

USSR

"Unity in Diversity"

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2

THE U.S.S.R.: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

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One often hears it stated at present that the peace of the future world and the generations to come will be dependent upon the ability of the United States, Great Britain and Russia to cooperate and to work closely together. This, of course, in turn will depend to a great extent upon their mutual ability and willingness to understand each other. There is no problem of mutual understanding between Great Britain and this country when the willingness to understand is exercised. However, this problem unquestionably does exist in the case of the United States and Russia, two countries which are rather far apart from each other, not only geographically, but also culturally, psychologically, ideologically, and in many other ways.

Under these conditions it is quite appropriate to raise the question as to what is the key that will unlock the door to an understanding of contemporary Russia? A great number of answers is given to this question. My answer is that Russia is not a country, but a world in itself. What makes Russia "A world in itself?" My answer to that question is its "unity in diversity." Although in every large country one can note a certain variety of geographical, cultural, social and economic conditions, they are more or less representative only of phases of the same social, economic and cultural life characterizing a given country and its people. This situation, however, is not so in the case of Russia. The diversity of the social, economic and various other aspects of life in the Soviet Union greatly exceeds that of any other country in the world, and yet, in spite of this, the unity of the Soviet Union cannot be questioned. A Russian poet, Nekrasoff, once stated that "one cannot either measure Russia or grasp her directly as you can grasp the spirit of other countries...one can only believe in Russia" meaning that some degree of intuition is required for an understanding of Russia.

Let us make a brief diagnosis and see what makes of Russia a world. First of all, there is its size. 8,176,000 square miles usually do not mean much to the average person. This is the extent of the area occupied by the Soviet Union. This figure, however, may acquire more meaning if we remember that, according to the computation of a historian, for three centuries the Russian Empire added to its domain at the rate of 60 square miles a day. The frontiers of the USSR are one and one half times the length of the equator.

The proverbs of the people sometimes reflect the facts much better than the figures do. According to a saying, "above the white walls of Mother Moscow lies the Kremlin, above it lie only the stars." There was another saying according to which "only the winds and sands of the Asiatic deserts know the frontiers of Russia in the South; only the Polar bears know its frontiers in the North; only smugglers know the frontiers of Russia in the West; but, as to its Eastern frontiers, only God in the sky and the Czar on the earth know them." Of course, this is an exaggeration to say the least, but it shows how the Russian people themselves feel about the vastness of their country.

Not so long ago there were great tracts of land, indicated on maps of Russia as white spaces. They signified unexplored and unknown regions. Some of these

regions were as large as are some of the territories of the European countries. It is said that Nicolas I once stated that "Russia suffers from its distances". During the first World War, Marshal Hindenburg complained that "Russia has not a heart at which a mortal blow could be aimed." Napoleon made the same discovery a century ago.

The thing that impresses a foreign traveler in Russia, the country of superlatives, is not only its endless distances, but its almost unlimited horizons. One can traverse Russia for thousands of miles without being conscious of crossing an important natural boundary. This means unity of the territory. This extensive unity, however, cannot escape geography. Russia is a land of infinite natural diversity, providing many contrasts and examples of every type of land, from unending flat plains to mighty mountains with peaks piercing the clouds.

The Ural mountains are not very high, reaching only to 6,151 feet above sea level. The Caucasian mountains rise to 18,468 feet. Peak Stalin and Peak Lenin, 24,590 and 23,386 feet high respectively, both in the Pamirs, are not only the highest summits in the Soviet Union, but also two of the highest mountain peaks in the world. And not too far from then, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, lies the deepest cavity in the country...a thousand square miles in area...Karagich. It lies 426 feet below sea level. The highest active volcano of the old world is in Russia. It is Mount Kliuchev in Kamchatka, and is 15,912 feet high. The largest lake in the world is also in this country of diversities. The Caspian Sea, which actually is a lake and not a sea, has a surface of 162,980 square miles. It lies, incidentally, 85 feet below sea level. The deepest lake in the world is Lake Baikal. It is in Siberia, and has a depth of 5,712 feet.

Russian rivers are as long as is the immense country they traverse. This is especially true of the Siberian rivers. The Ob River, 3,235 miles long, is the second of the mightiest rivers in the world. The river Lena is 3,116 miles long; the Yenissei 2,489 miles; the Amur 2,782 miles; the Volga is the longest river in Europe. It is 2,295 miles long and pours 2,113,500 gallons of water into the Caspian sea every second. After all the planned projects are completed, the system of inland transportation will make of Moscow a port of five seas connected through canals with the Gulf of Finland; with the White Sea through the Baltic Canal; the Caspian Sea; and through the Volga-Don canal with the Azov and Black Seas.

The geographical diversity of Russia is reflected also in its climate. When roses are in bloom in the Trans-Caucasus, a country of citrous fruits, wine grapes, and tea, it's mid-winter in Moscow. When the spring sowing begins in Turkmenia, the City of Petropavlovsk Kamchatka is buried in snow up to its house tops. Within the frontiers of Russia there is a frigid zone covering 16% of the territory; the sub-tropical zone covering 4% of the country; and the temperate zone, covering 80% of the Union. The annual fluctuation of the temperature in Siberia is greater than anywhere else in the world, varying from 91.4 degrees above zero in the summer to 94 degrees below zero in the winter. In the desert of Kara-Kum in central Asia, the temperature in summer reaches at times 158 degrees above zero; while in the so-called Verkhoyansk-Oimekon district lies the world pole of winter frigidity with the temperature reaching 103 degrees below zero.

The same diversity characterizes the atmospheric precipitations. There are only 4 inches per year in North Siberia, and 3 inches in Central Asia. There are 40 inches a year on the Pacific coast, while in West Trans-Caucasus, precipitations reach 100 inches a year.

Perhaps in no other phase of Soviet life are both its unity and diversity as noticeable as in its ethnography. From the standpoint of the composition of the population, Russia is a multi-national country. Between 175 and 189 nationalities,

peoples and tribes comprise the population of the Soviet Union. The reason that different figures are so often cited in this regard lies in the fact that ethnographers, historians and philologists frequently disagree on the question as to how demarkation lines should be drawn between a nation, people, tribe, language, etc. The whole terminology in this field remains rather confusing and often debatable. 150 languages are used in Russia, and 40 different religions are practiced.

It is true that 72% of the peoples of the Soviet Union constitute Great Russians, Ukrainians, and White Russians, that is Slavs. Many millions of them, however, belong to Turko-Tartar, Japhetic, and Finno-Ugrian groups. There are nearly 2 million Jews, and there were around one million four hundred Germans before the war. One-third of the latter have been living in Russia for centuries, having migrated there during the times of Peter the I and Catherine the Great. Among the peoples of Russia we find the so-called Oirots, who, anthropologists claim, are probably the closest related tribe to the American Indians outside of the American continent. Some of the Caucasian tribes are found by anthropologists to be closely related to the Basques in Spain.

The Caucasian tribe of Abkhazians can go on record as one having among its ranks individuals of extreme longevity; in fact, some of the longest-lived ever known in the world. One of their men, Nicholi Chapkovsky, was 142 years old, while another, Ekun-Shoua, is reputed to be the oldest man ever known in the world. He is 157 years old. There are many men and women in this tribe who have reached the age of 100, and shortly before this war, the Soviet Academy of Science sent a special expedition to investigate the conditions of life in the region of the Caucasus, where the tribe referred to has been living. In the Caucasian mountains a Jewish tribe was discovered, claiming descent from the lost 10 tribes of Israel; they speak the so-called "Tat"-Iranian language.

In the full meaning of the word, the diversity of the nationalities living in Russia is so great that the whole country can be called an "ocean continent." The Soviet nation may be compared with a vast river in which many rivulets, representing a huge number of European and Asiatic peoples and nationalities, are merged. They are, however, not mechanically mixed, but are organically blended into the unity of the Soviet people.

When the Soviet Congress first met, it presented a highly colorful assembly: flat-faced Tartars from the Crimea, yellow-skinned Uzbeks and Tadjkis from Central Asia, mixed with many scores of nations of the Caucasian and Slavic peoples. A similar representation in the United States would give the Congress in this country some 45 negroes, half a dozen Mexicans from the Southwest, a couple of Puerto Ricans and Hawaiians, and some Alaska Indians, legislating on equal terms with other workers from Detroit, miners from the Pittsburgh Valley, scientists from the university centers and farmers from the Middle west. The delegates to the first Soviet Congress came proudly wearing their national costumes and speaking their national tongues, sometimes assisted by interpreters. Some of these delegates represented nations that had never had a written language. Karelians, the Kirghiz, the Tajiks, the Turkmen, were peoples without alphabets until the rise of Soviet power. Near to them sat representatives of Georgia, which has a culture 3,000 years old; the Kirghiz who besieged Peking about the beginning of the Christian Era, after they had wandered in the arid lands of Asia for some 2,000 years. But all of these people knew that they were sitting in the Congress representing the will of one country. They knew that they were called to sit in the Congress by the Soviet Constitution, which had been discussed at 527,000 public meetings attended by over 36 million citizens before it was adopted. Over 150,000 suggestions and amendments were sent to Moscow in the process of those discussions. And when, according to the Constitution which was adopted, the Congress came into existence, all the delegates knew that it represents the political, economic and social unity of their country of diversities.

The multi-national ethnographic composition of the Soviet people and the diversity of the geographic conditions on the territory where they live is reflected in what may be called at present "Soviet culture." The Russian landscape, with its monotony and its vista of endless space, contributed to the melancholy side of the Russian character, a quality which is very marked in Russian literature and Russian music. At the same time, this endless space contributed to the imaginativeness of the Russian people, which is reflected in their social and economic thought.

The Russian Orthodox Church possesses to a great degree, both Rationalism of Western Christianity and the deep mysticism of the Orient.

If you take Russian law, it is to a great degree a combination of the formal Roman law and the common law prevailing among the various people comprising Russia. Before the revolution, on the territory of Polish provinces the so-called "Codex of Napoleon" was the governing law.

At present one very often hears about the rapid progress of education in Russia. What is most remarkable in this progress is not the rapid, spontaneous rise of the educational level as a whole, but its diversity, making it possible for the peoples comprising the Soviet Union to develop their own national cultures.

Among the desert tribes of Turkmenia only 7,000 children attended school before the Revolution. By 1936 this number had increased 2,300 percent. In 1936 there were 161,000 Turkmen children in schools.

Tajiks, the men of the mountains, had never seen a conveyance with wheels until after they had seen an airplane. Only 400 of their children went to schools. On the eve of this war, 199,000 Tajiks attended schools. And during this war, the Soviet peoples of Asia repaid their brothers of Western Russia; "Not an Uzbek family without an evacuated child from occupied Russia" was the recent slogan in the heart-of-Asia land.

In the first 20 years after the Revolution the publication of the works of Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoi, and Chekhov, writers representing the Russian culture as a whole, reached a record figure of 75 million copies, or three times as many as in the period from 1897 to 1916. What is more remarkable, however, is that Pushkin has been translated into 66 languages; Tolstoi into 54; Chekhov has now outstripped Dickens in the proportion of 7 to 1 (14 million copies as against 2 million.)

At the time when the new Soviet Constitution was in the stage of discussion, 60 million copies of its text were circulated in pamphlet form, translated into every language of the Union.

Russia has absorbed, published and translated the artistic, literary and scientific works of other nations probably on a larger scale than any country. The diversity of the peoples of the Soviet Union makes it possible for them to appreciate the works of American, French, German, English, Dutch, Spanish and other writers and composers, as well as their own. The study and translation of Shakespeare has remained a "priority" job in the USSR in wartime.

Many translations of Shakespeare have been made in the languages of the non-Russian people of the USSR. This year the theater in liberated Kiev will stage "Twelfth Night" in a new Ukrainian translation by Steshenko. It already has been translated into Kirghizian. The poet Lahuti is working on a translation of "Romeo and Juliet" into the Tajik language. During this war "Othello" has been translated into the Chuvash tongue. The Tartar Academic Theater is preparing at present to stage "King Lear."

In 1917 there were no permanent professional theaters in Armenia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan or Kirghizia. Today there are 27 professional theaters in Armenia, 23 in Tajikistan, 21 in Kirghizia, and 11 in Turkmenistan. Prior to the Revolution there were 35 theaters in the Ukraine; in 1940 there were 126 theaters in the Ukraine. In Georgia there were formerly only 2 theaters, whereas today there are 49. Uzbekistan had only 1 theater; today it has 49. Even Gypsies have a theater of their own in Moscow where plays are given in the gypsy language...the only theater of this sort in the world.

From the standpoint of their diversity, Russian music, architecture, literature and art in general, are more international and universal than the music, art, or literature of any other people in the world. The fact that so many ethnic groups co-exist in the Soviet Union exerts a powerful influence upon the psychology and culture of the people. It makes for better understanding of the cultures of other nations. It contributes to freedom from narrow nationalistic traditions, necessitates tolerance of the opinions, traditions, manners, and customs.

Russian culture has in itself a crusading spirit, in the best meaning of this word, directed toward pan-humanism, universal justice, and international brotherhood. Dostoevski in his famous address at the Pushkin Celebration stated "In the aspiration toward human universality, the sense of common humanity, is found to be precisely Russia's outstanding characteristic. Intuitively we display the ability to eliminate contradictions, to reconcile differences, and thus manifest our inclination toward a union with all the peoples of mankind. The destiny of a Russian is indeed Pan-European and cosmopolitan. The Russian soul, the genius of the Russian people, is probably better fitted than any other to shelter the idea of world-wide unity and brotherhood. To be a genuine Russian means to become the blood brother of all human beings." Only the ignorant and the enemies of the Soviet Union may take the Russian spirit of Pan-Humanism, expressed in these words of Dostoevski, for imperialism.

Let me cite here another famous Russian writer, Gogol. His words addressed to Russia 100 years ago are endorsed today by all 175 nationalities comprising the Soviet Union. They express in a beautiful form what the Russian people think of their country at present, and how they feel about their mother-land: "Russia, I see thee from my wondrously beautiful, distant abode, I see thee....There is nothing in thee to fascinate, to allure the eye....But what impenetrable, mysterious force draws one to thee?....Why does thy melancholy song, floating all over thy width and length from sea to sea, resound unceasingly in the ear? What is it that calls and sobs and clutches at my heart? What are these strains that so poignantly greet me, that go straight to my soul, that throb about my heart? Is it not there, not in thee, that boundless thought should be born since thou art boundless thyself? What a marvellous radiant expanse, unknown to the earth! Russia!"

Do these words suggest Soviet imperialism? Of course they don't. Diversity in unity, and unity in diversity has been, and is, the most characteristic feature of the Russian culture. It is the key that will unlock the door to an understanding of contemporary Russia.

Let us now draw certain conclusions. The first one should be taken from the experiences of this war. Not only the enemies of Russia, but also some of its friends, firmly believed a few years ago, that the Russian melting pot of diversities would crack under the unity of German force, under the German attack. And yet, Russian diversity turned out to be an indivisible and indestructible unity. All the nationalities of the Soviet Union rallied as one man to defend their country. They knew what they were fighting for. They knew that their inalienable

right to be different, to preserve their own cultures, languages and customs, depended upon their ability to be united. When the Germans were at Moscow, the number of regular troops of the Red Army at Moscow was not sufficient to stop them. The civilian population had to fight for two or three days until the reserves arrived. Civilians of all classes, ages, and professions fought...a great variety of them, a great diversity. In the famous Panfilov Guards who thrust their bodies against tanks and, in dying, saved Moscow, were Russians, Kazaks, Kirghiz, and peoples from the steppes of Asia. And at a crucial hour in Russian history, Soviet diversity passed the test of unity. This is a lesson for the future: after such tests of unity in diversity, the unity of the Soviet Union can never fail.

At present, Russian cities liberated from the Germans are humming with activity as citizens, working in their spare time, get well into the huge job of reconstruction, rebuilding the towns almost completely wrecked by German shot and shell.

According to the estimates of Leningrad authorities, the volunteers have put in some 11 million man hours of their spare time on reconstruction jobs. These volunteers can be found every day after their regular working hours, working away at carpentry, plastering or painting. Among them you will find schoolboys, artists, steel workers, musicians, nurses, and sales clerks.

In Leningrad, where 87 schools, 57 kindergartens, 7 movie houses, and 28 parks and stadiums have been rebuilt, in addition to 400,000 square meters of living floor-space and 7,500 meters of water mains,...great attention has been paid not only to healing the ugly scars of its long siege, but to beautify the city.

In Voronezh, where the Germans destroyed the ancient wharf built by Peter the First, and the historic monastery of St. Mitrophan, the outlines of a new city are gradually taking shape. Already more than 60,000 ornamental trees and bushes have been planted in the streets. But more important, factories and workers' homes, to be set in fruit orchards, gardens and trees, will be built on the outskirts of the city and will be provided with adequate light and health facilities.

My second conclusion is this: Hitler challenged the world by proclaiming that only a homogenous body of one people, one nationality, one culture and one language can make a creative nation. The Soviet Union challenged the world with opposing tenets, and the Soviet Union's, and not Hitler's, theory proved to be right. If so, then the question can be raised: if unity in diversity is possible in the Soviet Union, then who would dare to say that it is not possible in the world? Can race and national hatreds die? "Yes, they can" is the answer of 189 nationalities of the Soviet Union. The question is only of the methods, progress, and the determination on the part of the people themselves. To preserve the unity of humanity without losing the diversity of national cultures is the task which the world will face in order to win the peace after we win the war.

The unity in diversity of the Soviet Union proves that this peace can be won. It must be won if we wish the culture of the world to progress and flourish.

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