

Soviet Journey

ALL QUIET IN THE KREMLIN, by
George Marion. *Fairplay Publishers.*
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COMPETENT reporting requires
much more than accurate ob-
servation and honest and skilful

recording of what one sees; both the observing and the recording must proceed from a fundamental grasp of the nature of reality. The truly competent reporter must *understand* what he sees, in its manifold interrelations; he must have clear insight into the past and the future of what he observes developing in the present.

George Marion is a skilful journalist who is equipped with Marxist theoretical insight. He understands that mere "factual accuracy is not truth"; that "average" and "typical" are not synonymous terms; and that "you can tell the truth about Russia only by describing the process." Thus, on the basis of six very busy months in the Soviet Union last year, he seeks in *All Quiet in the Kremlin* to interpret "what is typical of the Russia now in process of becoming." In so doing, he has given us one of the most illuminating and interesting accounts available of the tremendous enterprise now moving forward in the socialist sixth of the world—the job of planning and constructing a new kind of society and a new kind of man.

In style and structure, *All Quiet in the Kremlin* gives the initial appearance of a light, breezy, "journalistic" account of an interesting man's travels. It is a chatty book, written in the first person, with the author talking directly to his reader in a familiar, seemingly face-to-face manner. Its predomi-

nating approach is anecdotal, with many interesting little narratives about the personal experiences of Marion and the people he met. Moreover, its division and chapter headings are popularly phrased—"So I Asked Mr. Vishinsky," "The Reluctant Russians," "How Miracles Are Made," "If You Were Stalin," "The Ruble and I," etc.—suggesting most anything but a serious, fundamental *analysis* of Soviet life.

After reading the first few pages I became annoyed, wishing the author would cut out the small-talk and let me have the story "straight." But I was profoundly in error. Long before I reached the end it became clear that both style and structure are admirably suited to the purpose of this book. The familiar, chatty style "grows on you" and leads to confidence and conviction; the personalized anecdotes afford concrete illustrations of fundamental and significant aspects of Soviet life; and the popularized, non-committal chapter headings designate sound and basic analyses which a more prosaic writer would have labeled "Post-War Reconstruction," "Socialist Planning," "The Public School System," and the like.

The chapter entitled "And A Schoolboy from Stalingrad," for example, turns out to be the exciting and illuminating story of a fourteen-year-old lad who wanted to become a lathe-operator, who got his chance. ("A boy has a

right to make such a decision in the Soviet Union and can choose his course not just in theory but in practice.") This lad developed speeds which the cutting edge of his tools could not stand, thus creating the need for an alloy hard enough for the job. "So he created such an alloy"—and his discoveries and techniques were "generalized" so as to enable other workers to operate their lathes at airplane speeds.

The apparent rationale of the chapter-heading "Book Wanted" is the author's quest for "something sensational" to write about; but in the course of exposing the American newspaper hoax about the alleged "purge" of economist Eugene Varga, he comes to the realization that the truly "big story" for his book is the tremendous job of reconstruction with which everybody is preoccupied:

"... the Russians have no time for anything sensational in our sense . . . they absolutely refuse to be diverted from their completely unnewsworthy daily dedication to the humdrum little tasks that make up the biggest job the world has ever seen. A quiet story, yes, but there are times when quietness can be positively sensational!"

"Show Business" begins with the apparently trivial story of some adolescent Russian boys who stole into an open-air theatre through a hole in the fence; but its significance lies in the fact that what

they were so eager to see was what American small-fry "would contemptuously describe as 'toe-dancing'"—the classical ballet, *Swan Lake*. The chapter then proceeds to describe the amazingly rich and varied cultural experiences of the Soviet peoples, on the countryside as well as in the cities: ". . . there is more theatre in Russia than in the other five-sixths of the world put together."

In similar anecdotal, popular fashion, other chapters describe concretely the remarkable rebuilding of Stalingrad, life in Moscow, the great "discussions" on genetics and linguistics, unparalleled provisions for the health and care and education of children—indeed, of the whole population; the transformation of rural life on the collective farm, and the spread of Michurinism and the creation of "scientific farmers on a mass scale"; the gigantic fifteen-year afforestation program to reclaim the barren steppes for agricultural production; the spirit as well as the techniques that produce a "Hero of Socialist Labor"; and the inspiring grandeur of Soviet planning—"planning on a scale and of a kind new to history."

One gathers that Marion set out to write a "united-front" book about the Soviet Union, convincing to the honest skeptic. This he has done with great effectiveness.

In certain respects, however, the author leaned over backward too far in his quest for the "popular."

His unfortunate choice of title, his prevailing use of "Russia" instead of "Soviet Union," and his frequent reference to "what Stalin did," etc.—all are unwarranted and unnecessary concessions to current misconceptions about the Soviet state. True, there are "explanations" which ask the reader to qualify the latter two usages; but their effect is lost in the constant repetition of the inaccurate and harmful terminology.

The united-front character of this book and its usefulness in the present period are emphasized by its frequent reiteration, in different contexts, of the profound truth that the Soviet people want peace. For example: "None [of the foreign correspondents stationed in the Soviet Union] had ever heard of even a private Soviet citizen making war talk. It simply isn't in the air!" Or: "... Soviet leaders are completely absorbed in this peaceful work and ... all the talk we hear about Russian determination to achieve world domination

is just talk." And again: "I think there is no country on earth where government and people alike so uniformly *require* peace for the fulfilment of their tasks and would therefore welcome it as much as the Russians would . . . we are pursuing an aggressive, dangerous, wholly unjustified policy of hostility toward the Soviet Union. . . . Victory for their way of life does not require the conquest of one nation by another any more than it requires the exploitation of man by man." Coupled as it always is with concrete descriptions of what Soviet officials and other citizens actually are saying and doing, the frequent assertion of this important truth "gets across" with effectiveness and conviction.

All Quiet in the Kremlin can be very helpful in building and strengthening the developing peace movement in our country. We should guarantee that it is widely read and discussed.

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