

The phenomenal surge of American interest in everything Russian has not bypassed the University of Oklahoma. Since 1956, a Russian studies curriculum, combining work in history, language, economics, government and geography, has been under the direction of a dynamic young assistant professor of history, Dr. Herbert J. Ellison. Enrolment in languages has jumped from 15 to 118, in introductory Russian history from 20 to 140 this semester.

Here Dr. Ellison sets forth a thesis that is a familiar one to the several hundred Sooners who have packed his classes the past four years.

What Is

# Communism's Challenge?

By DR. HERBERT J. ELLISON

IF ONE took a random sampling of well educated Americans and asked them, "What is the nature of the Communist challenge?" I would venture to suggest that the answers would be hesitant and contradictory. You, the reader, might try the question on yourself and see what ideas come quickly to mind in response to the question. If you have more than a hazy notion of what you might answer, you can probably justly count yourself as exceptional. And yet this is an absolutely essential question for any American to ask himself.

America is the leader of the grand alliance which aims at halting the spread of communism. And if this is to be her major foreign policy task, a task which, through military expenditure, takes the largest share of the tax dollar, then surely one should know something about the sense and the quality of the measures being employed. Yet one can hardly evaluate the measures devised to meet a challenge without knowing the nature of the challenge itself.

The communist challenge has many facets. It is a political ideology, a powerful state machine, a formidable technological and military force. It is all these things and more at one and the same time. We are all aware of the military challenge. The major part of American expense and effort in checking communist expansion since the beginning of the Cold War has been devoted

to military preparations and military operations. And if we had tended to forget the seriousness of the military challenge, we have the current Senate debates to refresh our memories.

We are aware too of the technological challenge, at least since Sputnik I, and if we follow the lead of the newspapers, our morale rises or falls with the missiles of Cape Canaveral. We are also made constantly aware of the challenge of a totalitarian state machine, a machine whose leaders are able without legislative quibbles and popular criticisms to direct the resources of a nation to their own ends. But we are much less aware of the challenge of the ideology, and it is on this point that I should like to concentrate.

The real challenge of communism today is not within the United States, or Canada, or Western Europe or Australia. It is in that huge area of the world which we link together rather loosely under the title of the uncommitted nations. The term "uncommitted" here is usually interpreted, unfortunately, to mean uncommitted to either an American or a Soviet military pact of one kind or another. The term might have much more relevance if it were defined as meaning uncommitted to either the American or the Soviet pattern of political, social, and economic organization.

Using the term in this way brings into

focus the significance of communist ideology. For the communists are engaged in the grandest of all ideological campaigns, the campaign to win a decisive group of the intellectual communities of uncommitted nations. And they hope to win this victory by demonstrating that their ideology provides both the explanation and the solution to the main problems of underdeveloped lands.

This task is being undertaken in a variety of ways and stages, most of which have been successfully used before. One of these is the direct invitation to delegations of intellectuals to visit communist countries, and such delegations—from Asia, Africa and South America—are going to and from the Soviet Union (and also Eastern Europe and China) constantly on a variety of tours. There are also substantial Asian and African student delegations studying in the Soviet Union on scholarships provided by the Soviet government. Indeed a project is now under way to provide a large new university in Moscow exclusively for foreign students.

The energy and expense being put into this kind of appeal is dramatically illustrated by the fact that the 1957 Moscow Youth Festival alone cost more than the entire United States Information program for the

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*"I'm not one of these people who believe in education as the means of eliminating differences but as a means of understanding. People in general approach Russia with fear. The real value in study is in removing this fear."*



*"Changes in the Russian economic situation are presented to us as changes in the whole. We tend to make comparisons only in this area while it is merely one of many aspects of Russia."*

## Communism's Challenge

Continued

whole of the same year. The tours and the scholarships make an impression both of communist generosity and of intense interest in the intellectuals from underdeveloped countries, while at the same time they provide ample opportunity for propaganda efforts.

This is one example of the importance which the communists attach to the ideological competition with the West and the means by which they pursue it. There is no humanitarianism here. There is the simple and realistic calculation that the small educated population of the underdeveloped countries will ultimately determine their destinies and that they will do so on the basis of the ideas to which they are committed.

Communist favors are, incidentally, shown not only to intellectuals currently living in their native countries, but also to many abroad, often for reasons of political opposition. I once met in England a young Spanish émigré, an opponent of Franco, who was being sedulously cultivated by officials at the Soviet embassy who invited him to see films on life in the Soviet Union, drink tea and talk politics.

And one must keep in mind the fact that these activities aimed at specific individuals are also accompanied by a broader campaign which employs cheap books, journals,

newspapers, radio broadcasts and all other possible means of mass contact and propaganda. Communist motives and methods are explained and exalted while those of America are damned.

In addition to cultivating the minds and the goodwill of intellectuals, the communists have been historically and are today superbly skillful in attaching their own organization and ideology to the main popular currents in underdeveloped countries. To the peasants they have stood as the party which espoused land reform more uncompromisingly than any other. To the nationalists they have represented themselves as the most passionate nationalists and the most vigorous opponents of "imperialism." And to those who would industrialize and modernize their countries the communists represent themselves as possessing the magic formula for the achievement of these ends.

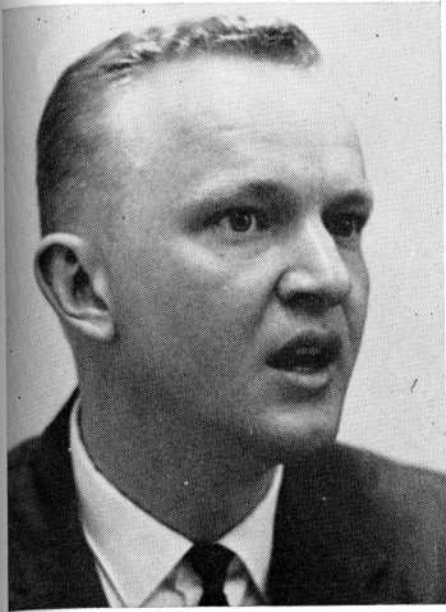
It is one of the tragic ironies of the 20th century that the Soviet and Chinese communists, who have imposed a kind of neo-serfdom on their peasants, have brutally destroyed the leaders of the nationalist movements inside their multi-national empires, and have industrialized at a cost in human suffering which places nineteenth century industrialization in the shade, have managed to portray themselves to so many

as possessed of model policies in all three areas. And yet this is precisely the kind of phenomenal misrepresentation which their propaganda and policies have wrought.

With regard to nationalism, for example, Chinese nationalists in the twenties or Arab nationalists in the fifties were both generally ignorant of the fate of suffering nationalities inside the Soviet Union. To them the only realities were the colonial status they had endured and the new national unity they hoped to achieve. If the Soviet Union would help them to end the one and achieve the other then its motives need not be closely scrutinized.

For many, if the Soviet Union would do these things, there must be much that was good in the rest of the line of products it had to sell. Thus came the creation of the ultimately decisive communist position in China. Thus too the unprecedented rapidity of the extension of Soviet influence in the Middle East since 1955.

We in America are in the peculiar position of having our practice better than our profession, and the latter, lying in the realm of ideas, must be vastly improved if we are to meet the communist ideological challenge. We must do it first by appealing to men of ideas in the uncommitted countries, by expanding immensely our educational program for foreign students, by financing



*"There is a striking ignorance of the real threat—ignorance which implies a widespread failure to appreciate the nature of the Soviet system. Any knowledge of Russia is confined now to Western Europe and the United States."*

*"It is important to develop some consciousness of the nature of the challenge to our own civilization. The conflict is not between capitalism and communism but between free institutions and totalitarianism."*



our intellectual programs as well as we finance our military efforts, by including an occasional personality in the field of arts and letters in presidential touring parties (Khrushchev didn't seem to mind having the distinguished Soviet novelist Michael Sholokhov with him when he visited the U. S.), and by appointing trained diplomats and other specialists in local problems to major ambassadorial posts.

More specifically a diplomatic task, but one squarely in the center of the arena of ideological competition, is that of aligning our own social and political ideals, through our diplomacy, with the main currents of social and political life in underdeveloped countries.

Thus, we cannot hope to be really influential while we oppose the major popular currents, be they nationalist, agrarian, or whatever. Nationalist ambitions and agrarian unrest have no necessary political connotations. They are endowed with political content by those who link up with them, and too often they have gone to the communists by default.

On the other hand, we have taken a good deal of interest in the problems of industrializing underdeveloped countries, but we seek to make here an artificial separation between economic and political tasks, assigning the economic tasks to economic spe-

cialists and leaving the political questions to solve themselves.

The idea of aligning American policy with desirable popular currents presupposes, however, some coherent policy program whose purposes can serve as a broad guideline. It presupposes also an America which has aggressively taken the initiative in competing with the communist world for the uncommitted nations. But instead of taking the initiative in the Middle East as British and French colonial power waned, we waited until the Soviets took the initiative and only then became gravely worried about the new base of Soviet power.

The same sort of thing is now occurring in large parts of Africa and in parts of South and Central America. It is not, in other words, until the communists show some sign of exploiting the forces of change that we show any interest. And then, unhappily, we too often blame the urge for change itself on communist inspiration, frequently a ridiculous charge which alienates leaders who would like to have American support and sympathy.

It is a sweeping assertion—but a justified one, I believe—that we have so far been poor competitors for the communists in the realm of ideas. And yet our political system was and is founded upon the noblest of political ideas—the idea of the free soci-

ety, governed by popular sovereignty, and providing equal opportunity for all. This idea was intended to be not just for Americans but for all mankind; the aspiration was universal.

But great truths and inspired visions must be re-articulated and newly conceived by every generation if they are not to become hackneyed and empty. And they seem to have lost their meaning for a generation which conceives its nation's achievements primarily as a "standard of living" and turns the task of "selling the goods" over to Madison Avenue advertising men to market like so much toothpaste. But what one generation deserts another may seize anew. America may yet have a rebirth of the visionary idealism of the ages of Jefferson and Lincoln and Wilson.

When this occurs, and I have faith it will, we shall abandon the fearful approach to communism manifested so commonly in America today which causes us to assume a tense defensive posture and paralyzes our will to really creative action. Perhaps then we shall see the communist ideological challenge as being just what we needed to force us to reassert and reapply our best ideals in our own ideological offensive on behalf of a free and prosperous humanity. Until this occurs America will not have met the essence of the communist challenge.