IS RUSSIA MOVING TOWARD POLITICAL DEMOCRACY?



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IS RUSSIA MOVING TOWARD POLITICAL DEMOCRACY?

MR. EAMES: Our attention is constantly and inevitably called to the growth and development of modern Russia. As well as we can, we look for clues to tell us the goal toward which the Russian bear is heading. Is it toward political democracy? Mr. Cesar Saerchinger and Mr. Ely Culbertson are unusually well qualified to debate the problem. An American on his father's side and a Russian on his mother's side, Mr. Culbertson knows the two countries with an intimacy that few can match. We might begin by narrowing the area of discussion with this question. Mr. Culbertson, what are the characteristic earmarks of political democracy?

MR. CULBERTSON: Democracy may be defined as a form of government in which the final effective power resides with the people. In a democracy the people freely choose their leaders. In a dictatorship the leaders choose themselves. A modern democracy, such as our American democracy, may also be defined as an unstable equilibrium of pressure groups. I apologize for this definition of mine, but to me it makes sense. In the great American pie, everybody has a finger—capital, labor, farmers, intellectuals and politicians. When one of those fingers becomes a fist; that is, when one pressure group, class or ideology controls all the others then you have a dictatorship. The essential difference, therefore, between a political democracy and a dictatorship—black, red or purple—is this: Democracy is based on freedom of opposition, while dictatorship is based on opposition to freedom.

MR. EAMES: Mr. Saerchinger.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, isn't that rather simplifying things? If you say that in a democracy the people elect their leaders and in a dictatorship the leaders elect themselves, what about Argentina? Mr. Peron was elected by the people, yet I have no doubt that he will be a very good dictator.

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, may I say about that-if

Peron was elected by an honest vote of majority of Argentinian people, then Argentina is a democracy and the form of government is. But it may become a dictatorship overnight!

MR. SAERCHINGER: It seems to me that is a contradiction in terms. But let's get on with this. I think that we have to consider a good many other things than you said about whether a country is a democracy. I think a country is a democracy in modern terms if we say that it's genuinely representative government of the people, with majority rule and universal and secret ballot. It must have such things as inviolability of person, freedom from illegal arrests. It must have inviolability of the home and personal property. It must have equality of opportunity; that is, education to the extent of one's ability and the same opportunity for jobs, no matter what your social standing and your other qualifications. Now, social equality, too, and of course the usual liberties—freedom of speech, press, assembly and conscience.

MR. EAMES: Mr. Culbertson, will you go ahead?

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, that, Mr. Saerchinger, and incidentally, I must say, it's the first time I'm debating with you, and I do admire you greatly for your wonderful work during the war and for your books.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Thank you. It's reciprocal.

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, your argument is simply—I think we agree. Essentially what you said is that democracy is based on freedom of opposition, whereas dictatorship implies opposition to freedom. You said about universal ballot, it does not imply democracy. For instance, I believe that in our country the American people vote, but in Russia they only register their votes.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, I don't quite see that distinction. I might say this, that in this country, though the people vote, they don't vote enough. That is to say, not enough of them vote, and one of the earmarks of a modern democracy or any democracy is the full participation of the people in politics. Now, in Russia, you say they just register their vote, but it is a secret ballot, since the latest constitution.

MR. CULBERTSON: How secret?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Absolutely secret, so far as we know. How can you say that it isn't? Have you got evidence?

MR. EAMES: Gentlemen, I'd like to interrupt this for a moment and tie down our debate just a little bit more. Mr. Saerchinger, in your opinion, are the political trends in Russia moving in the direction which you gentlemen have just been discussing?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, with certain qualifications, I should say yes, decidedly. First, you know, the original Soviet constitution provided for an unequal electoral system. The peasant vote didn't count as much as the workman's vote and the old ruling classes and the employing classes of the empire were disfranchised. The new constitution of 1936 has changed that. It provides for equal, universal, free elections by secret ballot. Now, whether it's in practice or not, it is there on paper, in any case. The formerly disfranchised classes are now equal with the others, including, incidentally, the clergy and even the old czarist police, if any are left. And another thing about it is that the constitution has a bill of rights very much like our own bill of rights. It guarantees the familiar freedoms: freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion—also the inviolability of the person and the home. And there's added something which hasn't even yet got into our Constitution, that is the right to a job, to guaranteed employment and security in old age, sickness, or incapacity, and also the right to a free education. Now that seems to me going pretty far toward democracy. It shows at least the trend in which Russia is moving.

MR. CULBERTSON: May I suggest it's a paper trend. What I want to speak about is a real trend, a real democracy. For instance, let me say that with all this beautiful constitution in Russia and which, incidentally, on paper is almost as beautiful as the constitution of Brazil. Now, without that, could the Russian people remove Stalin at any particular time?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Certainly not. That's quite true.

MR. CULBERTSON: Then may I say again, could they

remove any one of the officials of the Russian government by the democratic vote which they are on paper permitted to exercise?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, we don't know that they can't.

MR. CULBERTSON: I've never heard of a single one.

MR. SAERCHINGER: They have the right to recall. Now we must, of course, accept this, that Russia has gone through an enormous revolution and civil war, a tremendous upheaval. It hasn't had normal times since the Soviets came in until just before the war in 1936 when the new constitution was proclaimed, and then there was the threat of war and they recognized it and they were again in a state of war.

MR. CULBERTSON: In other words, they have never yet enforced the constitution.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, in a sense they have right now in their latest elections.

MR. CULBERTSON: In which sense?

MR. SAERCHINGER: In the sense that they had a free election so far as we know. Of course, I grant you, Mr. Culbertson, that we haven't got our correspondents to go anywhere we like to see whether that vote was secret or not. But the observations that were made, as far as we know, do not show that they were not, that the constitution was violated.

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, may I, then, simply suggest—I'm not arguing whether it isn't better for Russia to have any kind of a totalitarian government. Personally, I think it's a lucky thing for Russia that they did get a totalitarian government just before the war and during the war. What I'm discussing is not the advisability of having a dictatorship in Russia, but whether Russia is a democracy. So far I don't think you have demonstrated that Stalin could be removed at any time by the vote of the Russian people.

MR. SAERCHINGER: I think our argument is about

whether they are moving toward a democracy. I wouldn't say that they are a democracy in our sense.

MR. CULBERTSON: Have they moved an inch?

MR. SAERCHINGER: I think they have, just by those things which I've told you and, of course, anyone would tell you who has recently been in Russia that the whole atmosphere is different than it was, for instance, in 1935.

MR. CULBERTSON: Ah, the difference is that all they have there is a paper atmosphere, whereas we have a reality of American democracy.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, we have a hundred and fifty years of experience. Now just turn back the clock and see where we were within twenty-five or thirty years of our democracy. How much do you think we realized of our constitution by then?

MR. CULBERTSON: May I suggest that one hundred years before our constitution was adopted we had much more democracy, a hundred years before that, than Russia has today—a hundred times more?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Do you know that we had no manhood suffrage for the first fifty-eight years of our republic?

MR. CULBERTSON: No womanhood suffrage, either.

MR. SAERCHINGER: And no womanhood suffrage until 1920.

MR. CULBERTSON: That's right.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Yes, but we had no manhood suffrage. You had to have property qualifications, and you know that our leaders—most of them—didn't believe in democracy.

MR. CULBERTSON: But did we have concentration camps?

MR. SAERCHINGER: No!

- MR. CULBERTSON: Did we have the Cheka or Gestapo or any kind of a dictatorship of the police? Did we have a police state in our colonies?
- MR. SAERCHINGER: We did not have a police state. That's a modern invention.
- MR. CULBERTSON: Well, that's an ancient invention, one of the most immemorial inventions.
- MR. SAERCHINGER: It doesn't prove entirely that we were immediately a democracy and that Russia is not moving in the direction of democracy. I say give them time.

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, how many centuries?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, we've had one and a half and I don't think we're a complete and perfect democracy yet.

MR. EAMES: Well, gentlemen, I'd like to recanalize this discussion a moment. The fact that you brought up our own history naturally brings up another question, which I think is most important. Mr. Culbertson, would you say that the multiple party system is essential to political democracy?

MR. CULBERTSON: By multiple party system you mean more than one party?

MR. EAMES: That's right!

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, it's impossible to have a democracy and at the same time to perpetuate the control of the government by a single-party system. You can have a democracy or you can have a single party system. You cannot have both. This is because of what I call the law of cliques, according to which a group or a party without corrective opposition will be inevitably dominated by self-perpetuating cliques. In a single-party system the control of both the party and the government will be inevitably concentrated in the hands of such a clique. It does not matter, as I said, Mr. Saerchinger, how idealistic the clique might be, the tyranny and the tyrant are inevitable. Lenin's idealistic dictatorship of the proletariat quickly became the dictatorship of the Communist Party and that developed into the iron rule of the clique

headed by an autocrat. The single-party system is but a variant of the ancient "King is God" system, which also ran in a single party ticket. This immemorial system is built like a deck of cards in which each card of a higher rank is a master to all the cards of a lower rank, but a lackey to any card of a still higher rank. What Russia needs, sincerely, is long suits where a lowly deuce or a lowly trey can develop into a real effective people's power.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well. Mr. Culbertson, you're out of my depth! As for bridge, you've got me all over and I stand delivered. But look, if you say that a multiple system is necessary, then logically you could say that the more parties, the more democracy. For instance, France would be more democratic than England, which has a two-party system, and Germany would be more democratic than France because it had so many parties. But they got so stymied that finally the Nazis were able to walk in and say, "Boys, it's all over. One party is what you want," and they said yes. Well, now, the Soviets' idea is that political differences of the various parties reflect the conflicts of interest of the different classes. For instance, labor versus capital, landlords versus peasants, the small businessman and so on. They agree with us there can be no democracy without freedom for political parties whenever such classes exist. But in Russia, they say, there are no conflicting classes. Therefore, only a single party is necessary. Now, that may not be very logical to many Westerners but I'll say this. There can be such a thing as democracy within a party. And I think we ought to examine how the Communist Party itself is constructed.

MR. CULBERTSON: On paper or in reality?

MR. SAERCHINGER: In reality.

MR. CULBERTSON: All right. I see.

MR. SAERCHINGER: In reality. Whether the struggles of different opinions don't go on within the party—there's no question about that in my mind. It is impossible for a great number of intelligent and active men to be always of the same mind, because you can't always have a pistol at their back. They must have struggles and all these problems are being fought out within the party. And I would just say this. They've

been successful to this extent that they have been able within an incredibly short time to build up an industrial state and fight a successful war against the greatest military power in the world.

MR. EAMES: Now, Mr. Culbertson, would you like to develop your point there?

MR. CULBERTSON: Yes, I'd like to. You say they have been successful in the sense that they have built up a great industrial state because of a single party. But how did we do? We've developed a far greater industrial state without a single party. Regarding your observation on fights within the party, that's the kind of a fight precisely that I object to. That's why I don't want a single party system. The fights within the Russian party resulted in purges that involved the imprisonment and the killing of millions of people. And many and many former party members, actually hundreds of thousands of them, and indirectly millions, were purged through concentration camps. Now we in America, if we fight, whether we fight within the party or whether we fight between the parties or among the parties, we don't have to cut each other's throats. That's democracy! The other is a police state. May I finally say, essentially, to me a democracy is simply a device for change of leadership. In other words, in our country or in any democracy, you can kick out your leaders when you don't like them. Can you kick out a single one of them in Russia?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, that I don't think is essential to me. Change for the sake of change doesn't make sense to me. If you have a good man, keep him while he is good.

MR. CULBERTSON: Provided he hasn't got a policeman to shoot you if you don't want to keep him.

MR. SAERCHINGER: That's perfectly true.

MR. CULBERTSON: All right. Always remember that.

MR. SAERCHINGER: But you're always confusing the present with the past. And I say that revolutions are not made without breaking heads. The only revolution you can compare the Russian with is the French and even then the

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French pales in significance to this one. You couldn't possibly expect to have this without bloodshed. I'd like to say one thing more about the one-party system. I don't like the one-party system in this country. In the South a Republican has had as much chance in the last sixty-five years of being elected as Mr. Bilbo would have in Russia. Is that a one-party system or not?

MR. CULBERTSON: That is, if I may suggest, in the South, that is the will of the people. They vote by majority and if you and I wished to found a Republican Party in Alabama, all we have to do is to make beautiful speeches, have a good program, and pretty soon the people might vote for our Republican Party. We have no policemen.

MR. SAERCHINGER: I would like to be with you when you do that, Mr. Culbertson.

MR. CULBERTSON: I know. But we have no policemen in the South. We have no terror state. You see, what I am saying is that a democracy and a police state cannot go together. A democracy and a single party system where the people right on the top control it inevitably cannot go together. That is a contradiction in terms.

MR. EAMES: I do think, gentlemen, it would be advisable to avoid our own Southern problems and come back to the question of in what direction Russia is heading at the moment and I think, Mr. Saerchinger, there's a very practical problem that our audience would be interested in. How, for example, are political candidates selected in Russia?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, it seems to be something like this. When an election is in the offing, the local party units get busy all over the country. That's as it is in our country except there's one party there—only. There are numerous meetings and various favorites are discussed. In many cases, however, a candidate is recommended from the center, from Moscow. Certain important people have to be elected because they are needed for other functions as well. They needn't be residents of the district which they're going to represent, but once selected they are supposed to fight for the interests of their constituents. Now, that isn't essentially different from the system in England, where the central party

organization very often sends a candidate to a constituency to be what they call adopted, and he then becomes a member, if he's elected for that district. That's important because both in England and in Russia your members can become or will probably become members of the government, and the important people must not be sidetracked or get lost in the shuffle. Now I'd like to go on for a moment . . .

MR. EAMES: Please do, Mr. Saerchinger!

MR. SAERCHINGER: ... because there are also non-party members, which you've heard Mr. Stalin talk about. Not only the party holds meetings but all sorts of organizations—the factory may have a favorite or the village meeting or the collective farm. Then before the election, there's a free-for-all where all the prospective candidates of the district talk it out and one man is selected because there is a party slate. So he, of course, is sure of his election. And you may say that is not democratic, but I do think that the pre-selective process which corresponds to our primaries is much more democratic than what appears on the surface, because all of these people have been considered.

MR. EAMES: Now, Mr. Culbertson, would you like to develop your point of view as fully as you please?

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, I'd like to develop my profound admiration for Mr. Saerchinger. He is really, well, I don't want to bring the bridge game into consideration, but he is a person who loves humanity so much and everybody else, that whatever he sees on paper to him is already a living reality. Now, let's take the selection of candidates in Russia. May I suggest that all this elaborate system of selections and everything is nothing but a screen, in the same way that the United Nations is just an elaborate screen for power politics? So all this system of election in Russia is nothing but a screen to make people believe that they elect, but actually not one of the officials, of three million Russian officials, is ever elected by the people or nominated by the people. He is always nominated by the central authority and elected on the demands and on the insistence of the central authority backed up by the police state. If I should choose to nominate somebody else within the party, immediately I would get a visit at two or three o'clock in the morning and I'd have quite a conversation

there with certain gentlemen from GPU, for instance, the old-fashioned GPU. May I say this, though? The fact that Russia is a totalitarian, communist state and the fact that we are a democratic, capitalistic state does not mean that we have to fight each other and engage in any war. I myself in the book just published, I'm against any appeasement of Russia, but I'm also against any war against Russia. We must find a way where they can conduct her great experiment in peace within her own frontiers and where we can conduct our own greater experiment free from interference from communistic imperialism. That means simply that we have to create a world order of higher law. Don't think that I am against Russia as such. I am simply against your thesis that Russia is a democracy. It's a mockery of democracy! It may be better than democracy, but it is not a democracy!

MR. SAERCHINGER: I have not said that it is a democracy! I must remind you again that the trend, I think, may well be towards democracy. I am very skeptical myself. I am not the kind-hearted person you think I am with regard to these things. I'm just as hard-headed. And I'm glad you call it the great experiment because I do think that's it. I'd like to say one more word about this party business. Have you ever heard of machines—of party machines?

MR. CULBERTSON: Yes.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Do you think for a moment that we never pre-select people, just because the politicians run for office.

MR. CULBERTSON: What? With shotguns? Concentration camps? Never!

MR. SAERCHINGER: The method in this matter is less important than the fact.

MR. CULBERTSON: I know, but that's a big difference whether you have a gun in your neck to select it or whether you organize a machine.

MR. SAERCHINGER: True.

MR. EAMES: Now, Mr. Culbertson, the goal toward

which Russia is heading certainly can't be separated from its economic basis, and what part would you say that economic freedom plays in determining political democracy?

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, not only in Russia but all over the world political freedom is impossible without a large measure of economic freedom based on private enterprise. The government which is in total control of the economic life of the people will inevitably become a total master of its political life as well. This does not mean that in our complex industrial age the government should not actively participate in the regulation or planning of the economic life of the country or it does not mean that the government should not be permitted to undertake national projects which could not be efficiently undertaken by private initiative or capital. But it does mean -and I'm emphatic about it—that once this state substantially breaches the magic circle of private enterprise and initiative, the state tyranny and a dictator will follow. The best way, therefore, to preserve the political freedom of a nation is by safeguarding its economic freedom, and the best way to guard the economic freedom is by preventing any form of exclusive monopoly, be it the monopoly of a state or the monopoly of its citizens.

MR. EAMES: Mr. Saerchinger.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Wouldn't you say, Mr. Culbertson, that our great problem today is to find a balance between private enterprise and social controls? I don't think we can talk about private enterprise the way they did in the early nineteenth century or during the time of the Manchester liberalism when they believed in laissez-faire and when they thought that the sum total of all the selfishnesses in the world makes a higher benevolence. We don't believe in that any more. Today we have machines. We need traffic control in the streets because we have automobiles and we need economic controls because we have great big machine tools and power houses which are owned by some people, whereas other people have only their hands. And I think that Russia has, of course, the maximum control and we have the minimum control. It's yet too early to say whether the maximum control in Russia makes for or against democarcy. I think we must give them more time.

MD. CULBERTSON: Yes, well, I will say that substan-

tially I agree that there must be a balance between private enterprise and social control. But we must make sure that in the name of social control we do not sacrifice the fundamental principle of democracy, which is private enterprise, as has been done in Russia.

MR. EAMES: Mr. Saerchinger, our time is, of course, limited but I think there is just enough to treat one more question briefly. What part do you believe that economic security plays in political democracy?

MR. SAERCHINGER: Well, I think it plays a very important part. But to me economic security is social security. Economic security is always there for the rich and the possessing classes and the organized corporations. But, social security is that which protects the ordinary citizen. It was originally just a palliative in order to give the working man some time and not make him too pressing in his demands and, during our Roosevelt era, it was a device to get the workers behind the New Deal, but in the long run an overall social security system would increase the political independence of the workers and the employes. That is, they would be more inclined to vote in their own interest. Therefore, I think that social security is essential to real democracy.

MR. EAMES: Mr. Culbertson, we have just about a minute left and I'd like to have you reply to Mr. Saerchinger.

MR. CULBERTSON: Well, I think I'll have to agree once again with Mr. Saerchinger. You see, Mr. Saerchinger, in my opinion, is brilliant the moment he doesn't talk about Russia and he may well apply it to me, but the whole point is, why not look frankly on the thing and why not say that the Russians have a different form of government? They are not a democracy in any sense of the word.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Agreed!

MR. CULBERTSON: We are. They may or may not have trends. We don't know when they get to their trend, but whether they get to democracy or not, let's Russia and us and other nations build a world order where they cannot threaten us or we cannot threaten them. That's what I'd like to see done and that's what must be done!

MR. SAERCHINGER: And you think we can live side by side although the Russians have a different system from us and not come to blows?

MR. CULBERTSON: I do.

MR. SAERCHINGER: Thank you! I agree with that.

MR. EAMES: Well, I regret having to interrupt you and stop your interesting discussion, but our time is up. Thank you, Mr. Saerchinger, and you, Mr. Culbertson, on behalf of the American Economic Foundation and more than a hundred independent radio stations that carry "Wake Up, America!" from coast to coast.



NEXT WEEK

HAS THE WAR STRENGTHENED AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

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