

A LAND REFORM IN THE U.S.S.R.

AFTER a short trip to Russia Lord Passfield has published a few articles dealing with Russia and Communism. Russia, according to him, 'has a will and a plan,' whether it is the will of the people themselves, or one which has been forcibly imposed upon them, the writer does not tell us, and yet this is precisely what the average reader is anxious to know. Nevertheless, despite this reticence, Lord Passfield conveys a sufficiently clear idea of the only state which has adopted in its totality the teaching of Communism.¹

To begin with, the population of this Socialist State is strictly divided into classes. At the summit stands a very small minority—the Communist Party. The writer estimates it at one and an half million strong, which represents less than one per cent. of the total population of one hundred and sixty millions. This Communist Party, which does not wish to increase its membership but remains numerically stationary by a process of continuous weeding-out, is, as the writer puts it, the 'governing class' holding all power in the State. Next to it stand the candidates for membership. These are selected from another half million whose fidelity to the régime has been tested. Then come various other classes of the population graded according to their economic importance to the State, and lastly the people who have no right to exist in the Socialist State and must be 'liquidated' or destroyed not only as classes but as individuals also. These Socialist 'untouchables' do not interest Lord Passfield: he knew of their existence, for in one of his articles he has a passing reference to one of such classes, namely the *kulaki*. Though condemning the cruel and unjust treatment of individuals the writer believes that 'when whole classes of persons

¹ See his articles: 'The Steel Frame of Soviet Society' in the *Political Quarterly*, January 1933; and 'Freedom in Soviet Russia in the *Contemporary Review*, January 1933.

practice what is deemed to be seriously harmful to the community, the community has the right and the duty to suppress them.' This is very important, and must be accepted as one of the guiding principles set forth by a Socialist statesman. Acting upon this principle the State can logically condone every injustice and cruelty, and, as the latest Moscow trial has shown, justice can be understood merely from the point of view of State expediency. Lord Passfield does not consider that repressions against the *kulaki* or internment in labour camps represent 'the kind of repression by the Soviet Government that can properly be most seriously complained of.' The repression which he thinks hardest is that which is exercised against all intellectual opposition. Even during his short holiday in Russia he gained the impression that 'people are afraid to express, even in privacy, any fundamental objection to the Communist régime; or any preference for parliamentarianism or the profit-making system. The thinkers and writers, academic or administrative, seldom complain of this repression. But it becomes evident in intercourse that they feel a constraint not only on their expression, but, what is even more serious, on their thought.' Though Lord Passfield does not approve of this, yet he adds that the Soviet plea is that they are still at war, and cannot permit the luxury of intellectual liberty.

These few quotations suffice to characterise the existing Soviet State. The ruling class imposes its will upon the masses of the nation. These masses are not asked whether they approve of or like the ideals and policy of this ruling class. Unlike all other nations where the people are able to express in one or another way their approval or dislike of governmental measures, the citizens of the U.S.S.R. must accept and like all measures of the Communist Party under threat of being classed with 'counter-revolutionaries,' and become an object of suspicion to the police. Under such conditions it is scarcely possible to speak of the interests of the community. When the masses of the people are denied even the right to think freely, it is obvious

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that the suppression of whole classes is not decided by the community itself but by the small oligarchy which rules the people. Curiously enough this simple fact does not appear so obvious to foreign onlookers, and many people in this country are misled into believing that the Communists actually are the Russian people, that their ideals are identical to those of the nation, and when some important question is decided by them, it is done so in the name, and for the welfare, of the people. Not so long ago a Catholic priest writing in *BLACKFRIARS*² advocated an understanding between Catholics and Communists, evidently identifying them with the Russian people. Perhaps unconsciously Lord Passfield in his interesting articles makes it quite clear that the communist régime is the most accomplished tyranny, the total enslavement of a nation to a minority professing an ideal entirely alien to the masses, and carried into existence by a policy of violence and terrorism. For those who are unable to read between the lines of Lord Passfield's guarded statements we shall briefly outline the suppression of the *kulaki*.

It was easy enough for the Soviets to destroy the old privileged classes of Russia—the nobles, landowners, industrialists, merchants, even the middle-class *intelligentzia* and the professional classes. Those who did not succeed in fleeing abroad, with a few exceptions, were destroyed, not in a figurative sense but literally, either by execution or by exile to regions which meant slow and sure death. These classes never formed a compact mass but, being a small minority, disseminated amongst the overwhelming masses of peasants, they could be disposed of separately without difficulty. The *kulaki* did not form a class in themselves. In pre-revolutionary Russia this word—*kulak* (literally 'fist')—was a term of abuse applied to the small rural profiteers, traders or peasants, who oppressed their fellow-villagers in different ways, chiefly by means of usury, lending petty loans at exorbitant interest often repaid in

² October 1932 : 'Communism and the Catholic Apologist.'

kind when the harvest had been gathered in. The Bolshevik revolution reversed the position, and most of the former *kulaki* were wiped out during the first ten years. However, amongst the peasants themselves there was much inequality: in the same village one family might own as much as forty to fifty acres of land whilst another had to struggle along upon three to six acres. With their usual astuteness the Soviet authorities played upon the baser instincts of the poorer peasants by giving all power to the so-called 'Committees of the Poor' in which the worst elements of the rural population—the drunkards and the sluggards were appointed to rule the village communities. After a number of excesses a certain *modus vivendi* was established, and rural life went on more or less as before. Then in 1929 it was decided that Communism, under the form of Collectivization, should be introduced in the rural districts, and the 'liquidation' of an entire class of the more prosperous peasants was decreed. These were the peasants who by their personal industry had risen economically above the average villager. Any other country would have considered this class of small farmers to be the most promising, and would by every means have encouraged others to attain the same level. But not so the Soviet Government. All these peasants were declared to be *kulaki*. This was undoubtedly a gross calumny. The class of wealthier peasants destroyed in 1929-1930 had nothing to do with the former *kulaki*; neither did they exploit their neighbours, their only crime was to have been hard-working and thrifty.

According to the census of 1926-1927, this class of the rural population was estimated at some 5,800,000 people. The number of middling peasants was fixed at eighty-one millions, that of poor peasants at twenty-one millions. A very careful inquiry made by Sir Alan Pim and Mr. Edward Bateson, formerly a Judge of the Egyptian Mixed Tribunal, under the auspices of the Anti-Slavery Society, an organisation known for its humanitarian work, and numbering amongst its members several Socialist leaders

of this country, has in its Report a reference to this liquidation of the *kulaki* as a class. The policy of this liquidation was, according to the Report, announced by M. Stalin in December 1929. Five million people were expected to be involved in the liquidation. However, continues the Report, 'as the campaign proceeded, the temptation to declare middling peasants (*ceredniki*) to be *Kulaks*, for the purpose of acquiring their property, proved too strong, and large numbers of *ceredniki* suffered in this way 'an unallowable perversion of the class war in the village! The total number of persons ultimately concerned, therefore, probably considerably exceeds the estimate of five millions, and it must be remembered that the men whose property had been confiscated could not even join any trade union or become members of a collective farm.'³

Much more light is thrown on the question of this unprecedented destruction of a peasant class by an article which has just appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (April 1st, 1933). The author, M. Jean d'Albaret, begins by stating that the richer peasants, those who could be called *kulaki* in the old days, were not affected by the collectivization of 1929-1930, as they were actually suppressed in 1926-1927. Half of their number was shot before 1929, the others were exiled to northern regions, all their property being confiscated. The rural reform of 1929-1930, therefore, fell chiefly upon the middling peasants. They were divided into three groups: the wealthier, the strong and the necessitous middling peasants. Those of the first group were accused of resisting the collectivization, and shot wholesale. M. d'Albaret estimates the number of peasants shot during the winter of 1929-1930 at some two hundred thousand. Their families were deported to Northern areas. The second class was either sent to labour camps or deported, their families sharing the same fate. The last group, together with the poor peasants, were for-

³ *Report on Russian Timber Camps*, by Sir Alan Pim and E. Bateson. (London, 1931).

cibly enlisted in the collective farms (*Kolkhozy*) or made to work at the Soviet farms (*Sovkhozy*). By the spring of 1930 the 'reform' was accomplished: up to seventy-five per cent. of the rural population was collectivized, fifteen million people exiled, some three million rural homes destroyed, over fifteen million homes merged into collective farms. We may search history in vain to find anything approximating so wholesale a destruction of a peasant class. The nearest to it is Cromwell's transplanation of the Irish nation to Connaught in which half a million people were involved.

This stupendous revolution, M. d'Albaret states, took place without any special legislative act. It was decided by the little group directing the activity of the Communist Party. Scarcely any official acts refer to it, and during 1929 and 1930 the Press kept silent on the subject. It was only in 1931 that the suppression of a whole class of peasants was declared to be an accomplished fact. The data given by M. d'Albaret is so monstrous that it is difficult to believe it, and yet he mentions a secret document emanating from the Commissar of Justice and circulated among selected members of the Party Congress of 1931 which contains the official figures. Moreover, other statements in some way or other corroborate the same data by giving a true picture of the happenings of those last fateful years.

The collectivization of the farms was carried out with a purpose. A mass of individual small-holders presented a continuous threat to Communism. It was they who in 1921 forced Lenin to proclaim the New Economic Policy (NEP)—a relaxation from the strict application of Communism. While the peasants remained unconquered all the communist dreams of the industrialisation of the country, of vast exports, and even of the world-wide spread of Communism might have been wrecked at any moment. It was therefore of vital necessity for the survival of Communism in Russia to crush the rural class of over a hundred and twenty million people, and convert this mass of

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small farmers into a class of farm labourers possessing no land of their own. The will of the minority, this ruling class possessing all the means of compulsion, proved stronger than that of the disorganised toiling masses. Lord Passfield believes it to be 'the right and the duty' of the Communists to suppress them, provided, of course, that the rulers represent the interests of the community. But do they? . . . This is the crucial question which has been answered by the Russian nation in 1932. Such was the exasperation and despair of the rural population forced against their will into collective farms that a wholesale slaughter of horses and cattle and destruction of inventory took place throughout the land. The usual method of passive resistance and cases of 'sabotage' by damaging the imported costly machinery were the reply of men forcibly enlisted in the collective farms. The result was obvious: the crops in 1932 were so bad that famine was inevitable, and all reports show that a famine more terrible than the one of 1921, when millions of people perished, is already ravaging the country. The Communist Party enforced its will upon the people—what does it care about the many millions who die of hunger for the sake of another crazy Socialist experiment? Collectivization will become all the easier when the population is reduced by another thirty or forty million people As to the sentimentalist abroad he will still be able to admire his imaginary *kulak* 'bereft of everything by the Revolution and Collectivization, lying half-naked on a hill-side, but ecstatic, exultant in the inspiration afforded by his supreme abnegation,'⁴ and praise the 'self-sacrificing' spirit of the Bolshevik who 'does for nothing what the Christian . . . does for the greater glory of God and the hope of eternal reward!'⁵

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⁴ *The Clergy Review*, March 1933: 'Christ's Brotherhood. A plea for a more constructive attitude to the Soviets.'

⁵ *Blackfriars*, October 1932: 'Communism and the Catholic Apologist.'