

MOSCOW DIARY

Ambassador Davies' record of the Soviet people and their leaders. His personal journals and his confidential reports to the State Department. Reviewed by Joseph Starobin.

MISSION TO MOSCOW, by Joseph E. Davies. Simon & Schuster. \$3.

JOSEPH EDWARD DAVIES made no bones about the fact that he was an individualist, a capitalist, a devout Congregationalist. Nonetheless, and partly because of this, he came to admire the Soviet people, to respect their achievements and their leaders. To the Russians, differences of political outlook were taken for granted, and were beside the point, anyhow. The Russians were relieved to be able to deal with a man so much different from William Bullitt. They were glad, as Kalinin expressed it, to have an ambassador from the United States "who, by his training, would take an objective view of conditions and would reserve his judgment until all the facts had been fairly seen in perspective."

That is exactly what Joseph E. Davies did. He collected the facts and reserved his judgments to his diary, his personal journals, to the confidential messages for the President and the Department of State. When the course of vast historical changes linked his country's fate with that of the Soviet people, the former ambassador went back into his files. To compile them became one of his ways of helping in the common struggle. The result is a sometimes charming, sometimes curious, an always readable and highly important volume.

Of course it is not easy to suppress a sense of regret that such documents did not become public property earlier. Much less blood might have flowed under the bridges of history. On the other hand, we must be grateful for a book that confirms irrefutably the truths that many Americans had been fighting for all during the thirties. It is not the final word about the Soviet reality, but it does serve to erase much of the misunderstanding of the past in Soviet-American relations. And it will help to give those relations a strong, authentic foundation for the present and the future.

THE AMBASSADOR arrived in Moscow, together with Mrs. Davies (equally curious and eager), in January 1937, on the eve of a great crisis in Soviet life. It was almost the day when the Radek-Pyatakoff treason trials began. "Naturally, I must confess," says Davies, [that] "I was predisposed against the credibility of these defendants." But after watching the men in the dock, day in and day out, after observing court procedure with the eye of a professional lawyer, and after many late evenings at the Spazzo House, chewing the rag with a bevy of keen American correspondents in Moscow, Davies came to the conclusion

that the Soviet government had a case and that its case had been proven. In addition, he talked to "many, if not all the members of the Diplomatic Corps" and with possibly one exception, they were "all of the opinion that the proceedings established clearly the existence of a political plot and conspiracy to overthrow the government." Later that year, when seventeen Red Army generals were arrested and shot for high treason, Davies came to the same conclusion. And after a full year of travel through the USSR and many neighboring countries, including Germany, the Bukharin trial in March 1938 was no surprise.

He notes in his diary a conversation with Litvinov in which the latter says that "They (the government) had to make sure . . . there was no treason left which could cooperate with Berlin or Tokyo; that some day the world would understand. . . ." In fact, Litvinov continued, "They were doing the whole world a service in protecting themselves against the menace of Hitler and world domination, thereby preserving the Soviet Union strong as a bulwark against the Nazi threat. That the world would some day appreciate what a very great man Stalin was." Items like these with a prophetic irony that is breathtaking account for much of the thrill and satisfaction in the volume.

ANOTHER ASPECT of Soviet life which excited Davies greatly was the scope and pace of Soviet industrialization, only natural for a man who had himself been connected with some of America's biggest industries. He made a number of trips to the interior, visited the

Dnieper region, and Baku. The appendix contains verbatim conversations with managers of Soviet plants that might serve as a primer for an understanding of how Russian production works. Writing to the President, Davies remarks that "What these people have done in the past seven years in heavy industry is unique. They have painted on a 'ten-league canvas with a brush of a comet's hair.'"

For example, only five years before, the district of Zaporozhe, now containing enormous plants, about 125,000 people, with modern brick apartment buildings and wide avenues and parks, "was only a prairie plain." That fascinated an American from the prairies of America's midwest.

"Quite one of the strongest impressions left with us," Davies writes in a formal report to the State Department, "is the character of the men running these enterprises. For the most part they were men about thirty-five years of age . . . all educated in Russia but equipped by travel and technical study in other countries. They all appeared of the steady, studious, scientific type, quiet in manner but with indications of much reserve in executive strength." All the plants "had libraries, lecture rooms, and a night school for the operatives. In their libraries, they had technical magazines of many countries, a general library and translators."

But if these were the rank and file, Davies was even more amazed at the personalities of the Soviet leaders. Kalinin he finds "as comfortable as the proverbial old shoe." One night some sixty Red Army men sat down at the Embassy table, "Heroes of the Soviet Union" most of them, famous parachute jumpers, airplane designers, and so forth. "One was impressed with the fine appearances these men made—strong, healthy, with fine faces." One day, Marjorie (his wife) went to a "hen luncheon" at Madame Molotov's, and Davies notes his wife's great interest in the fact that a woman of Mme. Molotov's type "should be so much interested in serious business matters and should herself be a 'working woman.'"

Early in his mission Davies writes that Stalin is considered a man of "tremendous singleness of purpose and capacity for work." He adds somewhat quaintly that Stalin "is decent and clean-living. . . ." But by the end of his stay in the spring of 1938 he had seen Stalin twice, much to the amazement and envy of the other ambassadors, especially the British. He writes in a detailed letter to his daughter: "It was really an intellectual feast which we all seemed to enjoy. Throughout it, we laughed and joked at times. He has a sly



Joseph E. Davies

humor. He has a very great mentality. It is sharp, shrewd, and above all else wise, at least so it would appear to me. If you can picture a personality that is exactly opposite to what the most rabid anti-Stalinists anywhere could conceive, then you might picture this man."

Courage, hard work, mutual respect were the things that Davies cherished in the American tradition; he looked for them and found them in Moscow. But apart from everything else, he found honesty. He tells the amusing story of a painting he bought one afternoon while in Dnepropetrovsk, a painting represented as the original work of an old Italian master. That same night the blue-eyed, silent GPU boys, assigned to accompany the ambassador constantly, brought a man in by the scruff of the neck. He was the director of the shop where Davies had bought the painting. It seems that the painting was a fake; the price was outrageous; the director a black-guard. The GPU boys were "highly indignant about it," Davies says, "and over the fact that I had been deceived." He had something of a job prevailing upon them not to punish the deceiver too severely. Many American men of wealth had been similarly deceived in Europe, as Matthew Josephson recalls in his *Robber Barons*. But here was a unique phenomenon indeed—a Secret Service, frequently so corrupt in other countries, but in the Soviet world a model of simple honesty.

THERE IS, of course, a good deal about the USSR that Davies did not fully grasp. For example, he noticed five lipstick and perfume shops and three flower shops within five blocks of the Embassy on one of Moscow's main thoroughfares. He tells us he discussed this matter with Marjorie several times and came to the conclusion that here was "one of the significant indications of the drift of this government away from the principles of Marxist Communism"! Likewise, he found that in Russia people were paid at different rates for different kinds of work. He thought that this was creating a "class society." When his friends remonstrated with him, pointing out that classes were disappearing because the means of production belonged to nobody and therefore to everybody, Davies couldn't see it, even as an abstraction. He contents himself with the reply that "class" after all is an "idea"!

I do not wish to appear to be entering into a doctrinal discussion with Mr. Davies, for obviously the importance of his book does not depend at all on the degree to which he appreciates or agrees with the ideological foundations of the Soviet state. But when he says, as in his "Last Word" at the end of the book, that the USSR is a "system of state socialism operating on capitalistic principles," one has to demur—or rather, one has to ask the author whether the immense achievements of the USSR, the morale of its people, the strength of its army, the fortitude of its diplomacy can really be explained by such a phrase. Is it not *because* of socialism, rather than *in spite* of it, that the USSR is

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fully able to play as powerful a role as it does today?

IT IS INTERESTING to note that Davies was not a career man in the State Department; the ambassadorship to Moscow was his first diplomatic service, and this brings to mind a comparison with the work of another non-career man, William E. Dodd, whose diary stands out among the records of American foreign policy in the thirties. The comparison is interesting also because Dodd represented us in Nazi Germany in roughly the same period that Davies was in Soviet Russia, a time when many Americans badly missed the tremendous differences between the two nations.

Dodd was a college professor; Davies is a college alumnus, and very proud too, of the University of Wisconsin. Dodd was a scholar, a student of the old South; Davies is a lawyer and businessman. In Dodd's book one finds very decided opinions about American politics and especially about some of the responsible men in the State Department; Davies, on the other hand, is often indiscriminating in his praise for very different sorts of people, whether it be Sumner Welles, Joe Kennedy, the newspaperman Joseph Barnes, or an old conservative friend, such as for example the former Secretary of Commerce, Daniel Roper. Dodd was a poor man and tended to resent men of wealth; Davies, on the other hand, is wealthy enough to see beyond his particular social position. Dodd was a student of German culture, a product of old Germany's universities; Davies was new to Russia, and often he approaches what he sees with the awe of the tourist; he is amazed at the splendor of the former czarist palaces; he collects Russian paintings and is exuberated by the ballet with a kind of proud self-satisfaction that is sometimes boyish.

But the most significant contrast is this: that whereas Dodd was defeated, tragically defeated by what he experienced in Germany and returned to his homeland sadly isolated from its political life; Davies seems to have been buoyed by his totally different experience in Russia; and from this diary we get to understand some of the courage and fighting qualities of this man which have so distinguished him in the past six months. Both men were anti-fascists, and while both men seem to have misunderstood each other, judging from their books, one might say that Joseph E. Davies realized in action some of the ideals which William E. Dodd fought for and did not live to realize.

There is in Davies something robust, self-confident, assured, and vigorous; there is a desire to cooperate with people who disagree so long as they respect the integrity of his opinion; a readiness to respect theirs on the same basis. He saw in the Soviet world a pioneering of new frontiers. He saw a moral grandeur which he recognized as part of the Christian and humane tradition. He saw strength, and dedication to purpose and struggle against great odds.

But whether he realized it or not, he was seeing those qualities in the Soviet world which had made America great, qualities which have drawn the American people closer to the Russian people in their hour of common trial. Because he saw all this in Russia and reflected the best of America, he made a felicitous ambassador, and the record of his work is to be read and remembered.

JOSEPH STAROBIN.

American Indian Leader

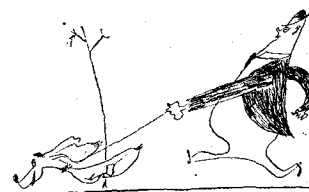
WAR CHIEF JOSEPH, by Howard and McGrath.
Caxton Printers, Ltd. \$3.50.

THIS book is meant to be a popular biography of a great leader in American Indian history, but it falls far short of this objective and succeeds only in presenting a very unskillful and highly sentimentalized characterization. Its chief value rests on its heavily documented material tracing the scope of tribal activities and the generalship of War Chief Joseph, military leader of the Nez Perce Indians of Idaho. There are over 300 pages of collated and annotated material on treaty history and military campaigns conducted by Indian fighters of the United States army against the Nez Perce tribe during the late seventies. Chief Joseph was regarded by his opponents as a leading military scientist. He had introduced new patterns of strategic warfare which baffled a host of United States army people for years. He became renowned for his military exploits and for his remarkable courage.

It seems regrettable, considering the careful chronology, the vast accumulation of data on Idaho and Washington local history, and the minute treatment given to battle incident after battle incident, that the writers should have failed to present a more detailed analysis of basic social conflicts between the Nez Perce tribe and the United States. The writers are naively disposed to interpret the difficulties between the two groups as sectional and geographical in character and seem to be unaware of the confluence of social forces which go beyond boundary limits. There is a conspicuous absence of a socio-economic interpretation of US-American Indian warfare.

For students placing a high social value on Americana, this is a very usable source book. It is not, however, a very revealing account of the tribal sociology of the Nez Perce Indians or of the social and military psychology of their great leader. The early anthropological monographs of Herbert J. Spinden on the Nez Percés are far more readable and have greater documentary value.

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