I WAS STALIN'S AGENT

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by

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THE RIGHT BOOK CLUB,
111, CHARING CROSS ROAD,
LONDON, W.C.2

This Edition 1940

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY WESTERN PRINTING SERVICES LTD., BRISTOL

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INTRODUCTION

On the evening of May 22, 1937, I boarded a train in Moscow to return to my post in The Hague as Chief of the Soviet Military Intelligence in Western Europe. I little realized then that I was seeing my last of Russia so long as Stalin is her master. For nearly twenty years I had served the Soviet government. For nearly twenty years I had been a Bolshevik. As the train sped towards the Finnish border I sat alone in my compartment, thinking of the fate of my colleagues, my comrades, my friends—arrested, shot or in concentration camps, almost all of them. They had given their entire lives to build a better world, and had died at their posts, not under the bullets of an enemy but because Stalin willed it.

Who is there left to respect or admire? What hero or heroine of our revolution has not been broken and destroyed? I could think of but few. All those whose personal integrity was absolutely above question had gone down as "traitors," "spies," or common criminals. Pictures flashed through my mind—pictures of the Civil War when these same "traitors" and "spies" faced death a thousand times without flinching; of the arduous days that followed, of industrialization and the super-human demands it made upon all of us, of collectivization and famine when we barely had the rations to keep us alive. And then the great purge—sweeping all before it, destroying those who had laboured hardest to build a state in which man should no longer exploit his fellow man.

Through the long years of struggle we had learned

to repeat to ourselves that a victory over injustices of the old society can only be attained with moral as well as physical sacrifice, that a new world cannot come into being until the last vestige of the habits of the old has been destroyed. But could it be necessary for a Bolshevik Revolution to destroy all Bolsheviks? *Was* it the Bolshevik Revolution that was destroying them, or had that Revolution itself long since perished? I did not answer these questions then but I asked them. . . .

At the age of thirteen I had entered the working-class movement. It was a half-mature, half-childish act. I heard the plaintive melodies of my suffering race mingled with new songs of freedom. But in 1917 I was a youngster of eighteen, and the Bolshevik Revolution came to me as an absolute solution of all problems of poverty, inequality and injustice. I joined the Bolshevik Party with my whole soul. I seized the Marxist and Leninist faith as a weapon with which to assault the wrongs against which I had instinctively rebelled.

During all the years that I served the Soviet Government I never expected anything more than the right to continue my work. I never received anything more. Long after the Soviet power had been stabilized, I was sent abroad on assignments that exposed me to the danger of death, and that twice landed me in prison. I worked from sixteen to eighteen hours a day, and never earned enough to cover the most ordinary living expenses. I myself, when travelling abroad, would live in moderate comfort, but I did not earn enough, even as late as 1935, to keep my apartment in Moscow heated properly or to pay the price of milk for my two-year-old son. I was not in a strategic position, and I had no desire—I was too much absorbed in my work—to become one of the now privileged bureau-

crats with a material stake in defending the Soviet order. I defended it because I believed it was leading the way to a new and better society.

The very fact that my work was concerned with the defence of the country against foreign enemies prevented me from thinking much of what was happening within its borders and especially in the small inner world of Power politics. As an Intelligence officer I saw the external enemies of the Soviet Union much more closely than its internal conspirators. I knew of separatist and Fascist plots that were being hatched on foreign soil, but I was out of contact with the intrigues inside the Kremlin. I saw Stalin rise to undivided power while Lenin's closer comrades perished at the hands of the state they had created. But like many others, I reassured myself with the thought that whatever might be the mistakes of the leadership, the Soviet Union was still sound and was the hope of mankind.

There were occasions when even this faith was badly shaken, occasions when, if I could have seen any hope elsewhere, I might have chosen a new course. But always events in some other part of the world would conspire to keep me in the service of Stalin. In 1933, when the Russian people were dying by the millions of starvation, and I knew that Stalin's ruthless policies had caused it, and that Stalin was deliberately withholding the state's help, I saw Hitler take power in Germany and there destroy everything that meant life for the human spirit. Stalin was an enemy of Hitler and I remained in the service of Stalin.

In February 1934, a similar dilemma confronted me and I made the same choice. I was then taking my annual month's rest at the Marino Sanatorium in the province of Kursk, Central Russia. Marino was once the palace of Prince Buryatin, the conqueror of

the Caucasus. The palace was in the resplendent style of Versailles, surrounded by beautiful English parks and artificial lakes. The sanatorium had an excellent staff of physicians, athletic instructors, nurses and servants. Within walking distance of its enclosed grounds was the state farm where peasants laboured to provide its guests with food. A sentry at the gate kept the peasants from trespassing on the enclosure.

One morning soon after my arrival I walked with a companion to the village where these peasants lived. The spectacle I beheld was appalling. Half-naked little brats ran out of dilapidated huts to beg us for a piece of bread. In the peasants' co-operative store was neither food nor fuel—nothing to be had. Everywhere the most abject poverty dismayed my eyes and depressed my spirits.

That evening seated in the brilliantly lighted dining-hall of Marino, everyone was chatting gaily after an excellent supper. Outside it was bitterly cold, but within a roaring fireplace gave us cosy warmth. By some chance I turned suddenly and looked towards the window. I saw the feverish eyes of hungry peasant children—the *bezprizornii*—their little faces glued like pictures to the cold panes. Soon others followed my glance, and gave orders to a servant that the intruders be driven off. Almost every night a few of these children would succeed in eluding the sentry and sneaking up to the palace in search of something to eat. I sometimes slipped out of the dining-hall with bread for them, but I did this secretly because the practice was frowned upon among us. Soviet officials have developed a stereotyped defence against human suffering:

"We are on the hard road to socialism. Many must fall

by the wayside. We must be well fed and must recuperate from our labours, enjoying, for a few weeks each year, comforts still denied to others, because we are the builders of a Joyous Life in the future. We are the builders of socialism. We must keep in shape to continue on the hard road. Any unfortunates who cross our path will be taken care of in due time. In the meanwhile, out of our way! Don't pester us with your suffering! If we stop to drop you a crumb, the goal itself may never be reached."

So it runs. And it is obvious that people protecting their peace of mind in that way, are not going to be too squeamish about the turns in the road, or to inquire too critically whether it is really leading to the Joyous Life or not.

It was an icy morning when I reached Kursk on my way home from Marino. I entered the railway station to await the arrival of the Moscow express. After eating a hearty breakfast in the lunch-room, I still had time to spare, and I wandered into the third-class waiting-room. I shall never be able to obliterate what I saw from my mind. The waiting-room was jammed full of men, women and children, peasants —about six hundred of them—on their way like a herd of cattle from one prison camp to another. The scene was so frightful that for a fleeting instant I thought I saw bats flying over these tortured beings. Many of them lay almost naked in the cold room. Others were manifestly dying of typhus fever. Hunger, pain, desolation, or just dumb half-dead submissive suffering, was on every face. While I stood there, hard-faced militiamen of the Ogpu began to rouse and herd them out like a drove of cattle, pushing and kicking the stragglers and those almost too weak to walk. One old man, I saw as I turned away, would never rise from the floor. This was but one mournful detachment, I know, of the horde of millions

of honest peasant families whom Stalin—calling them "kulaks," a name which no longer means much more than *victim*—had rooted up and transported and destroyed.

I also knew, however, that at that very moment—it was February 1934—Fascist field pieces in the streets of Vienna were shelling the model workers' apartment houses which the Socialists had built. Fascist machine-guns were mowing down the Austrian workers in their last desperate stand for socialism. Everywhere Fascism was on the march. Everywhere the forces of reaction were gaining ground. The Soviet Union still seemed the sole hope of mankind. I remained in the service of the Soviet Union—that is, of Stalin its master.

Two years later came the Spanish tragedy, and I saw Mussolini and Hitler pour their men and munitions to the aid of Franco, while Premier Léon Blum of France, a Socialist, was drawn in on the hypocritical game of "non-intervention" which doomed the Spanish republic. I saw Stalin—belatedly to be sure, and timidly, and not enough—come to the aid of the beleaguered republic. I still felt that, as a choice between evils, I was fighting on the right side.

But then came the turning point. I watched Stalin, while collecting hard cash for his belated help, drive a knife into the back of the Loyalist government. I saw the purge assume insane proportions in Moscow, sweeping away the entire Bolshevik Party. I saw it transported to Spain. And at the same time, from my vantage point in the Intelligence Service, I saw Stalin extend the hand of secret friendship to Hitler. I saw him, while thus paying court to the Nazi leader, execute the great generals of the Red Army, Tukhachevsky and the other chiefs with whom and under

whom I had worked for years in the defence of the Soviet Union and of socialism.

And then Stalin made his final demand upon me—the demand he made upon all responsible officials who wished to escape the firing-squads of the Ogpu. I must prove my loyalty by delivering a close comrade into its clutches. I declined the offer. I broke with Stalin. I forced my eyes to remain open to what I had seen. I forced my mind to know that, whether there was any other hope in the world or not, I was serving a totalitarian despot who differed from Hitler only in the Socialist phrases, the relic of his Marxist training, to which he hypocritically clung.

I broke with Stalin, and began to tell the truth about him, in the autumn of 1937, when he was successfully deceiving public opinion and the statesmen of both Europe and America with his insincere denunciations of Hitler. Although advised by many well-meaning people to remain silent, I spoke out. I spoke for the millions who had perished in Stalin's compulsory collectivization and compulsory famine; the millions still living at forced labour and in concentration camps; the hundreds of thousands of my former Bolshevik comrades in prison, the thousands and thousands who had been shot. It took the final overt act of Stalin's treachery, his pact with Hitler, to convince a large public of the madness of humouring him, of closing eyes to his monstrous crimes in the hope that he might carry a gun in the armies of democracy.

Now that Stalin has shown his hand, it is time for others who remained silent for short-sighted or strategic reasons to speak out. A few have already done so. Luis de Araquistain, former ambassador to France of the Loyalist government, has helped to disabuse world opinion as to the character of Stalin's

"help" to the Spanish Republic. Largo Caballero, the former Spanish Premier, has also spoken.

There are others upon whom rests an obligation to speak. One of them is Romain Rolland. The help that this renowned author gave to totalitarianism by covering the horrors of Stalin's dictatorship with the mantle of his great prestige, is incalculable. For many years Rolland conducted a correspondence with Maxim Gorky, the noted Russian novelist. Gorky, who was at one time comradely with Stalin, and even exercised a restraining hand upon him, no doubt played a part in bringing Rolland into the camp of the fellow travellers. During the last months of his life, however, Gorky was a virtual prisoner. Stalin refused him permission to go abroad for his health. His mail was censored, and by special order the letters from Romain Rolland were intercepted by Stetsky, then Stalin's head secretary, and filed in Stalin's cabinet. Rolland, disquieted at his friend's failure to answer his letters, wrote to another friend, the assistant director of the Moscow Art Theatre, asking what was the matter. During the last Moscow treason trial the world was told that Gorky, supposedly still Stalin's friend, was poisoned by Yagoda. At the time of this trial, in an interview with the eminent writer Boris Souvarine published in *La Flèche*, I explained to Romain Rolland why his letters had not been delivered. I asked him to make a statement on the fact that his letters to Maxim Gorky were intercepted by Stalin. He remained silent. Will he speak now that Stalin has openly joined hands with Hitler?

Eduard Beneš, the former president of Czechoslovakia, has also an account to settle. When Tukhachevsky and the Red Army chiefs were executed in June 1937, the shock to Europe was so great, the disbelief in their guilt so stubborn, that Stalin was

forced to seek a channel to convince Western democratic governments that the conqueror of Kolchak and Denikine was a Nazi spy. At Stalin's direction the Ogpu, in collaboration with the Intelligence Service of the Red Army, prepared a dossier of the alleged evidence against the Red Generals for transmission to the Czech Government. Eduard Beneš seems to have felt that he was not in a position to examine this evidence, particularly at a time when he was hoping for Stalin's aid for Czechoslovakia.

Let Beneš now recall and re-examine, in the light of present events, the character of the "evidence" prepared by the experts of the Ogpu and decide whether he is free to remain silent.

Now that it has become painfully clear that the worst way of fighting Hitler is to mitigate the crimes of Stalin, all those who were manœuvred into that folly ought to speak. If these last tragic years have taught us anything, it is that the march of totalitarian barbarism cannot be halted by strategic retreats to positions of half-truth and falsehood. While no one can dictate the method by which civilized Europe will restore to man his dignity and worth, I think that all those not destined for the camp of Hitler and Stalin will agree that truth must be the first weapon, and murder must be called by its real name.

W. G. KRIVITSKY.

New York, October 1939.

I

STALIN APPEASES HITLER

DURING the night of June 30, 1934, when Hitler's first blood purge broke out and while it was still going on, Stalin called an extraordinary session of the Politbureau in the Kremlin. Even before the news of the Hitler purge reached the wide world, Stalin had decided upon his next move in relation to the Nazi regime.

I was then at my post in the Intelligence Department of the General Staff of the Red Army in Moscow. We knew that a crisis was impending in Germany. All our confidential dispatches had prepared us for an outbreak. As soon as Hitler launched his purge, we began to receive constant bulletins from Germany.

That night I was working feverishly with a staff of assistants summarizing our information for War Commissar Voroshilov. Among the non-members summoned to that meeting of the Politbureau were my chief, General Berzin; Maxim Litvinov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs; Karl Radek, then director of the information bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party; and A. C. Artusov, chief of the Foreign Division of the Ogpu.

The emergency meeting of the Politbureau had been called to consider the probable consequences of the Hitler purge, and its effects upon Soviet foreign policy. Confidential information in our possession showed that two extreme wings of Hitler's opponents were involved. There was the group led by Captain Roehm,