On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the USSR, a number of prominent Australians tell the significance to them of the October 1917 Socialist Revolution.

James Aldridge

EVERY YOUNG MAN of my generation in Australia had his life shaped for him by the October Revolution of 1917 whether he knew it or not and whether he likes it or not. It wasn't the only event that decided our lives as we grew up in the bush or in the city or in the small country towns that always seem lost on our lazy rivers, but it became the most important one.

Young people today imagine that the older generation was always inclined to see things too much in black and white, but what they forget is that we actually lived in a black and white world, and had no other choice. If fascism had appeared in a world without socialism, nobody would have escaped it. That was the black and that was the white. What the socialist world did in those first twenty years of its existence was to establish a remarkable alternative which the world had always hoped to have but had never before achieved.

We have lived with the alternative now for fifty years, and we know that it works. Moreover it works better and better, despite the failures and the cruelties and the tensions that seem to pull it this way and that. Once we did claim that it was perfect. Now we know how foolish that was. Perfection is not yet the point. What fifty years of socialism is giving the world now is the only hope it's got. It is still the alternative. It is still the achievement of god knows how many years of struggle.

It is still the pride of an awful lot of people in the world who have never even seen it, and will probably never see it. I hate to think what life would be like if it weren't there. What more could a man say than that?
IN SCIENTIFIC and technological achievement the U.S.S.R. presents strange contrasts. Those natural sciences which are important for industrial growth and military strength — mathematics, physics and chemistry — have been fostered from the beginning, and show immense achievement. Knowledge gained in Russia and elsewhere has been applied rapidly and effectively in technology. In the age of computers, automation, specialized materials such as are necessary in jet engines and rockets, sophisticated electronics, and applications of nuclear energy, the U.S.S.R. has few equals. Soviet geology is excellent, and with its aid enormous resources of minerals, oil and natural gas have been discovered and exploited, especially in Siberia.

It is strange, therefore, that in some other ways the achievement has been so much less. Although some excellent modern buildings have been erected and many historic palaces and monuments restored with loving care and fine craftsmanship, the general design of houses, flats, factories and laboratories, is poor, and the workmanship shoddy. Many which I have visited show crumbling concrete and plaster, ill-fitting and badly finished woodwork, inadequate lighting and very elementary plumbing. Lifts, in even the best and most modern hotels, are of poor design and uncertain performance. While Soviet aircraft are among the best in the world, the organization at airports is chaotic and inefficient. Books are excellent, and very cheap, but the process of buying them is frustrating and time consuming. Obtaining meals in a restaurant is agonizingly slow, while buying medicine is reminiscent of entering an early Victorian pharmacy.

The most glaring anomaly, however, is the failure of this great nation to develop its agriculture. About 40 per cent of Soviet citizens still lead a peasant life on the land, as against 5-10 per cent. in other highly industrialised economies. The biological sciences, upon which advance in agriculture depends, have been neglected, and the best brains have all gone to the physical sciences. Perhaps this is due to the exigencies of defence and rapid industrialization, but the strange influence of Lysenko, now fortunately at an end, deterred good scientists from entering the biological field. However, it appears that this situation is now changing, and agriculture and animal husbandry in the Soviet Union may soon reach the same high standard of productivity and efficiency as has been achieved in nuclear energy, or the production of machine tools.
I FIND IT very interesting to compare the present conditions in the USSR with those of 50 years ago. Little did the people of the world anticipate the world wide changes in every field that developed as a result of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

As my personal struggle for the past sixty years has been to get equal status, rights and opportunities for women I will use the space at my disposal to report the phenomenal changes in this field in the USSR after the Revolution.

My earliest recollections are prohibitions as to what I should not do “because little girls did not do” that.

One of the experiences which gave me the greatest satisfaction in my life was when I went to the Soviet Union in 1938—there I saw women driving trains and buses—the engine driver and stoker of my train were both women. Women were working in the building industry—on the land—in fact everywhere. They seemed to have a free choice of jobs, and what is more, as long as 50 years ago they got the same rate of pay as the men and the same opportunities for advancement.

The USSR, by developing and utilising all its brains, has not only pioneered the way for women but has enabled women to make great contributions by the part they have taken in the development of research in the engineering and building industry, in farming and in every phase of science.

While doing this over the last fifty years the USSR has not neglected the Arts. Her ballet dancers, opera singers and musicians take their place side by side with the most celebrated artists of any other country.

An important aspect of the developments in the USSR is that they are nation wide. It is not only in Moscow and Leningrad that the gifted children can develop their talents—but in all the schools throughout the USSR all children are taught the arts and sciences as well as the routine subjects, and those that show the greatest promise in dancing, painting or any of the arts or sciences are sent to special schools, universities or conservatoria so that their talents may be fully developed. When the young people have completed their studies and qualified in their special training, they have no difficulty in finding employment. In fact jobs and opportunities are waiting for them.

These developments and the wide opportunities for the training of women in the USSR have resulted in a great expansion of the
opportunities open to women—especially in the medical profession.

Pioneers are necessary for progress in all fields. The USSR pioneered the development of the capacities of women. Now many countries are opening new opportunities to their women.

S. L. Macindoe

OF THE 18 European countries visited in 1965 the two weeks spent in the Soviet Union left the deepest impression. One could not but wonder at the advances made by an exhausted feudal Russia during a mere 50 years—progress made in spite of five years of civil war and foreign invasion, followed two decades later by devastation involving the death of an estimated 20 million Russians as they drove back the Nazi war machine.

Despite a comparatively low standard of housing, some consumer goods missing or not to our liking and slow hotel service, here clearly was a once backward society pioneering a new way of life with speed and vitality.

In Moscow and Leningrad the splendors of the past housed in museums and art galleries impressed more than their modern counterparts—Moscow University, the Palace of Congresses, the Moscow Botanic Gardens, buildings for young pioneers and many research stations. The 60 permanent pavilions in the Exhibition of Soviet Economic achievements helped us to realise the emphasis placed on labor, science and agriculture, since the exhibition must represent the bringing together of those things the Government and Soviet people think are most important.

The Soviet Union places great emphasis on biological and agricultural research. It has a network of 1,000 research stations. The eight we visited seemed to be well equipped and staffed. Soviet plant breeding programs in most instances parallel those in other advanced countries and in some fields they are well ahead.

In contrast to the problem of small farm size in other European countries, virtually all agricultural land in the Soviet Union is organised into large collective and State farms. A collective farm was visited at Krasnodar. It is difficult to gauge the efficiency and output of labor on a property of 27,000 acres worked by 7,000 persons. It appeared the collective has many of the functions of an Australian country town as well as being a group of co-operatively farmed enterprises. Certainly extensive areas are well farmed with big machine and large scale animal raising projects run on a business basis. Collective farming appears to have many advantages as a way of life.
Fred R. Ayres

DESPITE the importance of trade and cultural relations between Australia and the Soviet Union over the past 50 years, very little direct exchange in agriculture has taken place. The scope and growing influence of Soviet agriculture in the world today is not generally recognised by the average Australian.

Because of lack of contacts, many Australians have been led to believe that the Soviet Union remains the undeveloped backward country of the 1917 era. The fruits of her experimentation, development and achievements in agriculture, which includes her pastoral industry, grain production, viticulture and tea, cotton and rice growing, have been almost completely ignored in Australia, except perhaps by a select few scientific workers. This has been to our disadvantage. Mainly this has been due to insular social and political prejudice, and a very real fear by the majority of producers, and even the population of Australia, that expressed interest in Soviet life, science, or agriculture, and particular contact or friendship with the few scientists, educationalists, artists and agriculturalists visiting Australia, would immediately lay them open to social and security pressure or interference. Over the 50 years our Australian newspapers generally have been antagonistic and prejudiced in dissemination of news and description of research in the U.S.S.R.

In the Soviet Union there has been tremendous specialised research into processed phosphates, natural salts and plant stimulants, and treatment of underground salt and mineralised water. The development of huge acreages of semi-desert land for pasture, and the diversion of rivers, and the construction of large canals in the sand deserts of south-eastern Kazakhstan should be of interest to us here. The great benefit Australia can derive from the knowledge obtained by scientists and others who are developing the vast semi-arid areas of Central Asia is not what it should be.

The continual and steady increase in national and personal prosperity in the Soviet Union in recent years, and prospects for its acceleration in the near future, offer tremendous and vital prospects for increased disposal of our surplus wool at profitable prices. (We export 94% of our total wool production). That is, provided that Australia institutes a more realistic and equitable balance of trade and exchange, and agrees to take some of the
U.S.S.R. surplus products in exchange: surplus products—such as crude-oil, heavy machinery, airplanes, soft-woods, etc.

AUSTRALIAN SALES TO THE U.S.S.R.

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U.S.S.R. SALES TO AUSTRALIA

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Balance of trade in Australia’s favor is completely unrealistic. In 1963/64 it was 61 to 1; in 1964/65 it was 35 to 1; and in 1965/66 it was 30 to 1. This is despite the fact that we enjoy a Most Favored Trade Agreement signed in 1965.

Frank Nolan

OLD RUSSIA was a most backward country with the most down-trodden working class in Europe and millions of poverty-stricken peasants. Agriculture was extremely primitive.

She emerged from the first world war maimed and bankrupt. It would require but little imagination to realise the difficulties, turmoil and chaos that faced the new Government on winning power. On top of this the new regime was called upon to resist attacks by Japanese, French and British Imperialists plus assistance from America.

After the wars of intervention and the civil war the Government was faced with the task of restoring the country’s industry and agriculture. This was completed in a comparatively short space of time and then followed a program of industrial development the magnitude and boldness of which amazed the world and has since transformed the country into a powerful industrial State second only to the U.S.A.

One marvels at the tremendous progress made in all fields of economic and social endeavour and recalls the fact that in the days of the first 5 year plan most of the technicians were imported.
from America and paid high salaries. Russian technicians were few and far between.

The new Soviet Government from the first day of its existence has been striving for peace. By its very nature it needs peace to give its undivided energies to provide for the steadily rising standard of living and for improvements in the realms of Education, the Arts and Sciences.

The coming of world war two halted such peaceful developments and compelled the Soviet Government to use time and energy and the resources necessary to build such a life for a war which could only bring death and devastation.

That it was able to build up a military machine capable of withstanding the attacks of the Nazis is now history.

The revolution rescued the Russian people from the catastrophe to which the country was brought by the rulers of old Russia.

It extricated them from the imperialist war and saved the country from degeneration and destruction both political and economic.

It saved her from the imperialist aggressors. It emancipated her from economic slavery to foreign capital, it saved her from world economic crises which brought suffering and poverty to the people in the other countries in the late twenties and early thirties, and also from fascist reaction that raged around the capitalist world.

The revolution brought a new and better life to the Russian people. For humanity, it has laid the basis for a new social and economic system, a new advanced culture in which the new socialist man is being formed and it has brought into being that which the best minds of all races have envisaged—socialism.

Tom Wright

IN 1917, I was in the second year of my apprenticeship in Sydney working with Paddy Drew, a leading member of the Australian Socialist Party, who was giving attention to my political education. He spoke eloquently on the Russian Revolution, and from the first days was an ardent supporter of the bolsheviks.

This was a period of rising militant activity in the Australian working class movement. There was general support for the Russian people, activity against the war of intervention, and
support for the relief movement during the famine. The left-wing forces in Australia were profoundly influenced, leading to the formation of the Communist Party in 1920.

During 1927, I visited the Soviet Union as a representative of the Labor Council of NSW. This was the year that the Soviet economy was restored to the 1913 level, and preparations were being made for the first five year plan, to begin in 1928. Trotsky was opposing the five year plan as impossible of realisation. He denied the possibility of building socialism in one country, which caused a discussion throughout the Communist Party.

As well as the capitalist enemy without, the Russian workers had to contend with dangerous views from within. The Russian workers overcame all opposition and resolutely proceeded with the building of socialism.

My second visit to the Soviet Union was in 1952. After only a few years of peaceful socialist development, the Soviet people had been able to withstand the most powerful armed invasion in history, and, at the cost of enormous sacrifice and material loss, had defeated the fascist aggressors. The great creative forces of the Soviet people had made up for the tremendous war losses and had raised the economy to still greater heights.

Many new socialist states had come into existence and the old colonial empires were disappearing, and the imperialist states were a declining minority in the world.

In a further visit to the Soviet Union in 1963, I was able to witness again the great economic, social, and cultural progress. A dissenting voice from China had been raised within the socialist world, vilifying the Soviet government and Party and denying the possibility of peaceful co-existence between States with different social systems. The Soviet workers proceed firmly on their forward march at the head of world socialism, refuting their opponents, with practical achievements, and confirmed by history.

Katharine Susannah Prichard

TRIUMPH OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION in Russia changed the course of history. It is trite, perhaps, to say so, but it is nevertheless true. The October revolution introduced socialism on the basis of the ownership and administration of a country's resources by the people.

The U.S.S.R. has proved the case for socialism in practice. In a brief 50 years it has advanced from a backward, semi-feudal
country to one of the two most powerful sovereign states of our time. This has made a tremendous impact on peoples everywhere; inspired with hope and courage those struggling against poverty, exploitation and superstitions, for a better life.

The USSR has championed the cause of peace since the triumph of the great October Revolution. It has opposed the aggressive actions of other powers, as in the crisis over ownership of the Suez Canal; and intervened to negotiate a peaceful settlement of differences, as between India and Pakistan. It has opposed the gangster war of the United States of America in Vietnam, and supported North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam in their resistance to this barbarous and unjust war. It has sponsored the movement for international co-operation and disarmament.

Recognition by the Soviet Government of equal rights and opportunities for women citizens has made a great difference everywhere to the status of women.

During 1966, we know, thirty-four per cent. of all deputies in the Supreme Soviets of Union and Autonomous Republics were women, and 390 women were deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. There are many women occupying high government posts, for instance, Yadgar Nasriddinova is Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Yekatarina Furtseva is Minister for Culture for the USSR. Several other women have ministerial rank. What courage and faith in her country's scientists and government Valentina Tereshkova must have had when she became the first woman cosmonaut and explorer of space!

One phase of socialist culture which particularly impresses me is the extent of the Soviet Union's publishing interests. These cover works of science and technology, the literature of Soviet and foreign modern writers, translations from innumerable languages, the classics of these languages, and the histories, fables and stories of races which didn't even have a grammar or caligraphy until it was provided them by Soviet culture.

These scattered reflections don't do justice to my profound realisation of what the October Revolution has meant to humanity. It charted a new way for the progress and peace of all peoples. Throughout the 50 years of its existence, the USSR has championed the cause of peace. May the star of the USSR always glow for the peace, friendship and good living of all peoples.