


ANNA LOUISE STRONG

Author of "I Change Worlds"



**THE
SOVIETS
EXPECTED
IT**

In a book studded with facts and anecdotes, an outstanding authority on the U.S.S.R. gives the background of the Russian-German War and answers the question: "Can Hitler conquer the Soviets?"

I shall leave it to my friend, the Dean of Canterbury, as a specialist in religion, to convince you if he can that the Soviet system is "more Christian" than our capitalist world. I shall leave it to constitutional lawyers to decide how far freedom of religion can be given by a constitution; the Soviet Constitution as President Roosevelt has made clear* guarantees it as explicitly as ours. I content myself with one episode of an "attack on religion" as typical as any I know. In the 1930

* Press Conference, N. Y. *Times*, Oct. 1, 1941.

drive for collective farming, I visited Molvitino County in Ivanovo Province, a typical Russian rural district if anything "typical" exists.

I sat in a congress of young folks who were organizing the most tremendous flax-sowing ever seen in those northern parts. They did it under the slogan of "beating the Holy Helena," the patron saint of flax. Saint Helena, the "flaxen-haired," was mother of Emperor Constantine and the region's chief saint. Her festival, apparently superimposed on that of some earlier pagan goddess, fixed the proper religious day for sowing flax. With the gradual retarding of the Russian Church calendar through centuries, this date came two weeks later than the time that the Department of Agriculture thought would bring the best results. Under the old system of peasant farming, nothing could be done to change the "flax-sowing day." The priests and the older peasants held out for Holy Helena, and the old men ruled the family farms.

The younger, educated lads got their first chance when collective farming came. They had a vote on the farm as good, and maybe a bit better, than anybody else. They mobilized every kind of publicity, mass meetings, leaflets, slogans, and got most of the district sown early against the denunciations of the priests. The young farmers held a meeting to celebrate the "victory of science" and then sat tight and waited anxiously to see what the weather would do. Science is not infallible and weather is not perfectly predictable. Unseasonable frost might have sent the whole county back to "religion," with the priests all chortling, "We told you so!" Perhaps not all of the young folks, and certainly not their fathers, had broken with the Holy Helena in the secret depths of their souls. Fortunately for science, the warm spring rains came just after the early planting and those who planted betimes had the biggest crop ever seen.

With shouting and singing, the young farm leaders grabbed the county's single auto truck and started for the provincial capital to report success. I went with them all night through

the rain, through the mud, through the dark. When the gasoline was gone, they made an outraged stationmaster let them on a freight train and wrote up their report sitting on a flat car in alternating sun and rain. Plastered with mud and walking the last four miles, they banged into the provincial capital, one of the first proud counties to report. Nothing, they knew, would ever stop them now! Religion—alias the Holy Helena—was gone! Every rural district in Russia had similar conflicts; twenty years ago the priests induced the peasants to stone the first tractors as “devil machines.”

Today the traditional bearded, illiterate, superstitious Russian peasant has practically vanished. For quite awhile the New York newspapers have turned down pictures of Soviet farmers, since they don't look like peasants any more. Peasants have been replaced by these new, young, somewhat crude but thoroughly confident people who for twenty years have been growing in the womb of the Soviet land. The task of all revolutions is to make new people. Only so does the revolution in the end succeed. What are they like, these new, these “Soviet” people?