

December 24, 1956

Dear Raya:

I am again somewhat late in replying but, I trust, not unduly so. What is more serious, the quality of my comments may very well prove a strong disappointment: they are essentially "small talk" and are confined almost exclusively to points of fact which look very minor indeed ~~and~~ in comparison with the broad sweep of your presentation and with the dimensions of basic problems involved. The area of disagreement on the latter is large: I doubt the validity of the concept of state capitalism in general and of its usefulness with application to the Soviet economy; moreover, I cannot, in all honesty, consider myself a Marxist these days. If I had more time at my disposal, I would be glad to spell ~~it~~ out all this at some length, just for the sake of discussion (I certainly would not expect to convince you - you heard most of such arguments before). But since the time situation is as wretched as it is, I shall confine myself to smaller points, although some of my remarks will undoubtedly be colored by my "deviationism".

✓ P.3. The footnote on Trotsky and Stalin is not very clear. First of all, it is not clear which "plan" are you referring to: it would be presumably safer to say that Trotsky stressed the need for centralized overall planning earlier than ~~the~~ S. and B. ~~and/or~~ that in years 1927/28 he favored higher tempos of growth. Besides, it is not literally correct that Stalin indorsed the "snail's pace" idea: in fact, he sounded already in 1925-27 different notes although with regard to practical policies there was no disagreement between him and B. at that time. This may be a smallish point, but you'd better phrase it less emphatically because otherwise pro-Stalinists may have something to shout about. - Same page: NEP was introduced in 1921, not in 1923.
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✓ ~~pxtk~~

p. 7. "The whole cost of industrialization and militarization has been borne... through turnover tax" / How about compulsory deliveries by the collective farms?

p.10. Typing error: percentage figure for means of production should be 44.3, not 44.8 for 1928, (you have it right at another place).

✓ p.12. The statement that "the Commissariat of Justice is nothing other than the G.P.U. which etc.etc." is somewhat confusing. Why not say that it is a tool of the G.P.U.?

✓ p.15. Your 2,400 per cent increase in silk is due to a misplacement of ~~the~~ decimal point: the 1936 output was 51,220, not 512,000. ~~But~~ Besides: the remaining discrepancy between the rates of growth in cotton and silk, while very large, proves less than you want it to prove, in view of the ~~discrepancy~~

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diff tremendous difference in absolute amount: in 1934 (the only year for which I have comparable figures at my elbow) the amount of cotton ~~in meters~~ cloth (in meters) ~~exceeded that of silk~~ was more than 806 times the size of the amount of silk produced, and it is always easy to show terrific percentage increases when one starts from a very low base. I certainly realize that even after all this has been taken into account, there is still plenty of room for controversy as to the meaning of the thing. Maybe, I shall have a chance to say something about it later.

p.18. Instead of "Bukharin-Piatakov trial" it should be: "Račok-Piatakov trial". Bukharin was tried later together with Rykov and (if I am not mistaken) with Yagoda.

Back to the pages 17 and 18. I believe that you owe your readers an explanation why do you consider the groups listed in your table a ruling class unless (which is quite unlikely, to say the least) you assume that each hierarchy in skills and responsibility implies a class differentiation. You should say at least something about ~~what~~ income differentials, difficulties in social mobility and the like. Even then, many readers ~~will~~ (including myself) will possibly disagree, but at least they will understand your position better.

p. 20. I do not know what are the reasons for statement that "the full fury (of the purges) was unloosed against the workers" and what "mass graves" you have in mind. I am inclined to assume that (in percentage terms) the party bureaucracy and the managerial group were much stronger affected. I equally doubt the implied assumption that former workers are predominant ~~among~~ among the inmates of concentration camps. I may be wrong on this, and I may very well misunderstand you, but this is one more reason why such statements should be elaborated on a little more, and substantiated by whatever evidence there is.

p.23. I suggest that you check the figures in your table once more, because while most of them are undoubtedly OK, there are a few mistakes (e.g., in the tractor series it should be: 48.9 th. for 1932, 51 th. for 1937, 31.1 th. for 1940). If you do not have the original sources in Detroit, you could use Donald Hodgman's Soviet Industrial Production, 1928-1951, or Harry Schwartz' Russlan's Soviet Economy, 2nd ed., as reliable references. You could also consider mentioning the real wage estimates of Janet Chapman (Review of Economics and Statistics, May, 1954).

p.26. Your statement that the rule over the world market is the key motive behind the dogmat' i peregnat' is, to be sure, one of the controversial issues. You may have argued some of the basic problems involved in an earlac

Chapter. At any rate, it is not immediately evident (1) why the rule of the world market is the controlling consideration for an economic system which is autarkic, totalitarian, and not suffering from the lack of effective demand, and (2) why there is no mention of the desire to maximize the military power as well as the power over its own society. You certainly have some definite ideas as to how does it fit in into your world market business. It would be desirable to indicate them.

Back to p.22. An index of Soviet industrial production is available: the trouble is, to be sure, that its weights are, for many reasons, inadequate and misleading, at least up to 1950. It would be advisable for you to make this point rather than leave the reader with an impression that such an index possibly does not exist at all. (In order to have a handy reference on the subject, you could use Chap.I of Hodgman's already quoted book or the symposium in the Review of Ec. Statistics, Nov,1947).

p.28. Your analogy between Soviet and American purges is certainly provocative, but it would call either for elaboration or (much rather, I would say) for a very strong qualification in order to be defensible.

earlier

p.30. See comment on p.20 (regarding workers as main victims and chief resisters).

p.44. I doubt very much that V.'s "revelations on the state of the Russian economy" were the reason for his liquidation: first of all, they did not contain anything startling in their description of the war-torn economy, secondly they were permitted to circulate, under highest praise, for more than a year (if not longer) after their appearance. In connection with this: I definitely feel that your earlier remarks (p.31) about the wartime developments are, at the very least, severely incomplete unless accompanied by reservation that some developments of that sort are absolutely inevitable in any economy in conditions of total warfare and of large-scale enemy occupation of the country.

p.46. Stalin's piece appeared in October, 1952. (not in 1953). More importantly, I believe it is somewhat risky to attribute the deterioration in economic situation to people's reaction to its message rather than to very real difficulties (particularly in agriculture) which kept accumulating over the preceding years, particularly since Korea.

May I conclude with a few more general remarks. First of all, there is a problem whether it would not be desirable to bring the statistical information more up to date, or at least to register your opinion (with a few selective and suggestive figures to illustrate it) that things remained essentially the same (I mean, as far as general trends go) also in the postwar period. Should you decide in favor of it, you could use the book by Harry Schwartz, The January, 1956 issue of the Annals of the Amer. Academy of Pol. & Soc. Science (particularly Grossman's piece on agriculture) and Bergson's article in January, 1956 issue of Foreign Affairs.

*within the space
of one chapter*

The second point is perhaps more important. I believe that you shall be inevitably confronted with a barrage of rhetorical questions centering essentially around one big problem: are not the main problems (or at least ~~some~~ of them) like faster increase in producers goods than in consumers goods, increasing wage differentials etc., inherent in any kind of industrialization developing without substantial foreign investment to assist it? If so, what is the alternative you have in mind? No industrialization at all? Or different type of industrialization? I am sure that these are very old questions for you, but I feel that your chapter would gain if you could take the reader more in your confidence on this subject, and to indicate (you hardly can do more than that) what your answer is. I certainly cannot guarantee in advance that I will agree. But I would hate to see the situation when all kinds of characters will jump upon you and say that all this is at its best a good piece of moral indignation and no more. I am sure that your manuscript has an important message to convey, and while it will inevitably become a target for criticism, I would not like it to become an easy target, not even in its part which is, as I certainly realize, not the central part of the whole. I hope that you will take all my criticisms in this spirit, whatever your eventual decision on all points I raised will be.

With best regards and good wishes for the
New Year,

Yours,



Alexander Erlich

P.S. I would certainly be glad to send you a copy of my masterpiece but I have just one copy in loose sheets left with me and I am working on it currently. New School for Social Research (66 W. 12th St) has two bound and clean copies: they might be willing to lend them to you. Honestly, however, I think that ~~the~~ all actually needed for your purposes is contained in Proeobrazhenskii and Stalin Papers you have seen.