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Rabbi Silver reports on Russian advances, 1961.



Aug 1961 61-9  
For Plain Dealer

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

The Temple

Cleveland, Ohio

I was in the Soviet Union 26 years ago, and I wished to see what progress the country had made since that time. My impressions are necessarily sketchy, since a short visit of only three weeks is quite insufficient for a satisfactory survey, even though one has been following developments in books and newspapers.

The country has certainly made remarkable progress. This is apparent even to a casual observer. The tempo of its technical and industrial advance has been extraordinary. Great construction projects are everywhere in sight.

It is idle to speculate whether as much or more could not have been accomplished within 45 years by a progressive and democratic government without the costly and tragic social upheavals which took place.

The people, at least in the cities, are better dressed, and appear to be better fed than before. There is still a severe shortage of housing, and family living quarters leave much to be desired. But many new apartment houses which promise somewhat more space for families are being built. Consumer's goods, while still very limited, are more plentiful than before, and prices while still high are considerably lower than in the past few years. Wages are scaled by fixed categories - not all Russian citizens receive the same pay. The average is, by our standards, low but the wages are supplemented by free medical care, free education, all the way, for children, paid vacations, very low rent, and old age pensions.



There is no unemployment. Theatre, music, the cinema and sports of which the Russians are very fond, are available to them at low cost.

Particularly impressive is the progress which the country has made in education. It has pretty well stamped out illiteracy, and its system of education covering all branches, is of high and exacting standards, and affords every opportunity to young people, especially to those of exceptional ability.

The people are friendly, eager to learn, patient, confident, and very proud of their country's achievements, especially the outstanding scientific achievements of recent years - and its victories in the last war. They do not seem to be resentful of the regime under which they live.

Not all the people of the Soviet Union are unaware of what goes on in the West. They know that the people of the Western countries particularly those of the United States, have a higher standard of living and possess far more material goods than they do. They are not at all contemptuous of these advantages, and they hope to acquire them in due time. But they are fully persuaded that, intrinsically, their way of life and the society which they are building are better, more just and more interesting, and that the future lies with them.

There can be no doubt left in the mind even of a casual visitor to the Soviet Union that the government of the country is a tight dictatorship, and that the freedoms which the Western peoples cherish are either non existent or are sharply circumscribed. There is no free press. There is but one political party. No one expresses himself on any social, political or even cultural problem in a way which deviates from the prescribed party line. Religious worship is



tolerated in a sharply limited number of churches and synagogues, but religious education of the youth is prohibited.

The places of worships which are functioning are filled with worshippers, but mostly older people.

The people to whom I spoke, men and women in official life, academicians, professional people, directors of factories and collective farms, and working people generally all expressed in the course of our conversations a most earnest hope for world peace. Peace seemed to be on everyone's lips. Their country has not yet fully recovered from the horrible Nazi ravages of the last war in which Russian casualties were appalling. They are very sincere when they speak of peaceful co-existence with the capitalist West, although not all of them have thought through the implications of co-existence in terms of the self-restraint which their government must come to exercise in foreign affairs, and in the process of encouraging so-called movements of national liberation in other countries.

I have always believed in co-existence and have for years advocated it. The Russians have adopted a way of life which is theirs. I would not choose it for myself or for America. It has basic serious defects which we cannot ignore even as it has merits, which we should not underestimate. But their way of life is theirs, and whatever is wrong with it they themselves will have to correct in the future.

It has not been demonstrated that the two systems cannot exist side by side. There is much that each can learn from the other, though neither at the moment seem to be inclined to acknowledge it. Neither system has said the last word. Both have undergone change in the past, and undoubtedly will do so in the future. Life may bring



them much closer together, even though their dogmas and ideologies seem to be worlds apart and irreconcilable.

Certainly their differences cannot be resolved by the sword. The problem before the world today is not which system is the better, but how the two can keep from destroying each other - and mankind. Both are strongly entrenched and sufficiently powerful that one cannot destroy the other without destroying itself. The question is then not which will bury the other, but whether a war, once unleashed between the East and the West, will not bury them both.

We must learn to live on the same globe with the Soviet people and they with us. Neither they nor we are always in the right. The leaders of both countries must try to reduce tensions. The peoples of the world are waiting for signs of a new and inspired statemanship both in the Kremlin and the White House. The old is leading us nowhere, only from one crisis to another. Let us not be afraid to trade with each other in goods or in ideas. Let us compete in only one way - which system can do more for its people.





Rabbi and Mrs. Abba Hillel Silver on their return from Soviet Union.

Plain Dealer Photo (Dudley Brumbach)

## Rabbi Silver Reports on Russian Advances

### ★ From First Page

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#### All Want Peace

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#### Both Are Changing

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### Britain Applies Today for Common Market

BRUSSELS, Belgium (Reu-



# Rabbi Silver Reports on Russian Advances

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and Mrs. Silver returned yesterday from a four-week journey to Europe which included three weeks in the Soviet Union. In the accompanying article he recounts his observations in Russia and some thoughts inspired by them.

By DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

Rabbi of the Temple

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## Goods More Plentiful

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Wages are scaled by fixed categories—not all Russian citizens receive the same pay. The average is, by our standards, low, but the wages are supplemented by free medical care, free education, all the way, for children, paid vacations, very low rent, and old age pensions.

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Continued on Page 7, Column 1

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