The Literary Cavalcade

Chains on the Forge!

By John O'Connor

The chains for the American people are being forged in New York, in Washington and in Hollywood. They are not the chains of legislation nor of economics. These exist in [?] already. The chains I refer to are the chains of controlled ideas. The hammer strokes that are beating out the invisible bonds on the anvils of totalitarianism are ringing louder as the forces of the left prepare for their next campaign and its subsequent captives.

Recently Neil MacNeil, assistant managing editor of The New York Times, told the graduates at the Catholic University of America that the class of '48 graduates into a world of confusion. The creation of that confusion is the policy of the leftwing and its Communist fountainhead. In this country moral quislings are preparing to spread their ideas and eliminate all the ideas of those who might disagree with them or oppose them. This, of course, will be in the name of democracy.

* * *

The most subtle of these movements started recently in Hollywood, refuge of some of the most notorious foreigners and communist comrades in the world. I think you'll agree that the following facts should not have been hidden from the American public in trade journals. They belong on every front page. And here are the facts:

On July 26 the Executive Board of the Screen Writers Guild unanimously endorsed a program known as 'The American Authors Authority.' This will give Chairman or a small committee of men the dictatorial power to control all copyrights in literary material submitted to magazines, play producers, publishing houses, motion picture studios, and broadcasting stations throughout the United States! (Go back and read that again —if you're an American and still think you're in the U. S. A.!)

* * *

Still in the same vein, witness the following statement. The bland manner and calm tone are deceptive. The implications threw the shadow of the Kremlin and the ghost of Goebbels across the typewriters and manuscripts of America. James M. Cain, a famous novelist and screen writer is allowed, in [illegible] the following:

"We shall copyright for members [illegible] works except from writers who have become members of the proper guild. . . . We shall permit our writers to work on no material not leased through the Authority and this will compel every writer in the country, hoping for picture or magazine sales, to send his work to the Authority for copyright before the magazines or publishers get it."

The Executive Board handed this Cain business to a general meeting and the resolution to proceed with the plans was voted on: 800 to 8, with five people refraining. Reported The New York Times:

In response to criticism that the aim was control of all writing and all thought, the meeting moved a stipulation that the "Authority" would have no concern with the content of manuscripts submitted to it for copyright."

* * *

An avowal is one thing. A fact or a set of facts is yet another. The Screen Writers Guild is controlled and dominated by such avowed leftists (although they accept fat checks each week) as Dalton Trumbo, Ring Lardner, Jr., and others. In their own way, they practise the 'Jim Crowism' they condemn elsewhere.

This executive board has presented 'The Authority' as acting in the best financial interest of the writer — any writer. Beautiful checks are promised and glowing economic advantages are cited. Never a word about any possible politico power over your ideas and mine. "Nothing," wrote Bill Wilkerson of The Hollywood Reporter, "could be more to the advantage of the Communist Party in America than to obtain a complete monopoly of opinion which will enable it to suppress the views of all others."

Continued he: "For that reason the Guild meeting . . . may be as fateful as the first overture step which Hitler made in a Munich beerhall. It may be the first step toward the establishment of complete intellectual enslavement in this country.

"This is not an issue that concerns merely a few hundred writers. It concerns the millions of readers who must depend on the free trade of ideas for their means of judging the currents of modern history. It concerns still more millions of children — who can't read yet — but who were born with the right to hope for a free world.

"The request for this authority has all the earmarks of a Commie party line maneuver for the control of all the writers and their writings, with the next request a vote for [illegible] writer should write and can write with the permission of the dictatorship. It is the beginning of a regimentation of writers strictly along the line that now exists in Russia which gives the Soviet control of ALL writing and writing thoughts and the insistence of labors only for the causes. . ."

* * *

This condition, dear reader, is not confined to the screen. We'll pick up along there later. But where there's smoke, there's fire. And it smells like the fire from a forge where chains are being made.

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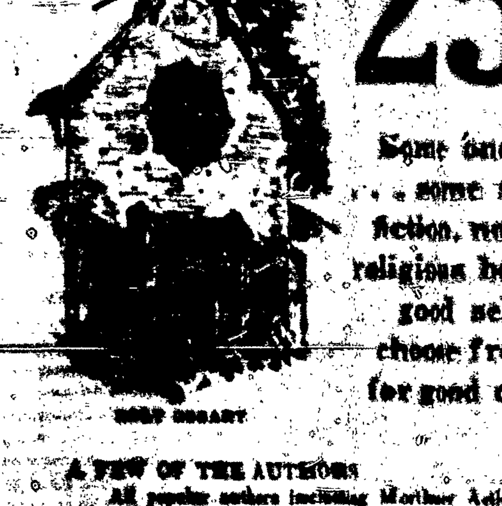

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I Chose Freedom By Victor Kravchenko

This is the twelfth installment of "I Chose Freedom," by Victor Kravchenko, former Soviet official, who played a prominent role in the Soviet war effort.

These Russian girls, shown in a Soviet war plant, are making Merlin 20 engines in one of the several phases of the war effort that came under Victor Kravchenko's supervision when he checked into the Kremlin as an engineering executive, as described in the accompanying chapter of "I Chose Freedom."

CHAPTER XXII

The Kremlin in Wartime

The Russians have a word for it, Vlast—"the power." It means the government, the supreme authority. But it means a lot more: Stalin, the Politburo, the secret police, Stalin's favorites, whether in official positions or courtiers without titles. In the mouth of the average citizen, moreover, the word has overtones of awe and undertones of resentment, implying "our masters" and suggesting the immeasurable distances separating them from common folk.

In the Sovnarkom I sat near the pinnacle of the vlast. For the first time I could look down on the world below from this privileged angle. Now I could observe (though I could not share) the feeling of the uppermost rulers that they were made of finer stuffs, moved in a different dimension of human existence and were, indeed, exempt from ordinary morals and sentiments, which they dismissed as "bourgeois prejudices" and "rotten liberalism."

Now I could understand the complacency with which these people used human life — shifting it, shuffling it, liquidating it —like so much inert raw materials for their plans, experiments and blunders. Suddenly I found myself among men who could eat ample and dainty food in full view of starving people not only with a clear conscience but with a feeling of righteousness, as if they were performing a duty to history.

At the head of our Sovnarkom stood Constantine Pamfilov, a man so close to the inner court that when he died, within a year after I entered the service, his ashes were buried in the Kremlin wall on Red Square. Under his chief assistant, Andro Utkin, there were five powerful departments, one of which I headed. Thus I was only two steps removed from the top. My department was subdivided into an array of specialized functions directed by my assistants.

In recording the fact of my brief eminence, of course, I am not bragging. I had been lifted by someone's whim. I could be pushed off with one polished finger by those above me who, in their turn, could be hurled to the depths without warning by their superiors. In a dictatorship the equilibrium is provided by a nice balance between unlimited power and unbounded fear.

The Inner Sanctum

The few of us who represented vlast in our Sovnarkom, perhaps thirty men in all, were set off from the middle layers of officials and the mass of employees below in a lot of ways. We had our own floor, as hushed as a church, policed by N. K. V. D. men of officer rank. We were served good breakfasts and suppers at our desks, free of charge, and had our own dining room for meals at ludicrously low prices. The Sovnarkom barbers came to the offices of Pamfilov, Utkin and others of their exalted rank, to shave and anoint them for the day ahead.

In private life I might be negligible but at my post in the Soviet apparat I was protected like a great national treasure. No outsider could visit me without my express permission. I would write out a pass for the caller, affixing my personal seal, and before it was issued the gate control would phone me for a second confirmation. To make sure that it was not some impostor at the phone, I had to identify myself with a password known only to the N. K. V. D. and myself. My password was "Lena number 17." Having received the pass, the visitor was obliged to run the gauntlet of four inspections of his identity before reaching my reception room. Sometimes I was ashamed of this system of super-control introduced by the N. K. V. D., especially when the caller was an old and dear friend.

As an additional precaution, only the automobiles of the chiefs of the Sovnarkom could drive through its gates, regardless of how important its occupants. Even People's Commissars had to park their cars outside the gates. The danger that someone might blow up our holy of holies by planting a time-bomb in a motorcar was thus obviated.

The real sign and symbol of my new dignity, however, was neither in this vigilance nor in my password. It was in a piece of furniture, outwardly commonplace but invested with peculiar significance in the life of Soviet dignitaries. It was a safe to which I alone had the combination. Well, not quite I alone —the secret was shared by the N. K. V. D. Only people high enough in the hierarchy to be entitled to secrets from their immediate bosses had such safes; and only one such safe in the country—namely, Stalin's —had a combination not known to the N. K. V. D.

Most vital was the fact that I now had the power to act in the name of the government. Within the sphere of my department's responsibilities, I directed the activities of local authorities and of commissariats throughout the R.S.F.S.R. I could request People's Commissars and their assistants to give me full reports on their work; I could order them, and even reprimand them, in connection with my assignments. I could summon them to appear at my office any time of the day or night, whereas they could not summon me.

Breakfast Divided

I shall never forget my first day at the new post. I arrived at ten in the morning. My secretaries were already in their places. Documents requiring my attention were neatly stacked on my desk. I paused in the doorway to survey the large, elegant room; the portraits of leaders on its walls; the big painting of Stalin directly above my chair of authority. At about eleven my secretary, an intelligent, pleasant-looking woman, knocked.

"Victor Andreyevich, will you have breakfast?" she asked.

"Yes, please. How about you? Have you breakfasted?"

"I'm entitled only to a glass of tea and a piece of sugar," she sighed. "I bring bread with me from home. War . . . what's one to do . . ."

Soon a waitress arrived, carrying a trayful of food: two eggs, some stewed meat, white bread, butter, a glass of hot tea, several lumps of sugar, a few cookies. Everything except the eggs and the tea was clearly of American lend-lease lineage.

There was something in the waitress' pinched features which led me to curb by appetite. I left one egg, a little meat, some slices of bread and a piece of sugar, as if it were more than I could eat. When my secretary came in, she fidgeted at the desk for a moment.

"I'm ashamed to talk, Victor Andreyevich," she said, "but I took the liberty of eating what remained of your breakfast. Please forgive me . . . It's so hard to keep alive."

"That's perfectly all right. In fact, I'm glad you did. But frankly, I was thinking that the waitress . . ."

"But Lisa and I have an understanding," she interrupted. "One day I take the left overs, the next day it's her turn . . . Hunger is a terrible thing, Victor Andreyevich. It's stronger than shame."

And thus throughout my months at the Sovnarkom I ate only half a breakfast, leaving the other half for Lisa and my secretary.

About noon I had another official guest—the man in charge of the Secret-Special Department, eyes and ears of the N. K. V. D. in every Soviet organization. He was a young man, every inch the police agent even in civilian dress. He was businesslike and a bit officious, behaving as though he were the real master of my office.

He handed me a sheaf of ten or twelve closely mimeographed sheets. In the familiar Soviet mixture of orders and threats, these pages instructed me how to handle State Party and military secret documents, how to guard my desk, my safe and the office against strange eyes, how to prevent even my private secretary from seeing certain types of official papers. I learned that there were two stenographic staffs in the Sovnarkom, ordinary and secret. Routine letters could be dictated to the ordinary variety but secret dictation must be given only to the secret stenographers. Every order from my superiors, the rules emphasized, must be on record in writing.

After I had finished reading, my visitor enlarged on the theme. The essence of his lecture was that I must believe no one and assume that others do not believe me. There must be written [illegible] of every meeting or conversation. Mutual distrust was not merely a fact in the Soviet apparat, it was the recognized, obligatory way of life, the only chance of survival.

CHAPTER XXIII

Stalin's Working Day

The schedule of the higher officialdom in Moscow is an extraordinary one, being geared to the peculiar work habits of one man. Stalin normally begins his day around eleven in the morning, working steadily until four or five. He then usually knocks off until ten or eleven in the evening, remaining at work until three, four or even later in the morning. Of these two sessions, the night installment is by all odds the more important.

There were vast theories about the dictator's strange hours. One had it that this schedule allowed him to keep in personal touch with his officials in all parts of the huge country despite four hours' difference in time between its most western and most eastern zones. Another theory was that he intentionally kept his top subordinates out of mischief by breaking into inconvenient day and night shifts; it did in fact reduce their opportunities and temptations for a private social existence.

Ride Like Gangsters

Whatever the reasons, officialdom in the capital regulated its existence by the eccentric Stalin clock.

Beginning about ten in the morning on working days the big bullet-proof Packards with their greenish windows roar down the suburban Mozhaisk Road, through the long Arbat Boulevard, and thence to the various citadels of "the power." From the sound of the sirens, from the way in which excited policemen stop traffic to give these noisy speeders the right of way, Muscovites know at once that: The Boss, Molotov, Beria, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Kaganovich and other such leaders are being convoyed through their capital. Each of the limousines is preceded by a car (usually a Lincoln) and followed by another, both manned by heavily armed N. K. V. D. guards in civilian clothes. The leaders, of course, always travel separately, not in a group, to reduce the dangers to their safety.

The routes are charted by the special branch of the secret police responsible for the safety of the highest officials. Every inch of the way is expertly policed. The inhabitants of every house on the route are known to the authorities and doubtful people are quickly removed. Thousands of men in civilian clothes and in uniform are posted at key points, their right hands on their revolvers ready for the draw; they know that their own lives will be forfeit if anything should happen to the Beloved Leaders behind the bullet-proof glass. Muscovites never stop to look as Stalin and his closest associates are whisked by.

Literally hundreds of orders, decisions, complaints and threats signed by Stalin and his closest associates, by Beria, Commissar of the N.K.V.D., and Molotov and Mikoyan, Vosnessensky, Malishev and Kosygin, came to my desk. I was in continuous touch by telephone with every commissariat, with factories, special industrial bureaus and regional offices throughout the country. In the course of a single hour I might check on production progress in Gorki and Sverdlovsk, in Novosibirsk and Chelyabinsk.

I came to know more intimately even than the ranking generals and admirals how valuable American lend-lease weapons, materials and machinery were in achieving victory. Americans may still have some doubts about this, but not the Soviet leaders. For them it is a fact. God knows we paid back in full —in Russian lives — for Allied help, but that does not alter the fact itself.

With free labor drained by the armed services, our industry became more and more dependent upon the vast armies of convict labor, their ranks now swelled to unprecedented size by war arrests. In official circles twenty millions became the accepted estimate of this labor reservoir. The estimate did not include the boys and girls from 14 to 16 forcibly torn away from their parents and assigned to regions and industries in which man-power shortages were sharpest.

Some of us in the Sovnarkom knew of episodes in which concentration camp prisoners were killed on a mass scale when it became clear that they could not be evacuated. This happened in Minsk, Smolensk, Kiev, Kharkov, in my native Dniepropetrovsk, in Zaporozhe. One such episode has remained with me in detail. In the tiny Kabardino-Balkar Soviet "autonomous republic" in the Caucasus, near the city of Nalchik, there was a molybdenum combinat of the N.K.V.D. operated with convict labor. When the Red Army retreated from this area, several hundred prisoners, for technical transport reasons, could not be evacuated in time. The director of the combinat by order of the Commissar of the Kabardino-Balkar N.K.V.D., Comrade Anokhov, machine-gunned the unfortunates to the last man and woman. After the area was liberated from the Germans, Anokhov received his reward, becoming President of its Council of People's Commissars, the highest office in the autonomous region.

Child Labor

The magnitude of child labor in Russia has for some reason remained entirely unknown outside the country. Even within our frontiers it was surrounded with a good deal of secrecy and, of course, disguised in hypocritical slogans. The essence of the system, stripped of verbal camouflage, is compulsion. Millions of children are taken from their homes against their own or their parents' will and impressed into industries on a "mobilization" basis without consulting their preferences. It would be wrong to credit the development wholly to the war, since it was initiated in 1930 and, as is evident from dispatches, has even been intensified since the end of the conflict.

If the system of child industrial conscription continues, and there is every indication that it will, the Soviet state by 1960 should have at its disposal from thirty to forty million workers trained on this regimented basis. It will be a new kind of "proletariat." Home influences reminiscent of a freer past and intellectual influences beyond those prescribed by the authorities will have been reduced to a minimum. Fully indoctrinated with Communist tenets and the Stalinist theories of world revolution, they will be people of the state. These morally and politically maimed Russians will represent a formidable force in the hands of the regime, whether for use at home or in foreign adventures.

This carefully conditioned body of citizens will be supplemented by perhaps twenty million N.K.V.D. forced-labor prisoners, and by a huge standing army of career soldiers and officers, trained from childhood on the basis of Stalinism solely for defense of the Soviet set-up, over and above the ordinary conscript forces and military reserves.

Nor should it be forgotten that tens of millions of other children meanwhile will have been indoctrinated in the ordinary Soviet schools, where devotion to the regime and its methods holds first place in the curriculum.

NEXT WEEK — The Two Truths — Distinguishing between propaganda for the masses and that for the Party faithful.

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Library Signpost

Saint John of Rochester

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

Nothing that I have read about our dear St. John Fisher has brought him so close to me or made him so real as a biographical sketch I have just read of him, written by the always inspiring and witty, Fr. James Broderick, S. J., for the July issue of The Clergy Review (London).

* * *

FR. EHMANN

As everyone in our diocese ought to know by this time, St. John Fisher has been chosen as our diocesan patron because he was the last bishop of Rochester in England, put to death at the same time as St. Thomas More by King Henry VIII. After that, the Catholic Hierarchy was suppressed in England, and remained so for three hundred years until Pope Pius IX restored it in 1849 shortly after Newman's conversion). But by then the changes of time had reduced the status of medieval Rochester, and it was not included in the list of the restored dioceses. We may consider that Rochester in New York State carries on the legacy of the name so gloriously relinquished by St. John Fisher.

* * *

Fr. Broderick tells us that Rochester was the smallest and poorest diocese and John Fisher the poorest bishop in England. Twice the bishop was offered larger dioceses: Ely, in 1505, and Lincoln in 1514, both of them far more commodious and magnificent. But he refused them.

The King was once proud of this holy bishop in his realm. Fr. Broderick puts it wittily: "Before Ann Boleyn started her mischief, even old Bluebeard, who from the beginning had plenty of faith but next to no good works, was proud of him and used to boast to visitors from abroad that no other country could produce the match of his Rochester." "It is safe to say that his only real peer in the world of his time was his good friend, the perfect, gentle knight, St. Thomas More, who wrote of him: 'I reckon in this realm no one man in wisdom, learning and long approved virtue together, meet to be matched and compared with him.' Lovely and pleasant in their lives, in their death they were not divided, and will now for ever keep each other company in the Church's remembrance."

* * *

Our stature of the good bishop are no guesswork. They have Holbein's crayon sketch of him for model, as well as the following pen-picture from the hand of his earliest biographer, van Ortroy, given here with the old spellings:

". . . tall and comlye, six foot in height, verie slender and leane, neverthelees upright and well formed, straight backed, bigg jointed and strongly sinewed; his hair through age and imprisonment turned to whitenees; his eyes nether full blacke nor full graye but of a mixt colour betweene; his forehead smooth and large, his nose of a good and even proportion, somewhat wide mowthed, and bigg pawed as one ordained to utter speech and speak much; wherin was notwithstandinge a certaine comlyness; his skin somewhat tannie, mixt with many blew vaines; his face, hands and all his bodye so bare of flesh as is almost incredible, which came . . . by the great abstinance and pennance he used upon himself many years together, even from his youth."

* * *

But he looms even greater and grander in the sketch which van Ortroy gives of him engaged in his pastoral work:

"Many times it was his chance to come to such poore howses as for want of chymneys were verie smokie, and therby so noisome that scant any man could abide in them. Nevertheless himself, would there sitt by the sicke patient many times the space of three or foure howres together in the smoke, when none of his servants were able to abide in the howse, but were faine to tarrie without till his cominge abroade. And in some other poore howses, where stayres were wantinge, he would never dysdain to clymbe up by a ladder for such a good purpose. And when he had given them ghostly comfort, . . . he would at his departure leave behind him a charitable almes, giving charge to his steward or other officers dayly, to prepare meate convenient for them (if they were poore) and send it unto them."

* * *

Fr. Brodrick, to whom I am debtor for these fine cullings, gives others of a curious and rare kind. After commenting that "everybody knows that John Fisher was one of the most learned men of his generation," he says that "perhaps not so many are aware that this retiring Saint . . . was the most famous and popular preacher of his age." He then cites page 212 of Saintbury's well known Short History of English Literature (1903), in which the learned Professor maintained that Fisher wrote incomparably finer prose than St. Thomas More. To which a Thomas More champion, another famous Professor, R. W. Chambers, took lively exception, though conceding that "the most finished pulpit eloquence of the day is to be found in the sermons of Fisher." Quaint spectacle of two champions battling it out over the respective merits of such gentle and holy friends!

* * *

Next week, with your patience, I shall give more of these inspiring reminiscences and reflections on the life of our beloved Fisher.

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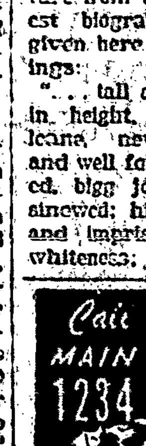

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