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# The Russian Revolution and the Danish Labour Movement

by MORTEN THING

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The question of how the Danish working *class* reacted to the Russian Revolution would demand a wide-ranging answer. Perhaps the question could not be answered at all today. However, we can raise the issue of how the organized labour *movement* reacted, and how it later managed its relationship with the Revolution and the Soviet Union.

The most conspicuous aspect of this is of course the split caused by the World War and the Revolution, in Scandinavia as elsewhere. The three Scandinavian countries, however, exhibited quite different reactions. For in Sweden the left-wing movement was founded as a spin-off from Zimmerwald *before* the Russian Revolution. In Norway *Arbeiderpartiet* [the Labour Party] joined Comintern without a split, and stayed there until 1923. In Denmark, on the other hand, the split in the labour movement came as a more or less immediate reaction to the Revolution.

## 1. The Social Democrats and the Revolution

The February Revolution in Russia was interpreted by the Danish Social Democrats as a revolution of *peace*. Peace became *the* crucial element in understanding the whole revolutionary process. The leaders of the party followed developments closely and were themselves to play a certain role in what happened.

F. J. Borgbjerg, the editor of the party's leading newspaper *Social-Demokraten* [the Social Democrat], interpreted the February revolution as a bourgeois revolution. He saw its coming in terms of the working of natural laws, and further viewed Kerensky's role in the government as representation of the lower class and a guarantee of peace. His talent for rhetorical bombast and enthusiasm proved almost boundless faced with this revolution of peace. And in *Social-Demokraten* on the 20.3.1917 the party chairman Thorvald Stauning congratulated the Vice President of the *duma* on "this significant step on the way towards emancipation".

Of course the Social Democrats had contacts with the Russian labour movement through the International, and were reasonably well-informed. But the party line was not least swayed by the Russo-German Social Democrat and financier Alexander Helphand, with the pseudonym *Parvus*. It was Parvus who, through his close contacts with both Stauning and Borgbjerg, influenced them to work towards the convocation of an international conference in Stockholm where the labour movements from both belligerent sides in the World War could meet and thus stop the war. The party decided to send Borgbjerg to Petrograd to interest the Petrograd Soviet in a peace conference in Stockholm. But he was not the only one among the Western European socialists to turn his sights to Petrograd. The leader of the Swedish Social Democrats, Hjalmar Branting, also went over there, as did Henderson, Thomas and Vandervelde, representing British and French socialists. They wanted to persuade the Russians to continue the struggle against Germany.

On the 9th of April Borgbjerg was at Haparanda in Sweden, but was denied entry into the country. After many complications he did however manage to reach Petrograd on the 27th of April, where he spoke to the Soviet and had a conversation with Kerensky. He won the consent of the Soviet to the idea of a conference. Yet the conference came to nothing, because the International supported Britain and France against Germany and the SPD, the German Social Democrats. By contrast, the Danish Social Democrats had close links with precisely the SPD.

Throughout the summer of 1917 Borgbjerg wrote intensively about Russia. His attitude to the Maximalists, as the Bolsheviks were called, was that Russia was not ripe for a workers' revolution. The working class was too backward. But gradually, as it became clearer that Kerensky would not be able to win peace, Borgbjerg's sympathies shifted towards the Bolsheviks.

The Danish newspapers had no regular correspondents in Russia during the whole Revolution. Reuter's was the all-important source, and to a lesser extent the Agence Havas and the German Wolff. It was not until 1918 that the newspaper *Politiken* had a correspondent in Petrograd for two periods, and in December 1918 *Social-Demokraten* had Georg Wiinblad there. Despite the poor flow of information *Social-Demokraten* was, thanks to its international connections, the only Danish newspaper to have a front-page spread on the 9th of November 1917 on "The New State Upheaval in Russia"; and on the same day Borgbjerg backed the Revolution up in an editorial. The next day the paper wrote, in a portrait of Lenin, that Kerensky fell because of his failure to obtain peace.

Shortly afterwards, Parvus wrote to Stauning to get him to revive the idea of a peace conference in Stockholm. Stauning wrote to Huysmann and Troelstra to have a meeting arranged where it could be stated that it was "the duty of all Social Democrats to help their party comrades in Russia to preserve the democratic benefits won or established by the Revolution."<sup>1</sup> However, the Bolsheviks wanted nothing to do with Parvus' "dirty hands".

In the subsequent period *Social-Demokraten* defended the October Revolution and the Bolsheviks. It was asserted that they were proclaiming the right to self-determination for all nationalities in the Empire of the Czar, and that the peasants supported the Revolution because the Bolsheviks were parcelling out estate land. In a later, often-quoted article, Borgbjerg wrote on the 9th of December 1917, under the headline "Revolution and the Parish Pump": "The deepest meaning of the eternal words uttered by a Jew almost two thousand years ago is the same as is to be found in Lenin's and Trotsky's proclamations of peace among men"; and "at the time of the great revolutions the organs of the established order have always crossed themselves piously, but just as the great names have endured, so will the names of Lenin and Trotsky, when our contemporary parish-pump historians are long forgotten". In November-December *Social-Demokraten* repeatedly defended the Revolution against the accusations of bloody terror etc. in the bourgeois press.

The turning-point came during January 1918. On the 20th of January *Social-Demokraten* reported that the constitutive assembly had been dissolved. On the 26th of January it was emphasized (with the Syndicalists in mind) that the Russian methods could not be used in Denmark. And after a ten-day pause for thought, the definitive volte-face came on the 29th of January. It was now claimed that it was the big farmers who had enjoyed the benefits of the parcelling-out of land. The rural population was being terrorized, industry was being destroyed, there was hunger in the cities, there were epidemics and the traffic system had collapsed. That the Russians wanted to provoke a world revolution was seen as a manifestation of Greater Russian chauvinism, and it was asserted that the support for the Finnish revolution was an infringement of the right of peoples to self-determination.

From then on the Social Democrat position developed gradually, not least to keep pace with developments in the SPD. In a speech from the end of 1918 Borgbjerg stated that Russia was a barbaric country, and that it was only in Germany and Scandinavia that the labour movement had produced a press of any significance, and the makings of a genuine workers' culture (*Social-Demokraten*, 10.12.18).

In the same speech Borgbjerg offered the crucial analysis of the Russian experience. There neither was nor should be any conflict between socialism and democracy. If any such arose in the revolutionary process, that process should be stopped and replaced by democratic reforms. And it was in the framework of the democracy/ dictatorship opposition that the attitude was elaborated in the years to come-not least with the translation and publication of Kautsky's pamphlets *Democracy or Dictatorship* from 1919, *Communists at Work* from 1920 and *Communism and Terrorism* from 1921.

In 1924, as a kind of full stop to this period, the Social Democrats published a manual against *Communism*. It was in two sections: the first section dealt with developments in the Soviet Union, which were described as a return to capitalism, and with the pathetic Danish Communist Party; the second section was about "The Future of Soviet Russia", and had been written by the former leader of the Jewish *Bund*, Raphael Abramowitsch. Indicative of his approach was the concluding chapter "Democratic Capitalism or Bonapartism".

One important reason for the intense anti-Soviet propaganda after 1918 was undoubtedly that the opposition to the Social Democrats within the labour movement had begun to assume some proportions. Between 1924 and 1932, however, there was no particular reason for the Social Democrats to take Communism seriously. And accordingly the anti-Soviet propaganda was muted somewhat.

## **2. The development of a revolutionary movement in Denmark**

The opposition within the Social Democrat ranks was not particularly strong, but it did grow during the World War. It was directed against the policy of truce with the established order and the participation of the Social Democrats in the government. Since 1916 Stauning had been a minister without portfolio in the coalition government. On the other hand there was Marie Nielsen, a member of the party leadership. She criticized Stauning's Stockholm conference project since she thought that the minority which supported Zimmerwald should also be represented at the conference. She herself attended the third Zimmerwald conference held in Stockholm in the winter of 1917.

Within the *Socialdemokratisk Ungdoms Forbund* (SUF) [League of Young Social Democrats] opposition was considerably stronger. The leader of the League, Ernst Christiansen, was probably the first Dane to be invited to see Russia after the October Revolution, in the autumn of 1918. At that point *Social-Demokraten* made much of the fact that he was there as a private citizen, not as a representative of the SUF.

Finally, there was a fairly vigorous Syndicalist opposition group within the trade union movement. This had much to do with a number of large demonstrations of the unemployed in January-February 1918 which ended in the "Storming of the Stock Exchange" and angered the Social Democrats greatly. There can hardly be any doubt that domestic problems helped to shape the Social Democrats' mental picture of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism. The definite tendency to equate Bolshevism and Syndicalism shows this. One could further sharpen the contours of the

argument by saying that until the Russian Revolution the Social Democrats in principle still believed in socialist revolution, although it was to be reached by reformist means; but the Russian Revolution and the strengthening of revolutionary currents in the working class that followed in its wake had a kind of "developer effect" on the Social Democrats and made them more than ever emphasize *democracy* as fundamental rather than *socialism*.

In March 1918 Marie Nielsen broke with the Social Democrats and founded *Socialistisk Arbejderparti* [the Socialist Workers' Party]. The party orientated itself towards the Bolsheviks, and the Spartacists in Germany. Not least because of persecution by the police, the party was dissolved within a year. It was invited to attend the founding of the Communist International, but did not take part.

The conflict between the Social Democrats and their youth organization SUF led to a split. In November 1919 SUF founded, with part of the Socialist Workers' Party, a new *Venstresocialistisk Parti* [Left Socialist Party], which was accepted by Comintern in 1920, thereafter changing its name to *Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti* (DKP) [the Communist Party of Denmark]. With many difficulties and several subsequent splits and mergers, the Syndicalists were in 1921 received into DKP, and from 1923 on there was one revolutionary group, a section of the Comintern, ideologically linked with the Russian Revolution. In practice it took more than ten years to get DKP to resemble a European Communist party. The same process incidentally took place in the other sections. Rather briefly, one can say that with the Russian Revolution the Communist parties began by splitting off from a movement dominated by the Social Democrats. But it was only with the help of the Comintern's organizational apparatus and the heterogeneous ideology of communism (see below) that it became possible to transform these nationally distinct and nationally-formed groups into a movement with certain shared features, with the Soviet Union as the central resort of appeal in both ideology and power structure.

### **3. Official Denmark and the Soviet Union**

Immediately after the German revolution Denmark broke off diplomatic relations with Russia after pressure from Britain and the USA. Indeed all relations were made difficult. The rouble could no longer be exchanged, trade stopped on the whole and a close watch was kept on everyone who wanted to go to Russia, and on Russians in Denmark.<sup>2</sup>

During the wars of intervention the Danish government refused to send regular troops. But in 1919 the Westenholtz Corps was recruited and sent by Danes. A protest from the Social Democrats led to a cessation of recruitment.

Later the Social Democrats worked for a resumption of diplomatic relations, and it was the first Danish Social Democrat minority government that implemented the *de jure* recognition of the Soviet Union in June 1924.

### **4. Organization of friendly relations**

The first approach to an organization of links with the Soviet Union was connected with the famine of 1921-22. Under the leadership of Willi Münzenberg the *Auslandskomitee zur Organisierung der*

*Arbejderhjelpe der Hungernden in Rusland* was started up from Berlin. This later developed into, among other things, International Red Help and the whole Münzensberg empire, with films, newspapers and periodicals. In Denmark in 1921 *Komiteén for Hjælp til Rusland* [the Committee for Aid to Russia] was established, with Marie Nielsen as one of the leading forces. Martin Andersen Nexø, the well-known author, also joined the Committee, which collected a substantial sum. The Social Democrats organized their own collection and were therefore unwilling to contribute to that of the Russia Committee, and this in turn was not allowed to advertise in *Social-Demokraten*. Finally, the Red Cross also made a collection.

Even before the *de jure* recognition, *Komiteén for økonomisk og kulturelt Samkvem med Rusland* [the Committee for Economic and Cultural Relations with Russia] was formed, abbreviated to KOMSAMRUS on the Russian model. This was while the first temporary Russian envoy César Hein was in Copenhagen. In 1924, when Mikhail Kobetzky became Ambassador, *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke* [the Association for Danish-Russian Cooperation] was founded. The Association's first chairman was the Secretary of the Danish Retail Cooperative Movement Georg Bolgann. The Association saw it as its mission to function as a Soviet window on the bourgeoisie in particular.<sup>3</sup> Before the Second World War it was not a large association. A membership roll from about 1930 lists 113 members, and the second chairman (from 1934 on), Einar Thomassen, estimates that this was the peak.

Probably around 1931, *Landsforbundet Sovjetunionens Venner* [the National League of Friends of the Soviet Union] was formed. Unlike *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke* it openly showed its Communist colours. The organization was very active throughout the thirties and up to 1941 published a periodical under different names. The periodical featured informative articles about the Soviet Union of the special variety that was to typify Soviet information after 1930-but more on this later. The Friends of the Soviet Union had 3-4,000 members at its peak. It was never reconstituted after the Occupation, when it was illegal.

At least in the 1931-33 period there also existed *Foreningen for Oplysning vedrørende Forhold i Sovjet-Rusland* [the Association for Information on Conditions in Soviet Russia], a strongly anti-Communist group which published the periodical *Om Sovjet* [About the Soviet Union].

In 1939 the Social Democrat professor of economics Albert Olsen took over the chairmanship of *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke*, and remained there until 1950, when the professor of philosophy Jørgen Jørgensen took over the post. Because of the positive mood towards the Soviet Union after the War *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke* grew, and from 1947 on was able to publish the periodical *Sovjetunionen idag* [The Soviet Union Today]. At the beginning of the fifties the organization had about six thousand members. In 1952 the name was changed to *Landsforeningen til samvirke mellem Danmark og Sovjetunionen* [the National Association for Cooperation between Denmark and the Soviet Union], and under this name the Association still exists.

## 5. The Soviet Union in Communist ideology

Originally the Russian Revolution was an event, and Russia a country, among many. But gradually there developed a quite distinct picture of the Soviet Union as Utopia come true. One can observe this development by reading the long series of accounts that travellers to the Soviet Union have written over the years. In the following I will draw especially on sources of this type.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the picture is *formed*, just as the traveller's account becomes a genre. It has its own history-the story of how the poverty-stricken, poorly developed country becomes the existing framework of a dream. From being one country among many, which, true enough, had carried out the only socialist revolution so far, the Soviet Union becomes the cornerstone of the Communist ideology. It was only towards the end of the twenties that Stalin launched the idea that the quality of a Communist could be gauged from his relationship with the Soviet Union. Inasmuch as the Soviet Union assumed this central status, it became a *holy* land-not only in the metaphorical sense, as a country to which pilgrims flock, but in the true sense of the word: the Soviet Union is no longer subject to discussion, the picture of Utopia come true is sacrosanct. There is a parallel development in the images of Lenin, and especially of Stalin, into icons with purely tangential points of contact with reality. And Trotsky is developed into a richly-faceted demoniac fetish.

With the development of a religious core in Communism comes the development of that special feature it has as an ideology, which could be called its *heterogeneity*. It comes to consist of several unintegrated, conflictful parts held together in this specific historical form, but not by an internal logic.

The heterogeneity can be described briefly as at least two main elements. First, Communism is the rallying-point and hatchery for a whole range of progressive complexes of ideas, not least associated with the "modernity" of the thirties. Here I am thinking in terms of the individual members, not the official ideology. These complexes of ideas involve things like sexual reform, psychoanalysis, modernism in the arts, antiauthoritarian educational theory, jazz, Functionalism, women's emancipation etc. Secondly, the religious and authoritarian element is associated with the Soviet Union as icon. This element too was authoritarian in function, and introduced Russian political culture to the western labour movement. Unconditional sacrifice for the party was an important authoritarian feature of this religion.

It is not enough to point out, as many have done through time,<sup>4</sup> that there is a religious element in Communism-or an authoritarian one. If one does not insist on precisely the heterogeneous aspect, it becomes impossible to understand the historical significance of Communism. One could also say that from about 1930 on Communism has been the historically-present framework of movement for progressive thinking. Obviously, there are others, but it is the dominant one and has a firm grip on the *Zeitgeist*. It both draws on authoritarian features, like other ideologies of the age, and it points forward towards the realization of the Socialist Utopia, indeed it insists that it has already been realized.

The really striking thing about this construction, however, is the fact that the Soviet Union, the earthly framework of the dream, continued to be a poverty-stricken, backward country all the time the pilgrims were visiting it. As late as the sixties one only had to travel thirty or forty kilometres outside Moscow to find villages without electricity. Nevertheless the reports came from an almost unanimous throng of travellers to the Soviets of a modern country in a process of rapid development. *They simply did not see the poverty and underdevelopment.* The sanctification of the Soviets had its own optics. Of course the travellers saw what they saw. But if one looks for statements about poverty, one will by and large look in vain. This was not only because these were normally delegation trips, where VOKS, the Russian institution which organized the trips, controlled what people saw. For total surveillance of so many visitors was impossible. Fundamentally, it is a matter of what people expected to see, and what they therefore saw. As Paul Hollander has pointed

out, this is a general problem with political pilgrimages-also the later ones to China, Cuba and Albania.<sup>5</sup> And the phenomenon was not confined to convinced Communists. The so-called *fellow-travellers*-intellectuals who had not joined the Party, but otherwise sympathized with the progressive parts of Communist policy-travelled to the Soviet Union and saw marvels.<sup>6</sup>

In his very central book in this respect, *The Russian Adventure*,<sup>7</sup> Halldór Laxness writes that the Communists' accounts of the Soviet Union grew up in a context of anti-Soviet propaganda. Because of the particularly defamatory nature anti-Soviet propaganda took on from the outset, what he calls *Soviet advertisement* was its contrary from the start. He writes of the Communists who visited the Soviet Union in the twenties and at the beginning of the forties "that they did not view life in the country as it looked to contemporaries, as overwhelmed by the difficulties of the moment, but saw it in the nimbus of the victory of the Revolution, as it manifested itself in the exalted visions of the future unfolded by the great mentors and the good genius of the Revolution, Lenin himself; they saw conditions in their progress towards the better, the more perfect" (p. 19).

Here Laxness undoubtedly touches on two central features: on the one hand, that the propaganda against the Soviets determined the reaction of Soviet advertisement; and on the other that the travellers took with them a special yardstick, the futuristic yardstick of socialism. The old, the poor, the underdeveloped could be overlooked in favour of the new, the growing, all that pointed towards the new society; so much so that the latter completely monopolized the picture.

If one talks to old Soviet travellers today they tend to place the emphasis precisely here. Of course they saw the poverty. But that was nothing to write home about. But the new factories, the Moscow metro, the workers' clubs, that was something.

It is of course true that the propaganda against the Soviet Union played an important role in the shaping of its positive counterpart. But then the fact that the propaganda was so persistent was connected with the fact that the conditions it described did in fact exist. The Communists themselves acknowledge this today. But if Social Democrats and Communists took such different views of the Soviet Union in the thirties, it was primarily a matter of *faith*. For the Communists, when they were there, did not get to see the conditions that anti-Soviet propaganda dealt with (terror, forced collectivization, show trials, massacres etc.); and the Social Democrats did not go there at all. Each could believe his own.

Originally it had by no means been Lenin's intention that the Soviet Union should play the crucial role in Communism and the Comintern. He imagined that a revolution in Germany would place the German Communist Party in the central position that a developed production apparatus and proletariat would guarantee. And as a corollary, part of Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolsheviks was due to the fear that the distinctive aspects of the Russian party (centralism, for example) would affect the western parties.

The failure of the German revolution, however, at one blow left the Bolsheviks in the position of *the* leading party. Beginning with a generalization of the Russian experience as a basis for political action, the *Soviet Union* became an increasingly central element in Communism. The policy of the Comintern became ever more tightly linked with changes in CPSU policy, and the Comintern became an instrument of foreign policy.

Throughout the thirties the notion developed of the Soviet Union not only as Utopia come true, but as the *touchstone* for the calibre of a revolutionary. After the great trials of 1936-38, it further became important whether one combated the enemies of the Soviet Union-the Trotskyite, Bukharinist and Fascist agents. As *Arbejderbladet* [The Daily Worker] put it in 1938 in an editorial

directed against the Social Democrats: "The attitude to the Soviet Union is the touchstone! One cannot on the one hand claim to be struggling for peace, freedom and progress, and on the other combat the Soviet Union, which is the strongest bulwark of peace and freedom" (6.3.38).

This strategic importance served only to underscore the sacrosanct nature of the Soviet Union, and furnished the visitors with their special glasses. And the special glasses saw picture post-cards of Paradise.

## 6. Communists on tour

In the first decade after the Revolution the travellers' accounts are typified by responsive curiosity. The visitors are prepared to *see* the fatherland of the proletariat, but they are also curious. So to a great extent they also see the poverty and misery. On the whole the travel accounts are intent on registration, full of figures and facts.

The first visitor was, as mentioned above, the Chairman of the *Socialdemokratisk Ungdomsforbund* Ernst Christiansen, who was also the first Chairman of DKP. In November 1918 he visited Leningrad and Moscow for four weeks. He wrote the pamphlet *I Bolschewikernes Rusland* [In the Russia of the Bolsheviks] (1919) when he came home. Here he wrote that he would reproduce his impression "as it looks to the objective, but friendly observer". He describes a very open form of government that conceals nothing. Here the Soviets rule dictatorially. It is the interests of the workers that predominate. He considers the restrictions on freedom of expression very reprehensible and makes no bones about the fact that the food supply situation is catastrophic. In his memoirs,<sup>8</sup> he writes of the pamphlet: "When I now read the pamphlet I wrote then, I suppose I consider it naive at many points [...]". And this is probably true enough, but particularly so with the knowledge he possessed forty years later.

In 1920 the revolutionary movement sent two representatives to the Second Comintern Congress. The Communists sent Aage Jørgensen and the Syndicalists sent Marie Nielsen. From her we have, among other things, a diary.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning she writes: "At the approach to Murmansk we were stopped by a Russian guard ship. The red flag was waving, although it looked rather tattered. And yet it filled me with a strange feeling of comfort. It was *our* flag, it was *our* ship, and the fjord was ours, it was our fatherland." This is a recurrent feeling among the travellers. But it does not stop her from seeing the miserable state of things. She places special emphasis on the will to change and the hope of a historical breakthrough. This also applies to the long series of articles she sent home to the Syndicalist daily *Solidaritet* [Solidarity].

The next year DKP, now merged with the Syndicalists, sent a larger delegation to the Third Comintern Congress. And the party published the pamphlet *Danske Kommuniste om Rusland* [Danish Communists on Russia] (1921). And here a number of the results appear. Much is made in particular of the developed system of child care, the new educational system where work and education are linked, and the so-called woodland schools where small children can romp freely in the countryside. Emphasis is given to the rebuilding of industry and the pace at which everything is moving. This does not preclude that there is still much to be built up; but the pamphlet seems to present a picture of Russia which gives disproportionate weight to the positive features. From one of the writers, the coppersmith Niels Johnsen, we also have some diaries from this period,<sup>10</sup> where he expresses some irritation over the Russians' way of organizing Comintern meetings-not least the end-

less stream of verbiage. This criticism does not feature in the pamphlet or in the articles he writes home to *Arbejderbladet*.

The first major work was written by the well-known author and Communist Martin Andersen Nexø. He was on a visit in 1922 and the next year he published *Mod Dagningen. Skildringer fra Rusland* [Towards Dawn. Pictures from Russia]. The book took on great internal significance, but can hardly have seemed particularly convincing to the sceptics. This was connected with Nexø's passionate identification with the Soviet Union. He saw it as a manifestation of the universal creative force of the proletariat. He could read it like this because "I was born a revolutionary proletarian and have nothing to do with Western European culture" (p. 8). His expectations of the workers' state are great and he thinks the light shines differently there, because it shines on all. Several of his accounts stand thus on the verge of allegory, and he quite seriously thinks that people are happier in the Soviet Union than in the Old World (p. 128). The book stands out from the literature on the Soviets of the twenties by virtue of its passionate advocacy. But just this made it a beloved book that was welcomed with open arms in Communist and sympathetic circles.

It was not only Communists who visited the Soviet Union in these years. There were also others who felt drawn to the Revolution and wanted to see the results. One of them was the author Aage Heinberg, who published the book *Øjeblikkets Rusland* [The Russia of the Moment] in 1924. He was anti-Bolshevik, yet still fascinated by what was happening. Today his book is interesting reading because he had come with quite different expectations from Nexø's. In particular he saw traditional Russia and the miserable poverty: "But the misery, the hopeless poverty, is also still to be found in Moscow; only a few minutes' walk from the main traffic arteries are the notorious slum areas where filth and all kinds of misery fester, where disease is rife and hopelessness reigns" (p. 42). At the same time he described carefully what the government was doing to eradicate the misery and beggary. Heinberg had serious political reservations about the regime, but was positively surprised by how much was happening.

The Professor of Slavic Languages at the University of Copenhagen, the Swede Anton Karlgren, was in the Soviet Union more or less at the same time as Heinberg. In 1926 he published the book *Bolsjevikernes Rusland* [The Russia of the Bolsheviks]. This was a meticulous book of almost 400 pages. Karlgren was the antithesis of Nexø. He saw only how badly things were going there. His scepticism probably also made him vulnerable to a good many tall tales. His position shines through clearly, for example when he writes: "Impudently, undisguisedly, manifestly before the eyes of all, this new social élite is taking possession of the comfortable position of the upper class [...]" (p. 30). But irrespective of his position, his book contains clear observations that no one would presumably question today. But the Communists did at the time. A great deal of polemic was poured on Karlgren, in an attempt to expose him as a swindler. Thus when literature existed that might have made the Communists more healthily sceptical, they chose to denounce and repress this scepticism. This process began as early as the twenties and became quite automatic in the thirties.

To counter the anti-Soviet propaganda that was fairly typical of the newspapers from the start, the Russians began in the course of the twenties to invite delegations to the Soviet Union. At first these were to be workers' delegations, representing the whole working class-i.e. not only the Communists. The first Danish delegation was in the Soviet Union in November-December 1925. It consisted of sixteen workers and one writer. Of these seventeen, eleven were Social Democrats, three Communists, and three were without party affiliations. The writer who went was the then well-known modernist poet Fredrik Nygaard. Throughout the journey he wrote a series of feature articles

for one of the country's biggest dailies, *Politiken*. They maintained a relatively neutral tone, but it was clear that Nygaard was surprised at what he saw. One could feel an undertow of restrained enthusiasm. But quite as interesting is the fact that at some points he indicated the antagonisms that existed within the delegation. For example he wrote: "Was this, as some of the delegation's Social Democrat faithful so greatly feared, a false front?"<sup>11</sup> And several times he commented on the Communists' almost desperate willingness to defend everything they saw.

Nevertheless the delegation-which felt bound by the mandate constituted by the fact that it had been sent out by the national organization *De samvirkende Fagforbund* [Joint Trade Unions' Organization], which had received the invitation-submitted a joint, unanimous report which was published in book form.<sup>12</sup> The report is very positive, if not in any way a paean of praise. It is full of specific information which probably impressed its readers. In terms of social welfare and child care the Soviet Union was far ahead of western Europe. The delegation also noted the negative points like the housing shortage in Moscow, the relatively high level of unemployment (14.3%) and the poverty: "The delegation strolled through the slums [of Baku], which can only be compared in their incredible misery with old Copenhagen's Pilestræde quarter and "Smedens Gang" (p. 111)". The delegation visits a prison which also houses Social Democrats, but is convinced that no cruelty is taking place. On the whole, the book give us a very positive impression of the land to the east.

Fredrik Nygaard also wrote a collection of poems from the trip, *Den klingende Kane* [The Ringing Sleigh].<sup>13</sup> This was something new, to write poems from over there. Unlike the articles in the newspaper the poems convey compressed feelings more than information. Nygaard contemplates the antithesis of new and old and his own ability to understand what he sees. As a traveller's account the poems express the outsider's curious but positive experience of something inconceivably great.

It was not unusual for the new country to be given an aura of mysticism. It exerted an attraction which can perhaps be paralleled by what China represented in the seventies. Many people wanted to go over there, but how was one to do it? It was a great sensation when three Communist students rowed from Copenhagen to the Soviet Union in June 1926. They covered the 1600 kilometres in 32 rowing days. Then they went another 400 kilometres by river until they abandoned the boat and took the train the rest of the way. It caused a stir in the Soviet Union too. They wrote some articles in *Arbejderbladet* when they came home,<sup>14</sup> the main thrust of which was that things were going forward rapidly. Apart from some mention of the great influence of the Church, there is no place for negative aspects in their picture. There is however some polemicizing against Karlgren's book.

A Danish delegation was also invited to the tenth anniversary celebrations in 1927. This consisted of 21 members including two representatives of *Dansk Arbejdsmands Forbund* [the Danish Union of Unskilled Workers] (DAF) which was at the time outside the national organization DSF, but which was still a union dominated by the Social Democrats. Besides these, some of the progressive unions took part, like the seamen and stokers and some of the local unions where DKP was strongly represented. An intellectual was invited along too. The delegation published a small book about its trip, full of lists and figures. The delegation was convinced of the great progress that had taken place. No attempt was made to conceal that there was a certain amount of unemployment, but this is unlikely to have shocked Danish workers in 1927. The delegation had a talk with Stalin, who declared (without comment from the delegation) that the Social Democrats were prohibited because they were counter-revolutionary, and that there could of course be no freedom of the press for the bourgeoisie, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (p. 62f).

Without overinterpreting the fact that leading members of the DAF were on this trip, it does however provide some indication that there were still in 1927-28 large parts of the working class in Denmark, which was dominated by the Social Democrats, which were spontaneously positively-inclined towards the Soviet Union and the Russian Revolution. This presumably only changed slowly in the course of the thirties with, among other things, the increased propaganda effort of the Social Democrats.

In 1928 the first delegation of Scandinavian intellectuals went to the Soviet Union. From Denmark came, among others, the well-known author Otto Gelsted, who was also a Communist. He sent a number of articles home to the big bourgeois daily *Ekstrabladet*. Here he gave a lively, keenly-sensed picture of what he had experienced. He conveyed a picture of something excitingly new-the fatherland of the revolutionaries, but also a slice of the Orient, something very non-European; and above all, an obtrusive impression of poverty and filth. The dirty plates in the restaurants made him feel like retching. And the miserable state of the peasants made a strong impression on him: "Danish farmers probably read about Russia peasants now and then. But they cannot form any conception of the misery of their comrades." Seeing Polish officers on the way home, he is amazed to see persons of rank again: "After a stay in Russia, one meets persons of rank again, important people. Well, of course I came across people in Russia too who were important because they were Bolsheviks. Idiocy hasn't been wiped out there either, and I even occasionally met a particularly hard-boiled kind of Bolshevistic idiocy; some people who were proud of the stupid, sectarian conceit that Marx and Lenin were tantamount to God the Father and Jesus Christ."

Gelsted also published several poems from the trip. And despite the excitement he had felt, the experience of misery was not to be brushed off. In the poem "Boots in Leningrad" (1928) he writes, among other things:

I remember the wretched beggar host,  
loitering, Russia, on your steps!  
A race of wandering detritus,  
stretching out their filthy paws!  
Remember women with children suckling  
a leathern flap - the well of life! -  
And children like the ripened fruits  
of famine, vodka and poisoned blood.

This was hardly what the party faithful wanted to read. One of them, the Communist author Harald Herdal, wrote a year or two later to the Secretary of the Russian Legation in Copenhagen asking to go to the Soviet Union himself. One of his reasons was: "Looking back at the intellectuals we've sent off, I could damn near weep. What have we got out of sending an F. Nygaard, an O. Gelsted, an A. D. [Henriksen] over there? What good have they done afterwards-it doesn't even seem to have done their writing much good, far less agitation for the Soviet Union."<sup>15</sup>

Seen in context, the travellers' accounts of the twenties from the Soviet Union are for the most part still accounts of travels in the real world. The travellers primarily recount what they see, and reproduce it especially in the form of facts, not least in terms of quantitative statements. Even if it is not everyone who sees it, one can be in no doubt that the Soviet Union is still a poor, backward country.

## 7. The Social Democrats and Communism in the thirties

Seen through the eyes of the Social Democrats, two crucial things happened in connection with Communism in the early thirties. One was that in December 1932 the DKP had its parliamentary breakthrough and had two members elected to the Folketing. This proof of the increased strength of the party made the Social Democrats resume the counter-propaganda that had lain latent since the beginning of the twenties.

The other event was, paradoxically enough, the Nazi power takeover in Germany in 1933. For this led to theoretical innovation in Social Democrat thinking. Communism and Nazism were seen in the same perspective: totalitarianism. In 1933 one of the party's leading theoreticians, Hartvig Frisch, a well-known historian and later minister of state, published the book *Pest over Europa* [Plague over Europe], where Communism, Fascism and Nazism were analysed as manifestations of the same antidemocratic tendency.

This attitude led to the establishment by the Social Democrats in 1933 of *Hovedorganisationernes Agitationskomité* [Agitation Committee of the Principal Labour Organizations], with the function of combating both Nazism and Communism. In 1935 the work was reorganized and broadened under the leadership of *Hovedorganisationernes Informations- og Propaganda-Afdeling* (HIPA) [Information and Propaganda Division of the Principal Labour Organizations]. Despite the dual aim of its statement of intent, HIPA devoted its efforts entirely to the struggle against Communism. This led on the one hand to a series of pamphlets and books against Communism, but on the other to extensive activity aimed at getting agitatory material out to the unions, not least in the form of so-called "speech manuscripts"-that is, speeches written by the central body.

Towards the election of 1932 the Social Democrats wrote a pamphlet on the Communists, saying they had "crisis as a father and demagogy as a mother".<sup>16</sup> It was asserted as a quite central fact that the Communists split the labour movement and that they were the long arm of Moscow. The same line was taken in the later Prime Minister Hans Hedtoft-Hansen's book *Kommunisterne splitter* [Communism Divides] from 1933. The main point of this was to publicize the Strasbourg theses for union tactics which DKP itself had not translated and printed. The more analytical work, however, was also translated. Raphael Abramowitsch was translated in 1932, with *Bolsjevikediktaturet, Femaarsplanen og Socialdemokratiet* [Bolshevik Dictatorship, the Five-Year Plan and Social Democracy], and the next year with *De politiske fanger i Sovjet-Unionen* [The Political Prisoners in the Soviet Union]. Both pamphlets aroused great anger among the Communists. Andersen Nexø in particular expended a lot of energy on exposing Abramowitsch's charlatanry.

In HIPA's agitation against DKP the Soviet Union played an absolutely crucial role. In the periodical published by HIPA, *Socialdemokratiske Noter* [Social Democrat Notes], the criticism of DKP which drew its arguments from Soviet conditions made up far more than half of the material about the DKP.<sup>17</sup> Besides this, HIPA published a series of pamphlets of the same type-for example, *Kommunistisk Konservatisme eller Socialdemokratisk Radikalisme* [Communist Conservatism or Social Democrat Radicalism] (1934), *Det kommunistiske Bedrag* [The Communist Fraud] (1938) and *Dansk Sovjet-Nazisme* [Danish Soviet Nazism], which indicate the tendency by their very titles. In fact the antagonism between the Social Democrats and the DKP had been aggravated so greatly

towards the end of the thirties that the DKP was clearly included as an element of the Social Democrats' arch-enemy. At the First of May demonstration in Copenhagen in 1939 the City's joint trade unions organization had issued the slogan "For the Preservation and Consolidation of Democracy and Popular Freedom". The DKP understood this to be directed at Nazism and cancelled its own separate demonstration. In his speech, the main speaker, Prime Minister Stauning, railed with great oratorical force against Communism and did not mention Nazism with as much as one word.

For the parliamentary election of 1939, HIPA published a pamphlet, *Samling om Socialdemokratiet* [Unity with the Social Democrats] by Hans Hedtoft-Hansen, in which he makes the anti-Communist struggle of the thirties quite clear with the words: "We do not believe in the "Socialism" of hate and dictatorship."

## 8. The Communists and the Soviet Union in the thirties

*Monde* [French: World] was the name of a Communist periodical published by sympathetic intellectuals from 1928 on. In this the Soviet Union played an important role. Especially after the crisis had made its impact on Denmark in the course of 1931, the Soviet Union assumed the role of the place in the world where the crisis and unemployment did not exist. Behind the periodical was a group which split in 1932. The victorious group came completely under the control of DKP, and with it the group's publishing house, which published much pro-Soviet literature in the thirties.

Three men from the *Monde* group—Aage Jensen, Ebbe Neergaard and Ebbe Munch—visited the Soviet Union in August–September 1930 as ordinary tourists, by car. In the November 1930 issue of *Monde* they reported that things were moving forward rapidly. Ebbe Munch, who had been one of the oarsmen from 1926, could hardly recognize the Russians. "Now they were lively, the pace was ripping, everyone was in a hurry, and they laughed a lot." People were neatly and plainly dressed. The whole scene resembled Nørrebro [a Copenhagen workers' quarter]—"a Nørrebro in good mood, with a straighter back and its own flexible charm without shoving and pushing." The children were in good form and maintained to "an amazing extent [...] the innate good qualities of human beings." The only quite clear shortage was of consumer goods.

Ebbe Neergaard also wrote an article in the major daily *Politiken* (9.12.30) on "The Russian Village". From this one really gets an impression of how backward Russian agriculture was. It is on the whole the only description by any of the travellers that clearly indicates this. At the same time the description is very positive, far from being intended as criticism.

In 1931 and 1932 the *Monde* group published two books that were very important for the picture of the Soviet Union for the next few years. First came *Sovjet-Unionens Femårsplan* [The Soviet Five-Year Plan], which was a review, based on official figures and accounts, of the First Five-Year Plan. The text and illustrations of the book presented a picture of the Soviet Union as the very homeland of modernity. It was borne up by enthusiasm over technology and grand solutions. The camera angles in the illustrations make the Soviet Union look like a Cubist-Constructivist paradise.

The next year saw the appearance of *Kulturrevolutionen i Sovjet-Unionen* [The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Union]. This was not least written by people who had been there and by specialists. They presented the Soviet Union as the homeland of culture. Here something was happening on the cultural front. Against the cultural decline of the West "a young and determined culture is rising" (p. 6). This antithesis structures the whole book. The Soviet Union becomes the

foremost expression of modernity, civilization and culture. This image remained effective among Communist intellectuals far into the future, even long after the small avant-garde theatres had been closed down and Socialist Realism had harrowed cultural life. This happened in 1933-35.

In 1933 the *Monde* publishing house issued Glaeser and Weiskopf's book *U.S.S.R-Landet uden arbejdsløse* [The USSR-The Country without Unemployment], mainly consisting of photographs. In 1934 came Krupskaya's reminiscences of Lenin and Stalin's report to the 17th Congress. In 1935 came Esther Comus' book *Mor og Barn i Sovjetunionen* [Mother and Child in the Soviet Union] and Sigvard Lund's book *Brød og Staal* [Bread and Steel]. In 1937 we got both a 600-page shorthand record of the Pyatakov trial and a celebratory book on the occasion of the Revolution's twentieth anniversary. In 1938 came a 479-page shorthand record of the Bukharin trial and yet another anniversary book. In 1939 came Laxness' *Det russiske Æventyr* [The Russian Adventure]. And in addition there were all the pamphlets that the party publishing house *Arbejderforlaget* [the Workers' Publishing House] issued. The thirties were rich in literature on the Soviet Union.

In 1932 the party publishing house issued Christian Langemark's pamphlet *Hvad jeg saa og hørte i Moskva* [What I Saw and Heard in Moscow]. This is in many respects an atypical traveller's account. Despite the completely uncritical support for the regime and a glorification of the party, he cannot refrain from noting in passing that people are standing in queues, that there are food supply problems, that there is a great scarcity of housing, that there are beggars, that the means of transport are too few, the bureaucracy huge and the factories rather old-fashioned.

In 1934, when *Landsforbundet af Sovjet-Unionens Venner i Danmark* [the National League of Friends of the Soviet Union in Denmark] (SUV) began publishing its periodical *Sovjet idag* [The Soviet Union Today], far firmer rules were laid down for the nature of travellers' accounts-not openly-adopted rules, but de facto ones. The accounts constituted a fixed genre. Characteristically, these typical travellers' accounts emerged at the same time as the first articles eulogizing Stalin, who until 1934 had not been a particularly conspicuous figure, and certainly not worshipped. In the next few years SUV grew apace: in 1936-37 from 1000 to 2400 members; in 1938 to 3200. The journeys to the Soviet Union played a considerable role in this success. It was simply the way ordinary people could get over there. But the League also prospered from showing Russian films. These were hardly ever shown in the cinemas, and one of the ways they were distributed was through friendship societies.

In the twenties Martin Andersen Nexø had lived in Germany and during this period had come closer to the Social Democrats again. But at the beginning of the thirties he was on his way back into Communism. In 1933 he was invited to the big writers' congress in Moscow. The visit led to a new book on the Soviet Union from Nexø. It was called *To Verdener* [Two Worlds]; and right from the front cover, which was split into two areas, a black and a red, the pattern of the book was laid down. He sees nothing but progress on all fronts; people are happy, all is well. There is nothing good to be said, though, about people who think otherwise. For example he writes: "To be able to get away with any kind of attack at all that has a chance of being taken seriously at least by the stupidest readers, the self-appointed blackeners have to work (as Professor Karlgren does) with sheer distortions, perversions and falsifications of fact. Qualities like cleanliness cannot be kept up by the sort of people who have to do-so to speak in the line of duty-work as dirty as whitewashing the kulak, probably the morally most disgusting phenomenon ever produced by Russia, and making him humanly presentable for the reading world" (p. 19). A longish section is devoted to Abramowitsch. The proof of his dishonesty Nexø finds in the Ramsin trial of 1931, when the GPU made Abramo-

witsch out to be the real mastermind (pp. 126ff). Through his love of the Soviet Union Nexø found his way back to the DKP, was received into the party and later into its Central Committee. His abrasive attacks on anyone who uttered a critical word about the Soviets were a recurrent feature of the party paper *Arbejderbladet* in the thirties. A whole pamphlet about these Soviet-knockers, especially among the Social Democrats, entitled *Hænderne væk!* [Hands Off!] (1934), came out too.

A rather different kind of Soviet traveller was Sigvard Lund. He was not a party member but a sympathizer, and close to the Communists. He made his living as a translator and went in the winter of 1932-33 to Moscow at his own initiative. He stayed there until well into the summer, when he took a harvesting job on a large *sovkhos* in the Kuban area by the Black Sea. Later he went with a delegation to Stalinsk in Siberia, where he saw a giant steelworks. When he came home he wrote the book *Brød og Staal* [Bread and Steel], which was issued by the *Monde* publishing house in 1935-that is, not by the party publishers, but by its intellectual publishers, as it were. The book was relatively positively received because of its almost neutral style. Lund is not at pains to convince people with positively-charged words, but with credible experiences. He paints a decidedly positive picture, even though he has his played-down points of criticism-for example, as regards the supply of goods, or the propaganda against the kulaks. They are blamed for more misfortunes than they could possibly have managed to cause, says Lund (p. 43).

Indeed, Lund visited the Soviet Union at a time that was to prove a turning-point. In the winter of 1932-33 there was still great distress, but the harvest of 1933 helped a great deal. And in the course of 1933 there was in fact a radical expansion in production.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, one gets from Lund's book a clear impression of how desperate the situation is. This is especially true of the food supply situation; but also of agriculture. His description of the Kuban *sovkhos*-that is, of collectivization-testifies to a hopeless lack of organization and reflection. The propaganda value of Lund's book was undoubtedly considerably greater than that of Nexø's fiery advocacy. For his unwritten conclusion is that here there is a struggle for bread and steel, and life has a meaning. And a written one is that in the course of 1933 the Soviet Union's most basic problems were solved. "I can travel home in the awareness of having seen the Soviet Union emerge victorious from a fateful year of struggle" (p. 167).

A third important traveller of the thirties was the teacher Axel Kjærulf Nielsen. In his youth he had worked in chemicals factories in the USA and Cuba, and in 1927 he resigned from his job as a council schoolteacher in Copenhagen and moved to the Soviet Union. There he found work in an aniline factory. When he had lived there a year he wrote his book for the party publishing house *Mit første Aar som Arbejder i Sovjet-Rusland* [My First Year as a Worker in Soviet Russia] (1928). This is a book that still bears the stamp of the heroic period. And like the travel accounts of the twenties it is particularly full of factual information and figures. But the description of reality also permits negative features to mix with the progressive, socialist ones. It is certainly a positive book, but it does not try to hoodwink the reader into believing that life in the Soviet Union is problem-free, not to mention prosperous. In 1936 Kjærulf Nielsen published the book *8 Aar i Sovjet-Unionen* [Eight Years in the Soviet Union]. By then he had worked as a chemist in various factories since the last book, and had travelled much. He himself thought that he was probably the Dane back in this country who had spent the longest time in the Soviet Union. But the book is quite different from the first one. By and large it contains only pre-processed information and experiences, almost no observations. It might as well be an official document. He constructs a cohesive universe of explanations, where everything is different from what one thinks. Dictatorship and democracy are one and the same thing

in the Soviet Union. The democracy of the working population is the same as dictatorship over other social forces. Wage differences are good! Stakhanovite work is fine! And all because the system is built up on quite different premisses.

For a man like Kjærulf Nielsen, who lived in the Soviet Union for eight years, things must of necessity be otherwise than for the tourist and delegate. He cannot have avoided *seeing* the poverty. He cannot have failed to hear about the great horrors of collectivization etc. The cohesive system he builds up in the book lacks the stamp of information and experience-it is credo. The book apparently appeals to reason, but in reality it is inexplicable except by faith. The religious element must necessarily be *the* bearing element in a Communism that can furnish its faithful with glasses that filter impressions of reality so thoroughly. So one can entertain one's suspicions about the book's value as external propaganda. But one should hardly underestimate its internal significance for the party. The many who could not get over there themselves attached great weight to the fact that Kjærulf Nielsen has lived there for eight years.

Testimony that the age was not blind to these expressions of faith is provided by an interesting major review written by the critic Ebbe Neergaard for the Communist cultural magazine *Plan* in February 1935. Here he discusses, among other things, Nexø's *To Verdener* [Two Worlds], which he considers is too unsubtle and paints too rosy a picture. But he also writes: "One begins to suspect how an entirely new kind of human being arises, with a new, clear morality, an irrepressible optimism and a burning idealism of the purest social carat." And in his discussion of Ilya Ehrenburg's *Skabelsens anden Dag* [The Second Day of Creation], he writes: "A meaning in life, a supra-individual goal for individual work, an obvious summons to individual effort in tandem with the effort of the masses - *that* is the crucial thing." True, these remarks were written by Neergaard with the Russians in mind. But without doubt they would have been more appropriate to the Danish Communists' attitudes to the Soviet Union. It was precisely the Soviet Union, as the religious element in Communism, that cemented the ideology together, but also produced the psychological possibility of establishing another political culture in the labour movement, a minority culture.

In the summer of 1937 the well-known Danish architect Edvard Heiberg was at an architectural congress in Moscow. He had been a pioneer of Functionalism in Danish architecture, and for a while had taught at the Bauhaus-Dessau. Heiberg, who was also a prominent Communist, sent his reports back to the party newspaper. Here he dealt particularly with the question of why Soviet architecture was the way it was. Criticism had been simmering, especially among intellectuals, of the heroicizing, monumental Soviet art. The Moscow metro stations in particular had made many people ask just that question. Heiberg wrote, among other things: "As a first groping attempt at such a democratic architecture, adapted to a people with a taste for the splendid and with distinct national traditions-a people that feels itself to be the victors, the new masters of the house-that is how the new Soviet architecture should be viewed." (*Arbejderbladet*, 30.7.1937). The arguments are almost archetypal. The possibility of distancing oneself from anything at all in the Soviet Union does not exist. So it is important to dam up any such potential criticism. Differences of national character and the difference in the systems become the cement that binds interpretation together. In another article on the Moscow development plan (11.6.37) it is taken for granted that it will be possible to control the development of the city and eliminate the housing shortage. When Heiberg was on a delegation trip again in 1953 he had to admit that this had not been possible. In fact, there was a huge housing shortage in Moscow. But he had the greatest expectations that "the enormous development in construction technology" would mean "a rapid elimination of the housing shortage" (*Land og Folk*

[Country and People], 4.9.1953). And even though the delegations of subsequent years bore home the same news, the housing shortage in Moscow seems to have remained a relatively constant feature of development.

One last Soviet traveller from the thirties should be mentioned, although he is not a Dane. This is the Icelandic author and Nobel Laureate Halldór Laxness. Laxness visited the Soviet Union for the first time in 1932, and the next year published the book *I Austurvegi* [In Russia]. The book was not translated into Danish. But in 1937-38, when he was the guest of the Writers' Association and had also observed the Bukharin trail, he wrote the large book *Det russiske Æventyr* [The Russian Adventure] (1939). His usual Danish publisher refused to publish it, so it was issued by the Communist *Monde* publishers. The title alone indicates a central feature: what is to be told here is a tale of wonders. The book is built up on the contrast between his two visits. In 1932 he had been amazed by the poverty-amazed because he had read far too much Soviet advertisement; that is, Communist books about the Soviet Union. When he went back in 1937 everything had changed. The poverty was gone. People were well-dressed and there were no queues. Education was incredible widespread: "Sometimes the Soviet Union had the effect on me of one long Sunday School all the way from the Baltic to the Pacific. Wherever you went, they were busy educating the masses" (p. 38). But it was industry's results in particular that were impressive: "All books about the superiority of Socialism tell you nothing compared with the realization of the Soviet Union's planned results in light industry" (p. 147). In principle Laxness has no objection to criticizing conditions in the Soviet Union; the crucial thing is that one understands "the main issue itself, the triumph of Marxism, as it manifests itself in the form of society-this Leninist work of art, the framework of human life in the vast Soviet territories" (p. 230).

The book was eagerly received in the DKP newspaper in a long review by another great author, Hans Kirk. He praised Laxness for seeing that the main battle had been won. The only thing Kirk was dissatisfied with was that Laxness called the Communist books about the Soviet Union *advertising*. But otherwise the book was excellent (*Arbejderbladet*, 6.7.1939). The book took on great importance, because Laxness began so surprisingly by criticizing this Soviet advertising. This put him in the position of *educator*. In interviews with old Communists many mention precisely Laxness' book as one that made a great impression on them.

However, there is yet another interesting feature about Laxness' book-that he later wrote a retraction. This was called *En digters opgør* [An Author Recants] and is from 1963.<sup>19</sup> Here he writes, of both his stays in the thirties: "If faith is at hand, reason holds its peace" (p. 127). Especially about the 1937 visits, he writes. "And yet the poverty was in fact what struck the eye first and last; the national characteristic you were most surprised by wherever you went in the Soviet Union in this glorious era of Stalinism" (p. 228). He writes of sprawling slums in Moscow and Leningrad and of the situation of agriculture: "Ineptitude like that of agriculture under Stalin probably never existed before on earth" (p. 229). The problem becomes how to understand why he apparently saw these things but originally wrote the opposite in his two books about the Soviet Union. His paramount explanation was *faith* - something the former Catholic had tried a few times in his life. But an explanation also lies in this description of the typical delegate: "They had the dream of heavenly bliss in their eyes when they came, and it did not fade no matter what they saw. They heard the Revolution speak through all things, but saw the endless hosts of ragged proletarians that filled the land as the inevitable remnants of capitalism" (p. 120). Yet if one is to believe him, there was also an almost cynical element in it: "On closer reflection I thought this banal Stalinist self-aggrandizement, along

with the endless varnishing of privation and bungling, had a certain moral justification and was a vehicle in the service of Socialism" (p. 122). At all events he was afraid to work against Socialism by saying exactly what he saw.

In the DKP's construction of Communism as a cohesive worldview in the thirties, the Soviet Union certainly played a crucial role; but the relationship with the Soviets was also marked by certain crises. I am thinking of the trials, the non-aggression pact and the Finnish War. The two latter crises in particular cost the party a good few members. But at the same time these crises also-unlike that of 1956-meant a strengthening of this Communist worldview. And at the end of the decade this was marked by the publication of *Sovjetunionens kommunistiske Partis (Bolsjevikernes) Historie* [The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (the Bolsheviks)], the most fraudulent of all the editions, and by its success as the DKP's biggest best-seller. On the first day 2300 flew off the counters, after a week 3700 had been sold, and after four months the first edition of 10,000 was sold out and a new edition had to be printed.

To round off this central phase of the genesis and development of Communism I will discuss the significance of the trials and the genesis of Stalin-worship itself.

## 9. The great trials of the thirties

On the 18th of August 1936, when an *Arbejderbladet* headline proclaimed "Counter-Revolutionary Gang Exposed in Soviet Union" and that it had been led by Zinoviev and Kamenev, there were many who were shocked. And they probably did not decrease in number when on the 21st of August the paper could report that the accused had also confessed. Nor did the links with both Trotsky and the Gestapo make things any easier. One of those who had trouble believing her eyes was Marie Nielsen, one of the founders of the revolutionary movement. On the 23rd of August she wrote to the Chairman of the Comintern Georgy Dimitrov and asked him to support the Norwegian Labour Party's action to have impartial witnesses from the western labour movement observe the trial and evaluate the material. She found it hard to believe that veteran Bolsheviks could transform themselves into individualist terrorists.<sup>20</sup> At an action meeting of the party on the 29th of August she attacked Soviet justice, according to the party organ, and was shortly afterwards excluded from the party.

But she was a lone voice. In fact, one has to wonder at how ready the party was to absorb the shock. From one day to the next they were prepared to start up the counter-propaganda. Big meetings were held where the issue was explained; and the party was quick off the mark with a pamphlet on *Trotsky and the Gestapo* (1936).

The Socialist Workers' International also wrote to the Soviets asking for the trial to be stopped, and later HIPA published a translation of F. Adler's open letter to Dimitrov, questioning the very nature of the trial and also referring to the previous trials (Shakhty etc.). There was no material evidence in these trials. The evidence that led to convictions was always confessions. Adler recalled the medieval heretic trials with their forced confessions.

In September 1936, however, *Arbejderbladet* could enter the fray against this accusation by citing the well-known English lawyer D. N. Pritt, who backed up the trial. Pritt's article was later published as a pamphlet.

Once the terror was in progress, things moved fast in the Soviet Union. The foreign public

first and foremost got to know about it through the trials. As early as November 1936 came the trial of Noskov, Shubin, Kurov and others. On the 21st of January 1937 came the news of the trial of Pyatakov and Radek. In this last case, the Soviets had learned the lesson of the first. It was an open trial, which invited observers could attend. The DKP's representative in the Comintern, Arne Munch-Petersen (who disappeared himself during the terror), reported home to *Arbejderbladet* from the courtroom, and shortly afterwards published a pamphlet about it. Martin Andersen Nexø also attended the trial and stated to *Pravda* that Trotsky was the prime enemy of democracy and humanity. Other well-known figures were called to testify to the credibility of the trials—for example the German writer Leon Feuchtwanger. There were also a few well-known left-wingers who demurred. The Norwegian author Sigurd Hoel, for example, wrote in the periodical *Veien frem* [The Way Forward]: "I would claim that the last two Moscow trials are a far more dangerous blow to progress in the world than Mussolini's victory and a possible lost war in Spain taken together." In the next issue he was roundly castigated by his Danish colleague Hans Kirk, for example with the words: "All over Scandinavia at this hour, liberal-minded writers are coming forth and wringing their hands over the Moscow trials. They are writing poems and articles of a profound, almost gloating hopelessness. They cultivate their frustration as the authors of the Decadence did their depravity" (*Veien frem* 2/1937).

The party called a big meeting where Arne Munch-Petersen, just back from Moscow, gave an account of the trials. The meeting adopted a resolution saying, among other things: "The assembly greets this assault on the forces of war and Fascism with satisfaction, as a victory for the forces of peace" (*Arbejderbladet*, 16.2.1937).

In the Radek trial and the subsequent trial of Bukharin the Russians resorted to issuing shorthand reports of the trials. In the case of the Radek/Pyatakov trial in particular this had great importance, and the Russians spent millions on getting the 600-page book translated into as many languages as possible, including Danish. One of the most prominent lawyers in the DKP, Carl Madsen, used this very shorthand record in presenting his evidence that the trials were just ones. Why, one could simply read what they were about! After all, they confessed! But only what they were absolutely forced to. He made no comment whatsoever on the fact that no evidence was presented in any other form than confessions (*Sovjet idag*, March 1937). In a review of the shorthand record, the leader of the DKP's student work group, Erik Schmidt, wrote: "Those who read the trial report will be quite convinced that there can be no question of tricks or falsifications" (*Clarté* 3/April 1937).

In June 1937 came the trial of Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Kork etc., which cost most of the Army leaders their lives. And then on the 28th of January 1938 came the Bukharin trial. It took place, like the Radek trial, in the presence of a large international contingent. One of those invited to observe the proceedings was the Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness, mentioned above. His reflections, given the extreme terms in which they are formulated, are interesting as proof of how comprehensive the distortion was. For example, he wrote: "The living picture of the battle between huge political forces, on which the trial sheds light, is in its entirety so impressive, in its vastness so closely akin to the very forces of nature, that elements like these conspirators' moral or legal "guilt", or the personal punishment that awaited them, in reality became trifles one was not even tempted to discuss" (p. 58f). The crucial issue for Laxness was that these conspirators were playing with the lives of 170 million people. He was himself an opponent of the death penalty. But in this case it would be a crime-nay, "a shameless betrayal of the whole progressive part of humanity" not to execute the

accused. In his memoirs he tells the story of the Bukharin process rather differently, but insists: "I would not have written about Bukharin as I did, if I had not believed what I was told [...]" (*En digters opgjør*, p. 262).

For Laxness the *political* aspect of the trial clearly takes the foreground. And of course the political aspect was also emphasized in the Communists' accounts; but here it is even emphasized at the expense of the specific acts of terrorism of which they were accused (murder, attempted murder, poisoning the population of cities etc.). It is as if one hears a very faint echo of the conviction that the trials were perhaps primarily a political showdown.

A Danish engineer who came close to being involved in the Pyatakov trial, and who worked in the Soviet Union from 1932-37, Bent Gregersen, thought when I interviewed him that even then he saw the trials as a political showdown, and that one perhaps should not take the charges at their face value. At all events, he found out that innocent people were also swept with the tide at one of the minor trials that followed the big ones. Here one of his friends was accused and convicted of something that Bent Gregersen could say for sure he had not done. He kept his doubts about the true nature of the trials to himself; they might harm the Soviet Union, if they came out. And he was much used by the friendship society SUV. Incidentally, he remembered that the Chairman of the Danish party for many years, Aksel Larsen, had told him after the War that the great trials were probably a sham.

One of the subtler defences of the trials came from the great Norwegian author Nordahl Grieg, who was not a Communist, but was close to the party. In 1939 he published *Ung maa Verden endnu være* [The World May Yet Be Young]. The main character is an English scientist, Leonard Ashley, who spends some time in the Soviet Union. Here he meets the girl Kira, who challenges his humanism. She gives him the mocking title *gumanist*, after the Russian pronunciation of "humanist". A *gumanist* is someone who feels anger over injustice, but does nothing to change conditions.

In the Soviet Union Ashley also meets the old revolutionary Lebedeff, to whom he becomes attached. But Kira informs on Lebedeff. He has been a member of a Trotskyite conspiracy. Ashley refuses to believe it, gives up and returns home. But Grieg's point is that Lebedeff is guilty, and that humanism has been defeated if it does not fight, so the second half of the book is set in Spain during the Civil War. The book was received as a masterpiece by the Communist critics, and there can be no doubt that it is a magnificent book. But if people who at the time defended the trials knew full well in their own minds that these were masked political showdowns, they at least accepted the premiss that the opposition and Trotsky were conniving with the Nazis. Hans Kirk, who praised Grieg's book as one of the major works in modern European literature, himself wrote a serialized novel in *Arbejderbladet* in 1939-40 based on the notion that there was an alliance between the Trotskyites and the Nazis aimed at overthrowing the Soviet Union. The book was called *Mørke Magter* [Dark Powers].

## 10. The sanctification of Stalin

For many years after the Russian Revolution the name of Stalin was unknown in the Danish Communist press. Before 1924 he was not mentioned at all, and only sporadically in the following years. When he became General Secretary he was of course mentioned as such, but for a long time the old Bolsheviks seemed to steal his thunder. This only changed in the thirties, and only

definitively from 1934 on, when the *sanctification process* began. Slowly a vocabulary was built up, a liturgy that could be observed when one spoke of Stalin, and only of him. And it had never been used before of any of the revolutionary leaders. The vocabulary in the first place involves the statuting of a number of "facts"-for example, "one of Lenin's closest colleagues" became a standard phrase, although it had nothing to do with reality. Secondly, a conception was built up of Stalin's character, his far-sightedness, his strategic, political and theoretical genius, his concern for the people, etc.-none of which had anything to do with reality either. Thirdly, more and more standard clichés appeared which sounded very odd in Danish, but which had been directly translated from the Russian precisely in order not to detract from the sanctity of the liturgy. Thus a former Communist publisher has recounted how when he had to translate a speech by Stalin, he had abridged the section that followed the speech, describing the ovations. This detailed how people rose in applause and shouted all sorts of paeans of homage to Stalin, and how the shouts culminated in the audience spontaneously breaking into song. Shortly afterwards the party was paid a visit by a Comintern envoy who reproached him with this interference. True, things had not happened as they were described; but it expressed the attitude of the masses.

One of the problems that quickly arose was that Stalin-worship looked very much like the worship of Hitler and Mussolini. And early on, attempts were made to counter criticism by simply maintaining that there was no worship at all, only the expression of "gratitude and devotion to the Communist Party, the Soviet power, and its excellent and greatest leader *Stalin*" (*Arbejderbladet*, 8.1.36). The devotion to "the victorious master-builder of Socialism" was due to the perilous duties he had taken upon himself as the helmsman of the first socialist state-just as one feels gratitude for the helmsman who guides a ship through rough seas.

At the same time it became the custom to have well-known intellectuals express their unqualified enthusiasm, to show that the talk of Stalin's genius was not hot air. Shortly before his death the great French author Henri Barbusse wrote a panegyric to Stalin, referring to him as the "undisputed leader of the band of "old Bolsheviks" who have heroically sacrificed themselves for the creation of the Soviet Union", "the best theoretician and the wisest man of action", and a man with "uncommon gifts" (*Sovjet idag*, February 1936).

The sanctification began in the thirties. But it was the War that definitively clad it in religious vestments. Writing about Stalin became a sacred act. In 1946, when Hans Kirk reviewed the official Stalin biography, *Kort Biografi* [Short Biography], he criticized it because it failed to convey an understanding "of Stalin's importance in world history, of his mighty personality, his strength of character, wisdom, loyalty and political genius" (*Land og Folk*, 25.1.1946).

*SUKP(B)s Historie* [The History of the CPSU(B)] which had gone through two editions before the war, came out in a third edition in 1946. In a discussion of the significance of the work, one of the leaders of the party, Villy Fuglsang, wrote of "the book that teaches us to conquer" and referred to it quite simply as "Stalin's book" (*Land og Folk*, 21.10.1948). And in the next few years it is as if the big words have all too quickly worn thin, so that some people feel antipathy against them. An article warns against this tendency-only the enemies of Socialism feel this way.

In connection with Stalin's seventieth birthday in December 1949 the hagiography reached hitherto unheard-of heights. In a number of feature articles Stalin's greatness in various fields is described. The "ultra-left analysis" from the end of the twenties is described as "Stalin's mastery in realizing and describing this phase of the development of capitalism" (*Land og Folk*, 8.12.1949). On the birthday itself the front page of the paper was cleared of everything but a portrait of Stalin along

with the party's homage to the "leading light of socialism", "the sure guide and leader of all" (*Land og Folk*, 21.12.1949). On the next page Andersen Nexø paid homage to Stalin with the words: "Stalin's greatness consists, like Lenin's, of the fact that his personality is a rallying-point for all oppressed peoples in the world, and the source of a persistent unease and concern among the rich."

That day the party organ contained sixteen pages of homage. In the evening there was a giant celebration in the Sports Hall in Copenhagen, where the Party Chairman, Aksel Larsen, sent his thanks to Stalin: "Under your brilliant leadership socialism grew strong and invincible in the Soviet Union. Thanks to your efforts on the theoretical front, the Marxist-Leninist theory of struggle was enriched and elaborated, the world Communist movement grew strong" (*Land og Folk*, 22.12.1949). And in the party periodical *Tiden* [The Age] Gelius Lund could reveal that "it was thanks to Stalin's theory of the party that the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party was able to expose the Tito gang in Yugoslavia" (*Tiden*, 10/1949).

Similar heights were scaled when Stalin died in March 1953. On the front page of *Land og Folk* we find, among other things, the following announcement: "The greatest historical figure of our epoch, the heir to the immortal *Lenin*, the brilliant leader of the Soviet Union, the standard-bearer of world socialism, the master-builder of Communism and the ensign of peace, Comrade Stalin, is no more [...] Inconceivable was Stalin's greatness, inconceivably great his work and his significance for our age and the future" (*Land og Folk*, 6.3.53).

Developments from 1934 until 1953 show strikingly that Stalin had become a holy figure-to a degree and in a way that clearly exhibit liturgical features. And the Communists knew it; regularly, they had to retaliate against criticism of precisely the sacred element in Communism.

But in the same period there was a sanctification of the Soviet Union as such. The traveller's account as a genre ran in the same narrow, liturgical channels. Both things happened in periods when the terror in the Soviet Union was at its peaks. It was during the great terror at the end of the thirties, and during the resumption of the terror in the post-war period, that the sanctification was strengthened as the internal defence against the external pressure. The "doctors' trials" and the trials in Eastern Europe (Slansky etc.) exposed Communism to a pressure unheard-of since the non-aggression pact and the Finnish War. On the whole, anti-Communism in the post-war period reached heights it has not seen before or after.

One could therefore claim that the heterogeneous aspect of Communism as a worldview is not simply a given feature, but also developed with the political conjunctures in the Soviet Union itself. The religious cement was to an increasing degree shifted from *the cause* to *Stalin the person*. The worship of Stalin was not, as Khrushchev claimed, a kind of deviant development; it was the logical development of the historical ties between Communism and the development and policies of the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup>

## 11. The labour movement and the Soviet Union after World War Two

As we know, the Soviet Union emerged from the Second World War as the ally of the western powers, and with an enormous amount of good will in Europe. The Communist parties swelled as never before. The small Danish party, which before the war had probably been reduced from about 5000 members in 1938 to half of this in 1940, swelled in the summer of the Liberation to 50,000, and *Land og Folk* became one of the country's biggest newspapers with a circulation of about 60,000. At

the October 1945 election the party, which had three members elected to the Folketing in 1939, managed to win eighteen seats.

All this left its clear stamp on the relationship with the Soviet Union. Although the Social Democrats kept a thick wedge of cold air between themselves and the Communists, they prepared to take an open line towards the Soviet Union. The party publishing house issued several positive books about the Soviets, including a book by a Swedish engineer, Eugen Wolfson, about *Sovjetunionens Industrialisering* [The Industrialization of the Soviet Union] (1945), which was more or less a work of homage to developments over there. The Conservative Foreign Minister Christmas Møller wrote in the preface: "Almost no task is greater and more meaningful than the dissemination of knowledge and understanding of Russia [...]".

Accordingly, both the Chairman of the Social Democrats, Hans Hedtoft, and the Chairman of the Trade Unions Council Ejler Jensen joined the board of *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke*, the official friendship society. The society's periodical *Sovjetunionen idag* [The Soviet Union Today] contained, in its first issue from November 1947, a general declaration of the intent to build up a positive relationship with the Soviet Union, and the two Social Democrat leaders also signed it. But the broad front did not last long. As early as 1948 the leading Social Democrats withdrew from the society.

Where the Danish Social Democrats had retained strong ties with the German SPD up until 1933, after the War they turned towards the British Labour Party. In addition, England was the main outlet for Danish agricultural exports. A recent survey shows that there was close cooperation between the Danish Social Democrats and Labour, not least in the development of anti-Communism.<sup>22</sup> Denmark's abandonment of its traditional neutrality by joining NATO in 1949 was related to this. The Soviet Union was no longer a central focus for informative work. On the contrary it had now become the most appropriate image for the antithesis of a democratic welfare state. The post-war attitude of the Social Democrats to the Soviet Union was therefore to a great extent determined by links with the interests of the great powers.

Internally in Denmark the party resumed its intensive propaganda against the Communists. A special section was established for this purpose, called *Arbejderbevægelsens Informations Central* [the Labour Movement Information Centre] (AIC). One of the AIC's jobs was to localize Communist shop stewards in the trade union movement, and preferably to help to ensure that their numbers did not become too great. The AIC issued large quantities of propaganda material against the Communists, the most important point in which was: "Their end is the same-dictatorship. Their methods of achieving their end are the same: seeking by all possible means to create unrest and schisms within the labour movement."<sup>23</sup> The cold war was marked by Bjørn Svensson's book *Saadan er Kommunisterne* [The Way Communists Are] which appeared from the Social Democrats' publishing house in 1949. In the preface the author points out that the bourgeoisie perhaps sees an advantage in the split in the labour movement, on the divide-and-rule principle. But he warns: "if one looks to the interests of the country, the crucial issue must be the danger inherent in the Communists by virtue of their ties with powerful factors outside the borders of the country."

It is hardly surprising that it was also the Social Democrat AIC that was the first to publish Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956 at the Twentieth Party Congress. This appeared in a pamphlet where the whole course of development in Eastern Europe since the war was outlined.<sup>24</sup>

## 12. The Communists and the Soviet Union after 1945

The DKP became a big party in the first few post-war years. It included many intellectuals and had great prestige thanks to its major contribution to the resistance movement. In fact, the Social Democrats had on the whole been absent from the struggle against Nazism.

In the post-war period it became the task of the intellectuals in particular to defend the Soviet Union. The defence can be found partly in the travellers' accounts, a few more of which I will discuss shortly, and partly in articles countering criticism. What they countered was in the main correct information about conditions in the Soviet Union that emerged in the anti-Communist press or in public opinion as a whole.

But at the same time the intellectuals were sorely tried several times in the post-war era, when the party even more than before attempted to create ideological uniformity among the intellectuals—in short, to lead them. The first crisis was Zhdanov's interpretation of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which was on the whole rejected by the many artists who joined the party. Only a few attempted to follow the Russian models. The second crisis was the Lysenko affair, when the party, like the CPSU, wanted to dictate a particular attitude in the theory of genetics. Here too it met fierce resistance and had to live with the fact that the biologists in the party disagreed with its ideologists.

One of the big battles in the post-war era was fought over the gulags, the Russian system of forced labour camps. These had already been described several times in the thirties, but after the war the descriptions became legion. One understands this when one knows how many people had experienced the camps. In *Les Mandarins*, Simone de Beauvoir has painted a good picture of the controversy as it was waged between Sartre and Camus. In Denmark the debate was first and foremost provoked by Victor Krawchenko's *Jeg valgte Friheden* [I Chose Freedom], which was translated in 1948, and David J. Dallin and Boris J. Nicolaevsky's *Slavearbejde i Sovjetunionen* [Slave Labour in the Soviet Union], which was translated in 1949. Even before it had been translated into Danish it was rebutted by the historian Olaf Olsen as a "new collection of fabrications about the Soviet Union" in *Land og Folk* (12.8.1948). Olsen used the technique of picking out isolated points in Dallin's attempt to map out the penal camps, and showing by means of other sources that these points were unsound. From this he drew a general conclusion on the value of the source material. When the book appeared *Land og Folk* had a double feature on "Soviet "forced labour"". Here (6-7.9.1949) Erley Olsen described how he himself visited one of these forced labour camps in the thirties. For they did exist. But it emerged that they were anything but slave camps. The prisoners were almost better off than they would have been outside. In full earnest he wrote that the prisoners earned up to 500 roubles a week, whereas the workers outside earned 600 a month.

Another problem was the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union. The issue was brought up several times, and had its roots in a long-standing, complex antagonism between the Jews and the Russian state. Fundamentally, the problem did perhaps stem from traditional antisemitism; but particularly within the Communist party it was also due to the attitude of Lenin, among others, to the Jews' claim to be a people, not primarily a religion or a race. The Jewish Social Democrat *Bund* had in fact struggled for national autonomy. But what happened in reality, as has now been described fairly thoroughly,<sup>25</sup> was that the Jews were incorporated into the CPSU in special sections, which with time were dissolved. The Jewish autonomous region was located in one of the remotest provinces, in Birobidzhan, an uninhabited marshy area far from the culture of which the Jews formed

a part. Especially after the war, Jewish culture was attenuated in the Soviet Union: theatres were closed, as were publishing houses and newspapers. There can hardly be much doubt that Stalin himself was an antisemite and that this in particular left its mark on the "doctors' trials" and the Slansky trial in Prague.

The same historian, Olaf Olsen, had a longish article in *Sovjetunionen idag* in 1949 where he rejected the claims that the Jews were being persecuted: "Anyone who has even the slightest familiarity with Communist theory and Soviet Russian nationality policy will understand that *any* form of racial discrimination is quite unthinkable in the Soviet Union." He reviewed developments since the Czarist period and found his best proof that there was no antisemitism in the fact that only two per cent of the Soviet Jews had moved to Birobidzhan. If that was true, it was because there was no need for them to do so. The Jews in the modern Soviet Union had no need to feel like Jews: they were in the process of being assimilated. It was a rather poor argument, but that was the long and short of it. Later the accusation re-emerged several times. Each time it was rejected by reference to the fact that the Soviet Union was the only country in the world that had solved its nationality problem.

The post-war era was not least the era of the delegation trip. Several delegations of well-known intellectuals, both Communists and non-Communists, were assembled. In many cases they summed up their impressions and published them when they came home. At the end of 1948 there was a cultural delegation in the Soviet Union. In it was the Communist author Hans Kirk, who wrote a series of articles for *Land og Folk* revealing that he had seen what he expected. But there were others who did not. Professor Axel Milthers, who was an agricultural expert and a non-Communist, was very taken with the experience—so much so that he kept a very low profile on the Lysenko issue. A well-known non-socialist journalist, Jørgen Sandvad, was surprised that things were not more exotic. He took a wealth of positive impressions home with him. The Conservative Carsten Høeg was similarly very positively surprised by what he saw. But he had not left his critical glasses at home and did not fail to draw attention to this in the jointly-published article (*Sovjetunionen idag* 1/1949). He further published a number of articles in the newspaper *Information*, and these later came out as a small book.<sup>26</sup> The book is interesting, because one can make comparisons now and see what the other members of the delegation did not observe even though they had seen it.

Høeg emphasizes that the delegation trip was so organized that it was hard to do anything spontaneous. He points out that wage differentials have *increased* since the time of the Revolution. He thinks that one can distinguish an upper and a lower class from the way people are dressed. There are many of these small observations that are completely missing in the others' enthusiasm over theatres and scientific progress, construction and optimism. He also says that he was interviewed for TASS. The journalist submitted the final interview for his approval, and Høeg read a long panegyric on the Soviet Union. He complained and was allowed to delete what he could not stomach. But he also thought there should be something about what he found disturbing, and it cost him long negotiations before such observations could be included in the interview and he could sign it. But then it was never published (p. 54). Carsten Høeg was prepared to go a long way to understand the Soviet Union for the sake of world peace. But the dual scrutiny he applied to the country, the critical interest, was unparalleled among his contemporaries. Between blind, enthusiastic acceptance and blind total rejection there were not many islands.

In May 1950 a new Danish delegation was in the Soviet Union. Most of its members were cultural figures, some were trade unionists. The head of the delegation was Professor Mogens Fog, a

highly-esteemed doctor who had been a central figure in the resistance struggle. He was not a card-carrying member of the DKP, but was considered a de facto member. On behalf of the delegation he summed up the main impressions: "But out of multiplicity there arises something unified, a feeling that one has touched the inner truth that is the bearing element in this whole society and lifts it forward. To stand before a secure community where no one feels nor can feel despised, cowed or even superfluous; where the call is for joy in work and lust for life from all; where one stands for what one can do and what one is, without at the same time oppressing others; and where he who seeks the common good through his own can be sure not only of his material, but also of his spiritual needs" (*Sovjetunionen idag* 5-6/1950).

This rather abstract, but very positive, formulation shows once more that people grasped at what they thought pointed forward to the fulfilment of Utopian expectations. The same tendency recurs in all the Communist members of the delegation. And the few non-Communists were also enthralled by the country. However, we will dwell on one of the Communists, the author Hans Scherfig. He, along with Nexø, Gelsted and Kirk, constituted the great authors of the DKP. He was also the greatest Danish satirist of this century. As an author he provided biting funny satires on capitalist society. In 1950 he wrote a series of articles about the trip in *Land og Folk*, which later appeared in book form. The book heralds a quite new genre in his oeuvre besides the satiric-critical novels-the travel books from the socialist countries.

In general, one can say that *all is well*. It is not only well, but wonderful: "There is a different atmosphere among people than in the wild West, a friendly gaiety, a marvellous innocence that one will scarcely understand in the liberal democracy of the neuroses" (*Rejse i Sovjetunionen* [Travels in the Soviet Union], 1950, pp. 18f). Towards the end of the book he sums up: "Even though it can now be affirmed that the standard of living of a Soviet worker on the whole is superior to that of a Danish worker, this tells us nothing about the happiness felt by the individual. Human satisfaction cannot be gauged on the basis of statistics. I think that here, through personal contacts, we have been able to discover something meaningful. There are no statistics for human cheerfulness and friendliness, the figures can tell us nothing about mutual candour and congeniality; the mood, the feeling, the warmth are things that must be felt. It was confirmed that socialism is possible, and one felt, wondering and moved, how much external social conditions have determined mentality, human intercourse, the tone among people" (p. 90).

Scherfig had found Cloud-Cuckoo Land. To an absolutely incredible degree, the astute critic had gone blind when he passed the border of a socialist country. It is true of the whole long series of travel books that they are animated by a naiveté and short-sightedness that forms a glaring contrast with his novels. And his talent for seeing through his own arguments vanishes too. For example, he mentions that abortion was banned in 1936 after the Soviet Union had been the first country in the world to introduce free abortion. He writes: "In a country where social welfare is so constituted that a child can never become a burden, the prohibition of abortion does not seem unreasonable" (p. 23). What he does not see, but would have seen if the argument had been about his own country, is that if the children are really so well cared for, then abortion is unnecessary, so why forbid it? If, on the other hand, it is prohibited, then there must be a reason!

Scherfig's naive and sentimental journey through the Soviet Union is typical of the Communist travellers of the fifties. There is a crucial difference between the travel accounts from the thirties and those of the fifties.<sup>27</sup> In the thirties poverty was the all-important problem one should *not* see. Poverty still existed in the fifties, but it was far from being as obtrusive. And indeed in the fifties

the travellers' tales are of a visit to Paradise, which, despite everything, they were not in the thirties.

### 13. Crisis and religion-an attempt at a conclusion

There were tendencies before 1956 for crises to shake the cohesiveness of Communism. Each time it was a matter of Soviet policy: the non-aggression pact, the Finnish War, the Lysenko scandal, the "doctors' trials" and so on. But 1956 was a crisis of quite different dimensions. When it became clear that Khrushchev's secret speech really existed, the Communist identity split. As regards the ties with the Soviet Union, many experienced it as an old Communist told me: "Imagine waking up one morning, and everything you've struggled for, were willing to give your life for, is a lie!" On the other hand, Communism was after all a quite specific political stance, which *per se* had nothing to do with the Soviet Union. These two elements formed the point of departure for the reactions from the great majority of members of the Communist Party, even though it took two years of internal party struggles to fight the matter through. One wing chose to drop the association with the Russian Revolution and the Soviet experience, and founded the first "Eurocommunist" party in Europe, *Socialistisk Folkeparti* [the Socialist People's Party], which since it was founded in 1959 has been the biggest left-wing party in Denmark. Another wing chose to give highest priority to its Communist identity and persisted in claiming, despite the criticism from Khrushchev, that Stalin had after all implemented socialism.

Since the schism in 1959, the DKP has been a sorely-tried party. After many years in the wilderness it did however manage a new breakthrough in the seventies thanks to the political upheavals among the young and the struggle against the EEC. But this lasted only a few years. The big influx stagnated and turned into decline. At the last general election the party won 0.8% of the vote.

Far more important, however, is the fact that the Communist identity is now rapidly fading. Gorbachev's reforms, for one thing, have led to a degree of openness in the once so close-lipped party. In the past few years the party newspaper has featured articles on the Stalin-Brezhnev period that must have made the hair of the paper's readers stand on end. What was formerly brushed off as rabid anti-Communism and slanders on the Soviet Union can now be read in *Land og Folk* in statements or writings by Russians. Once more there is a group that gives the identity highest priority and tries to persist in an analysis that says that, while it is true that all these terrible things happened under Stalin, they were *necessary*; necessary for the construction of socialism. Others are inclined to question seriously what is particularly socialist about the Soviet Union, and want a new political basis. Yet their great problem is that the DKP today, minus the political association with the Soviet Union, looks very much like *Socialistisk Folkeparti*. The special identity of the party seems inextricably tied up with this particular aspect, the Soviet Union as Utopia come true.

On the other hand, one might reflect on whether the reaction to Gorbachev's reforms in the rest of the working class reveals a kind of secret love of the Russian Revolution. At any rate, the reactions to the reforms have been so unambivalently positive-and not only in Denmark-that one may wonder what happened to two generations' intense anti-Communist influence. It is of course possible that the explanation is quite different, but the relief over the fact that things "are going the right way" is at all events striking, even among the Social Democrats.

The answer I have given in the preceding pages to the initial question about the significance

of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union for the Danish labour movement is unlikely to differ in its main features and periods from the answer that would be given for a number of other countries. This external similarity is often striking when one is dealing with research on Communism, and is especially due to the close ties with Russian politics. Yet it is my experience that this process can only be understood as an interplay between this external, overall framework and the central driving forces in the development of the national working class. I hope I have been able to suggest this in my paper.

May 1989

## NOTES

1. Dated 20.11.1917, Social Democrat archives, Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv, Copenhagen (ABA).  
This section also draws on the following unpublished theses: Erik Beukel, *Dansk Perception af den russiske revolution med særligt henblik på Socialdemokratiet og de radikale i tiden 1917-19* [Danish perception of the Russian Revolution with special reference to the Social Democrats and Radicals in the 1917-19 period], 1970; Lars Brønd Sørensen, *Det danske socialdemokrati og Sovjetrusland 1917-1924. Socialdemokratiet som internationalt parti* [The Danish Social Democrats and Soviet Russia 1917-1924. The Social Democrats as an international party], Copenhagen 1978; Hans Flugel, *Den socialdemokratiske partiledelse, Alexander Helphand og den II. internationale fredsbestræbelser 1914-1917* [The Social Democrat party leadership, Alexander Helphand and the peace effort of the 2nd International 1914-1917], Copenhagen 1974.
2. Bent Jensen, *Danmark og det russiske spørgsmål 1917-24. Dansk Ruslandspolitik fra bolsjevikernes magterobring til anerkendelsen af det bolsjevikiske regime de jure* [Denmark and the Russian Question. Danish policy on Russia from the Bolshevik seizure of power to the de jure recognition of the Bolshevik regime], Århus 1979.
3. Einar Thomassen, "Fra Dansk-Russisk Samvirkes første år" [From the Early Years of *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke*], in *Sovjetunionen idag* 4/1954; "Dansk-Russisk Samvirkes Historie" [History of *Dansk-Russisk Samvirke*], in *Det nye Rusland* 1/1931. The membership list is in the Aage Jørgensen archive, ABA.
4. See for example Richard Crossman (ed.), *The God that Failed*, New York 1949.
5. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928-1978*, New York 1981.
6. David Cauter, *The Fellow Travellers. A Postscript to Enlightenment*, London 1973.
7. Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Gerska æfinþyrið*, Reykjavík 1938; translated into Danish in 1939 and published by the Communist *Monde* publishing house.
8. Ernst Christiansen, *-men det gik anderledes* [-But Things Went Otherwise], Copenhagen 1960, p. 95.
9. Marie Nielsen's Diary, Russia 1920, the Børge Houmann archive.
10. Morten Thing & Henning Grelle (eds.), *I arbejdernes Rusland. Kobbersmed Niels Johnsens Moskva-rejser til Komintern og Profintern 1921 og 1922* [In the Russia of the Workers. Coppersmith Niels Johnsen's Moscow Journeys to the Comintern and Profintern 1921 and 1922], Copenhagen 1981.

11. Fredrik Nygaard's articles can be found in *Politiken*, 15.11, 22.11, 29.11, 11.12 and 18.12.1925.
12. *Hvad saa vi i Sovjet-Rusland? Beretning fra den danske Fagforenings-Delegations Ruslandsrejse Novbr. 1925* [What did we See in Soviet Russia? Report of the Danish Trade Unions Delegation's Journey to Russia in November 1925], ed. A. Adamsen, Copenhagen 1926.
13. Fredrik Nygaard, *Den klingende Kane. Rejsedigte fra Rusland* [The Ringing Sleigh. Travel poems from Russia], Copenhagen 1926.
14. The rowing team consisted of Otto Melchior, Jørgen Dich and Ebbe Munch. The articles were published in *Arbejderbladet* 24.9, 8.11 and 31.12.1926 and 11.2.1927.
15. Harald Herdal to Aage Jørgensen, 8.4.1931. Aage Jørgensen archive, ABA.
16. *Et par Alvorsord om de danske Kommuniste og deres Arbejdsmaade* [A Few Serious Words about the Danish Communists and their Way of Working], Copenhagen 1932.
17. Hans Erik Avlund Frandsen, Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen & Morten Thing, *Planøkonomi og Folkefront* [Planned Economy and Popular Front], Copenhagen 1979, p. 172.
18. See for example Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.*, London 1969, pp. 224ff.
19. Halldór Laxness, *Skaldatími*, Reykjavík 1963, translated into Danish 1964.
20. Marie Nielsen archive, ABA.
21. Stalinism has been interpreted in many ways. See for example Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism. Essays in Historical Interpretation*, New York 1977, as well as the many Stalin biographies, e.g. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin. A Political Biography*, 2nd ed., London 1966. The issue here is not, however, Stalinism in the broad sense, but the role of Stalin-worship in Communism.
22. Vibeke Sørensen, *Social Democratic Government in Denmark under the Marshall Plan*, Florence 1987, unpublished thesis.
23. *Kommunisternes politiske Karrusel. En Dokumentation* [The Communists' Political Whirligig. A Documentation], published by the AIC, Copenhagen 1946, p. 43.
24. *Krustjovs hemmelige tale om Stalin* [Khrushchev's Secret Stalin Speech], published by the AIC, Copenhagen 1956.

25. See for example Lionel Kochan (ed.), *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, 3rd ed., London 1978; Zvi Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics. The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930*, Princeton 1972.
26. Carsten Høeg, *Indtryk og tanker fra en Ruslandsrejse. Fem kroniker* [Impressions and Reflections from a Russian Journey. Five Articles], Copenhagen 1949.
27. On this, see Sylvia R. Margulis, *The Pilgrimage to Russia. The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners 1924-1937*, Madison 1968.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ABA Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv [Labour Movement Library and Archives]

AIC Arbejderbevægelsens Informations Central [Labour Movement Information Centre]

CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union

DKP Communist Party of Denmark

DSF De samvirkende Fagforbund [Joint Trade Unions Organization]

GPU The Russian Secret Police

HIPA Hovedorganisationernes Informations og Propaganda Afdeling [Information and Propaganda Division of the Principal Labour Organizations]

SPD The German Social Democrat Party

SUF Socialdemokratisk Ungdoms Forbund [League of Young Social Democrats]

SUV Sovjetunionens Venner [Friends of the Soviet Union]

TASS The Soviet Press Agency

VOKS Russian organization for friendly relations with foreign countries