

Excerpts from  
*Angel's in Stalin's Paradise*  
by James William Crowl  
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## CHAPTER VII

### 1934-1944: WINDING DOWN

#### Duranty Returns to the U.S.

Duranty quit his post in December 1933, mainly because of poor health. Moscow's weather and the effects of more than twelve years in Russia had aggravated a heart condition and left him exhausted. At the age of fifty he resigned from the New York Times and went into semi-retirement in southern California to write his memoirs.

The product of that effort was I Write As I Please, published in 1935. The book was more than an account of Duranty's twelve years in Russia, however, it was also a restatement and a defense of the philosophy that had marked his reports from Moscow. Though he was, as yet, widely respected in the West and had lost little of the prestige that had gotten him the Pulitzer award in 1932, both Eugene Lyons and William Henry Chamberlin had left Russia at about the same time as Duranty, and the claims they made in 1934 about the famine raised questions about the accuracy of Duranty's reports. Apparently Duranty seems to have had some success in that regard. Though to a later reader his often repeated theories about Russia's "Asian" character seem tiresome and over-simplified, they were as well-received in 1935 as they had been in the past. The book was a best-seller, and, according to one writer, it increased support for Stalin's Russia among Americans during this period.<sup>1</sup>

Duranty's success came from his insistence that he had known Russia as few outsiders had. He reminded readers that this insight had begun with his war experiences, where he claimed to have learned to look beyond the casualties in order to see their meaning for Europe's future. It had been valuable training for Russia, he claimed, where it was vital to be able to judge the long range impact of policies. He argued:

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I'm a reporter, not a humanitarian, and if a reporter can't see the wood for trees he can't describe the wood. You may call that special pleading or call me callous, and perhaps it is true, but you can't blame me for it; you must blame the War, because that was where my mental skin got thickened.<sup>2</sup>

#### Fischer Regains His Enthusiasm

While Duranty's views on Russia were unchanged during 1934, Fischer was beginning a final burst of support for the Soviets. The phase would last until 1937 and would see him write some of his most enthusiastic articles before turning somewhat

against the Soviets in 1938 and 1939. Fischer's experience, in this way, was similar to that of Eugene Lyons, who had broken with the Soviets in 1933. Like Fischer, Lyons had been intensely idealistic and had struggled for years with his doubts about the Soviets. Even during the periods when he could overcome those doubts, Lyons claimed later that they were only suppressed, and much of the enthusiasm in his articles was part of the effort to keep them in check. Thus, according to Lyons, his last months in Russia found him writing some of his most enthusiastic pieces in a final effort to convince himself that his doubts were baseless.<sup>3</sup> For Fischer the famine years had been ones of frustration and, at times, disillusionment. Yet so much of his life had gone into the Soviet experiment that he clung to it, hoping for improvement. When conditions got better in 1934, Fischer suppressed his fears and became as enthusiastic as ever.

Fischer's articles in this three-year phase from 1934 to 1937 were uniformly one-sided. He insisted that the Soviet economy was at last delivering consumer goods and a higher standard of living. Just as he had been obsessed with the great construction projects earlier in the 1930's, Fischer was preoccupied in these years with gathering evidence that the sacrifices of the Five-Year Plan had been worthwhile. In January 1934, he

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announced that:

every observer in Moscow notes the marked improvement in the general aspect of the city, in the clothes of the people, and in the displays in store windows. Shops sell wares that Russians never knew, wares of striking excellence and taste.<sup>4</sup>

Years later, however, after he broke with the Soviets, Fischer all but admitted having deceived his readers in the mid-1930's with reports of improved living conditions. Only the upper element of Soviet society lived better, he remembered, and in his desire to see the rest of the population share in the advances, he had written about them as if they already did. Actually, he recalled:

Only the new ruling class lived well; new shops, with lavish displays and heavily laden shelves were opened for them. On the other hand, the grocery stores patronized by the ordinary mass citizen displayed tantalizingly realistic and mouth-watering imitations in wood of hams and sausage.<sup>5</sup>

The "Open Road" tour groups that Fischer led across Russia each summer during the mid-1930's only increased his fervor. The tourists were, for the most part, well-educated, affluent liberals. Like Fischer, they were idealists, hoping that the Soviets were creating a better society, and they wanted their hopes confirmed.<sup>6</sup> Fischer took them through factories, kolkhozes, sovkhoses, rest homes, apartment houses, and even the partially completed Moscow subway. He noted that every group became so enthusiastic that he had to dampen their zeal with facts about the G.P.U. and the Stalinist cult.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Fischer seemed to absorb the tourists' mood. After leaving his 1934 group, he declared:

the Soviet Union is overflowing with energy. The Bolsheviks have split the social atom and released unlimited units of energy which

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are being directed into the channel of national upbringing.

He found that “the cities are bursting their bounds.” Moscow “throbs,” and “human electricity tingles in the streets, Moscow’s tempo is racing, staccato, mad.”<sup>8</sup> By the end of the 1935 tour, Fischer’s praise had become increasingly shrill. “Everywhere there is change and progress,” he exclaimed, “nowhere stagnation or retrogression.” “The whole country boils with activity,” and “the nations of the U.S.S.R. are full of loyalty, optimism, and confidence in a bright future.”<sup>9</sup>

### The Great Purge

One reason for Fischer’s optimism was his belief that the decline of internal opposition had created a new political climate in Russia. Reasoning in Marxian terms, he was convinced that after years of class struggle, Russia was ready for democracy. Fischer seemed to congratulate himself on having not given up on the Soviets during those years of oppression, as some of his colleagues had done.

The first indication of the new era, according to Fischer, was the G.P.U.’s decline. As early as mid-1933, he had applauded Stalin’s choice of Ivan Akulov as procurator-general, supposedly with control over the secret police. Fischer thought Akulov an old Bolshevik with a “penchant for reform,” who had been unsuccessful in an earlier effort to curb the G.P.U. He explained that Akulov had been given a high post in the secret police in 1931, only to be forced out by those opposed to reform. Fischer interpreted his new appointment as proof that Stalin was determined to go ahead with that reform, and he labeled it one of the year’s most promising developments. When the Party’s Seventeenth Congress early in 1934 ordered that the G.P.U. be reorganized as the Commissariat of Internal Affairs or N.K.V.D., Fischer was convinced it had been stripped of power. He told his readers flatly that a secret police like the G.P.U. was no longer needed.<sup>10</sup>

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Sergei Kirov’s assassination in December 1934, did not shake Fischer’s conclusions, even when the murderer was linked to Zinoviev by the police. On January 1, 1935 Fischer wrote to Freda Kirchway, explaining that he agreed with her editorial in The Nation advising the Soviets not to make hasty arrests of former oppositionists. He confided that he was concerned by the round-up of some of Zinoviev’s supporters, but he added that “I can’t write on it yet because the matter is not clear in my mind.” Fischer insisted, however, that there was no reason to expect that the arrests would multiply. He claimed:

I am sure of only one thing, the ex-G.P.U. has already suffered and will suffer, its prestige was struck a heavy blow, and this is the organization which would carry out a new terror if there was to be one. For this and other

reasons, I am convinced this is a regret-able and serious interruption, in Russia's progress towards greater liberalism)<sup>11</sup>

That was still Fischer's opinion when he returned to Moscow from the West in May, 1935. In an article for The Nation, he admitted that the government had over-reacted in arresting former oppositionists. Fischer's remarks seemed directed more to the Kremlin than to his readers when he argued that the opposition was dead and no good would come from further persecution. He was confident again that the arrests were only a temporary setback in the trend toward freedom. He asserted that "a large number" of kulaks had been released from work-camps early in 1935, and this was proof that the "tendency toward tolerance and relaxation" had continued "with a consistency and clarity which prove that the Kirov assassination provoked no panic and no doubts."<sup>12</sup>

Despite his apparent confidence in Russia's direction, Fischer spent less and less time there. In 1935 he was in Russia from May until September, just long enough to complete his second "Open Road" tour. His interest had shifted to European problems and the unrest in Spain, and he wrote only a

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few articles about Russia in 1935. There is no evidence that he was uneasy about political uncertainties in Russia, however, and when he returned in May of 1936, his enthusiasm seemed as great as at any time since the start of the five-year plans. The "Stalin Constitution" with its promises of democracy and republican government was apparently the reason for his feelings. He declared:

Though I violently dislike the raucous paeans of praise for Stalin which are repeated in this country with benumbing frequency and monotony, I must add my voice to the chorus. Democratization is not a whim inspired by a moment or a bit of opportunism provoked by a temporary situation. Stalin apparently thought this out years ago. He has been preparing it ever since 1931. Forward-looking people abroad will hail the change toward democracy.<sup>13</sup>

Years afterwards, in The God That Failed, Fischer conceded that, from the start, he had seen "deficiencies" in the constitution. Nevertheless, according to him, "I clutched at it. I wanted to believe. I did not want to forswear a cause in which I had made such a large spiritual investment."<sup>14</sup> In Men and Politics, published in 1941, Fischer claimed that his doubts concerning the constitution had deepened in August 1936, when the first of the show-trials of the great purge began. He had been in Kiev, he remembered, and rather than return to Moscow for the trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others, he had left for Spain. His articles and letters from 1936, however, give a different impression. In an article dated August 1, Fischer was as enthusiastic as before about the constitution, calling it a "remarkable" document and describing what he claimed were built-in checks and balances to protect civil liberties. "The reign of law," he declared, is "now definitely established in the U.S.S.R." He concluded that the "world has seen a number of parliamentary regimes converted into dictatorships. The Bolshevik dictatorship is the first to resign in favor of democracy."<sup>15</sup>

Fischer was still in Paris in mid-September 1936, when he wrote to Max Lerner at The Nation. The trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev distressed him, he admitted, but he rebuked Lerner for claiming that it put a shadow across Russia's future. Fischer argued that Russia was still a blend of terror and dictatorship, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other. Although the old Russia was dying, Fischer explained that "the methods of dictatorship continue out of inertia to operate after the base of the dictatorship has been displaced by a new class alignment which makes democracy inevitable." The Kirov assassination and its aftermath of arrests had been an earlier interruption, he wrote, and they had been followed by the new constitution. Fischer argued that:

the shift from dictatorship to democracy is not only unprecedented, it is also difficult and tortuous. It takes time and it does not move in a straight line. One must observe this change with some historical perspective rather than with newspaper impatience.<sup>16</sup>

A few days later Fischer left for Spain, where the Civil War was both a diversion and a new commitment. He had visited Spain each year since 1933 and believed deeply in the Loyalist government. During 1936 and 1937, Fischer wrote more than two dozen articles calling for the West to support the Loyalists. At the same time, he waited for news that Russia was moving toward democracy again. Word of increasing repression disappointed him, but, since Russia was supporting the Loyalists while the West seemed paralyzed, Fischer clung to the hope that Stalin had only postponed democracy for Russia.<sup>17</sup>

There was a second reason why Fischer did not break with the Soviets before the end of the Spanish Civil War. As was often the case with him, idealism blended with realism. Reporting the Civil War was an outstanding opportunity for him, but his success as a journalist there depended upon his sources of information in the Loyalist government.

Had he broken with the Soviets, Fischer would have lost those contacts, and, indeed, he seemed inordinately sensitive to the Kremlin line in Spain. For example, he denounced the anarchist F.A.I. and P.O.U.M. organizations, despite their efforts for the Loyalists, and, in April 1938, he even supported the Communist demand that political commissars be placed in the army to improve troop morale. Several correspondents covering the Loyalists, including Anita Brenner, Max Nomad and Carlo Tresca, criticized Fischer for taking his information directly from Communist sources in the Loyalist government.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, in Moscow the great purge trials were held in August 1936, January 1937, and March 1938. Although Fischer reserved judgment on the trials, Duranty vigorously defended them. According to him, Trotsky had created a spy network at the very time that Germany and Japan were spreading their own spy organizations in Russia. He explained that the two groups shared a hatred for Stalin, and fascist agents had cooperated with the Trotskyites in Kirov's assassination.

The show-trials, Duranty insisted, had revealed the Trotskyite-fascist link beyond question. The trials showed just as clearly, he argued, that Stalin's arrest of thousands of these agents had spared the country from a wave of assassinations. Duranty charged that those who worried about the rights of the defendants or claimed that their confessions had been gained by drugs or torture, only served the interests of Germany and Japan. He wrote:

The Kremlin's enemies have used this belief and bewilderment to weaken, at a most critical period, the international prestige of the USSR, but that does not alter the fact that their Trojan horse is broken and its occupants destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

Such remarks were striking evidence that while Duranty no longer had to contend with the Soviet censorship, his views after returning to the West were no less slanted than they had been in the past.

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Duranty wrote about the purges in parts of two books that were published in the early 1940's. In The Kremlin and the People, appearing in 1941, he insisted again that the Great Purge had eliminated a "Fifth Column" of Trotskyite and fascist agents. Scoffing at claims that the accused may not have been guilty of the charges against them, he argued "it is unthinkable that Stalin and Voroshilov and Budenny . . . could have sentenced their friends to death unless the proofs of guilt were overwhelming." Yet Duranty showed no interest in examining the evidence, and he appears to have accepted the charges solely on his faith in the Soviet leadership. Thus, he claimed that "Piatakov's execution and the execution of Muralov are to me the strongest proof that they were guilty." In the case of the secret trial of Marshal Tukhachevsky and other Red Army commanders in June 1937, Duranty explained that they had been caught plotting with enemy agents. The accused had "all confessed guilt," he noted, and he took the suicide of General Gamarnik as proof the he "had engaged in some deal with the Germans."<sup>20</sup>

Three years later, in his book U.S.S.R., Duranty's position seemed less dogmatic, but only because he could no longer find a publisher willing to print his earlier views. His first version of the book apparently expressed such strong support for Stalin's actions during the purge era that it was rejected by the major publishers.<sup>21</sup> In its rewritten form he offered a sympathetic explanation for Stalin's actions, rather than a justification for them. Indeed, he seemed willing to concede that Stalin might have overreacted to what had appeared to him to be a terrorist threat.

Duranty argued that on the eve of the purge the Soviet Union had been menaced by Germany and Japan, and Stalin had been expecting a wave of terrorism designed to weaken the Soviets in preparation for a fascist military attack. Kirov's assassination seemed to indicate that the assault had begun, Duranty claimed, especially since Louis Barthou, the French foreign minister sympathetic

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to Russia, had been murdered two months earlier. Stalin may have panicked by arresting anyone with a reason for cooperating with enemy agents, Duranty admitted, but he claimed that under the circumstances the arrests had been reasonable and necessary. He argued, as he had earlier, that the arrests had crushed the terrorist conspiracy and kept Russia from being invaded in the mid-1930's.<sup>22</sup>

### Epilogue

Duranty's U.S.S.R. was written ten years after he left Moscow, and evidence that his views on Russia had not changed in any important way during that time was obvious from more than his explanation of the purge. The book was, in fact, little more than a benumbing repetition of his views on Russia's history and character. For example, he observed that the five-year plans had been adopted because

men like Stalin, who had spent the best years of their lives in danger and difficulty, imprisonment and exile, could never be deterred by thought of the hardships their policies might inflict upon others. They knew that the Russian masses were accustomed and inured to hardship, and that the Revolution had released a vast force of energy with which miracles could be wrought if it was rightly employed. They had the feeling which Napoleon, another child of Revolution, shared with them, that nothing was impossible, no problem insoluble, no mountain too steep to climb.<sup>23</sup>

Duranty was certain that it had been worthwhile, and claimed:

the most ignorant and backward of all white nations has moved into the forefront of social, economic and political consciousness. Its obsolete agricultural system has been modernized and mechanized; its small and artificial industry has become gigantic and self-supporting; its illiterate masses have been educated

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and disciplined to appreciate and enjoy the benefits of collective effort.

His greatest regret was that the Soviets were so misunderstood in the West. Duranty complained:

If this were a fairy-tale it might be said that the good fairies who met at the cradle of the infant Soviet Republic wished it courage, clear-sightedness, perseverance, determination and unbounded energy. But the wicked fairy added the curse that it would always be misunderstood and traduced.<sup>24</sup>

For Duranty, then, the years after he left Moscow were marked with the same pro-Soviet bias, the same apparent convictions about Russia's national character, and the same willingness to serve the Kremlin that he had shown as a correspondent. Fischer, however, broke with the Soviets soon after the end of the Spanish Civil War. When Franco's victory grew certain in the spring of 1938, Fischer's interest shifted back to Russia. Yet, when he returned to Moscow in May, he found that the purges had created appalling conditions. The friends who once had jammed his apartment upon every return did not welcome him back and were reluctant even to speak to him. His wife, Markoosha, once had been strongly pro-Soviet and had helped overcome his reservations about Soviet policies. This time, however, she introduced him to people

who waited with their suitcases each night for the N.K.V.D.'s visit, and she helped convince him that the purges had wrecked their hopes for Russia.<sup>25</sup>

An added factor in disillusioning Fischer in 1938 was the revival of Russian nationalism. He argued in later years that Soviet internationalism had been one of his strongest ties to the regime. When he arrived in Moscow in 1938, however, he was sickened by the glorification of Russia's past and by the currents of Russian chauvinism in Soviet policies. Not only were pre-revolutionary tyrants being praised even as Trotsky and Bukharin were

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vilified, but there were new efforts to impose the Russian language on the minority nationalities. Of all the "interracial frictions" that Fischer saw being generated by the new stress on nationalism, he seems to have been outraged the most by anti-Semitism. For several years, he explained later, the large number of Jews victimized by the purges had concerned him and made him wonder if the Jews were not a special target. According to Fischer, Russians sometimes had questioned an arrest by asking "He's not a party member and he's not a Jew, so why has he been arrested?" Fischer concluded that Stalin was using the Jews as a means of enflaming Russian nationalism- -just as the tsars had in the past.<sup>26</sup> Though he was still reluctant to break entirely with the Soviets, Fischer seems to have been bitterly disappointed by what he found in Moscow. After a month in Russia, Fischer moved back to the United States and began the slow process of getting his family out of Russia. It was a complicated task, for his wife had become a Soviet citizen and neither of their sons had been registered with the American embassy. The Soviet government refused even to consider their request at first, and Fischer credited Eleanor Roosevelt's intercession for getting the family's release.<sup>27</sup>

Even when his family arrived in New York, however, Fischer kept silent about Russia, apparently since he was reluctant to speak out while he had even a sliver of hope remaining. It took the shock of the Stalin-Hitler Pact in August of 1939 to jar him into denouncing the Soviets. His reaction to the treaty later reminded him of the effect of the 1921 Kronstadt revolt on Alexander Berkman. Berkman was the anarchist leader who had supported the Soviets after 1917, despite his growing impatience with Bolshevik treatment of non-Communist radicals. The Kronstadt revolt had been too much for him, however, and he had denounced the Soviets in the harshest terms. Fischer claimed that his own experience had been similar. He had despaired over the purges and the failure of the 1936 constitution, but needed the shock of the 1939 Pact to make him break with the Kremlin.<sup>28</sup>

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It took years before Fischer became truly alienated from the Soviets, though. Initially he was outraged only by what had happened to Russia after 1936. In his book Men and Politics, written in 1940, Fischer's enthusiasm for Soviet accomplishments before 1936 seemed almost as great as before, and he refused even to attack the Kremlin for its role in the 1933 famine. Though, in part, he may have been anxious to minimize his own role in concealing the famine, Fischer seemed convinced that the famine had been an unfortunate by-product of the struggle to modernize Soviet agriculture. He



was still certain that such an effort had been essential, and he did not fault the Kremlin for its treatment of the peasants.<sup>29</sup>

Fischer insisted that in 1936 Russia had been on the verge of satisfying his dreams for the country. The second Five-Year Plan had brought increasing prosperity and better living conditions, he argued, and he was still convinced that Stalin had decided to introduce democracy and a republican form of government. He claimed that it was only by accident that these plans had been stillborn. According to him, Kirov's assassination had forced Stalin to postpone and then cancel the reforms, just as they were about to be implemented. Although Fischer had criticized Stalin for his megalomania repeatedly over the years, he was unwilling to believe that Stalin had started the purge to boost his power. Too much had been done in dismantling the secret police and preparing the country for the 1936 constitution to persuade him that Stalin had never intended to put the reforms into effect. Fischer believed, then, that Kirov's death had reawakened Stalin's old fears about enemies, and those fears had led in turn to the Great Purge. Fischer was convinced that if the assassination had occurred a year later, the civil rights provided by the new constitution would have blocked the purge. Despite all that Russia had experienced since 1936, however, Fischer believed that the Soviet system might be salvaged. He explained:

I still feel that even Stalin has not been able to kill all the good that came out of the

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Revolution. Whatever is left has no real expression in Soviet politics. It cannot influence present-day policy. In fact, a prolongation of Stalin's rule, by him or his successors, may completely destroy it. But if a different and better world ever emerges out of the welter and chaos of blood that mar our lives today it will find in Russia allies who are now silent and unhappy.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusions

### Their Views

The two correspondents came, of course, from very dissimilar backgrounds. Duranty was twelve years older, fairly well-born and excellently educated, in contrast to Fischer's humble origins and modest education. Yet both men were complex, and the way in which they looked at themselves and at Russia shows striking similarities and differences.

Each man's work seems to have been shaped in part by his feelings of inferiority. Malcolm Muggeridge saw these traits in Duranty and thought they stemmed from his diminutive size, the loss of his leg, and a childhood in which he had been educated with better-born classmates who treated him condescendingly.<sup>31</sup> The result was that, he became preoccupied with making himself known and respected. This all-consuming personal ambition meant that he had few values or standards apart from himself. That made it easy, for instance, for him to completely reverse his views about the Soviet regime when the New York Times needed a Moscow correspondent who could get along with the Bolsheviks.

The same effort to overcome his sense of inferiority may explain why Duranty was so interested in developing formulas about the Russian national character. He wanted to prove that he alone had insight into how and why Russia was unfolding. Then, too, by believing that Russians, were an inferior people, Duranty could enjoy the

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reassurance of feeling superior to them.

Muggeridge adds that Duranty's fascination with power also stemmed from his sense of inadequacy. He explained that Duranty spoke often of Russia's strength, "it was the sheer power generated that appealed to him; he was always remarking on how big Russia was, how numerous Russians were." He listened to Duranty praise Stalin on one occasion and claimed:

I had the feeling . . . that in thus justifying Soviet brutality and ruthlessness, Duranty was getting his own back for being small, and losing a leg. . . This is probably, in the end, the only real basis of the appeal of such regimes as Stalin's, and later Hitler's; they compensate for weakness and inadequacy . . . Duranty was a little browbeaten boy looking up admiringly at a big bully.<sup>32</sup>

Like Duranty, Fischer had personality problems that seem to have colored his journalism. Like many young people from an impoverished background, he was determined to excel, and, in part, Russia was his means for gaining respect and a reputation, just as it was for Duranty. Thus, he thrived in his role as an interpreter of the Soviets to the West, and he wanted to be recognized as an unquestionable authority. If he was dogmatic in his articles, he was perhaps even more so in his dealings with people. After a fund-raising party in New York for the Spanish Loyalists, the host wrote to Fischer complaining about his "boorishness" and his "indiscreet comments" to the other guests. The Loyalists would have been better served, the host argued, had Fischer thrown his support to Franco.<sup>33</sup>

Fischer was like Duranty also in his attraction to power. He was drawn to both Soviet and Western political figures not only because they could help with his reporting, but because they were important. He was enormously proud of his association with such figures, and he was as

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deferring toward them as he was overbearing toward others.

Yet, while Duranty's chief concern was himself and his career, Fischer was anxious to find a society without poverty, injustice, and anti-Semitism, and Soviet Russia was his answer. Consequently there were fundamental differences in the way in which the two men looked at Russia. Duranty seems to have had little interest in the Soviet people and even less in socialism. When he looked to Russia's future, he believed that Communism would either fulfill its purpose by modernizing the country, or else Russia would fall back into a stagnant "Asian" condition. In either case, he appears to have been convinced that Communism would gradually ebb away since it was no more than a prod to push the country forward.

On the contrary, Fischer saw the West as bankrupt and believed that it would be compelled to follow Russia into socialism. His articles seemed designed to educate his readers in preparation for that future, while Duranty's were intended to reassure readers that they would never have to face such a future. Most of all, while Duranty admired the use of power to regiment the Soviet people, Fischer was apologetic about such regimentation.

### The Question of Responsibility

That two such biased correspondents could have helped to shape American opinion toward Soviet Russia during the 1920's and 1930's, raises questions about how and why they were able to maintain their posts and their influence for so many years. In part, it seems, the responsibility for their work lies with American newspapers of that era. Dragged down by the public's isolationist mood after World War I, the press appears to have abdicated much of its responsibility for informing readers about developments abroad.

The Soviets contributed as well, by their censorship of out-going news. As William Henry

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Chamberlin has pointed out, almost any unfavorable comment about conditions in Russia might be censored. While there was no direct censorship of reports sent by mail, such pieces were routinely opened by the authorities, and, if they proved objectionable, the reporter could be reprimanded and denied the use of press department facilities. There was the possibility, too, that repeated violations would bring expulsion from the country. Many newspapers, therefore, preferred to send their reporters to Baltic cities where information about Russia was plentiful, though often biased against the Soviets, while other newspapers seem to have opened their Moscow assignment to almost any reporter who was willing to tolerate the censorship and the living conditions. For these publications the object of having a reporter in Moscow seems to have been more a matter of prestige than it was a means of obtaining reliable information.

It is possible, however, that the Moscow post might have been made into a reliable source of information. The Soviet government in the period between the World Wars was eager for diplomatic and trade ties with the West. The Soviets, as Eugene Lyons claims, may have been more in need of good relations with the Western press, than the press was in need of having correspondents in Moscow. Yet Western newspapers tacitly acquiesced in it by sending to Moscow radical journalists like Lyons and Muggeridge who supposedly would work in harmony with the censors. According to Lyons, when his relations with the Soviets became strained in mid-1933, Karl Bickel, president of United Press, chided him, for not cooperating with the Soviet press department. Bickel explained that a warm relationship between a reporter and the government where he was assigned is essential for the proper flow of news. Lyons concluded:

Americans who suppose that editors are inclined to cheer their correspondents in the fearless pursuit of truth have a naively idyllic view of modern journalism. They forget that the principal commodity of the newspaper is news,

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not truth, and the two do not always coincide. . . The correspondent who gets himself expelled or even disliked for talking out of turn puts his employers to great expense and, more important, endangers their sources of information.<sup>34</sup>

The failure of Western newspapers to do all that they could to inform their readers about conditions in Russia was never more apparent than during the Soviet famine of the early 1930's. Although the home newspapers were aware of the travel restrictions placed on their correspondents at the start of 1933, there was no outcry from them. Moreover, while there were clues enough even before the travel ban that conditions were not satisfactory in the countryside and that there might be a food shortage, only the most conservative newspapers in the West gave the early reports of famine the attention they deserved. It was almost as if the Western press itself was willing to accept a role in the famine cover-up.

The New York Times role in this dismal press coverage of the Soviet Union seems to have been especially onerous. While the Times was (and is) widely regarded as one of the world's best newspapers, its reputation for accuracy and fairness was clearly not deserved in the case of its coverage of the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1933. During and after the October Revolution, the Times savaged the Bolsheviks and implored the Russian people to come to their senses. Its strong anti-Soviet bias was exposed in 1920 in The New Republic by Charles Merz and Walter Lippmann who accused the Times of relying upon "totally untrustworthy" and biased correspondents in its coverage.

Evidently stung by the charge, the Times curbed its editorial abuse of the Soviets to an extent. But its apparent response to the article's criticism of its biased correspondents was to permit--and perhaps encourage--one of its Redbaiters to metamorphose into a Soviet apologist. The Times seems not to have questioned Duranty's

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motives or his reliability or fitness in 1921, when he shifted abruptly from attacking to defending the Soviets. Then, for more than a decade, the Times apparently was content to keep Duranty as its Moscow correspondent, even though, according to Gay Talese's study of the Times, the newspaper's editors regarded Duranty as a Soviet apologist.<sup>35</sup>

How, then, could the Times in good conscience have tolerated Duranty in its Moscow post? Leland Stowe, for much of the inter-war period a European correspondent, concedes that as an outsider to the Times' organization, he can only speculate about its motives in retaining Duranty. Nevertheless, like Eugene Lyons, he notes that the first concern of a newspaper is news, and the Times apparently was no different from other newspapers of that era in being more interested in gathering news than in

making a determined effort to uncover the truth. Duranty seemed to fulfill the news gathering function quite well, and Stowe suggests that the Times may have reasoned “well, he’s in there and knows the language--and could we get anybody else in?”

In addition, Stowe makes the startling accusation that from 1927 until 1939 the Times’ European news coverage was controlled largely by a man of mediocre ability, who showed little interest in promoting either fairness or excellence among his correspondents. Edwin L. James was chief of the Times’ correspondents in Europe and later Managing Editor of the newspaper during those years, and, according to Stowe, he “tolerated several gross incompetents or ‘slanters’ (like W. Carney in Madrid) and a drunk in Stockholm . . . and some other mediocre newsmen on [his] foreign staff for years.” Stowe insists that under James the Times seems never to have removed any European correspondent for poor performance or bias, and “never hired outstanding men for the Times” for fear they might outshine James’ own shabby work. Indeed, according to Stowe, Duranty’s “smooth, glossy, prose” was so much better than James’ own,

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that he may have kept him in Moscow rather than another European post “because he didn’t want him any nearer, or where he might show up more than James’ own dispatches did.”<sup>36</sup>

While it is impossible to verify these charges if they are accurate it would mean that Duranty’s reporting, far from being unique, fit into a pattern of inferior and even incompetent Times’ coverage of European affairs during much of the era between the World Wars.

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<sup>1</sup> Quincy Howe, The News and How to Understand It. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> I Write As I Please, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Eugene Lyons, July 17, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Fischer, “Luxury in the U.S.S.R” The Nation, CXXXVIII, No. 3578, (January 31, 1934), P. 122.

<sup>5</sup> Fischer, The Life and Death of Stalin, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> Lyons, Assignment in Utopia, p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> Fischer, Men and Politics, pp. 217-218.

<sup>8</sup> Fischer, “A Trip Around the Soviet Union,” The Nation, CXXXIX, No. 3617, (October 31, 1934), pp. 500-501

<sup>9</sup> Fischer “The Russian Giant in 1935,” The Nation, CXLI, No. 3668, (October 23, 1935), pp 464 - 466

<sup>10</sup> Fischer, “In Russia Life Grows Easier,” The Nation, CXXXVIII, No. 3580, (June 13, 1934), p~668.

<sup>11</sup> Letter of January 1, 1935, from Fischer to Freda Kirchway, The Louis Fischer Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Fischer, “Behind the Kirov-Executions-II,” The Nation, CXL, No. 3645, (May 15, 1935), p. 772.

<sup>13</sup> Fischer, “The New Soviet Constitution,” The Nation, CXLII, No. 3702, (June 17, 1936), p. 772.

<sup>14</sup> Fischer in: The God That Failed, p. 195.

<sup>15</sup> Fischer, “Soviet Democracy: Second View,” The Nation, CXLII, No. 7, (August 22, 1936), pp. 198-200.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of September 12, 1936, Fischer to Max Lerner, The Louis Fischer Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Fischer, Men and Politics, pp. 413, 443.

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<sup>18</sup> James J. Martin, American Liberalism and World Politics, 1931-1941. (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1964), pp. 504-505.

<sup>19</sup> Duranty, “The Riddle of Russia,” The New Republic, XCI, No. 1103, (July 14, 1937), p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Duranty, The Kremlin and The People, (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), pp. 146-148.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Parker Enwright, V, of Orlando, Florida on October 3, 1974. Mr. Enwright’s mother married Duranty a few weeks before his death and inherited his personal effects. No copy of the rejected version of U.S.S.R. remains.

<sup>22</sup> Duranty, U.S.S.R., pp. 210-216.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* p. 138.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 276.

<sup>25</sup> Fischer, Men and Politics, pp. 494-495.

<sup>26</sup> Fischer, The Life and Death of Stalin, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Fischer, Men and Politics, pp. 494-495.

<sup>28</sup> Fischer in: The God That Failed.

<sup>29</sup> Fischer, Men and Politics, p. 255.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239, 349.

<sup>31</sup> Muggeridge, The Green Stick, pp. 254-256.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* pp. 254-256.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Alan Campbell to Fischer, no date. The Fischer Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Eugene Lyons, July 17, 1972.

<sup>35</sup> Gay Talese, The Kingdom and the Power (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966), p. 438.

<sup>36</sup> Letter of June 19, 1977, Leland Stowe to the author.