challenge to the West – which enjoyed the most influence after 1945, as it became rapidly and readily accepted by politicians, academics and commentators at most points of the political spectrum. Traditional anti-communism enjoyed the advantage of combining elements of truth, particularly when pointing to the repressive nature of Stalinism, with a mish-mash of superficial analyses based upon surface appearances, and easy answers and glib recipes based upon prejudices. The insistence of traditional anticommunists that the primary dynamic behind the Soviet regime was ideological led them and their heirs in the postwar totalitarian school completely to misconstrue the conservative, counter-revolutionary role of the Soviet bureaucracy, and it is no surprise that many key events in the Soviet Union, right down to the regime's ignominious resignation in 1991, took leading Cold War ideologues unawares.30

The more open and less categorical approach of the works of the centre ground of the 1930s was echoed in the revisionist challenge to anti-communist assumptions that emerged during the 1960s. However, this trend was unable to extend its influence far

^{30.} Hence Martin Malia, writing as Gorbachev's regime was breathing its last, could not believe that the Soviet bureaucracy would simply quietly resign itself to its miserable fate. See Malia (1992), 676-8.

beyond the academic world, and, despite making many convincing and incisive criticisms of Cold War orthodoxy, was considerably less able than the prewar centre ground to make any significant impact upon Western political discourse.

Through an extensive examination of the source material, this thesis has shown that not only was the Soviet Union a subject of considerable interest in Britain during the period under discussion, but that the assessments of the Soviet Union that appeared in Britain during those years demonstrated the possibility of the existence of a more thoughtful and reflective attitude, one which rejected the predetermined standpoints of the anti-communists and the pro-Soviet lobby, and was able to detect various aspects of the Soviet Union that eluded many commentators of this and other times. The proclaimed mission of the Soviet Union, its declared intention to stand as an alternative to capitalism, inevitably ensured that the study of that country would be heavily politicised. This was no less the case with the period under review in this thesis than it was at any other time of the country's history, and even those who produced more dispassionate and objective assessments often did so more as a result of their estimation of the requirements of British domestic and foreign policies than through the desire to elaborate a careful analysis of the Soviet Union. And so, with the onset of the bipolar world of the Cold War and the popularisation of the theory of totalitarianism, one particularly incisive observation made during the 1930s - that the Soviet regime under Stalin was essentially a conservative, counter-revolutionary force — was seldom if ever publicly broached in the political mainstream, and only occasionally elsewhere, in Britain after 1945. Yet this and other glimpses into what was then a rapidly-emerging and novel form of society, despite being based upon sparse information and inchoate and tentative judgements, were in many ways more fruitful than the findings of the dominant concepts of the post-1945 discourse on the Soviet Union, constrained as they were by the overarching ideological and analytical ideas of the postwar world.

Bibliography

THIS bibliography is arranged in three sections. The first section details books published during the period under discussion, that is, 1929 to 1941, along with those published before this date. As there are a small number of references in the main narrative, mostly in Chapter Four, Section Three, to books published on the Soviet Union during the Second World War after June 1941, these have been included in this section, with a cut-off date of 1945. The second section details magazines and journals on the basis of the same criteria as the first section. The third section details material that was produced after 1945. Hence, a book by, say, EH Carr that was published in 1939 will appear in the first section of this bibliography, one by him that was published in 1947 will appear in the third section. The first and second sections consist almost entirely of primary material, and the third section consists of secondary material.

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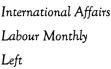
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