

Report on the Soviet Union :

# INSIDE RUSSIA TODAY

By John Cleveland

John W. Cleveland,, a second year English and Philosophy major at King's College is the son of His Excellency, the Hon. J. H. Cleveland, Canadian Ambassador to Finland. Mr. Cleveland, Jr., was born in Ottawa, but for the last three years, he has been a resident of Helsinki. When asked for his opinions of Finland, he said that geographically it look very much like Northern Ontario, and that socially, the people have a very Scandinavian outlook on life. Said Mr. Cleveland, " their politics are very much more realistic than ours. They get to the issue and they get things done." — Ed.

The unsmiling soldier in the grey uniform walked deliberately down the aisle of the bus; I surrendered my passport. Minutes late the baggage had been checked. The gates of the Forbidden Country closed behind me. I was in Russia.

**TOURIST, NOT THEORIST**

For nine days this summer, I visited several north-eastern cities in the Soviet Union with a group of Finnish tourists. What are my opinions as a result of the trip? I will not even attempt to answer that question. Generalizations based on incomplete information are worthless. I observed as a tourist not as a theorist. And this is what I saw.

**THEY'RE JUST LIKE US**

My first impressions? Disappointment, perhaps. In the back of my mind, I had always fancied Russia as essentially different — a dark and gloomy outcast from Europe. Yet she is very much the same. The country is populated with normal ordinary human beings. It was very difficult for me to adjust to this fact. I continually looked upon quite commonplace events as evidence of a rebellion against the communist norms or assertion of preference for Western habits and attitudes.

**MANY SOLDIERS**

The first thing I noticed was that the towns were teeming with soldiers on and off duty. In Moscow and Leningrad, arm-banded volunteer marshalls 'kept order' ensuring that irresponsible citizens and drunks were kept under control. The Russians certainly have ingenious means of solving their unemployment problems!

**KYNA! KYNA!**

There is apparently a great demand for Western finished products in Russia. Stepping from the bus in Vyborg, I was surrounded by young children crying "Kyna, Kyna" (pen, in Finnish). A similar scene was recreated in the bigger cities. The only difference was that the merchandise sought was more expensive and the people older. One man sold two dozen nylons in his hotel room. Later, he was apprehended at the border and lost all of his Russian money.

Three college graduates whom I met in the Youth Center (frequented by Eutushenko formerly) talked seriously about modern music and their educational system for over an hour. They then proceeded to try and buy the shirt off my back.

**CLEAN SLUMS**

In Moscow it rained. I saw many lovely museums. One day I walked all around the city alone. Looking for slums, I found them — depressing living conditions, broken down churches (now warehouses, museums or simply abandoned) and overcrowded houses. All buildings were the same dull grey or faded yellow. It was much cleaner than New York however. This little sojourn had only served to arouse my curiosity; I wanted to see inside the houses.

It wasn't until the eighth day that the opportunity arrived. The tour conductor, who spoke some Russian invited two girls, Hera and Valentina, to dinner at the posh hotel restaurant.

**HERA AND VALENTINA**

One was a Komosomol — a young communist. They spoke little English; I understood less Russian. We conversed. The discussion varied from sexual morality and individual freedom to Marxism in the school curriculum. We then walk-

ed home. It was after midnight. I suddenly realized that a group of boys were following us. One stepped in front of me. He grabbed Lena's arm, threatening her. He wanted a fight. After calming him down we walked quietly away. Lena said they simply hated to see her frequenting with foreigners — they might report her. To whom? Perhaps I had misunderstood. It was all very confusing.

**SQUALID LIVING CONDITIONS**

At about three o'clock, we reached their apartment, six floors up. We entered under the pretense of using their facilities.

"Perhaps my home is not as elaborate as yours is," Lena suggested hopefully, "but it is normal."—This was a classic understatement. The floor had eight rooms, one ancient, rather dirty bathroom and a tiny kitchen. Eight families occupied the cramped quarters. Lena's room was about thirty five feet long, fifteen feet wide. In it were a cramped table, two beds (one for parents, one for children) a couch, bookcase, and a nearly empty cupboard. The girls offered us a snack — sour milk and stale bread. It was all the food they had. As the summer sun rose, I reached my hotel again. I felt quite guilty, as if in possession of some forbidden knowledge.

**BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU**

I received quite a shock when I realized how much knowledge the authorities had on me. In Moscow, I asked the hotel manager about times and places of various theatrical performances. We struck up a conversation. He snapped off my age, birthplace, and place of origin rapidly. Yes, he had seen Montreal once. He had been a seaman long ago. Canada was very much like Russia, he thought.

**LIQUOR IS GOD**

A young friend from the Canadian Embassy didn't think so. We walked around Moscow one day. One can be compromised very easily when alone. He showed me Gum's the largest department store in Russia. It was big all right, but a tremendous amount of space was wasted in its construction. Each article was sold in a separate compartment. As we neared the exit, I noted several men downing some large glasses of what looked to be ginger ale. It was champagne.

Liquor is cheap in Russia. What better way is there to keep the men happy?

Back at the hotel, Jack asked if we could use the phone to call his father. It didn't work. He tried another in my room. No go. Something funny was going on!

**SELF - INDOCTRINATION**

The Russians are a very serious people. At first their gravity was unbearably depressing. The libraries are always filled with students. Almost everybody, it seems, is trying hard to get a good education. Everyone reads — on the bus, in the streets, in the theatre — everywhere. It is not surprising that the Russians are so well-versed in their own doctrine — they all absorb it each morning in the newspapers.

**"I THOUGHT IT WAS A FOOD QUEUE"**

I missed the Lenin Mausoleum. I discovered that it was only open for a few hours from 11 a.m. to early afternoon. The resulting long line and endless wait guarantees enthusiasm. The long column reminded me of the story about a young Russian peasant from out of town who eagerly joined the procession one cold winter day. Reaching the tomb hours later, he nevertheless appeared considerably less excited than the others. A nearby soldier asked him why. "I thought that it was a food queue," he explained bitterly.



John W. Cleveland

(D.G.P. Munroe)

**PATRIOTISM**

The Russians have great competitive spirit and patriotic feelings. They are immensely proud of the success of their astronauts. When the first news of Valentina's successful flight came over the air, Moscow erupted. A special issue of Pravda was printed. Everyone bought one. Radios, apparently built in above shops all over the city, blared the news, with a foreground of triumphant national music and loud cheering. The television cameras were set up in the Red Square. People jostled each other in the crowded streets. It was the Grey Cup.

**TRUTH IN OUTER SPACE?**

The night of the Soviet Science is emphasized in all publications to a ridiculous extreme. It was to impress upon the people that the truth is not to be found in religion but in Outer Space. Lenin is their Christ, their Buddah, their Mohammed. The presidium and the astronauts are his disciples. Few people attend church for obvious reasons. The govt. gives the churches no moral support. There is no social pressure to attend. Cosmonauts and Party Members must declare their atheism

Before joining. Indeed, I met one engineering student in the isolated small town of Vyborg who did not know what I meant by religion; I spent hours trying to explain to him with gestures the conception of the Supreme Being. He was genuinely perplexed. Last Easter, the Christians held a high mass in the one of the remaining Moscow churches. A large crowd gathered to jeer and make cat calls at the solemn procession of priests and congregation carrying lighted candles.

I was interested in the extent to which the people had been indoctrinated. Children are taught about Marx and Lenin from their first day at school. The material changes from simple little tales about Marx and Lenin during their childhood to the complex texts themselves. Communism I, like Math I at Dal, is a compulsory course for everyone. There is but one difference. Everybody passes.

The tourist guide in Leningrad spoke fluent English. We had a long conversation, discussing such touchy matters like the racial issue in the United States, and the ready convertibility of Parts doctrine and Stalin. His speech was simply a regurgitation of Marxist phrases.

I saw few posters when in Moscow. Feeling deceived, I took the subway tour to the permanent Economic Achievement Exhibition. The only reward I received for my efforts was blistered feet and a cold horsemeat-burger. The only posters noticed emphasized four things: first, only Soviet people want peace; secondly, only in Russia are all races equal members of a harmonious brotherhood; thirdly, thou shalt not take the name of thy father Lenin in vain for the party shall not hold him guiltless; fourthly, Russian science is supreme and all astronauts are heroes.

**EATING AND TWISTING**

The food in the Soviet Union is poor. There is almost no milk and little fresh meat and vegetables. However, there is liquor. In restaurants one seems some degenerate military and college types as in Halifax. I even encountered several hard rocks in black leather jackets. The better parts of Western culture appear to be spreading rapidly. The twist hasn't caught on yet. When an old tune is played the Russian couples are satisfied with just waltzing a bit faster. However in Leningrad and in Uykovg close to the Finnish border, the radios tune into the American hit parade regularly. When in Leningrad, I ran into a group of teenagers by the river bank, one of whom carried a guitar. They all broke out into a furious rendition of "Tutti Frutti". We twisted like mad. They followed us with interest.

Throughout my stay in Russia I took great care to keep all the rules of entry presented to us at the border. I sold no clothing. I carried no loaded revolvers into Soviet territory. I took no illegal photos of bridges, museums, tall buildings or soldiers. But I was especially careful to obey the most important regulation of them all. I can solemnly disclose that I made no underhanded attempts to smuggle live carrier pigeons in or out of the Soviet Union.

**COMPLEX NATION**

There can be no conclusion — there are but scattered incidents and comments. Russia is a complex nation. It is extremely important to understand her for what she really is.

## BRIGADOON

### TUESDAY TO FRIDAY

Everyone who is interested in trying out for a part in the musical is urged to attend on one of the evenings. All parts are up for grabs leads, chorus and dancers. Those who took part in last year's production are asked to lend the society the benefit of their experience and anyone who feels they have the least bit of talent will be most welcome.

Brigadoon is a production filled with song and dancing and talent will be the deciding factor in choosing the players. The casting will be done by the Director, Miss Genni Archibald and it is perhaps necessary to emphasize that she and she alone will choose the cast. There are 14 major parts, all of which involve some singing as well as a chorus of 15-20 and a dancing group of the same number.

**ROOM 21, 8:00 P.M.**

# AUDITIONS