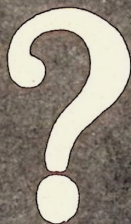


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R U S S I A



AN HONEST REPLY TO

HONEST QUESTIONS

BY

ANNA LOUISE STRONG

SEARCHING OUT THE SOVIETS

An Honest Reply to Honest Questions

THESE questions posed by *The New Republic*, as covering the chief attacks against the U.S.S.R., were submitted by me to ten friends, chiefly American reporters on *The Moscow Daily News*. While I take full personal responsibility for the final phrasing of the answers, they also represent the collective judgment of several trained American observers, living for several years in the U.S.S.R., who are sympathetic but not bound to the Soviet regime.

We all agree that no easier time could be found to answer anti-Soviet attacks. With spring sowing carried out at a speed and with a quality of tillage never before seen in this country; with a two-year grain surplus that has resulted in the doubling of pigs and calves in a single year; with iron production second only to America, and electric energy level with Great Britain, and farm-machinery production the highest in the world; with rural-trade turnover in the first quarter of the year 36 per cent above a year ago; with transport at last moving ahead under Kaganovich, car loadings holding around 70,000 daily, which is 112 per cent of plan; with sugar production in the first two months of the year up 35 per cent and butter up 20 per cent and milk up 18 per cent over a year ago; with this economic strength reflecting itself in international relations making the U.S.S.R. a leader in the councils of Europe! . . . Really, with all this, and a million Muscovites joy-riding in our marble-decorated subway in its first three days of general traffic, it would seem easy to answer attacks on the U.S.S.R.

Yet the questions are serious—and difficult. They embody past centuries of capitalist tendencies in thinking, consoli-

dated by the Soviets' cleverest foes. It is still more difficult to answer them briefly, without adequate explanation of the new bases of thought on which the Soviet world rests. . . . We have written and eliminated often. Here is the result of our labors:

1. Is Russia ruled by one man, Stalin, much as Italy is ruled by Mussolini and Germany by Hitler?

No country is ruled by one man; this assumption is a favorite red herring to disguise the real rule. Power resides in ownership of the means of production—by private capitalists in Italy, Germany, America, by all productive workers jointly in the U.S.S.R. This is the real difference that today divides the world into two systems, in respect to the ultimate location of power. (Incidentally, why omit Roosevelt, whose personal dominance in mechanisms of government was as unconditional as anyone's during his first two years?)

Since liberals treat class rule as a figure of speech, let us note how it functions. The chief task of government in capitalist countries is regulation of relations between various private owners and the protection of their properties from encroachments by the working class. Recent history in Germany, Italy and America shows varying methods used to attain this goal. In the U.S.S.R. the chief task of government is the management and improvement of the jointly owned properties of the country and the building of a good life thereon for the joint owners.

Formation of government policies in the U.S.S.R. begins in local factory-production conferences and local village meetings in which all workers are urged to take part. Once or twice monthly the Communists of the given factory meet to correlate the results of such mass discussions and fit them into the general plans. These general plans themselves are determined by statewide and nationwide con-

gresses arising from and correlating these local units. Party congresses draft the "general line" of policy; government congresses formulate its detailed application in government; trade-union congresses and farm congresses apply it in their own respective spheres. The delegates to all these congresses bring with them a wealth of local decisions and mandates.

No policy is ever announced by Stalin except as a result of this process. Major policies result from nationwide discussions of concrete conditions, continued over a period of months; these policies are known for years ahead and cannot be changed by any individual will. Minor shifts of policy are based on wide, swift sampling of thought in basic "political centers," *i.e.*, big factories. Even the famous "Dizziness from Success" statement by Stalin, which marked a reversal of method for thousands of local Communists, was not Stalin's statement alone. When millions of peasants cheered it, trying to make Stalin a personal hero, he swiftly disclaimed this, saying: "The Central Committee does not exist to permit personal initiative of anybody in matters of this kind."

Men in the U.S.S.R. never speak of Stalin's "powers," or Stalin's "will." They speak of his "authority" in the field of politics, of his "analysis," of his "method." His authority is the prestige of successfully applied knowledge; his method is the use of Marxian economic analysis to guide collective will. His speeches never deal in emotional oratory, as do those of personal dictator-demagogues. They consolidate with remarkable ability the thinking of hundreds of economists, scores of sections of the Academy of Science, millions of party members interpreting local conditions and demands.

"Authority with us," said a Soviet factory manager to me, "depends on how widely you can think. I can think with the workers of one factory for two years. Others can

think for a whole trust for five years. We have comrades capable of managing government and others capable of directing trade unions. But Stalin thinks more widely than any. No one can analyze so matchlessly as he the place of the U.S.S.R. in the changing scheme of world revolution, and the place that must be given to each aspect of our daily task."

To analyze the mechanical and human forces that make history, and lead the working class of the U.S.S.R. in the use of those forces—such is Stalin's service to a working class that is doing daily, and increasingly, more serious, sustained economic thinking than any other working class in the world.

2. Under Stalin has world revolution been abandoned for the sake of Russian national policy?

Capitalists and Trotskyists like to think so, but neither Russian workers nor foreign Communists do. Even the Five-Year Plan is discussed by Russians from the standpoint of its international significance; I have heard such discussions at four in the morning in an auto-truck fifty miles from the railroad by Young Pioneer girls engaged in a local sowing campaign.

Since it is Stalin's policy that is in question, we might quote Stalin himself on this subject: "The proletariat finds in the successes of the Five-Year Plan fresh argument in favor of revolution against the bourgeoisie of the whole world. . . . *The successes of the Five-Year Plan mobilize the revolutionary forces of all countries against capitalism.*" (Italics by Stalin, and almost the only ones in his fifty-nine-page report on the completion of the Plan.)

It is the revolutionary significance of Soviet successes that causes the wide campaign of lies today against the U.S.S.R., lest hungry, despairing workers the world over should know of those successes. The U.S.S.R., however,

does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, whether by arms or propaganda. Only the workers of each country can overthrow their own bourgeoisie. Interference from outside enslaves the workers to their bourgeoisie in the name of patriotism. The success of one worker-ruled country is the strongest propaganda and incentive.

3. Has the average worker or peasant any voice in the government of his country?

Considerably more than he has in America. The elections last December convinced me of that.

First, more people have the voting right, *i.e.*, all adults over eighteen except for a diminishing $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of "deprived." In America voting starts at twenty-one, and is not permitted to transient residents, migratory workers, soldiers and sailors or non-citizens, all of whom vote in the U.S.S.R.

Second, of possible voters 85 per cent took part in the last election, a proportion unheard of in other countries.

Third, each voter gives more time and attention to voting, attending many preliminary meetings to discuss in small groups and in detail both candidates and instructions to the incoming government. These voters' meetings compile instructions to increase schoolhouses, to make more radios or sound films, to put artists in charge of design in textile factories, to adjust university hours to factory workers, to increase children's books of a certain type, to put township architects in charge of the new "farm cities," etc. All these were part of some 48,000 instructions issued by Moscow voters to their local government, which reported within three months on the fulfilment of hundreds of these and on the disposition it had made of them all.

Fourth, the voters choose some fellow worker whom they all know to carry out their instructions; student bodies

choose students, Moscow Grand Opera sends a famous singer, auto workers choose a worker. They pick him for past efficiency in work, not for his speeches. Candidates never make speeches or election promises; this would be highly indelicate. The voters appoint and instruct them, and demand frequent reports from them. Voters themselves serve on taxing and housing commissions, etc., doing most of the miscellaneous work of government as volunteers correlated by their elected deputies.

With the growth of literacy and political consciousness and the approaching abolition of classes, a new election law now provides for secret, direct, equal balloting for all offices from the lowest to the highest. . . . See question one for further account of the participation of the masses in government.

4. Is the present standard of living extremely low? If this is true is it not proof that communism works less well than capitalism?

Since neither communism nor full socialism yet exists in the U.S.S.R., but only the preliminary stage known as "productive socialism," the question becomes: Does joint ownership of the means of production work less well for the common good than private ownership?

The answer is clear. Starting with a standard of living comparable to that of China or the Balkans, with millions of peasants living on a diet of black bread, supplemented at harvest time by meat or fat, and only very rarely a little sugar; suffering thereafter the ravages of war and intervention from which she did not recover even to pre-war standards till 1928—the U.S.S.R. created in five years thereafter and without the help of foreign loans a thoroughly modern industry and farming, and built on them a rapidly increasing standard of living. She has abolished

unemployment. Millions of peasants who never possessed shoes, sheets, forks, toothbrushes are today buying bicycles, gramophones, radio sets, musical instruments. Soap, that touchstone of cleanliness and culture, increased from 170,000 tons annually in the whole of Tsarist Russia to 460,000 tons last year. Grammar schools increased in their attendance from ten millions to nineteen millions between 1928 and 1932—one prerequisite of this achievement being the production for the first time of adequate numbers of children's shoes. The struggle of the rural districts is no longer for bread but for sound films and "farm cities" designed by architects.

No one in the U.S.S.R. doubts that if Russia had remained capitalist, her economic backwardness would have doomed her to the fate of China, carved into spheres of exploitation by the world's imperialists. Instead of this, she is a modern industrial nation second only to America. Her industrial production in 1934 attained 239 per cent of its 1929 level, and was four times what it was before the War. At the same time the capitalist world is going backward, dropping to .76 per cent of its 1929 level of industrial production (America to 67 per cent).

The Soviet standard of living goes steadily upward, while that of the rest of the world falls. Even during the Five-Year Plan, when the country strained itself to produce chiefly the means of production, its output of consumers' goods increased 87 per cent, and its rural-trade turnover 75 per cent, from 1928 to 1932. The collective standard of living therefore improved rapidly even during this period, though many classes of workers felt a drop due to the draining away of consumers' goods to supply eleven million newly employed workers who had had literally nothing before. Today, on the basis of the achieved modern industry, goods are rapidly increasing and prices are rapidly dropping.

5. Is it true that during 1932-33 several million people were allowed to starve to death in the Ukraine and North Caucasus because they were politically hostile to the Soviets?

Not true. I visited several places in those regions during that period. There was a serious grain shortage in the 1932 harvest due chiefly to inefficiencies of the organizational period of the new large-scale mechanized farming among peasants unaccustomed to machines. To this was added sabotage by dispossessed kulaks, the leaving of the farms by eleven million workers who went to new industries, the cumulative effect of the world crisis in depressing the value of Soviet farm exports, and a drought in five basic grain regions in 1931. The harvest of 1932 was better than that of 1931 but was not all gathered; on account of over-optimistic promises from rural districts, Moscow discovered the actual situation only in December when a considerable amount of grain was under snow.

Opposing the tendency of many Communists to blame the peasants, Stalin said: "We Communists are to blame" —for not foreseeing and preventing the difficulties. Several organizational measures were at once put into action to meet the immediate emergency and prevent its recurrence. Firm pressure on defaulting farms to make good the contracts they had made to sell one-fourth their crop to the state in return for machines the state had given them (the means of production contributed by the state was more than all the peasants' previous means) was combined with appeals to loyal, efficient farms to increase their deliveries voluntarily. Saboteurs who destroyed grain or buried it in the earth were punished. The resultant grain reserves in state hands were rationed to bring the country through the shortage with a minimum loss of productive efficiency. The whole country went on a decreased diet, which affected most seriously those farms that had failed to harvest their grain.

Even these, however, were given state food and seed loans for sowing.

Simultaneously, a nationwide campaign was launched to organize the farms efficiently; 20,000 of the country's best experts in all fields were sent as permanent organizers to the rural districts. The campaign was fully successful and resulted in a 1933 grain crop nearly ten million tons larger than was ever gathered from the same territory before.

6. Is there a chance of another famine this year, as Cardinal Innitzer asserts?

Everyone in the Soviet Union to whom I mention this question just laughs.

Reasons for the laughter are:

Two bumper crops in 1933 and 1934.

A billion bushels of grain in state hands, enough to feed the cities and non-grain farmers for two years.

A grain surplus in farmers' hands that has sufficed to increase calves 94 per cent and pigs 118 per cent in a single year.

The abolition of bread rationing because of surplus in grain.

The abolition of nearly half a billion rubles of peasant debts incurred for equipment during the organizing of collective farms—this as the result of an actual budget surplus in the government.

Tales of continued famine are Nazi propaganda on which to base a future invasion of the Ukraine.

7. Why were so many people executed after the Kirov assassination? Were any of them punished because they were political opponents of the present regime?

No persons were punished merely for political views.

One hundred and three persons were executed as members of murder gangs who crossed the Soviet border with revolvers and hand grenades to commit murder and other

acts of violence against Communists and Soviet officials. Such gangs have existed ever since the revolution drove out the White Guard armies, but Berlin gave them shelter after Hitler came to power. They have for two years been bragging in newspapers published in Berlin and Jugoslavia of their successes in murder and destruction beyond the Soviet frontier. Today the whole world knows about Nazi terrorist tactics across frontiers.

These cases were handled by border guards until the assassination of Kirov aroused a storm of popular resolutions calling for drastic action against terrorists. A court-martial composed of well known members of the Supreme Court thereupon made a rapid clean-up of all these cases in several cities, publishing the fact that the terrorists had been armed when arrested, had run the border from Poland and Rumania and had plotted and carried out murders. The trials were *in camera*, since open discussion of details was tantamount to accusing several governments of acts that rank as causes of war.

In the Kirov case itself fourteen persons were executed, former members of the "Zinoviev opposition," who confessed that they had in recent years formed a "Leningrad Center" to assassinate Soviet leaders. They connected abroad through the Latvian consul-general, who on evidence shown was recalled by his government. . . . Zinoviev and Kamenev themselves, with a small group of Moscow followers, were imprisoned on their own confession to organizational connection with the Leningrad Center and knowledge of its terrorist views. There was some popular demand for their execution, but it failed, as nothing indicated direct participation in or knowledge of the actual murder.

8. During 1928-32 were many scientists and technicians falsely charged with sabotage and arrested or imprisoned merely as scapegoats for inevitable shortcomings of the Five-Year Plan?

Every American specialist who worked in Soviet industry

during those years knows that there was much sabotage. Ball, in the Stalingrad Tractor Plant, told me: "At first there were two gangs in this plant; one was making tractors, the other was preventing them. I've seen sabotage in the States when firms were at war. Think I didn't know it here? The plant was lousy with it, but oh, boy, they took them out of here!"

Other Americans told me of an agronomical expert who organized the ploughing of a 200,000-acre farm to increase erosion, of a factory manager who sent false reports on American machines being bribed by a rival German firm. I myself heard a dozen Russian employees of the British firm Metro-Vickers tell in open court of the destruction they did in power plants.

Men high in the canning industry put broken glass, animal hair and fish tails into food destined for industrial workers. A township veterinary who hated collectivization inoculated 6,000 horses with plague. An irrigation engineer tried to discourage the policy of settling nomad races on the land by using thirty-year-old surveys that he knew were incorrect and that would not deliver the water. All of these and thousands more confessed.

What were the causes? Resentment of the highly aristocratic Russian engineer against workers' rule; resentment of new technique that made their knowledge out of date; actual bribes by foreign firms; anger at the final drive against capitalism embodied in the Five-Year Plan. This led in 1928-30 to what Stalin called "an epidemic of sabotage" among the higher engineering staff.

Scapegoats for failure were not needed, for the Five-Year Plan did not fail. The energy and sacrifice of loyal workers and technicians carried it through. Its success won over many earlier saboteurs, so that by 1931 Stalin was able to report that "these intellectuals are turning towards the Soviet government," and should be met "by a policy of con-

ciliation." Thereafter sabotage cases rapidly diminished both in number and seriousness.

9. Is the O.G.P.U. under another name employing two or three million political prisoners in carrying out a program of forced labor?

The picture that these words arouse for the average American—of idealistic intellectuals condemned to heavy, unpaid, chain-gang work—does not exist in the U.S.S.R.

There are, however, "labor camps" in many parts of the country, as part of the Soviet method of reclaiming anti-social elements by useful, collective work. They replace prisons, which have been steadily closing; I have found old prison buildings remodeled as schools. Men in the labor camps draw wages, have vacations in which they leave the camp, and rise in their profession like free workers. They work at their specialty; engineers do large-scale engineering, intellectuals do cultural work, teaching and clerical work, actors put on plays, unskilled workers are trained in trades and illiterate men get schooling. Their wives and families are often allowed to visit them for extended periods.

These camps usually work on some nationally famous project which is intended to stir instincts of creative energy and collective pride. Men who respond to these motives may rise to the highest honors. The Baltic-White Sea Canal, for instance, was celebrated not only as an achievement in construction, but as a place where criminals "made themselves over." Many former thieves, saboteurs, murderers, received the Order of Lenin, the highest honor in the country.

Statistics of the number and type of men in these camps are unavailable. The highest estimate I ever heard by a competent judge gave a total of several hundred thousand men. This was three years ago, when kulak prisoners working alongside free men in Kuznetsk, Magnitogorsk and other construction jobs formed the largest part of the total. Since

kulaks have since been granted amnesty, the number today can be only a fraction of that.

Moreover, the "labor camp" system is also temporary, and applicable to the period when anti-social elements threaten to disorganize the new socialist society in its formative stages. The former aristocrats recently exiled from Leningrad were not sent to camps, but to ordinary Soviet cities, some of them to higher-paid jobs than they had in the metropolis. For the type of prisoner meant in America by the word "political," a transfer to a job in a different city is often considered sufficient to break up old associations. It must be remembered that "political" in a socialist society includes also saboteurs, destroyers of public property and terrorist murderers.

10. Is there a new privileged class of bureaucrats that is taking the place of the class of capitalists and landlords?

Inequality of income is increasing but not "privilege." The characteristic "privilege" of the capitalists is their ownership of the means of production which enables them to exploit others.

Equality in income is not a Marxist principle. Marxist "equality" is the equal emancipation of all from exploitation, the equal joint ownership of the productive means, the equal duty of all to work according to ability, and the equal right to receive according to one's work during the period of socialism, and according to one's "requirements" during the future period of communism. Capitalism rewards men not in accordance with either their labor or their requirements, but in accordance with their ownership; *i.e.*, in accordance with privilege. Such privilege does not exist in the U.S.S.R.

Inequalities sometimes increase and sometime diminish in the U.S.S.R. Some years ago, when standards of lower paid workers were very low, the policy was to increase these first towards "equality." This policy reached its ob-

vious limits when workers began to refuse to become managers or to increase their skill, since rewards did not increase with responsibility.

Today, when the production of skilled staffs is the greatest need, the policy is to obtain this by differentiation in rewards. The highest payments, however, go not to "bureaucrats," *i.e.*, officials, but to writers, actors, scientists, engineers and skilled workers, all of whom are paid on piecework. This policy also will reach its limits; it produces abuses in the tendency of some people to "splurge." Such people are not generally admired but are criticized as "bourgeois" or as having the "peasant mentality."

Marxists rely on the joint ownership of the means of production to prevent inequalities from consolidating into "privileges." They rely on the rule of workers to correct abuses before these go too far. There are signs already of a counter tendency in the arrest of several officials for unduly lavish expense accounts and waste of state funds.

11. Has censorship sapped the vitality of Russian art?

This is another of the questions at which everyone who hears it laughs. We all know that Moscow is the mecca for artists of all kinds, and that it is especially in those fields where censors exist—theatre, movies and the novel—that Russian art attracts the attention of the world.

If art survived censoring by the whims of princelings in the feudal ages, and censoring by the profit motives of publishers, the illiterate Comstockians and the Catholic Church in America today, why should it not survive censoring by highly educated officials of the Commissariat of Education, who judge from the standpoint of its usefulness for a socialist culture?

To the author in the U.S.S.R. the "censor" is not unlike the publisher's reader in America—a person who attempts to forecast the judgment of one's future public. If the author disagrees, he hunts another reader; in the U.S.S.R. he can

hunt another censor. Important plays are increasingly censored by previews attended by leading critics, and even by workers and children—the future audience. Sometimes as many as fifty persons make comments during these previews, which often last for six or seven hours. Only an artist who produces for his own solitary enjoyment finds in such collective comment a bar to creative work.

As the forms of the socialist society become more established, the tension between artists and censors tends to lessen, since both are increasingly attuned to the same social environment. What is this social environment in the U.S.S.R.? It is an increasingly cultured population, whose masses increasingly take part in the creation of art. Millions of rural journalists, thousands of rural dramatic clubs, tens of thousands of rural and factory orchestras furnish a basis of mass self-expression from which a veritable Renaissance can grow. This is recognized by most critics who have visited the U.S.S.R. in recent years.

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