

■ Famed Hollywood actor reports on his impressions after a visit to Moscow film festival.

## RUSSIAN LOVE-HATE

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It is impossible not to have pre-conceived ideas about Russia. The literature swarms with extraordinary characters; a lady in black proclaiming to a roomful of deaf ears that she is in mourning for her life; an aged man reflecting *with* wonder on a rumour that they have stretched a string from Moscow to some provincial town, although ignorant of the reasons behind such a remarkable technical feat; a mystic illuminated by some inner radiance freely confessing to a crime he did not commit.

The picture is further clouded by the images of the cosmonauts proudly striding down an endless red carpet on an air-strip flecked with puddles, to embrace eventually the jubilant Mr. Khrushchev amid a sea of flowers and enough rhythmic

clapping to gratify a battalion of flamenco dancers.

I was conscious of all this before I went, and yet it seems to me in retrospect that the apparently massive contradictions do form a fairly convincing equation. First of all, those aspects of Soviet society which tend to irritate or even scare the visitor — the complicated bureaucracy governing meal tickets, travel permits and those ladies who sit like sentinels on every floor of your hotel checking the goings out and comings in, meeting your smile with a challenging, penetrating stare — all these, far from being sinister inventions of the Soviet State to ensure its internal security, are in fact aspects of the Tsarist regime which the Revolution never succeeded in sweeping away.

It was the Russian Empire

which, to its eternal discredit, invented the visa. The idea of withdrawing a passport to prevent the free movement of a suspect character emanated from St. Petersburg, and has since been endorsed by countries boasting of their freedom. The patience of the Russian, his seeming passivity, and his discipline in a queue are qualities formed by a sense of immensity in which time has no meaning, and in which travel only leads to further horizons.

The love-hate relationship of the Soviet State with its own history is, I am sure, a more compelling emotional engagement than mere distrust of Capitalism or fear of the West. Not far from the anti-God museums are laboratories painstakingly restoring ancient Russian icons. The atheist guide at the Hermitage will tell you in the greatest detail the biblical stories illustrated by some Italian master. The hail of St. George in the Kremlin, where the Soviet hosts are in the habit of entertaining guests of the Government, is still adorned with proud two-headed eagles, and the walls are covered with battle

honours dedicated to those regiments who found terrestrial glory in the service of a now hated Tsar against a more hated enemy.

Russia, any Russia, has a pervading perfume from which there is no escape for those who were born to recognize it. The lady on Leningrad Airport comes to mind, a lady with a Stateless passport, emotionally telling me that she found it almost impossible to leave. "It is my country, and yet it is not." The old lady encountered casually in a dacha who had come home after forty-six years of tidy exile in Geneva with the express intention of ending her days on this demanding soil. In answer to the official questionnaire, "What is the purpose of your visit to the Soviet Union?" she had replied, "To die." The taxi driver, engaged in a heated argument with a client, who played his trump card, "ya, Russki cholavek" ("I'm a Russian man"), which expressed everything and nothing, but which silenced the client.

Naturally there are certain evident results of the fear of the West which are manifest

in a curious imbalance of the economy. There are Sputniks galore, and yet no adequate tooth paste. Air transport is efficient and comfortable, and yet the most hardened party fanatic will counsel against the purchase of a Soviet fountain pen. "Buy one in Helsinki," I was told. Yet, face to face with this gigantic experiment, I felt it was inelegant to carp about the lack of creature comforts to which we have become accustomed.

It is perhaps our way to concentrate on the well-being of the individual even to the point of permitting self-indulgence in times of affluence. It is their way to concentrate on things in which the community may take pride — space exploration, the hydrofoils and water skiers on the Moscow canal, the extraordinary emphasis on the education of children in community centres.

Their mistrust of the foreigner is far from being unnatural. What is more remarkable in the light of their history is the extravagant hospitality they reserve

for the visitor of goodwill. After a long history of invasions, the Russian desire to pad her frontiers with buffer States and satellites is in reality an almost landlocked nation's historical equivalent of Britain's island complex about far-flung naval bases and the ruling of the waves.

Communism may be an international creed, but no mere letter of the law has ever succeeded in changing the character of a people. Communism in Russia is essentially Russian, and whereas it may share its monotonous slogans with other Communist Parties and influence them as regards policy, it, in its turn, cannot remain entirely impervious to the influences of Polish, Czech or even French and Italian thought and art.

Just as any deviation in the Western bloc brings an American ambassador-at-large or even Mr. Kennedy hurrying to the scene to mend the rift, so any flutter in the Eastern heart-beat has Mr. Khrushchev rushing hither and thither with the flowers and handclaps. It is not easy to be a Great Power, locked for

better or for worse in a position of extremity.

The British can afford to be avuncular in their advice, the French can afford their almost daily declarations of independence, the Cubans can afford to yell cold-bloodedly in a public place like a calculating child: the Americans cannot afford to slap it for fear of being thought cruel by the passers-by, nor can they be too stern with us in Western Europe because of our geographical position and our somewhat frayed sensibilities. The position of the Russians is very similar: Mr. Gomulka may speak some peremptory words about the need for realism in the arts, but the Polish mind is too tempted by experiment and adventure to pay much heed. Others likewise go their independent ways, and Russian artists watch with fascination.

Now that the Chinese have reached about the year 1919 in their revolutionary development, with far more dangerous toys at their imminent disposal than were available then, and with the hope of war as the only solution to their desperate birth con-

trol problem, even the emancipation of the Soviet artist is assured within the loosening corset of Socialist theory.

The victory of Fellini's film "8 1/2" at the Moscow film festival at the very moment of the breakdown of the Sino-Russian talks is more significant than may be imagined. It had already been violently attacked by several Soviet critics. Khrushchev himself had recently spoken out against any hint of the unrealistic. And yet "8 1/2" had won the Grand Prix.

This victory was interpreted by certain organs of the Western Press as an attempt to encourage Italy's large Communist Party, but I believe the truth to be much more exciting and much less devious. The best man won, as he was bound to against the kind of opposition he had. Russian intellectuals will be arguing about the decision for months to come. So much the better. Many people think they are not allowed to argue.

At a banquet I had cause to say that in my opinion we all have far more to learn from one another than we

have to teach one another. After a momentary pause, this remark was greeted with rapturous applause by the Soviet guests. It was not just politeness. The world is shrinking by the minute, and with the improvement in communications, they are slowly losing their sense of immensity and of timelessness, just as we are adapting ourselves to the fact that a

few miles of sea is less of a barrier today than was a moat in the Middle Ages.

I suspect men of goodwill already recognize that their well-being is our well-being, and vice versa. As to those whose positions of authority preclude the exercise of mere goodwill, it will take the Chinese to bring the lesson home. — *The London Times*, July 28, 1963.

## KNOWLEDGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Cicero, in enumerating the various heads of mental excellence, lays down the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, as the first of them. "This pertains most of all to human nature," he says "for we are all of us drawn to the pursuit of knowledge; in which to excel we consider excellent, whereas to mistake, to err, to be ignorant, to be deceived, is both an evil and a disgrace."