SHAW ON STALIN

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TWOPENCE

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Shaw on Stalin

ON the 31st of May a letter from Bernard Shaw appeared in the New Statesman and was reproduced with some variations in the Hearst newspapers in the U.S.A., besides being quoted extensively in the American Press generally.

The occasion of the letter was a criticism by the editor of the N.S. of Mr. Shaw's political attitude as unaccountably favourable to Stalin.

What Price Stalin?

SIR,—Stalin is mischievously and dangerously underrated by us. At present we are either reviling him as a bloodstained monster whose sole occupation and delight is the shooting of his political opponents, or assuming that his diplomacy, like that of our own Foreign Office, is concerned solely with the ambitions, rivalries, and cupidities of the seventeenth and eighteenth century dynasties.

Stalin's eminence rests on his solution of two big problems. Confronted with the orthodox theory that Socialism is impossible in a single State surrounded by capitalist States, and that "the revolution" must be international, he decided to try, and established Single State Socialism in the teeth of the Trotsky opposition.

The second was the agricultural problem, which our chosen faineant Prime Ministers failed so dangerously to solve. Stalin solved it by collective farming. Meanwhile he was nursing industrial Socialism on a scale which was founding new cities

and colonies in two continents much faster than we can get a private bill through Parliament for a new tramline. We could not even put a bridge across the Severn whilst he was irrigating deserts and digging two or three Severns. What other statesman now in power has a hundredth part of his achievement to boast of?

My statement that he was neither Chancellor nor Fuhrer nor Duce nor anything but secretary to the Russian Politbureau or Thinking Cabinet (a very necessary State organ inconceivable in this fatheaded country) was perhaps inexact; for it may be that in Russia as in England a secretary is entitled to a month's notice instead of five miautes; but this does not matter now that Stalin is Prime Minister and can be sacked at a moment's notice as Neville Chamberlain was. He has no hold except that of being the best man for the job.

As to his being afraid of the Fuhrer and the German army, how can that be maintained in the face of the fact that he is the only ruler in the world who has acted in every military crisis as if the German army and its present owner did not exist? What evidence is there that he asked Herr Hitler's leave before he resumed White Russia, changed the Russo-Finnish frontier, and gathered in the Baltic provinces? Is it suggested that these operations were pleasing to the Fuhrer. Or that he would not have prevented them had he dared to tackle the Red army?

Obviously, what Stalin is afaid of is not military defeat but war as such. In a socialised country war is a nuisance and a mischief to everybody. To turn from the marvellous welfare work of building a new civilisation in Asiatic Russia and bringing European Russia up to date to pure destruction, mischief, and devilment, is the worst that Stalin has to fear; and naturally he will go to the utmost limit of prudence to avoid it. But we cannot understand this, because with us war means glory, patriotic heroism, colossal profits, and, at the back of it all, the restoration of the interest on gilt edged to the old five per cent. We throw millions of capital into the fire of war exactly as we threw fishes back into the sea or tons of wheat or coffee into the kiln to keep up the scarcity value of the rest. Under such

circumstances we cannot understand a Communist statesman whose object and interest it is to cheapen capital and avoid war as an intolerable plague. Nevertheless, if the U.S.S.R. is forced to fight, I pity its adversaries.

What Stalin has not feared to face is a general election in each of his four new Baltic republics, with adult suffrage and secret ballot. We dare not venture even on a free vote in the House of Commons.

I am acutely aware of the risk of praising a statesman before he is dead; but the extent to which we are duping and doping ourselves by reckless abuse of Stalin just as we used to in the cases of Voltaire and Washington is too dangerous to be let pass.

G. BERNARD SHAW.

The editor's comment was as follows:—

[We agree with Mr. Shaw that if Stalin succeeded in keeping the Soviet Union out of war while the rest of the world reduced itself to ruins, he would certainly be acclaimed by history as the first statesman of this age. We should add that in a world reverting to dictatorship, rulers will be judged not by the standards of the nineteenth century, but by those we are accustomed to apply when discussing Charlemagne or perhaps Henry VIII. But to deny that Stalin is a dictator makes nonsense of this realistic defence. If Mr. Shaw is not convinced by the recorded facts that Stalin cannot be sacked by anything short of assassination, then he would not be convinced even though all those who had attempted to challenge his position were to rise from the dead. To say that Stalin behaves as " if the German army and its present owner did not exist " is arrant nonsense; it also greatly under-estimates Stalin's abilities. The whole trend of Stalin's recent policy shows that in spite of the very great military force at his disposal, he has a very lively and intelligent fear of war with Germany. To quote only two recent instances: Stalin has allowed his most energetic and trusting followers in Bulgaria to be passed over to the Nazis, and has preferred to let the Dardanelles and his Turkish alliance

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go by the board rather than to risk a quarrel with the Fuhrer. This may well be wise policy; it certainly displays a prudent respect for German power.—Ed. N. S. & N.]

To this Mr. Shaw replied briefly:—

Sir,—May I have additional space for just a scrap more of my "arrant nonsense"?

Is it quite clear that Stalin has "let his Turkish alliance go by the board" with the Dardanelles? Why should he object to the Germans passing through the Dardanelles into the Black Sea? Would not Russia and Turkey then have them on the spot? Should not our navy do its best to drive them into the trap out of the Mediterranean?

I grant you Stalin's "very lively and intelligent fear of war," which I am lively and intelligent enough to share; but I again urge that this is something entirely different from a specific fear of defeat by Germany in the event of war. Russia's resumption of White Russia and the Baltic Provinces in the teeth of the Fuhrer are facts that winna ding.

I grant you also that Stalin "cannot be sacked by anything short of assassination." But as the same is true of Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, your money is on, both ways.

Thus far Mr. Shaw in the New Statesman. But the version of his first letter in the Hearst papers in America ends as follows.

What Stalin has not feared to face is a general election in each of his four new Baltic Republics, with adult suffrage, secret ballot, and all possible democratic facilities and safeguards. The results were more overwhelmingly in favour of the change than Mr. Roosevelt's compulsory referendum on the war this year. Both statesmen need watch one another closely; for the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. are the only great republican federations in the world, and the balance of power is in their hands. If they quarrel the danger to civilisation will be ten times greater than from the Fuhrer's dream of world domination.

Mr. Roosevelt has just made a speech for which all the

nations waited breathless. It was, of course, a big speech: the President knows that part of his job thoroughly. But it contained only two words that might not have been uttered a hundred years ago; and these two ("collective bargaining") were invented by the British Socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb. It was pre-Marxian, and might almost have been delivered by Tom Paine. Stalin is up-to-date, and always full of commonsense and modern experience. He is post-Marxian; and the difference secures his eminence. He has been through the difficulties that await Mr. Roosevelt and are not foreseen by him. So much the better perhaps; for, as Cromwell said, the man who does not see whither he is going goes farthest.

A century and a half ago American fundamentalists talked mischievous nonsense about Voltaire and Rousseau. Some of them do so still. We had better not make the same mistake about Lenin and Stalin. We have much to learn from them; for they have made all the mistakes that we are going to make unless we carefully study the remedies they have found for them. There is nothing in the American constitution that is not in the Russian one; but there are one or two clauses in the Russian that are not in the American; and on these it is the American one that is out of date. It has been patched too often to be quite presentable nowadays.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shaw had found able support in a letter signed Student of Affairs, which is so important that we must quote it in full. Its publication in the "New Statesman" is a conspicuous example of the editor's fairness under the circumstances.*

Sir,—So Stalin is frightened of the German Army, is he?

From 1936 to 1938 Soviet help went to Spain, bursting through the German, Italian, French and British blockade, with the certainty that the French and British and American Governments would eagerly sell arms to

*We print the full text, which was a little cut by the "New Statesman and Nation" for reasons of space.

Germany and oil to Japan if these two States attacked the U.S.S.R. From 1937 onwards the Soviet Union has been helping China—far more than Britain and the U.S.A. combined—in the teeth of British and United States help to Japan: again knowing that the latter would be redoubled if Japan and Germany attacked it. In 1938, before Munich, the Soviet Union offered to help Czechoslovakia single-handed if required: with the full certainty that Messrs. Chamberlain and Daladier would then gladly sell arms to Germany.

But Stalin, of course, is afraid of the German army.

On two occasions during the last two years Hitler has had the choice of attacking the U.S.S.R., with the certainty that the grateful blessings of the British ruling class would attend upon his adventure. One was in September, 1939, when he found that Mr. Chamberlain would declare war if he attacked Poland. The other was in July, 1940, when France was knocked out and the outlook for Great Britain looked grim. Yet Hitler deliberately chose the west on both occasions. In 1935 he had told Lord Londonderry why: it was Soviet tanks, aeroplanes and infantry he didn't like.

But Stalin is afraid of the German army.

In September, 1939, the Germans had advanced almost to the Ukrainian frontier before the Soviet troops crossed it, and the Germans in places had to fall back hurriedly for a hundred miles. In September, 1940, the German Government had made all arrangements for an Axis-controlled Danube Commission: but suddenly the Axis delegates had to make room for another at the table —and for Soviet gunboats and seaplanes along the final stretch to the Black Sea. In November, 1940, the U.S.S.R. offered Bulgaria a pact of mutual assistance, which would have implied war with anyone who attacked Bulgaria thereafter (the pact was rejected because, like many others, the ruling class of Bulgaria preferred to risk the extermination

of its people rather than the possible extinction of its class privileges). In March, 1941, the U.S.S.R. (though having no alliance whatsoever with Turkey) gave the pledge of "complete understanding," as well as neutrality, should she be forced to fight in defence of her own territory.

Yet Stalin is terribly afraid of—oh, chuck it!

The fact is, that once again the game of alternate prophecies about German-Soviet relations is being played, with which the good people of Great Britain have been beguiled since the outbreak of war. It would cost the Royal Institute of International Affairs many hours of research to compile a list of occasions on which Hitler was just on the point of making a grand attack on the U.S.S.R., or the U.S.S.R. was just on the point of signing some final, terrific, overwhelming and grandiose alliance with Hitler. The rabbit never came out of the hat, but the diplomatic correspondents went on juggling, and it continued to escape the notice of the bewildered people that the British Government had condemned it to the role of a perpetual spectator—for fear that intervention as an actor would bring the British people (God knows, perhaps the Indians, too) into undesirable contact with those Russians.

"Why do the British behave like imbeciles in their relations with us?" ask Soviet citizens, knowing that their Government pursues an absolutely independent policy and has made innumerable efforts to improve relations with Great Britain: believing, too, with Molotov, in their innocence, that "the art of politics in the sphere of foreign relations does not consist in increasing the number of enemies for one's country." More particularly if you have a war of some magnitude on your hands. And if the British Government, on the contrary, seizes the occasion of that war to give masterly demonstrations of how to make more enemies, what possible explanation can the Soviet citizens give one another, except that the British ruling class hates the U.S.S.R. far more than it hates Ger-

many—with which it has, alas, to fight only because Hitler, by some perverse error, took the wrong turning ?

For these are the facts. At the end of September, 1939, the U.S.S.R. was asked, would it resume trade negotiations with Great Britain. It said yes. So the British Press spent a month inciting the Baltic States, Turkey and Finland not to sign pacts of mutual assistance with the U.S.S.R., and then the British Government offered to open negotiations. Naturally, the U.S.S.R. as good as told it to go to the classic monkey. In February, 1940, asked if it would accept mediation in the Finnish War, the U.S.S.R. said yes. Would Great Britain oblige? So, of course, Lord Halifax refused. In March, 1940, the Soviet Government was asked again if it would like trade negotiations. It said yes. So the British Government thought up the famous mare's nest of alleged Soviet re-exports to Germany, which held things up nicely for two months; and when that fell through, was getting on very comfortably with a demand that the U.S.S.R. should reveal which of its own goods it was exporting to Germany, when Mr. Chamberlain resigned, and Mr. Churchill reigned in his stead.

Never say die. One gesture had to be made: Sir Stafford Cripps, with some effort, was got away to Moscow, and within three weeks had had a long and frank talk with Stalin (July 1) and begun trade talks with Mikoyan. But all was well: On July 18 the Burma Road was closed, without consulting the U.S.S.R., which was China's best friend, sending its goods over that road. Then another heaven-sent opportunity: the Baltic Parliaments, elected by universal suffrage, proclaimed their countries Soviet Republics and joined the U.S.S.R. What an issue—recognition of sovereignty, seizure of gold, "freezing" of ships—to hold up Anglo-Soviet relations to all eternity! And when a new effort is made, in October, to talk trade **contingent** upon the Baltic questions being settled, who more deft, more timely than the Ministry of Shipping, to requisition 23 Baltic ships in British ports, and thus start the game all over again?

We may in mercy pass over the famous "offer" which the Soviet Government have charitably not replied to—since it would have had to reply politely to a promise to reopen the question of the Baltic States' legal status at the future Peace Conference.

"Are you suggesting, then, that the U.S.S.R. would come in on our side if we were less tough with them?" ask a thousand eager voices.

No, I am not. All I am suggesting is that, if the British Government showed as much concern and effort in clearing away obstacles to Anglo-Soviet friendship as it displayed, in the brave days of yore, in kowtowing to Hitler and Mussolini, it could reasonably expect that friendship to mature. Of course, if the friendship of a Great Power with a population of 193 millions has no importance unless it goes to war with Hitler, there is nothing more to say.

STUDENT OF AFFAIRS

A week before the savage attack of Nazi Germany upon the Soviet Union this pamphlet was sent to the printers. When the attack took place it was already in type. Not one word of the two letters of Mr. Shaw, or that of "Student of Affairs," needed alteration.

At the present moment it is more than ever necessary that the British public should understand not only what the Soviet Union is doing now, but what its past policy has been. This pamphlet will fulfil a very valuable function of enlightenment. This first edition consists of 100,000 copies. We hope that this will prove insufficient for the demand and that we shall have to reprint very quickly.

We make grateful acknowledgment to Mr. Bernard Shaw, "Student of Affairs," and the "New Statesman and Nation," for permission to reproduce the letters contained in this pamphlet.

National Committee,
Russia Today Society.

June, 1941.

The Soviet-Finnish Campaign

by

MAJOR A. S. HOOPER

The most insanely dangerous feature of our foreign policy during the last twenty years has been our vilification and deliberate estrangement and provocation of the Soviet Government. Major Hooper's book "Through Soviet Russia, 1937," published by himself at his own risk and expense, was the first book available at a popular price which gave us the simple truth about daily life there. But we still senselessly underrated the formidable military power of the U.S.S.R., and described the Finland Affair not only as a crime on Russia's part but as a demonstration of her incompetence in modern warfare.

In exposing this silly fiction Major Hooper has done us another service of first rate social and military importance.

BERNARD SHAW

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