

# The Soviet Way

*From the beginning the Soviet approach in the Korean airliner crisis has been marked by a distinctive national style, one remote from American ways. Here the character of the Kremlin's public comments since the shooting down of the plane is analyzed by Robert Conquest, a leading British student of Soviet affairs. Kevin Klose, formerly the Moscow correspondent for this newspaper, discusses the nature of the Soviet Union's own state-run civilian airline, Aeroflot, which has become the focus of much international attention.*

**Robert Conquest**

## Brutality and Deceit: So What's New?

The American public seems almost more surprised by Andrei Gromyko's and Nikolai Ogarkov's clumsy fabrications over the airliner incident than by the actual killings themselves.

But this mix of brutality and deceit is and always has been a normal characteristic of the Soviet regime. In fact, they are twin aspects of the same thing. Boris Pasternak spoke of "the inhuman reign of the lie," Alexander Solzhenitsyn of the lie being the necessary vehicle of the totalitarian tyrant.

Every few years the Soviet leaders do something that reveals them in their true light. Kronstadt, the slaughter of the peasantry, the fake Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan . . . why do these lessons never stick?

First, no doubt, because of the parochialism we all suffer from unless we make a continual and conscious effort to transcend it. We project onto the Politburo our own ideas of what is natural and normal for any human being. Even if we see that they are not "good" people, we think that they are "bad" people within our own traditions of what constitutes reasonable behavior for good and bad alike. Or we assume that though deviant, their natural gravitation is toward the values or attitudes we find natural.

Above all, it is alien to our political culture to consider that there are rulers who really do not mind killing people. A glance at the history of Tamerlane or Genghis Khan should be enough to remove that delusion. And the present Soviet leaders began their careers at a time when the regime was practicing massacre on a grand scale. This month in Washington there will be a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian holocaust. And it can now be shown from modern Soviet statistical work that the excess, unnatural deaths in the period 1926 to 1937, which saw the collectivization terror, was not less than 14 million—with the Yezhov terror and its various sequels yet to come.

If parochialism is one barrier to our understanding of the U.S.S.R., optimism or self-deception is another. A Soviet regime that was essentially peaceful, or about to become peaceful, would mean far less anxiety about war. Tom Kahn of the AFL-CIO argues in the current issue of the social democratic New America that in many well-meaning minds "the view of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian expansive state is incompatible with détente and curbing the arms race," so that "if you would work for peace you must reject" this view. The truth lies elsewhere: the Soviet Union is such a power, and a true peace can only be sought with the realities borne firmly in mind.

Third, there is (in the United States, though the species scarcely exists in France or Britain) a powerful caste of academics of whom it might be said, in the words of "Waiting for Lefty": "For all their education they don't know from nothing"—political "scientists" who treat the West and the Soviet bloc as identical chess pieces in an abstract international game; who are learned in the "structure" of the Soviet regime but care nothing about the basic motivations of its leadership. For to understand an alien phenomenon requires, as George Orwell put it, an effort not only of the intellect but also the imagination. It is a notable phenomenon that novelists like Orwell and Arthur Koestler understood Stalin's Russia better than scholars like the Webbs or Sir Bernard Pares.

President Carter said after the invasion of Afghanistan that it had made him change his views of the Soviet leadership. But why did he have erroneous views in the first place? Because he was misled by well-meaning advisers, from Averell Harriman to Marshall Shulman—who nevertheless continued even after that debacle to be seen as respected experts in the field by those who seek reassurance in the view that a wolf that occasionally puts on sheep's clothing is a sheep.

But reliance on such estimates is made worse by yet another factor—factiousness, internal divisions, partisan habits of mind. In Susan Sontag's formulation there are many here who would rather be wrong with *The Village Voice* than right with *Reader's Digest*, or at any rate wrong with Harriman than right with Ronald Reagan.

**"It is alien to our political culture to consider that there are rulers who really do not mind killing people."**

Sen. Charles Mathias, in an ill-timed article in the current issue of the prestigious *Foreign Affairs*, takes Reagan to task for his recent pronouncements on Soviet motives, calling them "black-and-white depictions of an adversary."

No doubt Reagan sometimes overstates or overloads his case. But every single assertion Mathias deplores is the merest fact: that "to them negotiation is only another form of struggle"; that "generosity in negotiation . . . runs counter to the basic militancy of Marxist-Leninist ideology"; that Lenin had laid down that "the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause—meaning that they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat in order to attain that, and that is moral"; that "their cause . . . is world

revolution"; that they "seek subversion and conflict around the globe"; and so on.

But what exactly is Mathias complaining of? Lenin did indeed say, often and publicly, that "our morality is completely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle"; and equally publicly, he urged communists to use any deceit necessary (in this case to penetrate the Western trade unions, but the principle is obviously a general one). When Lenin was not writing for the record he went further, as when he approved, as "a beautiful plan," hanging class enemies and blaming it on anti-communist peasants.

It is equally the case that the Politburo publicly seeks a "socialist" world; and that by the term "socialist" it excludes any regime, even a Dubcekite or Maoist communist one, that does not follow the Soviet model or submit to Soviet control. As for negotiations being "another form of struggle," this too is their normal doctrine: indeed, "détente" itself has been so defined from the start in scores of pronouncements from Leonid Brezhnev down. And they equally publicly seek "subversion and conflict" defined as assistance to "proletarian and national liberation movements" (if only of ones they control or hope to control).

The view of a prominent dissident is that the Soviet leaders would not object even to a nuclear war on two conditions: that they themselves would be safe, and that their power would remain intact. At any rate, the best guarantee of peace is making sure that these conditions are not attainable.

For the moment those who really understand the U.S.S.R., as my friend Sen. Henry Jackson did, are being listened to, and the voices of delusion are silent. But in a year's time? Or two years' time? Let us hope that this once we shall see the lesson properly learned, at least by enough citizens and formers of opinion to tip the scale toward a permanent bipartisan policy founded on fact.

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