

# Russian "Propaganda"

by VICTOR S. YARROS

WHAT ignorant or malicious Russophobes say about Russian "propaganda"—its volume, quality or forms—need not worry Americans who are friends of the Soviet Union. But when genuine, sincere and honored liberals indulge in false or highly exaggerated statements about that phenomenon, it is our duty and privilege to examine their charges critically, point out mistakes and correct misapprehensions. Truth, of course, cannot be condemned as propaganda. The Russian regime has a perfect right to report its achievements, to take legitimate pride in its successes, to direct world attention to its advances. It has no right, and never has claimed the right, to misrepresent facts, issue misleading figures, or boast of purely imaginary accomplishments.

Let me consider, in the light of this rather obvious proposition, some damaging indictments of Russian propaganda. Damaging, in the sense that their source inspires confidence and hence injures Russia.

Some time ago, "Topics of the Times" (*New York Times* editorial page feature) quoted with satisfaction and pleasure the following "striking" paragraph from H. A. L. Fisher's *A History of Europe*. (Fisher is a respected and enlightened British historian whose ability and learning are generally recognized.)

Yet there is this novelty in the Soviet system. A living religion is enforced by the massed large-scale propaganda of a scientific age, by machine guns and airplanes, telephone and telegraph, printing press and film, broadcasting and the regimentation of all the arts. A hundred and sixty million human souls are by a gigantic system of governmental pressure hermetically sealed against the invasion of unwelcome truth. All previous experiments in tyranny recorded in human annals pale beside this colossal achievement.

Now, there is some confusion of thought behind this rhetoric. The Soviet government is of course utilizing modern scientific instrumentalities and facilities in its propagandist activities. In this there is nothing surprising and assuredly nothing reprehensible. All contemporary governments are doing the same thing. Why should they not, and what sane person would expect them to refrain?

During the war no one deplored Russia's utilization of modern machinery. Her allies gloried in her "miracles," her military and industrial, and the most conservative statesmen and generals paid

her eloquent tributes. Since the end of the conflict she has been treated as a stubborn obstructionist, a plotter against peace and reconstruction, a perverse treaty-breaker and willful trouble-maker. Her sacrifices and losses are either belittled or forgotten. Her urgent needs are seldom mentioned, and our sympathy and mercy are reserved for our defeated enemies. Why Soviet Russia has the audacity to demand reparations and to seek to render herself secure! Nay, she even has opinions of her own on such problems as disarmament, atomic control, the boundaries of Germany and Austria, the type of government desirable in the now occupied countries. She is treated as a nuisance and menace by many influential American newspapers and politicians. Why not crush her now and put an end to "Communism?"

Even liberals are outraged by her "massed large-scale propaganda!"

But let us ask, simply and quietly, what is wrong with her propaganda? Historian Fisher's indictment is twofold: In the first place, Russia is enforcing her new "religion," Soviet Communism, by every means and device science provides, and, in the second place, her rulers, "ruthless tyrants" that they are, keep her hermetically sealed against the invasion of unwelcome truth. As to her "religion," in other words, her particular social system, it happens that her leaders deeply believe in it. They have zeal and enthusiasm, faith and confidence, and they naturally manifest these qualities in their propaganda. Is this wicked and intolerable? What about the propaganda of the capitalists and champions of so-called free enterprise? These are rebuked daily for insufficient zeal, for lukewarmness, for lack of faith in the supreme virtues of their "religion!" What is responsible for this sad condition? Communist propaganda? Cannot capitalism effectively defend itself, silence the opposition, vindicate its alleged superiority? If it cannot, something is rotten in the sacrosanct system. "Communist propaganda" is an alibi, and a poor one.

As to the "iron curtain," the isolation of the Russian people, this Churchill

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(nee Goebbels) tag or cliché has been used and abused with little intelligence. Books continue to be written about Russia, scientific conferences have been held there; neutral and impartial writers, American and British, have been telling the public that they did not encounter any difficulty in visiting the places they wanted to see, interviewing persons of all ranks, asking the questions they wanted to ask. The iron curtain is largely a myth. There is a Russian censorship of foreign press correspondence, but considering the brazen lying, distortion, malicious or stupid misrepresentation so many correspondents indulge in to suit the wishes of the Hearsts, Howards and their ilk, this fact cannot cause much surprise or criticism. Too many headline readers become bigoted Russophobes and resist facts and correct information.

Thoughtful writers are aware of the fact that, if Russia had not spent a single kopek or the energies of one man on "propaganda," the actual accomplishments, deeds, victories, "miracles" of the Soviet Union in the past quarter of a century would have spoken louder than our words, would have affected the life of the whole western world profoundly in many ways, would have stirred and influenced governments, parliaments, labor unions and all manner of social and economic organizations all over the globe. That form of propaganda—the unanswerable propaganda of deeds in farm and factory, in school and college, in laboratories and research agencies, military strategy and battle—defies press mendacity and plutocratic vituperation.

A recent book by a British author, Professor Edward Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, candidly recognized the full force and substantial effects of that impact. Russia has been imitated and emulated in the West to a remarkable extent, despite the furious and savage attacks on her regime by the reactionary and conservative parties. Her "propaganda" is hardly the explanation of that fact. Her actual achievements offer the true explanation. Millions of men and women everywhere understand the revolutionary character of the Soviet regime and its permanent and solid accomplishments. They sense the truth that the repressive aspects of the Soviet regime are transitory and that democracy and liberty, in our sense of those terms, are not incompatible with the economic and social reforms realized by the Soviet regime. Give Russia security, an assurance of peace and non-intervention, and that regime will proceed to liquidate its repressive features, now regarded as the necessary conditions or price of survival. Plutocracy, by openly urging or threatening war on Russia, delays the full democratization of her government. This is the simple truth.