

AMERICA THROUGH THE KREMLIN'S EYES

BY LOUIS JAY HERMAN

DID you know that Walt Disney was an arch-reactionary? That movie attendance is falling off because of public indignation at Hollywood's vile anti-Soviet propaganda? Or that crime is flourishing because the police are all out tracking down progressive-minded Americans? Such cockeyed facts might be news to you, but every one of them is true — at least it says so in the Russian press, which is currently embarked on an extraordinary campaign of popular enlightenment about America and Americans.

The basic premise of the Soviet propaganda approach to the United States is simplicity itself. As the *New Times*, a weekly Russian foreign policy journal, has expressed it: "Today, the world is divided into two camps — the anti-democratic camp of imperialism, headed by the United States, and the anti-imperialist camp of socialism and democracy, headed by the Soviet Union and the people's democracies."

This being the case, it is plainly incumbent upon all good Soviet citi-

zens to let fly with everything but the kitchen samovar at the imperialist camp. In case they fail to get the point, the Kremlin has carefully spelled it all out for them. Russian literati have been officially notified by the Union of Soviet Writers that they "must expose . . . the nature of capitalist [read American] encirclement, struggle against its corrupting influence, and reveal the character of contemporary imperialism." The same goes for dramatists, who have been ordered to "battle on the ideological front . . . by means of an active, merciless, and unceasing attack upon our enemies." Even Soviet jokesters now have to be sure a good proportion of their wisecracks are aimed in Uncle Sam's direction. The USSR's leading humor magazine, *Krokodil*, was admonished by the Central Committee of the Party for failing "to respond quickly to burning international events and subject the bourgeois culture of the West to criticism, revealing its ideological insignificance and degeneracy."

LOUIS JAY HERMAN is assistant editor of the *New Leader*. He specializes in research on Russian propaganda, and is also a frequent contributor of phrase origins to the *MERCURY*.

For sheer volume, the current campaign to expunge the last trace of wartime affection for America from the Russian mind is in a class by itself. If an American newspaper or magazine devoted comparable space to the Soviet Union and Communism, its bored readers would desert in droves to a competitor. But in Russia the Communist press, which has no competitors, can pour unlimited doses of repetitious propaganda down the throats of its captive audience. The pace-setter has been the *New Times*, which is published in Russian, German, French and English (on unusually high-grade paper, by Soviet standards), and is distributed in every part of the world. The *New Times'* contents during March 1950 show how seriously it takes the Party's injunction to attack the imperialist warmongers. Of a total of 35 articles, ten were specifically anti-American diatribes. The remainder were sufficiently salted with sideswipes at the Yankee malefactors — plus passing shots at their British and French accomplices — to keep the reader's indignation at the proper boiling point.

The propaganda drive is by no means confined to journals of foreign affairs like the *New Times*, or to general newspapers. In totalitarian Russia, whatever a paper's specialty — whether theatre, sports or hand-crocheting — it remains first and fore-

most an organ of state policy; and today it must contribute its meed to the drive against America. As a result, Soviet readers see nothing amiss in a lengthy denunciation of the Atlantic Pact in the *Literary Gazette*, an article entitled "Soviet Dramaturgy in the Struggle with the Warmongers" in *Theatre*, or a warning against "The Devilish Spirit of a New Aggression Threatening the People's Peace" in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*.

In the theatre itself, the conventional type of villain has almost vanished from the scene. Today, instead, the boards creak beneath a never-ending procession of unscrupulous, grasping American plutocrats. Recently an American correspondent set the number of specifically anti-American plays and movies showing in Moscow alone at 26, not including those with merely passing hostile references. Typical of the many attractive personalities introduced in these real-life dramas is Henry MacHill, of *Conspiracy of the Doomed*, described in the vivid words of *Soviet Art* as "an American financier, a warmonger, a man who conceals beneath an ingratiating mask a malicious, bestial soul." Running MacHill a close second in fiendishness is Sam Gibson, the hate interest in *Behind the Second Front*: "On the outside he is a sociable and even a jolly fellow, but . . .

he is capable of cutting anyone's throat with a broad smile and even a joke if the success of his business depends on it."

II

Under the iron heel of the MacHills and the Gibsons, America looks pretty bleak to the Soviet press. As the *New Times* reports it:

A handful of plutocrats wallow in wealth and enjoy unlimited power, while tens of millions of ordinary people suffer privation and oppression and live in constant fear of the morrow. . . . In their crusade against all progressive-minded Americans, the monopolists are out to turn the United States into a land of police bludgeons and torture chambers. . . . Anyone who dares to give expression to thoughts which do not happen to be to the liking of the omnipotent monopolies and their agents is subjected to persecution . . . the American Gestapo-men [the FBI] are taught how to attack strikers, and are initiated into the gentle arts of secret manslaughter, terrorism and intimidation.

Those Americans not bludgeoned into submission by the FBI Gestapo-men are spiritually corrupted by the monopoly press, which is "controlled by a handful of fascist and aggressive capitalists and their hired menials; [it] preaches . . . man-hating theories, insane ideas of world domination." Much of this witches' brew is

dished up at the notorious National Press Club in Washington: "Here, over a glass of whisky, around the card or billiard tables, rumors and insinuations are born, domestic and world news is manufactured, vicious, lying stories are penned at the warmongers' orders."

In the vanguard of journalistic reaction are the "anti-democratic and pro-fascist" magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek*, and "such mouthpieces of the American monopolies as the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*." The Communist Party theoretical journal, the *Bolshevik*, reports that the *Times* is published by the sinister Arthur Hays Sulzberger — "a Jew in origin but a racist and anti-Semite in convictions." Among other agents of Wall Street similarly unmasked are the "malicious warmonger," Walter Lippmann; "the notorious pen gangster, Stewart Alsop"; "the well-known pro-Fascist, Dorothy Thompson," and "the well-known radio liar, Walter Winchell." And worse than Winchell himself in polluting the air-waves and the public print is Drew Pearson — that "eminent gangster of the pen," "unsurpassed master of lies and slander," and "chained dog of the Wall Street monopolies."

"Never before," the *New Times* observes, ". . . did the trusts administer the country as directly as they

have been doing ever since Truman was installed in the White House." Those strange guttural noises issuing from certain quarters in the business community whenever Mr. Truman makes a speech are mere camouflage to deceive the masses, say the Russians. The Republicans and Democrats are actually as alike as Tweedledum and Tweedledee: "both are devoted heart and soul to the service of Wall Street." And the Fair Deal is merely a "concession . . . to the masses"; the President's civil rights program, mere "demagogic . . . frothings."

The Taft-Hartley law, as seen by the Russians, is certain proof of Wall Street's fell grip on the American body politic: "The connection between the draconic Taft-Hartley law and the present course of United States policy is obvious. . . . Monopoly capital, which is out for world dominion . . . regards the existence of strong labor unions as a serious obstacle to the realization of [its] far-reaching plans." If Truman vetoed Taft-Hartley, says the *New Times*, he was merely courting the approval of labor; he knew all the while that he "was not risking the fate of the bill, for the issue of a second vote in Congress [which overrode the veto] . . . was a foregone conclusion."

Working hand in glove with Wall

Street are the "bureaucrats" of the CIO and the AFL, who, "besides abetting the monopolies on all major domestic issues . . . openly support the imperialists on the international scene." The worst of the scurvy lot is William Green, "a lackey of monopoly capitalism, political bandit and provocateur." Next come Philip Murray, the "dictator" of the CIO, Michael Quill and Walter Reuther, who "have long been in the service of the imperialists."

III

Though the picture is most disheartening, Soviet commentators do not despair for the future of America. For there are still the "progressive" Americans — the "democratic," "honest," "ordinary," or "decent" Americans, or, more simply, "the broad masses" — who will always resist Wall Street. As glimpsed in the pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestia* or the *New Times*, these people have a curiously wraith-like quality — they are constantly "growing," but they never seem to get anywhere. Throughout the year, they turn out in force for mighty demonstrations for "peace," "Soviet-American friendship," etc., only to disappear mysteriously on election day.

Most of these elusive creatures are concentrated in the Progressive Party, "a movement of honest Americans who want peace, work and freedom

from fear of war." But they are also active in other spheres. When the celebrated "Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace" convened at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York last year, the Soviet press had no difficulty in identifying it as another expression of "the true voice of the American people, who sincerely desire to insure stable peace and friendship among the peoples . . . and cherish a profound respect for the Soviet Union."

The Russian journalists accuse the men who rule America of poisoning the pure wellsprings of American culture. "The propaganda of crime, corruption, animal instincts," cogently observes the journal, *Soviet Literature*, "is needed by reaction in order to make obedient tools of the popular masses." Every resource of the reactionaries is mobilized for this sinister mission, including the works of that "philosophical lackey of American imperialism" and "warmongering Winston Churchill of philosophy," John Dewey. Their chief reliance, however, is placed on that peculiarly American weapon of imperialist aggression, the motion picture. "Post-war Hollywood production," the *New Times* points out, "is an orgy of vulgarity, of repulsive race propaganda [presumably, the Russians are kept in the dark about such movies as *Gentlemen's Agreement*, *Crossfire*,

Lost Boundaries, *Home of the Brave*, etc.], of psychological perversion, of murders and sadism, decadence and mysticism." This dreadful product is "distributed all over the world [in order] to poison people's thinking and feelings, stir up war hysteria, encourage all the basest instincts and stultify the minds of men and women. The cinema . . . pursues . . . aims connected with the subjugation and enslavement of other peoples, with the mad plans of U. S. world domination." Leading the whole plot is the "Hollywood agent of Wall Street," Eric Johnston, the head of the Motion Picture Association of America.

Things are just as bad on Broadway, which is "essentially nothing but an experimental ground for Hollywood." Broadway plays, according to *Theatre*, are "fashioned in complete conformity with the tasks set by Wall Street." Adds *Pravda* by way of amplification: "A monstrous delirium of reactionary propaganda of fascism is rammed down audiences' throats, people are transformed into the mute, blind instruments — deprived of thoughts and normal feelings — of sordid imperialist goals, the goals of the incendiaries of a new war." Along cultural lines, this is the way they view some of the more popular American plays: *Harvey* — "wandering about the stage is a white rabbit — a product of the hallucinations of

the hero of the play . . . who is suffering from delirium tremens"; *The Iceman Cometh* — "seated around a table are drug addicts, devoid of all human appearance, the dregs of society"; *Arsenic and Old Lace* — "the old ladies in the play . . . hide corpses in a chest"; and *Mister Roberts* — "very toothless criticism of the stupidity of the United States Navy [which] shows the dullness of the average American sailor's life."

IV

On the literary front, Wall Street has evolved an infinitely complex campaign, operating on a sort of two-platoon system. On the one hand, there are the "literary decadents," who "help reaction in its attempts to demoralize the masses and discredit the common man's struggle for freedom [by] vilifying the human race and gloating over repellent scenes of ugliness." Their "works are permeated by moods of pessimism, cynicism, hatred and contempt of the masses." One of the top-ranking "decadents" in America, in the view of *Soviet Literature*, is the ex-progressive, John Steinbeck, who has become "a frank apologist of the present-day American social system." Other decadents are Eugene O'Neill, who exhibits "Freudian leanings, a desperately gloomy view of life and a tendency to emphasize the brute in men"; "the rene-

gade Dos Passos," who "has shown himself in his true fascist colors," and William Saroyan, a specialist in "all sorts of degenerates, drunkards and prostitutes." *Soviet Literature* explains that these are the "avowed decadents," who at least "demoralize the masses without any attempt at concealment." Skulking along behind, under false colors, are the "writers who defend the interests of Wall Street, imperialism and fascist elements in the guise of 'opponents' of decadence and proponents of a 'healthy' literature." While the decadents pump the broad masses full of "gloom and unnameable terrors," "the 'healthy' literature of a militarist tenor aims at educating cynical, immoral men for the role of SS bodyguard to American fascism."

These phoney anti-decadents go right to work recruiting future SS guards among the children, who are taught to read *Superman* magazine from the age of eight. The little tykes are thus indoctrinated with the idea that "gangsterism is the norm in human relations." Later on, they graduate from *Superman* to "gruesome murder novels, [which] educate Americans in the spirit of cruelty, crime and contempt of humanity, [and] serve as guidebooks in the 'murder' line for thousands and thousands of readers."

Along these lines, the Russians in-

dict John Hersey, the well-known "agent of American militarism." Hersey's *A Bell for Adano*, which American readers took for a sympathetic novel on the problems of a liberated Italian town, was actually "permeated . . . by a desire to impose the will of American ruling circles on the Italians." Another such insidious book was *See Here, Private Hargrove*, written by the notorious Marion Hargrove, which put "special stress on the American soldier's devotion to the laws of bourgeois ideology." But the most shameless imperialist apologist of the war was Bill Mauldin, whose drawings appeared in *Stars & Stripes*, a publication identified by *Soviet Literature* as "the organ of American militarists." The heroes of Mauldin's cartoons were Willie and Joe, "two brutish, degraded American soldiers," who are "permanently drunk," who steal chickens from starving French peasants, and gaze upon Europe's "ruin, poverty and suffering . . . calmly and indifferently, with a cigarette stub stuck to the lower lip."

Perhaps the strangest tale is that of Upton Sinclair, a former progressive. As late as October 1948, according to *Soviet Literature*, he was "the leading writer in contemporary America." Indeed, he was "obliged to be his own publisher since the publishing houses run by the plutocrats refuse to take anything written

by as progressive an author as Sinclair." (He has been published for many years by Viking Press.) Almost three million copies of his works had been printed in the Soviet Union. But then Sinclair came out in favor of the imperialist, warmongering Atlantic Pact; he was quickly excoriated in an article in the *Literary Gazette* for April 20, 1949, entitled "Upton Sinclair — Careerist and Slanderer." Sinclair, the *Gazette's* readers were informed, had been motivated purely by "the irresistible desire . . . to ingratiate himself with the powers that be in the U. S." It now appeared that he had been "long known as a careerist and literary profiteer. . . . From the very beginning [his sole concern] was always his personal career. Everything else . . . was only a means to . . . that desired end." And all his progressive books were written "on the assignment of Wall Street."

The Soviet journalists' imaginative recreation of recent history is remarkable, too, particularly with regard to World War II. So many American leaders appear to have been occupied with hatching subterranean plots against the Soviet Union that it is difficult to understand just who was detailed to keep the war going against the Nazis and Japanese. The best British and American brains were

evidently recruited for the task of postponing the opening of a second front in Europe to aid the beleaguered Red army. "In the staffs in Washington and London," recounts the *New Times*, "reactionary political strategy was working energetically to delay and postpone the invasion of Western Europe [in] the hope that the Soviet Union would be weakened and exhausted in its singlehanded duel with Germany." When the second front finally came, it was only because "it became evident . . . that the Soviet Army was able singlehandedly to defeat fascist Germany, occupy her territory and liberate Europe."

Needless to say, the Anglo-American imperialists left most of the work to Russia in the Far East, as well as in Europe. "It was only the resolute and speedy action of the Soviet government after declaring war on Japan on August 8, 1945, that struck the decisive blow and compelled her to surrender [so that] American forces were able to occupy her territory." (Japan sued for peace on August 10, making this unquestionably the most spectacularly successful war in history!) The atom bomb was dropped "not to hasten victory over Japan . . . but to further the long-range policy of atomic blackmail against the Soviet Union."

More recent events on the international scene have been strained

through the same Marxist propaganda filter. A forest fire which laid waste much southern French timberland last year was pronounced by *Izvestia* as the work of "the American chemical trust" bent on ruining France's turpentine industry. When the United States offered to provision athletes at the 1948 London Olympics, it was, said the weekly *Ogonyok*, merely in order to dispose of surplus supplies. "If the Americans don't win," the Russians added, "they can justify their defeat by referring to the canned pork which . . . increased tenfold the strength of the European athletes."

Nothing, however — not even decadent, man-hating American movies — seems to have stirred Soviet journalists to quite the same pitch of dialectical fury as that most nefarious of all American imperialist weapons, that bottled scourge of peace-loving humanity, Coca Cola. Everywhere they go, Stalin's globe-trotting news-hawks are haunted by that grim red-and-white sign. Their henchmen in France, along with lobbyists from the wine industry, have even waged a successful legislative campaign to remove it from the French marketplace. Indeed, if the USSR were an ordinary corrupt bourgeois democracy, it might almost be supposed that the Kremlin was yielding to pressure from the vodka distillers' lobby.

FRANKLIN PIERCE: THE RELUCTANT PRESIDENT

BY WENZELL BROWN

THE American people had a grandiose dream in the years that followed the Louisiana Purchase. They saw the United States as a tremendous nation which would absorb Cuba and other islands of the West Indies, plus Central America, and parts of South America. In the political elections of 1852, both leading political parties pledged themselves to a program of national expansion. The Whigs chose as their Presidential candidate a tough, aggressive warrior, a man of courage, strength and iron will untroubled by the subtleties of politics or morals, a man whose modern counterpart might best be found in the late General George S. Patton, Jr. The Democrats selected a dreamer, a gentle idealist, a man both scholarly and naïve. The Americans voted into office the dreamer, expecting him to bring their dream to fruition; by so doing, they prevented the dream from ever becoming reality.

In retrospect, we may realize that

the dream was tawdry, that it lacked morality and that it was activated by a lust for power, but at the time few men thought of it in this light. America's failure to expand outward into the Caribbean and southward into Latin America was caused by bickering, indecision and inadequacy rather than by recognition of man's inalienable rights.

The two men who faced each other in 1851 were strangely matched. The only characteristic they shared in common was that of striking physical appearance. Oddly enough, the more striking and forceful of the two was fore-ordained to be the loser, for Winfield Scott had the power not only to make fast friends but bitter enemies. The crux of the campaign, therefore, was the acceptance or rejection of Scott rather than the adherence to Pierce. Scott was a huge man, six feet, five inches in height, weighing well over two hundred pounds. He was a man of irascible

WENZELL BROWN has written several Presidential reappraisals for the *MERCURY*. His last contribution, "The Fearless Andrew Johnson," appeared in the issue for May 1950.