

On Pilgrimage: Russia, II

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Summary: Continues her account of a visit to Russia. Recounts a visit to Red Square, Lenin's tomb, the graves in the Kremlin wall, and comments on Russian writers. (DDLW #515).

I use the word Russia, because the three weeks tour which I enjoyed this summer together with fifty-four others for "Promoting Enduring Peace" was announced as covering Eastern Europe. That meant Warsaw, Leningrad, Moscow; Sofia, Varna and Zlatni Pyassatzi in Bulgaria, and Budapest in Hungary. Thanks to the radical labor movement, with which I was associated for ten years in my late teens and twenties, I was acquainted with people from these countries and with their literature to some extent. So the trip was not just a sightseeing trip, but was rich in associations for me.

I regret that I did not get to Archangel (a famous monastery there) or Murmansk, both seaports in the Arctic Circle and familiar to me not only from reading, but also from a seaman we knew.

I would have loved to take the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok, which Maurice Baring wrote about in one of his novels (but I made the trip as I read Chekhov's letters, when he travelled by carriage across Siberia to visit the prison island of Sakhalin).

I could not visit Zagorsk, the large monastery outside of Moscow, which both Tolstoi and Dostoievsky visited. Was Fr. Zossima from Zagorsk? Did Stravrogin confess to the monk there? Nor could I visit Tolstoi's home at Tula, south of Moscow. There were restrictions as to travel. There is a saying in Moscow embassies that there are two dictatorships and the second is that of Intourist. But we were blessed by the kind of guides we had, so gifted in knowledge of history and economics, as well as art, literature and music.

Jim McGovern

I was not the first of the Catholic Worker movement to visit Eastern Europe. I suddenly remembered as I wrote of the Arctic Circle ports that one of our dear departed friends during the first year of **The Catholic Worker's** existence, was a seaman, James McGovern. He was first mate on an oil tanker, a graduate of Marquette, who lost his faith and regained it, found the CW on board ship in the Gulf of Mexico, and from then on gave his salary to us to pay the printing bill. He walked with us on picket lines between trips, and sent a wonderful story of a seamen's club in a Russian port for the sixth issue of the CW. (He

died during the second World War when his ship was torpedoed off the Central American coast.) The Soviet port he visited was on the Eastern shore of the Black Sea, Novorossiysk. It is southeast of Rostov-on-Don, where my nephew-in-law was working this summer, as he had done the summer before, together with an international team of scientists on some experiments relating to peace, not war.

Karl Meyer

The other young man who visited Russia was Karl Meyer, who at present is serving his sentence of a two-year term (and thousand dollar fine) at Sandstone Federal Prison, for obstructing the income tax system by refusal to pay taxes for war. He had made the San Francisco-to-Moscow walk some years before, joining the march at Chicago. The walk ended at Moscow University, where the students, though not agreeing with the American visitors, demanded that the time of their talks be extended. He also distributed leaflets in Red Square! It was a memorable visit and I think the War Resisters at 339 Lafayette St., New York may still have some mimeographed accounts of this adventure.

The hotel that our tour crowd stayed at was just around the corner from Red Square and my guardian angel must have been on duty the evening we arrived, because the room to which Nina Polcyn and I were assigned had a bay window, which looked out on no less than four churches, with their beautiful cupolas each of different design and coloring. It was a joy to get up early in the morning to read the psalms, and sit in the bay window (two comfortable chairs), and look out not only on the churches, but the brisk cleaning job being done by half a dozen women sweepers, who with long-handled brooms and long-handled dustpans whisked up any scrap of paper, stubs of matches or stray leaves from the streets and sidewalks. This has been remarked on many times before by visitors to Moscow, and I think at First street we must give our visitors the same opportunity to comment, by getting busy each day with the same job (when we are not cooking meals, mailing out the papers or answering mail). It would be a relief to get out and stretch and we'll have to start collecting brooms right now. But we'll need shovels, not dustpans. The other day a young student from Oxford took over the job at my urging, gathering up armloads of trash from the gutters, the spill-off from overflowing trash cans blown up and down the street. That one man revolution of the do-it-yourself school, Ammon Hennacy, would approve.

In Red Square itself no traffic is allowed, only humans. My aforementioned nephew, arriving the night before I was to leave Moscow, had written ahead for me to meet him in Red Square at the left end of the Lenin Museum, at seven o'clock in the evening. We had the evening and the next morning together, and enjoyed visiting the Gum department store, and riding on the famous Moscow subway, which is as cheerful, clean, decorated and spacious as it is advertised to be. It is deep underground, perhaps with air-raid shelters in mind, but dear God, deliver us from another war! There can be no shelter from atomic and nuclear war. There are eight million people in Moscow now and the subway extends out in all directions like the spokes of a wheel. A trip on the subway is part of every tour, but we took it on our own. There was of course a river tour, and a trip to the opera and the ballet at the famous Bolshoi theatre. We visited museums and churches which had become museums, though there are many "working"

churches in Moscow. Our Lady of All Suffering, Our Lady of Tenderness—these are some of the titles of Mary, Mother of God. Where a former church stood there is now a swimming pool, heated winter and summer. Ivan the Terrible is called Ivan the Awesome. There is a story that he blinded the architect after he had built one palace or church so that he would not be able to design another for any other monarch. But perhaps he is termed “Awesome,” the guide told us, because he repented of his sins and made many retreats and turned to God before he died. The guide in Leningrad informed us that St. Alexander Nevsky had been canonized by the Czar because of his great military exploits. He was not a saint, she said, but a patriot and a hero—which indicated to me that she knew what a saint was.

Everywhere there were flowers, like our own. Along the Kremlin wall, and everywhere else little wild flowers also peeped out, chicory (blue sailor), Queen Anne’s lace, clover, golden glow. Tourists came from all over the Soviet Union during this vacation time, dressed in their best clothes, and eating ice cream cones. They were expensive but everyone was enjoying them, and the stores were full of goods and full of shoppers.

Lenin’s Mausoleum

It was not every day that the crowds gathered to visit Lenin’s Tomb, but they were lined up on the evening we arrived and on the day before we left. The lines twisted like a snake, two deep, such long lines that they extended blocks, and twisted all around the Kremlin wall. As a foreign tour, we were supposed to be near the front, but even we were a block or so away, and proceeded slowly. Before we reached the beginning of Red Square, my folding chair was taken away from me and the American Tour guide’s brief case, both of which we retrieved easily later. Everybody else seemed to know the rules—no bundles, no talking, no casually loafing with hands in pockets. Dignity and seriousness were the rule. Astronauts had visited the tomb before they set out on their perilous journeys and returned to make thanksgiving on their return. (The graves of the three astronauts who perished are covered with fresh flowers, and the tragedy is still so recent that people weep as they pass the new graves under the Kremlin wall.)

But first you go to the Mausoleum, a great square block—a most severe contrast to the ebullience, the exuberance, the joy one might say, of the intricately designed, colored and gilded St. Basil’s cathedral, which is outside the Kremlin but which dominates both Red Square and the Kremlin. Napoleon, that godless one, had stabled his horses there and wanted to tear it down; but the Soviet government today is constantly at work restoring the beauty of all these shrines. Who knows what the effect will be on the millions of school children who are guided through these museums and “working” churches? “The world will be saved by beauty,” Prince Myschkin said in **The Idiot**.

There is indeed something awesome in Lenin’s tomb. Entering the mausoleum, you are blinded momentarily after being in the bright sunlight, because inside the lighting is blue and dim. One walks down a flight of stone stairs—a winding flight—into a dim crypt, dominated by an uptilted coffin in which the head and face of Lenin are illuminated by spotlight. On either side of this catafalque stands the guard, which is changed every hour, a guard scarcely noticed in the gloom of the surroundings. The lines move slowly, and regardless of the guard,

I stopped a moment to make the sign of the Cross and to say a prayer for this man who brought so great an upheaval into the world. (To understand more about the struggle the world is in right now, it is good to read such personal accounts as the work of Lenin's widow, Nadeszda Krupskaya, who shared his exiles and his later work; also the autobiography of Leon Trotsky, whose name was linked with Lenin's until Stalin came into power and the reign of terror began.)

Kremlin Wall

How fragmentary such an account as this must be. But I must not omit our walk along the Kremlin Wall, where I was moved to see the names of the Americans, Ruthenberg and Bill Haywood, on the Kremlin Wall in Roman letters, and the name of Jack Reed (with whom I worked on the old **Masses**), in Cyrillic characters in a flower-covered grave, one of many which were on the side of the brick walk we were traversing. I did not see the grave of Madame Krupskaya, but Stalin's grave was behind the Lenin Mausoleum, the last one of a long line of Soviet leaders whose sculptured heads graced the graves, Stalin's grave showed no bust marking his plot. For a while he had shared a place of honor by the side of Lenin in the mausoleum, but his remains were moved in 1961. I felt that my former roommate, at the University of Illinois, Rayna Prohme, should have had a flower-bedecked grave along the Kremlin wall also. She had edited a paper in Hankow, had accompanied Madame Sun Yat Sen to Moscow when Chiang Kai Shek had taken over the Communist dominated city, and was preparing to continue her work as a dedicated Communist when she died in Moscow. Vincent Sheehan tells her story in his book **Personal History**, in the chapter titled "Revolution."

I was interested to read on my return from Europe that Nikita Krushchev, another downgraded leader of the Soviets, had been buried in what some American newspapers termed an obscure cemetery outside of Moscow. But it was really in the famous old cemetery in the grounds of the 400 year old Novodevichye Monastery, which is just three miles from the Kremlin and within sight of the famous Moscow University on Lenin Heights. He may have been denied a state funeral, this man who released the prisoners from the slave labor camps and was responsible for allowing Alexander Solzhenitzyn to publish his first great book, **A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich** in Nov Mir, the popular literary journal of Moscow. But he is resting in the company of many Russian greats, such as Soloviev, that philosopher of ecumenism, who so influenced Dostoievsky's thinking. "Soloviev is the prophet of ecumenism, and indeed of everything good in Russia," Helene Iswolsky told me, as I was writing this.

Chekhov

Anton Chekhov is also buried there, brought back from Yalta where he was dying of tuberculosis. His wife was an actress in the Moscow Art Theater and lived long after him. She continued to act in his great dramas, as he wished to have them played, and when she died there were demonstrations of grief by the people in Russia, who so loved her husband's works.

I remember one of the things Chekhov wrote in a letter after visiting the prison camp in Sakhalin Island. "God's world is good. It is only we who are bad. . . One must work, and to

hell with everything else. The important thing is that we must be just and all the rest will come as matter of course. . . My soul is in an upheaval.”

Thomas Mann wrote an analysis of Chekhov’s plays and his philosophy of work many years ago in an article which appeared in **Masses and Mainstream**. I loaned out this precious copy, and I never saw it again, though I’d like much to get hold of it. I guess I shall have to read over the plays myself and dig out those excellent quotations on work. Or maybe the reader who has my copy will return it.

More Coming

It can well be seen that my interests on this trip were not so much economic as religious. I am leaving out my account of Bulgaria and Hungary until another issue of the CW. I would like also to recommend to our readers a very clear account of our pilgrimage from the pens of Dr. Jerome Davis and E. Raymond Wilson, the leaders of our tour, which appeared in the October issue of **Quaker Life**.