

Collier's

April 1, 1955: p. 95

The Nether Side of Paradise



HARRY DEVLIN

Thorn in his side

WHEN GEORGI MALENKOV surrendered the premiership of Russia with a confession of "guilt and responsibility for the unsatisfactory state of affairs that has arisen in agriculture," he put his finger on the foremost problem facing the Communist high command.

Russia isn't producing enough food to meet the needs of its people, and the situation is worsening steadily. Russia's livestock herds are leaner and more sparse than they were under the czars. There is one third less milk produced in Russia today than 30 years ago. The most vigorous efforts of the Communist party have failed to boost grain production anywhere near a level adequate to feed the 3,000,000 new Russians born each year.

It puts no bread in hungry mouths for the Soviets to point out that Russian heavy industry has increased briskly through this period; even the industrial workers must go on eating if they are to go on producing.

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GEORGI MALENKOV

The challenge to the disciples of Marx is to produce *both* food and machines, efficiently enough to generate the momentum of prosperity.

This is the challenge put to the Communists by the American free-enterprise system, which has managed not only to mechanize its whole economy but also to build an agricultural system which, utilizing one twelfth of the population, turns out enough food to keep the entire nation fat and healthy, export vast surpluses to the free world's needy, and stuff innumerable warehouses with what's left over.

For the failure to meet this challenge, Malenkov took too much blame upon himself. Marx is the original culprit.

Marx dreamed of a communized Utopia sparked by the diligence and devotion of industrial workers. But Marx drew his blueprint on the basis of the countries with which he was familiar—industrial-minded Germany and England. He didn't know a great deal about human nature, and he was particularly ignorant of the mind and nature of the soil tiller. This proved all the more ironic because Communism got its toe hold not in Britain and Germany, but in agrarian Russia and China.

It seemed a perfectly feasible scheme to Marx's disciples to enlist the peasants' cooperation with the promise of land, taken from the rich and distributed among the poor, and then go on to indoctrinate the peasants to the degree that they would happily surrender their small plots for the privilege of being cogs in the collectivist state. The Russian peasants went for the pie-in-the-sky promise—as did the Chinese peasants 30 years later.

But when, around 1929, Joseph Stalin launched the collectivization phase, he ran into trouble—trouble that has lasted to this day. He discovered that the peasant, once he had hold of his small plot, became a rugged individualist, a vigorous free enterpriser fiercely attached to the idea of reaping the profits of his own sweat and toil. Stalin found that the peasant powerfully resented being pressed into a collective pattern where the state scooped off the bulk of the profits, and indiscriminately distributed

GEORGI MALENKOV

what was left among the diligent and the lazy.

By killing the peasant's incentive the Communists also killed his will to work. The grimness of the resistance is suggested by the fact that the liquidation of 10,000,000 truculent peasants failed to change the attitudes of the other 100,000,000. They merely switched from active to passive resistance.

That's what ails Soviet agriculture. And the new bosses can cook up all manner of schemes for cultivating the Siberian badlands, and preach the glories of Marxism till kingdom come—but until they give the peasant back his incentive they'll go on having trouble. And they can't restore the incentives of free enterprise without blaspheming Marx and likewise surrendering their one means of exercising economic and political domination of the peasants. They have dug themselves into a very deep hole.

What has happened in Russia can reasonably be expected to happen in China where, following a similar prelude of mass bloodshed, collectivization is proceeding under forced draft. Indeed, the problem stands to become more acute in China, which has four times as many peasants as Russia and a far greater shortage of scientific and technical agricultural skill.

The prospect of desperate want overtaking one third of the earth's people offers no cause for jubilation. And there is the continuing hazard that the Red leaders may try to relieve the internal pressure by seeking an outside war.

There are, nevertheless, some ways in which the free world can exploit the Communist dilemma without violating humanitarian principle.

There is good reason, here, to intensify the bombardment of the iron curtain peoples with messages of truth and hope, and reassurances that the free world maintains its sense of kinship with those who wear Communist shackles.

And there is good reason for a fresh look at American policy in Asia.

Much has been said of the need to export know-how to Free Asia; certainly the Free Asians need the means to strengthen their econ-

GEORGI MALENKOV

omies and enlarge their understanding of democracy's dynamism as against Communism's physical and spiritual poverty.

But just as urgently, Americans need to gain know-how—the know-how to persuade these people that what we offer them is true and good and in their interest. This is a complex matter, but it will be far simpler if we grasp one basic fact: in dealing with Asians we are dealing not with chunks of geography or swarms of brown-skinned population units, but with people. They are emotional people, like the rest of us, and suspicious people with good historical grounds for suspicion. But they are also freedom-loving people like ourselves, full of pride and eager determination to be masters of their own destiny.

They are setting out on a very long road; they need to build their economies and living standards step by step. They need our guidance in laying strong foundations—schools, farming methods, health, leadership. But along with this, and inseparable from it, they need our faith and respect. As Delia and Ferdinand Kuhn say elsewhere in this issue: “. . . it is people—not dollars, not weapons, not good intentions—that will decide the issue. And the only people who can save Free Asia are the Asians themselves.”

The way to exploit Communist weakness is to build democratic strength; in Asia it must be built—with our sympathetic help—by Asians, with their own hands, in their own way.