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IN PURSUIT OF THE IDEAL SOCIETY: H.G.WELLS AND RUSSIA

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IN PURSUIT OF THE IDEAL SOCIETY:

H.G. WELLS AND RUSSIA

Abstract

The celebrated interviews Lenin and Stalin accorded H.G. Wells are a part of our century's troubled political history, and as such well-documented both on the Soviet side and in the West. It is less widely known that Wells's interest in Russia antedates the October Revolution, indeed, that he visited that country with his russophile friend Maurice Baring on the eve of the First World War, at a time when Wells had already acquired a remarkable literary reputation. There, he was admired by writers as disparate as Tolstoy, Zamyatin, Nabokov, and Gorky with whom he formed a close friendship, abetted by their mutual love of the Baroness Budberg. These Russian connections of Wells's, as well as his three journeys to Russia and the Soviet Union have not been previously explored against the background of his attitudes to socialism, which in turn played a crucial part in Wells's own search for an ideal society. For Wells, this quest was inseparable from his idea of a federal world state and his perception of the Russian revolutions of 1917 as its harbinger. Although he had many doubts about the Bolshevik regime, he attempted to persuade the English people that Lenin -- whom he met in 1920 -- and his party were the only possible option at a time when few governments were prepared to recognize the Bolsheviks. His own doubts became genuine misgivings in 1934, after his disappointing encounter with Stalin. Nevertheless, Wells's final disenchantment with Russia did not mirror that of other fellow travellers of the period, such as Arthur Koestler and George Orwell. Before his death in 1946, Wells's profound and inconsistent feelings towards the U.S.S.R. were further complicated by the Second World War and the role the Red Army would play in the struggle against Hitler.

Résumé

Sources d'une abondante documentation tant à l'Ouest qu'en Union Soviétique, les célèbres entrevues accordées par Lénine et Staline à H.G. Wells font partie intégrante de notre histoire politique mouvementée. Fait peu connu cependant: Wells s'intéressa à la Russie bien avant la Révolution d'octobre. Il visita en effet ce pays, en compagnie de son ami russophile Maurice Baring, peu avant la Première Guerre Mondiale, époque à laquelle il jouissait déjà d'une remarquable réputation au niveau littéraire. Il y fut admiré par des écrivains aussi disparates que Tolstoï, Zamiatine, Nabokov, et Gorki, avec qui il se lia d'amitié -- amitié renforcée par leur commune passion pour la Baronne Budberg. Personne ne s'est encore penché sur l'influence jouée par ses liens avec la Russie et ses trois voyages dans ce pays, sur sa perception du socialisme -- doctrine qui joua un rôle majeur dans sa quête d'une société idéale. Wells considérait cette dernière comme étant étroitement liée à sa vision d'un état fédéral mondial, et la Révolution russe de 1917 comme un présage. Même si le régime bolchevique lui inspira de nombreux doutes, il tenta de persuader la population anglaise que Lénine, qu'il rencontra en 1920, et son parti, représentait le seul choix possible au moment où rares étaient les gouvernements prêts à reconnaître les bolchevique. Ses doutes s'amplifièrent en 1934 après son infructueuse rencontre avec Staline. On ne peut cependant comparer le désenchantement ressenti par Wells face à la Russie à celui d'anciens "compagnons de la route" de l'époque, tels Arthur Koestler ou George Orwell. La Seconde Guerre Mondiale et le rôle joué par l'Armée Rouge dans la lutte contre Hitler, contribueront à influencer les sentiments complexes de Wells face à l'Union Soviétique jusqu'à sa mort en 1946.

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This dissertation began with a study of the reaction of British intellectuals in World War I, under the supervision of Professor Martin Petter, who has since left McGill. I gratefully acknowledge his tutorials and patience in helping me to understand some ambiguous aspects of modern British history. To Professor Valentin Boss, whose work on Milton and Russia sparked my own interest in interdisciplinary studies, I am truly grateful for his constructive comments regarding Russian and Soviet history.

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INTRODUCTION

Acometer molinos de viento.

Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Book 1.

In 1917, in the Sherlock Holmes tale "His Last Bow," Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote:

> There is an east wind coming, Watson ... such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.

Long before the creator of Sherlock Holmes had written these words, Herbert George Wells (1856-1946) had been prophesying what discontents this east wind would bring about, as well as expounding a belief, which parallelled Conan Doyle's own, that the final outcome of the blast of war, or of revolutions and other conflicts discussed in Wells's vast literary output, would indeed be a better world. Wells's ceaseless attempts to foresee the future and to play an active part in the shaping of this "cleaner, better, stronger land" led him to eventually travel to the four corners of the globe. It is not surprising to learn that Wells had travelled to the United States, Australia, France, Germany, Switzerland, and other European countries, but it does seem puzzling that a man who had once described himself as the "antithesis of a Slav" should have felt the urge to visit Russia three times. Indeed, it is even more curious that the first of these pilgrimages should have taken place as early as January 1914, before the outbreak of the First World War, a period which Antonina Vallentin, Wells's contemporary and a friend, described as the one in which

> British travellers seldom ventured into Russia, whose frontiers were guarded by a figure never seen elsewhere in those days -- the passport official. Russia was not only off the beaten track, it was practically outside the European community.[1]

While this statement is accurate to a great extent, Russia was not always considered inaccessible to foreigners. There is, in fact, a large body of literature dealing with various journeys undertaken by Western travellers to Russia. The earliest and the most influential of these accounts were Baron von Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii* (1549) and Adam Olearius' *Newe Beschreibung der Moscowitischen und Persischen Reyse* (1647). Depicting Russia as a despotic state where common people lived under the harshest of conditions and were brutally exploited by the nobles who themselves were mere slaves to the tsar, these two accounts set the tone for future foreign portrayals of this great uncharted land. Of these, the British accounts were the most numerous, beginning with Richard Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589) and Giles Fletcher's *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (1591). Even the great English poet Milton made a contribution to this body of literature with his *Brief History of Moscovia* (published posthumously in 1682). The names of writers, diplomats, mercenaries, merchants, exiles, physicians, various experts, adventurers and the like, are too numerous to mention here.[2]

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[1] Antonina Vallentin, *H.G. Wells Prophet of Our Day* (New York, 1950) 222.

[2]Several of the most useful sources exploring this theme are described in Francesca Wilson's *Muscovy Russia Through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900* (London, 1970), Peter Putnam's *Seven Britons in Imperial Russia 1698-1812* (Princeton, NJ, 1952), J. Hamel's *England and Russia* (New York, 1968, originally circa 1854), Lloyd E. Berry

The relevant matter to be raised here is that these travellers introduced the theme of Britain's romance with Russia, or with the mystery of Russia, to English literature. It is perhaps Winston Churchill's famous and somewhat facile description of Russia as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" which encapsulates the attitudes of most foreign visitors to Russia. Through the centuries, however, there were those among them who attempted to make the transition from such a stance to a more balanced and deeper understanding of Russian people and culture.[3] Such writers often succeeded in distancing themselves from the tedious vein of condescension which permeates the written accounts of Russia. Their counterparts in modern scholarship are historians who tend to revise conventional views of Russia as a primitive, despotic tyranny, encrusted with inferior political institutions and mired in the apathy and sloth of the Russian peasant, by emphasizing the civilizing expansion of Russia in Asia and the Caucasus, and the continuity of wondrous periods of far-reaching reforms under such rulers as Peter and Catherine the Great, Alexander I (in the first half of his reign) and Alexander II (the "Tsar Liberator").

H.G. Wells's sketches of Russia need to be considered in this context.

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and Rovert Crummey's *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* (Madison, WI, 1968), and Anthony Cross's *Russia Under Western Eyes 1517-1825* (London, 1971).

[3]Madame de Staël's account (*Ten Years' Exile*, London, 1821), for example, is one of the most sympathetic and well-balanced portrayals of the character of Russian society, while Robert Pinkerton's depiction of Russian religious sects (*Russia*, London, 1833) reveals an understanding of Russia uncommon to most such foreign observers.

Like much of his writing, Wells's accounts of Russia went against the grain of contemporary opinion. He was one of the first Western socialists to expound his vision of Russia as a stirring giant about to play an important role in the shaping of the future of Western civilisation. Once Russia became the giant awakened -- in 1917 -- it was visited by countless "fellow travellers" (to use a term of later coinage) and the like, whose written accounts sometimes paralleled but often rejected many of Wells's utterances on the subject. We know a great deal about the disillusionment of ex-communists and fellow travellers (such as George Orwell and Arthur Koestler) with the Soviet regime, but Wells's journey followed quite a different path which, so far, has not been charted either by his Western biographers or by his many admirers and critics in the Soviet Union who were constrained by the prerequisites of ideology.

In Russia before 1914, Wells was already one of England's best known writers, his fame resting largely on his scientific romances, which had been translated into Russian surprisingly early on, as far back as the 1890's.[4] Even Tolstoy, no admirer of Shakespeare or of Milton's *Paradise Lost* -- he harshly criticised both -- was moved enough by one of these novels to write to Wells to ask for a copy. At the time of his first visit, Wells was naturally aware of and

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[4]According to the Umikian catalogues of the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library (now the National Library) in St. Petersburg, there are more Russian translations and editions of Wells than of any other prose author writing in English. Since the compilation of this remarkable catalogue, there have been several editions of Wells's collected and selected writings, which have also continued to be published separately. A continuous favourite, *The Invisible Man*, came out in 1992 in a paperback edition of 100,000 (see plate 1).

[Plate 1]

delighted by the fact that the first edition of his collected works in any language was published in Russia as early as 1909. Wells's popularity in pre-revolutionary Russia was not cut short, as happened with so many other "bourgeois" western writers after 1917, by the prescriptions and contortions of Bolshevik cultural policy. His transparent individualism should, as in the case of Balzac, Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, or Milton, have marked him as a target for Soviet criticism and censorship, which did in fact occur in the case of most of his remarkable compatriots, socialist and non-socialist alike, such as Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy, Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, and Arnold Bennett. That this did not happen may in part be explained by Wells's utopianism and his faith in science, which had an understandable and major influence on first generation of post-revolutionary Russian writers. Perhaps the most original of these, Yevgeny Zamyatin, author of the dystopian novel *We* (which inspired *1984*), was commissioned to translate Wells as early as 1918. Later, Zamyatin would fall into disgrace and be driven out of the Soviet Union for his ideological nonconformity. In his critical essay on Wells, however, Zamyatin discusses the English writer's work, the meaning of revolution and of what he looked upon as the heretical role of the artist in society -- the very same attitudes and convictions that had originally prompted Zamyatin to support the Bolsheviks, in his ardent espousal of a radiant new Soviet literature, which the next generation of "artists in uniform" would of course betray.

But Wells also appealed to Russians with no ideological axe to grind. To

Vladimir Nabokov, who is today in post-*Perestroika* Russia regarded by its foremost critics as the greatest prose writer of the twentieth century, Wells was simply "a great artist," which to anyone familiar with Nabokov's literary criticism is the ultimate accolade. Nabokov's homage is therefore worth citing. H.G. Wells, he wrote, was

> ... my favourite writer when I was a boy. *The Passionate Friends*, *Ann Veronica*, *The Time Machine*, *The Country of the Blind*, all these stories are far better than anything Bennett, or Conrad or, in fact, any of Wells' contemporaries could produce. His sociological cogitations can be safely ignored, of course, but his romances and fantasias are superb.[5]

Praise such as this, from a pen so unlike his own, would have surprised Wells, but his own willingness to visit Russia in 1914 was not unaffected by the esteem in which he knew he was held there.

Equally curious was the timing of Wells's second journey to what had become the Soviet Union: September of 1920, exactly a year after the final evacuation of Allied troops which had taken part in the occupation of Murmansk, Archangel, and other parts of the country in 1918-1919. At this time, although there were many European intellectuals who saw the Russian revolution as a model of the future, there were probably more who shared Winston Churchill's conviction that Russia was being devoured by the "cancer" of communism and militarism, and as such not fit to join Europe and the rest of the civilized world.

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[5]Herbert Gold, "The Art Of Fiction XV Vladimir Nabokov An Interview," *Paris Review* 41 (Summer-Fall 1967) 108.

The last of these journeys took place in July of 1934. Again, the timing was fortuitous in that the visit occurred four months before the assassination of Kirov, the "darling" of the Communist Party, considered by some as a rival to Stalin -- including most probably by Stalin himself. Kirov's death is now generally looked upon as the starting point of Stalin's Great Terror, which also marked the consolidation of his dictatorship over both country and Party. Wells's meeting with Stalin *prior* to these events was probably the last instance in which the Soviet *vozhd*[6] would allow himself to be drawn into a serious theoretical discussion with a non-communist on the fate of socialism in the Soviet Union and the West.

There are certain governing themes in the writings and utterances of every author which may tell us more about how the author's mind works than the recourse to more conventional methods. Rather than attempting to compile every sentence Wells may have uttered on the subject of Russia or socialism, and thus having to trace what may appear as obvious contradictions on Wells's part, identifying these major themes might prove a more profitable task, in the long run, to anyone wishing to answer the question of how much of Wells's work on Russia still lives today and is worthy of scholarly consideration.

That Wells was often a careless writer and that he disliked genuine

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[6]This Russian term for Stalin after the ouster of Trotsky, is to this day mistakenly rendered as "leader," whereas *Führer*, with its particular associations, would be more accurate.

research has been noted elsewhere; however, to

> describe Wells as a "spluttering imaginative little man in a hurry, bouncing from one contradiction to the next" is like describing Shakespeare as a bald and verbose playwright, over-partial to puns -- true in itself but not exactly helpful.[7]

It is not sufficient, for example, to state that "Wells's advocacy of dictatorial socialism and planning encouraged Hitler and gave credibility to the regime of Stalin," as Michael Coren does,[8] since it would be equally easy to cite instances where Wells's words or actions made such assessments seem quite inaccurate.[9] Therefore, identifying certain basic disciplinary themes can help one to arrive at a deeper understanding of the whole of an author's work: an author's *mind* generally changes less obviously from chapter to chapter, or from book to book. Given the fact that Wells published as many as five hundred articles and some hundred and ten books, and that he moved freely from one genre to another, such an approach is especially suited to this prolific and versatile writer.

The major difficulty in writing about Wells lies in the fact that so much has been written about him over the last one hundred years by admirers and detractors alike. That he was one of the most influential voices of his age and

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[7]Michael Draper, "Essays on Wells," *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 35 (1992) 222. Draper is quoting A.J.P. Taylor's description of Wells.

[8]Michael Coren, "A Bastard," *The Idler* 27 (January-February 1990) 50.

[9]Any scholar who has read Wells's writings on fascism will conclude that Wells felt nothing but strong resentment and contempt for such an ideology. Fascism did, after all, stand against "progress" -- something Wells believed in profoundly; this fact alone should have pointed Mr. Coren in the right direction. See, for example, Wells's "The Spirit of Fascism: Is There Any Good in It At All?" in *A Year of Prophesying* (Toronto, 1924) 221-225.

that his writings stimulated as many disciples as he had opponents is an easily established fact. As is often the case with great public figures, Wells's life engendered a mythology. For as long as he was successful and stuck to writing his "scientific romances" that mythology remained popular. But when Wells turned toward being more of a political and social activist and utopian theorist, the mythology changed. He was then increasingly thought of and described as a "misguided utopian," failed prophet of world government, careless writer and confused historian, shameless adventurer and irresponsible father, among other things, by individuals who seemed not to care that a writer's public and private lives need not be reconciled in terms of their personal ethics. Wells's emotional instability and philandering became an indispensable element used by his foes even in discussing his views on issues completely removed from the subject. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the mythology surrounding his treatment of Rebecca West. It is important to briefly mention this here because inaccuracies supplied by Rebecca West herself and by such figures as Dorothy Richardson have made their way into several studies of Wells. Without repeating the oft-described details of the many controversies Wells's name became subject to, suffice it to say that one of the most difficult aspects of writing historically accurate studies of Wells lies in the fascinating and sometimes painful task of wading through the extensive literature on his life filled with remnants of malicious portrayals of his character based on "facts" which were never seriously

examined but increasingly put to use from the 1960's onwards.[10]

It was with the publication of Anthony West's study in 1984, as well as several other shorter studies of Wells that some scholars began to revise their interpretations of Wells's life and work.[11] And yet, is it not curious that a man who was once described by Isaiah Berlin as "the last preacher of the morality of the Enlightenment,"[12] should be the subject of the most recent biography whose author, Michael Coren, feels free to call Wells a "bastard," a man whose "personal baseness was merely the natural extension of a political and social creed which could blithely accommodate both Soviet and Nazi diabolism?"[13] If such emotional, historically imprecise statements persist in scholarship even after half a century of polemical exchanges on the topic of Wells's loyalties in the last thirty years of his life, is it then surprising to find that some such misunderstandings concerning his views on the Soviet Union have not yet become defunct?[14] Without fearing to criticize Wells for what may have been serious

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[10]Some instructive examples of the sort of fabrications Wells scholars have to deal with is provided in Anthony West's intriguing study of his father *H.G. Wells Aspects of a Life* (New York, 1984). For example, see 11-14 as well as 90-104.

[11]For a résumé of some of the inaccuracies rectified by West's book, see William J. Scheick's "Antidote for a Poisoned Wells," *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 28 (1985) 79-81.

[12]Isaiah Berlin, "The Bent Twig," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity Chapters in the History of Ideas*, edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1990) 241.

[13]Michael Coren, "A Bastard," 49.

[14]In Christine A. Rydel's "*Russia in the Shadows* and Wells in the Dark," *Michigan Academician* 18 (Summer 1986) 393-410, the title of which is indicative of the author's partisan slant, even the date of Wells's first visit to Russia is cited as

transgressions and lapses in judgement, historians should surely re-examine Wells's attitude to Russia and the Soviet Union and respond to the past inaccuracies of others. What did Wells think of Russia in 1914, *prior* to the Bolshevik revolution? Did he see that revolution as a clear break with the past and did it influence the way he saw his own world and how it was contrasted to Russia? Did his impressions of Russia change in 1920? In 1934? Was he, in 1934, aware of the famine in the Ukraine and of the collectivisation which had brought about the deaths and arrests of millions of ordinary people labelled by Stalin and the NKVD "kulaks" and "enemies of the people"? Did his well-publicised discussion with Stalin, as is casually inferred by Mr. Coren, lend credibility to the Stalinist regime? What were Wells's final reflections upon Russia?

One of the fundamental problems with Wells and Russia revolves around establishing whether or not Wells saw the Russian experiment as the wave of the future, as a real possibility of the world as it was about to become. It is therefore essential to assess Wells's views on Russia *prior* to 1917, in order to understand whether or not it was the October Revolution -- probably the greatest turning point in Russian history, and perhaps in the history of Europe also -- which made Wells think of Russia as an inspiring alternative to the sort of future he envisaged for the Western world.

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having taken place in 1915. The journey took place a year earlier -- *before* the beginning of the war.

In his first article on Russia, Wells wrote the following:

> In Russia things are taken seriously. The Russian's soul, just as much as his churches and his pictures and his children's toys, is done in stronger, simpler, more emphatic colours. His religion is real, his monarchy is real, his life is a business of passionate self-examination because he has faith. Russia is full of faith, overflowing with faith, the ointment runs down upon the beard; and I, who am an Englishman and have thought much of England all my life, do not know whether England has any faith at all, or if only it is very subtly and deeply hidden.[15]

Such were his ruminations upon Russia and England in the beginning of 1914. At the time of this first visit to Russia, Wells's mind was preoccupied, as always, with the question of where civilisation was going and what part socialism might have in the shape of things to come. It would be a redundant task here to paint yet another picture of the intellectual climate in England and Russia at the beginning of the century.[16] Nonetheless, it is important to remember that this was the world of Bernard Shaw, Maurice Baring, G.K. Chesterton, Bertrand Russell, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and many others in England, and that of Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Andreyev, Korolenko, Kovalevsky, Artsybashev, and so forth, in Russia. Most of these writers and thinkers were dealing -- some directly, some through plays or novels -- with topics such as imperialism, nationalism, socialism, education, conditions of the working classes or of peasants, and the rising demands for change on all levels of society. In England

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[15]Wells, "Russia and England A Study in Contrasts," *The Daily News and Leader* (21 February, 1914). Pages in newspaper articles are omitted throughout; see Bibliographic Note.

[16]This has been done in many general studies such as Samuel Hynes's *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968), Modris Ekstein's *Rites of Spring* (Boston, 1989), and other works, or in detailed studies of specific figures of this period, such as, for example, Michael Holroyd's multi-volume biography of George Bernard Shaw.

itself, Wells wrote in 1911,

> Since [the Boer War] the national spirit ... has been in an uneasy and ineffectual revolt against deadness, against stupidity and slackness, against waste and hypocrisy in every department of life.

Furthermore,

> we have come to see more and more clearly how little we can hope for from the politicians, societies and organized movements in these essential things.[17]

Wells's words here echo the writings and pronouncements of the thinkers mentioned above. It is therefore not entirely fair to them and to the multitude of other writers in pre-1914 Europe to argue, as David C. Smith does in his biography of Wells, that "it would take the horrors of the First World War to sharpen thinking and create a focus on these problems within a framework of analysis" and that "Wells began to lay out a credo twenty years earlier."[18] Upon closer examination, it becomes obvious that it did not take the horrors of the First World War -- another undeniably shattering turning point in twentieth century life -- for writers, thinkers, socialist theorists, and would-be reformers to realize that the world needed changing. Quite apart from the many versions of utopian societies invented by numerous thinkers at this time, a multitude of writers published plays, novels, pamphlets, articles, and tracts dealing with the necessity to alter certain thinking habits and various political, social, and cultural traditions.

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[17]Wells, "Of the New Reign," in *An Englishman Looks at the World* (London, 1914) 23-24.

[18]David C. Smith, *H.G. Wells Desperately Mortal* (New Haven,CT, 1986) 90.

On the other hand, although the Union for Democratic Control and many members of the Labour Party shared some of Wells's notions on the world government, it was only Wells who never abandoned his obsession with the creation of a world state and implementation of his own peculiar brand of socialism. Is it therefore astonishing that a man whose intellectual, emotional and, as he wrote, even physical energies, were channelled towards finding a cure for nationalism and other evils of the twentieth century, should have been so impressed by the Russian character? For Wells was a man with a mission: the creation of a socialist utopia ruled by his "Samurai,"[19] an élite of benevolent scientific intelligentsia, and it must have seemed to him, in 1914, that Russia was the only place where a few dedicated "Samurai" were to be recruited. Why Russia, and not England, or Germany, or the United States? Quite simply because, in Wells's mind, by comparison "the English seem to have no real beliefs ... no religion and no aims in life."[20] He disliked Germany,[21] and as far as the United States was concerned, it would be only in 1934 that he would write of his delight at finding Roosevelt surrounded by so many "Open Conspirators." This faith in the Russian national character did not disappear from English literature with Wells's death. One of the most popular modern spy-fiction

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[19]Variously called the "New Republicans," or "Open Conspirators" in other writings by Wells.

[20]Wells, "Russia and England."

[21]For confirmation of this, see his articles in 1914, reflecting Germanophobia which was only strengthened during the war. Smith provides a list of several such articles in the extensive notes to *Desperately Mortal*; see 549-551.

authors, John Le Carré, revived this theme in a 1989 novel, *The Russia House*, which struck some Wellsian chords. The novel's protagonist, Barley Blair, a hard-drinking, saxophone-playing, shabby, disillusioned publisher, echoed Wells's feelings about Russia in the following passage:

> Why did it always draw me? ... Why did I keep coming back here? ...
>
> Because of their making do, he decided. Because they can rough it better than we can. Because of their love of anarchy and their terror of chaos, and the tension in between ....
>
> Because of their universal ignorance, and the brilliance that bursts through it. Because of their sense of humour, as good as ours and better.
>
> Because they are the last great frontier in an over-discovered world. Because they try so hard to be like us and start from so far back.
>
> Because of the huge heart beating inside the huge shambles.[22]

Barley Blair's romantic anarchism and his nostalgia for Russia mirror H.G. Wells's own. Like Le Carré's fictional character, Wells also fell in love with a beautiful Russian, the Baroness Maria von Benckendorff (Moura Budberg). This relationship -- interrupted in *Dr. Zhivago*-like fashion by the Soviet Union's revolutionary upheavals -- would always colour Wells's image of Russia. Secondly, like Barley Blair, Wells has sometimes been looked upon as a type of quixotic figure, futilely fighting against an intellectual milieu not ready to accept him, and searching for answers in a realm not his own. In 1914, however, the world had no shortage of windmills to tilt at.

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[22]John Le Carré, *The Russia House* (Markham, ON, 1989) 155.

CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF A RUSSOPHILE

Any person under the age of thirty, who, having any knowledge of the existing social order, is not a revolutionist, is an inferior.

Bernard Shaw, *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, 1903

Wells's English biographers devote very little attention to his first visit.[1] Astonishingly, anyone interested in this episode of Wells's life must turn to primary sources from Russia. Even Yuli Kagarlitskii's biography of Wells, written in a marxist vein, devotes only two sentences to this trip. The most useful account, however, is to be found in a very short piece by I. M. Levidova, "Pervyi priezd G.D. Uellsa v Rossiiu" ["H.G. Wells's First Visit to Russia"].[2] Levidova quite rightly points out that it is during the author's "*first* contact with a new country that he acquires the brightest and the most solid impressions, in relationship to which everything he sees and learns in the future develops."[3]

Wells arrived in St. Petersburg on 13 January, 1914. Although he wanted to keep his trip secret, so as to avoid spending time with reporters -- and Levidova points out that "for the reading public of those days, the visit of Wells

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[1]Some standard biographers omit it altogether: Vincent Brome and Richard Hauer Costa, for example. Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie's *Time Traveller The Life of H.G. Wells* (London, 1973) contains one paragraph on the topic (301). James Playsted Wood also devotes one paragraph to the first visit in his *Damn You I Told You So! The Life of H.G. Wells* (London, 1969), duplicating the most quoted description of Wells's impressions in "Russia and England" (122). Antonina Vallentin's *H.G. Wells Prophet of Our Day* devotes two full pages to the visit in an attempt to offer some clues to Wells's interest in Russia. While her book is not a scholarly biography, it nevertheless contains several very sensitive remarks on Wells and Russia (221-3). Even Smith's *Desperately Mortal* makes very hasty mention of Wells's first contact with Russia, apart from introducing a short quote (233) from a letter Wells sent from Russia to his wife on 24 January, 1914.

[2]I.M. Levidova, "Pervyi priezd G.D. Uellsa v Rossiiu," in *Gerbert Dzhordzh Uells Bibliografiia russkikh perevodov i kriticheskoi literatury na russkom iazyke 1898-1965*, compiled by I.M. Levidova and B.M. Parchevskaya (Moscow, 1966) 125-9.

[3]Levidova, "Pervyi priezd," 125.

was indeed an event" -- an interview with him appeared in *Rech* two days later.[4] This interview, conducted by a journalist named Nabokov, offers a rare detail regarding Wells's aims on this trip. Apart from visiting St. Petersburg and Moscow, Wells was greatly interested in observing a Russian village and peasant life. In the interview, he emphasizes the fact that people and customs of Russia are far more engaging topics than the monuments and historical relics. In another interview, three days later, Zinaïda Vengerova, a critic and translator who had followed Wells's career over the years, relates a similar story:

> In Russia, Wells is interested largely in day to day problems. He shies away from theoretical dialogues, he wants to see and know what makes people happy in Russia. When he is told that he will hardly be able to see this, he simply does not believe it. He believes all too powerfully in the instinct for happiness which possesses all people on earth. From St. Petersburg to Moscow, he is going to the Russian village -- and that he will not see happy life there, we cannot convince our guest from England.[5]

It is self-evident from these remarks that Wells was determined to like Russia from the start. Although the first interviewer stated that Wells approached Russian contemporary situation without any pre-conceived notions or prejudices, it is clear that in fact he was resolved to look for some of the more agreeable aspects of Russian life. For confirmation of this, one need look no further than at Wells's introduction to Denis Garstin's *Friendly Russia*, written later that year:

> Of all that [Mr. Garstin] tells so briskly and vividly I think I can

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[4]V.N. Nabokov, "Uells," *Rech* 14 (15 January, 1914) 2.

[5]Zinaïda Vengerova, "Dzhordzh Uells evo prebyvanie v Peterburge" ["George Wells His Stay In Petersburg"], *Den'* 17 (18 January, 1914) 3.

> guess what will astonish the English reader, and that is the workman from the slums of Odessa who had been in England and who pitied the English poor. "They are so poor," he said, "so terribly poor!" My own experience of Russia has been of the briefest, but that tallies very closely with my own impression. I went into one or two villages of the Government of Novgorod and into several peasants' houses. They are roomier than English labourers' cottages; they look more prosperous; the people seem more free and friendly in their manners, less suspicious of interference, and in all the essential things of life better off....[6]

One can debate the truthfulness of such statements, but it can be argued that Wells's convictions were accurate to a great extent, given the fact that Novgorod had always been a most prosperous province. One also tends to forget nearly a century later just how dreadful and squalid were the slums of London and other industrialized European cities at that time. It is fascinating to note, however, that the Russian liberals Wells met on this trip held exactly the opposite view. Levidova relates the story of F.D. Batyushkov's (the Chairman of the All Russian Literary Society) giving Wells the text of the welcoming address, in which

> the liberally inclined intelligentsia had unambiguously expressed its attitude to Russian reality: "You appear to us unexpectedly, like some of your Martians, but let's hope, without the intention to invade us. Yet nonetheless, you do conquer us with the strength of your talent, acting irresistibly on us. Let us hope that in travelling through Russia, in getting to know the positive and negative aspects of Russian life, you will not fall victim to some Russian microbe and that you will return safely and in good health, to your great free England from which we have received so many examples of wise social structuring, such examples of wonderful culture and civilisation, which so far have not been surpassed in any other country."[7]

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[6]Wells, "Introduction" to Denis Garstin's *Friendly Russia* (London, 1914) 12.

[7]Levidova, "Pervyi priezd," 127.

England was still the paragon of virtue and model of democracy for much of Russian intelligentsia.

Following this, Wells spent the day in the Vergezha village, in the company of one such member of the intelligentsia, the well-known revolutionary from the 1870's, Arkady Vladimirovich Tyrkov. Levidova reports that when *Novgorodskaia Pravda* published a piece devoted to Tyrkov in 1965, some readers, who still remembered Wells's visit, wrote letters to the newspaper. Several unknown photographs were uncovered in the family album of the local (zemskaia) school teacher, Nina Alexeevna Andreeva, to whom Wells had apparently "paid much attention." An idyllic portrait of Wells's sojourn begins to emerge from one of those photographs: the visitor is sitting in a sledge, surrounded by the Tyrkov family and the local villagers. T.M. Iakovleva reports that Tyrkov and Wells "frequented together the houses of poor peasants, and were interested in their lives."[8] Anyone acquainted with Russian hospitality, especially in those days, can easily imagine that the villagers went out of their way to make Wells feel welcome. Furthermore, the fact that he visited the countryside in the middle of the winter means that the snow concealed any obvious squalidness that may have been more easily noticed in England. Wells describes the journey from the train station to the village, in a scene which could have been transposed from Russian folk art:

It thawed on Sunday, and the surface of the ice was covered with

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[8]Letter from Iakovleva is quoted in Levidova's "Pervyi priezd," 127.

> inch-deep lakes of water and so rotten with snowy slush that always we seemed near upsetting, and once we upset altogether. This water rippled a little under a chilly breeze, and except for that, it might have been an under-sky; the sledges that followed us hung low between clear sky and clear water, they were black against the serene levels of sunset colour, pink and gold and mauve, and their high arched yokes nodded over the heads of the horses....[9]

The same theme plays a notable part in *Joan and Peter*, which Wells wrote four years later. It returns time and again as a haunting motif. The novel abounds in descriptions of Russian people and landscape, with scenes which must have stimulated Wells's customary ruminations upon humanity. Oswald Sydenham, the character in the novel, relates how

> the picturesqueness of Russia had a great effect upon him.... The wild wintry landscape of the land with its swamps and wild unkempt thickets of silver birch, the crouching timber villages with their cupolaed churches, the unmade roads, the unfamiliar lettering of the stations, contributed to his impression of barbaric greatness.... In Petrograd, he said, "away from here to the North Pole is Russia and the Outside, the famine-stricken north, the frozen fen and wilderness, the limits of mankind."[10]

Once he arrived in Moscow, Wells revealed the same sort of interest in the people, rather than in sightseeing. The newspaper *Utro Rossii* reported that he "categorically rejected an invitation of acquaintances to visit monuments of antiquity."[11] After spending the entire first day in the streets of Moscow, Wells devoted a whole day to visiting the Sergeev's Trinity monastery, seeing at one point a "dirty, evil-smelling little tramp with his bundle and kettle, worshipping

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[9]Wells, "Russia and England."

[10]Wells, *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education* (Toronto, 1918) 381.

[11]cited in Levidova, "Pervyi priezd," 127-8.

unabashed ... in the cathedral."[12] In his pursuit to learn as much as possible about Russian life, Wells also spent some time at the Khitrov market and in an all-night "tea-house."

There is one more episode in Wells's Moscow visit worthy of notice. Wells went to see the performance of *The Three Sisters* and *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. He described his passionate response to these spectacles in *Joan and Peter*[13] and added:

> ... far more interesting than the play to him was the audience. They were mostly young people, and some of them were very young people; students in uniform, bright-faced girls, clerks, young officers and soldiers, a sprinkling of intelligent-looking older people of the commercial and professional classes; each evening showed a similar gathering, a very full house, intensely critical and appreciative. It was rather like the sort of gathering one might see in the London Fabian Society, but there were scarcely any earnest spinsters and many more young men. The Art Theatre, like a magnet, had drawn its own together out of the vast barbaric medley of Western and Asiatic, of peasant, merchant, priest, official and professional, that thronged the Moscow streets. And they seemed very delightful young people.[14]

Wells was not the only Westerner thus impressed by the Russian people and the Russian "national character" -- a notion difficult to pin down in any sort of meaningful fashion because of its self-defining and contradictory elements. Without falling into the trap of expounding upon some vague, emotional generalisations concerning the essential goodness of Russians (something that

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[12]Wells, *Joan and Peter*, 380.

[13]Wells's reaction to the performances was also reported in the newspaper *Ranyee Utro*, 21 January 1914.

[14]Wells, *Joan and Peter*, 389.

Wells is indeed guilty of in the article cited above), one can nonetheless outline *Wells's* idea of Russian national character in order to arrive at an understanding of what it was that drew him to Russia in 1914 and afterwards, as well as fuelled his articles on the subject of helping Russian war efforts.

One helpful clue in this pursuit is offered by the fact that Maurice Baring, "the shrewd and perceptive russophile,"[15] was Wells's companion and guide during this first visit. Baring can be credited with having almost single-handedly introduced Russian literature to the English readers, with the publication of his *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (1914),[16] *The Outline of Russian Literature* (1914), and *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse* (1924). Baring's far more intricate descriptions of Russian national character nevertheless match in essence those of Wells's self-admittedly primitive and as yet half-baked views of 1914.[17] For example, Baring affirms that it is the Russians' "Christian charity, their sympathy, which is by far their most pleasing and attractive state."[18] Similarly, Wells describes feeling that "in Russia ... for the first time in my life I am in a

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[15]thus described by Anthony West, *H.G. Wells Aspects of a Life*, 71.

[16]This book is still in print.

[17]Wells wrote in "Russia and England" that after spending two weeks in Russia, he found his "mental arms full of such a jumble of impressions as no other country has ever thrust into them," and that it would take him "months of reflection before [he] could begin to sort out this indiscriminate loot, this magnificent confusion of gifts."

[18]Maurice Baring, *Maurice Baring Restored Selections from His Work* (London, 1970) 237.

country where Christianity is alive."[19] Why should this detail be of any importance to Wells? The answer is to be found in *The Outline of History* (1920), in a revealing statement on how Christianity fits into Wells's world view:

> Through all its variations and corruptions, Christianity has never completely lost the suggestion of a devotion to God's commonweal that makes the personal pomps of monarchs and rulers seem like the insolence of an overdressed servant, and the splendours and gratifications of wealth like a waste of robbers. No man living in a community which such a religion as Christianity or Islam has touched can be altogether a slave, there is an ineradicable quality in these religions that compels men to judge their masters and to realize their own responsibility for the world.[20]

Russians, in Wells's eyes, were merely members of one of those communities he deemed most likely to rebel against the existing "evils" and inadequacies of various governments.

Both Wells and Baring write of the physical beauty of Russian landscape, "Kremlin's clustering domes and cupolas" (Wells), and of its mysterious power:

> in the twilight, continents of dove-coloured clouds float in the east, the west is tinged with the dusty afterglow of the sunset; and the half-reaped corn and the spaces of stubble are burnished and glow in the heat; and smouldering fires of weed burn here and there; and as you reach a homestead, you will perhaps see ... a crowd of dark men and women still at their work; and in the glow from the flame of a wooden fire, in the shadow of the dusk, the smoke of the engine and the dust of the chaff, they have a Rembrandt-like power; the feeling of space, breadth, and air and immensity grows upon one; the earth seems to grow larger, the sky to grow deeper, and the spirit is lifted, stretched, and magnified.[21]

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[19]Wells, "Russia and England."

[20]H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, vol. 2 (New York, 1967) 770.

[21]Baring, *Restored Selections*, 267.

Wells naturally wanted all of mankind to be thus affected, to feel affinity with their surroundings *as a necessary prelude* to the acceptance of the notion that they indeed belonged to a world community, a vast utopian brotherhood. This idea is absolutely crucial to an understanding of Wells's interest in Russia: in the introduction to Denis Garstin's *Friendly Russia*, published in the same year, Wells writes that the author is

> engaged here upon one of the most necessary and beneficial tasks of our time, the explanation of a people much maligned, the increase of sympathy and understanding across spaces and ignorances that have *separated men from men*.[22] [my emphasis]

In Wells's mind, narrowing this distance was of utmost importance if humanity was ever going to be able to win "the race between education and catastrophe," to repeat his oft-quoted expression. This notion of a race between enlightened individuals and the uneducated masses becomes the most important clue to the puzzle of Wells's attraction to Russia. Both he and Baring wrote about the level of education and culture in Russia. Baring points out that

> An all-round development of faculties is much more common in Russia than in other countries. It is much rarer to find in Russia a man who has certain qualities strongly developed and others utterly non-existent, than a man who is developed at all points and on all sides to a certain extent.[23]

Wells too, makes the striking statement that

> the audiences at the performance of the "Three sisters" and "Hamlet" ... at the Moscow art Theatre, might have been the

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[22]Wells, Introduction to *Friendly Russia*, 9.

[23]Baring, *Restored Selections*, 236.

younger and brighter half of the London Fabian Society.[24]

In an article written in August of 1914, at the start of the war, Wells adds that

> against the business enterprise of better educated races, [Russia] has no weapon but the peasant's poor cunning. It is, indeed, a helpless, unawakened mass. Above these peasants come a few millions of fairly well educated and actively intelligent people. They are all that corresponds in any way to a Western community such as ours.[25]

It is interesting to note that the fact that Wells's unquestionably being a Russophile (something not stated clearly by numerous biographers) did not prevent him from dwelling upon the less pleasant aspects of life in Russia. He is certainly aware that Russia *is* (Wells's emphasis), "in bulk, barbaric," that between "eighty and ninety per cent of her population" is "an illiterate population ... superstitious in a primitive way, conservative and religious in a primitive way."[26] But it was Wells's conviction at the time that the élite mentioned above, the Russian intelligentsia, would play the role of his Samurai, who would, if roused to action by some external events, bring about an "educated Russia." In Wells's theories of the revolution, this élite group plays a crucial role, for, according to him,

> it is still only very curious and exceptional minds, or minds that have by example or good education acquired the scientific habit of wanting to know *why*, or minds shocked and distressed by some public catastrophe and roused to wide apprehensions of danger,

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[24]Wells, "Russia and England."

[25]Wells, "The Liberal Fear of Russia," *The Nation* (22 August, 1914).

[26]Wells, "The Liberal Fear of Russia."

that will not accept governments and institutions....[27]

It is somewhat ironic that Wells had put such faith in the Russian intelligentsia at the very time when an article entitled "The Passing of the Intelligentsia" appeared in *The Nation* (7 March, 1914). The article was a review of Harrold Williams's *Russia of the Russians*, where the author convincingly argued that the Russian intelligentsia was a "phenomenon of a bygone age," that these "highly educated people, in many cases endowed with fine imaginative and artistic powers, or with scholarship, science, and philosophic speculation," who had "given all they had to the one and undivided purpose of liberating the Russian people" had ill-fatedly become enslaved to their theoretical polemics, so much so, that the various factions had become their own worst enemies. The tsarist officials were thus able to annul the concessions given in the October Manifesto of 1905, following which "the devoted, lovable, impractical old Intelligentsia departed into history."[28] It is difficult not to agree with the essence of those remarks, if one keeps in mind the fact that the Social Democrats of Russia split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks as far back as 1903, and that the Octobrist party branched off from the Constitutional Democrats in 1905, precisely on theoretical grounds.

And yet, it seems to be a trademark of all Russophiles that their faith in the Russian genius is never completely lost; Williams ends his book with the

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[27]Wells, *The Outline of History*, vol. 2, 664.

[28]"The Passing of the Intelligentsia," *The Nation*, 7 March 1914.

following description:

> The days when Tolstoy lay dying were days of national exaltation such as only those who lived in the midst of it can realize. It was as though a *wave of purifying and uplifting emotion* [my emphasis] had swept across the country revealing the best that was in every man. And this high and solemn emotion lingered on for many weeks after Tolstoy was at rest.[29]

It can be safely argued that Wells expected that some such tremendous "resurrection of spirit" would take place in Russia in the very near future.

How was Russia to accomplish this? Wells offers one possibility in "Russia and England," when he argues that Russia must raise

> its own average of education and initiative ... by *liberalizing* [Wells's emphasis] upon the West European model. That is to say, it will have to teach its population to read, to multiply its schools, and increase its Universities; and that will make an entirely different Russia from this one we fear. It involves a relaxation of the grip of orthodoxy, an alteration of the intellectual outlook of the officialdom, an abandonment of quasi-religious autocracy....

It is relevant at this point to remember that the great Russian writer, Maxim Gorky, whom Wells first met in 1906 in New York, soon after the 1905 Revolution,[30] held almost identical views on Russia during and after the First World War. In the hundreds of articles Gorky wrote for his Journal *Novaia Zhizn'*, under the heading of "Untimely Thoughts" (or "Thoughts Out of Season") between May of 1917 and July of 1918, the Russian writer demonstrates his belief in the Wellsian cries for the necessity of a different kind of revolution: like

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[29]"The Passing of the Intelligentsia."

[30]On this occasion, the two men discussed the events of 1905 in Russia at length.

Bernard Shaw's Superman, like Wells and his many fictional alter-egos, Gorky was essentially calling for a change in the human psyche:

> The Revolution, the only one which is capable of freeing and ennobling man, must take place within him, and it will be accomplished only by cleansing him of the mould and dust of obsolete ideas.[31]

Furthermore, the two friends betray the same ambivalent attitude towards humanity. In Gorky's case, his observations on the brutality and backwardness of the Russian peasantry are in constant clash with what Alexandar Kaun (and other Gorky's biographers) has described as his burning faith in the essential goodness of man. Wells, on the other hand, wavers between his observations on Russia being "substantially barbaric ... [a] wilderness of wolves, knouts, serfdom and cruelty,"[32] a " foil to our dazzling liberties, the darkness to accentuate our Enlightenment,"[33] and his faith in Russians' not being "evil." Perhaps the best encapsulation of the latter attitude is to be found in "The Liberal Fear of Russia." Wells's statements here parallel those of Gorky and need to be reproduced in their entirety:

> The existing Russian idea will have to give place to an entirely more democratic, tolerant, and cosmopolitan idea of Russia as a whole, if Russia is to emerge from its barbarism and remain united. There is no cheap "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" sentiment ready made to hand. National quality is against it.

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[31]Maxim Gorky, *Novaia Zhizn'* 107 (4 June, 1918). Quotations from Gorky's articles are taken from *Untimely Thoughts Essays on Revolution, Culture, and the Bolsheviks 1917-1918*, translated by Herman Ermolaev (New York, 1968).

[32]Wells, "Liberal Fears of Russia."

[33]Wells, Introduction to *Friendly Russia*, 9-10.

> Patience under patriotism is a German weakness. Russians could no more go on singing and singing "Russia, Russia over all," than Englishmen could go on singing "Rule, Britannia." It would bore them. The temperament of none of the Russian people justifies the belief that they will repeat on a larger scale evenas much docility as the Germans have shown under the Prussians. No one who has seen the Russians, who has had opportunities of comparing Berlin with St. Petersburg or Moscow, or who knows anything of Russian art or Russian literature, will imagine this naturally wise, humorous, and impatient people reduplicating the self-conscious, drill-dulled, soul-less culture of Germany, or the political vulgarities of Potsdam. This is a terrible world, I admit, but Prussianism is the sort of thing that does not happen twice.[34]

It is important, however, to distinguish between Wells's and Gorky's parallel views on human nature and the Russian "national character" and their disparate views on Germany. Gorky did not make any such bellicose statements upon the subject of Germans, not even in the third year of the war:

> Clearly, in sending [Russia's] talents to the slaughter, the country is exhausting her heart, and the people are tearing out the best pieces of their flesh. And what for? Perhaps only so that a talented Russian should kill a talented German artist. Just think, what an absurdity this is, what a terrible mockery of people!... Can it be that this accursed slaughter must turn even artists, who are dear to us, into murderers and corpses?[35]

It was indeed Wells's initial bellicosity of 1914 which created several controversies among the English intellectuals and other public figures during the war. Even longtime friends such as Vernon Lee, who used to address Wells as "My Dear Fellow Utopian," were not fond of his anti-German propaganda. In a letter to the New York *Nation*, in response to an earlier "Appeal to the

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[34]Wells, "The Liberal Fear of Russia."

[35]Gorky, *Novaia Zhizn'* 2 (20 April, 1917).

American People," by Wells,[36] Vernon Lee expressed her hope that the American president would help end the war by

> staying the hand of covetousness, of race enmity, and of fear; the hand also, I am sorry to say, of such idealistic, utopistic, mythopoeic self-righteousness as has led Mr. Wells to ask America to deprive Germany of food for the speedier coming of the kingdom of peace and good will upon earth.[37]

Much of Vernon Lee's past admiration for Wells as a humanist faded with time, so much so, that by the twenties, her biographer argues, she not only did no longer have the time for Wellsian utopias, but she came to look upon him as a type of a pro-Fascist thinker.[38]

Bernard Shaw never went as far in his many polemics with Wells, although he did assume Vernon Lee's pacifist stance in 1914. Shaw and Wells entered into one of their famous verbal duels after Wells wrote "The Future of the North of Europe," in December of 1914. In this article, Wells made a passing remark on the "irresponsible, muddleheaded, anti-Russian talk of that lamentable pattern Mr. Shaw has so obligingly set our antagonists."[39] After dismissing Wells's remark with his customary witticisms, Shaw elucidated his position on Russia:

> I still earnestly beg my literary colleagues not to flaunt their

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[36]Published in the *Daily Chronicle* on 24 August, 1914.

[37]Cited in Peter Gunn's *Vernon Lee Violet Paget, 1856-1935* (London, 1964) 204-5.

[38]Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, 221.

[39]Wells, "The Future of the North of Europe," *The Daily Chronicle* (18 December, 1914).

> admiration of the Moscow Art Theatre (which I share) too much in the face of the north, nor to let it carry them to the extremity of hinting that the floggings and hangings and Siberian transportation of people like Mr. Wells, which are part of the daily routine of government in Russia, and which have not been checked in the least by the war, are mere false reports spread about an unenlightened and ardently Liberal regime by pro-Germans.[40]

Furthermore, Shaw accused Wells of whitewashing the tsarist regime:

> the attempt now being made to represent [the Russian tsardom] to the French and English peoples as the liberator of humanity is like an attempt to white out the night sky with a whitewash brush.[41]

Lastly, Shaw attempted to completely demolish Wells's idea of Russians' being a type of latter-day "bon sauvage":

> We must not, when the Germans remind the neutrals of the abominations of the Cossack rule, turn around and say, "Oh, you do not know the soul of the Russian people. They are seething with Liberalism, they alone have preserved the tradition of Village Communism; and Mr. H.G. Wells is the most popular author in Moscow." The practical man in the neutral countries still replies, Oh, that be blowed! These *enlightened moujiks* of yours are singing hymns to their tsar, and shooting down whoever he tells them to shoot down, just as they flog and hang and drag to Siberia whoever he tells them to; and it is jolly lucky for Mr. H.G. Wells that he is an Englishman and not a Russian, and equally lucky for any German that he is a subject of the Kaiser and not of the Tsar....[42]

In all fairness to Wells, it must be pointed out that he did share some of Shaw's views on tsarism. In St. Petersburg, Wells had gone to a session of the Duma -- a detail Levidova chooses to omit. If Wells's fictional recreation of that episode

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[40]Bernard Shaw, "Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Wells," letter to the *Daily Chronicle*, 23 December 1914.

[41]Shaw, "Mr. Bernard Shaw."

[42]Shaw, "Mr. Bernard Shaw."

is to be trusted, it would seem that

> the thing that most gripped his attention was the huge portrait of the Tsar that hung over the gathering. He could not keep his eyes off it. There the figure of the autocrat stood, with its side-long, unintelligent visage, four times as large as life, dressed up in military guise and with its big cavalry boots right over the head of the president of the Duma. That portrait was as obvious an insult, as outrageous a challenge to the self-respect of Russian men as a gross noise or a foul gesture would have been.
>
> "You and all the empire exist for ME," said that foolish-faced portrait, with its busby a little on one side and its weak hand on its sword hilt....
>
> It was to that figure they asked young Russia to be loyal. That dull-faced Tsar and the golden crosses of Moscow presented themselves as Russia to the young. A heavy-handed and very corrupt system of repression sustained their absurd pretensions. They had no sanction at all but that they existed -- through the acquiescences of less intelligent generations.[43]

Why then, did Wells seem to contradict himself in 1914? Why did he enter into a vehement exchange of letters and articles in the English press with Bernard Shaw?

There may be many answers to this question. In the first place, he was part of the war propaganda machine, headed by Charles Masterman, along with other literati.[44] Moreover, he saw in the blast of war an opportunity to change the existing complacent society of contemporary England, as well as a possibility to abolish the nation-states of the world. Furthermore, as D.G. Wright points

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[43]Wells, *Joan and Peter*, 388.

[44]A short account of Wells's involvement in the anti-German propaganda is to be found in D.G. Wright's "The Great War, Government Propaganda and English 'Men of Letters' 1914-16," *Literature and History A New Journal for the Humanities* 7 (Spring 1978) 70-100.

out, "by 1916, he was regretting his earlier jingoism,"[45] stating later in his *Experiment in Autobiography* that his "mind did not get an effective and consistent grip on the war until 1916."[46] Lastly, Wells never did run away from a good argument with Shaw, and each new altercation seemed to renew their long friendship.

It is evident that Wells's journalistic discussions of Russia were coloured by the fact that England was at war and Russia was its ally. It is therefore understandable that Wells's moderate defence of the tsarist government at the beginning of 1914 -- inspired by his patriotism -- seemed to be in direct contradiction to his vitriolic utterances on the "unintelligent and dull-faced" (*Joan and Peter*) tsar Nicholas II made both before and after the Great War. Wells had never been fond of the monarchy in so far as he considered the monarchs to be at the top of the caste which he disliked immensely; the lords and aristocrats were indeed a "doomed class," to repeat a marxist cliché, since, in Wells's eyes, they belonged to the past, to an old, outdated, rotting, useless social order. However, as the war gathered momentum, and Wells's jingoism began to fade, he reverted to his customary criticisms of the social order in England and elsewhere.

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[45]Wright, "The Great War," 89.

[46]*Mr. Britling Sees It Through* remains, however, an important document on the war.

As was pointed out, Wells was determined to like Russia even before he visited it in 1914. It was also established that his companion during this visit, Maurice Baring, infected him with enthusiasm and love for the Russian people, and particularly for the Russian intelligentsia. It is also clear that Wells's attraction to Russia had everything to do with his belief that the Russian intelligentsia would succeed where the Western one, so he thought, was failing at the time: in winning the "race between education and catastrophe" by establishing a (Wellsian version of the) "New World Order."[47] One can legitimately argue that Wells held the belief that somehow those who were in a more "primitive" state would have a better opportunity to remake the world -- that Slavs (this was also a theme in later National-Socialist propaganda in Germany) who had been isolated from the "decadent" Western culture were ready and able to create this new order.

Indeed, as early as 1916, Wells had written to Lord Northcliffe[48] concerning the necessity for a type of revolution to replace the war. In fact, when the first (February) revolution broke out in Russia, Wells created a small furore by inducing Lord Northcliffe to print a letter in *The Times* which suggested that

> the time is now ripe, and that it would be a thing agreeable to our friends and Allies, the Republican democracies of France, Russia, the United States, and Portugal, to give some clear expression to the great volume of Republican feeling that has always existed in

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[47]*The New World Order* is the title of Wells's 1940 booklet.

[48]with whom he became involved in anti-German propaganda work, under the Advisory Committee to the Director of Propaganda (Northcliffe himself).

the British community

and that

> these ancient trappings of throne and sceptre are at most a mere historical inheritance of ours, and that our spirit is warmly and entirely against the dynastic system that has so long divided, embittered, and wasted *the spirit of mankind*.[49] [my emphasis]

The February revolution was an indisputable proof to H.G. Wells that his expectations of Russia -- formed in 1914 -- were being fulfilled. Nay, more than that,

> the news of the Russian revolution, of the giant stride from autocracy to republic-democracy, astounded Western Europe. This great change in Russia, this banner of fiery hope that has been raised over Europe, was no farce or spectacle. It comes, indeed, as the call of God, too, to every liberal thinking man throughout the world. We had not dared to hope it. Even men who, like myself, have been most energetic in pleading the cause of Russia in Western Europe and America, who have been saying ever since the war began: "You are wrong in your fear of Russia: Russians are by nature a liberal-spirited people, and their autocracy is a weakness that they will overcome" -- even we who said that counted on nothing so swift and splendidly complete as this revolution.[50]

Other prominent Englishmen joined Wells in welcoming the new regime in Russia. Bernard Shaw expressed his belief that a German revolution was now "made inevitable by the Russian example."[51] He also reiterated some of the earlier arguments used in his discussion with Wells regarding the abhorrent

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[49]H.G. Wells, "A Republican Society for Great Britain," letter to *The Times* (21 April, 1917). Notice the same expression -- "spirit of mankind" -- which Wells used in the "Introduction" to Denis Garstin's *Friendly Russia*.

[50]H.G. Wells, as quoted in "Assure New Russia of British Regard," *The New York Times* (1 April, 1917).

[51]Bernard Shaw, as quoted in "Assure New Russia of British Regard."

tsarist regime. Viscount Bryce, the Marquis of Crewe (former acting Foreign Secretary), G.N. Barnes (Minister for Pensions), Arnold Bennett, T.P. O'Connor, and others also expressed their sympathies for the Russian people and the new Russian government.

However, the British Foreign Office did not share quite the same enthusiasm for the change of government of their main ally in the midst of a war. The Russian leaders were quick to offer assurances to Britain and France that Russia would indeed remain in the war. Even after Guchkov and Miliukov were replaced, Kerensky made the same pledge to the West. Nevertheless, recriminations, accusations, and mistrust of Russia ran rampant both in the British government and among the public. Even though individuals such as Maurice Baring had done much to acquaint the English men of letters with Russia, very few ordinary citizens knew anything about it, beyond the fact that Russia had a large army and was Britain's ally. Hence, the knowledge and opinion of men who had visited the country and were able to make some perceptive observations about its people, were highly sought after. Wells seems to have anticipated all of this when, after the first visit, he told Frederick Macmillan that English readers would have "a great need to know about Russia soon."[52] Wells was even asked by the British press to lead what would today be called by journalists a "fact-finding" mission to Russia, but declined due to other war work.

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[52]Wells, as cited in Smith, *Desperately Mortal*, 233.

There was another aspect of Wells's feeling about Russia in February 1917. As is usually mentioned by Wells's biographers, he sent a letter to Maxim Gorky in May of 1917, in which he welcomed

> this struggle to liberate mankind, the German people included, from the net of aggressive monarchy and to establish international goodwill on the basis of international justice and respect.[53]

Wells was renewing his calls for a world state, or at least a "New Republic," as is also made evident by "Mr. H.G. Wells and the Labour Programme," a short manifesto-like document published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 22 June, 1917. This "manifesto" consists of eleven points, the first two of which provide valuable clues to Wells's state of mind at the time. Wells suggests

> (1) The ultimate abolition of all hereditary privilege and the establishment of Democratic Republicanism throughout the Empire.
> (2) The conversion of the Empire into a *League of the Free Nations* [Wells's emphasis].[54]

This statement, when taken in conjunction with Wells's persistent hounding (since 1915) of C.F.G. Masterman and Lord Northcliffe to clearly outline Britain's war aims, leads one to conclude that Wells had come to see the war and then the first and the second Russian Revolution of 1917 as merely different stages in the process which would ultimately result in the creation of some sort of a world organisation, which in its turn would bring about lasting world peace

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[53]Excerpts from the letter are quoted both in Anthony West's *H.G. Wells Aspects of a Life*, 72, as well as Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie's *The Time Traveller*, 313.

[54]H.G. Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Labour Programme," *Manchester Guardian* (22 June, 1917).

and order. Wells once said that he "launched the phrase 'the war to end war' -- and that was not the least of my crimes." He also reprimanded himself for not having offered to the young men who suffered in the trenches anything better than this catchy phrase. Nonetheless, it is entirely legitimate to argue that in spite of Wells's wavering on some war issues and his side journeys into religion and propaganda work during the war, the phrase "war to end war" best encapsulates what he thought was going to be the ultimate result of the "New Republic," or the "League of Free Nations" -- a world state by any other name. War was, naturally enough, one of the two greatest evils of modern times. The other great evil, in Wells's eyes, was nationalism.

> All through 1917 Wells campaigned for this League. He explained that he
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> > put in that word free because [he] hoped then for republics in Russia and Germany and possibly Britain. [He] did not believe in world peace without revolution and [his] efforts to keep the revolutionary impulse in touch with the peace-making movement were very persistent.[55]

The idealism and passion that were rekindled in Wells's mind by the February Revolution led him to continue to support the Russian government even after the Bolsheviks took over. It is important here to establish how Wells greeted the Bolshevik putsch in order to arrive at an understanding of what his expectations were when he went to Russia in 1920.

Astonishingly, Wells's biographers devote very little attention to this

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[55]H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, vol. 2 (London, 1934) 695.

episode in his life. They offer unsatisfactory explanations, omit discussion of the 1917 situation in Russia altogether, or merely mention it as a brief preamble to describing Wells's 1920 journey. Even D.C. Smith, in his standard 1986 work devotes only a paragraph to this event and concludes that

> by the spring of 1918, Wells knew that if the war was to be a war to end war, it would take strong action, planning, and idealism. That was why he welcomed the Russian Revolution and continued to endorse it no matter what form it took.[56]

How, then, did Wells go about "endorsing" the Bolsheviks? In order to answer this question, one must turn to "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks Some Disregarded Aspects," a long article Wells wrote for the *Daily Mail* on January 15, 1918, a mere two weeks before Russia broke off the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. In this article, Wells blames the western diplomacy, especially the British Foreign Office for having been "caught napping" at the time of the Russian revolution:

> Our diplomacy has floundered pitifully in regard to Russia ever since, struggling with a situation for which its traditions and organisation and ideas fit it about as well as a cow is fitted for catching foxes, and the appeal that the de facto Russian governments make is directed so manifestly not to other governments but to peoples that it has become our duty and an urgent necessity that such common people as the reader and I should ourselves try and get some grip upon this situation.... We mere common persons who have sons to be killed and lives to be spoilt by silly secret treaties, Court intrigues, and antiquated international muddling, have perforce to get on to this business ourselves.[57]

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[56]Smith, *Desperately Mortal*, 235.

[57]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks Some Disregarded Aspects," *The Daily Mail* (15 January, 1918).

After this appeal to the reader, in the best tradition of classical rhetoric, Wells centres his discussion on three great "misconceptions" held by the British about the Bolsheviks. Hindsight permits us to point out that in the first instance, it was Wells himself who was mistaken, not the British politicians, diplomats, and public. After accusing the British navy of not having done anything to save Riga and Kerensky, Wells continues to affirm that the Bolsheviks were not "traitors in German pay," as the "Tory Press" had accused them of being, and that there is "not a tithe of evidence that the Bolsheviks are aided or bought by the German government."[58]

And yet, Wells was not wrong when he concluded in this part of the argument that Lenin appeared to be completely innocent of "German imperialist sympathies." The simple truth was that Lenin and company took the German money but had no intention of siding with the Germans once inside Russia. Solzhenitsyn, who can certainly not be accused of being in any way partial to the Bolshevik leader, described Lenin's state of mind in his 1975 novel, *Lenin in Zurich*:

> The whole problem has come down to this: there is no point in reconnoitering the route through France and England -- Germany is the only way to go, of course, but it must look as though the idea originates not with *US*, but with somebody else.
>
> If anyone doubts it, we must argue along these lines: Your misgivings would make a cat laugh! Can you see the Russian workers believing for a minute that old and tried revolutionaries are on the side of the German imperialists? Are you afraid they'll say that we've "sold ourselves to the Germans?" People have always

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[58]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks."

> said this sort of thing about us internationalists anyway, simply because we don't support the war. We shall prove by our deeds that we are not German agents. In the meantime, all we must think about is going home, if necessary, with the help of the devil himself![59]

Solzhenitsyn's fictional account of the musings of Lenin's feverish brain is indeed based on fact and can be accepted as an historically accurate description of how Lenin came to go along with the so-called "Martov Plan" -- the journey to Russia through Switzerland and Germany.

Lenin did eventually proceed to prove that another point Wells made about the Bolsheviks in this article was not inaccurate. It was Wells's contention that the British public was wrong in thinking about the Bolsheviks as not being "straight." Basing his argument on the Brest-Litovsk negotiations -- at this point they were about to be broken off -- Wells states that the Bolsheviks

> have never wavered from their claim to be doing what is in the end the same thing that we are doing on the Western front and everywhere -- that is to say, appealing against German imperialism to the intelligence, fears, and feelings of the German people. They are trying, as we are trying, to revolutionize Central Europe and so end aggressive militarism in the world for ever.... They believe that they can do this by mental work, by propaganda.[60]

To Wells, this "mental and moral method," as he describes it, if used against Germans, had the potential to do what the military were only to accomplish in November of that year -- end the war. Again, the connecting threads which run through this notion and Wells's love of things Russian is the

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[59]Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Lenin in Zurich* (New York, 1976) 237.

[60]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks."

belief that the revolution must take place in the *minds* and hearts of people, as well as his single-minded willingness to observe historical events and see in them a world revolution or a world state or a world republic by any other name.

In the second place, Wells confirms Levidova's statement that is the first contact with a new country which creates the most solid impressions in relationship to which everything the writer later sees and learns develops: Wells's respect and passion for education, as was established earlier, lay at the heart of his attraction to Russia. According to him, the greatest misconception about the Bolsheviks was that they were thought of as

> ignorant, illiterate, inexperienced men of no account. When a Bolshevik leader meets a Junker, one might imagine Bottom was meeting Theseus.[61]

Basing his assertions on his experiences of 1914 and on his correspondence with Gorky and others, Wells contends that the Bolsheviks, contrary to what the British press writes, are

> much better educated than our diplomatists. Our public has to realize this fact. These Bolshevik leaders are men who have been about the world; almost all of them know English and German as well as they do Russian, and are intimately acquainted with the Labour movement, with social and economic questions, and indeed with almost everything that really matters in real politics. But our late Ambassador, I learn, never mastered Russia. Just think what that means. Hardly any of our Foreign Office people know anything of Russian, of the Russian Press, or Russian thought or literature.... It is they who are ignorant and limited men, and not these Bolshevik people.[62]

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[61]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks."

[62]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks."

In this remarkably plain and common-sensical statement, Wells did not only point out what, it can be argued, may have been the most immediate cause of Britain's and Allies' ultimate failure in their diplomatic relations with Russia -- their lack of language skills. Wells also unknowingly anticipated the sort of criticism that Russian scholars of the post-Gorbachev era would be aiming at the so-called "Kremlinologists" or "Sovietologists." It is sad to realize in these post-Cold War times that throughout the 1960's and 1970's, the scholars who spoke Russian were somehow looked upon, especially by the American academe, as not being entirely reliable, *because* they had mastered Russian. Today, Wells himself would have been greatly amused to see these armies of Soviet "think-tanks" scrambling for jobs and feverishly learning Russian.

The third great misconception about the Bolsheviks, according to Wells, was the notion that they were "trying to climb down to some shabby little patch-up of this war," rather than making sure that a far more "fundamental and final peace" was the ultimate outcome of the war and negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. Wells's ruminations upon this matter proved to be prophetic in many respects, and deserve to be reproduced here at length:

> The Bolsheviks appeal straight to the German people; the cry of "No peace with the Hohenzollerns," the cry that brought the common men of Great Britain, you and I among them, heart and soul into the war, is the Bolshevik cry. Mr. Philip Snowden and Lord Landsdowne and our pacifists of the left and right, the conscientious objector and the frightened Tory, may welcome Mr. Lloyd George's statement that we do not want to change the internal constitution of Germany, but to me that admission is the admission of defeat. It implies the abandonment of the idea of the League of Nations in which a free Germany can be included....

> Peace without a German revolution cannot be a peace. It is impossible to consider any League of Nations in which the German Imperialists can take a share. Such a League of Nations would be like keeping open house with a notorious kleptomaniac as the principal guest. So long as the German imperial monarchy remains, so long will it dominate the universities, the schools, and the press of Germany, and so long will the German mind be poisoned by the poison of nationalist aggression. What is the good of telling fairy tales about the world being tired of war and saying that if we patch up this war with a sort of peace with the Kaiser "Germany will have learnt her lesson?" War will go on for all our weariness unless we set up a new way of government in the earth.... No peace we can make with the Hohenzollern can ever be a real peace; it will be merely a cessation of military operations for five or ten or twenty years. "The war after the war" will begin straight away....
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> The world is nearer exhaustion than most people seem to realise. Famine, social breakdown, pestilence, and world-wide disorganisation are quite near at hand unless we have the wit to arrest the degenerative process. We have to stand up to the task of vast political and economic reconstructions if we are not to be overtaken. But if we seek a mean immediate peace, instead of supporting the Bolsheviks in their bold but profoundly wise insistence upon a peace of the peoples, we shall not achieve that reconstruction because the Hohenzollern tradition will prevent it. We cannot reconstruct the world except in good faith. A cunning, scheming monarchy at the heart of Europe will cripple all our good intentions. We shall not dare to disarm; we shall not dare to have free discussion; the Balkans, all Asia and Africa will be kept in a fever of intrigues and conflict until the Hohenzollern dream is as dead and destroyed as the will of Peter the Great.[63]

Allowing for Wells's obvious anti-German bias, one can legitimately argue that his words here encapsulate, albeit in a sketchy and incomplete fashion, some of the major occurrences in the period leading up to the second world war: the military operations did cease for twenty years (some historians refer to this

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[63]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks."

period as "The Twenty Year Armistice"); a "mean, immediate peace" was indeed brought about only to be made into a farcical struggle for supremacy among the victors, ultimately resulting in what some called the "Versailles Diktat." Finally, as Wells pointed out, there was to be no disarmament, and no free discussion, or very little of it, once such figures as Hitler and Mussolini gained power.

There is an overwhelming sense of pending catastrophe at the end of Wells's article. His attempts here to forewarn the public of the coming "world-wide famine, world-wide brigandage, the cessation of education, the ending of trade and traffic," echoes the themes of some of his most successful "scientific romances," such as *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. One can easily argue that the whole of Wells's work is held together through the introduction of such governing themes as the fragility of human achievement, as the empire succeeds empire, the shadowing of despair implied in the sense that human affairs are never stable. It is perhaps the presence of these haunting themes, remembered and reiterated by Wells throughout his works, which lends a tremendous narrative dignity to even the most politicized of his writings.

There has been a great deal of discussion among Wellsians as to whether or not he was a mere pessimist or a well-meaning but naive optimist in his political writings and endeavours. The relevant issue to be pointed out here is that whatever the final verdict on his mental state may be, Wells never gave up his search for a passage into Narnia for all of mankind, not even in the face of

all the disappointing events that were to take place in the next quarter of a century. To dismiss Wells as a misguided utopian who pursued Russian revolutionary phantoms brings one no closer to an understanding of the contemporary thinking on this subject.

It has been demonstrated that Wells was convinced that his expectations of Russia, formed both before and during his first journey there, were fulfilled in the period leading up to his second visit. In the light of his musings on the February and October revolutions, one can now attempt to address the fundamental issue concerning Wells's links to Russia: did he continue to see the Russian experiment as a harbinger of a new internationalism *after* his 1920 pilgrimmage to the "New Jerusalem?" What did he see in Russia this time?

CHAPTER II

WELLS, THE PARLOR BOLSHEVIK?

...better to burn in the flames of the revolution than to rot slowly in the garbage pit of the monarchy...

Maxim Gorky, *Novaya Zhizn'*, 1917

Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book One

> Our dominant impression of things Russian is an impression of a vast irreparable breakdown. The great monarchy that was here in 1914 ... has fallen down and smashed entirely. Never in all history has there been so great a *débacle* before. The fact of the Revolution is, to our minds, altogether dwarfed by the fact of this downfall.[1]

Wells found it profoundly depressing that the beautiful golden-capped city of 1914, St. Petersburg, had become at the time of his visit in September 1920, dreary, grey, run down, and devoid of the busy little shops he delighted in only six years ago. All the great markets were closed too; trading was called "speculation" and proclaimed illegal -- "the detected profiteer, the genuine profiteer ... gets short shrift; he is shot."[2] A few streetcars passed by every now and then, with passengers hanging on the outside; a handful of official motorcars, left over from the tsarist times, rolled along wretched-looking roads full of holes two or three feet deep. Everyone looked shabby:

> Everyone seems to be carrying bundles in both St.Petersburg and Moscow. To walk into some side street in the twilight and see nothing but ill-clad figures, all hurrying and carrying loads, gives one an impression as though the entire population was setting out in flight.[3]

Sadly enough, Wells's statement here describes equally accurately the Russia of the Napoleonic wars or the Soviet Union of 1940's -- the great migration of people which took place every time a foreign invader threatened Russia.

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[1]H.G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, (London, 1920) 11.

[2]*Russia in the Shadows*, 19.

[3]*Russia in the Shadows*, 17.

There were no drugs or medicines. The hospitals lacked even the most basic materials; operations were performed only once a week, and half the beds were unoccupied "through the sheer impossibility to deal with more patients if they came in."[4] Rationing had been introduced as the only means of distributing some food to an undernourished, weak population:

> The Soviet Government rations on principle, but any Government in Russia now would have to ration. If the war in the West lasted up to the present time London would be rationing too – food, clothing, and housing.[5]

Wells's first chapter of *Russia in the Shadows* gives myriad other details of daily existence in Russia, which, at this time, quite apart from being blockaded by the Allies and suffering from six years of continuous fighting with various foreign enemies, was still in the midst of a fierce and bloody civil war. In its essence, Wells's account of Russia's physical hardships does not differ from the stories brought back by such other Western visitors at the time as Bertrand Russell, Haden Guest, Philip Snowden, and George Lansbury. But what had become of the men of letters, men of science, the artists and writers whom Wells envisaged as the most likely instrument of change in Russia? What had become of the Russian intelligentsia?

The answer to this question was hinted at in Harold Williams's contention that during the Stolypin era (1906-1911), "the devoted, lovable, impractical old

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[4]*Russia in the Shadows*, 23.

[5]*Russia in the Shadows*, 19.

Intelligentsia departed into history."[6] However, some figures of the pre-revolutionary era were still there in the new Bolshevik society: Gorky and his entourage, Shalyapin, the great singer who refused to sing except for pay ("and when the market gets too tight, he insists upon payment in flour or eggs"). In a stirring vignette, Wells describes his meeting with the great composer Glazounov, ending with these words:

> I could see that he was consumed by an almost intolerable longing for some great city full of crowds, a city that would give him stirring audiences in warm, brightly-lit places. While I was there, I was a sort of living token to him that such things could still be. He turned his back on the window which gave on the cold grey Neva, deserted in the twilight, and the low lines of the fortress prison of st. Peter and St. Paul. "In England there will be no revolution, no? I had many good friends in England...." I was loth to leave him, and he was very loth to let me go.[7]

Wells also visited the so-called "House of Science" in Petersburg:

> It was to one of the strangest of my Russian experiences to go to this institution and to meet there, as careworn and unprosperous-looking figures, some of the great survivors of the Russian scientific world. Here were such men as Oldenburg the orientalist, Karpinsky the geologist, Pavloff the nobel prizeman, Radloff, Bielopolsky, and the like, names of world-wide celebrity.[8]

Wells's heart sank at this spectacle of misery and hardship. These woeful remnants of Russia's best minds were all that remained of his would-be "Samurai" elite, of the learned, cultured, vibrant men and women he came to know and admire in 1914.

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[6]"The Passing of the Intelligentsia."

[7]*Russia in the Shadows*, 44.

[8]*Russia in the Shadows*, 39-40.

There was, however, one person who made an indelible impression on him. This was Marie von Benckendorff, now Maria Zakrevskaya, whom Wells had first met in 1914. This glamorous countess now owned only the clothes she wore and was under the protection of Gorky, her husband having been shot by the Bolsheviks. The descendant of an old aristocratic family, she spent a year at Cambridge and spoke English, French, and German; she was therefore useful to Gorky in his colossal project of translating the world's great classics into Russian. Anthony West makes it clear that Wells had fallen in love with "Moura."[9] She acted as his guide, along with Wells's son Gip who had learned Russian earlier at Oundle. She also served as an interpreter for Gorky's long evening talks with Wells. It is important to mention Moura's presence since she had a great influence on Wells. Because of her, Wells would always look back upon his journeys to Russia with a sense of profound nostalgia. The relevant fact to be mentioned here, however, is that Wells makes the following point at the very beginning of *Russia in the Shadows*:

> ... she has been imprisoned five times by the Bolshevist government, she is not allowed to leave Petersburg because of an attempt to cross the frontier to her children in Esthonia, and she was, therefore, the last person to lend herself to any attempt to hoodwink me. I mention this because on every hand at home and in Russia I had been told that the most elaborate camouflage of realities would

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[9]"Moura," as she was also known, had been involved with Bruce Lockhart, the British spy. This is what led to her imprisonment. Anthony West writes that in spite of her precarious situation, "her irrepressible wit and bubbling good humour, and the coolness with which she handled herself under this pressure, made an ineffaceable impression on [Wells]. His liking for her was powerfully re-enforced by the fact that she was an extremely attractive woman, with few inhibitions, a passionate nature and great intelligence." *H.G. Wells Aspects of a Life*, 74.

go on, and that I should be kept in blinkers throughout my visit.[10]

The fact that H.G. Wells, regarded in Russia as a distinguished representative of the British intelligentsia, decided to write about Bolsheviks was enough for politically committed writers both in England and Russia to take notice of and offer comments on *Russia in the Shadows*.[11] Each of these commentators inevitably introduced their own "slight amendments" to what Wells had written. As was the case in 1930's, when politically committed individuals could choose only between two camps -- the fascists and the communists -- so it seemed that in 1920 the world was polarized between pro-Bolsheviks and their opponents. No discussion of this period in Wells's life would be complete without an account of the manner in which *Russia in the Shadows* was received in Britain and elsewhere.

It is a virtually unending task to track down all the comments regarding *Russia in the Shadows*, all the more so because not only were there numerous reviews of it in periodicals and weekly magazines, but because even the daily papers printed countless responses and letters on this topic.[12] The reviews

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[10]*Russia in the Shadows*, 10.

[11]It has been reported in several of Wells's biographies that the five articles which constitute *Russia in the Shadows*, published separately in the *Sunday Express*, increased the circulation of that paper by eighty thousand copies between the time the first and the last article appeared.

[12]There is an extensive list of such items in William J. Scheick and J. Randolph Cox's colossal work, *H.G. Wells A Reference Guide* (Boston, 1988). For years 1920 and 1921, see the following items: 956, 873, 978, 985, 998, 999, 1003, 1006, 1007, 1012, 1017, 1019, 1027, 1028, 1031, 1035, 1036, 1039, 1042, 1050, 1051, 1058, 1068, and 1070.

usually fall into two categories. On the one hand, Wells is said to be giving an impartial and accurate account of the Soviet Russia written by an ideal observer. As the *New Statesman* reviewer put it, Wells

> had every qualification; the faculty of keen and curious observation, the sense of the value of big movements, the natural sympathy with anything that was recognisably a genuine human effort, and that profound yet tolerant disillusionment which comes of long association with the Socialist movement of Europe.[13]

On the other hand, Wells is presented as a wrong-headed, misguided, and "hoodwinked" outsider who presumed that a fifteen day visit to Russia was sufficient for him to become fully acquainted with realities and evils of Bolshevism. Naturally, Henry Arthur Jones was the first to join the fray, having appointed himself Wells's official "flapper." Jones borrowed this title from *Gulliver's Travels*, where "flappers" were attendants who warned the absent-minded Laputan philosophers of obstacles in their path by slapping them in the face with a blown bladder. Jones writes:

> Being impressed with your striking resemblance to the Laputan Philosophers I resolved that I would put aside less urgent business and constitute myself your flapper, in the Laputan sense.[14]

Jones had previously attacked Wells on the basis of his 1918 *Daily Mail* article. Jones suggested that Wells's "laudation of its [Bolshevik] leaders as far seeing statesmen," who were "shining clear" and "profoundly wise" made him a

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[13]"Russia As It Is," *New Statesman*, 11 December 1920.

[14]Cited in Vincent Brome, *Six Studies in Quarrelling* (London, 1958) 58.

dangerous figure.[15] Wells had replied that Jones's letter was

> much too silly to notice in any matter except one. You put "shining clear" and "profoundly wise" in inverted commas as if I had used them for the Bolshevik leaders. This is not the case.[16]

Further exchanges followed. Wells again felt compelled to return to the topic and explain that he wrote that the Bolsheviks were "shining clear" on one issue only ("No peace with the Hohenzollerns!"), and that they were "profoundly wise" in one matter only, that is, in the way in which they treated the "cancer of German monarchy."

> All such qualifying and limiting clauses slip past your hasty, ill-trained mind. You want to rant and nothing will prevent you from ranting

concluded Wells.[17] However, Wells's self-appointed "flapper" would not be silenced. He persevered in his criticism of Wells upon publication of the Russian articles; Wells relates that "a special thud in the mornings always represented another bomb from Jones." On the whole, Jones's arguments centred around Wells's love of Bolsheviks and the fact that, as Jones perceived things, Wells's own "international theories were being translated into facts" in Russia. Wells also carried on with his rejoinders to Jones's remarkably long and vehement letters. In one of his final responses, Wells observed that

> being written at by H.A. Jones is like living near some sea channel with a foghorn. You never know when the damned thing won't be

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[15]Brome, *Six Studies*, 50.

[16]Brome, *Six Studies*, 51.

[17]Brome, *Six Studies*, 52.

> hooting again.... The jester can always invent a quotation. It is his waggish privilege. He says I called Lenin "the beloved Lenin": a lie, out and out, but who is going to trouble about that?... he must have repeated his lie that I called the Bolshevists "shining clear" about a dozen times; he must have said that I am the enemy of no country but my own two or three score times; and he must have called me "my Dear Wells" several hundred times....[18]

Eventually, Wells ceased to pay heed to Jones's attacks, but Jones went on and on, shrilly, relentlessly, not caring that Wells remained silent. For Wells's attention had now shifted towards a more formidable and, in his eyes, a more worthy opponent -- Winston Churchill, at that time a member of the Parliament and British Cabinet Minister. Wells's acquaintance with Churchill had begun some time early in the century. Churchill read everything Wells wrote and on occasion sent him a letter commenting upon Wells's treatment of issues which interested both men.[19] As was the case with Bernard Shaw, Churchill too remained a life-long admirer of Wells, a fact which may easily escape historians who focus their attention on the heated debates and controversies the two sometimes engaged in. Wells had even publicly supported Churchill in a 1908 by-election in Manchester, although one of Churchill's rival was a socialist. Wells's intervention (which reportedly angered Ramsay MacDonald) took the form of a letter published in the *Daily News* of 21 April, 1908: "Mr. H.G. Wells on the Issue at Manchester Why the Socialists Should Vote for Mr. Churchill: An Open Letter

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[18]Brome, *Six Studies,* 56-57.

[19]For a short account of their friendship, see D.C. Smith's informative article "Winston Churchill and H.G. Wells: Edwardians in the Twentieth Century," *Cahiers victoriens et edouardiens* 30 (1989) 93-116.

to an Elector in N-W Manchester." On the other hand, Churchill had been instrumental during the war in proposing Wells's idea on "land dreadnoughts" to military experts: the ultimate result was the tank. Several years later, Churchill was to serve as a witness in a suit brought against Wells by a person claiming that Wells was not the inventor of the new war machine. Thanks in part to Churchill's testimony, the court upheld the general belief that it was indeed Wells who devised the idea to build tanks.

It is clear that the two men respected as well as admired some aspects of each other's work. However, on the question of Bolshevism, there was no doubt in their minds that they stood on opposite sides of the scale. Churchill was anti-Bolshevik through and through:

> There has never been any work more diabolical in the whole history of the world than that which the Bolsheviks have wrought in Russia. Consciously, deliberately, confidently, ruthlessly -- honestly, if you will, in the sense that their wickedness has been the true expression of their nature -- they have enforced their theory upon the Russian towns and cities; and these are going to die.[20]

In his famous analogy, Churchill likened Bolsheviks to a cancerous growth:

> We see the Bolshevist cancer eating into the flesh of the wretched being; we see the monstrous growth swelling and thriving upon the emaciated body of its victim.[21]

Lastly, in what proved to be something of a prophecy, Churchill suggested the immediate cure for this disease:

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[20]Cited in "Churchill and Merejkovsky Reply to Wells," *Current Opinion* 70 (February 1921) 216.

[21]"Churchill and Merezhkovsky," 217

> Let the Bolsheviki drop communism. Let them leave off enforcing this unnatural system which paralyses human effort and dries up the springs of enterprise and wealth. Instantly, the recovery will begin. But then they would cease to be Bolsheviki. They would cease to be communists. They would become only commonplace criminals who had pillaged an empire and installed themselves amid the ruins of its towns.[22]

Lenin was indeed to abandon "communism" the very next year, by introducing the New Economic Policy in an attempt to encourage the peasants to produce more food for the starving city populations. Looked upon by some as the "Golden Age" of the Bolshevik era, this period between 1921 and 1928 was indeed a partial return to capitalist economy. It was also a period of the growth of new labour camps.

Wells's response was in many respects a reiteration of the arguments made in his book, along with some colourful and stinging remarks aimed at Churchill himself:

> Although I am an older man than Mr. Churchill, and have spent most of my life watching and thinking about a world in which he has been rushing vehemently from one excitement to another, he has the impudence to twit me with superficiality.... He believes quite naively that he belongs to a peculiarly gifted and privileged class of beings to whom the lives and affairs of common men are given over, the raw material for brilliant careers.[23]

Furthermore, Wells complained that it was his lot

> to hear and read much anti-Bolshevism during the last two weeks, because the mere attempt to give even so unflattering a portrait of

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[22]"Churchill and Merezhkovsky," 217.

[23]Cited in "Churchill and Merezhkovsky Reply to Wells," 218, as well as Smith's *Desperately Mortal*, 272. See Smith, 563, note 5 for a list of rejoinders by Wells.

> the Bolshevik as I have done, without the customary expressions of abuse, is enough to raise the typical followers of Mr. Churchill to a frenzy. They write post cards and letters; they produce copious incoherent articles; they address muddled letters to "My dear Wells"; they send me propaganda literature wonderfully scrawled upon and marked in blue and red. All this stuff has one characteristic in common with Mr. Churchill's reply: it betrays no trace of a creative purpose; it holds out no hope of any better or finer life for mankind. It is "anti," through and through.[24]

Dazzling as these exchanges between Wells and Churchill may be for students of great English essayists and polemical writers, the relevant issue to be pointed out here is whether or not Wells was indeed a radical pro-Bolshevik, as Churchill, Jones, Merezhkovsky, as well as some modern commentators have maintained. Was this the case indeed? Some scholars persist to this day in perpetuating the belief that Wells turned out to be a mere apologist for the Bolshevik regime. Christine A. Rydel obviously thought "Wells in the Dark" where his views on Bolshevik Russia were concerned. Her article is preceded by a caption which reads "None so blind as those that will not see." Even the most recent publication on this subject is a variation on the same theme: Mary Mayer's 1992 article is entitled "Russia in the Shadows and Wells Under a Cloud."[25] Rydel's contention is that Wells's conclusions regarding Russia of 1920 were coloured by "rosy optimism," whereas Mayer insists that Wells's statements lent legitimacy to Lenin:

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[24]Wells, as cited in "Churchill and Merezhkovsky," 218.

[25]Mary Meyer, "Russia in the Shadows and Wells Under a Cloud," *The Wellsian* 15 (1992) 16-24.

> the fact that as Soviet writers described it, the great prophet [Wells] had not been able to foresee the electrification of Russia and the fact that what he had written about Lenin, of whom he clearly thought highly, could, sometimes with slight amendments, be used as part of the Lenin cult.[26]

Mayer was referring here to a flood of short articles written about Wells by Soviet writers and scholars in the 1950's and 1960's, some ridiculing Wells for having called Lenin a dreamer where his plans for electrification of Russia were concerned. One of these items contains a photograph of an electrical plant with the following caption: "VOT TAM, GERBERT!" ["Take that, Herbert!"].[27] However, where Mayer's statement above is concerned, it would surely be wise to observe that almost any statement by any writer can be used as part of something it was never intended for. For example, Yulii Kagarlitskii's "slight amendments" included reproducing a famous picture of Wells at seventy-nine shaking his fist at an unseen enemy. Kagarlitskii quite unabashedly describes this photograph as "H.G. Wells demonstrating his hatred of capitalism."[28] Wells was, in fact, shaking his fist at a neighbour's sycamore tree whose roots were apparently impeding the growth of his own garden!

The relevant task at this time would be to answer the following questions: What did Wells really think of Bolshevism? What was his assessment of Lenin? In order to do so, one must turn to *Russia in the Shadows*. Wells had already

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[26]Mayer, "Wells in the Dark," 22.

[27]Iulii Kurganov, "Oshibka Gerberta Uellsa," *Leninskaia Smena* (Gorkii) 19 August 1958.

[28]Iulii Kagarlitskii, *The Life and Thought of H.G. Wells*. (London, 1966) 130.

sketched a part of the Bolshevik portrait in the article quoted extensively above.[29] He had stated that the Bolsheviks were well-educated, competent, skilled revolutionaries who spoke several languages and were well acquainted with the realities of European political movements. Wells had of course written that article in 1918, when his knowledge of Russia was several years out date. In what manner did his opinion regarding the Bolsheviks change during his 1920 visit? For change it did.

The clearest statements upon this issue are to be found in "The Quintessence of Bolshevism,"[30] the third chapter of *Russia in the Shadows*. In the first place, Wells points out that the Bolsheviks embody an "idea," as opposed to such men as Denikin, Kolchak, or Wrangel, whom he describes as mere "brigands." This "idea" consisted of giving the land back to the peasants and making peace with Germany. Gliding lightly over "the end justifies the means" ethic, Wells continues his narration by asserting that in order to remain in power the Bolsheviks established the Cheka; in Wells's estimate, this organisation's killings were done "for a reason and to an end" ("apart from the individual atrocities"), unlike the killings of the Denikin regime, characterised as "silly aimless butcheries."[31] Asking himself "Who are these Bolsheviki?", Wells dismisses "the crazier section of the British Press [which describes Bolsheviks as]

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[29]Wells, "Mr. Wells and the Bolsheviks."

[30]Was Wells purposely parodying Shaw's title, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*?

[31]*Russia in the Shadows*, 64.

agents of a mysterious racial plot, a secret society, in which Jews, Jesuits, Freemasons, and Germans are all jumbled together in the maddest fashion."[32] Bolsheviks, declares Wells, are exactly who they say they are -- Marxist Socialists. He adds that he "does not agree with either their views or their methods but that is another question."

Elsewhere in the book, Wells indulges in what can only be described as the debunking of Marxism and, by association, of Bolshevism. He relates that there are hundreds of people in Russia working on the translation of the world's classics, but bookselling is illegal, as is all trading:

> In this matter of book distribution the Bolshevik authorities are clearly at a loss. They are at a loss upon very many such matters. In regard to the intellectual life of the community one discovers that Marxist Communism is without plans and ideas. Marxist Communism has always been a theory of revolution, a theory not merely lacking in creative and constructive ideas, but hostile to creative and constructive ideas.... The Russian Communist Government now finds itself face to face ... with the problem of sustaining scientific life, of sustaining thought and discussion, of promoting artistic creation. Marx the Prophet and his Sacred Book supply it with no lead at all in the matter. Bolshevism, having no schemes, must improvise therefore -- clumsily, and is reduced to these pathetic attempts to salvage the wreckage of the intellectual life of the old order. And that life is very sick and unhappy and seems likely to die on its hands.[33]

It is a matter of historical record that the Bolsheviks were indeed improvising during the first years of their regime. Wells makes it clear that he has many doubts about their ability to build a new world. The Bolsheviks, he argues, never

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[32]*Russia in the Shadows*, 65.

[33]*Russia in the Shadows*, 48-49.

anticipated having to deal with all the empty shops, and buildings, and markets, once they abolished all trading and waited for the withering away of the state and the coming of earthly paradise. They never anticipated all the practical daily obstacles and problems of running a huge country such as Russia. It is a generally accepted historical fact that Lenin himself was utterly surprised when the Bolsheviks took over. He had no real plan of action, as is confirmed by his citing Napoleon -- "On s'engage, puis on voit" -- just prior to seizing power. Once the initial shock wore off -- "it is enough to make one's head spin" is another famous quote from Lenin at the time -- the Bolshevik leader decided to take over the Socialist Revolutionaries' program on land reforms, since he had no illusions about whom the peasants supported -- it was indeed the SR's. Lenin's next decision was to proclaim a dictatorship.

It is in part the result of these decisions that Wells describes in "The Creative Effort in Russia" and "The Petersburg Soviet" in the second half of the book. Wells observes that

> these Bolsheviks are, as I have explained, extremely inexperienced men, intellectual exiles from Geneva and Hampstead, or comparatively illiterate manual workers from the United States. Never was there so amateurish a government since the early Moslim found themselves in control of Cairo, Damascus, and Mesopotamia.[34]

For example, after addressing the Petersburg Soviet, Wells was able to observe the running of this parliament's daily business:

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[34]*Russia in the Shadows*, 91.

> Here speakers rose in the body of the hall, discharging brief utterances for a minute or so and subsiding again. There were shouts and interruptions. The debate was much more like a big labour mass meeting in the Queen's hall than anything that a Western European would recognise as a legislature.... It was in fact a mass meet incapable of any real legislative activities; capable at the utmost of endorsing or not endorsing the Government in control of the platform. Compared with the British Parliament it has about as much organisation, structure, and working efficiency as a big bagful of miscellaneous wheels might have, compared to an old-fashioned and inaccurate but still going clock.[35]

One can surely argue then, that whatever Wells thought of these well-educated, experienced revolutionaries in 1918, he found their lack of experience in governing the country appalling and entirely inadequate in 1920. The simple truth, which Wells recognised, was that Lenin and his followers had no practice and no experience in running a government when the dictatorship was proclaimed and the Constituent Assembly dissolved. They were to acquire this through their bitter and bloody descent into the Civil War.

Why then did the controversy over *Russia in the Shadows* arise? If Wells's opinion of the Bolsheviks was so low, why did Churchill, Jones, Merezhkovsky, and others berate him for "supporting" the Bolsheviks? Why did he support them in his half-hearted fashion? The answers to these questions are provided in part by Wells himself. In the final analysis, after reflecting upon his experiences in Soviet Russia, Wells came to the conclusion that there was no viable alternative to the Bolshevik government in 1920:

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[35]*Russia in the Shadows*, 119-120.

> There are of course a multitude of antagonists -- adventurers and the like -- ready, with European assistance, to attempt the overthrow of that Bolshevik Government, but there are no signs of any common purpose and moral unity capable of replacing it. And moreover there in no time now for another revolution in Russia. A year more of civil war will make the final sinking of Russia out if civilisation inevitable. We have to make what we can, therefore of the Bolshevik Government, whether we like it or not?[36]

Again, the notion of the "race between education and catastrophe" came back to haunt Wells; the sense of urgency which permeates so much of his fiction, as well as non-fiction, was again colouring his judgment. At the very beginning of the book, Wells made the point that

> the dominant fact for the Western reader, the threatening and disconcerting fact, is that a social system very like our own and intimately connected with our own has crashed.[37]

There was absolutely no doubt in Wells's mind that if Russia were not brought back into the community of nation, or rather the "common European house," to borrow Gorbachev's later expression, this collapse would spread and ultimately result in the collapse of Western civilisation itself. The West should therefore help Russia, even if it meant helping the Bolsheviks. Instead of preaching hostility, sending troops, supporting the Whites, and so on, Wells reasoned, the West ought to either keep out of Russia or recognise the Bolshevik government and send humanitarian aid, as well as establish diplomatic and economic ties with it.

Such was Wells's assessment of what he regarded as the only intelligent

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[36]*Russia in the Shadows*, 147-148.

[37]*Russia in the Shadows*, 12.

course of action in 1920, confirmed both in *The Outline of History* (1920) and *An Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), as well as numerous short pieces of journalism. Wells never would change his mind on this matter. Years later, he would write that the Allied invasion of Russia was a great error, that it only strengthened Lenin's position, since he could claim to defending the country from foreign invaders. Whatever he thought of some of the "narrow and doctrinaire" members of the Bolshevik government, Wells was certain that Lenin and other "men of imagination and intellectual flexibility"

> would have been forced to link their system on to the slowly evolved tradition of monetary system, and to come to dealings with the incurable individualism of the peasant cultivator.[38]

And so they did, a year later, with the setting in motion of the New Economic Policy. Wells's argument, however, went further; he maintained that one of the consequences of the Allied invasion was not only that the bolsheviks became more entrenched in their niche of power, but also that they resorted to ever more ruthless and inhuman means to strengthen their position. It was Wells's belief that had normal ties been established with Bolshevik Russia as early as 1918, the contact with the outside world would have greatly softened their tyrannical methods. Thus, Wells argues,

> the new Soviet Russia was the best moral and political investment that had ever been offered to Britain. And our Foreign Office turned it down -- like a virtuous spinster of a certain age refusing a

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[38]Wells, *The Outline of History*, vol. 2, 890.

proposal to elope and bear ten children.[39]

The truth, the only historical truth, is that we simply do not know what would have happened if the West had supported Lenin. How does one assess such hypothetical statements on Wells's part? The fact remains that Lenin, Trotsky, and others did use brutal tactics to suppress every type of rebellion against their regime. Lenin himself authorized execution and the use of the Cheka in suppressing not only the monarchists, but also his own fellow "marxists" -- particularly the SR's and Mensheviks, many of whom he described as "petty bourgeois socialists" in his remarkable booklet *State and Revolution*. One of Wells's early critics, John Spargo, who had been writing extensively on the Russian Revolution, immediately challenged Wells's version of events in Russia:

> My quarrel is not with H.G. Wells, the keen and conscientious reporter, but with H.G. Wells the muddled social theorist, the misguided philosopher.... I submit to H.G. Wells and to his and my readers that by their destruction of the Russian peoples' organs of self-government the Bolsheviki made inevitable a whole series of disasters. They made inevitable the reign of anarchy and looting which Mr. Wells cites as the apparent justification of the terror. They made inevitable, too, the civil strife, the revolts and insurrections which now figure in Mr. Wells's account as independent causes of the present misery. Just as the Bolsheviki brought the revolution of 1905 to disaster, so they sabotaged the democratic forces of the nation which were creating a truly popular government.[40]

While Spargo's contention that the Bolsheviks were responsible for the failure of

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[39]Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 771.

[40]Cited in "H.G. Wells's Views on Bolshevik Russia Challenged," *Current Opinion* 70 (January 1921) 69-70.

1905 is not quite accurate, it is true that the polarisation which was there in 1905 between different marxist factions existed also in 1917. The Civil War itself started between the left -- Bolsheviks -- and the other left -- SR's, Mensheviks, and others --, not so much between the "left" and the "right," that is, between the Reds and the Whites. Even in the camps, later on, the Bolsheviks were concerned less with the monarchists than with other groups which resisted their takeover -- of these, the SR's had been the most numerous. It is indeed to Wells's discredit that in *Russia in the Shadows* he lashed out at the émigres, calling them "politically contemptible" for rehearsing "endless stories of "Bolshevik outrages" and not being capable of any creative political reflection.[41] It may very well be that this lapse of judgment on Wells's part, more than any other statement, angered Dmitry Merezhkovsky, one of the most famous Russian refugees at the time. Merezhkovsky felt compelled to write a famous "Lettre ouverte à Wells." A long-time admirer of Wells, he wrote this letter while living as an exile in Paris, having spent two years in a Bolshevik jail. His bitter reply to Wells includes a long harangue of Maxim Gorky, as well as of Lenin and his "Bolshevik barbarians." It ends with an ardent appeal to Wells to reconsider carefully his attitude towards Bolsheviks:

> Et pour terminer, Mr. Wells, permettez-moi de vous citez vous-mêmes.
>
> Savez vous ce que c'est que les bolcheviks? Ce ne sont ni des hommes, ni des bêtes, pas même des diables, mais bien vos *Marsiens*. Il se passe aujourd'hui, et non seulement en Russie, mais

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[41] *Russia in the Shadows*, 89.

> partout dans le monde, ce que vous avez si génialement predit dans la *Guerre des Mondes*. Les Marsiens sont descendus sur la Russie ouvertement, mais on sent déjà qu'ils fourmillent de toutes part d'une façon souterraine.
>
> Ce qu'il y a de plus effroyable chez les bolcheviks ... c'est qu'ils sont des êtres appartenant a un monde différent; leurs corps ne sont pas les nôtres; leurs âmes, pas les nôtres. Ils nous sont étrangers, a nous enfants de la terre, de toute la transcendance étrange de leur nature.
>
> Vous les connaissez, Mr. Wells, mieux que personne. Vous savez que le triomphe des Marsiens signifie non seulement la perte de ma patrie et de la votre, mais de toute cette planète.
>
> Seriez-vous donc avec eux contre vous-mêmes?[42]

It is not surprising that Wells does not seem to have ever written a reply to Merezhkovsky, although he did not hesitate to respond in his customary energetic fashion to Churchill and Jones.[43] For in spite of his constant attempts to influence Western governments to recognise Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Wells's personal feelings in this matter were far from clear and his support of the Bolsheviks was of a half-hearted nature, partly induced, as was already mentioned, by his fear of the pending world wide catastrophe. This fear on Wells's part is the most important clue in understanding his attitude to Russian events following the First World War. Where his ties to Bolsheviks are concerned, there are two more elements which need to be mentioned here in order to solve the puzzling question of his initial support for them.

In the first place, it is easily conceivable that given the self-made man's

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[42]Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, "Lettre ouverte à Wells," *Révue hébdomadaire*, n.s. 1 (January 1921) 132.

[43]To the best of my knowledge, Wells did not respond publicly to Merezhkovsky, although he may have done so in a private letter.

contempt for the ruling classes and the self-educated man's impatience and lack of sympathy for certain types of intellectuals, Wells would have dismissed such a crucial event as the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly as a necessary and not entirely unjustified act on Lenin's part. It is plausible that Wells saw some similarities between this event and Cromwell's dissolution of the Rump Parliament, as did some other westerners, such as Isaac Deutscher and E.H. Carr.[44] Cromwell's famous words to the members of this Parliament are echoed in Wells's call for a "New Republic" in England when the news of the February revolution first reached him. However, although Wells self-admittedly admired Cromwell as one of the great Englishmen, he did not advocate violent overthrow of the British government. In this sense, Wells can be looked upon as a type of "parlour Bolshevik," thus described in 1921 by Herbert Croly.[45]

In the second place, it was Wells's meeting with Lenin, the "Dreamer in the Kremlin," which cemented his belief that there may yet be a possibility to build a brave new world in Russia. Prior to this meeting, Wells's estimate of Lenin was not entirely flattering. In a letter to an American author, Wells wrote the following:

> Lenin, I assure you is a little beast, like this (followed a drawing of the little beast). He just wants power and when he gets it he has no use for it. He doesn't eat well, or live prettily, or get children, or

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[44]Cromwell was one of Wells's heroes, described by him as a "great Englishman."

[45]Croly writes that "parlour Bolsheviks" differed from "plain Bolsheviks" in their "conviction of the impotence of violence as an agency of radical social amelioration." Croly, "Hope, History and H.G. Wells," *The New Republic* 29 (November 30, 1921) 10.

> care for beautiful things... Lenin is just a Russian Sidney Webb, a rotten little incessant intriguer.... He (Lenin not Sidney Webb) ought to be killed by some moral sanitary authority....[46]

What was it in Wells's meeting the Russian leader which changed his opinion about the "little intriguer?" Wells informs his readers that he had come to the meeting expecting to struggle with a doctrinaire Marxist, but he "found nothing of the sort."[47] Instead, the two men engaged in an all-out debate on the future of Russia and what course of action was needed to save the country from complete ruin. Wells wanted to know specifically what sort of state Lenin was trying to build; Lenin, on the other hand, was curious to know why there were no attempts in England to establish a communist state through revolution. The talk turned to what both men considered to be a necessary task at the time: the "defeat of the Russian peasant en masse," and along with it all those forces of inertia created by what they considered to be the illiterate, static elements of society. Neither man displayed much patience with the great mass of uneducated "moujiks," for they were responsible for slowing down the growth of a new society.

Lenin also discussed the electrification of Russia -- Wells was quite cynical about the Russian leader's chances of success in this endeavour, but he praised some of the educational efforts he had seen. It was Lenin's command of English, frankness, quickness, and intensity which dazzled Wells, even if he did not agree in theory with the Bolshevik leader's convictions: Wells stated that the essential

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[46]This letter is cited in Brome, *Six Studies in Quarrelling*, 66.

[47]*Russia in the Shadows*, 129-130.

difference between them was that he was an "Evolutionary Collectivist" where Lenin was a Marxist, although a more accurate term to describe Lenin -- and this is indeed what Wells meant to say -- would be to borrow Rosa Luxemburg's term -- "volontarist." Wells's encounter with Lenin is an event of utmost importance, since it helped to persuade him that a new socialist state could indeed come into being on the soil of Russia:

> In him I realized that Communism could after all, in spite of Marx, be enormously creative. After the tiresome class-war fanatics I had been encountering among the Communists, men of formulae as sterile as flints, after numerous experiences of the trained and empty conceit of the common Marxist devotee, this amazing little man, with his frank admission of the immensity and complication of the project of Communism and his simple concentration upon its realisation, was very refreshing. He at least has a vision of a world changed over and planned and built afresh.[48]

So, of course, did Wells.

Was this a lapse in judgment on Wells's part? Or is the only proper manner to view Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin as Vladimir Nabokov did -- common criminals distinguishable only by their facial hair? Some critics condemn Wells to this day as a man who accepted and supported both Lenin and Stalin.[49] Such commentators also tend to share the belief that Stalinism was a direct continuation of Leninism -- a matter upon which there is as yet no consensus at all. Thus, Wells's ruminations upon Russia are often dismissed as belonging to the dustbin of history, along with such "fumbles" as, for example, Neville

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[48]*Russia in the Shadows*, 137-138.

[49]Michael Coren, Mary Meyer, and Christine Rydel, for example.

Chamberlain's supposedly naive acceptance of Hitler's little piece of paper.

It is not only a historian's intellectual but also an ethical duty to refrain from passing such historically naive judgments on past generations. Nonetheless, from time to time, a new book or an article is published about H.G. Wells, reiterating ad nauseam that Wells was a silly character who had no morals and was almost single-handedly responsible for endowing Lenin's and Stalin's regimes with legitimacy. Does such scholarship add anything new to our understanding of not only Wells but of "what actually happened," to borrow Ranke's old tenet? Surely it is time now, in this post-Cold War era to lay the ghosts of Henry Arthur Jones and his disciples to rest, and consider Wells for what he was -- an intensely passionate man with a fervent and profound interest in world affairs and the future of mankind. The controversy surrounding Michael Coren's new biography of Wells may very well serve to sell more copies of this book, but there is not a single utterance in it which adds something new to scholarship or is not coloured by Coren's peculiarly strong bias regarding Wells. In an overly politicised age where such pseudo-historians seem to be looking for an "angle" on their topics, one might do well to remember Ranke's other precept, that "every generation is equidistant from God." If this is indeed so, passing definitive moral judgments on dead writers and dead generations is at best unhistorical and belongs to the domain of moral philosophy.

There is one last issue worthy of mention here. In one of the most humorous passages ever written by a serious author upon a serious subject, Wells

built a case against Marx and Marxism in *Russia in the Shadows*:

> I have always regarded Marx as a Bore of the extremest sort. His vast unfinished work, *Das Kapital*, a cadence of wearisome volumes about such phantom unrealities as the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*, a book forever maundering away into tedious secondary discussions, impresses me as a monument of pretentious pedantry.... In Russia, I must confess, my passive objection to Marx has changed to a very active hostility. Wherever we went we encountered busts, portraits, and statues of Marx. About two-thirds of the face of Marx is beard, a vast solemn woolly uneventful beard that must have made all normal exercise impossible. It is not the sort of beard that happens to a man, it is a beard cultivated, cherished, and thrust patriarchally upon the world. It is exactly like *Das Kapital* in its inane abundance, and the human part of the face looks over it owlishly as if it looked to see how the growth impressed mankind. I found the omnipresent images of that beard more and more irritating. A gnawing desire grew upon me to see Karl Marx shaved. Some day, if I am spared, I will take up shears and a razor against *Das Kapital*; I will write *The Shaving of Karl Marx*.[50]

It is noteworthy that some Soviet writers of the Cold War period used Wells's words here in fictitious re-enactments of the Wells-Lenin encounter. In a scene which resembles a non-sequitur Marx brothers routine, Nikolai Pogodin uses several elements from *Russia in the Shadows* to paint an unflattering picture of Wells:

> Lenin: I am listening.
> The Englishman: I, of course, do not believe the rumours about your being a freemason.
> Lenin: So, there are still freemasons around in London? My God, such rubbish!
> The Englishman: (unruffled) I am told that you are poorly acquainted with Russian daily life. It is very hard to get to you. There are so many guards and sentries here. How can you have any real contact with your people?

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[50]*Russia in the Shadows*, 69-70.

> Lenin: My contact with the Russian people does not depend on the guards.
> The Englishman: I plan to write a long book against Marx.
> Lenin: (smiling) That's interesting.
> The Englishman: He bores me.
> Lenin: Who does?
> The Englishman: Marx. I did say Marx, didn't I?[51]

Having thus disposed of Marx, Wells, on the other hand, set forth the notion that "there would have been Marxists if Marx had never lived." In a conversation with Zorin, a young Bolshevik who had returned from America, Wells compared their experiences of struggling to better their sort in a capitalist society:

> We told each other stories of the way our social system wastes and breaks down and maddens decent and willing men. Between us was the freemasonry of a common indignation.
>
> It is that indignation of youth and energy, thwarted and misused, it is that and no mere economic theorising, which is the living and linking inspiration of the Marxist movement throughout the world. It is not that Marx was profoundly wise, but that our economic system has been stupid, selfish, wasteful, and anarchistic.[52]

It is not difficult to agree with some of Wells's statements above. One must simply remember the slums of London at this time, or some of the darker passages from Zola's novels or Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, to bring to mind some of the less appealing and perturbing aspects of capitalist-based economies of the time. Like most intellectuals of the left and some of the right, Wells had the usual reactions to the contradictions of modern day-to-day existence -- to the

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[51]Nikolai Pogodin, *Kremlin Chimes* in *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1973) 136-137.

[52]*Russia in the Shadows*, 72-73.

impressive wealth and jarring poverty which industry brought into being. At the same time, like most Victorians, he believed in science and its untapped future achievements. When it came to pondering *The Salvaging of the Civilisation* (as one of his titles from 1921 suggests), he naturally turned to science as the only real solution to the political problems bequeathed by uneven industrial development, as well as to the divisions between classes which now became the acute social issue of the times. In the ordinary sense, Wells was a planner, rather than a socialist.

CHAPTER III

DISILLUSIONMENT

It is not revolutions and upheavals
That clear the road to a new and better day.

Boris Pasternak, "After the Storm", 1958

Wells's third journey to Russia has been described many times in the standard biographies. It took place in 1934, fourteen years after Wells's encounter with Lenin. During this time, Wells had not been idle in his search for methods to bring about an ideal society. For a short while he dabbled in politics, running as a Labour Party candidate in the 1922 and 1923 elections -- he lost both times, but the Labour Party was to form its first government only a year later. Wells had travelled to the United States in 1921 to be present at the Washington Disarmament Conference. During his 1934 visit there, he met F.D.R. and was impressed by the group Roosevelt had gathered in the "Brain Trust." It was Wells's contention at the time that Roosevelt's New Deal was precisely the sort of socialism Wells had often envisaged, but once he became more acquainted with the individuals who ran the daily business of the U.S. government, his enthusiasm diminished to some extent.

Wells was also present at the League of Nations assembly in Geneva in 1924; he lectured at the Sorbonne in 1927, and addressed the Reichstag in 1929. The connecting theme in all these activities is to be found in Wells's numerous pamphlets, articles, and novels of the period. For example, *The World of William Clissold*, published in 1926, is an eight-hundred page discussion about the methods needed to bring into being a type of new internationalism. Only two years later, Wells would call this refurbishing of his old ideas on world government *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution*. Reiterating

some of his ideas from *A Modern Utopia* (1905), *The Research Magnificent* (1915), *The Salvaging of Civilisation* (1921), and other novels as well as non-fiction dealing with *The Idea of a League of Nations* (1919), Wells continued to call for the creation of an international community of great businessmen, scientists, artists, and intellectuals of all types who would "openly conspire" to bring about a world government by making their own governments obsolete.

Alas, only a year after Wells published *The Open Conspiracy*, the stock market crash put an end to some of these dreams: the great business corporations which were to be the bedrock of Wells's future internationalism were now disappearing into the Great Depression. This great economic crisis in the West brought about a situation where Soviet Russia's economic policies, namely collectivisation and industrialisation, were looked upon as the "progressive" solution. At a time when there seemed to be no relief to the misery and despair brought about by the unemployment in the West, Soviet Russia presented a great contrast indeed, with its first five year plan seemingly keeping everyone employed and contented.

As Arthur Koestler reflected ironically after the Second World War, in the 1930s

> every comparison between the state of affairs in Russia and in the Western world seemed to speak eloquently in favour of the former. In the West, there was mass unemployment; in Russia, a shortage of manpower. In the West, chronic strikes and social unrest which, in some countries, were threatening to lead to civil war; in Russia, where all factories belonged to the people, the workers vied in socialist competitions for higher production outputs. In the West, the anarchy of *laissez-faire* was drowning the capitalist system in

> chaos and depression; in Russia, the First Five Year Plan was transforming, by a series of giant strokes, the most backward into the most advanced country of Europe. If History herself were a fellow-traveller, she could not have arranged a more clever timing of events than this coincidence of the gravest crisis of the Western world with the initial phase of Russia's industrial revolution. The contrast between the downward trend of capitalism and the simultaneous steep rise of planned Soviet economy was so striking and obvious that it led to the equally obvious conclusion: they are the future -- we, the past.[1]

Is it therefore astonishing that books and articles on Russia were highly sought after by readers in the West? Russophiles and fellow travellers renewed their pilgrimages to the "New Jerusalem," with, for example, Bernard Shaw's and Lady Astor's visit of 1931, or Sidney and Beatrice Webb's journey shortly thereafter. Harold Laski, John Strachey, Bertrand Russell, Sidney Hook, Bertram Wolfe, Max Eastman, Arthur Koestler, Emil Ludwig, Malcolm Muggeridge, Romain Rolland, André Gide, Henry Barbusse, and countless other writers, political figures, and thinkers of various kinds either visited Russia or engaged in the great debate on the Soviet Union in the 1930s. There is a number of well-researched studies of the intellectual currents which fed the 1930s renewal of Western intellectuals' fascination with Soviet Russia. For example, Jürgen Rühle's *Literature and Revolution, a Critical Study of the Writer and Communism in the Twentieth Century* (1969), David Caute's *The Fellow-Travellers, Intellectual Friends of Communism* (1973), and Neal Wood's *Communism and British Intellectuals* (1959), all contain a wealth of information on the literary and public

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[1]Arthur Koestler, *Bricks to Babel* (London, 1980) 69-70.

figures' connections with Soviet Russia.[2] Rühle, for example, defines these men and women as "the card-carrying communist and the homeless Leftist, the fellow traveller and the heretic," all playing an equally significant part in his study.[3]

The relevant issue to be pointed out here is that although Wells cannot be defined as a fellow traveller, his encounter with Stalin must be put in the context of the debate of such profound importance to Western intellectuals and pro-socialist thinkers at the time: where does the West go from here? Is Soviet Russia a viable example of the sort of future some "liberal" thinkers envisaged for the rest of the world? Can there be a meeting of minds between the West and the East, Russia being the obvious common ground for any such rapprochement?

The Socialism of the West met the Socialism of the East on July 23, 1934. The interview itself took place in the Kremlin and although it was supposed to last about forty minutes, it went on for nearly three hours, at Stalin's insistence. Wells's first remark was to ask what Stalin was doing to change the world. "Not so very much," was the Georgian's modest reply. The conversation then took on a far more serious tone after this innocuous greeting. It would be redundant to describe here the course of the entire three hour conversation, since there are

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[2]Jürgen Rühle, *Literature and Revolution, a Critical Study of the Writer and Communism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969); David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers, Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven, 1988); Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (New York, 1959).

[3]Rühle, 314.

several detailed assessments of this encounter in Wells's biographies. Suffice it to say that by comparison with Bernard Shaw or Emil Ludwig -- these being only two of the more prominent figures who interviewed Stalin at the time -- Wells had attempted to do something far more constructive and responsible. He tried to engage Stalin in a conversation the purpose of which, it would seem, was to push the Soviet leader towards reform-minded elements in the world, that is, Roosevelt and his "New Dealers." By provoking Stalin with statements which pointed out how old-fashioned and useless Communist propaganda in the West had become, Wells hoped to draw the dictator away from hurling the usual Marxist dogma at his guest and to engage in a meaningful exchange on the future of socialism. But Stalin refused to accept any possibility of rapprochement between the West and the East, drawing arguments from a plethora of Marxist clichés regarding the inevitable demise of capitalism:

> The aim which the Americans are pursuing arose out of the economic troubles, out of the economic crisis. The Americans want to rid themselves of the crisis on the basis of private capitalist economy without changing the economic basis.... Here, however, as you know, in place of the old destroyed economic basis, an entirely different, a new economic basis has been created.[4]

This economic basis had, of course, been built upon the Gulag Archipelago, although public knowledge of such historical facts would only become widespread several decades after the fact.

Wells and Stalin continued to discuss the role of the individual in a

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[4] H.G. Wells *Stalin-Wells Talk, the Verbatim Record and a Discussion* by G.Bernard Shaw, *et al* (London, 1934) 5.

socialist state, the methods of achieving political power, the role of the intelligentsia in revolutionary movements, and even such incidental details as Cromwell's place in history. However, the point over which the two sparred, and which Shaw wholly distorted in the ensuing debate, was the crucial one of the revolution and the Comintern: should the communists use the left-wing tactics and ally themselves with Socialists, moderate socialists, and the other so-called progressive forces, as they had tried to do earlier in England? It is perhaps ironic that the policy which Wells was trying to persuade Stalin to follow had been earlier supported by the Soviet Leader when Trotsky and the so-called "Left" in the party were purged. Indeed, at that time, the *New York Times* had gone so far as to call Stalin a "moderate."

But only a few months after the conversation of Stalin and Wells came the assassination of Kirov, and not long after that the proclamation of the emergency decrees that would give Stalin and the NKVD absolute power, leading to a far more ruthless type of dictatorship than the Nazis were to establish after the *Gleichschaltung*. What emerges from this conversation is the indisputable fact that Wells not only believed in centralized planning and some measure of coercive methods in the running of a country, but that in many respects he also anticipated the theory of convergence between socialism and capitalism that would later be developed by Sakharov and his friends in the concluding phases of the Cold War. Moreover, it is very revealing of Wells's own intentions that nowhere did he mention collectivisation and the brutal consequences to which

this had given rise. Did Wells know about the famine forced collectivisation had brought about in Ukraine? Did he know about the deaths and arrests of millions of Soviets branded as "kulaks" or "enemies of the people?" Malcolm Muggeridge and others who had visited Russia at the behest of Beatrice Webb, had only enthusiastic statements to make regarding Bolshevik policies. Even Arthur Koestler -- later to become one of the staunchest anti-communists in the West -- after travelling in Russia in 1932, spent the next two years working for the Comintern Propaganda Office in Paris. But Muggeridge's attitude and that of Koestler and other Westerners began to change as the results of collectivisation became apparent to foreign journalists and other observers prepared to recognize what was taking place in Russia in 1933. Indeed, in 1930, Stalin himself made the famous "Dizzy with Success" speech in which he criticized certain "overzealous revolutionaries" in the Communist Party for using coercive methods to collectivize the peasant farms in the U.S.S.R.[5]

It is impossible to believe that Wells was unaware of all this. As early as 1931, he had made the following contemptuous comments about Stalin in a BBC Radio Broadcast:

> It was better in any skilled job to have an expert who was not a Communist than a Communist who was not an expert. Stalin had found that out at last. It is a pity that he did not find that out earlier in his career, before he began to lop off the abler of his associates. It is a pity he could not think of it before putting some of his best scientific advisers on trial for their lives last year. But

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[5]Stalin, "Dizzy with Success," in *Works* XII (Moscow, 1955) 197-205.

better late than never.[6]

Wells feared violence and anarchy, was prepared to sacrifice much for international peace and disarmament, but he buried the doubts that collectivisation and other events must have brought to the surface even before the assassination of Kirov, in his single-minded and, as it may appear today, myopic campaign to bring Stalin over to an alliance of reform and progressive-minded humanity that would stretch from F.D.R.'s New Deal to Stalin's Five Year Plans. If this attempt on Wells's part may seem naive in retrospect, the idea was certainly honourable in view of the rise of Hitler and nationalism.

The issue which needs to be thoroughly examined here is Wells's seemingly blissful ignorance of the horrendous violence to which the peasants of Russia were being subjected under his very nose. Why did Wells commit such a lapse in judgement on this matter? In order to answer this question, it does not suffice to state that it was "Wells's *hubris* and tenacity" that prevented him from condemning the mass murder under Stalin, as Michael Coren indicates.[7] Rather, one must consider the intellectual context of these events. While Wells, Shaw, and others wrote a great deal about socialism, they were not in the least bit concerned with the peasants' role in the building of their socialist utopias. The peasants, after all, had all but disappeared in England and the West. But

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[6]H.G. Wells, "Summing Up," in H.R. Knickerbocker et al., *The New Russia* (London, 1931) 124.

[7]Michael Coren, "A Bastard," 50.

this historical observation is also not in itself a[illegible]te to explain the most colossal oversight ever made by Western pundits regarding Russia. One must also remember that the "media" of the day was not instantaneous as it is today: there was no voice for the starving millions in the Ukraine the way there was a multitude of voices reporting, for example, on the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s.

In order to fully grasp the issue at hand, it would be wise to turn to some of Wells's utterances upon the role of peasants in Russia. In the concluding passages of *Russia in the Shadows*, Wells's fears over the possible future "collapse of civilised system in Russia into peasant barbarism" reached a fever pitch in the following passage:

> Nothing like this Russian downfall has ever happened before. If it goes on for a year or so more the process of collapse will be complete. Nothing will be left of Russia but a country of peasants. The towns will be practically deserted and in ruins, the railways will be rusting in disuse. With the railways will go the last vestiges of any general government. The peasants are absolutely illiterate and collectively stupid, capable of resisting interference but incapable of comprehensive foresight and organisation. They will become a sort of human swamp in a state of division, petty civil war and political squalor, with a famine whenever the harvests are bad; and they will be breeding epidemics for the rest of Europe.[8]

Wells's other ruminations regarding peasants are equally replete with an overwhelming sense of contempt for these "unwashed masses"; in the same book, Wells maintains that

> the great mass of the Russian population is an entirely illiterate peasantry, grossly materialistic and politically indifferent. They are superstitious, they are forever crossing themselves and kissing

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[8]Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, 146.

images....[9]

These examples of Wells's resentment and fear of Russian peasantry, reveal the extent to which he was influenced by his friend Gorky in this matter. Wells and Gorky had engaged in long discussions on all aspects of Russian life in the course of their meetings. The two writers held a common belief that workers and other less-educated groups were incapable of governing themselves without the guidance of some sort of an élite. In an article published in Berlin in 1922, Gorky's views on the peasantry parallel Wells's. Using a variety of derogatory epithets to describe Russian peasants, Gorky concludes that

> The Russian intelligentsia, which has tried manfully for almost a whole century to lift those heavy Russian masses, lazily, heedlessly, and negligently wallowing on the ground, to their feet -- I say that this intelligentsia is a victim, a victim of the history of a people which has managed to vegetate in astounding poverty in a land incredibly richly endowed. And at last, the Russian Revolution has brought the inert peasantry to life (which will surely say to the intelligentsia that it is stupid like the sun "for like the sun, it works without profit.").... The intellectual élite, the workers, the creators of culture, have been devoured swiftly but surely by the emerging peasantry.... Now it may be said with certainty that at the price of the intelligentsia's destruction, at the price of the eclipse of the working class, the Russian peasantry has come into its own. [10]

Gorky was writing in the wake of the bloody Civil War and Lenin's New Economic Policy, which seemed to him a step backward from the proper course of revolution. Gorky's attitude to the peasants also elucidates to some extent the

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[9]Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, 88.

[10]Maxim Gorky, *O russkom krest'ianstve*, (Berlin, 1922), translated by Valentin Boss as "On the Russian Peasantry," (Montreal, 1988), MS in author's possession.

motives behind his eventually becoming a supporter of the Bolshevik regime under Stalin, upon his return from a self-imposed exile in Capri. For under Stalin the peasants who had "come into their own," as Gorky put it in 1922, were again being subjected to serfdom, albeit of a very modern type.

It is important to point out that the meeting between Wells and Gorky in 1934 was a disappointing one for Wells. Over the years the two writers had developed a close friendship. They admired each other's work and shared many ideas on literature and politics. The irony of this, their last encounter (Gorky was to die two years later under mysterious circumstances), lies in the fact that the two writers no longer shared the passion for intellectual freedom which had brought them together in Gorky's darker moments, during his 1906 visit to America. Wells wrote in his *Experiment in Autobiography* that by 1934 Gorky had "become an unqualified Stalinite." When Wells attempted to persuade him that it would be a good thing for Russian writers to join the P.E.N. organization, Gorky staunchly refused to admit to the necessity of the freedom of expression:

> The greater the political and social rigidity, I argued, the more the need for thought and comment to play about it. These were quite extraordinary ideas to all my hearers, though Gorky must have held them once.... I must confess to a profound discontent with this last phase of his. Something human and distressful in him, which had warmed my sympathies in his fugitive days, has evaporated altogether. He has changed into a class conscious proletarian Great Man.... And he sat beside me, my old friend, the erstwhile pelted outcast dismally in tears whom I tried to support and comfort upon Staten Island, half deified now and all dismay forgotten, looking sidelong at me with that Tartar face of his, and devising shrewd questions to reveal the spidery "capitalist"

entanglement he suspected me of spinning.[11]

Wells failed in his efforts to persuade the Russian writers he met in Gorky's palatial dwelling to join the "liberal brotherhood of the P.E.N. Clubs," as he called it. He predicted quite accurately that

> In the long run it would be the Russian intellectual movement that would suffer most by this insistence upon making its cultural relations with the outside world a one-way channel, an outgoing of all that Russia thought fit to tell the world and the refusal of any critical return. Mankind might even grow bored at last by a consciously heroic and unconsciously mystical Soviet Russia with wax in its ears.[12]

There is another issue relevant to a complete understanding of Wells's 1934 visit to Russia and his oversight regarding collectivisation. Based on the fact that Wells would never again visit Russia after 1934, as well as some of his statements about it in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), *The Fate of the Homo Sapiens* (1939), and *'42 to '44, A Contemporary Memoir upon Human Behaviour During the Crisis of the World Revolution* (1944), it is painfully obvious that Wells had become a disenchanted Russophile. Just as Maurice Baring never visited the country he loved with such passion after 1914, Wells never went back to the "New Jerusalem" after 1934. Both writers had come to the sad conclusion that almost everything they had fallen in love with in the Russia of the pre-revolutionary era had disappeared. In 1939, Wells wrote:

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[11]Wells, *Experiment*, 810-11.

[12]Wells, *Experiment*, 813. It was not until *Perestroika*, as a result of Gorbachev's policy of *Glasnost'*, that the Soviet writers joined P.E.N.

> The darkest shadow on the Russian outlook today is its failure to reproduce a constellation of first-rate men able to evoke its general intelligence and speak for it to the world. Like most countries today, Russia does not seem to be putting her best men foremost. She does not know how to find them and use them. She goes on being clumsy. Russia is faltering and losing its imaginative appeal. Their inability to deal with her internal difficulties without a series of trials and executions so presented as to be extraordinarily repugnant to the Western mind, and the open and undignified bickering of Trotsky and Stalin, have done much to rob her of her once almost magical fascination.[13]

Gone were the vibrant writers, artists, and scientists Wells had met in 1914. Gone was the sense of Russia's being a slumbering giant slowly awakening to its potential greatness. Instead, Wells's ruminations regarding the whole of Western civilisation -- best summed up in his "race between education and catastrophe" postulate -- began to resemble his gloomy thoughts of Russia. In one of his last writings on the "Russian experiment," Wells talked of

> the intense conflict between a new birth of society and narrower and grimmer forces, that may yet abort the last hopes and creative struggle of mankind. I doubt if this great crisis of suffering is frustrated, there will remain sufficient mental and moral vitality in our race to go on with further efforts.[14]

Wells's expectations of Russia, and the promises of a future liberal utopia Wells envisaged coming into being in Russia were not fulfilled. And although Wells persisted in his tenacious beliefs that Russia was still somehow, to some small degree, the harbinger of new internationalism, it seemed to him, as early as 1931, that she was

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[13]Wells, *The Future of Homo Sapiens*, 255.

[14]Wells, "Foreward," to N. Gangulee, *The Russian Horizon* (London, 1943) 8.

> like a reptile trying to fly before her wings were evolved. She is like some stupendous palaeozoic tadpole trying to walk on land before its legs arrive. The attempt to construct at one bound a vast modern State Capitalism, a single rationalized economic machine, by the methods of despotism under Stalin, has broken down....[15]

In view of such statements on Wells's part, it would be wise to examine the reasons which led him to still continue to believe, to however a small degree, in the eventual success of the Russian experiment. His conversation with Stalin provides the most important clue in the puzzle. In the course of their long debate on the values of socialism, individualism, collectivism, and the meaning of the revolution, the two men sparred over the so-called "technician class," that is, the group of men Wells defined as the middle-class technical workers. It was Wells's contention that the "technical intelligentsia," that is, a group of highly skilled, educated professionals (such as his "Samurai" élite) were essential to the re-organization of the Soviet society. But Stalin argued that although this technical intelligentsia

> can under certain conditions perform miracles and greatly benefit mankind. But it can also cause great harm. We Soviet people have not a little experience of the technical intelligentsia.[16]

Stalin then reminded Wells of all those members of the intelligentsia who opposed the October Revolution and sabotaged the work that followed it:

> You, Mr. Wells, evidently start out with the assumption that all men are good. I, however, do not forget that there are many wicked

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[15]H.G. Wells, "Summing Up," 125.

[16]Wells, *Stalin-Wells Talk*, 10.

men. I do not believe in the goodness of the bourgeoisie.[17]

Wells tried in vain to persuade Stalin that many of these skilled men, who formerly opposed socialism and revolution, were now greatly interested in them. "Your class-war propaganda has not kept pace with these facts. Mentality changes." Again and again, Wells urged Stalin to abandon Marx, the proletariat, and the old-fashioned notion of the class war, in order to keep pace with the great political and social changes of the early 1930s. "It seems to me that I am more to the Left than you, Mr. Stalin," were Wells's daring words to the most powerful dictator of the time, "I think the old system is nearer to its end than you think."[18] It was Wells's belief that if Russia were to recruit its best men for the task at hand, it would again be on its way to the federated socialist utopia of his dreams.

> A wide education, a free intellectual atmosphere, a whole class, not merely of technicians, but of capable men with common ideas and a common sense of responsibility, is called for. An ego-centred autocrat with a political party disciplined to death, a press bureau, and a secret police, is no substitute for that.[19]

In spite of the great disappointment engendered by his meeting with Stalin, Wells found a small remnant of the old Russian intelligentsia in the person of the aging scientist Pavlov. Pavlov still pursued his work on animal intelligence, went to church, spoke freely and openly about the lack of

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[17]Wells, *Stalin-Wells Talk*, 11.

[18]Wells, *Stalin-Wells Talk*, 11.

[19]Wells, "Summing Up," 125-126.

achievements of the new regime as well as about the need for "absolute intellectual freedom if scientific progress, if any sort of human progress, was to continue."[20] After this meeting, Wells's son Gip made the following remark to his father: "Odd to have passed a whole afternoon outside of Soviet Russia."

> That I thought was a good remark. But if we had been outside Soviet Russia, where had we been? That was not so easy. It wasn't the Past. It was a little island of intellectual freedom? It was a scrap of the world republic of science? It was a glimpse of the future? But in the end we decided that it was just Pavlov.[21]

The meeting with Pavlov was a small sign to Wells that it was still possible to salvage the Russian experiment. After leaving Russia for the last time, Wells would still continue to write and think about it to a great extent. He would engage in an extensive debate on the meaning of his dialogue with Stalin in the pages of *The New Statesman*. Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes, C.E.M. Joad, Ernst Toller, Douglas Jerrold, Dora Russell, and J.A. Spender, amongst others, sent letters to *The New Statesman* and exchanged views on some of the major issues raised in the Stalin-Wells talk. Wells himself responded to some of these. It is worthwhile to examine briefly some of the comments engendered by this encounter, since it is through an analysis of such controversies that a historian may arrive at an understanding of the mentality of the time.

Bernard Shaw was naturally the first to comment on what he saw as Wells's inability to raise relevant issues in his talks with the Soviet leader. Shaw's long letter is replete with variations on the following theme:

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[20]Wells, *Experiment*, 816

[21]Wells, *Experiment*, 817.

> Stalin, with invincible patience, again gives Wells a lucid elementary lesson in post-Marxian political science. It produces less effect on Wells then water on a duck's back.[22]

It was Shaw's contention that the Stalin-Wells encounter was a "collision between an irresistible force and an immovable obstacle."

Ernst Toller, the German dramatist who was exiled in 1933, focused on the issue of censorship. He denied Wells's assertion that there was no intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union. Toller was especially impressed, as any writer would have been, by the claimed level of literacy (98%) in Soviet Russia. Toller, having just returned from the Soviet Writers' Congress (which Wells himself had no time to attend), argued that "nowhere is cultural life suppressed; it is encouraged everywhere. Nowhere are spiritual values destroyed; everywhere they have become the possession of the people."[23] Toller's works abounded with elements of doubt regarding the possibility of combining respect for the individual with revolutionary activities, yet even this perceptive and sensitive writer seems to have presented a blind eye to the extraordinarily intricate forms of censorship Soviet writers of the thirties were subjected to. However, his disagreement with Wells on the issue of intellectual freedom is indicative not so much of the fact that he had some sort of a fanatic devotion to Russia, being an utopian pacifist and revolutionary himself, as it is exemplary of the attitude adopted by Western governments and a majority of leading intellectuals toward

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[22]G.B. Shaw, letter to *The New Statesman*, 3 November 1934.

[23]Ernst Toller, letter to *The New Statesman*, 3 November 1934.

the Soviet Union after Hitler's rise to power. It seemed to Ernst Toller in 1934, that

> a new type of humanity is growing up [in Russia], a type which is fundamentally different from the people of Fascist countries. While the intellect is hated and persecuted in Fascist countries, in the U.S.S.R. the working people of the whole country are striving to find an intellectual basis for their life in order to achieve a living relationship with the great cultural values of the past and the present.[24]

Toller never joined the growing community of German exiles in the U.S.S.R. -- men and women who were pursued by the Gestapo only to eventually lose their lives at the hands of the NKVD during the Purges, or at the hands of the Gestapo itself -- when, following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Stalin treacherously repatriated German Communists.

One wonders at the light-hearted fashion in which other individuals responded to the Stalin-Wells talk. One reader -- later to achieve recognition as an anthropologist -- of the *Statesman* sent the following to the editor:

Sir,--

"Mr Stalin," said H.G.,
"I want to make you see
That it's only the beautiful and true
Can pull humanity through."

Stalin
Answered: "Darlin',
It's plain that politics
Are not your bag of tricks."

H.G. retorted: "Class war
Is to my mind such a bore.

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[24]Toller, letter to *The New Statesman*.

Now in science
I place much more reliance."

Stalin soliloquised: "It looks
As if that man better stick to books.
He has such an extremely rum
Idea of the shape of things to come."

Geoffrey Gorer[25]

In the same vein, "Kipps in the Kremlin," a satiric fictional reconstruction of the interview, published in the *Saturday Review*, likens Wells to two of his most famous fictional characters, Mr. Polly and Mr. Kipps, bathetic figures completely out of depth in the face of a ruthless "Dictator of the Proletariat":

> The little Englishman retreated before the Dictator with white face and trembling cheeks. He felt and looked like Mr. Polly in a similar precarious position. As he went backwards, he fell over a travelling trunk in the corner of the room. The accident relaxed the tension. Stalin roared with laughter, while Mr. Wells picked himself up and resumed his shattered poise of the Intellectual.
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> "Pardon, mon cher ami," said Stalin. "You reminded me of a Menshevik whom I shot with this very pistol in 1917."[26]

Wells's attempts to persuade Stalin to forsake Marxist dogma and join Roosevelt were in general looked upon as a failure. Malcolm Cowley portrayed Wells as an ineffectual Utopian, pursuing his own ideas, only to realise at the end of his talk that Stalin could not be liberalized. Wells's urging Stalin to unite with Roosevelt against the obstacles to "universal freedom and abundance" is presented by Cowley as utterly ludicrous:

> Imagine a Mohammedan missionary setting out to convince the

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[25]Geoffrey Gorer, letter to *The New Statesman*, 10 November 1934, 660.

[26]"Kipps in the Kremlin," *Saturday Review* 158, 25 August 1934, 7.

> Pope that he ought to renounce the Bible and make a pilgrimage to Mecca, after being circumcised. Then imagine Wells in the Kremlin, if you can.[27]

Even John Maynard Keynes, whose response was one of the least partisan ones, concludes that his

> picture of that interview is of a man struggling with a gramophone. The reproduction is excellent, the record is word-perfect. And there is poor Wells feeling that he has his one chance to coax the needle off the record and hear it -- vain hope -- speak in human tones.[28]

Wells continued to respond to some of his critics in the pages of the *Statesman*. For the most part, the debate was carried on by him and Bernard Shaw, until, as in 1914, the two writers tired of needling each other. Wells, however, never ceased to reflect on his Russian experiences. In 1939, he published *The Holy Terror*, a long rambling novel portraying the rise to power of a character called Rud Whitlow. Satirising such figures as the fascist leader Sir Oswald Moseley -- whom Wells thoroughly despised -- in the person of Sir Horatio Bohun, the novel is a fictional indictment of both the Stalin and Hitler regimes. Wells's disenchantment with Stalin in the novel parallels to some degree Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, written at about the same time. In *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, also published in 1939, Wells makes it clear that "like most of the world, [he] was amazed at those strange public trials and the killing-off of,

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[27]Malcolm Cowley, "H.G. Wells in the Kremlin," in *Think Back on Us ... a Contemporary Memoir of the 1930s* (London, 1967) 85.

[28]John Maynard Keynes, letter to *The New Statesman*, 10 November 1934.

among others, a majority of the original revolutionaries."[29] One must remember that these Moscow Trials were widely written about in the West by journalists and lawyers such as Dudley Collard, whose assessment was that the trials were "conducted fairly and regularly according to the rules of procedure, that the defendants were fully guilty of the crimes charged against them," and that all the British and American correspondents present at the trial of Radek shared his view. Furthermore, it was Collard's conclusion that he should like to express his "sympathy with the Soviet Government and the people of the U.S.S.R. in having had this series of appalling crimes committed in their country and to offer his congratulations to them in having caught the men responsible."[30]

In view of such statements, later proven to be so absurdly and tragically inaccurate, it is well to remember that Wells was one of the first so-called "progressive" writers in the West to recognize the Moscow Show Trials for what they were: a perverse example of the methods used by Stalin's NKVD to control and liquidate the old Bolshevik guard, as well as anyone else who dared to criticise Stalin's regime. Furthermore, although he once described Stalin as "honest and strong and human," Wells reveals that he was "disillusioned about him [Stalin] mainly by those foolish films of personal propaganda," such as *Lenin in October* in which Stalin, although he played a very minor role in the

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[29]Wells, *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, 259.

[30]Dudley Collard, *Soviet Justice and the Trial of Radek and Others* (London, 1937) 82, 106.

revolution, is portrayed as the Great Leader giving out orders to capture strategic points in the city.[31]

Wells showed an ability for a finer shade of analysis in one of his last assessments of the situation in Russia. He argued, among other things, that there was something manifestly wrong with the head of the U.S.S.R.:

> The organization at the head of things must be radically wrong to be put out of gear by a mere personal feud [between Stalin and Trotsky]. It must be framed as to eliminate good types of mind and promote mediocrities.[32]

Therein lies the most important clue in the mystery of Wells's continued involvement with Soviet Russia in the face of all the evidence that seemed to point out what a ruthless dictatorship it had become. For all the disappointments Wells came to feel about the great Russian experiment, it was his firm belief that if only all the mediocre minds of the Communist party, that is, all the *apparatchiks*, were replaced by the type of first rate Russian intellectuals Wells knew and admired, all would be for the best, again, in the best of all possible worlds. Was Wells grasping at straws? Some of his readers thought so. It is precisely this attitude on Wells's part that led a perceptive *New Statesman* reader to describe Wells as an "incorrigible Panglossian optimist," for like Voltaire's Panglosse, Wells interpreted even the most hideous instances of oppression in Soviet Russia as a necessary step on the road to eventual

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[31]Wells, *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, 263.

[32]Wells, *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, 261-262.

enlightenment. As was the case with Maxim Gorky in 1918, Wells's faith in the goodness of mankind, in people's ability to use reason and will to right certain wrongs, kept pulling him away from the stance of an objective observer of man's inhumanity to man. In the aforementioned article on the peasantry by Gorky, there is an echo of Wells's final thoughts on Russia:

> ... where -- it may be asked -- is that kind-hearted, thoughtful, Russian peasant, that indefatigable seeker after truth and justice whom Russian novelists in the nineteenth century used to describe so beautifully and so convincingly to the world?
>
> In my youth, I tried hard to find such types in the villages of Russia, but I failed in my search. The type I came across most often was a sober realist, a cunning sharpie who knew far well how much it was to his advantage to present a simple and naive façade to the rest of us.[33]

Gorky's "cunning sharpies" were precisely the sort of men who came to run the U.S.S.R. after the 1920s. That Wells was well aware of this fact there is no doubt. Witness the following passage from *The Fate of the Homo Sapiens* in which Wells discusses J.D. Littlepage's *In Search of Soviet Gold*. This book by an American mining engineer in Soviet Russia is the book Wells admits having learnt the most from:

> At the Littlepage touch the vast, sinister phantoms of Trotskyite conspiracies and organized capitalist sabotage vanish from the scene, the confessions of the accused join the confessions of sorcerers during the witch mania, and we see the human reality of incompetent men trying to cover up the mess they are making of things, of wrongfully-appointed men holding on to their jobs by trick and subterfuge, of hates and jealousies, of elaborate misrepresentations to save the face of groups involved in a common failure.... The head does not know whom to believe, grows

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[33]Maxim Gorky, "On the Russian Peasantry," 8.

> suspicious and incalculable. The impulse of most of us when we cannot hit accurately, is to hit hard. The shootings become understandable; take on the quality of necessity.[34]

It would seem that well in advance of Solzhenitsyn's novels, Ginsburg's memoirs, or Robert Conquest's historical accounts of the horrors of Stalinism, Wells had some notion of the deeper reasons which led many Russians and Westerners alike to turn a blind eye to the regime which proved itself far, far more monstrous than Hitler's Third Reich, in the sense that Stalin -- as is now commonly accepted -- killed many more people than did the Nazis with their Final Solution. Numbers alone cannot be decisive, of course, in making such parallels, but it is noteworthy that even today there is a revival of the myth of the "strong hand" in Russia, that is, the notion that primitive or idiosyncratic societies such as Russia "need" Stalin-like dictators to keep them on the road to progress and ever-lasting bliss. Even in the West, such views are uttered by many members of the media or commentators on post-Soviet Russian affairs. Wells's ruminations on Russia in the 1930s may resemble "Panglossian fantasies" to the post-Cold War readers, but is this perhaps not due to the fact that the readers of today do not share the same Victorian and Edwardian tendency of Wells's to believe that mankind ought to strive towards some final disposition of things? The death of ideology may have cured us of this.

Wells's final reflections in his *Experiment in Autobiography* provide a seemly albeit gloomy conclusion to this discussion:

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[34]H.G.Wells, *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, 261.

> ... I felt that Russia had let me down, whereas I suppose the truth of what has happened is that I had allowed my sanguine and impatient temperament to anticipate understandings and lucidities that cannot arrive for many years.... I had started out to find a short cut to the Open Conspiracy and discovered that, by such abilities as I possess, there is no short cut to be found to the Open Conspiracy.
>
> I had expected to find a new Russia stirring in its sleep and ready to awaken to Cosmopolis, and I found it sinking deeper into the dope-dream of Sovietic self-sufficiency. I found Stalin's imagination invincibly framed and set, and that ci-devant radical Gorky, magnificently installed as a sort of master of Russian thought.... There has always been a certain imaginative magic for me in Russia, and I lament the drift of this great land towards a new system of falsity as a lover might lament estrangement from his mistress.[35]

Wells appears, for a while, to have cast the Russians in the role of the noble savage. He had hoped quite simply -- naive as this may seem today, in the shadow of the U.S.S.R.'s collapse -- that the faith of the Russian intelligentsia in socialism would lead the more hesitant West into a better world.

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[35]Wells, *Experiment*, 820-21.

CONCLUSION

His death on August 13, 1946, at the age of 79, came with a shock. England without H.G. Wells, to many of us, will hardly be England. "Heavens, what a bourgeois!" Lenin exclaimed of him after a long and famous interview. Translated out of Marxian into English that reads: "Heavens, *what* an Englishman!"

John Middleton Murray, *Adelphi*,
October-December 1946.

In his *Portraits from Memory*, Bertrand Russell related the circumstances of his first encounter with H.G. Wells. The meeting took place

> in 1902 at a small discussion society created by Sidney Webb and by him christened "The Co-efficients" in the hope that we should be jointly efficient....
>
> I had never heard of Wells until Webb mentioned him.... Webb informed me that Wells was a young man who, for the moment, wrote stories in the style of Jules Verne, but hoped, when these made his name and fortune, to devote himself to more serious work.[1]

This would indeed prove to be the case. Wells would become, in Russell's estimate, "an important force towards sane and constructive thinking both as regards social systems and as regards personal relations."[2] In the ensuing years, Wells became involved in the activities of the Fabian Society, only to resign in 1908 after the Amber Reeves scandal. By that time Wells had already become devoted to various other Socialist causes. He had become acquainted with such figures as Shaw, the Webbs, G.D.H. Cole, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), G.K. Chesterton, and would go on to meet almost every major political, literary, and public figure of the first half of this century. By the time of his first visit to Russia, Wells had travelled a long way towards fulfilling his ambitions of devoting himself to "more serious work," as well as towards becoming a prototype of the modern *auteur engagé*. Apart from his "scientific romances" and Dickensian

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[1]Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory* (London, 1956) 76-77.

[2]Russell, *Portraits from Memory*, 80.

novels (such as *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly*), Wells had to his credit, by the beginning of the second decade of this century, such politically committed works as *A Modern Utopia* and *The New Machiavelli*.

Wells's accomplishments after leaving the Fabian society have been discussed in numerous literary and biographical volumes. This early fame as a writer of fantastic novels and a member of the Fabian Society, was succeeded by his reputation as a social novelist, propagandist, political satirist, journalist, teacher, inventor, would-be politician, historian, popularizer, encyclopedist, and so forth. At various times Wells has been labelled a prophet, "super-journalist," world state crusader, socialist utopian, irreverent cosmopolitan, or a "*philosophe* of the Darwinian age." Although Wells himself sometimes joined in inventing labels for his life-long activities, at one point describing himself as a "Republican Radical in Search of Hot Water"[3] or a "human ecologist," there is ultimately one label upon which both Wells and his critics can agree: Wells was, above all, an educator, committed to influencing the direction of his society and ultimately of the world. It is this particular streak of didactitism in Wells's character and thought -- his need to educate and therefore to *lead* others (in the original Latin meaning of the term) -- which ties him to the central figures of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Russia. For what both Wells and such Russian thinkers as Herzen, Belinsky, Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Plekhanov, and

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[3]This being part of the title of his pamphlet *The Travels of a Republican Radical in Search of Hot Water* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1939).

Korolenko held in common was their pursuit of an ideal society as well as an intellectual's preoccupation with history, or, in the words of Sir Isaiah Berlin, a preoccupation

> not so much with history as with patterns of history, with historicism, with the laws of history, with the idea that history in some sense is subject to some kind of pattern which is inexorable and inevitable, through which all human groups, nations, cultures must necessarily go.[4]

As intimated above, Wells devoted a great deal of his time towards devising means to spare mankind from following some of those "inevitable" paths -- such as warfare and nationalism -- before creating the sort of ideal society he himself envisaged upon his return from Russia in 1914. Wells's attraction to Russia was based not only on intellectual and even emotional affinities with the democratic intelligentsia of tsarist Russia, but on real expectations that a genuine socialist order might emerge in Russia before it did so in the West. In our own day, in a scientific key, Wells would have appreciated Andrey Sakharov's concept of a "convergence of civilizations,"[5] or Solzhenitsyn of *The First Circle*.

What particularly drew him to Russia was the passionate attachment of its intellectuals to ideas, a quality that may now be vanishing under the impact of the so-called capitalist reforms in post-*Perestroika* Russia, accompanied by what Russian poet Yevtushenko recently termed "McDonaldization" of Russia.

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[4]Isaiah Berlin, "The Russian Preoccupation with History," transcript of BBC Radio 3 broadcast, 24 July 1974, (tape no. TLN 50/TX1147B) 1.

[5]Sakharov's vision was that of a future global community which would combine the best elements of capitalism and socialism.

But this is precisely the quality which has attracted many others to Russian culture. It is linked not only to the great literary tradition associated with the names of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Chekhov, Gorky, and other writers who were being discovered in England by Wells's generation, but to a philosophical temperament and quest for truth described so clearly by Sir Isaiah Berlin in the following quote:

> [The Russians'] preoccupation with the structure of history, quite apart from its validity or invalidity, is something which appears to me to be peculiar to the Russians and to ricochet from them on to the rest of the world. It comes from the West, of course, it comes from the Germans, it comes from Hegel, it comes from Saint-Simon in France, it comes perhaps from some of the thinkers even of the French enlightenment. It comes ultimately from the Judao-Christian tradition of a theodicy, of mankind historically pursuing certain divine goals. That is where it comes from, but in Russia it takes peculiarly concrete forms, because while in the West it stills remains something in the realm of theory, which intellectuals and ideologists and professors discuss, in Russia it's actually lived in the way in which people in the West do not live their ideas. Not with that degree of intensity, not with that degree of dedication and not, one may say, with that degree of practicial effect, both successful and disastrous.[6]

Following his encounter with Stalin, Wells's twenty-year love affair with Russia diminished in its intensity. Ivan Mikhailovich Maisky, Soviet ambassador to Britain at the time, as well as Wells's long-time reader and admirer, wrote in his memoirs that

> the harmony of our relations with Wells came to be disrupted more and more often. Cracks and misunderstandings appeared.... What was the matter? Why did our relations with Wells after 1934 take

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[6]Berlin, "Russian Preoccupation," 18.

on such a lopsided and even contradictory character?[7]

In a not uncharacteristic marxist fashion, Maisky's answer was twofold. In the first place, he argued that it was Wells's own disposition which made it hard for him to apply himself to any sort of "collective action," since Wells was, in Maisky's view, "an individualist of the purest type."[8]

Secondly, Maisky relates that after his return from Soviet Union in 1936, Wells suddenly appeared to him in a worried and anxious state and asked the following blunt question: "What is going on over there?" Wells was naturally referring to the Moscow Trials and the beginning of "Ezhovshchina," the most vicious two year period of Stalin's rule of terror. Maisky states:

> I, of course, could not provide Wells with any convincing explanation of the events occurring in the Soviet Union. Wells went away completely dissatisfied and after that avoided meeting me.[9]

In attempting to elucidate Wells's estrangement from Russia, Maisky never directly condemns the purges of 1936-38, but proceeds only so far as to put the blame for this and the Western intelligentsia's turning away from the U.S.S.R. on Stalin's personality cult.

There is a sense in which one can agree with Maisky's assessment of Wells as a complex, even paradoxical figure. Nowhere is this more manifest than in his attitude towards things Russian. Wells was both fascinated and appalled

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[7]I.M. Maisky, *B. Shou i drugie* [*Bernard Shaw and Others*] (Moscow, 1968) 80-81.

[8] Maisky, *B. Shou*, 82.

[9]Maisky, *B. Shou*, 82.

by the old and the new Russia. He admired Lenin, but, like his friend Gorky, could not bring himself to believe in Lenin's simplistic division of men into classes. He had a genuine devotion to socialism, but despised marxism. Although he thought communism of his time hopelessly mired in stagnation and dogma, he continued to provide money to communist and "fellow-travelling" causes. He was not very fond of Trotsky, yet one of the last gestures before his death in 1946 was to lead a group of various British public figures to petition the Nuremberg war-crimes tribunal to disprove the alleged conspiracy between Trotsky and the Nazi party.[10] In 1924, Trotsky had written a scathing attack on Wells, entitled "H.G. Wells and Lenin the Philistine Discourseth on the Revolutionary," but this did not prevent Wells from seeking justice on Trotsky's behalf two decades later.[11]

Although Wells's love of Russia faded after 1934, it was to be rekindled on three separate occasions. When the U.S.S.R. came to the aid of the Spanish Republic in 1936, according to Maisky, Wells's attitude to Stalin's regime softened somewhat. Maisky also relates in his memoirs that after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22 1941, "Wells's hatred of Hitler and Mussolini came

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[10]Trotsky had been accused by the Soviet authorities of conspiring with the Nazi party and convicted in absentia. Other names appearing on the petition included Koestler and Orwell. "Trotsky Data Asked of Nuremberg Tribunal," *New York Times* 27 March 1946.

[11]Leon Trotsky, "H.G. Wells and Lenin the Philistine Discourseth on the Revolutionary," *The Labour Monthly* 6 (June 1924) 411-420. Also see Trotsky's "Their Morals and Ours" in *Basic Writings of Trotsky*, edited by Irving Howe (New York, 1963) 370-373.

to a boiling point".[12] From that point onwards, Wells campaigned vigorously for the opening of the Second Front which did eventually help the Red Army in its struggle against Hitler. Lastly, after the remarkable victory over Hitler's armies at Stalingrad in 1943 -- a battle which is still described as the most brutal one in the history of warfare -- Wells experienced one last renewal of his attraction to Russia. During his last meeting with Maisky, Wells expressed his conviction that the Stalingrad victory signalled not only the utter destruction of Hitler and fascism, but also the dawn of the time when one could seriously plan a future world government. "As you can see, history turned out to be merciful to my plans and conceptions," was one of Wells's last remarks to Maisky.[13]

Maisky, like many others, had grown sceptical of Wells's optimism regarding world government. Two years earlier, George Orwell had expressed the same sentiment in "Wells, Hitler and the World State." Orwell's criticism of Wells focused on what he perceived to be Wells's inability to understand that the forces governing the world of 1941 were "chiefly the atavistic emotion of patriotism," along with "racial pride, leader-worship, religious belief" and "love of war."[14]

Is this true? Was Wells, in Orwell's words, "too sane to understand the

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[12]Maisky, *B. Shou*, 89.

[13]Maisky, *B. Shou*, 99.

[14]George Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol 2, *As I Please 1943-1945* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1970) 141.

modern world"?[15] Orwell's unhesitating answer would be to point out that all Wells had to offer against "the screaming little defective in Berlin" was

> the usual rigmarole about a World State, plus the Sankey Declaration, which is an attempted definition of fundamental human rights, of anti-totalitarian tendency....
> ... it is the same gospel as he has been preaching for the past forty years, always with an air of angry surprise at the human beings who can fail to grasp anything so obvious.[16]

Orwell reproached Wells for his failure to grasp the fact that Hitler was a real danger to civilisation, and that modern science, Wells's god, was used "in the service of ideas appropriate to the Stone Age."[17] Although Wells's optimism regarding Hitler's eventual fall proved to be justified four years later, Orwell's remarks were in many respects perceptive and incisive. There is indeed a sense in which Wells can be regarded as a type of late nineteenth century optimist who could not accept the notion that modern movements and ideologies were in many respects retrograde. Although Maisky and Orwell were ideologically irreconcilable -- for Maisky, although an Old Bolshevik, ceased being a free agent with the Purges, if not earlier -- curiously, both the Englishman and the Russian came to almost the same assessment of Wells as a man who was spiritually and intellectually a "latter-day heir to the great nineteenth century utopians."[18] And yet, Orwell argued,

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[15]Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State," 145.

[16]Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State," 141.

[17]Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State," 143.

[18]Maisky, *B. Shou*, 101.

> is it not a sort of parricide for a person of my age (thirty-eight) to find fault with H.G. Wells? Thinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells's own creation....
>
> ... I doubt whether anyone who was writing books between 1900 and 1920, at any rate in the English language, influenced the young so much. The minds of all of us, and therefore the physical world, would be perceptively different if Wells had never existed. Only, just the singleness of mind, the one-sided imagination that made him seem like an inspired prophet in the Edwardian age, make him a shallow, inadequate thinker now.[19]

Did Orwell believe his own words here? Or was this condemnation of Wells occasioned by his sadness at the realisation that, as Orwell put it,

> the literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism has not yet appeared and is barely imaginable. As for the writer, he is sitting on a melting iceberg; he is merely an anachronism, a hangover from the bourgeois age, as surely doomed as the hippopotamus.[20]

Whatever Orwell's motivation for writing this unflattering essay on Wells, it remains that Wells's influence on the generation of writers coming to terms with the political anxieties of the 1930's cannot be overestimated. The influence of *A Modern Utopia* on Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *1984*, has been acknowledged at various times by the three authors. Well's vision of a world utopia created and administered by the "samurai" elite stimulated the consciousness of some of the most prominent political writers of our century.[21]

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[19]Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State," 143.

[20]George Orwell, "Inside the Whale," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (Harmonsworth, Middlesex, 1980) 48.

[21]Young Eric Blair borrowed *A Modern Utopia* from his neighbours so often that they finally let him keep it. See Charles L. Elkins, "George Orwell, 1903-1950," in *Science Fiction Writers*, edited by E.F. Bleiler (New York, 1982) 233-241.

It is true that the rise of ideologies of communism and fascism, as well as their liberal adversaries, in Wells's lifetime, and the passionate allegiance of mankind to these ideologies made Wells appear as an irrelevant utopian thinker. However, the collapse of these and other ideologies in the post-Cold War era, and the renewal of self-determination and the perverse evil of nationalism, have made the remedy Wells looked and fought for relevant again, for it was Wells's despair at the fratricide and destruction wrought by nationalism that made him so passionate a seeker for a way out of mankind's ills.

Like so many others, Wells made the mistake of initially identifying Soviet communism with the socialism of the West. As was pointed out above, Wells's initial enthusiasm and passionate interest in Russia were replaced by a mixture of admiration and scepticism for Lenin's vision of the future Russia, only to end in profound disenchantment with Stalin's transformation of Russia into a "rock-pool of mental stagnation and increasing backwardness due to the suppression of free expression."[22] In Wells's words,

> Russia in the shadows displayed an immense inefficiency and sank slowly to Russia in the dark. Its galaxy of incompetent foreman, managers, organisers and so forth, developed the most complicated system of self-protection against criticism, they sabotaged one another, they intrigued against one another....
>
> ... hero worship took possession of the insurgent masses. The inevitable Champion appeared. They escape from the Czar and in twenty years they are worshipping Stalin, originally a fairly honest, original ambitious revolutionary, driven to self-defensive cruelty and inflated by flattery to his present quasi-divine autocracy. The

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[22]Wells, *Guide to the New World A Handbook of Constructive World Revolution*, (London, 1941), 128.

> cycle completes itself and we see that like every other revolution, nothing has changed; a lot of people have been liquidated and a lot of other people have replaced them and Russia seems returning back to the point at which it started, to a patriotic absolutism of doubtful efficiency and vague, incalculable aims.[23]

At the end of his life, between the late 1930's and 1946, Wells's hostility towards Stalin's Russia was very clearly expressed in several such statements. And yet, Wells's writings on the Soviet Union of the 1930's and 1940's do not have the edge and fierce clarity of Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, for example. Is this due to the fact that Wells was never a member of some clandestine communist organisation, like Koestler, Ignazio Silone, André Malraux, Richard Wright, Bertram Wolfe, or Romain Rolland, to name a few, and therefore did not observe the hypocrisies and evils which the adherence to this ideology produced? Most scholars would agree unhesitatingly with this explanation. And yet, upon further thought, a careful reader of Wells has no choice but to question such ready-made judgements, handed down to Wellsians since Orwell's pivotal "Wells, Hitler and the World State" essay.[24] Upon reading *The Holy Terror*, written by Wells at the same time as Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, it becomes clear that Wells understood only too well how easily revolutions turned into dictatorships and how easily well-meaning men and women came to accept propaganda and play an active part in perpetuating the horrors of a police state. Wells, quite simply, was not willing to go from one extreme to another, that is, from supporting socialist and

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[23]Wells, *The New World Order*, (London, 1940), 51.

[24]This is still the most often quoted source in recent Wells criticism.

communist causes only to become the sort of staunch anti-communist exemplified by Koestler, Silone, and others.

In the final analysis, is this perhaps a more constructive and historically accurate stance? Isaac Deutscher, himself an ex-Communist, thought so:

> the pedagogical pretensions of ex-Communist men of letters seem grossly exaggerated....
>
> Worse still is the ex-Communist's characteristic incapacity for detachment. His emotional reaction against his former environment keeps him in its deadly grip and prevents him from understanding the drama in which he was involved or half-involved. The picture of communism and Stalinism he draws is that of a gigantic chamber of intellectual and moral horrors. Viewing it, the uninitiated are transferred from politics to pure demonology. Sometimes the artistic effect may be strong -- horrors and demons do enter into many a poetic masterpiece; but it is politically unreliable and even dangerous. Of course, the story of Stalinism abounds in horror. But this is only one of its elements, and even this, the demonic, has to be translated into terms of human motives and interests. The ex-Communist does not even attempt the translation.[25]

If Deutscher's position here can be used to defend Wells's attitude, one might also add that the fact that Wells was never a member of the Communist Party and that he never felt the attraction of marxist dialectics, saved him from the intellectual gyrations of those ex-Communists who had abandoned a faith and felt the necessity of finding another one to replace it. Wells's disillusionment with Soviet Russia, in other words, did not come with sudden loss of faith in communism, although even in the case of Koestler -- as his latest biographers

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[25]Isaac Deutscher, "The Ex-Communist's Conscience," reprinted in *Arthur Koestler A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Murray A. Sperber (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1977) 94-95.

inform us -- the disillusionment was never as sudden as autobiographies tend to proclaim. This is why charting Wells's ambiguities towards Russia, starting with his admiration for pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia and his enthusiasm for Lenin and ending with his disenchantment following the Purges, is in some respects a more puzzling and more arresting exercise than the stories of disillusionment described in *The God That Failed*.

Wells's belief in social planning was not the result of a reaction against the war, Depression, or Fascism. It antedated all three. In this, he differed from Koestler and many other communists and fellow travellers, for he seems to have drawn on a native radical tradition that goes back to Robert Owen. For Wells, socialism remained a matter of common sense, as it was for William Morris, but unlike Morris, he looked to science and planning to bring it about. From this faith he never wavered. His disappointment was not with ideologies but with human beings. Those who joined or supported the communists thought of themselves as marxists, but they put their faith less in the forces of history or science, than in the party machine. Lenin himself, for the most part, took the truth of Marxism for granted and concentrated on strategy and tactics. What Wells did share with Lenin was his élitism, although he came to it by a different route. For the Bolsheviks and their western sympathizers, the parting of the ways with democratic Marxists of the type who joined the British Labour Party or joined the German S.P.D., came with Lenin's decision to organize his faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party from the top down, in the name of the

principle he ambiguously described as "democratic centralism." With the Bolsheviks as their party took shape after the split with the Mensheviks in 1903, the central committee controlled the grass roots rather than the other way around, so that by the time Stalin was in the saddle he could proudly assert that in the Soviet Union "cadres decide everything" -- the very principle which made dictatorship inevitable (since it was Stalin and the Central Committee who appointed the cadres).

Wells was naturally aware of this, knowing full well that the "dreamer in the Kremlin" had given place to a leader who had the will to attempt the transformation of its social and economic structure on a scale few intellectuals in England believed possible. Was Wells truly aware of the monstrous human cost incurred by collectivisation and Stalin's forced industrialisation? Probably not -- or if he was, then very superficially -- at the time of his interview with the "man of steel" who had taken the dreamer's place in the Kremlin. Unlike Koestler or other true believers, such as Malcolm Muggeridge, Wells did not have the opportunity to travel in the Ukraine and other parts of the vast country where the famished victims of Stalin's social experiment either lay dying or were being rounded up in the cancerous labour camps which were being set up throughout the Soviet Union, reaching their horrendous apotheosis just before the war.

But if Wells was unaware in 1934 of the rate at which labour camps were mushrooming throughout the Soviet Union, so were most of his contemporaries in the West who refused to take seriously the allegations of the "Whites" and

other foes of Bolshevism (such as Trotsky) who as yet managed to evade the attention of the NKVD's assassins. Moreover, the expansion of the GULAG began with the appointment of Yezhov in 1936. What blinded Wells as well as so many gentlemen-intellectuals in England -- whom D.S. Mirsky contemptuously described as its "intellizhentsia"[26]-- to what was really taking place in Stalin's Russia were two related attitudes. In the first place, the allegations made by the Soviet Union's foes seemed far too "un-British" to be plausible; secondly, there was the élitism Wells shared with Shaw and others which made him peculiarly sympathetic both to the New Deal and the Five Year Plan. It seemed to Wells that mankind could only be saved by the bold actions of men like F.D.R. or Stalin, since the scientifically regulated World State of the future would never come into being through democratic elections. Aldous Huxley, who started writing *Brave New World* with the intention of "pulling the leg of H.G. Wells" ironically came to believe -- much as Wells did -- that a decadent mass society could only be changed by a "Samurai" caste to administer it, a group which in Huxley's vision was to be surmounted by an even higher "caste of Brahmins."[27]

Wells was not as naive as Huxley who, because of this attitude even initially sympathised with Hitler and the railings of H.L. Mencken in the United

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[26]*zhe* being the transliteration of the first letter of *gentleman*; Mirsky was thus implying that these "intelligentlemen" were too busy gazing at their navels and not concerned with real issues.

[27]See David Bradshaw's introduction to *The Hidden Huxley Contempt and Compassion for the Masses 1920-1936* (London, 1994).

States -- who also, when Hitler first came to power, mistook authoritarianism for leadership. Yet, despite this elitism, Wells, it may be said in his defence, romanticised the Russian people rather than its leaders, an attitude which he shared with his friend Maurice Baring, whose remarkable books on Russia were carefully read by Wells. But unlike Baring, who turned to Catholicism and gave up on Russia in 1917, Wells became even more attracted to its people as a result of the revolutions of that annus mirabilis. His interest in Russia, with all its ups and downs, as we have seen, survived both the Moscow Trials and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and were vindicated -- so it seemed -- by the Red Army's performance against the Third Reich.

And yet, Wells thought little of politics in the traditional sense, and much of planning. That is why, unlike former communists who found comfort in following the Party line, Wells never took Marxism seriously either as a political ideology or as an economic *Weltanschauung*. Quite simply, Marxist dogma was alien to the way his fictional heroes perceived the world. Not a single sympathetic character in Wells's fiction can be described as a Marxist. Ultimately, what did attract Wells to the U.S.S.R. was the unprecedented manner in which the Bolsheviks went about setting rational targets for transforming society, which they did moreover with what eventually seemed close to total popular support.

Thus, Wells approached the Soviet Union with hope, being impressed by Lenin, and less so by Stalin, to whom he was nevertheless prepared to give the

benefit of the doubt. Yet he addressed Lenin and Stalin as equals, an attitude only one Russian writer dared to adopt once they were in power. The price Gorky paid for the privilege is well known. In serving the true cause, Gorky ended up lying for it and being poisoned at Stalin's behest once he saw the light (so it is disclosed today). Such a moment never came for Wells, since Gorky rejected a faith -- the millenarianism of the Bolsheviks -- which Wells never really shared. To the last, he remained a *philosophe*. In his final rejection of the Soviet Union, Wells spoke more in sorrow than in anger.

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Synopsis

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The system of transliteration used below is compatible with system two in J. Thomas Shaw, *The Transliteration of Modern Russian for English Publications* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967). In the text, however, proper names were spelled in the form familiar to H.G. Wells and to English readers; i.e., Yevgeny Zamyatin rather than Evgenii Zamiatin, Gorky rather than Gorkii, etc. In citing newspapers (such as *Novaia Zhizn'*, I have also followed English usage by capitalising both nouns and adjectives. In the text itself, where Russian names or terms are used in passages quoted from Wells and others, the form originally used has been retained.

Bibliographic Note

The most recent and useful of bibliographies on Wells is *H.G. Wells A Reference Guide* (1988), by William Scheick and Randolph Cox. These lists are

kept up to date in *The Wellsian The Journal of the H.G. Wells Society*, although one occasionally finds lists of recent articles on Wells in other scholarly periodicals. The purpose of the list that follows is to cite those reference works, fiction and non-fiction by Wells, articles on and by Wells, monographs, and biographies which were useful to the present author.

Reference works are listed in section A; section B refers to newspapers essential to an understanding of the times Wells lived in. This section also contains periodicals such as *The Wellsian*, where a plethora of articles devoted to Wells is to be found. One of the latest issues thereof is devoted entirely to Wells's connections with Eastern Europe. Two of the four articles, Leon Stover's "Wells's Communist Revision, Perestroika, and the New World Order" and Juliusz Palczewski's "Wells: Champion Revisionist, Reformist and Perestroishchik," relate Wells's work and thought to the remarkable reforms brought about i the U.S.S.R. by Gorbachev's policies of *Glasnost'* and *Perestroika*. Mary Meyer's article (cited in chapter I) repeats the usual accusations against Wells, namely his alleged inability to recognize the evil of Bolshevism. The first part of D.C. Smith's "Wells and Eastern Europe" recapitulates briefly Wells's journeys to Russia, but all of the information presented here is to be found in Smith's own definitive biography of Wells, *H.G. Wells Desperately Mortal* (1986). The second part of Smith's article dealing with Wells's interest in Eastern Europe is infinitely more engaging; it was, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with that particular topic.

Vast as the literature on Wells is, there is no book-length study of Wells's interest in Russia, although a doctoral dissertation on a related topic has been begun by Mary Meyer (University of Westminster) who specializes in literature, literary theory, and science-fiction. Due to space limitations, I could only touch upon the Russian and Soviet attitudes to Wells. Since much of this work was done before *Perestroika*, it is unfortunately and inevitably marred by ideological and dogmatic constraints of the era preceding it. After his interview with Lenin (1920), Wells came to be described by some Russian scholars as a "bourgeois"

writer -- a view advanced by Trotsky in 1924 -- but even this could not detract from Wells's popularity in the Soviet Union as a writer of fiction. Most of the literature by these Russian and Soviet writers is to be found in Levidova and Parchevskaya's bibliography (see section A). As one might expect, given its date of publication, this work begins with a section entitled "V.I. Lenin on Wells," containing two items, one of which indicates that Lenin wrote to Gorky in 1921 to ask the Russian writer to urge Shaw and Wells to organize humanitarian aid for the starving masses in Russia.

Section C contains monographs and articles by Wells which were particularly useful to the present author. The list of articles by Wells is of necessity cursory and only contains the most important items related to my thesis topic. A more comprehensive list of Wells's journalism is to be found in W.Warren Wagar's *H.G. Wells and the World State* (1961) and in the extensive notes to D.C. Smith's biography of Wells.

In section D are listed responses to Wells's writings by some of his contemporaries, only a handful of such items from the vast literature of writings about Wells being of use here. Cox and Scheick's bibliography alone lists over three thousand such items written by critics, historians, friends and foes alike, between 1895 and 1986. Responses engendered by the Stalin-Wells talk are too numerous to list here. Most of these items can be found in *The New Statesman and Nation*, volume 8, November and December, 1934. Newspaper articles obtained through the Interlibrary Loans in many cases did not have page numbers; they are therefore omitted throughout.

Lastly, section E consists of secondary sources, biographies being listed separately for the purpose of clarity. Some items in this section are written by Wells's contemporaries, and as such might be labelled as primary sources. My decision to list them here is of necessity arbitrary. It was impossible to list the many book reviews of the secondary sources which I consulted; only a handfull of these are cited here. All the articles and monographs in this section have been consulted, although some items were not cited because no occasion arose for

doing so. Wherever possible, an attempt has been made to let Wells and his contemporaries speak for themselves. To the extent that these secondary sources helped spark an idea or influence my views, they are duly listed below.

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