

THE RUSSIANS. By *Hedrick Smith*. New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, 1976. xiv, 527 pp. \$12.50.

RUSSIA: THE PEOPLE AND THE POWER. By *Robert G. Kaiser*. New York: Atheneum, 1976. xiv, 499 pp. \$12.95.

Hedrick Smith and Robert Kaiser set out to write, in the words of the latter, "the kind of book I looked for and could not find when we were preparing to go to the Soviet Union." Each in his own way has succeeded. These books build on the available scholarly literature and add to it the vivid impressions of two highly trained reporters, giving the general reader a picture of the Soviet Union that is reasonably balanced but clearly reflects the spirit of our time.

They cover much the same ground with differences of emphasis and style. Smith in particular captures the look and sound and mood of Russians with extraordinary immediacy. He has effectively integrated his own family into his narrative, and the experiences of his youngsters in a Russian school gave him insight into adult expectations and handling of children as well as into the outlooks and behavior of children themselves. Kaiser's book is more discursive, with themes recurring at various points. Occasionally he touches thoughtfully on issues of absorbing interest to Western students of Russia, such as moral conduct and how it grows out of a social context, drawing on studies of American moral behavior for a useful comparative perspective.

The overall picture of Russian life and the Soviet system that emerges from both these books can fairly be summed up as follows. Russia *is* accessible to us and has nothing mysterious about it, only some puzzling aspects. Russian society *is* very different from our own and above all reflects deeply ingrained popular traits of submission to authority, a craving for order and security, a distrust of individual initiative, and a limited sense of life's possibilities. Both reporters see as the dominant trends of the Soviet seventies: a growing consumer materialism especially evident among people at the upper levels; an intensified and more openly expressed sense of national identity, among Russians as well as national minority groups; a political retrenchment by the leadership, which has learned how to make some concessions to internal restiveness and Western opinion while ensuring continued popular compliance with its policies through the exercise of more refined controls.

Neither author foresees the Soviet system evolving toward political pluralism or substantially more freedom for the individual. "The longer I lived in Soviet Russia," writes Smith, "the more Russian it seemed to me and hence the less likely to undergo fundamental change." Kaiser concludes, "living among them I came to doubt that the Russians could be convinced to try something fundamentally different." Yet he highlights that phrase of Peter the Great that Russia is a country in which things that just don't happen happen.

Both books reflect the present Western tendency to correct earlier misimpressions and illusions that looked for rapid changes in the Soviet system. Smith and Kaiser have rightly stressed the importance of historical factors, but in so doing they may have gone too far in emphasizing unchangeability. In dwelling on the continuity of prerevolutionary attitudes they reinforce a now prevailing bias about the nature of the Russian people and the Soviet system. We risk a closing of our minds altogether to Russian capacities for individual initiative, creativity, and pluralistic growth, and to the possibility that these capacities might one day find effective expression in the mainstream of economic and perhaps even political life. It seems unwise to extrapolate from the present into the indefinite future.

On the question of Soviet dissent, Smith wrote that "dissent among the liberal intelligentsia was disintegrating as the Seventies wore on," and Kaiser said that "it appears that the KGB and the Party have virtually completed the crackdown against active dissidents." The flare-up of open dissent after the signing of the Helsinki Agree-

ment should make us more cautious about predicting its decline. It remains to be seen what forms dissenting Soviet opinion may take in the coming years.

Smith's statement that "not surprisingly, most Russians are apolitical" is true in our sense of participation in political life. But there is another sense in which the statement is untrue and this is not widely understood in the West. Russians are intensely political in sensitivity to the shifting boundaries and nuances of the permissible and the impermissible, and we are coming to realize that this process of sensitization begins early in childhood. It would be interesting to explore what and how children in Russia learn about the arrangements of power, first within the family and, later, between the family and other institutions of Soviet society.

In conclusion I would say that both of these books are written with admiration and sympathy for the Russian people and a sharp awareness of the controlling aspects of the Soviet system. I can recommend them as enlightening and useful to the general reader.

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ON WATCH: A MEMOIR. By *Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., Admiral USN (ret.)*. New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, 1976. xvi, 568 pp + 16 pp. photographs. \$12.50.

There are few first-rate books about war not as drama, but as the most important causal factor in history. Admiral Zumwalt's report of his adventures in Washington as chief of Naval Operations between 1970 and 1974 belongs on an exalted shelf with Churchill's *Memoirs* and Solzhenitsyn's *August, 1914*.

Admiral Zumwalt's subject is American democracy and the way it reaches the decisions which determine our fate. His focus is naturally on his own experience. But his naval vantage point is not a bias. A sophisticated man, and an intellectual as well he sees the security problem whole, as a social, psychological, and political problem quite as much as a military one. And his book is alight with wit, insight, and an enthusiasm for absurdity which make it a joy to read. Zumwalt's passages on Admiral Rickover, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon, interservice rivalry, and a number of congressmen, senators, and other Washington totems are quite as iconoclastic in style and candor as his famous battle to liberate the Navy from racial discrimination and petty tyranny.

Early in his career, aided perhaps by the fact that his wife is a White Russian from Harbin, Zumwalt achieved a clear factual understanding of the nature of Soviet policy. And a tour of duty with Paul H. Nitze, when Mr. Nitze was secretary of the navy, helped to broaden and deepen his perspective on politico-military affairs. The experience also gave him a sure feel for the crucial but limited role of nuclear deterrence in the process it is no longer fashionable to call the Cold War. Unlike many participants in Washington policy making of the period, Zumwalt did not suffer from myopia or hysterical blindness in evaluating the evidence about the Soviet military build-up which accelerated so dramatically after 1962. He was never among those who found an endless supply of plausible reasons for denying the superobvious fact that Soviet policy is expansionist, and draws its strength only from military power.

The principal theme of *On Watch* is the struggle to translate these perception into effective American policy, both in handling the Indochina War and in building up the nuclear and the conventional deterrent strength of the United States and its allies in ways which kept pace with the military power of the Soviet Union. It must be said that if at an earlier point Zumwalt was among those who advocated military victory in Vietnam, that position was not made manifest during his term as CNO. It