
BOOK REVIEWS

THE SOCIALIST SIXTH OF THE WORLD

By Dr. Hewlett Johnson

Victor Gollancz • 7s. 6d. net

THE Dean of Canterbury is that rare and refreshing being who can distinguish the essential from the trivial, the permanent from the transient, the fundamental from the superficial. With supreme understanding he selects that which is constructive, that which is positive, that which shows the purposive development of the country. I, for one, am grateful to him for ignoring the trivialities with which the casual tourist or trade union leader regales us, the tales of missing plugs, and late buses.

He has attempted very successfully to give a picture of the stage the Soviet Union has reached on its road to Communism, and if it is apt to read too much like perfection it is not because Dr Johnson does not recognise and admit the imperfections. But for him, as for many of us, the achievements have justified our belief in humanity, while the failures show that surrounded by enmity and hostility humanity will for a long time retain many of the objectionable features developed by the struggle for existence.

The book is divided into four "books." The first includes an autobiographical sketch and Dr Johnson's views on capitalism and Christianity in an attempt to explain himself. The story of the U.S.S.R. begins with Book II, with a valuable chapter "Tsarist Background," a necessary reminder of conditions before the revolution.

A great many visitors to the U.S.S.R. appear to be entirely ignorant of Tsarist Russia and their impressions are therefore of little value. For the U.S.S.R. is the one country that cannot be regarded statically. Only when related to its

past, and viewed dynamically as a country that is continuously changing from one phase into another, can a just appreciation of what is happening there be obtained. It is because means and methods, and the application of principles, change so rapidly that it is essential to seize hold of the fundamentals of Soviet life. Otherwise understanding is impossible.

The ordinary reader will for the first time obtain a clear idea of Socialist Planning in the U.S.S.R. If the simple and vivid language needed any help it is supplied by the excellent diagram on page 115.

Dr Johnson is at his best when describing the use the Soviet Union makes of science, and the possibilities it affords for research. He has captured the thrill and the adventure of being a Soviet scientist, the excitement of achieving that which the world held to be impossible.

In industry and agriculture alike Soviet Scientists set out, with the resources of the nation behind them, to make nature serve man, so they change the geography of the land, they grow wheat in the Arctic, they find that underground gasification of coal is not merely a health proposition, it is an economic proposition.

Dr Johnson has understood the unity of Soviet life, and in writing of the development of industry he notes that the U.S.S.R. has only one map of the country, that geology coincides with industry, so that factories are built near the sources of materials with no waste of human effort.

In writing of the Five-Year Plans Dr Johnson rightly claims that time has answered the criticism of "haste and waste" that was levelled against the U.S.S.R. in the early days. Had she not hurried so much with her industrial development she would not have been immune from attacks for so long.

There are informative chapters on the position of women, on the different republics, and on the Stalin Constitution. All emphasise the equality of races, creeds, and sexes, particularly the economic equality. There are chapters which deal with communications and machines, with coal, and gold, and oil. Two things are brought out in each chapter: the purposive planning of all the activity, and its service for the community.

It is not surprising that in a survey of one-sixth of the world some information should be out-of-date, as is the case with the chapter on Education. Polytechnisation ceased to be practised in 1937, when the school workshops were done

away with. The understanding of the place of science in the productive development of the country is given in the science lesson in the laboratory, while manual work is carried on in free time in the innumerable school and other clubs. In the technicums and institutes the course includes not merely specialist training but the economics and politics of the subject, whether engineering or transport or aviation. Those who leave a technical college at the age of seventeen must work in the industry for which they have trained for three years, after which they may, if they wish, enter Higher Education. Those who enter technical institutes at eighteen years come at the completion of the secondary school and train as specialists or research workers.

The chapter on Religion is in some respects the least satisfactory. It is hardly true to say that "Marx, Lenin, and Stalin were anti-religious just because they believed that religion had consistently aligned itself with organised injustice." They were anti-religious because materialistic philosophy, which Dr Johnson rightly points out has nothing to do with capitalist materialism, is intellectually opposed to any belief in supernatural phenomena. The insistence that a man who is moral and ethical must be a Christian is a little illogical. Why cannot he equally be a Confucian or a Mohammedan or a Jew, or indeed an atheist?

One or two misprints tend to obscure the meaning occasionally, and it must be a printers' error on page 247 which states that the U.S.S.R. has nearly 200 races; nationalities or ethnological groups was surely meant. Similarly Moscow cannot have "groups of 200 nationalities." Dr Johnson gives a timely reminder, at the end, of the many defects still existing. Regarded as an attempt to inform the world of permanent and vital developments under a system which has long ceased to be an experiment, the book is of very great value.—B. K.

HANDBOOK ON RUSSIAN (Volume II)

By Michael V. Trofimov, M.A. *Sherratt and Hughes* 8s. 6d. net

A LANGUAGE that is spoken by 170 million people must in itself be of importance. When this language is that of a country one-sixth of the world, engaged in the task of creating a new kind of society, its importance is increased immeasurably. When the language is as beautiful as Russian is, boasting a literature of acknowledged greatness, there is

added reason for its study. Any book which encourages this study is to be welcomed. This is a book for advanced students and teachers.

Professor Trofimov says "the object of this volume is to serve as a reference-book giving a record and a general description of the modern Russian morphological and syntactical system." As such it should be of great value to both teachers and students.

In our next number we hope to have a detailed review of the book. Meanwhile we welcome it as a contribution to the study of Modern Russian.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Centner = 220 lbs.

Hectare = 2.5 acres.

Pood = 36 lbs.

Kolkhoz = Collective-Farm.

Sovkhoz = State-Farm.

U.S.S.R. = Union of Socialist Soviet Republics consists of 11
Union republics.

R.S.F.S.R. = Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, the
largest of the Union republics.