

THE SOVIET "DICTATORSHIP"

By Anna Louise Strong, 1934¹

On my recent visit to America after three year's absence, I lectured all over the country on my twelve years in the Soviet Union. I was struck by an appreciable increase in would-be intelligent questions about dictatorship in government. "How can three million Communists rule one hundred and sixty million people?" is the simplest form that the question takes. It may be accompanied by envy of Communist shrewdness in putting it over, or by a sophisticated fling at Stalin - "just another Hitler!" It may show the superiority of the intellectual climber, aware that dictatorships are made today. Oftener it implies some aloofness of America, not to be caught in the nets of Europe. "Those backward Russians, those quarrelsome Europeans may need dictatorships; but we will make our changes democratically."

I have little doubt that if, and when, a Fascist dictatorship takes hold on Washington, it will write on its banner: "Back to Jeffersonian democracy," for Fascism always hails some ghost of ancient history with a passionate disregard of fact. As Mussolini revives the Roman Empire, and Hitler rules in the name of Germanic gods, and Japanese Fascists cry: "Back to Asia," so we may expect democracy as it fades to become even more vivid as a slogan.

Do we not even now observe that those patriots who are most convinced of America's democratic uniqueness, are the ones who yell most vociferously to Washington: "Let Congress get out of the way of the President"?

I shall not raise the obvious question whether one hundred and twenty million Americans are ruled today by three million or by a very much

smaller group. Nor shall I note how attempts to make deep social changes "democratically" have ended in recent years in Fascism, so that the last war may perhaps be called by future historians "the war that ended democracy in the world." I shall give no theoretic analysis of "dictatorship of the proletariat," since I count myself no authority on Marxism. I shall even avoid, when possible, the word "democracy," which to some connotes hypocritical farce and to others a mystical faith handed down by the Fathers, and has always ambiguous implications.

My task is simpler: I am neither economist nor historian, but a reporter living now my thirteenth year in the Soviet Union. I have lived and moved among the daily workings of a great dictatorship, which calls itself a "dictatorship of the proletariat" and which most of the world's would-be sophisticates call the dictatorship of Stalin.

And though every Open Forum in America has discussed dictatorship versus democracy thrice annually for the past three years, and every serious magazine has all but exhausted its readers with the subject, it has not, I think, exhausted the subject. The discussions I have heard have, in fact, hardly started the subject, for they set out with a singular avoidance of facts. They set out with a wish-fulfilment rather than with a search for information; and they usually put on one side Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini-all dictators, to be contrasted with democracy, actual or hoped for. They seek the flattering contrast of democracy with dictatorship in order to avoid the truer and more annoying contrast of the Soviet Union with the capitalist world.

¹ *The American Mercury*, October 1934 issue, pages 169-179. Online access: <http://www.unz.org/Pub/AmMercury-1934oct-00169>

But I am also indulging in theory; let me turn to the facts of my twelve years' experience. I think at once of the millions of ordinary folk giving time in the Soviet Union to the job of governing, on housing commissions, taxing commissions, social insurance commissions, investigating commissions of all varieties. I remember where "planning" starts, not in some Moscow "throne-room," but on winter evenings in the snow-bound rural village over the "plan" of the collective farm, or after working hours in "production conferences" of foundry hands and forge men. I think of the hundreds of new ideas in government and in economic administration that begin in a Ukrainian township or a Ural steel mill or a Central Asia cotton gin and that sweep the country through mass acceptance to universal adoption. I think of hundreds of men and women I have known in government offices, as factory managers, inspectors or judges rising steadily from the masses through years of voluntary government work in which millions take part, and always keeping in touch with some farm or factory through which they interpret and lead the will of the mass. I remember the proud words of a small official in Molvitino township: "Why should we ask Kostroma? Haven't we a Soviet Power of our own?" . . . and the testimony they bear to local initiative and rule.

I shall therefore content myself with concrete reporting on items of daily life in the Soviet Union, which show how our life here is governed, adding such personal interpretation as my twelve years have brought me. To know such facts is of vital importance for all serious people today. For

government by debate and vote-casting, which was a natural expression of the past centuries of trading capitalism, is proving inefficient in the intimate adjustments of today's more interdependent world. If anything of that self-expression and mass initiative which men have valued in the past under the term "democracy" is to survive in our industrial society, it must be in a form far more complexly organic. It must combine and organize the intimate varieties of a million wills more concretely and more fully than does either the parliamentary form derived from last century or the more medieval rule to which Hitler makes return. Does the Soviet Union offer advance in this direction?

II

Let us seize the sharper horn of the bull at once: that exiling in recent years of perhaps a million *kulaks* (the better-to-do peasants who exploited hired labor or tools of production)² from their rural homes in European Russia and Ukraine to Siberia and the Northern woods. Here was an act of ruthless dictatorship which caused in America wide comment, and is still the stock example of writers to illustrate the fanatic tyranny of the Soviet Power. What was the process? How was it carried on? The usual assumption outside the Soviet Union is that this exiling occurred through drastic action by a mystically omnipotent G.P.U. The actual process was quite different; it was done by village meetings of poor peasants and farm-hands³ which listed those *kulaks* who "impede our

² This definition is a major oversimplification. By the time article was written *kulaks* might've looked like "rich peasants who exploited hired labour", but their primary activity (during Russian Empire) was grain speculation and predatory lending. As a rule, *kulaks* were using their gangs (*podkulachniki*) to keep actual peasants under control – to prevent them from selling grain to anyone else or taking loans from other sources, for example. I.e. *kulaks* were rural organized crime of the Russian Empire that persisted well into Soviet time.

³ The actual procedure was a bit more complicated. Initial lists of candidates for "*dekulakization*" were sent to be reviewed (to add or remove candidates) to local Party/Komsomol groups, and only then the lists were discussed among the local "poor peasant and farm-hands". After this a closed meeting of Village Council was held – to ensure that actual *kulaks* are not left out nor simply rich peasants did not get nominated due to someone's envy. And it was after this final third review list was sent back to regional center, from where militia squads and volunteers were dispatched to keep watch over the suspected *kulaks* while councils conducted formal investigation and decided if suspects were indeed *kulaks*. This procedure was made as secret and as speedy (no longer than 2 days) as possible, to avoid potential retaliation from *kulaks* and their gangs of *podkulachniki*, or even potential hijacking of *dekulakization* – it was hardly unusual for *kulaks* to take over local Village Council or even ruling body of *kolkhoz*.

collective farm by force and violence” and asked the government to deport them. In the hot days of 1930 I attended many of these meetings. There were harsh, bitter discussions, analyzing one by one the “best families,” which had grabbed the best lands, exploited labor by owning the tools of production, as “best families” normally and historically do, and who were now fighting the rise of the collective farms by arson, cattle-killing and murder. Meetings of poor peasants and farm-hands discussed them, questioned them, passed on them, allowing some to remain but listing others as “dangerous to our peaceful development, - should be deported from our village.”

The meetings I personally attended were more seriously judicial, more balanced in their discussion than any court-trial I have attended in America; these peasants knew they were dealing with serious punishments and did not handle them lightly. But if, as some claim, there were often meetings which were swayed by “outside agitators,” or where personal hates were rampant, this would hardly alter the case; these are everywhere to be found in popular meetings. But those who envisage that the rural revolution which ended in farm collectivization was a “war between Stalin and the peasants,” simply weren’t on the ground when the whirlwind broke. The anarchy of an elemental upheaval was its chief characteristic; it was marked by great ecstasies and terrors; local leaders in village, township and province did what was right in their own eyes and passionately defended their convictions; Moscow studied and participated in the local earthquakes, and out of the mass experience made, somewhat too late to save the livestock, general laws for its direction.

It was a harsh, bitter and by no means bloodless conflict. I was reminded of it again when I saw the farm laborers’ struggle in the valleys of Southern California in the autumn of 1933. There were the same graduations from half-starved farmhand to wealthy rancher, though the extremes in California were wider. In each case deportations occurred with the

sanction of the state. California authorities deported pickets who interfered with the farming of private ranchers; Soviet authorities deported *kulaks* who interfered with the collectively owned farms of poor peasants and laborers. In proportion to the number engaged, there were more shootings in California. In both cases the central government sent investigating commissions, moderating and therewith sanctioning the local actions. The Governor’s commission in California threw out a few of the more untenable cases against strikers, while township and provincial commissions in the USSR reviewed and cut down the lists of *kulaks* for exile, to guard against local excesses. But the active winning will which could count on government backing was in California the will of wealthy ranchers and financing corporations; in the USSR it was the will of organized farm-hands. That, in its simplest essence, is “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

It by no means follows that dictatorship by a proletariat, or by a populace or by any organized combination of masses, or even “dictatorship by a majority,” is any less tyrannical in the limits imposed on the life of an individual than is the mandate of a czar. It is even more tyrannical for those individuals who cannot identify themselves with the ruling will, for a czar can be bribed, persuaded or “reached” through ministers, but it is difficult to bribe the masses unless you have exceptional talent. To take an example from a non-controversial field, I note what are so aptly called “dictates” of fashion, as an example of mass dictatorship far more ruthlessly prescribing details of individual dressing than sumptuary laws of a medieval autocrat would dare do.

It does not even follow that dictatorship “of the proletariat” means freedom for the individual who is a “worker.” Ask any worker who ever belonged to a trade union what freedom he has to work when his union votes to strike. The dictatorship of his organization may compel his wife and children to hunger; yet he courts violence if he seeks to feed them. Nor are strikes invariably called by the will of the majority of

workers, whatever the constitution may say. They are called by the majority of those who go to meetings, under influence of their leaders—a very different thing. Such is the way the Soviet Union is governed: by the will of all persons engaged in production who are interested enough to come to meetings and work actively for what they want. It is at once more dynamic and more organic than any counting of hands or ballots.

It is no valid criticism of the Soviet government to say that more people suffer under its regulations than under the laws that are passed in Washington. Washington, until the days of Roosevelt, hardly intervened in individuals' lives at all. How much freedom is allowed to the individual workman by Henry Ford, to the individual business man by the chain store, to the individual banker by Morgan? How much freedom is allowed to the average American by the combined net work of his boss, his banker, the stores where he trades, the laws of his country and the habits of his neighbors? Combine all these forces, let them operate in one direction by a common plan, and you have the amount of latitude allowed to the individual in the land of the Soviets.

I often wonder whether any person who has grown to adulthood, as I did, in that period of competitive capitalism in America when it was possible to choose between conflicting masters and thus gain the illusion of freedom, can ever completely fit into the life of the Soviet Union. I speak as one who suffers under dictatorship, who resents the censoring of my articles⁴ to a gray monotone, for I was born to the anarchic freedom of the western pioneer. Yet that anarchic freedom is doomed in any case, whether through Socialism controlled by the masses, or through monopoly capitalism, controlled by the few. There remains for us all but one free choice, one last and final choice of masters. If I have in part succeeded in adjusting myself to the dictatorship of the Soviet

Union, where so many good “friends of the Soviets” have failed, it is because of my three years' experience of trade union life in Seattle, in the old, and justly denounced, American Federation of Labor.

With all its shortcomings, that trade union experience taught me, what most American liberals and radicals never learn, that the will of the group you choose may smash your individual preference in the intimate desires of your life, and you must obey. In compensation therefor you can be part of a mighty organizing power that makes history; you can share and help create a collective will that is strong and free.

This is the only freedom permitted in the Soviet Union; to some it seems oppression, to others it seems incredibly spacious liberty, heretofore unknown in the world.

III

How wide is the actual participation of masses in the apparatus of government in the USSR? Whence come the ideas that are finally expressed and followed in the life of the land? What initiative, what creative energy is allowed? Who correlates and chooses between the many ideas? Who rises to high posts and by what means? Let us consider these questions in the Soviet Union, in determining what kind of dictatorship it is.

Before one can decide how many citizens participate in governing, one must know what the government is, and what it is supposed to do. This is by no means simple; I do not know, I do not think anyone knows, what the government in Washington claims as its function. Is it the government's job to get prosperity for its citizens? Or merely to police the dog-eat-dog fight of rival industries? Is it the government's job to get work for all who need it? Or merely to arrest

⁴ Apparently, it refers to demands to refrain from politicizing newspaper she was co-editor of – “Moscow Daily News” – with pro-Soviet and anti-Capitalist articles, and to focus instead on explaining the benefits of cooperation between USSR and USA, so as to support foreign investments into Soviet economy (source: “*Precious Fire: Maud Russell and the Chinese Revolution*”, by Karen Garner 2009 – NB: page number?).

the unemployed who become clamorous? Who am I to decide among the cloud of witnesses?

Yet there is one thing on which all conflicting witnesses agree—that the government in Washington does not exist to run any kind of profitable enterprise. At the mere suspicion of anything so “un-American” as an industry run by the state for profit, all sides at once raise up protesting hands. They may differ as to whether NIRA is useful or destructive, whether Civil Works should be continued or abolished, whether four or eight billion is the sum of public money to spend for the sublime purpose of starting the “wheels of private industry” again. But that this last is the sacred goal which hallows all the sacrifice – to start the wheels of private industry so that businessmen may again make profit – everybody agrees. Whether by acts of commission or acts of omission, this is the ultimate aim of Washington.

The function and aim of the Soviet government is just the opposite. The expansion of publicly owned properties through profitable operation until all production and distribution is publicly owned, and their improvement to supply a high standard of living and a well-rounded life for all citizens – is the first and fundamental task of the state in the USSR. This incidentally explains its “one-party system,” its “dictatorship.” Here is no parliament, adjudicating between rival private owners, between steel mills of Birmingham and textile mills of Lancashire. Here is rather a board of directors possessed of the mines and mills of the country, with one chief task, to organize and operate them well. The bulk of legislation which clogs the parliaments of the world disappears under these conditions; problems of management arise to replace it, on which any man may speak as loudly as he chooses, but to which action rather than speaking, is the approved approach.

This first essential task of government – the management and improvement of publicly owned properties – starts at the factory bench and in the “brigade meeting” of the farm.

A perfect snapshot of the Soviet proletariat caught in the act of “dictating” appears in a recent letter on an inside page of *Pravda* signed by three railway workers from the Vspolia railway station on the Northern Railway. They recount how the Seezeran station of the Kazan Railway was recently lauded by a whole page in the railwaymen’s daily paper, the *Whistle*, and how the chief of locomotive service of the Kazan Railway, Nazarov, also issued a report filled with the virtues of Seezeran as a model station worth copying by all transport workers.

“Becoming acquainted with the reputation of Seezeran through these articles in the *Whistle*, continues the letter, “the workers of Vspolia station decided to send a brigade to Seezeran to study its experience. The election fell on us. On reaching Seezeran we found that twenty other brigades with a similar purpose had preceded us from various parts of the country. This confirmed our impression of the importance of Seezeran. However, to our great regret, the more we studied, the more we convinced ourselves that Seezeran cannot be used as model.”

The three workers from Vspolia then expose the fictitious bookkeeping that gave Seezeran its reputation. Falling into conversation with an engineer named Sednin, they learn that he received his locomotive from the repair shops, took it on a run and discovered four unrepaired defects; but the station master ordered him to enter these as “new repairs” instead of “repeats,” in order to protect the reputation of the repair shops. When Sednin persisted in reporting the “repeats,” he was demoted to a worse engine. The Vspolia “brigade” discovers that many locomotives are sent out from the repair shops defective, and that if the “repeats” were properly listed, there would be hundreds per month instead of the “model figure” of nine.

Further investigation shows that in order to give a low percentage of “sick” locomotives, they are “written out” of the repair shop two days before they are actually fit for service; and that in order to get a high production rate per man, the

number of employés is given as 1,290 when it was actually 1,585 in April and 1,595 in May, the two months under observation. The letter conscientiously notes "excellent work" of the coal bunkers, but "certainly Seezeran as a whole cannot serve as a model for our railroads."

This letter, which will have far-reaching effects in investigations and demotions, and in reprimands as high up as chief of locomotive service, Nazarov, for basing a report on incorrect data, is such a normal daily process in the USSR that the *Pravda* readers will not even notice those aspects of it which must strike an American as amazing. Imagine workers in a small railway junction of the Erie reading in a daily newspaper devoted to railwaymen that a certain station on the Pennsylvania is a model; imagine them electing a delegation to go and study it with a view to improving their own station. If this can perhaps be imagined, then assume still further that all the bookkeeping inside the Pennsylvania repair shop is open to these visitors from the Erie and to twenty delegations from other roads on similar errands. Note, finally, that when these workers find defects in an alien railway station, they do not go home and gloat over the inadequacy of their rival, but give time to investigate and draw up a public report, which censures a chief of locomotive service, not for wages, hours or conditions or work, which might conceivably be the province of workers, but for inaccuracy in reporting production.

That is a typical photograph of Soviet workers in the act of managing their common properties. On acts like this is based the whole of the Five Year Plan which startled the world. The "plan" takes form in workers' conferences, known as "production meetings," which all workers in any given shop are urged to attend and which the more active ones do. They discuss problems of production, how output can be increased for the coming year, what raw materials, machines and skilled labor are needed to that end. Their discussions are enlarged on a factory scale; they go from the factory to the central offices of a trust. The trust replies that the country needs certain

new machines, and asks the workers whether these can be made in their plant to avoid import from abroad. There follow workers' suggestions, new inventions, adaptations of the plan. Delegates from other industries which need the machines arrive to explain and consult.

The biggest industrial plants, producing equipment on which the rest of the country depends, become naturally the "political centers" around which smaller groups of workers coalesce. I can pick them out in Moscow: the Electric Works, Auto Works, Ball-bearing Works, Aviation Works, and a score of others; they are centers of government and power. When any new problem confronts the nation, from the organization of harvest transport to the expansion of industry into the Far East, these big "political centers" send forth chosen "brigades" of half a dozen to several score workmen, for temporary or permanent new assignments. They become "patrons" of struggling collective farms, and teach them bookkeeping or division of labor. From their experience arise new ideas and policies for the nation; and before any new policy is considered, wide sampling of workers' opinions takes place in these political centers throughout the land. When the new policy is carried into being, these workers and others organized around them become the active force for putting it over.

IV

Political life in rural districts starts with the organization and use of the soil. Sixty or a hundred peasants in council – the collective farm of a small village – meet with a representative of the township land department to draw up their "farm plan." They take account of number of households, of people, of horses, ploughs, tractors, the extent and type of the land. I have seen these "plans" – they cover twenty-four large sheets of typed questionnaire, including the little community's food and fodder needs, the past crop rotations, the marketable crop demanded by the state. The sixty peasants in council, meeting again

and again through the winter, decide by what concrete means they will arrange their fields for all these purposes; and how they will expand in coming years. The “plan”, registered with the force of law in the township center, becomes the basis on which county-wide, nation-wide farm plans are based. From this simple economic foundation all other government tasks in the USSR begin. Taxing commissions, housing commissions, social insurance commissions, sanitary commissions, complaint commissions – in all these tasks of execution and checking, wide masses take part. They are carried on literally by the unpaid voluntary labor of millions of citizens, served by the secretarial work of a much smaller number of full-time officials. They call it “doing social work;” every worker and office employé is urged to do it; factories and offices pride themselves on the proportion of their staff which takes voluntary part in public affairs. Frequently it runs to 70 or 90% of the total number of workers. Driving along a country road fifty miles from a railway I see four women on a shady bench poring over a ledger; – a rural tax commission revaluing village property for report to the village meeting. A few miles further is a district court, holding traveling session under the trees; it has drawn in local peasants to serve as co-judges. When Moscow decrees a passport system and opens scores of offices for listing and investigating, the work is largely done by volunteer “brigades” of teachers, office workers, factory workers, women on old-age pensions emerging to do their bit in government. In a Stalingrad tractor plant, American workers were induced by the urging of the Russians to become members of the City Soviet, that the needs of three hundred Americans working there might be expressed. All minority groups of workers are given special attention, that every shade of desire and knowledge may combine in the “common will.” But they must combine and not compete; they must add their bit to a common program, not propose diverging programs.

Whence come new ideas in the country’s life? The hundreds of new methods annually adopted

in industry, farming and political organization spring from no central genius in Moscow, but from the hot experience of a million local men. Every day in the year Moscow newspapers carry at least twenty new ideas sent by peasants, workers, engineers, reporters; *Pravda* and *Izvestia* each have at least sixty to eighty full-time correspondents scouring the country for “success stories” of good methods; those which appeal to the far-flung readers spread rapidly through the land. The *Whistle*, organ of railway workers, issues a special “card service” of new ideas in the railway service, each of which has originated locally and been tested by groups of workers and engineers; there are many thousands of these cards, each of them subscribed for by thousands of railway workers. “Socialist competitions” thus started locally and developed across the country into a hundred forms of mutual stimulation of labor. Thus also began, last autumn in the Caucasus, the plan of organizing the old men of the collective farms, who had hitherto been rather left out, as “inspectors of quality”; within three months it was a nation-wide policy.

Practically all new government officials arise from the men and women who have already served long apprenticeship in unpaid “social work.” Gribkova springs to mind, an energetic woman who is chief of Workers and Peasants Inspection in a township. Twelve years ago Gribkova was an illiterate farmhand, who wished to “better herself,” and got a job as longshoreman loading boats on the Volga. Thus she entered the public services where, in her own words, “the road lay open to all life.” Working her way downstream she got a job as unskilled worker in a textile mill, which like all Soviet factories, was a center of education, political life and advancement. She learned to read and write; took technical courses and began to handle a machine, took political courses and became an “active one” in her factory. From this point her rise was possible in two directions; through technical training to high posts in industry, or through political training to posts in government. Gribkova chose the latter; she worked on

workers' investigating committees till she became proficient in this task, and was chosen by her fellow workers as part of their "quota" for a two-year course to prepare needed factory inspectors. She is now a full-time official.

This is the normal path to political office in the USSR. But if Gribkova is wise, even after she becomes a full-time official, she will keep up close connection with her factory group. There is no hard and fast line between full-time officials and the millions who do part-time government work. A textile worker, by showing efficiency in the factory day nursery supervision, may become assistant chief of the city's Motherhood and Infancy Bureau without leaving her loom. A man whose financial ability is practised as dues collector for his union may rise to part-time work as assistant chief of the city taxes while continuing his other job. Even if "freed from production" for full-time public service, he may return to his factory as teacher in bookkeeping two nights a week in the factory school.

This doubling of factory toil with government posts is not caused merely by shortage of skilled personnel; it is a conscious policy of keeping close connection between workers and government. Workers who take no part in government work are considered lazy and backward, and are subjected to frequent campaigns to "draw them into the tasks of governing." On the other hand, government officials who do no work in factory or farm organizations soon lose caste as "alien to the masses." These are the every-day relations of proletarian dictatorship.

V

To correlate and guide this widely scattered initiative of the masses and to carry it forward in the direction fixed by the October Revolution, is the function of the Communist Party, which is not "three million people ruling" a recalcitrant hundred and sixty million, as often pictured abroad. It is rather the most energetic part of that hundred and sixty million, who give their full time

to the public tasks of creating a new social and economic system, considering this the continuing purpose of their lives. That the party has its share of "yes-men" and careerists is merely saying that it is composed of human beings. But efforts are constantly made to improve the quality of membership and to keep them closer to the masses. Applicants who are engaged in intellectual or office work are commonly required to spend two years doing regular "social work" in some factory, before even making application for membership in the party. The view of the workers in that factory is taken regarding their "capacity to interpret and lead the masses," which is supposed to be the function of party members.

Every Communist is expected to give considerable time outside his job to routine "party work," in some of the multitudinous tasks of organizing masses in industry and government. He is subject to "mobilization" to be sent far from home and friends in order that some new factory or distant province may have a good quota of "experienced party men" to lead the workers in the direction fixed by the "party line."

For it is not enough to interpret the will of the masses as a ballot might or a showing of hands. The will even of one man varies; it may be stirred to high endeavor or relax to drift the easy way. The will of masses also varies, depending on their leaders. They cannot be led consciously against their own interests; but they can be led to endure severe hardship, make heavy sacrifices if the result in some future good is clearly shown. Certainly no group of unurged soldiers would ever vote to storm a trench; and certainly the workers and peasants of the USSR would not have voted unurged, unled, for the hardships of the Five Year Plan taken out of their own food and comforts, and for the painful speed of collectivization without adequate machines or organizers. But when the Communist Party analyzed, urged and demanded, showing the world situation and the need of making the USSR self-sufficient, showing the goal of a Socialist state and the hard road to its achievement, they were able to find, organize and create, deep in the heart

of the masses, a will that carried through. Without that will in the tens of millions, the three million could have done little.

I recall the Communist organization that carried through the sowing in Molvitino township, some five hundred miles' northeast of Moscow, a backward folk on poor soil. There were 317 Communists and 450 Young Communists⁵ in a population of 55,000, widely scattered through more than a hundred hamlets. Every one of these party members had his task in supervising and stimulating the sowing which he did outside his regular job. One night at two in the morning I went with the township banker to his assignment in a small collective farm of twenty families. We trudged three miles over hills and swamps and reached the village as dawn was graying. The banker checked their sowing record, made suggestions on their bookkeeping, gave them the news of how the rest of the township was sowing, discussed with them minor problems of organization while he walked beside them in the fields. He was back in the town at 6 A. M., rested till the branch of the State Bank of which he was local manager, opened at nine, and was back again on "party work" that evening, checking up a different farm. Every other party member in Molvitino did similar work in the sowing.

When Molvitino township won the banner in Ivanovo province as first in sowing, the party secretary Krotov told me the secret of their success. "First, we keep up the quality of our party members; if a Communist isn't known by his work, we clean⁶ him out quickly. The second help was our organizational plan, keeping day and night in touch with every farm during the sowing. ... That's the real secret, the mass believes us, believes us without limit! Look what we did with the early sowing and the extra-early! Straight against century-old tradition we went. We said: plant three weeks earlier than before; plant on the mud of melting snow. And the masses,

worried, wavering, believed us and planted. Already they see the shoots."

Not by accident does Stalin guide from the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party, rather than from any governmental office. For the work of the party is wider and greater than that of government; to run the state is but one of its many tasks. Part of its members, surrounded by and leading much larger numbers of non-party workers, are used to run the state. Another part, similarly aided by non-party workers, runs the great trade unions with more than twenty million members. Others guide the collective farms, which are economic organizations of peasants, in no sense governmental, yet kept in line with "party policy." Other party members correlate the work of nation-wide cooperatives, or the "Friends of Children," or the "Automobile Society," or the score of voluntary organizations which are not at all governmental.

The legend persists outside the Soviet Union that we who live here are quite thoroughly regimented by an all-powerful state. Actually, one hears much less of the state than of the "line of the party," which plans beyond the state. In these past twelve years I have seen the forms of the state changed often, administrative districts expanded, contracted, new government departments added, combined or abolished, new functions given to the state or taken away and given to trade unions or cooperatives.

The state today, in most of our common thought, is chiefly Litvinoff's foreign policy and Voroshiloff's army, both of which have the task of protecting our peace to build. In internal affairs the state remains as the concentration of our finance, the correlation of our industry, farming and transport, a very flexible instrument, rather than an end or a power.

The function of Stalin has no parallel in America or in any government, for he is not a

⁵ "Communists" refer to Party members, while "Young Communists" are *Komsomoltsy*, members of VLKSM or *Komsomol* – youth division of the Party (14-28 years).

⁶ While "cleaning" is the correct translation from Russian, the process of removing party or state functionaries from their posts by the will of the collective historically is translated into English as "purge".

government official at all. In no sense is he a “ruler,” giving “orders”. He is the chief analyst of the “party line” which takes precedence of all concrete laws and orders. Though he is cheered at all congresses, whether of government, trade unions or farms, yet those who cheer him never inquire what is “Stalin’s will?” They inquire what is Stalin’s analysis of the world situation, his summing up of the important next steps.

“We have several good comrades who could run the government of the Soviet Union,” said a responsible Communist to me. “We have others who can run the whole net-work of industries, and others who can manage trade unions. But we have no one who can interpret so matchlessly as Stalin has done in the last two party congresses, the place of the USSR in the whole changing scheme of World Revolution, and exactly what weight must be given to each aspect of our daily struggle. This is Stalin’s contribution; it is the highest function in our country.”

The Soviet Union is the one country in the world where the function of analyst and prophet ranks highest.

Men in the Soviet Union speak of Stalin’s “authority,” but not of Stalin’s “power.” “Power” resides in the will of working masses; “authority” is that prestige of ability and knowledge which enables a man to interpret and create collective will. If Stalin should die tomorrow; if a thousand of the highest men in the Soviet Union should be blown up by dynamite in a single hour, the “Soviet Power” would be unchanged either in policy, method or the rate of its motion. There would be a serious change in quality of work from the loss of these efficient people; but the “power” of the masses would put forth new leaders to interpret it’s will.

In all the great processions that storm the Red Square in Moscow, it is Stalin with the other chiefs of party and state who stand in the high tribune to

receive the salutes of the marchers. But once in my twelve years in the USSR I have seen Stalin himself march in procession, paying tribute by salute to power above his own. Certainly he would not thus salute any branch of the Soviet state, for the party is above the state which it leads. Still less would he march in salute to any representative of capitalist power, which he considers it the party’s task to supersede.

But on the day when Moscow welcomed back the heroes of the *Chelushkin*⁷ and the aviators who saved them, Stalin and the chiefs of party and state strode through the Red Square beneath them, with hands raised in tribute. Those snow-burned men and women in working garb represented the heroic, collective will of Soviet workers conquering the yet-unconquered North. These shall outlast all states and classes and all political guidance, into that day when men of forge and farm, of laboratories and ships, cooperating through technical, social and economic relations, go forward with science to dominate the world.

⁷ Misspelled *Chelyuskin* – Soviet cargo ship that attempted to navigate the Northern Route (across the Arctic, from Atlantic to Pacific) in a single season so as to ascertain the possibility of non-icebreakers using it. The attempt was essentially successful, but ship still got caught in the ice near Bering straits (Sep, 1933) and was eventually crushed and sunk there (Feb, 1934). Crew was evacuated by air (March-April, 1934), and the pilots were the first to be awarded with the title of Heroes of the Soviet Union.