

The Pattern of  
**SOVIET  
POWER**

*by* Edgar Snow

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# *The Pattern of* SOVIET POWER

*Books by* EDGAR SNOW

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FAR EASTERN FRONT

LIVING CHINA

RED STAR OVER CHINA

THE BATTLE FOR ASIA

PEOPLE ON OUR SIDE

THE PATTERN OF SOVIET POWER

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*To*

BEN HIBBS *and*  
MARTIN SOMMERS

*who gave me this assignment  
and full freedom to  
report it.*





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*L. P. Beria, Commissar for Internal Affairs*

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*All the photographs in this volume are provided by Sovfoto*

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# *The Pattern of* SOVIET POWER





## CHAPTER ONE

# *Long Bright Days*



### I

## Back to Moscow

WHEN I had left Moscow early in 1943, near the end of a tense and anxious winter, it was still a place of hunger and suffering beneath its hard determination, and behind the dark ice-coated buildings which lined its shabby streets. People had little to cheer them then except the fresh triumph at Stalingrad, the hope of a western front in Europe, and the warm urge of spring in the air. The front was not far off and Moscow lay under threat of siege and what would prove to be the last great German offensive, coming out of Orel. A year had gone by and it was already difficult to believe these were the same Muscovites. They seemed to wear new faces full of hope and confidence, and the city was radiant with light in contrast to the memory I had carried around the world with me.

Summer accounted for some of the changed aspect, of course. All around for a thousand miles or more I saw, flying up from Astrakhan, an endless expanse of vivid green, as lush and smiling with crops as in winter it was forbidding and deathlike in its still mask of white, charred by the deep gloomy forests of birch. Now everything in Moscow seemed newly washed, even the air, and this was not just summer illusion. The drapery of painted trees and factories and apartment buildings had been scrubbed from the Kremlin buildings and walls, so that now they have dimensions again, and form and color. The Bolshoi Theater had taken off its scaffoldings and its fine columns sparkled in the

blessed sun. Now you could see that the University and Chaikovsky Hall and a dozen other buildings were really very good, something you never noticed when tricks of camouflage confused the eye, and the stinging wind kept your face buried low in a fur collar.

So Russia really had color, and not only in daylight. After the long dusk there was almost always a salute for new victories. Throngs of lightly clad women and a scattering of soldiers gathered on the twilit streets, in Red Square, on the bridge across the Moscow River below the Kremlin towers, on Comintern Square and in Revolutionary Plaza before the Metropole. All over Moscow people waited for the fireworks. Now it was all reverse traffic for Hitler. His armies were being ground to pieces under triumphant offensives in the Ukraine, in White Russia, in the Baltic States. Nothing could save him now, and Moscow knew it. Guns thundered every night, and red, yellow and green rockets wove bright patterns against the northern stars. Radio loudspeakers blared forth the new Soviet anthem on the streets, and the names of heroes of the day were read to the listening nation. The Voice of Moscow that broadcast them was no calmer, no more nor less hurried, than when it had been obliged to announce "Citizens, Moscow is under attack."

Among the watchers before the Metropole stood Jack Margolis, the dark little British-born manager of the hotel, who married a Russian girl a decade ago and gave up his British passport to become a Soviet citizen. Now he was glad again that he had done so. "Look at it," he exclaimed, and a grin effaced his old sadness. "It's just like before the war. Look at the crowds—it's peace again! Oh, it's great to be a *Russian* these days!"

Behind him, the Metropole had become the scene of bitter competition for rooms. Correspondents were no longer the small tight band of a year ago and the male monopoly had been broken by the arrival of indefatigables like Anna Louise Strong and Ella Winter. Rivalry for space was further intensified by the overflow from the swollen embassies as new diplomats came in, demand-

ing priorities, and representatives appeared from half-forgotten countries preparing for rebirth. Nobody yet knew what it was going to mean when Russia became the only great power in Europe, but every Government now realized the need to have more and more men here to study what Churchill had called "a riddle wrapped in an enigma." And soon Winston himself would come to join the seekers after answers.

The British Ministry of Information had lodged a large staff in the Metropole; various military and diplomatic missions had sealed off blocks of rooms for their own use; and on top of that American engineers and fur buyers were back demanding accommodations. What was happening here was going on at every other hotel and all over the city. It was almost impossible to get a bed anywhere. This city had had four million inhabitants before the war; during the evacuation it had dropped to half that; and now it was back with more Muscovites than ever.

Houses and apartment buildings were disintegrating more rapidly than the Metropole. *Pravda* took time out from telling the Allies what was wrong on the western front, to issue warnings to bewildered citizens to get on with the apparently impossible. "There are no special insurmountable circumstances," *Pravda* pundits complacently asserted, "standing in the way. And if in some cities things are in bad shape, if roofs leak, if plaster falls down, if repairing is done badly, it's the fault of local governmental and party bodies."

Paint, materials, transportation, the labor question—those weren't problems for *Pravda* to solve. It was "up to the party bodies."

Everywhere now people were more concerned with humdrum domestic and household needs than in the leaner days of war. There was more grumbling; the city was no longer holding its breath. Any country is far more dramatic in time of defeat and mounting disaster than it is in days of victory, and if Moscow at first seemed a happier place, it was a less exciting one. The Government would have to invoke more than patriotism to

impart to the prosaic tasks that lay ahead the heroic stamp that had called forth the best in every Russian during the crisis of his nation's existence.



## II

## Prices—and Prices

ONE of the most puzzling things about Russia, however, is that while its bureaucrats bungle a hundred simple tasks, or neglect an easily remedied nuisance till it becomes a serious menace, just when you decide that nothing can be going right, where such glaring inefficiency prevails, you are astonished by revelation of some major accomplishment requiring a high degree of organization and foresight. This paradox is what made people speak of "miracles" being achieved during the war. In matters that really counted, not only on the fast-moving front but in the growing pace of production and in rehabilitation work in the devastated areas, things were still happening in that big, unexpected, deceptive Russian way.

The year's triumphs at the front, for example, were well matched in the rear by the truly magnificent success of the women and children of the reoccupied Ukraine and White Russia in bringing in a bountiful harvest. On those black plains, which before the war alone produced almost a third of the nation's wheat crop, obstacles as serious as German defense works confronted the Soviets. Seed grain was largely gone; thousands of combines and harvesters had been wrecked or carried away; few cattle remained; and literally millions of men had perished or been driven west.



Yet somehow the land was cultivated and planted and the crop reaped, while villages and towns still lay in ashes. "I don't know how they've done it," a Frenchman just back from a trip through the Ukraine told me, "but it's a fact that everywhere I went the fields were covered with glorious crops. From the best estimates I could get it will be a rich yield—eighty to ninety percent of a normal year." Later on I had an opportunity to find out, on the spot, how the effort had been organized—a story of the "bitter strength" of Russia told elsewhere in this book.

Optimism over the Ukrainian harvest had apparently influenced the food commissariats, and people were getting a little more to eat. Norms of rationed food had not increased, but stores more often were able to supply the minimum guaranteed. All over Russia well-stocked "commercial" food stores were opening. Mostorg, the capital's big department store, had reopened with shelves bulging with goods, and a number of variety shops were offering articles to the general public for the first time since 1941.

The so-called commercial stores were, of course, state-owned and operated. Unlike establishments which provided goods only for ration coupons and at controlled, pre-war prices, the former sold everything at inflated prices, in competition with the black market. Commercial stores were thus an interesting demonstration of how state control of trade could be manipulated for multiple purposes. In this case they were a morale builder, for they hinted of a return to normality. Also, they were an anti-inflation measure; they neatly extracted inflation rubles from the overstuffed pockets of speculators and peasants. They gradually forced the black market down, until it would ultimately disappear.

Butter and sugar already cost less than half the 1943 prices and potatoes were down more than sixty percent. In general, consumers' goods prices were being reduced about ten percent every month. But they were still fantastically high compared to pre-war and rationed prices. In 1944 a pound of white bread in