

MR. INGERSOLL RETURNS FROM RUSSIA

The editor of PM writes his impressions of the USSR for his newspaper. What he saw and what he did not understand. Some serious limitations. By A. B. Magill.

RALPH INGERSOLL, editor and publisher of the newspaper *PM*, has been to Russia and come back with a bagful of impressions, anecdotes, comments, and assorted odds and ends. In a series of articles which ran for about three weeks, he dumped them all into the readers' laps and left it to Joe Smith and Minnie Jones to put together and add up. And Ingersoll's articles do add up. He irritates you and gets in your hair, he is a perpetual Roman candle fizzing and sputtering over the page, but for all that is trivial and silly in his pieces, for all that is even downright false—not by design perhaps, but because of the class prejudice that warps vision and understanding—Ralph Ingersoll has brought back more of the truth about the Soviet Union than has any American capitalist journalist in years. After the succession of Eugene Lyons', Jan Valtins, Krivitskys, and other professional poisoners of the public mind, what Ingersoll has done is a great deal. For today the truth about Russia, never an academic question, is literally one of life and death for America as a nation and for every individual American. It is one of Ingersoll's supreme virtues that he understands this, that he recognizes that the USSR is America's ally, and wants that alliance to be strong and complete in every sense.

Of course, Ingersoll hasn't told anything like the full truth about the Soviet Union. For one thing he did not see enough, know enough, or spend enough time there. In fact, after only three weeks in Moscow and three more on trains entering and leaving the country, it would have been better and truer had he not attempted to cover so much ground, journalistically speaking; had he, for example, spared his readers definitive judgments (mostly fatuous) on Soviet art, the theater, the cinema, and almost anything that happened to pop into his head. But a more important factor in limiting the amount and kind of truth that Ingersoll brought back was that everywhere he went he carried with him the intellectual and psychological baggage of a person whose fundamental ties are with the capitalist world. He tells us that he did his best to free himself from prejudice. There is evidence that he really tried, but there is even more evidence that, despite occasional flashes of understanding of the deeper meaning of socialist life, he did not succeed. And so, what Ingersoll has done—whether consciously or unconsciously doesn't matter—is to tell enough of the truth to persuade the American people that all-out aid to the Soviet Union is a good investment in terms of their own security, but not enough to cause them to draw too favorable conclusions about the social principles on which Soviet life is based and about the American advocates of those social principles. On the contrary, the editor of *PM* goes out of his way to drive a wedge

between the Soviet Union and Communism.

INGERSOLL'S ARTICLES contain three types of material: what he has seen, what others have told him, and what he thinks about it all. He is at his best when he tells what he himself has seen and experienced. He writes warmly of the Soviet people, of wounded soldiers and friendly officers. He has enormous curiosity and pokes his nose into all kinds of places, including a secret anti-aircraft battery and a Roman Catholic church. He makes his interview with Stalin exciting and dramatic, radiant with the greatness of the man even though he cannot reveal anything Stalin said. And he tells us much that is heartening: that the quality of the Red Army's equipment is superb; that "there will be a Red Army intact and under present management in the field a year from now"; that "I found Soviet trains running faster and more efficiently when I came out ninety miles behind the front line than I had when I came in six weeks earlier from the East"; that "in six weeks' study on the spot I found no evidence of disruptive political force"; that "Racial tolerance is a prime issue of this war. Racial tolerance is a prime virtue of the Soviet Union"; and much more.

Of course, it is true that for many of us all this is obvious. But most Americans don't know these things, have been kept from knowing them by the falsifications of the press, the radio, and the anti-Soviet journalistic racketeers. And it is well that Ingersoll's articles, despite their serious shortcomings, have reached not only the readers of *PM*, but hundreds of thousands in other cities in the United States and Canada where they have been syndicated.

It is when Ingersoll attempts to give his readers a detailed picture of what life under the Soviets is like—laudable as that attempt is—that he begins to fumble. Take, for example, his effort to make it appear that the Soviet people live in overwhelming poverty. The conclusion that he wants American readers to draw is obvious. He describes the appearance of the villages and towns that his train passed through in Asiatic Russia. But what he doesn't say is that this was one of the most backward regions in the world before the Revolution and that it has gone so far in twenty-odd years that what is poverty by New York standards would be envied by the people of China, India, Japan, Spain, Italy, yes, and by the people of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and large sections of our own South.

Ingersoll keeps harping on this poverty note, telling his readers that the derelicts on Bowery breadlines are better dressed than the average Moscow worker (which Bowery are you talking about, Ralph?), and that "a dishwasher in an American hash house would not trade his

life for that of an average Soviet workman" (what about vice versa?). And there are such plain misstatements of fact as that "it has been only for a year or two that *all* the citizens of Moscow have had shoes and shirts." I was in Moscow in 1930, when conditions were not nearly as good as in more recent years, and while I made no exhaustive investigation, I saw no one without shoes or shirts.

The curious part about all this emphasis on poverty and on shoddy clothes and lack of gadgets is that Ingersoll knows the answers and even gives them, though not in a way that would change his emphasis. "For if their [the Soviet people's] poverty is no secret," he writes on November 10, "neither is the reason for it. It is self-imposed. For over twenty years the Russians have consciously skimped and starved themselves to buy two fantastically expensive capital assets: The first is an industrial plant. It now stands, half finished. The second is their army." And Ingersoll really rebukes himself when he says: "... it's hardly fair to compare their country with ours, 150 years after we began carving this country out of a new continent." He might have added that millions of Europeans today would gladly trade their better-made clothes (if any) and their gadgets for those two capital assets of the Soviet people.

THE FIRST BIG FACT about economic conditions in the Soviet Union is that living standards are limited by those two considerations and by them alone, considerations that now make possible the magnificent Soviet resistance; in capitalist countries the living standards of the masses are limited primarily by the fact that a handful of wealthy individuals have grabbed the lion's share of the country's wealth to the detriment of everybody else. The second big fact is that in the USSR no one can get rich at the other's expense, no wide discrepancies in income exist, and everybody has an opportunity to acquire the skill that commands the highest material as well as spiritual rewards. The third fact is that in addition to the money wage, the Soviet worker gets free all kinds of social services, such as an old age pension, sickness and maternity compensation, etc. The fourth fact is that until the Nazi attack, living standards were constantly ascending and the first limiting consideration, the lack of an industrial plant, was in process of being completely overcome. Ingersoll repeatedly gives the figure of 200 rubles a month as the typical wage of a Soviet worker. It is not. According to the report of Voznesensky, chairman of the State Planning Commission, to the Communist Party conference last February, the average monthly wage in 1940 for all Soviet workers, skilled and unskilled, industrial and white-collar, was well over 400

rubles a month, and in 1941 it was scheduled to rise to more than 500 rubles.

In this connection Ingersoll's attempt to invent castes and classes in the Soviet Union shows a confused approach and little knowledge of the facts. It is not true that "Whole classes are disenfranchised while other groups get special privileges." Article 135 of the new Constitution gives the right to vote to "all persons who have reached the age of eighteen, irrespective of race or nationality, religion, educational and residential qualifications, social origin, property status, or past activities," the sole exceptions being "insane persons and persons who have been convicted by a court of law and whose sentences include deprivation of electoral rights." In his speech in 1936 on the new Constitution Stalin specifically urged the rejection of an amendment to bar the vote or the right to hold office to "ministers of religion, former White Guards, and all persons of pre-revolutionary times who are not engaged in socially useful labor." It is equally untrue that in order to be eligible for membership in the Communist Party a person "must have a pure blood line and be born of workers, descended from workers." If this were so, Lenin, Molotov, and other Soviet leaders could never have become members of the Party. When I visited the Soviet Union, I met a writer who was descended from the nobility, born a prince. He was a member of the Communist Party and one of the most popular Soviet poets.

There are other things that Ingersoll gets out of kilter, but perhaps nothing is quite so silly as his attempt to give his readers the lowdown on what the Russians really think of the American Communist Party. He quotes no one specifically, but presents his own impression that "They [the Russians] thought American Communists stupid and spoke scornfully of them." He follows this with the following alleged composite quotation: "Any fool could have seen that we were simply playing for time, that while we were at it we had to be polite to the Germans. The last thing we wanted was to help Germany defeat Great Britain, and we gave the Germans as little as we could." Something is wrong here—in fact, it looks like a case of mistaken identity. Was it the American Communists who said that the Soviet Union wanted to help Germany defeat Britain? Or is it Ralph Ingersoll, who only a few days before this article appeared wrote: "I had been very angry about the Soviet government's working alliance with the Nazis" (*PM*, Nov. 2, 1941)? Ingersoll seems to have played a trick on those anonymous Russians; he has attributed to the American Communists his own and his friends' nonsensical ideas about Soviet-German relations and appropriated for himself the Communists' realistic attitude which has been confirmed by events. Yes, indeed, any fool could have seen. . . .

But beyond these absurdities and despite them, Ralph Ingersoll has caught a glimpse of the future, and his report leaves no doubt that it works. "Under the imperial regime of

the czars," he writes, in *PM* of November 10, "they [the Russian people] were dependent for their food upon the impact of nature on a backward agricultural system. It often starved them to death by the millions. They were ignorant and slothful. They had indeed 'nothing to lose but their chains.' The czar put on a fine show in his court, but there was not a factory in Russia that could produce a ball bearing, let alone a tractor or a tank. Hitler could have had the Ukraine for a single panzer division if he had only the czar's army to oppose him today.

"This is the great paradox of Russia: poor as its people are today, theirs really is a success story. The only legitimate room for argument is in whether their success would not have been greater under liberal capitalist management. It seems to me rather an academic argument. There's no doubt that, be-

fore the war, the present generation in Russia was more satisfied with its lot, more confident of its future than most generations in Europe and any in Asia."

Certain it is that the argument about socialism versus liberal capitalism is one that can well be left for the future to decide. Only if Hitlerism is destroyed will the peoples of all countries be able freely to determine their individual destinies. Meanwhile there's a war to be won, a war for America's very life, as well as Russia's and Britain's and China's. And in the winning of that war not only liberal capitalists, but conservatives have a stake no less than workers, Republicans and Democrats no less than Communists. By telling as much of the truth as he has, Ralph Ingersoll has helped make clear this common stake, this urgent obligation of us all.

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CAMPAIGN FOR THE CAUCASUS

Colonel T. considers the tactics developing in the contest for the Soviet oil fields. Possible maximum and minimum objectives. How the Red Fleet figures in the picture.

WHATEVER happens south of the Rostov line is, directly or indirectly, an attack on and for the oil of the Caucasus. This attack has maximum and minimum goals. The Nazis' maximum goal is actually to seize the oil fields of Maikop, Grozny, and Baku. The minimum goal is to seize the oil fields of Maikop, and perhaps Grozny, and to deprive the Soviet Union of the Baku oil by cutting the lines of communications between that city and the country north of the Caspian Sea.

To achieve the minimum objective the Nazi army may carry on limited operations to the area north of the great Caucasian Range. Complete command over the Black Sea would not be necessary for these operations. The maximum goal would entail either the forcing of the Caucasian mountain barrier or marching through Transcaucasia from the rear. For this, complete command of the Black Sea would be necessary. And this could be achieved only by depriving the Soviet Black Sea Fleet of all its bases, including Poti and Batum.

At this writing the German armies are exerting their maximum efforts in the Crimea. Here their goal is twofold: one (see map)—to force their way to the Strait of Yenikale (or Kerch) in order to prepare a crossing over to the Caucasian mainland, in the Kuban district; and two—to take Sebastopol and deprive the Soviet Black Sea Fleet of its best and only complete base. Operation 1 pertains to the minimum goal. Operation 2 pertains to the maximum goal. Of the two, the operation against Kerch may succeed before the one against Sebastopol.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the Germans have succeeded in taking Kerch and have reached the entire shoreline of the Straits (from one and one-half to four miles wide). At this juncture they would have to undertake a naval operation under the guns of the Red Black Sea Fleet which will be, at least in part, concentrated here. Again let us assume that a pea-soup fog has permitted the Nazis to cross over to the Taman Peninsula (3) in fair numbers, using assorted bottoms gleaned along the coast of the Sea of Azov and, perhaps, hammered together in short order.

This limited force would first of all face the Soviet prepared positions on the Taman Peninsula. This is a narrow defile, or bottleneck, not much wider than Perekop. And while Perekop was stormed by the entire power of von Runstedt's southern wing, a necessarily restricted number of German troops would have to storm Taman. These troops would have in their rear not the broad

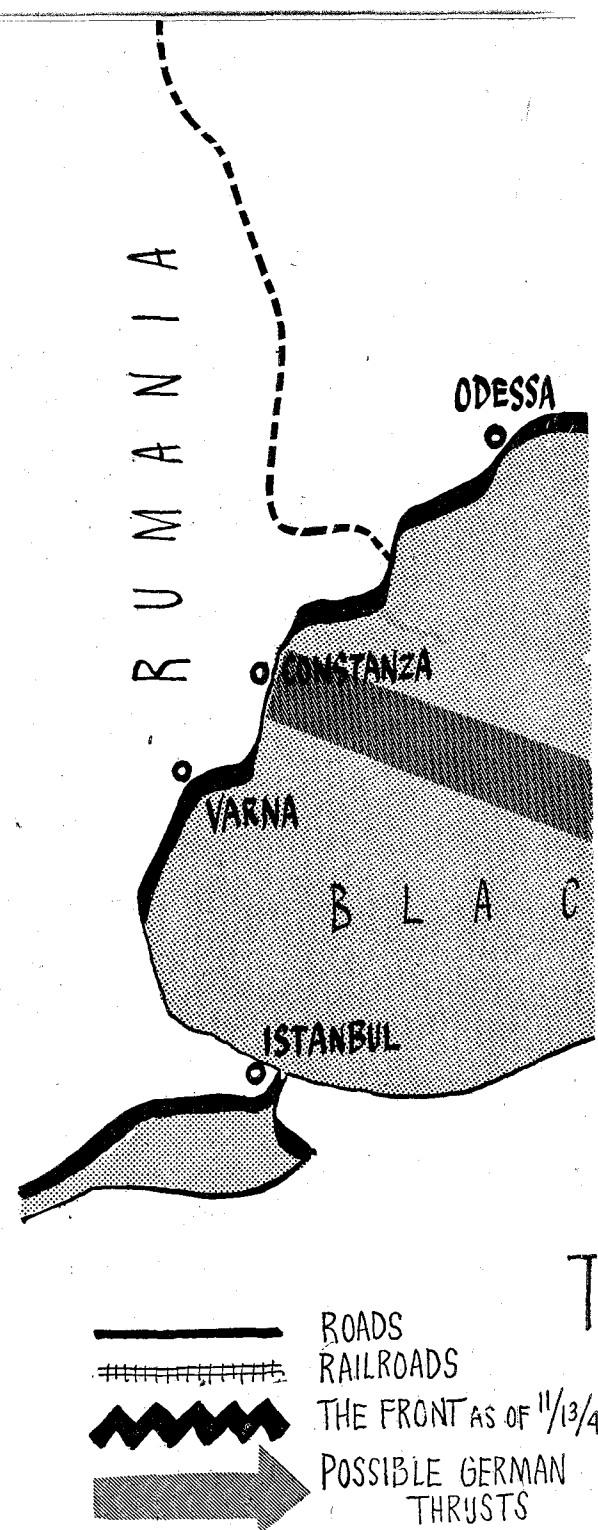
expanses of the Ukraine, but the narrow communications from Perekop to Kerch plus a body of water between them and their bases—a body of water which would be made far from safe by the Black Sea Fleet.

In case of success against the Taman position, the German High Command would have to face the problems of Operation B as outlined on the map. This operation would entail: (a) outflanking the Don position by a stab toward Stalingrad and thus helping Operation A which has been stymied before the defenses of Rostov for weeks; (b) pushing toward Astrakhan in order to cut both the line of the Volga and the railroad Baku-Kizliar-Astrakhan-Kuybyshev (with a detour); and (c) a march along the northern fringe of the Caucasian Range to take the Maikop and Grozny oil fields and to sever the Baku-Astrakhan railroad at Kizliar.

This enormous and complex operation, necessitating many army corps, would attain the minimum German oil goal only partially, because the oil from Baku would still be able to move north by way of Guriev and, failing this because of middle-winter ice, by way of Krasnovodsk, due east from Baku across the Caspian. True, both routes would be tenuous and long, but they would be possible. Operation B, just outlined, would probably encounter in the huge area Rostov-Stalingrad-Astrakhan-Kizliar-Krasnodar not only a good number of regular Red Army divisions, but would also come up against the great reserves trained by Marshal Budenny who doubtless is whipping them into shape precisely in this area.

The march on Stalingrad, and especially that on Astrakhan would take place through almost roadless wastes of steppe where terrific frosts and winds rage during the winter months. All dwellings would be burned and destroyed. The new line of supplies for the Germans would be more than double in length of the one they have to maintain between the border and Kerch, for instance. The last railhead would be some 200 miles short of the lower Volga. The Germans would have only one railroad line along direction "a," and a single track line at that, passing through the Don Cossack country. And Don Cossacks make tough guerrillas.

The march along the Caucasian Range to Grozny and Kizliar would be a 550-mile flank-march along a mountain fastness teeming with regulars and guerrillas. The German right flank would always be exposed, unless they sent armed expeditions into each little valley and gully on that way. And von Runstedt would hardly have enough companies and even platoons to do that.



In other words it would seem that the only attainable thing for the Germans if and when they cross the Straits of Yenikale would be to try and occupy what would be left of the Maikop oil fields. Also to send a force to help crack the Rostov position, and to occupy Novorossisk. But the Black Sea Fleet would have Sebastopol, Poti, and Batum left. Of course, should the Rostov defense give way by that time, the situation would be different, but in that case the Crimean operation would not change things much. And so we see that Operation B would not achieve the maximum goal: Baku would still be on the other side of those terrible mountains with peaks rising to 18,500 feet. In order really to achieve something worth while the Germans would have to get over them. But how?

The Caucasian Range reaches from the