

VII

THE NEW YOUTH*

THAT NIGHT I WAS DESTINED NOT TO SLEEP.

"I am sorry," the chairman informed me, "but the girls are giving a dance tonight and they would like you to be present."

"A dance?"

The tone of surprise in my voice startled him.

"Yes, a dance," he said, grinning sheepishly, "a dance . . . tomorrow is their day off . . ."

Later, I learned that it was I who was really the cause of the dance.

The collective has many young girls and not enough young men. That is, there are plenty of young men in the collective but after the harvest many of them leave for the city. Some of them go to the university or work in factories, while others study in the agricultural schools. They return to the collective in the spring. Thus, during the long winter nights, the majority of the girls who remain to work in the shop of the collective are alone and bored.

To be sure, there are many diversions in the collective—lectures, study classes, movies, theatres, but then, one feels like dancing sometimes, too.

The girls sought to exploit my presence. I had the shock of my life when the serious looking Komso-

* See also: *Young Workers at the Club.*

molka who only a short while before had so heatedly discussed with Dinah the very vital problem of intermarriage, asked me to show her some real American jazz steps. After all, as she told me later, I was the first American to visit their collective who was neither bald nor fat.

But I am running ahead of my story. The chairman's announcement seemed to me very strange for two reasons. Ghetto youth was dancing! In the old days it was indecent, even sinful for Jewish boys and girls to dance. But that was not all: I was already sufficiently aware of the fact that old taboos and shibboleths had long been discarded in Soviet Russia. What surprised me most was the fact that *the Soviet youth* was indulging in such forms of amusement, for it is they who carry upon their shoulders the burden of socialist construction. Only later, upon becoming more intimately acquainted with Soviet life did I realize that there was nothing remarkable in that: physiologically, the Soviet youth is in no way different from the average normal youth of America; sociologically, on the other hand, they are miles apart.

The Russian Revolution was prepared and carried out by a generation of revolutionists who, as long ago as 1905, had fought for the overthrow of the Tsar. The administration of the Soviet state, however, launched by this generation, has long since passed into younger hands, younger, as Klaus Mehnert puts it, not only physiologically but also sociologically.

Now that the romantic period of Bolshevism is

over, clear thinking Bolshevik theoreticians are beginning to realize that it will take more than one generation to bring the Revolution to its logical conclusion—the creation of a classless Communist society. Lenin, to be sure, who based all his hopes on the growing generation of Russians, realized it as early as 1920. "The task before the elder generation," he said in his address at the Third Congress of the Komsomol, "was relatively simple. For them it was a matter of doing away with the bourgeoisie, of inspiring hatred for it among the masses . . . The task before the younger generation is infinitely more complicated: the erection of the Communist society."

Since then a new generation of Russians has come to consciousness. A product of the War, the Revolution, the civil war, and conditioned entirely by Soviet environment, the Soviet youth is radically different from the youth of any other country of the world. It is "a striking mixture of, or balance between, liberty and discipline, personal enjoyment and social responsibility, utter frankness and utter disdain of abuses."

What is true of the Russian youth as a whole is doubly true of the Jewish young men and women. The Komsomols whose dance I was asked to attend, next to the agronomists, are most instrumental in the success of the collective. There are only twenty-five members of the Young Communist League at the Horepashnik, yet their influence is felt throughout the collective. They inspire the older Jews to action. In planning the work of the collective, the Komsomols are in the first ranks. They are also its shock-

brigadiers and leaders of the various working brigades: the tomato brigade, the tractor brigade, and the potato brigade. It is the Komsomol who edits the collective's *Wall Newspaper*, organizes excursions and leads literacy and government loan campaigns.

In the collective "The Jewish Peasant," relates Miroel, the Komsomolka Minna Kogan is the best worker in the truck garden. The brigade which she leads is the model of the collective. Not long ago Minna lived in the town of Liubar eking out a miserable existence by weaving baskets out of straw. Upon joining the kolhoz, she was sent by the management to study truck gardening at the agricultural technicum at Evpatoria. Today, there is not a kolhoz, in the Crimea that has not heard of Minna Kogan. Besides being an expert in gardening, she also inspires the colonists to creative enthusiasm.

There are many young people like Minna in the kolhozes. Meyer Botman, for instance, came to the collective late in 1932. A printer by profession, Meyer could have gotten along very well in the city, but he believed that the settling of the Jews on land would help solve the Jewish economic problems in Soviet Russia, so he decided to give up his trade and become a farmer. Meyer leads a brigade of twenty men, whose job it is to take care of and guard the collective's property.

Of course, the Revolution in Russia is not yet completed. Neither has human nature undergone a complete transformation. While the Revolution has left its traces even in the most remote and backward

parts of the country, great numbers of the younger as well as the older generation still have one foot in old Russia. The "old"—the word the Bolsheviki use in referring to prevalent Western customs and morals—still persists within the new. Out of a hundred million people under twenty-five living in Russia today, only about twenty million (the "elite," as Mehnert refers to them) have been seized by the ideas of Bolshevism, are devoting themselves to it and are seeking to give it embodiment. It is this "elite," however, the dynamic section of the youth, which is the spear point in every advance in the life of the Soviet Union. It is they who build the Russia of tomorrow and determine to a large extent the future course of her development. A new social man is gradually evolving there, and it is with new and young Russia, Gentile and Jewish, that the world will have to reckon in the next decade.

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When I entered the collective's clubroom where the dance was taking place, it was already crowded to capacity. All my acquaintances were there.

Several couples, mostly girls, were waltzing to the tune of the latest Soviet "hit":

"O, eti chornye glaza menia plenili . . ."

"O, these black eyes have captivated me . . ."

Feygele, dressed in a fresh white blouse, a red kerchief tied around her neck, was sitting in a corner with Akhmed. The secretary of the Komsomol group—a son of a former tinsmith—in his enormous

and muddy boots was doing a solo. In another corner, young Joseph, tall and lean, played the accordion. I was asked to dance. Much to the discomfort of the Komsomolka whom I was teaching a fox trot, my mind was not on the dancing. I watched the perspiring faces of the colonists. They danced: young and old. They were gay. And yet it seemed to me that their gayety was only superficial. I observed them again and again. Yes, on their faces intermingled looks of gayety and thoughtfulness, happiness and sadness. I wondered: What were they thinking about at that moment? Was it of a miserable life spent in the ghetto; of bloody pogroms; their future as tillers of the soil? Was it perhaps my fertile imagination? . . .

"Joseph," the secretary of the Komsomol suddenly cried out, "hey, Joseph, stop that sob song and give us something gay."

Joseph did not have to be asked again. Apparently he was just waiting for this signal. Slowly he wiped his perspiring forehead, threw his cap on the ground, adjusted his chair, and rolling up his eyes in typical peasant fashion, struck up a gay and lively Russian *Kamarinsky*. The secretary of the Komsomol stamped first with his right foot, then with his left, and suddenly catching the serious-faced Komsomolka by the hand, went off with her into a furious gallop . . .