

America as a country where the workers live in misery, victims simultaneously of inflation and unemployment (no mention of the fact that unemployment compensation—our domestic brand of socialism—provides a much better standard of living than the average employed Soviet worker enjoys) most Russians know that the United States is well ahead of their own country in material well-being.

The clothes worn by the average American tourist, the car which the occasional American drives into Russia, are more eloquent than any amount of Voice of America broadcasting. Millions of Russians in uniform got into Germany and Austria after the last war and many of them got an idea of the superior rations and pay of the American soldier.

A Soviet Obsession

To get ahead of the American standard of living has long been a matter of prestige, almost an obsession with the Soviet leaders. Almost thirty years ago, just when the first Five Year Plan—with its expropriation of the peasants and its sacrifice of consumer goods in the present to building huge factories to produce tractors, machines, and chemicals in the future—was condemning most Soviet citizens to extreme hard-

ship and some to actual starvation, Stalin grandiloquently declared:

"When we put the Soviet Union on an automobile and the peasant on a tractor, then let the worthy capitalists, who boast so loudly of their 'civilization,' try to overtake us."

It was an official Communist party slogan in Russia at that time "to overtake and outstrip America." And a contraband joke went the rounds by word of mouth of a humble Soviet citizen going up to a communist and whispering:

"Comrade, when we just come abreast of America, let me off. I don't want to go any further."

Stalin did not live to see the day when the Soviet Union was ahead of the United States in goods and services provided for its people. And it is a safe prediction that Khrushchev, to turn against him one of the homely peasant figures of speech of which he is so fond, will no more see the Soviet Union ahead of America in output of food and consumer goods than he will see his own ears. And this prediction also goes for Khrushchev's successor, whoever he may be.

Some fainthearted and gullible persons in the United States have been so impressed by Soviet success in putting earth satellites

(which add nothing to what people can eat or wear) in orbit and by greatly exaggerated reports of the efficiency of Soviet education (which has just been subjected to a major overhaul) that they were inclined to accept the probability that Khrushchev might make good on his "overtake and outstrip America" program. But a few comparative facts and figures, based on Soviet official sources, which many economists believe are computed on a basis calculated to magnify achievements and minimize deficiencies, show clearly that the United States possesses such a tremendous lead in standard of living that the Soviet Union could not hope to catch up in any predictable period of time.

Freedom Outyields Coercion

In many ways, contrary to general belief, the United States is further ahead of the Soviet Union now than it was over forty years ago, when the Czar was overthrown and Lenin and his Communist party took charge. For year in and year out, even in times of depression and recession, the United States, under its comparatively free enterprise system, has been turning out an infinite variety of goods for the consumer, including such expensive durables as automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines, radios, televi-

sion sets. This output, in terms both of quality and quantity, is so far ahead of the Soviet that there is really no basis of comparison.

Money income comparisons between the two countries are almost meaningless because the rate of exchange for the Soviet ruble is completely arbitrary and strictly phony. Officially, four rubles are the equivalent of one dollar. An unskilled worker earns from 300 rubles (the minimum wage) to 500 rubles a month; a skilled worker may go as high as 1,000 to 1,200. The average wage is estimated by John Gunther in *Inside Russia Today* at 650-800 rubles.

Here are some current prices of everyday goods, as reported partly by Gunther, partly by a more recent visitor to Russia, Mr. Victor Meier, East European specialist for the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, one of the most highly reputed newspapers in continental Europe.

Nylon blouse — 320 rubles
Chocolate bar — 14.80 rubles
Washing machine (inferior small type) — 800 rubles
Man's felt hat — 160 rubles
Butter — 28.50 rubles a kilo (2.2 pounds)
Beef — 15 rubles a kilo
Pair of shoes — 200-500 rubles
Man's shirt — 90-300 rubles

Set these and other similar prices for staple foodstuffs and articles of clothing against an av-