

TSARS AND KAISERS WERE LIBERALS

BY MAX NOMAD

NEXT to the pun, the practical joke is the lowest form of humor. Yet this seems to be the kind of amusement selected by history as an escape from the boredom of time. In its choice of victims history plays no favorites. The great and the lowly, the brave and the craven may all expect, sooner or later, to be kicked in an undignified sector. And history's favorite device for this practical foolery is revolution. The Russian upheaval of 1917 and the German breakdown of 1918, for instance, now seem ghastly jokes — not only on the rulers of the two nations but on their subjects as well.

Few of their people mourned the downfall of the Kaiser and the Tsar. Most Germans hated the arrogant scion of the robber barons who by luck and chicanery had become masters of one of the most civilized nations of the world. Most Russians feared the cruel stupidity of the degenerate descendant of semi-Asiatic despots. The passing of more than two decades has made no change in this basic judgment of

the regime of the Prussian Junkers and the Tsarist bureaucracy. Yet those who lived in pre-war Germany and pre-war Russia cannot help feeling a certain nostalgia for the old days, now that they view them through Hitlerism and Stalinism. Which is where history's practical joking comes in. Life under the Kaiser, and even under the Tsar, seems amazingly free when contrasted with the "national socialism" administered by Hitler and the "proletarian socialism" under Stalin. By comparison with their current successors, Wilhelm Hohenzollern and Nikolai Romanoff look like old-fashioned liberals!

To be sure, life was scarcely inspiring to a western-minded liberal under the rule of the Kaiser. When Wilhelm mounted the throne near the end of the past century, civilized Europe had accepted the idea that royalty was at best a traditional ornament not endowed with any real power. Even Wilhelm's father and grandfather had left politics to their Iron Chancellor. But not so Wilhelm II. He took

seriously all the claptrap about the divine right of monarchs, and believed all the flatteries of his courtiers. In one of his addresses to army recruits the Kaiser made the famous remark that they owed him blind submission and that in view of the frequent labor troubles they might have to shoot down their own parents if he so ordered. Again, in addressing soldiers starting on the punitive expedition against the Boxer uprising in China, he encouraged them to behave like "Huns," so that Germany should be forever respected in Asia.

He showed as little restraint in matters of culture. Speaking of modern art he uttered his famous "*Die ganze Richtung passt mir nicht*" (The whole trend does not suit me), the obscurantist impudence of which was matched only by its unconscious humor. After seeing Gerhart Hauptmann's *Weavers*, one of the masterpieces of its time, he indignantly gave up the box that had been placed at his disposal. He was equally reactionary in matters of what he believed to be science. The only "serious" book he ever read was the notorious *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a renegade Englishman-turned-German. That pseudo-scholarly

concoction deified the German race and helped create the German megalomania from which so many members of an otherwise intelligent nation are suffering. The Kaiser became one of the most ardent publicity agents of this pre-Nazi bible, which to a large extent formed the mind of Adolf Hitler.

But despite all this oratorical, esthetic, and scientific frightfulness life was tolerable under the Kaiser's regime, even to those who opposed him. The soldier, told to kill father and mother, hardly ever had the opportunity. Strikes were no crime, as they have become under Hitler. Occasional heavy sentences against radicals seem mild compared with what any prisoner can expect in a Gestapo jail or concentration camp today. Radical editors went to prison for *lèse-majesté*; but after a year's seclusion they were back at their desks, covered with glory and, possibly, some additional flesh. Today, if a prisoner ever does get out, he is usually crippled in body and mind.

Under the Kaiser it was not a crime to call oneself a republican, or even an anarchist, and to spread subversive ideas through speeches or newspapers. In Parliament, Socialists could with impunity insult the Hohenzollern family by stating, as one of them did, that "the

breaking of one's word belongs, so to speak, to the lofty traditions of the Prussian ruling dynasty." Three years later the man who had spoken those words was elected Vice-Chairman of the Reichstag. Anyone making similar remarks about Hitler and his entourage today would rot in a prison cell.

There were no purges under Wilhelm II. Hardly anyone was hated by the Kaiser more than his two former chancellors, Bismarck and Bülow, who told him in so many words that he was a meddling fool. Yet the two died in their beds with the highest titles of nobility bestowed upon them by their ruler. For contrast, let us recall how Hitler's former intimates (like Gregor Strasser, once his political teacher and manager of his campaigns, and Captain Roehm) were murdered without trial when they disagreed with the Führer. Nor did the Kaiser's predilection for Houston Chamberlain's anti-Semitic trash prevent Jewish scholars like Professor Ehrlich, Jewish artists like Max Liebermann, or Jewish businessmen like Albert Ballin from attaining the highest honors.

Wilhelm's taste in literature and art was that of any Prussian backwoods squire. He loved heroic plays glorifying his ancestors, and his favorite authors were Major Lauff

and Ernst von Wildenbruch, whose very names evoked a contemptuous smile from all lovers of literature. But there was no Goebbels law forbidding criticism of the imperial taste. Writers and artists in disfavor with the Kaiser were played in all theatres, read in all libraries, and exhibited in art galleries. And they could enjoy the rewards of their effort. Now writers and artists unacceptable to the new masters are in exile or concentration camps, or silenced.

II

Life was less pleasant under the Tsar. Nicholas II was no mere mediocrity like his Prussian cousin; he was of subnormal intelligence. He trusted advisers who, though reared in European schools, knew no other way to maintain their rule except brutality — which reflected their realization that no other methods would maintain the privileges of a very thin upper crust of the population.

Two geographical names are symbolic of the system of government prevailing under the last Tsar. One is Kishinev, a city in Bessarabia. In 1903 it witnessed a ghastly massacre of defenseless Jews, organized by the police authorities. The other geographical

name was Lena, a Siberian river in a region containing rich gold fields. In 1912 the workers in that section struck for better wages. The government's answer was a massacre (of Russians, this time) which shocked the world. Nevertheless, Tsarist tyranny can stand favorable comparison with the "freedom" inaugurated by Bolshevism. The Bolshevik government has done away with Jewish *pogroms*. Yet more Jews have been shot by order of Stalin for opposing *his* system than had been murdered in all the *pogroms* put together. They were shot as malcontents, but their fate was just as much plain murder as if they had been killed for belonging to an unpopular race.

Treatment of the great black mass of peasants under the Tsars was brutal enough. Yet it seems mild now, against the fresh memory of the Soviet regime's forcible methods of "collectivizing" the *mujiks*. Nothing in a thousand years of Muscovite horror can compare for inhumanity with the so-called "liquidation of kulaks" — the uprooting and exile of at least 5,000,000 men, women and children — and the subsequent man-made famine of 1932-33.

Such outrages under the name of justice as the celebrated Mendel Beilis case could not occur in Sta-

lin's Russia. In 1911, Beilis, whose only crime was his race and religion, was accused of murdering a boy for "ritual" purposes. The falseness of the accusation was transparent. The government knew that the boy was the victim of thieves on whom he had squealed. But the Cabinet in St. Petersburg and the prosecutor in Kiev needed a scapegoat for popular discontents and Beilis served the purpose. Yet they could not prevent the greatest legal talents and Christian theological experts from exposing the stupidity of the charge. And they could not prevent the acquittal of Beilis.

Twenty-five years later dictator Stalin staged trials to discredit those within his own party who were opposed to his personal tyranny. Among the victims were heroes of the revolution and practically all the intimate associates of the revered Lenin. The accused men, though civilians, were judged by a military court before which they were forced in devious ways to confess to incredible and impossible crimes. The trials were a mockery of the idea of justice — rehearsed mock trials, without real defense or tangible evidence. The convicted men were executed within twenty-four hours after these make-believe proceedings. Such is the

state of Russian justice after the overthrow of the most barbarous and unscrupulous tyranny of its time.

Viewed from the vantage point of today, the Tsar's treatment of political dissenters bordered on comparative philanthropy. There were summary trials in the old Russia, followed by executions; and there were outrageous floggings in prison. But these sadistic outbursts were counterbalanced by occasional amnesties, or, at worst, by the release of the prisoners after their terms expired. Moreover, every prisoner could keep in touch with his relatives and friends, at least during the reign of the last three Tsars. Not one of the future leaders of the Soviet state would have survived if the Tsarist handling of enemies had been half as harsh as under the future Cheka and GPU. Exiled and sometimes imprisoned revolutionaries could continue their studies and writings; often they wrote to the Petersburg library for research materials — and received them!

All this "bourgeois sentimentality" has been done away with. Once a person has been arrested for a political offense in Stalin's domain, he disappears utterly and completely. Even his body is not returned to his family if he is

executed. The prisoner himself rarely knows the crime of which he is accused. His term is frequently extended without notice or excuse after he has served it. Contact with the family is rare and permitted only in the case of very mild sentences. Conditions in prison camps, exile places, and "isolators" are everywhere as bad as under Tsarism and in many places much worse. The victims are not permitted to write. Indeed, they are treated as ordinary criminals, without that saving satisfaction of the status of "politicals" allowed by the Tsars.

And finally there is the matter of sheer magnitude. For every political outcast in the old Russia, there are hundreds in the new. Statistics, of course, are not available. Yet the evidence is overwhelming that Bolshevism has created a prison and prison camp population of millions, startlingly larger than under the old regime.

III

The Tsarist system used to be described as "despotism mitigated by assassination." The reference was to the many terrorist acts committed against the representatives of the regime. But under the Tsars only the direct participants in attempts at assassination were held respon-

sible. Today anyone who decides to commit such an act must be ready not only to sacrifice his own life, but also to jeopardize his family. After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, in 1881, not more than six persons were executed, though the Tsarist government at that time held hundreds of revolutionists in its prisons. The murder of Sergei Kirov, a Bolshevik dignitary, by a solitary disgruntled young communist in 1934 was immediately avenged by the execution of one hundred and sixteen persons who had nothing to do with the act. Thousands more have been killed off and imprisoned since then, directly or indirectly for the Kirov assassination.

If peasants became unruly or workers went on strike in old Russia, they were brutally shot down and the news spread abroad. Not so the Bolsheviks. Eager for the sympathies of the workers of the world, they use a technique of suppression which is more efficient and less noisy. Children are brought up in the schools to act as informers against their own parents and are rewarded if they deliver them to the police. And when entire regions oppose some measure by passive resistance, the reply of the government is mass starvation, such as Stalin resorted to in 1932; between

four and six million peasants were left to starve to death as a result of a sowing strike, although the administration had sufficient supplies to prevent the catastrophe.

The reduction of illiteracy is usually mentioned as the great dividing line between the barbarism prior to 1917 and the "new civilization" inaugurated by the Revolution. At bottom, however, it is a moot question which system is more inhuman — that which leaves a large section of the population in total ignorance, as did the Tsarist regime; or that which shuts the whole nation off from all sources of information except those approved by the ruling bureaucracy.

Censorship is a thousand times more rigid under the Stalin regime than it had ever been under the Tsars. Works by Marx, Plekhanov, Lenin, radical periodicals, and even Bolshevik newspapers, could be freely published and circulated in Tsarist Russia for many years before the Revolution of 1917. No paper not in absolute agreement with the regime has been permitted to appear for twenty years in Soviet Russia. Discussions of the "party line," tolerated until 1927, have been discontinued since Stalin became the uncontested boss. The publishing of a book on politics, economics or sociology not in con-

formity with the strict tenets of official theology is unthinkable.

Under the Tsar, Gorky, Andreyev, and scores of other writers could publish or produce anything, despite their anti-Tsarist stand. Works of art or science, whether by liberals, atheists, or other non-conformists, were rarely interfered with. Under the regime of Stalin no scientist or artist is safe if he runs afoul of some official dogma or other. Certain theories of genetics — such as held by the world famous scientist Vavilov — are declared taboo because of their alleged “bourgeois” implications. Even before Stalin attained supreme power, operas and plays, such as *Lohengrin*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Werther*, Schiller’s *Maria Stuart*, Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*, were banned by the Bolshevik censor because of their “ideological” inadequacy. Now well-known Soviet writers, like Pilnyak suddenly disappear from the shelves of bookstores or from the theatre, and stop writing altogether because of doubtful orthodoxy. Or the dictator himself orders the silencing of the works of a composer — as in the case of Shostakovich — because such music went over his head.

Such is the practical joke played

by history on two great nations, Germany and Russia. But history was merely repeating an old pattern. After the liberation of Italy from foreign yokes, the land-hungry and overtaxed peasants still complained. “Why do you grumble?” they were asked. “Have you forgotten the time of Austrian and Bourbon rule, when it was worse?” “That’s true,” the peasants would reply, “but when it was worse it was better.” A similar story is told about Bosnia, when it had been snatched from the Turks by the Austrians. “Why do you grumble?” an Austrian official asked a discontented peasant. “Don’t you remember the time of Turkish rule, when at the sight of a Bey or Pasha you had to get off your horse and strike the ground with your forehead?” “Yes, that is true,” the Bosnian explained. “Now I don’t have to do it any more. The Austrian tax collector took away my horse.”

In Russia and in Germany, under slogans of “liberation,” new tyrants have arisen who make their predecessors seem desirable by contrast. Between the tyranny of the Hohenzollerns and Romanoffs, and the new Hitlers and Stalins, who among their subjects would not prefer the bad old days?

► *The record proves that academic freedom and war don't go together.*

TEACHERS IN WARTIME

BY LUCILLE B. MILNER AND GROFF CONKLIN

THE struggle for freedom of teaching has been unceasing in America — in Colonial days, through the Revolutionary period and the Civil War. But during and since the World War, teachers' freedom has been abused as never before. More teachers were dismissed or disciplined, and more laws were passed interfering with teaching and the school curriculum than in any time in our history.

Long before the end of 1917, boards of education were disciplining teachers suspected of pro-Germanism, pacifism or "disloyalty." College authorities set up a reign of terror among faculty members. Educational organizations, notably the American Association of University Professors and the National Educational Association, issued statements decrying "sedition" or anti-war speech or activity on the part of their members. Teachers spied upon and accused their associates. Parents' associations, and even individual parents, often acting upon the statements of their children, agi-

tated for dismissal or other punishment of teachers believed to hold unpopular views. Patriotic organizations filled the schools with militaristic propaganda, examined textbooks, and pressed for legislation to make patriotism compulsory. Violence was used in attempts to secure conformity.

The earliest attacks on teachers hinged on their German nationality or pro-German opinions. Even association with someone of German extraction was ground for investigation. Lucinia Hopkins, a school teacher of Bucksport, Maine, was dismissed in 1918 because she took driving lessons from an unnaturalized German. Mary Buerger, daughter of a Civil War veteran, whose husband was an unnaturalized German, was dismissed from the Los Angeles schools as "in law a disloyal alien enemy."

In Iowa, Leon Battig, a teacher whose opposition to the war was religious, was suspected of "disloyalty." He was kidnapped by a mob, stripped to the waist, and his