

HARVARD ALUMNI BULLETIN



Heptagonals; Finish of the Mile

Travel, Not Research

Travel, Not Research

Some Reflections of a Sheldon Fellow

By Robert H. Socolow

BECAUSE of my knowledge of Russian, and because I had no official designation in the U.S.S.R., I had remarkable opportunities last summer to come to know the Soviet way of life. I rode their subways and buses, shopped in their stores, ate in their snack-bars; and I picked up hundreds of conversations. All has blended now into a general impression of a strangely sensitive, credulous, and inefficient people, accepting poorer living standards than their economy should provide, firm in their expectations of a better future, and complaining only rarely because the life they have known has been so much worse so often.

I was privileged to observe classes, in-cognito, in two of Moscow's schools. The first was the Institute for Economics, whose function is to supply the government offices with a yearly crop of budding national planners. I sat in on four classes with the third-year students and found, to my surprise, an almost complete absence of discipline. The students passed notes and talked together in small groups, barely mindful of what any of the lecturers were saying. The clamor reached a peak in the lecture in comparative economics, which that day was concerned with the problem of the economic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. A dignified, gray-haired lecturer presented an hour-long review telling why the U.S.S.R. was now be-

hind the U.S.A. and how it was about to catch up. Not for a moment did he deviate from the usual *Pravda* presentation, marked by an absence of any absolute statistics and an abundance of apologies and promises. I found it hard to believe that even the future economists were not expected to judge these matters on the basis of an open consideration of the facts. I was not the only disgruntled one, however. When the lecturer boasted, "We've caught up with the U.S.A. in the production of certain items already" a student in a T-shirt heckled from the back of the room: "Yeah, ice cream."

The atmosphere at Moscow University, which I visited a few days later, was in marked contrast. There was a greater formality of dress, and the students seemed far more serious. They still read novels on their laps all through the required lecture on Marxist-Leninist philosophy (except for five Chinese students clad in blue, who sat close together in the front row in rapt attention), but in the classes in mathematics and physics which I attended the calibre of teaching was high and the students were responsive.

In general, however, I feel that we have really overestimated the Soviet educational system, and would be making an even greater mistake to imitate it. The extreme specialization imposed on the students confines their development and inhibits their curiosity in a manner which is incompatible with the ideals of a democracy. Almost no one in the Soviet Union learns more of a foreign language than the amount necessary to translate a technical periodical in his field; there is not a course in Scientific English but a course in English for Computer Engineers. Certainly there are language specialists,

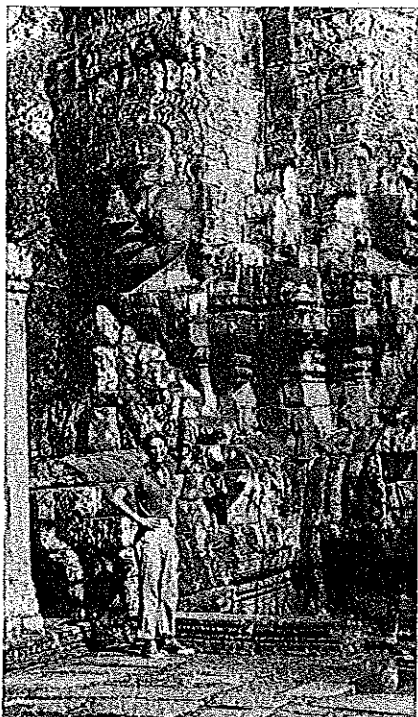
who have completed a five-year course of intensive study of a single language and its literature, but they frequently know little else. There is also a tiny number of extraordinarily well-informed students in Moscow who have taught themselves English by listening to the unjammed English-language broadcasts of Voice of America and B.B.C. But the fact that there are still many Russians today who have a firm knowledge of the humanities and the social sciences is a tribute far more to the enduring intellectual traditions in Russia than to the educational system.

Also I feel that, in our assessment of the capacity for growth of the Soviet economy, we tend to overestimate the U.S.S.R. Nearly all of us among the guides and students who visited the U.S.S.R. last summer were surprised to find that country so far behind America in every form of secondary and tertiary industry, with the exception of certain types of public transportation. But, more than that, we were shocked by the inability of the totally state-directed system of the U.S.S.R. to respond to some of the most elementary needs of the population as consumers and as citizens. My own private symbol for this phenomenon is the underpass that was constructed last summer at one of Moscow's most important intersections on Gorki Street. The builders had fenced their work off in such a way as to create a fifty-foot bottleneck for pedestrian movement. This forced all passers-by to shove their way through a jam of people moving in both directions, a maneuver which could not be accomplished in less than five minutes at any time of day. No private construction firm could give so little thought to pedestrian detours and expect to get a contract again. I became convinced, as a result of this and other experiences, that if the Soviet Union is ever to approach the United States standard of living, it will have to intro-

CERTAIN Sheldon Prize Fellowships—perhaps three or four—are awarded each year to members of the senior class that they may "engage in travel rather than intensive research; they may not enroll in foreign universities for formal studies." Last June Robert H. Socolow, upon receiving his A.B. *magna cum laude*, set off on a Sheldon Fellowship for Russia, whence in the fall he made his way across the continent to Southeast Asia. His return itinerary includes East Africa, Israel, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe. In the fall he will return to Harvard to enter upon graduate work in physics.

duce large elements of free enterprise. I think ultimately it will do this. There were, incidentally, several young Russians who agreed with me.

THE Southeast Asian countries that I visited face today many of the same crucial sets of choices: Do you



TEMPLE AT ANGKOR WAT

emphasize agriculture or industry? (The pattern generally is to stress agriculture but to make a great deal of noise about the few industrial projects.) Do you encourage free enterprise or extend socialization? (Vietnam leans to the first policy; Burma to the second.) Do you align yourself with the United States, or do you practise neutralism and non-alignment in the power struggle? (The four countries are split: Cambodia and Burma are neutralists; Thailand and Vietnam are strongly pro-Western.)

Of all these sets of choices, perhaps the choice between free enterprise and socialism is the most significant. Today, in each of these countries and especially in India, the proponents of these two alternative economies are engaged in a great debate. There are those who look forward to the appearance in the next decades of India's Andrew Carnegies and Vietnam's B. F. Goodriches; they hold that the hope of each

country rests with its business entrepreneurs. Their opponents favor the closest state regulation of economic development, and would prefer to see most of the new ventures begun under state ownership. These positions are not always incompatible, and in fact the Indian government today, through a system of incentives and loans, is encouraging a large number of young men to establish their own small businesses. But on many issues, a choice must be made between placing an industry under government regulation and leaving it to the country's businessmen, and in most cases I feel that the more persuasive argument lies with those who favor government regulation. Industrialization in South Asia must be accompanied by a redistribution of wealth, if it is to be worth anything, and this redistribution is unlikely to occur under free enterprise when the labor force is as badly organized as it is today. Furthermore, in most Asian countries industrialization cannot occur at all without government management and financing, for the necessary ventures, like steel mills and dams, require more capital than any private individual or individuals in the country can raise, and more technical skills than the country possesses within its borders.

So, after I had become skeptical in the U.S.S.R. of the capacity of the government which exercises ubiquitous controls to make a developed economy become more highly developed, I was forced, upon my arrival in Asia, to a new respect for the capacity of that type of government to launch a country in-

to the first stages of economic development. If I have learned anything on this trip, it is that the problems of economically developed and economically underdeveloped countries are strikingly different, and that the parallels we Americans tend to perceive when prescribing cures for Asian ills are generally deceptions.

In view of my intention to resume my studies in physics next September, I have made an effort to learn as much as I could about the current state of scientific research in South Asia. I have seen research institutes in Lahore, Pakistan; in Delhi, Lucknow, and Calcutta, India; and in Rangoon, Burma. Especially in India, most of the experimental research goes on in large, trim, modern buildings with impressive offices for the directors and somewhat less impressive laboratories. In those laboratories, the scientists are investigating subjects as varied as electronics (National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi), tuberculosis (Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow), and optical glass (Central Glass and Ceramics Research Institute, Calcutta). Yet all of them share common research objectives and experience common frustrations. The common objectives are solutions to problems which have significance for the development of the country; for example, many laboratories, motivated by their country's need to reduce its dependence on foreign exchange, are engaged in research to find industrial processes which utilize indigenous raw materials instead of those which need to be imported.

The common frustrations are numer-



THE MAIN BUILDING OF SWAT COLLEGE

or
w
"j
w
p
li
tc
er
sc
oi
te
h
ac
bi
oi
cc
w
th
h
A
th
ti
d

I
tv
u
ki
tc
ac
de
Sl
of
w
of
ul
H
w
tc
pi
m
ct
le
cc
to
n
th
in
al
ki
le
fa
gl

cc
A
to
ph
gi
cr
is
er

M

ous. They are those of scientists who would like to try for a while to do some "pure" research, and of some who would simply like to buy a spool of copper wire without needing an import license. They are those of administrators who come into conflict with government, which is likely to be the only source of financial support for the laboratory, over countless budgetary matters. They are those of students who have been sent abroad to study some advanced and impressive-sounding branch of science, like semiconductors or nuclear physics, and return to their countries unable to find any laboratory where they can continue with any of the research techniques which they have spent several years acquiring. And in every country I have been in, there is an unhappy lack of coordination between scientific research and industrial production.

I HAVE visited, also, a large number of institutes of higher education. In two instances, in India, I have resided on university campuses (Benares, Santiniketan). On one occasion I was asked to give a talk on Soviet Education, and addressed the entire 300-member student body of Jehanzeb College, Saidu Sharif (the sole college of the Kingdom of Swat, a semi-autonomous principality within West Pakistan). From hundreds of conversations with students and faculty I have begun to appreciate the Herculean proportions of the obstacles which confront the educational system today in all of the Asian countries. The problem of wastage of talent, underpayment of teachers, and obsolescence of curriculum, all dwarf our own equivalents. And the problems related to the conflicting claims of various languages to be the medium of instruction have no parallels in any Western country. At the same time, the problems confronting the various Asian countries are not always the same—Vietnam does not know Burma's student discipline problem, nor is any Southeast Asian country faced with the equivalent of India's glutted market for white-collar jobs.

I have been deeply interested in discovering the attitudes of Asians toward America, toward Communism, and toward their own leaders. I had the opportunity to hear Nehru address one hundred thousand people in the fair grounds of New Delhi when the China crisis broke, and I have followed this issue as I moved among China's southern neighbors. I have been told that

America's prestige in these countries has never been higher, and it certainly has been no extra hardship to travel in these countries during the months when President Eisenhower has paid a visit to Asia.

Few Americans at home realize, I suspect, the scope of the United States government's activities in South Asia. I have been impressed by the number and the quality of the Information Service libraries which our government has established in all of the major cities. In many of these cities, even though they are "college towns," all other library facilities are meager, as in Katmandu, Nepal, and Mandalay, Burma, and the Information Service libraries afford the students in these cities their best access to Western ideas. That these libraries are a part of a general propaganda campaign on our part is an indubitable fact but one in no way to be disparaged; the United States can ill afford to relax in this ideological competition. At the same time, I think that some of the people working abroad here for our government tend to become unduly frantic and to underestimate our lead in this competition of ideas, for I have observed that the Communist appeal is not reaching the Asian people. I suspect that this appeal fails less because of their love of liberty than because of their basic conservatism. The Communist threat in these countries is likely to be, for a long time, principally one of external intervention and not of popular revolution.

More precious than any facts I have learned has been the romance of coming to know the Asian way. I have traveled generally on the rough side, closer to the soil and the way of life of the country than the tourist usually does, by train, by river boat, by Chinese bus. I lived for three days in Peshawar, Pakistan, in the home of a retired postmaster, a refugee from India at the time of Partition in 1947, whose ascetic ways may allow him to live to be 100. I stayed for nearly a week in Rangoon, Burma, in the home of a once-prominent businessman who laughed and laughed at the way his crazy American friend chased around trying to get so many things done. Many times I have rented bicycles so as to get about a town on my own. I could feel the impregnable character of the fortress at Amber, India, when I had to cycle over the mountain pass which led into it, and I could feel the untamed quality of the countryside outside Katmandu, Nepal,

as I cycled from one temple to another over the rocky cow paths. I have crossed rivers by ferry where no bridge has yet been built, and no bridge is planned for a long, long time. I have wandered among the markets in small towns, with an inevitable crowd of shy but curious children at my heels, and have delighted the shopkeepers with my eagerness to sample the local cooked specialties and sweets which they prepare. I have joined a Uzbek family for dinner on the carpet in their mud-walled house and laughed with them over their awkwardness in handling the forks and spoons which had been brought "for the guest's comfort." Experiences like these have been the most meaningful of all. At every occasion, the Asian people, by the simplicity of their way of life, by their happy demeanor and self-sufficiency, have taught me something about how many of the trappings of our own way of life are truly dispensable, and they have left me the lighter of heart for knowing them.

Yale Games for Most Spring Sports

SHOCK hit Harvard athletics, and did so in the sport closest to the hearts of old alumni. The heavyweight crew, which Thomas D. Bolles, athletic director and former coach, said was the equal of his great 1941 and 1947 eights, was upset in consecutive weeks by Cornell and Penn, thus cooling considerably its hitherto confident Olympic hopes. Meanwhile the lightweighters, in winning their division of the sprints, established themselves beyond much doubt as the finest lightweight crew in America, and possibly the world. Another trip to Henley this summer would decide the latter honor.

On land, the varsity lacrosse team continued its complete reversal of last year's form, featuring a compilation of huge scores over most opponents. This team contains two possible All-Americans in its first line, and is altogether possibly the toughest outfit in the entire College. The track team won two dual meets, then surprised its followers by taking second in the outdoor Heptagonals, before tying Yale.

CREW

THE SEASON started fine for Harvey Love's Henley champions. On its first Saturday performance, the varsity heavyweight crew gave onlookers an impressive display of what all partisans hoped would be an Olympic champion. Word had spread from