

*A critique of the writings of the professors who lately journeyed behind the Iron Curtain.*

## The Circular Travels of the Professors

JAMES BURNHAM

IN THE AUTUMN of 1959 Professor of History Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., editor Edward Weeks, literary critic Alfred Kazin and playwright Paddy Chayevsky paid a month's visit to the Soviet Union, Poland and Yugoslavia as the first "American writers' delegation" under "the Lacy-Zarubin agreement," which put into effect President Eisenhower's cultural exchange program. The choice of this group—all its members of the far Left and all critics of both American culture and Administration policy—is no doubt a tribute to Mr. Eisenhower's non-partisanship in foreign affairs, or perhaps to his indifference, though it does seem a rather narrow cross-section for the "people to people" togetherness that the President has long advocated as the solution to Russo-American "mis-

understanding." A few months later, Prof. Schlesinger wrote an account of the odyssey for *Harper's* and the English (US-subsidized) magazine *Encounter*.

Our returned traveler promises, at the outset, to stick to "new and concrete impressions," to the "complexities of experience" in place of the "easy abstractions which rule [the] thought" of stay-at-homes. "So superficial an inspection," he disarmingly grants us, "could hardly be expected to yield profound conclusions." However hardly to be expected, though, it does seem to have yielded a good many that are, if not exactly profound, at any rate portentously worded.

As early as his opening paragraph, Prof. Schlesinger has discovered from his officially guided tour of a few cities in three

of the two dozen Communist countries that there is a universal "heterogeneity of Communist practise"—which fact, moreover, such is the acuteness of his concrete impressions, he realized to be "the best, if not the only, hope for eventual world peace." And he must have brought in his equipage an outstanding telescope, for half of his second paragraph records his findings on China.

So it goes. "Power, of course, settles heavily on the Sino-Russian side of the spectrum. . . . The heart of Soviet dogmatism is the principle of infallibility. . . . The platonic essence of 'capitalism' does not correspond to the many mutations of a ceaselessly changing economic system. . . . Human nature is too obstinate, various, and elusive to be efficiently mastered by any technique thus far devised short of physical obliteration." Finally, God save the mark: "The one safe generalization about the Soviet Union is that it is in flux." If it were not for Prof. Schlesinger's initial disavowal, one might almost think that these were "easy abstractions." Toward the end of his narrative, our author harks back to his opening candor: "The great value of a few weeks behind the Iron Curtain is to remind oneself of the treachery of abstractions." *Ipse*, that time, surely *dixit*.

It is disappointing, really, that Prof. Schlesinger doesn't tell us a little more about what he saw and heard and smelled. When precisely made and accurately expressed, direct observations of unfamiliar places—"concrete impressions"—can be wonderfully interesting in themselves, as well as occasionally instructive. But even the rare sentences where Prof. Schlesinger seems merely to be recording observations rather than proclaiming abstractions are suspect on closer notice. "The streets of Moscow are filled with people trickling back from exile and hard labor in Siberia." It may be so, but it is certain that Prof.

Schlesinger did *not* observe, and could not have observed, anything of the sort. What percentage of Moscow streets did he see? Among the passers by, how many did he, personally, confirm to be returned exiles? Could he, who does not speak Russian and to whom returned exiles would be most unlikely to pour out their life stories even if he did, have confirmed such a generalization in any case? In similar fashion, most of the assertions about "life and comfort," "consumer goods," Khrushchev's wanting "very much to be liked," about the new Soviet citizens who feel "so free and so affluent" and who "are reaching out for beauty and gaiety, for speed and risk, for autonomy, privacy, and self-expression," dissolve into semantic dust at the lightest touch of a critical finger. True or false, these were not things seen, but conclusions deduced from hearsay or preformed beliefs.

Nor was it from Russia but from his colleague across the Harvard Yard, Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith, that he got the "impressions" out of which, in the rhetoric of the inside-stuff observer, he cast a key paragraph: "It is impressive and scary to see [*sic*—it takes X-ray eyes for this depth of seeing] what energy a great nation can generate when it allocates its talent and resources according to an intelligent [a strangely selected word] system of priorities. . . . The Soviet leadership thinks it important to send a rocket to the moon and not very important to supply tourists with tickets to Odessa, so they apportion their talent and resources accordingly. The able men work on rockets, the dopes on tickets. . . . Our own beloved country meanders along on the opposite theory: we allow the market to determine our national priorities, which means that we allocate a major share of our talent and resources to consumer services and too often leave the sending of rockets to the moon to men who

might be better employed [N.B. Dr. Braun and General Schriever] selling tickets to Odessa. If three-quarters of the national energy now dedicated to creating and satisfying consumer wants were dedicated instead to building national power, we would not have to worry about the Soviet campaign to 'overtake and surpass' the United States." We would not have to worry, it might be added, because if three-quarters of the energy were so allocated, we would all starve to death. But statistics have never been one of Prof. Schlesinger's strong points.

Actually, the only sentences that seem derived from direct, behind-the-Curtain observation are those which describe meetings with Soviet writers (whose words were presumably filtered for Prof. Schlesinger—though this detail is not mentioned—by translators). Curiously, nearly all the facts observed in these meetings contradict the generalities and the abstractions.

*In abstractu*, Prof. Schlesinger repeatedly informs us that "Soviet citizens talk freely" and "feel free," that "freedom of comment has unquestionably improved since the death of Stalin," that Soviet youth, "as against the bleak and sterile dogmatism of their fathers . . . appear to be reaching out for concreteness, variety, spontaneity," that in sum, "nearly all the changes which have taken place since the death of Stalin have been in what the Western liberal must call the right direction." But whenever Prof. Schlesinger gets down to cases and tells about actual meetings with actual human beings, he invariably finds: "What seem as ascertainable facts to the Westerner are believed in the Soviet Union only when they conform to the official stereotypes"; "Within the elite, manners tend to be pompous and hectoring, and the conception of discussion is hopeless" (if "hopeless," why, then, a cultural exchange program?); "I have never been

lied to as casually, contemptuously, and persistently as in the Soviet Union"; "The style in which they discussed such matters [politics, economics, peace] was as discouraging as the substance"; "The hard fact is that the last thing the Soviet Union cares about is a free exchange of ideas." But hard facts make no lasting impression on soft minds.

Prof. Schlesinger is too faithful an ideologue to be able to observe. Like all ideological travelers, he brings back only what he takes with him. What he took on this visit to the other side were his Liberal axioms and values, a theory of Soviet development, and a passionate commitment to a policy of coexistence-at-all-costs—*i.e.*, appeasement.

The theory of Soviet development is a refurbishing of Trotsky's theory of Thermidor—of the inevitable bourgeoisification of revolutions. The rise of Khrushchev—so the theory goes in the Schlesinger adaptation—marks an essential break with the Stalin era. "Since the death of Stalin, [the Soviet Union] has been divesting itself of much of the irrationality which we considered its essence. . . . The implication of the talk about the 'bad times' [of Stalin] is that times are better now. This cannot be gainsaid. . . . It would be a great mistake to suppose that there is no 'real difference' between Stalin's Russia and the Russia of Khrushchev."

On the one hand, Khrushchev has "normalized" the regime and led it in a liberal direction, if not yet all the way to the "liberal Communism [which] Poland and Yugoslavia forced this observer to concede the feasibility of."

On the other hand, and more fundamentally, Khrushchev not merely strengthened the Soviet economy but "took over the Malenkov program . . . and in the last two years has been making a prodigious effort to raise standards of life and comfort. . . .

There can be no question [no question, mind you, and don't give me any of your statistics on gadgets per capita] that Khrushchev has committed his country to the consumer-goods merry-go-round." The easy life promises, given time, to crack the hard shell of Communism. "One cannot help feeling that the movement towards a consumer society will in the long run begin to erode the dogmatic monolith. . . . The critical question is whether . . . the consumer-goods passion may not upset the system of priorities and sap the single-minded intensity with which the Soviet economy dedicates itself to the building of national power. One detects already [on sensitive Harvard seismographs, apparently] a new deference to consumer motives."

The consumer-oriented economy and liberalized internal regime promote and indeed demand a peaceful foreign policy. "Stalin *required* international tension: only an overhanging external threat could reconcile his people to his savage interior tyranny. Khrushchev, by diminishing the interior tyranny, diminishes at the same time the need for external crises. . . . I would guess that Khrushchev deeply wants a *détente*."

Now comes the policy payoff. We must "reject the mystique of Either/Or," stop dividing "the world too glibly between the 'democratic' or 'capitalist' and the 'socialist' or 'Communist' camps," and accept a *détente*, so that Khrushchevian Communism can complete its evolution to affluent, liberal and peaceful "de-totalitarianization." The sure way to disaster is for us to try to get tough. "Surely one of the strongest arguments for a *détente* is precisely the fact that relaxation might give the forces of pluralism and tolerance a chance to dissolve the ideological dogmatism of Soviet society. . . . The one thing above all indispensable for the victory of the Polish-Yugoslav [liberalizing] tendency

is the relaxation of international tensions. The resumption of the cold war would snuff out the inchoate burgeonings in the Soviet Union."

## II

No one will suppose that Prof. Schlesinger could have "observed" all *that* on a month's whirlwind tour. Where, then, did he get in particular this theory of Soviet development that he carried in his knapsack? We have noted that his theory of national power and consumer affluence was borrowed from his campus colleague, Prof. Galbraith. For the theory of development, he had only to drop a couple of miles further down the Charles River to Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the offices of Prof. W. W. Rostow.

In the autumn of 1958 Prof. Rostow delivered a series of lectures at Cambridge University. These were printed by *The Economist* last summer and published this year as *The Stages of Economic Growth*. Therein he "presents an economic historian's way of generalizing the sweep of modern history . . . a theory about economic growth and a more general, if still highly partial, theory about modern history as a whole." The treatise is a neo-Marxian Manifesto, a work of what *Pravda* nowadays calls "revisionism"—that is, watered-down Leninism.

In summary, the Rostow theory identifies "all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of five categories: the traditional society, the preconditions for the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption." Each society waits around for millennia in the traditional category. In post-Renaissance times one after another has been somehow stirred to set up the preconditions for industrial take-off. From that point on, caught in the gears of compound interest, it mounts more or less inevitably through

the successive stages to the high mass-consumption level which the United States and Canada are said to have reached in the 1920's, Britain and Australia in the '30's, and Sweden, Germany, France and Japan a few years ago.

From the point of view of economic history, the Rostow Stages theory seems to be a linguistic device for the arrangement of data, analogous to Toynbee's "challenge and response" terminology or the Hegelian-Marxian "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" triad. As such it is not very elegant—Prof. Rostow not sharing the Schlesinger-Galbraith literary flair—nor does it tell us anything much about the subject-matter, other than the rather obvious point that some nations have become industrialized and concomitantly raised their material standard of living. It may have a certain utility in planning the topics for a course of lectures or suggesting the table of contents for a book.

Prof. Rostow, however, is by no means willing to restrict his theory to so modest a role. Though with a running diversionary fire of qualifications, "on the other hands" and "other things being equal," Prof. Rostow is in reality proposing a hypothesis not of linguistics but of substance: a neo-Marxian economic determinism as an inclusive theory of history. If that were not the way in which both he and his readers were understanding it, his book would have little interest for anyone but specialized scholars, instead of the large and still expanding influence that it is in fact having on publicists, chancelleries and Presidential candidates.

Not only are the five stages an economic growth pattern through which every society all but inevitably passes, but the economic transformations are, in turn, all but inevitably correlated with—are the cause of, *tout court*—transformations in customs, politics, beliefs, and so on.

When driving up through the early stages, a nation is terribly aggressive and dangerous to outsiders. But as it enters the affluent stage of automobiles and high mass-consumption, it relaxes. War is no longer in the national interest, no longer "rational." If it is able to do so, the high mass-consumption society prefers to live in peace with others in order to focus on its "inner frontiers" and enjoy its flesh pots, cars, ranch homes, outboards and babies.

So the United States. And Russia now is moving from the stage of maturity to the stage of high mass-consumption: that, at bottom, is the meaning of the change from the Stalin to the Khrushchev era. The Russians want the flesh pots and cars, and Khrushchev wants to give them what they want. Russia's "criteria of national interest" dictate an acceptance of controlled arms limitation, subordination of sovereignty, and a peaceful world of "diffused power." *Our* problem is to carry out "the great act of persuasion" that will get the Russians "to accept the consequences of peace and the age of high consumption, so that they can go forward with the rest of the human race in the great struggle to find new peaceful frontiers\* for the human experience." This we can do if we give the newly taking-off nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America lots of help in rushing through *their* stages, and if we "demonstrate to the Russians that there is an interesting and lively alternative . . . to either an arms race or unconditional surrender." (More briefly: foreign aid and appeasement.) Communism in the disagreeable, the aggressive, sense is only—as a subhead puts it, "A Disease of the Transition." It will fade away as the stages of growth unfold, so long as we don't upset

\*The appearance of the term "new frontier" as central concept in Senator John F. Kennedy's speech accepting the Presidential nomination is *not* coincidental.

the applecart by challenging it during this "century or so until the age of high mass-consumption becomes universal."

### III

Professors Schlesinger, Rostow and Galbraith are leading fellows in the contemporary school of social scientists who write political tracts in the form of history, economics and sociology: a defense of the New Deal in the form of a history of Andrew Jackson; an apology for statism in the guise of an analysis of the new economic equilibrium; a call for recognition of Communist China masked as a scholarly survey of Chinese "prospects."

The essay of Prof. Schlesinger's that I have here examined is insensitive and pedantically abstract if taken as a first-hand account of the experiences of travel; Prof. Rostow's book, taken as a historical theory, is pretentious, dull and almost empty of verifiable content. But it is naive to read them as if travel essay and historical theory. Both are in reality tracts that exploit a respectable, accepted form to propagandize for a political point of view that is unacceptable to most Americans—doubtless even to Messrs. Schlesinger and Rostow—when stated baldly and unadorned: the point of view of unconditional coexistence with Communism; that is, of appeasement.

The Schlesinger-Rostow-Galbraith concept of a Khrushchevian liberalization and *détente*-seeking induced by a growingly consumer-oriented economy falls into place in the long chain of concepts and theories that have served to justify our unwillingness to accept the truth about Communism. The unchanging objective of the Communist world enterprise is and has always been a monopoly of world power, and therefore our destruction. This has been the unchanging objective under all circum-

stances and in all "stages of growth": in 1903 when the enterprise was founded by a few dozen outcasts with a half-dozen revolvers as armament; in defeat and victory, war and peace, Five Year Plans, War Communism, New Economic Policy or Opening of Virgin Lands; under Lenin, Stalin, Malenkov, Khrushchev, Suslov or Mao.

This truth means that the only thing we can do about Communism, if we are unwilling to surrender, is defeat it. But we of the West have so far declined to face that cheerless conclusion. We therefore invent one theory after another to explain why Communism cannot win, will turn gentle, or will be defeated on our behalf by someone else. In pre-1917 years we explained to ourselves that Communism could not win because Communists were a powerless sect of crackpot fanatics. In 1917 they became patriotic Russian democrats overthrowing reactionary Tsardom. Lenin's New Economic Policy showed them to be reverting to capitalism. Stalin's Socialism in One Country was proof that they had given up world ambitions. With the Popular Front they were transformed into staunch anti-fascist allies. In China there was nothing to worry about, because Chinese Communists were agrarian reformers. After the war, Tito was heaven-sent as he-who-would-do-our-work-for-us: imperial, international Communism would split into a score of rival national Communisms. The Red Army is really Russian, not Communist, and will restrain Communist adventurism. The Sino-Russian conflict absorbs the energies of the Communist bloc, so that there is no excess for external aggression. At each and every moment there is always a theory, usually a choice of theories, to prove that we don't have to meet the challenge of Communism ourselves, because something internal to Communism or someone else or some great im-

personal force of History will do it for us.

The idea of Khrushchev the peace-needing, consumer-oriented liberalizer, risen to power in response to an increasingly affluent Russian economy and comfort-minded citizenry, is a postwar egghead link in this continuous chain of excuse and rationalization.

Then, after the weaving of so much fine ideological cloth by our busy trio, Khrushchev the Liberalizer tore it to pitiful shreds in a single morning in Paris last June. Khrushchev, worse luck, doesn't read Professors Schlesinger or Rostow, or even Professor Galbraith. We might be a good deal better off if he did, and we didn't.

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