

# Liberation

A Journal of Democratic Discussion

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No. 28, November, 1957.

One Shilling

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## EDITORIAL

### A NEW ERA

"With the launching of the Soviet earth satellite yesterday, the history of man entered a new era."

S.A.B.C. announcer, October 5, 1957.

"The first issue of *Liberation* makes its appearance at a time of profound world crisis. The first half of the twentieth century has been marked by a dizzy acceleration in the rate of scientific discovery and technical advance. Man's stature has been raised, his horizons boundlessly expanded. Yet, for the most part, social and economic systems have not kept pace with man's ever-increasing conquests over nature.

"The overwhelming majority of mankind still lives in grinding poverty, ignorance and disease. Over Africa, and large parts of Asia and America, the wanton ravages of imperialism lay waste vast human and material resources.

"Our times are marked by continuous wars and revolutions . . . All these upheavals are symptoms of the modern crisis — the contradiction between advanced science and antiquated forms of social organisation.

"The greatest single danger that today faces humanity is that these tensions should be allowed to explode into a catastrophic world conflict; a vast and terrible intercontinental war in which the secrets man has wrested from nature will be used to destroy him, to bury his proudest achievements and his glorious hopes."

— From the first *Liberation* editorial, February, 1953.

**M**AKES you think, doesn't it? That is the profoundly sane and correct reaction of the ordinary man to the first Sputnik as, watched with tremendous awe, pride and enthusiasm by countless millions of people in every inhabited part of the globe, the earth's new companion wings its way at the fantastic speed of five miles a second in its orbit about our ancient and surprised planet.

Indeed, Sputnik must make us think. And we must think deeply, wisely and well about the meaning and consequences of this newcomer among the stars if we are to realise its far-reaching consequences for our human race.

Thus far, much of the thinking, especially as expressed by leading statesmen of the West, has been pathetically shallow, dangerously out-of-date, incredibly vulgar and narrow. The reactions of the MacMillans, Eisenhowers and Dulleses have revealed nothing but their own invincible ignorance and backwardness, their stubborn and inveterate anti-socialist prejudices, their meanness of spirit and their utter blindness to the grandeur and majesty of the future which is opening up before mankind.

When the heads of the British and American Governments, instead of hailing this new wonder of science and congratulating those responsible, bemoan their own failure to get in first, and make panicky efforts to pool their resources to catch up, they betray a petty national and political narrowness lamentably out of keeping with the wonder of this new portent that has appeared in our sky.

For, let it be said with all the gravity and emphasis at our command, Sputnik is far more than a victory for "Russian" science and Soviet technology. It is above all, and in the first place, a glorious achievement of mankind. Those daring spirits in the Soviet Union who have vied with the gods and placed a new star in the firmament have become great as giants reaching up into the skies because they stand upon the shoulders of all the heroes of science, famous and unknown, of all nations, who went before them. Ptolemy and Galileo and Copernicus, Democritus, Lao-Tze, Confucius, Darwin, Marx, Newton, Tsiolkovsky and Einstein, all these and countless others, wise men of Asia and Africa and Europe, have played their part in opening up man's road into space. And all those countless nameless millions who have toiled and suffered and sacrificed since the dawn of humanity to create the culture, the civilisation and the wealth which had to go before this momentous first step in the conquest of the universe.

To mature, thinking people Sputnik is not "someone else's" possession, to be regarded with fear, unconcealed envy, and snarling jealousy. It is a thrilling victory for us all. It must make us proud to be human. It must make us exclaim with Hamlet:

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god!"

## **SOME LESSONS**

The advent of Sputnik has many lessons to teach us. Not all of them are new, but they have been brought home with such dramatic force and irresistible power that none but the blindest and most bigoted can long continue to ignore or deny them.

The other day from London it was reported that the British Prime Minister was still, incredibly, holding forth in public about the nuclear weapon remaining the "great deterrent" against alleged "Soviet aggression," and in defence of "the free world" — those stale empty slogans of the day before yesterday.

Now all this thinking belongs to the far-off period when, secure in the belief that "the West" (i.e. the United States) held the sole and exclusive patent of nuclear weapons, Sir Winston Churchill could announce from Fulton in America that the American monopolists could and should use that fancied monopoly to blackmail the whole world, especially the Soviet Union, and impose their capitalist way of life everywhere. It was imagined, and said, that the Soviet Union was too backward, scientifically and technically, ever to produce an atom bomb. And when, not long afterwards, the first Soviet nuclear explosions took place, two unfortunate, innocent American parents were barbarously done to death, human sacrifices to fortify the illusion that Soviet science could only produce an atom bomb because the "secret" had been stolen from America.

This line of thinking, which has continued to dominate the whole of imperialist foreign policy for more than a decade, had already been shaken to its foundations by one demonstration after another of Soviet scientific and technical advancement. It has now been utterly demolished. The first earth satellite, with its obvious proof of the Soviet announcement about the perfection of the inter-continental ballistic missile, has made such glaring nonsense of all the empty chatter about the "great deterrent" that one can only assume that Mr. MacMillan keeps repeating the words without thinking, like a parrot which has been taught to recite phrases without the slightest understanding of the words it is saying.

To understand this extraordinary behaviour it is necessary to go back a little in history.

Forty years ago, on November 7, 1917, when the booming guns of the battleship "Aurora" heralded the ending of capitalism in Russia and the birth of the Soviet Republic, the statesmen of the West looked upon this new, unnatural, thing with unbounded fear and horror. The workmen and "lower classes" taking power; the factories, land and mines being taken away from their lawful owners; the dark-skinned races being proclaimed as equals — these terrible things could not be! British, French, German, Japanese, American armies, that had been till then locked in mortal strife, joined forces to strangle the Russian revolution. When Lenin and his men held firm, and their own workers at home threatened rebellion, the imperialists had perforce to withdraw their armies; but they did not cease for a day, by slander, subversion, blockade, by every means they could lay their hands upon, fair or foul, to destroy the workers' state. Week by week, year after year, the prostitute writers and anti-Soviet experts proclaimed in the newspapers the imminent ruin, bankruptcy and downfall of the Soviets; Hitlerite Germany, the vilest regime that ever defiled the earth, was created and built up with the specific object of attacking the U.S.S.R.; and when that monster turned upon its Frankenstein creators and Russian blood flowed like water in defence of democracy and civilisation, these same gentry continued to intrigue and scheme for the "next" war — against the Soviets, after the Soviets had carried out the task of saving them.

It is because for forty years the imperialists have wished themselves into believing that the Soviet Union was weak, backward and on the verge of collapse; because with their arrogant class prejudice they are incapable of understanding or accepting that common working people are able to govern as well as or better than themselves; because, like children closing their eyes in fear, they have refused to acknowledge the fantastic industrial upsurge which in forty years (more than half of them absorbed in unwanted warfare) has transformed Europe's most backward country into her foremost — it is for these reasons that the imperialists have so stubbornly and intransigently refused to see and to understand that socialism exists as a world system, that it is making phenomenal progress, that it cannot be destroyed by blackmail, propaganda or force of arms.

We have to live in the same world with the Soviet Union, China and socialist East Europe.

We cannot defeat them in war. To attempt to do so would be the final lunacy.

We cannot intimidate them by a technical superiority which we do not possess, nor can we blackmail them by threats which we are not able to implement.

There is no alternative to peaceful co-existence.

These are the lessons which must be learnt, and quickly too, by our rulers. And those who are unable to read them, must make way for others who can. If the Soviet Union was able to sacrifice a man like Molotov, with all his past great services to the cause of peace and socialism; because his mind was not sufficiently flexible for the Sputnik era, then the U.S.A. must summon the elementary wisdom to drop its misguided missile Dulles who possesses the flexibility of a poker and is manifestly no more fit to guide the external policy of the world's foremost industrial nation today than he is to pilot a space-ship.

The marvels of ingenuity and construction with which the U.S.S.R. has astonished the world would have been unthinkable forty years ago. True, Russia has never lacked scientists of genius, but the vast engineering and technical resources essential to such mighty achievements simply did not exist in the ramshackle empire of the Tsars.

It is not simply the extent, but above all, the pace and drive of Soviet advancement which must cause all thinking men deeply to ponder. Before the first World War, American industrial output per head of population was fourteen times that of Russia. Since then, despite two world wars in which the U.S.A. prospered while Russia was devastated, the gap has fantastically narrowed. America retains her lead, but her output per head today is only two-and-a-half times that of the Soviet Union.

And, despite this remaining advantage, it is the Soviet and not the American Republic which has taken the lead in scientific-technical progress.

Why?

It may well be, as President Eisenhower has said, that the American scientists were concentrating too exclusively on the practical military

aspects of rocket development (though they do not seem to have been too successful in that direction either.) It may be true too that if the Americans had not been so obsessed with secrecy and security and had co-operated more with their British and other colleagues, they would have made greater progress.

But to get the real answer to our question we must probe deeper, and examine the fundamental differences between the respective approach to science in the two countries.

In the United States, science is largely at the service either of the military, or of vast (and often conflicting) private capitalist interests, who are solely concerned with the rapid commercial exploitation of the fruits of research. Big business wants to sell science; sometimes even, in the interests of an existing monopoly it wants to suppress new discoveries.

In the Soviet Union, science is organised and planned as a whole, and developed by all the vast resources of a State.

We should not be surprised that a civilisation which could find no better use for the marvel of television than to advertise a special brand of toothpaste, or of the miracle of nuclear fission than to destroy the innocent civilians of two Japanese cities, should fall behind in the race to put a girdle round the earth.

American capitalism has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. The precise path formulated by Marx and Lenin and followed by the Russian people may not be the one that all countries will choose to follow; indeed, we may be sure that every country will find its own road ahead according to its own peculiarities of historical circumstance and background. But of one thing we are convinced beyond reasonable doubt: man's road ahead lies in a socialist rather than in a capitalist direction.

## OTHER LESSONS

There are many other weighty consequences of the new era which we lack the time and space to enlarge on here.

The new starlet in the heavens has a message of hope and promise to all who are oppressed, and heavy laden, to all who suffer hunger and fear.

The petty ideologies of racialism, the miserable greed and selfishness which makes millions labour in ignorance, poverty and dirt so that a few may bask in the sun of luxury, the narrow bigotry and superstition which seeks to close men's minds to new ideas — all these pale into insignificance beside the sublime horizons which are opening up to the human race. Science is opening the door to an abundance which will conquer poverty; it will emancipate mankind from the dungeon of ignorance and hatred.

To these and similar themes, including the meaning of the new era for those who struggle for freedom and justice in our own beloved and tortured South Africa, we hope to return in future issues of this magazine.