

Sunday Afternoon
July 15th 1945

Dear Ones,

As I start this letter I like to think of a Sunday afternoon at home - perhaps at this time you are sitting down to write to me. Sometimes the idea of my being in the New Hebrides seems entirely unreal; even after I had entered the service and knew that one day I would go overseas, I used to find it difficult to comprehend what that meant in terms of leaving the surroundings and the routines to which I had been accustomed - and that feeling continues now that I am here. I think that someday I will look back on this experience - that is, my physically being here - as something that really did not happen at all.

This note is to answer your letter of the 4th, Daddy, and to comment on the Bess article in Sat Eve Post since your ideas coincide so closely with those of the Post writer. Let me say at the start that I think that your attitude is a highly acceptable one and is entirely understandable, that you have faced the problem as you see it, and that your conclusions are fair and in fact bring you to an admirable attitude toward the problem of our relationship with Russia and with communism. I agree for the most part with your conclusions but I am not wholly in sympathy with the premises of your thinking.

First about the war: I think the argument that we did not fight the war primarily for ideals is based on a misconception; it can be traced to the confusion between what specific thing caused us to go to war and what we fought for. No great human effort was ever culminated on an entirely negative platform or program - wars, projects, what have you, may start out to prevent or avoid or stop something but they invariably end up with a positive goal beyond the negative aim. It is true that "why we fight" is usually clear to all while it takes time for "what we are fighting for" to take shape. However, I feel that it is no more than debatable rhetoric to say that we are not fighting primarily for the achievement of our ideals - I know that I am, and I am sure that most soldiers would agree with me.

Secondly: since this discussion depends very largely on a use of words with many meanings it is important that we define totalitarianism, that is distinguish it from fascism. And it is clear immediately that our first goal was to defeat fascism, not totalitarianism. (This is borne out by the fact that we still fight fascism in forms like race riots and anti-Semitism in this country even though it is thoroughly disassociated from totalitarian forms.) Nobody ever claimed that we were fighting totalitarianism. We can agree then that the negative phase of our effort was the defeat of Fascism as an ideology which can corrupt any governmental form - separatist, federal, democratic, totalitarian or otherwise. This does not deny that totalitarianism by its nature lends itself to Fascism, but that is not the point at hand.

Thirdly: I fear that you are confusing communism and totalitarianism. I think that what you mean to say is that there is no "ideological affinity between totalitarianism and democracy" where you ~~you~~ substituted "communism" for "totalitarianism." However, I will say that in either case, I do not agree with you. Now, Bess quotes the Britannica definition of totalitarianism as the "centralization of control .. emphasis on the organic unity of the state." That is a good definition - note that there is not any mention of who is in control, how broad the base of the controlling element is, what the factors are that motivate that controlling element. We know that it is that broad political concept called communism that motivates the totalitarianism of Russia; therefore it does not seem unfair to me to come to the conclusion that we must study the tenets and basics of communism and that we must try to avoid judgment on the basis of the method which is the medium of the communistic experiment. In and of itself, totalitarianism is not the major issue at hand, then.

Fourthly, my conclusions then are different from yours as to the nature of Russia today, since I see communism not totalitarianism as the motivating force in Russia. And I feel

that there is a remarkable affinity between communism and democracy in principle. Here you must avoid the assumption that the communistic ideal presumes the totalitarian dictatorship of the proletariat; on the contrary, the foremost goal of the pure communist is the "withering away" of the state when the country arrives at the point of economic and political education that control and regulation no longer are necessary. That is of course unachievable in the extreme, but it points to the principle that the totalitarian phase is no more than a phase. The points which I made in my previous letter - the new constitution, the recognition of the Church, the new marital laws, the dissolution of the comintern, the new wage scales - are all significant within that context. The fact that this is the first time this experiment has been tried is no reason for you to foredoom it to failure; certainly there may be upheaval during the changes, but that does not deny the fundamental strain and course of events. The "power begets power" expression which is one of your favorites is not as infallible as you would make it. One recent example is Battista in Cuba; the history of the growth of English constitutional democracy is the record of regal powers given up to a rising tide from some level beneath.

Fifthly: the most obvious affinity between democracy and communism at the present is the doctrine of equality. At the present time, it is not true to say that Russian equality is no more than the equality of slaves - there is a great deal more of equality of opportunity in several phases of endeavor in Russia than there is any place else in the world. Because the Russians have not yet reached the stage of the second and complimentary practice of political liberty, do not deny the existence of equality.

So far I have tried to keep away from the economic aspects involved in equality and liberty as much as possible; I am sure you agree that the Russians have economic equality - at the price of what we would consider basic economic liberty. Between political status and economic status there are always the closest ties, and so again we see that where we work from the bottom the Russians work from the top. Just as the political entity of the Russian State is to be the heritage of the people, so is the economic structure. Specifically I want to try to make one point - monopolies are not automatically a negation of liberty. Are the monopolies of the supply of power and light, of water and public transport, negations of liberty? The critical element of a monopoly is who controls it, not the fact that it is a monopoly per se.

On the question of liberty, I think that we can safely split the economic and the political phases. You could have the most totalitarian state in the world and yet have complete political liberty. The same can not be said for economic liberty; however it can be shown that since economic liberty is in fact controlled by the degree of regulation imposed by the government it is directly related to political liberty. If you seek the optimum of economic liberty it will be reached within the framework of optimum political liberty. For that reason I feel that your emphasis on the economic phases of the question of Russian and the US is not entirely justified. The true index will be found in the degree of political liberty and equality. That applies to any nation; for we assume that with this liberty will be intelligent self interest and a degree of economic maturity that will in turn dictate the proper economic policy. And we also assume that we are speaking in the broadest and most general terms, in terms of long range growth and development.

What we are getting at then is the broadness and effectiveness of the base of the controlling element in Russia and that is the thing to watch; at present it is the Party. And unlike you, I see every reason to think in terms of that base's growing broader and broader not remaining a tight little group. I hope that my arguments and train of thought did not grow too disjointed and lose the point of what I am trying to get across. My conclusions and attitudes on the question of our relationship with Russia are very close to yours; I just feel that you do not judge Russia correctly and where you say "in spite of" I try to make clear that in fact we have a great common bond with Russia and there are many instances where it should be "because of." Very briefly, it might be because of communism and despite the current totalitarian phase.

OK for now - by the way, how is Diffy these days -

Mike Sumner