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Article abstract

In 1936 George Drew, future Premier of Ontario, was greatly concerned that a false and very dangerous impression of the Russian experiment in government was being spread in Ontario. So he traveled to Russia in 1937 where he confirmed his preconceived ideas with first-hand observation. For him, toleration of domestic communism could lead either to the horrors of Stalin's USSR or to the fascism of Hitler or Mussolini. Canada's best option, he felt, was to follow Britain in ending partisan politics and establishing a "National Government." Thus, in the 1930s, he worked, unsuccessfully, to create coalition governments in Toronto and Ottawa. This article concludes that the lens through which Drew viewed the USSR can be reversed to gain insight into the Canadian political culture of which he was a part. The right-wing solutions that Drew advocated were conveyed to the public through international comparison and analogy based on Drew's eye-witness account of his European tour.

'NO SENSE OF REALITY'

George A. Drew's Anti-Communist Tour of the USSR and the Campaign for Coalition Government in Ontario, 1937

by Kirk Niergarth



When George Drew returned from the Soviet Union in 1937, he pledged to tell Canadians the truth about the reality of conditions in the USSR. In the context of tours of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, however, “reality” and “truth” were floating signifiers. Hindsight has revealed that the substance of George Drew’s eyewitness critique of Stalin’s USSR was substantially correct. Yet, as we shall see, the then-future premier of Ontario’s reports about his tour are in several respects less creditable than those of more sympathetic travellers, who, we can see in retrospect, conveyed fundamentally mistaken ideas about life in the Soviet Union. Is accurately describing an illusory experience more honest than dissembling to describe something true? Moral philosophers might pause over this question, but

for historians what Drew actually saw in the Soviet Union may be less significant than what he *said* he had seen.

Drew’s travelogue, which was given a great deal of space and attention in the press, used international circumstances, comparisons, and analogies to advocate for right-wing policies in Canada. In Drew’s eyes, the Soviet Union was the greatest threat to world peace: Canada should re-arm to support Great Britain, which might be wise to ally with fascist Italy and Germany to resist the Soviet menace. Domestically, unchecked communism endangered Canadian liberties. To meet this threat, inspired by Britain’s “National Government,” Drew advocated the merger of Ontario’s Conservative and Liberal parties. Parliamentary democracy would be preserved by turning Ontario, essentially, into a one-party

Abstract

In 1936 George Drew, future Premier of Ontario, was greatly concerned that a false and very dangerous impression of the Russian experiment in government was being spread in Ontario. So he traveled to Russia in 1937 where he confirmed his preconceived ideas with first-hand observation. For him, toleration of domestic communism could lead either to the horrors of Stalin's USSR or to the fascism of Hitler or Mussolini. Canada's best option, he felt, was to follow Britain in ending partisan politics and establishing a "National Government." Thus, in the 1930s, he worked, unsuccessfully, to create coalition governments in Toronto and Ottawa. This article concludes that the lens through which Drew viewed the USSR can be reversed to gain insight into the Canadian political culture of which he was a part. The right-wing solutions that Drew advocated were conveyed to the public through international comparison and analogy based on Drew's eye-witness account of his European tour.

Résumé: *En 1936, bien avant de devenir premier ministre de l'Ontario, George Drew était fort préoccupé par le sentiment qui se répandait en Ontario envers le système expérimental du gouvernement russe. Craignant la fausseté et les dangers potentiels de cette idéologie, il effectua, en 1937, un voyage en Russie, lors duquel il confirma ses appréhensions. Selon lui, la tolérance du communisme domestique pouvait mener soit aux horreurs de l'URSS de Staline, soit au fascisme d'Hitler et de Mussolini. La meilleure option pour le Canada était d'imiter la Grande-Bretagne et de mettre fin aux politiques partisans pour établir un « gouvernement national ». Il tenta donc, à la fin des années 30, de créer un gouvernement de coalition à Toronto et à Ottawa, mais sans succès. Les solutions de droite de Drew étaient transmises au public par les comparaisons et les analogies internationales basées sur sa propre expérience lors de sa tournée européenne. Cet article conclut qu'en examinant l'attitude de Drew envers l'URSS, il est possible de mieux comprendre le climat politique canadien auquel il appartenait.*

state. Ottawa might then follow suit. If eliminating competition between political parties seems, from the perspective of the present, a strange way to oppose Stalinist Communism, Drew was far from the only proponent of the idea. In the 1930s, he was only one of a number of influential political and business leaders who actively, if unsuccessfully, worked

to create coalition governments federally and provincially.¹ As part of this campaign, Drew's travelogue reflected political ideas he had developed before he departed on his trip. For Drew, as it was for many western visitors, a visit to the USSR only amplified but did not alter the ideological trajectory of a political journey begun at home. The lens through

¹ This campaign gathered momentum in 1934, driven principally by Edward Beatty of the CPR, but was closest to achieving success in Ontario in 1937. See Don Nerbas, *Dominion of Capital: The Politics of Big Business and the Crisis of the Canadian Bourgeoisie, 1914-1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013): 105-106, 135-47, 196-98. See also, John T. Saywell, 'Just Call Me Mitch': *The Life of Mitchell F. Hepburn* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 329-32, 341-43.

which Drew viewed the Soviet Union can be reversed to gain insight into the Canadian political culture of which he was a part.

What led a conservative, anti-communist such as George Drew to visit the USSR? In 1930s Canada, the Soviet Union was the subject of much debate, a debate in which those who had visited the USSR spoke with special authority. The success or failure of communism in the USSR mattered to both those on the Left and on the Right for reasons less connected to international relations than to domestic political possibilities. What ramifications did the Soviet experience—in terms, for example, of state planning, social security, and gender equality—have for Canada? In February 1936, writing to another supporter of “National Government,” CPR president Edward Beatty, Drew explained that he was “greatly concerned about the effect of the attitude of papers like the Toronto *Daily Star* which are giving a false and what may conceivably be a very dangerous impression of the Russian experiment.”² A year later, Drew had progressed from concern to alarm when the Committee for Industri-

al Organization [CIO] gained members in Ontario. He urged authorities to “take an uncompromising stand against the inroads of an organization which is an exact counterpart of the Soviet in Russia and is directed by men who have actually gone to Russia to study their organization methods.”³ In July 1937, Drew decided to undertake his own travel study in the USSR. Apparently, his experience matched his expectations perfectly and completely. He returned having witnessed firsthand the failure of the Soviet experiment. “In a nutshell,” he wrote to a friend, “I doubt if ever since Man left the cave state has civilization been reduced to such an appalling condition.”⁴

A significant number of Canadians were among the roughly 100,000 interwar international visitors to the USSR who attempted to read the results of the “Great Experiment” with their own eyes.⁵ Drew’s hostility to the USSR—before, during and after his journey there—differentiates him from the majority of visitors from Western nations who were most often, at least initially, sympathetic to or curious about “actually existing Communism.”⁶ Historians who have

² Library and Archives Canada, George Alexander Drew Fonds, MG 32 C3 [Drew Papers] V.23, F.88, “Beatty, Sir Edward, President CPR,” Drew to Beatty, 23 February 1936.

³ Drew Papers, V.23, F.1256, “Rowe, Hon. Earl,” Drew to Rowe, 30 April 1937.

⁴ Drew Papers, V.23, F.25, “Balfour, Gordon.”

⁵ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

⁶ In addition to David-Fox’s recent work, see: Sylvia Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The USSR and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924–1937* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the USSR, China, and Cuba, 1928–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); David Cauter, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988); David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the USSR, 1920–1940: from Red Square*

studied these travellers—Paul Hollander calls them “political pilgrims”—have focused on the intellectual climate that produced their attraction to the USSR and the “techniques of hospitality” used by the Soviets to “lure and seduce” international visitors.⁷ In most cases, as Hollander writes, “visitors in the 1930s were deceived, not necessarily by staged events, fake settings, or the unrepresentative sampling of the sights, but by the overall image of Soviet life and society conveyed to them.”⁸ Drew was certainly not swayed by Soviet hospitality. When assessing his travel narrative, however, it is worth considering what Hollander notes as a limitation of his study, *Political Pilgrims*: “While a fair amount has been written here (and elsewhere) about the political attitudes and errors of Western intellectuals connected with their sympathy for Marxist movements and regimes... much less is known and has been said about political misjudgements of the opposite character.” Hollander then quotes Malcolm Muggeridge’s 1940 observation that “as many adhering to the Left journeyed to the USSR, there to offer thanks and admire all that they were shown, so did their corresponding type of the Right make Hitler their hero and the Third Reich their paradise.”⁹ Drew did not claim

Hitler as a hero, but in comparison to his dystopia-seeking in the USSR, he found a great deal to admire in nations he visited governed by right-wing regimes.

Few Canadians who visited the USSR in the 1930s were unreservedly enthusiastic about what they saw during their tours. Particularly this was the case for social democrats, whose judgments ranged from being unimpressed (in the case of Agnes Macphail) to being optimistic about the USSR’s future (in the case of King Gordon) with most falling in between (including J.S. Woodsworth, Frank Scott, and George Williams). These travellers often found that in standard of living and personal freedom, the USSR compared unfavourably to Canada and to the Scandinavian countries they also visited. They did often report positively, however, about aspects of the USSR: particularly regarding education, prison reform, socialized healthcare, and the role of women in Soviet society.¹⁰

By contrast, aside from ex-patriate Russians, Drew was among a small number of Canadian travellers who entirely condemned the Soviet system after witnessing conditions in the USSR. Notably, among their number was Andrew Cairns, an Albertan in the employ of the Empire Marketing Board, who

to the Left Bank (Routledge: New York, 2007); Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen, eds., *Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the USSR in the 1920s-1940* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

⁷ “Techniques of hospitality” is Hollander’s phrase (*Political Pilgrims*, 16); “lure and seduce” is Stern’s description of the aims of the Soviet tourism apparatus (*Western Intellectuals*, 35).

⁸ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

¹⁰ J. L. Black, *Canada in the Soviet Mirror: Ideology and Perception in Soviet Foreign Affairs, 1917-1991* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1998), 102-105.

spent five months in the Soviet Union in 1932 and wrote an unpublished, detailed and devastating account of the famine in Ukraine.¹¹ Drew stands out in the degree to which his negative view of the USSR was used directly in support of a domestic right-wing political agenda. In some respects, Drew's interpretation of the USSR shared much with American diplomatic personnel of the 1930s who thought the Soviet Union could be better understood by studying the national and racial characteristics of Russians than the ideology of communism.¹² Anticipating the Cold War, however, ideology figured prominently in Drew's essentially Orientalist view of the USSR: it was *because* of Russian racial inferiority that Communism had spread and come to power there and, hence, Anglo-Saxon Canadians should take whatever measures were necessary to prevent the proliferation of the contagion of Communism in Canada.¹³

Canadians more sympathetic to Communism were, likewise, more enthusiastic about the USSR. Margaret Gould, Executive Secretary of the Child Welfare Council of Canada, spent ten weeks in the USSR in 1936 and wrote about her experiences in a series of articles in the *Toronto Star*.¹⁴ The same month she left, April 1936, her name appeared as one of the editors of the Communist-sympathetic magazine *New Frontier*.¹⁵ Her reports from the USSR were characteristic of a fellow traveller: decidedly, though not uniformly, sympathetic.¹⁶ As Drew was "concerned" about the *Star's* portrayal of the USSR *before* Gould began publishing her dispatches, it is not difficult to imagine the mood in which he greeted the arrival of her articles and book. Perhaps a desire to refute her account played some role in Drew's decision to see the USSR for himself.

Drew has been called the "most Tory

¹¹ Andrew Cairns, *The Soviet Famine 1932-33: An Eye-Witness Account of Conditions in the Spring and Summer of 1932*, Tony Kuz, ed. (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1989).

¹² Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 244-71.

¹³ Drew's racial worldview was on display six months before he travelled to the USSR when he orchestrated a by-election campaign in East Hastings in December of 1936. Here, he was, in Jonathan Manthorpe's words "responsible for one of the strongest appeals to racial prejudice in modern Canadian history." At one point in the campaign Drew told a crowd that "it is not unfair to remind the French, that they are a defeated race, and that their rights are rights only because of the tolerance by the English element who, with all respect to the minority, must be regarded as the dominant race." During his European tour the following summer, he wrote often about racial characteristics—Stalin was, invariably, "Asiatic"—and allowed that a visit to England made a visitor especially "proud of the race to which he belongs." Col. George A. Drew, "Government Capable of Governing", *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1937, 1. The quotation above is from Jonathan Manthorpe, *The Power and the Tories: Ontario Politics—1943 to the present* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 25. On Drew's perception of the necessity to take dramatic measures against Communism based on his observations of the USSR see, among many examples, "Section 98 for Ontario Advocated by Col. Drew," *Toronto Star*, 17 September 1937, 22.

¹⁴ Margaret Gould, *I Visit The Soviets* (Toronto: Francis White Publishing Ltd., 1937), i.

¹⁵ *New Frontier*, 1.1 (April 1936).

¹⁶ "A country, like a human being," Gould wrote, "can neither be completely villainous nor completely angelic." Gould, *I Visit The Soviets*, iv.

of Tories,” and certainly he had an appropriate lineage for such a designation.¹⁷ Born into a prominent family in Guelph, Ontario, in 1894, both Drew’s grandfather and father were lawyers who were elected under the Conservative banner.¹⁸ Drew followed in his father’s footsteps in attending Upper Canada College, the University of Toronto, and Osgoode Hall law school. After serving in the First World War, Drew returned to Guelph where he practiced law and entered municipal politics, becoming an alderman in 1922 and mayor in 1925. Between 1926 and 1934 he was appointed to positions by the Conservative government of Ontario: he was assistant master and then master of the Ontario Supreme Court before becoming, in 1931, the first chair of the Ontario Securities Commission until he was replaced following the election of a Liberal government under Mitchell Hepburn in 1934.

In 1936, Drew entered provincial politics and lost his campaign for the leadership of the Conservative Party to Earl Rowe. He served briefly under Rowe as a party organizer, before breaking from the party and running unsuccessfully as an Independent Conservative in the provincial election of 1937. Rowe led the Conservatives to defeat in this election,

prompting Drew to return to the party to contest and beat Rowe for the leadership in 1938. Drew was elected to the legislature in a 1939 by-election and led the opposition until he became premier, with a minority government, in 1943. Drew won a majority government in the election of 1945. His party won again in 1948, but Drew lost his own seat and left provincial politics following the election to lead the federal Progressive Conservatives until 1956. He continued his passionate denunciations of Communism into the 1950s, becoming, in the view of Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, one of Canada’s “would-be Joe McCarthys” during the Cold War.¹⁹

Drew’s 1937 trip to the USSR occurred during his self-imposed exile from the Conservative Party. His break with leader Earl Rowe and the extensive coverage Drew’s travelogues received in the *Globe and Mail* were both connected to the alliance Drew developed with that paper’s charismatic publisher, George McCullagh. By the spring of 1937, Drew and McCullagh both agreed that Ontario could not afford the democratic luxury of competing political parties in the legislature. An alliance of the Liberal and Conservative parties would free the government to enact the kind of policies

¹⁷ Manthorpe, *The Power*, 29. A full scholarly biography of Drew has yet to be published. According to Donald C. MacDonald, J. L. Granatstein was forced to abandon his Ontario Historical Studies Series biography of Drew when Drew’s son Edward restricted access to his father’s papers in the early 1980s. See MacDonald, *The Happy Warrior Political Memoirs* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1998), 295. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who directed me to this source.

¹⁸ Robert Bawtinheimer, “The Young George Drew and his Guelph Background, 1894-1925,” MA Thesis, University of Guelph, 1975, 27-33. Bawtinheimer published some of the findings of this thesis in “The Development of an Ontario Tory: Young George Drew,” *Ontario History* 69:1 (March 1977), 55-75.

¹⁹ Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, *Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: Lorimer, 2003), 35-39.

Drew and McCullagh thought were desirable, even if they might not be popular with the voting public.

McCullagh, unlike Drew, was not born into the Canadian elite; he rose to wealth and prominence through a combination of hard work and stock speculation. McCullagh's standing in Canadian public life rose significantly when millionaire mine owner William H. Wright purchased the *Globe* and then the *Mail and Empire* in 1936 at McCullagh's urging. McCullagh was then installed as publisher of the newly merged papers.²⁰ In September of that year, Ontario's Liberal premier Mitchell Hepburn appointed him as the youngest governor in the University of Toronto's history.²¹ McCullagh was Hepburn's ally, friend, and (clandestinely) investment adviser, but this did not prohibit him from simultaneously cultivating a close relationship with then-Conservative Party organizer George Drew.

Initially in McCullagh's tenure the *Globe and Mail* supported Liberal provincial and federal governments under Hepburn and William Lyon Mackenzie King, respectively. In June 1937, when Hepburn announced that he was "not a Mackenzie King Liberal any longer," Mc-

Cullagh tried, personally, to mend bridges between the two leaders; publicly his newspaper had already begun advocating a move away from party government altogether.²² The idea of a union or "national" government brought about through a merger of the Liberal and Conservative parties was the idea that brought McCullagh, Drew, and Hepburn into alliance in the spring of 1937, spurred by fears about the arrival of the CIO in Ontario.

Affiliates of the CIO led strikes in Sarnia and Oshawa in March and April of 1937. The well-known confrontation at General Motors in Oshawa spurred an extraordinary response from Hepburn. To fight the forces of "John L. Lewis and of Communism," Hepburn created a special police force (dubbed almost immediately, Hepburn's Hussars) and attempted to convince the Federal government to deport and bar American union organizers from Ontario.²³ The *Globe and Mail* was behind Hepburn's anti-CIO stand—and, according to McCullagh's recollection, was behind it in both senses of the term—with front page coverage hailing Hepburn as "Canada's Man of the Hour."²⁴

Drew supported Hepburn's anti-CIO campaign and, like Hepburn, thought the issue was serious enough to

²⁰ Brian J. Young, "C. George McCullagh and the Leadership League," *Canadian Historical Review* 47:3 (September 1966), 204.

²¹ Neil McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 88.

²² Mackenzie King recorded a Liberal organizer named Nathanson's version of this political evolution in his diary: "[Nathanson] says... McCullagh is wholly inexperienced, and his idea is to do away with party government altogether. Hepburn is lending himself to this idea and is really in alliance with Colonel Drew, the former aspirant for the Tory leadership, who is secretly writing for the *Globe*." King Diary, 6 July 1937.

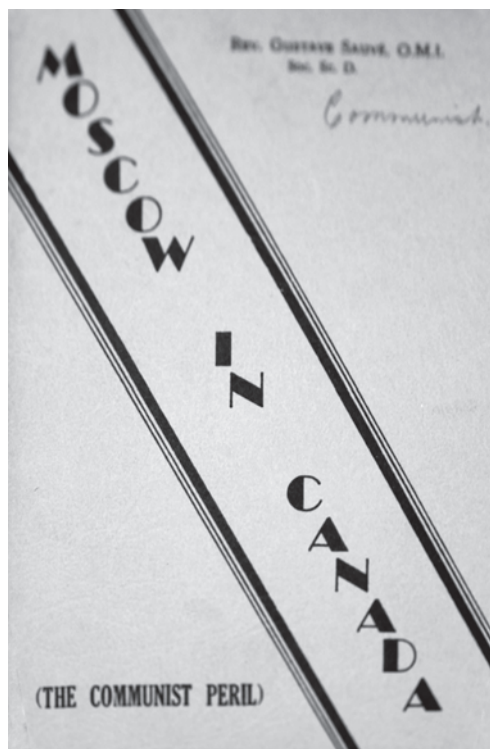
²³ McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn*, 105-114.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

Figure 1: *Moscow in Canada*. This 1935 pamphlet by Rev. Gustave Sauvé is among the large collection of anti-communist materials in George Drew's papers. (Library and Archives Canada, George Alexander Drew Fonds, MG 32 C3, V.35, F. 309-B "Communism Printed Material.")

justify the creation of a union government in Ontario. Such a government, Drew told his party's leader Earl Rowe, would be able to "effect reforms which every thinking person believes should be carried out, but which in the very nature of party politics are extremely difficult for any party to do."²⁵ On 23 April, the day the Oshawa GM strike ended, Hepburn advised Lieutenant Governor Herbert Bruce that he might dissolve parliament and ask for a union government. Only two days later, Drew told Bruce and his wife that he was to serve as attorney general in the new government.²⁶ Rowe, however, would not acquiesce to the scheme and, on 30 April, when Rowe refused Hepburn's proposal, Drew resigned. The next day, when the *Toronto Star* broke the story of the union government negotiations, Hepburn denied such a proposal had ever been made.

Drew's resignation was not announced until 6 May, the day after Rowe told an audience that his party "stands for the right of employees to bargain collectively through their own representatives." This made plausible Drew's explanation that he was leaving the Conservative party because he agreed with Hepburn's stance against the CIO. McCullagh, through the



Globe and Mail's editorial page, expressed his sympathy with Drew, wondering how Rowe could find anyone "except the Reds and the Pinks and others who thrive on discontent and agitation, to stay with him."²⁷ The *Globe* was enthusiastic about the idea of union government and the *Toronto Telegram* suggested it might help fight "class warfare." Among Toronto's major dailies, only the *Star* denounced the idea as one of the most "dangerous" in Ontario's history. Such a coalition against labour, the *Star* wrote, would amount to "naked fascism."²⁸

Having failed with Rowe, McCullagh

²⁵ Drew Papers, V.23, F.1256, Drew to Rowe, 30 April 1937.

²⁶ McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn*, 120.

²⁷ As quoted in McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn*, 124.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

advised Hepburn to proceed in forming a “national government” with Drew as the leading Conservative member. McCullagh described his version of events in a lengthy discussion with Mackenzie King in January of 1938, which King recorded in his diary:

McCullagh's idea was that he could get millions from Americans and other capital invested into Canada if he could make clear that both political parties were united in suppressing the CIO and movements of the kind. He had gone to Hepburn....When Rowe turned the proposal down, McCullagh talked it anew with George Drew, and suggested to Hepburn uniting with him to form a sort of National Government again using the CIO as the excuse therefor.... Hepburn gave McCullagh his assurances that everything would be worked out satisfactorily with Drew, and [McCullagh] left for England himself with the understanding that when he returned, arrangements would be completed and an election brought on.²⁹

Drew, like McCullagh, embarked for Europe in the summer of 1937 and, if arrangements had been worked out with Hepburn, they are not a matter of public record. Having left his party because it had refused to stand firmly enough against Communism and having, in the process, been accused of conspiring to create a Canadian variant of Fascism, Drew set out to see both systems of government in practice in Europe.

When he travelled to the USSR

in July of 1937, Drew was not ‘curious’ about conditions there—his clippings files and correspondence reveal him to have been closely following news of the USSR and of Communism in Canada since the 1920s (Figure 1).³⁰ Rather it seems probable that Drew intended to ‘debunk’ the favourable reports of travellers such as Gould. When Drew wrote his own account, he explained how other tourists “had failed to see what was actually before their own eyes.” Drew imagined that such travellers would be preoccupied playing Bridge on the train while passing by the “ghastly squalor of a large city like Minsk.” Adjourning the game in the station at Moscow, after having been “far too busy to notice the haggard faces and sordid unhappiness of the crowded streets on the outskirts of the city,” they will begin “a day or so of carefully supervised visits” before moving on to “Leningrad or some other point of interest where the same process is repeated.”³¹

Drew would be much less easily fooled. His account of the USSR appears in retrospect to have been essentially correct. Hindsight has verified the accuracy of his significant charges—that Stalin was a despotic dictator in the process of ‘liquidating’ his political opponents; that the USSR was a society in which an elite was privileged while the masses faced deprivation; that major infrastructure projects were being carried out by

²⁹ King Diary, 6 January 1938.

³⁰ Drew corresponded with other Canadian anti-Communists, including Watson Kirkconnell, and made connections with anti-Communist Russian émigrés. Drew Papers, V.35, F.309-B, “Communism Printed Material” and V.82, F.152-D, “Kirkconnell, Watson.”

³¹ Drew Papers, V.298, F.56, “Articles Russia Oct-Dec. 1939,” n.d., 4.

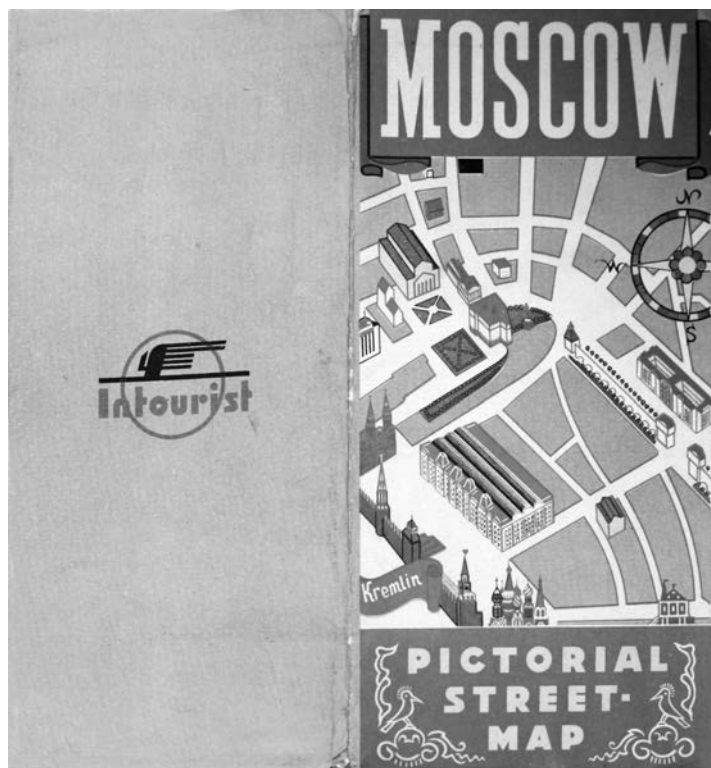


Figure 2: Canadian in Moscow. Drew's tour of the Soviet Union was conducted by Intourist [State Joint-Stock Company for Foreign Tourism]. Foreign visitors to the USSR had many complaints about this organization. As Michael David-Fox explains, Intourist tours featured "heavy handed propaganda in guides' interactions with foreigners, loading visitors down with notoriously long schedules that also served to prevent wandering around." (Showcasing the Great Experiment 2012, 178).

prison labour; that many basic freedoms were severely curtailed and the secret police services were widely and deservedly feared. In this sense, at least, it is possible to regard Drew as one of the most clear-eyed observers of the USSR of his era.

It is difficult to verify, however, what Drew actually observed in the USSR. While travellers such as King Gordon, Frank Scott, Graham Spry, and Frederick Banting kept detailed diaries recording their daily activities on their tours, such a document has not survived in Drew's massive archive. In his numerous publications about his trip, Drew provides few details as to his itinerary

or length of stay. He travelled by train from Poland to Moscow—and, as in the quotation above, saw Minsk, at minimum, from the windows of his train. Drew was in Moscow, he reports, on 14 July when Mikhail Gromov completed his record-setting flight between Moscow and

California. He was also there for the formal opening of the Moscow-Volga canal, an event that is featured in the copy of the 17 July *Moscow Daily News* in Drew's papers. He has a copy of the next day's issue as well. He saw the sights in Moscow guided by the Soviet tourist agency Intourist—including the new subway, Lenin's tomb, the Park of Rest and Culture, and the Museum of the Revolution (Figure 2). He visited a collective farm close to Moscow and the Kazansky railway station in northern Moscow. Visits to the Mother and Child Rooms at this station were a regular feature of Soviet tours in the mid-1930s.³² Drew

³² Drew Papers, V.126, F.1278, "Russia, 1937-1939," and Stern, 122.

also visited Kolomenskoye, just south of Moscow—formerly a royal estate, it had become an architectural museum with relocated churches and other buildings from pre-revolutionary Russia that were moved there to make way for Soviet construction. It was at this tourist attraction that Drew wrote that he saw a camp of prison labourers surrounded with barbed wire and machine gun nests.

Given that on 1 August he had already been in Paris attending the World's Fair for at least a day and that in the interim he spent time in (at minimum) Latvia and Lithuania, Drew's time in the USSR must have been no longer than two weeks. Over the course of his travels in June and July, Drew also claimed to have visited: England, Portugal, Spain (where, if he saw any of the Civil War, he wrote nothing about it), Italy, Greece, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.³³ Hence, his time in the USSR may have amounted comparatively to a long stop.

In spite of his wide-ranging tour, Drew wrote at length about only four countries: England, Italy, Germany and the USSR. His reflections upon current conditions in these four states were published in eight lengthy front page stories in the *Globe and Mail* between 11 and 19 August 1937. These articles, written retrospectively in London, are less travelogues than commentaries on international affairs supported with evidence drawn from first-hand observation. The

first installment provided an introduction, an overview and a rationale for the articles that followed. Europe was in “serious crisis” and Drew would provide a “real understanding of what is going on in Italy, Germany and Russia.” Canadians ought to know “the causes which have led so many countries to voluntarily choose dictatorship [Drew's emphasis].” This choice, in Drew's view, was

to a great extent the result of Communism. It is most unlikely that Mussolini would ever have been dictator of Italy were it not for the fact that Communists had so disorganized the whole economic and social structure of the country.... In Germany, it is doubtful if Hitler would every have been heard of, had it not been that the people of Bavaria... had seen the horrors of Communism under the government of Kurt Eisner.

Mussolini and Hitler were “obviously inspired by a passionate love of their own country” and, outside of the “cruel despotism of Russia,” the “vast majority of people in all the dictatorships are sincerely behind their governments in the violent hatred of Communism.”³⁴

Mussolini's Italy was the first dictatorship Drew described for readers of the *Globe and Mail* and it was the one that most impressed him. In an article published the same day that Hepburn announced that there would be a provincial election in Ontario in October, soon-to-be candidate Drew explained that what Mussolini had achieved in Italy was “little short of a miracle.” Admittedly, “conditions have been imposed which, it is to

³³ Col. George A. Drew, “Europe Wants Peace But War is in the Air,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 August 1937, 1.

³⁴ All quotations in this paragraph from Drew, “Europe Wants Peace,” 1.

be hoped, will never be imposed in any British country,” but “if the question of Mussolini’s continued leadership of the Italian people were put to a completely free popular vote, he and his form of government would be supported by an overwhelming majority.” It was worth considering that if Italians “willingly accept their loss of personal freedom... there must obviously have been much that is good as well as much that is bad.”³⁵ Drew was particularly impressed with the revitalization of the Italian military, but he believed that Mussolini “wants peace.”³⁶ Drew made no mention of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia or the involvement of Italian forces in the Spanish Civil War. These lacunae were not noted in an editorial in the same paper praising Drew’s “unbiased and constructive appraisal of Italy under Mussolini.”³⁷

Drew’s next article expressed pleasure that Neville Chamberlain had as unbiased a view of Mussolini’s Italy as he did. Reports of the “friendly discussion” between the new British Prime Minister and El Duce, Drew wrote, were welcome news to “people in England who have been in touch with events in Europe, and particularly those who have been in Russia.” Drew did not name the “people” who shared both his recent experience and political perspective, but they “have been gravely concerned with the apparent unwillingness of the British Govern-

ment to deal on any friendly basis with either Italy or Germany, while being prepared to listen somewhat favourably to arguments by Russia.” It was intolerable that Britain would align itself “even remotely and indirectly, with the most sinister and oppressive government in the world to-day.” In Italy and Germany, Drew had found a “real feeling of friendship towards the British Empire.” Much could be accomplished “if Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy sit down on a friendly basis to discuss their common problems.” Whether or not the actual appeasement policy Chamberlain would go on to pursue was what Drew had in mind is unknowable, but clearly he believed that if war was to come he had preferences about with whom the British Empire should be allied. As the title of his article put it, “Friendship with Soviets seen as Mistake.”³⁸

During Drew’s time in Germany, he noted some differences between Hitler and Mussolini. For one thing, Hitler was more anti-Semitic. This, too, could be blamed on communism. “It is doubtful if Hitler’s bitter and unreasoning antagonism to the Jews within Germany was as much the result of any racial feeling,” Drew wrote, “as it was of the unfortunate fact that most of the Communist leaders in Germany immediately after the War belonged to that great race.”³⁹ Hitler, according to Drew, had also antagonized Germa-

³⁵ All quotations in this paragraph from Col. George A. Drew, “42 Million People Seen Ready to Obey Dictator of Italy,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 August 1937, 1.

³⁶ Drew, “42 Million People,” 1.

³⁷ “Freedom v. Force,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 August 1937, 6.

³⁸ Col. George A. Drew, “Friendship with Soviets Seen as Mistake,” *Globe and Mail*, 13 August 1937, 1.

³⁹ Col. George A. Drew, “Duce Secure but Foes Beset Adolf Hitler,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 August 1937, 1.

ny's Roman Catholics and, with the arrest of Protestant ministers such as Martin Niemöller, Protestant opinion was beginning to shift against the Nazis.⁴⁰ Yet, Drew wrote, it would be "nonsense" to suggest that Germans were "oppressed, fearful, and terrorised." As in Mussolini's Italy, it was "inspiring" to see busy people and "public works of every kind under construction." Drew was convinced that the youth of Germany were firmly "behind Hitler and what he is doing." While Drew claimed to "dislike Nazism," Canada had much to learn from the advances in efficiency the Germans had made in "almost every field of purely material development." The German army and airforce were the "strongest in the world, and they are efficient with an efficiency which only comes from pride in the job they are doing." In spite of this strength—and, clearly, "efficiency"—Hitler, Drew thought, was not an imminent threat to world peace. A number of Hitler's advisors had what Drew called "strong pro-British tendencies" and he felt an understanding between Germany and Great Britain was a "very real possibility."⁴¹

Drew's comments about fascist Italy and Germany have some parallels to the kinds of comments social democratic Canadian travellers made upon their return from visits to the USSR. They were generally appalled at the lack of personal freedom afforded Soviet citizens. They did, however, note areas in which Canada might consider the merits of Soviet

policy: on, for example, social security, education, or the rights of women. Drew, observing fascist governments, likewise offered selective praise. From fascism's economic efficiency and militarism, Canada could draw lessons, but Drew alerted readers to the "excesses" that if applied in Canada would violate British liberties. Drew blamed these excesses, including Hitler's anti-Semitism, on communism. If further evidence was needed to convince Canadians to oppose communism both at home and abroad, Drew claimed to have found it during his visit to the USSR.

Drew introduced his own experience in the USSR by first describing how the USSR *wanted* to be seen by the rest of the world. At the Paris World's Fair, Drew wrote, the Soviet pavilion was a "masterpiece of propaganda." On display was the new Soviet constitution, which professed to be the most democratic in the world. Drew, however, "had left Moscow just a few days before, having been there at a time when an open shooting season had been declared for generals, commissars, engineers, and anyone who looked as though they might possibly agree with Trotsky that the Revolution has been betrayed." The descriptive panel beside the displayed Soviet-built tractor, Drew noted, "did not explain that two-thirds of all the tractors in Russia are out of commission at the present time." Drew provided no source for his statistics on tractor

⁴⁰ Niemöller, a conservative who initially supported the Nazis, was arrested on 1 July 1937. Drew, "Duce Secure but Foes Beset Adolf Hitler," 1.

⁴¹ Col. George A. Drew, "Finds Germany Touches Peak of Efficiency," *Globe and Mail*, 16 August 1937, 1.



Figure 3: *So this is Russia!* In 2015 dollars, the \$160 suit Drew has photographed would cost about \$2,650; the \$50 high-heeled shoes about \$828. Because part of Intourist's mandate was to accumulate hard foreign currency, the exchange rates charged to tourists for rubles was exorbitant. Drew's prices were likely those advertised in *TORGsIN*, a chain of stores with expensive imported goods where tourists were encouraged to shop. Photograph from *Maclean's*, October 1937, 14.

maintenance in the USSR, but he could speak from personal experience to contradict the “complete sham” display of Soviet railroad equipment: “I travelled on the main line from Warsaw to Moscow and I was not aware... that there was still in existence such primitive railway equipment in the world.” He had seen troop trains as well, and the men “were filthy... with a general appearance of inefficiency.” Soviet inefficiency—in contradistinction to Nazi efficiency—was a frequent theme.

Surprisingly, Drew ended his first article about the USSR with a positive account of the capital. Moscow was a “show place of Russia” where propagandists “seek to convince the few tourists that Russia is really the Workers’ Paradise.” In Moscow, “headquarters of the vast bureaucracy,” the “better brains” of

the USSR could be found and “there is much to be seen that is both interesting and attractive.” Drew’s opinion of Moscow would decrease as his distance from it in space and time increased, but even at this early juncture, he wanted readers to know that the Revolution was not responsible for the highlights of Russian cultural life: “there is not a single theatre in Moscow which was not built in the time of the Czars,” Drew concluded.⁴²

The next day’s article, under the front page headline “Workers in Russia Starving,” contained not even grudging praise of Soviet society. Drew focused on the prices of consumer goods in Moscow. These prices made goods such as suits, dresses, and high-heeled shoes completely unaffordable for most citizens (Figure 3).⁴³ In terms of wealth and poverty, Drew

⁴² Col. George A. Drew, “Soviet Exhibits Seen Sham and Propaganda,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 August 1937, 1.

⁴³ I discuss tourist shopping experiences in the USSR and their often frustrated efforts to as-



Figure 4: Drew visits a collective farm. Drew (as if there could be any doubt) is the adult figure on the right, in the white shoes. Photograph illustrating George Drew, "How Powerful is Russia?" *Saturday Night*, 11 November 1939, 2.

world." Drew anticipated that "hundreds of thousands of Russians will die of starvation during the coming winter, unless a miracle of reorganization takes place in the next few months."⁴⁴

One of Drew's photographs shows that he did visit at least one farm (Figure 4). The man Drew is posing beside is described in the caption as an "old peasant whose frank criticisms of the present regime were apparently tolerated as the result of age or eccentricity." The man does not appear to be on the brink of starvation, but a few of the children on the right do appear to be barefoot (although, as an anonymous reviewer of this article noted, in the 1930s a rural child in the USSR or in Canada might be barefoot in summer by choice rather than necessity). As was the case for most tourists to the USSR, Drew was taken to a relatively prosperous collective farm in proximity to Moscow. Through his interpreter, Drew inquired about the income of the farm and the farmers. Drew's arithmetic quickly determined that while the farm manager claimed the annual income per farmer was 5000 rubles, the total income divided by the number of inhabitants worked out to only 1573 rubles. This was one of Drew's favourite illustrative anecdotes about the USSR and he used it often to

wrote, "I doubt if there is any country in the world in which the extremes are any greater than they are in Russia today." While Soviet workers "get about 200 rubles a month, 'according to their needs,'" some commissars and bureaucrats, "the new aristocracy of Russia," were paid "7,500 rubles a month and more, 'according to their needs.'" Meanwhile, "people in the villages and smaller towns are mostly in bare feet and in tattered rags. I have never before seen whole masses of people literally on the verge of starvation. I had not realised that such ghastly destitution still existed anywhere in the

sess the Soviet cost-of-living in a short film available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUPMjVrffoU>

⁴⁴ Col. George A. Drew, "Workers in Russia Starving," *Globe and Mail*, 18 August 1937, 1.

demonstrate the unreliability of Soviet statistics and propaganda claims.⁴⁵

Exaggerated claims made by a collective farm manager and evidence of masses on the brink of starvation are, however, quite different things. Hunger was a killer in Stalin's USSR, but Drew was visiting in a summer of relative plenty. As Sheila Fitzpatrick notes, "the only really good year of the 1930s in Russia seems to have been 1937—ironically, the first year of the Great Purges—when the harvest was the best in the decade and there was plenty of food in the stores."⁴⁶ This does not mean that Drew did not see evidence of deprivation and inequity in his travels in the USSR. It does seem likely, however, that Drew may have on occasion supplemented his own experiences with secondary research. His comments on the salaries of commissars and bureaucrats, for example, aligned perfectly with the figures cited in an article by Max Eastman in *Harper's* that was abstracted by *Maclean's* on 15 May 1937 and clipped by Drew before he himself visited Russia. Unlike Drew, Eastman, who had lived in the USSR for two years in the 1920s and was still at this time a socialist, pointed out that the disparity in income in the USSR was "not radically different from conditions under American capitalism."⁴⁷

Inequality was only one of many aspects of Soviet society that offended

Drew. Any Soviet achievement Drew observed appeared either absurd, hypocritical, or both. The Moscow subway stations were impressive, but "there does seem something just a little strange about spending 160,000,000 dollars for a little more than six miles of tube in a country where they can't find any means to put even the cheapest leather boots on the feet of their peasants." As for other celebrated Soviet building projects, Drew was equally unimpressed. The House of the People's Commissars was only "the size of some of our smaller office buildings in Toronto." The Hotel Moscow "would probably be classed as a cheap commercial hotel in New York." The opulence of these buildings, constructed amid widespread deprivation, was "typical of everything one sees in Russia today. There is no sense of proportion. There is no sense of reality."⁴⁸

The Gromov polar flight was a "great flight," but, on the whole, Canada's record in arctic flying was superior to the Soviets. The Volga-Moscow canal had been presented by the Soviet Press as being an unrivalled achievement in engineering, but Drew wondered what "would have happened if I had written to the editors and pointed out that the Welland Canal in a place called Ontario... had been a far greater undertaking" and had not been built with prison labour. Drew claimed

⁴⁵ For example, George Drew, "So this is Russia!" *Maclean's*, 1 October 1937.

⁴⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

⁴⁷ Max Eastman, "Rich Russians," *Maclean's*, 15 May 1937, 28.

⁴⁸ Drew, "Workers in Russia Starving," 1. Images of the Hotel Moscow that make questionable Drew's assessment of it are discussed in a short film available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iERJZ5P1nMo>

to have seen Soviet canal workers surrounded by barbed wire and machine guns near Kolomenskoye: "I could not help thinking at the time that some of our Communist friends in Canada, who pretend to be so interested in prison reform, should go to Russia and do a little job there."⁴⁹ Drew took several photographs at Kolomenskoye that were published in *Saturday Night* in 1939; he did not, it would seem, manage a snap of the 15-foot barbed wire fences surrounding the canal labourers. The GULAG museum in Moscow has no record of either a permanent or a temporary prison camp in the vicinity of Kolomenskoye.⁵⁰ Given that the Moscow-Volga canal enters Moscow from the north and Kolomenskoye is located in the south, this certainly would not have been a convenient location for workers engaged on that project. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of prisoners in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1937 and it is not impossible that Drew saw some of them. If, however, he saw the kind of camp he described it would have been a remarkable oversight by Drew's Intourist guide. The summer of Drew's visit, controls over tourists' activities were tighter than they had been at any time in the 1930s.⁵¹ One prison was part of many tours, the "show" GULAG at Bolshhevo where conditions were liberal and interactions with tourists were carefully managed. Perhaps, in the chaos caused by

the purges for both tourist organizations and the Soviet prison system, Drew's tour came upon a prison camp by mistake or perhaps Drew escaped, somehow, from the Intourist itinerary. Or, perhaps, he described, quite accurately, a kind of prison camp which he knew existed in the Soviet Union based on sources other than his own observation.

Drew's clipping files reveal that he had been closely following news of Stalin's show trials before his departure. The recent past and the present of Drew's first-hand account were brought together in the *Globe and Mail* as Drew described the reign of a leader who made "Ivan the Terrible look like a cooing dove." "10,000 had been shot following the assassination of Stalin's favorite, Kirov" and "more than 200,000 people were ordered out of Leningrad and sent into exile in Siberia" and now "wholesale executions are taking place in Russia almost daily... Several executions were officially announced by the Russian press while I was in Russia." It was a "marvel" to Drew, that Stalin, a "Georgian of that race which has lived by the gun and sword for centuries" had not yet provoked another Russian revolution. It was as though, Drew wrote, "Al Capone were President of the United States."⁵²

The "Red Dream," Drew concluded, had nearly come to an end. There was no comparison, Drew thought, between Stalin's tyranny and that of the fascist regimes

⁴⁹ Drew, "Workers in Russia Starving," 1.

⁵⁰ A short film showing my visit to Kolomenskoye and describing my inquiries at the GULAG museum in Moscow is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbPugu9mVEs>

⁵¹ Stern, *Western Intellectuals*, 122.

⁵² Drew, "Workers in Russia Starving," 1.

he had visited. He had heard “that ardent [British] Socialist, Sir Stafford Cripps, stirring up crowds with his assertion that Nazism is Public Enemy No. 1 in the world today. Bad though Nazism is, any man who makes that statement today has no right to be taken seriously.” The *Globe and Mail* agreed. An editorial the next day repeated the highlights of Drew’s assessment “for the benefit of the lengthy list of dupes who gaze toward that distant alleged Elysium of the proletariat.” Drew could be believed, by contrast, because “political dogma does not change a race of less than average practical ability into one of genius.” Drew’s “British idealism, rare courage and brilliant intellect” had allowed him to provide the kind of “public service which shows him to be the kind of man... who is needed in public life.”⁵³ The editorial did not go on to congratulate voters in the riding of Wellington South for having been given the opportunity to be “represent[ed] by one of the keenest-minded, most outstanding men in public life”—that compliment the *Globe* saved for the following month when the provincial campaign was well underway.⁵⁴

Drew’s British idealism was in full display in the final installment of his *Globe and Mail* series. How had Britain avoided the “extremes” and “factionalism” that had resulted in dictatorships elsewhere? It “found that the only way to preserve that freedom which is the

foundation of all democracy, is to have strong government which is capable of governing as efficiently as any dictatorship.” To achieve this end, Drew wrote, “the Labour, Liberal and Conservative Parties [had] joined to form a National Government which could do those necessary things which no one Party could have done alone.” Thus Britain was not “cursed with the apostles of Party Warfare.” In British industry, according to Drew, there was “no suggestion anywhere of antagonism between employers and employees.” Contrary to the role of the CIO in Ontario, “British workers never have and never will permit international interference of any kind with their internal affairs.” Drew concluded that

if the other democracies which still survive are not to succumb to the disease of Fascism or Communism they must assure the same strong form of government and the same good-will between all classes which makes everyone who comes to this wonderful little country proud of the race to which he belongs.⁵⁵

The following day’s editorial explained that Drew had shown that a “strong National Government was more efficient than one limited to party” and “we of this Dominion... shall deceive ourselves if we go elsewhere for an example.”⁵⁶

Drew’s articles attracted favourable attention and were reprinted in newspapers in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Kitchener, and Regina.⁵⁷ They evoked outrage

⁵³ “The Facts About Sovietism,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1937.

⁵⁴ As quoted in McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn*, 134.

⁵⁵ Col. George A. Drew, “Government Capable of Governing,” *Globe and Mail*, 19 August 1937, 1.

⁵⁶ “The British Way,” *Globe and Mail*, 20 August 1937.

⁵⁷ See “Colonel Drew Writing about Russia,” *Ottawa Journal*, 23 August 1937; “Soviet Sham,”

in the Communist press. The *Daily Clarion* interviewed John Buckley, Secretary of the Toronto District Trades and Labor Council, who had visited the USSR in May. Buckley called Drew's article on starving workers "a deliberate lie." Buckley had traveled further than Drew and he "never saw anybody in rags neither did I see anybody starving."⁵⁸ T.A. Barnard, identifying himself as a veteran, a mechanic and a trade unionist, also rebutted Drew. Barnard claimed to have traveled more than 10,000 miles in the USSR over a period of four months the previous year. Drew described, Barnard wrote, "the reverse to what I saw." Barnard cited the opinion of other Canadian visitors, Margaret Gould and Agnes Macphail, who also found conditions much better than those "Col. Drew unearthed in his brief visit to a Moscow hotel."⁵⁹ Other contributors to the *Clarion* pointed conspiratorially to a link between Drew's articles and his election campaign: "Can it be an accident that Col. Drew had that series of articles praising Hitler and Mussolini printed in the *Globo* [sic] and now, with the support of both that paper and the *Telegram* is running as an 'independent' in Wellington South on a

'national government' platform and proposing a provincial 'Section 98' [making the Communist Party illegal]...?"⁶⁰

Drew made use of Communist attacks against him during his election campaign. One of his pamphlets reprinted a circular letter that had been distributed in South Wellington accusing him of carrying the "germ" of fascism. Drew reprinted the letter as evidence that his Liberal opponent, Dr. J.H. King, was allowing Communists to campaign on his behalf. Communism had "become an issue in South Wellington," Drew wrote. "I went to Europe as a Canadian to see what I could learn" and returned convinced that the "only way we will ever turn to Fascism is if we will permit Communism to create the disorder which led to dictatorship in Italy and Germany." Drew promised that, if elected, he would introduce "laws which will prevent the spread of Communism." The pamphlet concluded in large bold type: "A Vote for Drew is a Vote Against Communism" (Figure 5).⁶¹

Drew's opponents were less convinced that communism was a key issue in the campaign. The incumbent, King, suggested at an all-candidates meeting that "you could put all the Communists

Montreal Beacon, 27 August 1937; "Just as Efficient," *Regina Leader Post*, 24 August 1937; "The Truth or What?" *Regina Leader Post*, 28 August 1937; "Another Russian Revolt Brewing, Col. Drew Thinks," *Kitchener Daily Record*, 2 October 1937; "Russian Stores and their Customers," *Maritime Merchant* [Halifax], 7 October 1937; "Russia no El Dorado," *Nokomis Times* [Sask.], 7 October 1937.

⁵⁸ "Surplus of Food in USSR Today," *Daily Clarion* [Toronto], 19 August 1937.

⁵⁹ T.A. Barnard, "Col. Drew Went to Moscow," *Daily Clarion*, 2 September 1937, 4.

⁶⁰ "Hitler's Agents Invade Canada," *Daily Clarion*, 11 September 1937. See also, "Hitler's Agents in Ontario," *Daily Clarion*, 19 August 1937; J.S. Wallace, "When and by whom were your articles written COL. DREW?" *Daily Clarion*, 20 August 1937; "Who is Financing Col. George Drew?" *Daily Clarion*, 21 August 1937.

⁶¹ Drew Papers, V.126, F.1279, "Russia (6)".

Communism in South Wellington

Communism has become an issue in South Wellington. First it was announced that there would be a Communist candidate in the field. Then at a meeting of the Communist Party, in the City of Guelph a week ago Friday, it was decided by the Communists to withdraw their candidate, Mr. Bernhardt, and they announced on the platform that they were throwing their support behind Dr. King in an effort to defeat me.

In spite of the fact that Dr. King refuses to take Communism seriously and has not expressed any disapproval of their support, which they formally placed behind him at their public meeting in Guelph a week ago Friday, Communism does exist in South Wellington. I think everyone should have an opportunity of reading this latest circular distributed in Guelph on Friday in an effort to assist in the election of Dr. King:

A Worse Menace Than Infantile Paralysis

A worse scourge than infantile paralysis threatens Ontario. A scourge that, unless stopped, will kill in its thousands and cripple in its hundreds of thousands. Science has a cure for it if applied early and ruthlessly.

But the appalling thing is that in its first onslaught the disease comes in forms so mild that public vigilance may sleep. Then the virus becomes more violent as it attacks each victim until finally, left unchecked, it becomes fatal to all.

The disease is the Black Death.

Col. Drew, we charge you with being a conscious carrier of it.

Your insane ambition, your arrogance, your aristocratic and upper-crusty associations made you fit for the virus. Enemies of mankind, enemies of Canada, marked you out as a natural born carrier for it. You accepted the offer they made you, the offer of the men behind the *Globe and Mail*.

You went to Rome, you went to Berlin, where the Black Death rages in its most virulent form.

You brought back its germs.

Today you are spreading them with icy, systematic deliberation.

You pretend to be a friend of the people. But you float the overwhelming opposition they have expressed over and over again to Section 98.

You pretend to be a friend of peace.

But in the name of "peace" you would drag the bleeding body of Canada behind the Rome-Berlin axis you have praised in so many ways.

You pretend to be a friend of British institutions. But your very election campaign in South Wellington is a step towards ending all elections. Victorious in that election you would move on towards the "strong, central government" you have advocated so often of late, lopping off one by one the parliamentary institutions of Canada.

You are the yes-man of the mining magnates of Canada. You are the yes-man of those Merchants of Death who would make Canada into a Krupp-works. You are an enemy of evil to all that is old and honored, to all that is young and promising in our beloved country.

For that reason the eyes of Ontario are on South Wellington.

Will the people there recognize that there is a carrier of that deadly disease of fascism in their midst? Will they realize that even in its most plausible preliminary forms it carries with it all the potentialities of death? Recognizing this, will they put all secondary issues aside, all minor differences of opinion, in a common effort to stamp out this common enemy?

We have faith in the common sense of all liberal minded people of South Wellington. In the vigilance of the workers of Guelph. But we ask them not to be misled by defeating Drew but to make their victory so overwhelming that the work of carriers of fascism will be made that much more difficult in Canada.

I accepted no offer. I did not have any way paid to Europe as Tim Buck, Stewart Smith, Al Bernhardt and other blingings of Moscow have when they have gone there to learn their propagand. I went to Europe as a Canadian to see what I could learn of conditions in Europe. I have returned more convinced than ever that Democracy is worth preserving by every possible effort. The only way we will ever turn to Fascism is if we will permit Communism to create the disorder which led to dictatorship in Italy and Germany.

We have Communism in South Wellington. The Communists have their own meeting hall where they are poisoning the minds of unsuspecting young Canadians, as well as those of the older generation, by their subversive propaganda. They are seeking to destroy religion and morality. These are the words of Lenin himself, to the Young Communist League, which are followed in the teaching of Communism in Canada today:

"It is frequently asserted that we have no ethics and that we deny all morality. In what sense do we deny ethics and morals? In the sense in which they are preached as deduced from God's commandments. We say that we do not believe in God. The clergy, the landlords and the bourgeoisie all claim to speak in the name of God in order to protect their interests as exploiters. We deny all morality taken from superhuman or nonclass conceptions. We say that our morality is wholly subordinate to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. We deduce our morality from the facts and needs of the class struggle of the proletariat."

Our impressionable youth, particularly those in families which have recently come to Canada and have not yet had an opportunity of observing British traditions, must be protected from these vicious teachings. I have promised that if I am elected I shall work for the introduction of laws which will prevent the spread of Communism. I ask for your support because I have taken that stand.

Last Thursday the Governor-General of Canada became a member of an ancient order, founded by Samuel de Champlain at Fort Anne in Nova Scotia more than three hundred years ago. It was known as the Order of Good Cheer. During the ceremony in which he was admitted to this Order, Lord Tweedsmuir was asked "Do you believe that the spirit manifested by the early pioneers of the country should be maintained by us today? And he replied, "I do so believe."

That is the sort of spirit we want in Canada today. We want the spirit of the pioneers on the old simple faiths and filled with hope for the future. We have no need of these strange foreign doctrines. We have no need of Communism on one hand or Tammany Hall tactics on the other. What we want is a return of the simple courageous belief in the future of Canada which inspired our forefathers. Every young man and every young woman should be taught to love this country as they did and should seek to preserve that same spirit.

Once more I ask for your support on Wednesday and promise you that if you elect me I shall do everything I can to preserve those things which are British and to prevent the spread of any organization which is seeking to destroy what is good in Canadian life.

I wish to particularly thank all those who have so kindly worked for me during this campaign. Their enthusiastic support has been most encouraging and if I should not be successful it will certainly be through no fault of those who have given me such loyal assistance.

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE A. DREW.

P.S.—As it is difficult for many voters to get to the polls it will be of great assistance to me if those would care to help by driving their cars on Wednesday, will call the Committee Rooms (No. 831) and let the Secretary know where and at what time the car will be available.

A Vote for Drew is a Vote Against Communism

Figure 5: Drew campaign pamphlet, 1937. Library and Archives Canada, George Alexander Drew Fonds, MG 32 C3, V.126, F.1279, "Russia (6)".

in Guelph in a flour sack." Drew responded that it was "imperative" that Canadians realize that communism stood for prevention of the "co-operation which was vital to the solution of Canada's problems."⁶² Drew had already explained to Guelph audiences that the CIO was "a political organization led by 250 known communists who are committed to a policy of lawlessness and opposed to British ideals and traditions."⁶³

In September and October of 1937, Drew was in demand as a speaker at conventions and clubs and he consist-

ently spoke about the USSR and its relevance to Canada. The content of Drew's speeches about his experiences in Russia varied little. He had a repertoire of material, largely drawn from his *Globe and Mail* articles, that he repeated with minor variations. Occasionally, he would say something moderately positive: "I saw an athletic demonstration at the great Moscow sports field, which seats 90,000 people which was really an extremely inspiring sight." He also had seen cheerful people on the streets of Moscow, but this could be easily explained: "Laughter dies

⁶² Ken MacTaggart, "Red Menace Draws Fire of Candidates," *Globe and Mail*, 29 September 1937, 1.

⁶³ "Section 98 for Ontario' Advocated by Col. Drew," *Toronto Star*, 17 September 1937, 22.

hard when one is young. But everyone who served during the Great War knows that cheerfulness is not in itself evidence that those who are going through such an experience really enjoy it.”⁶⁴

As Drew explained to one audience, a “misunderstanding of what is happening in Russia may... considerably effect the course of events in Canada.”⁶⁵ Drew had two framings for the relevance of his impressions of the USSR. First, Canada should re-arm, support British re-armament and oppose any possibility of alliance with the USSR. Rearmament, in Drew’s thinking, was the only road to disarmament. As he explained it, “if the Anglo-Saxon people work together..., the disarmament of which we dreamed so short a time ago may come about through the knowledge that no powers, which seek to rely on force, can hope to prevail over the united strength of the Anglo-Saxon people.”⁶⁶ Second, the Soviet experience should convince Canadians of the need to adopt policies to counter the threat of domestic communism. Drew cited the number of votes tallied by Communist Party leader Tim Buck in elections for the Toronto Board

of Control as evidence that there was, on a percentage basis, more sympathy for Communism in Toronto than there had been in the USSR at the time of the revolution. It was “time for Canadians to wake up to the fact that Russia is waging an undeclared war within our borders... An enemy to everything that is decent and British and Christian has invaded our country. There is only one word for succour intentionally given to that enemy. It is treason.”⁶⁷

Drew’s rhetoric accorded nicely with Premier Hepburn who defended his policy against the CIO on the hustings, claiming at one point that there had been 15,000 armed Communists in Ontario at the time of the Oshawa Strike. To deal with a threat like communism, Drew agreed, required strong government that was not preoccupied with “rigid party politics.” It was time, Drew suggested, to “end the burlesque in the Legislature.”⁶⁸ George McCullagh agreed. In a province-wide radio broadcast the Saturday before the election, McCullagh endorsed Drew, supported Hepburn, raised again the idea of national government, and criticized the Conservative party for its

⁶⁴ Speaking notes in Drew Papers, V.126, F.1278. See also press reports: “Section 98 for Ontario,” 22; “Russia Held Peace Menace by Col. Drew,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 September 1937; “Gloomy Picture of Russia is Painted by Col. Drew,” *Toronto Telegram*, 13 October 1937; “Lack of Food Seen in Soviet,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 October 1937; “‘Worst Disease Is Communism’: Col. Drew Again Assails ‘Workers’ Paradise’ in Russia,” *Toronto Telegram*, 21 October 1937.

⁶⁵ Speaking notes in Drew Papers, V.126, F.1278.

⁶⁶ Speech in Drew Papers, V.29, F.25, “Speeches, 1937.” Occasionally, Drew suggested policies suited to his audience, as when he addressed the “Reunion Conference of Clerical Graduates of the Union of Trinity College” and told them that his experience in the USSR had convinced him that the “time has come for the restoring of religious beliefs in our schools where it belongs” since it constituted a “vital part of British life.” Drew Papers, V.126, F.1278.

⁶⁷ Drew Papers, V.126, F.1278.

⁶⁸ As quoted in McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn*, 134.

weak stance against the CIO.⁶⁹ Conservative leader Rowe thus had to campaign against the Liberal party, the *Globe and Mail*, and Drew, the Independent Conservative candidate in Wellington South.

On 6 October, the election went better for Hepburn than for Drew or Rowe. J.H. King was returned in Wellington South by a margin of more than 2,000 votes over Drew.⁷⁰ Hepburn won a majority government and within a year Rowe had resigned as leader of the Conservatives. In 1938, over the objections of Rowe, Drew was elected leader and the schism he had caused in the party appeared to have been forgiven. "I may have been mistaken [in resigning]," Drew told the delegates, "but I was honest."⁷¹

After the 1937 election, Drew continued campaigning against communism based on his experiences in the USSR. Among his papers is an undated note describing a conversation Drew had with a Mr. Hopkins of Imperial Oil who had been in Moscow at the same time as Drew, attending the World Geological Conference.⁷² Drew's use of the information provided him by Hopkins is suggestive of the way Drew incorporated or appropriated second-hand sources into his first-hand accounts of life in the USSR. This conversation must have taken place after the publication of Drew's 1 October

article "So this is Russia!" in *Maclean's*.⁷³ Hopkins corrected Drew's identification of the stone on the front of the Moscow Hotel as "marble" in that article: it was, Hopkins said, a "dark, almost black Baltic rock that is one of the hardest stones to cut and consequently the most expensive." Drew corrected this detail in subsequent speeches and articles.⁷⁴ Unlike Drew, Hopkins had travelled in a reasonably modern train, had seen new rolling stock between Moscow and Leningrad and found a hotel, the Savoia, where the meals were fairly good. He told Drew an anecdote about the highly exaggerated figures of Soviet oil production that were presented to conference delegates. This anecdote, and not the review of the Savoia, was repeated by Drew in subsequent articles where it joined his story about the arithmetically-deficient collective farm manager in illustrating the meaninglessness of Soviet statistics.⁷⁵

The next thing Hopkins told Drew suggests a more serious instance of borrowing. According to Hopkins, "one man in his party got arrested twice in one day for taking pictures." Henceforward, Drew, too, claimed to have been likewise arrested, though he had neglected to recall it in any of his previous articles or speeches. On 21 October, speaking to the Canadian Independent Telephone Asso-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁰ King received 9,006 votes, Drew 6,923. *Toronto Star*, 7 October 1937.

⁷¹ Manthorpe, *The Power and the Tories*, 28.

⁷² Drew Papers, V.126, F.1278.

⁷³ Drew, "So This is Russia!" 15.

⁷⁴ George Drew, "How Powerful is Russia?" *Saturday Night*, 11 November, 1939, 2.

⁷⁵ George Drew, "The Riddle Wrapped in Mystery that is Russia," *Saturday Night*, 4 November 1939, 2.

ciation, Drew described being detained by Soviet police for trying to photograph a “building where six engineers who were subsequently shot by the firing squad were on trial.”⁷⁶ This was an appropriate anecdote to tell the Telephone Association because Drew had “wanted to call the British embassy and tell them where I was but I wasn’t permitted to do so.” This element of the story also made it very difficult to verify: the British embassy staff would have been accessible to Canadian reporters; the Soviet police would not. The Russia of Tim Buck, Drew told the Telephone Association, “simply doesn’t exist at all.” True, but had the Soviet arrest of Drew, in fact, existed? The anecdote’s exclusion from his numerous earlier accounts—when it would have been so in keeping with their argument and theme—raises doubts about its veracity.

Drew’s reminiscences about his time in the USSR were given another extensive airing in a series of articles in *Saturday Night* in November and December of 1939. In that year, George McCullagh had again tried to forward the idea of national government through an organization called the “Leadership League” that was promoted through radio broadcasts and the *Globe and Mail*.⁷⁷ Mackenzie King thought this was an effort to “work

out a Fascist party in Canada” that was “prepared to use Hepburn, Drew, and others.”⁷⁸ A few weeks after Drew’s final article on Russia appeared in *Saturday Night*, Mitchell Hepburn would endorse opposition leader Drew’s censure of the federal government’s handling of the Canadian war effort and Mackenzie King would seize the issue to fight and win a federal election.

The more immediate prompt of Drew’s mainly recycled *Saturday Night* articles, however, was the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939 and the Soviet invasion of Finland. As Drew explained, “Finland has proved and is proving that the Russian fighting forces are inefficient and badly equipped. The time to deal with them is while we are strong. Soviet Russia is dangerous only as a friend.”⁷⁹ It is not entirely clear why Drew’s recollected impressions of 1937 Moscow qualified him to comment on the relative strength of the Soviet military in 1939, but he believed certain extrapolations could be made: “a sloppy civilian makes a sloppy soldier and a sloppy soldier is rarely of much use... With very few exceptions the people in Moscow dress and act as though they cared nothing about their appearance and little about themselves.” Having clearly forgotten his previous ob-

⁷⁶ “Drew Says ‘Reds’ Refused to Let Him ‘Phone Embassy – The Russia of Tim Buck Simply doesn’t Exist,’ He Declares,” *Toronto Star*, 21 October 1937. This story is repeated, briefly, in a caption accompanying “A Canadian Camera Shows How Russia’s People Live,” *Saturday Night*, 11 November 1939, 1. The caption of a photograph of a Russian courthouse reads “for taking this picture with a telephoto lens, Col. Drew ran foul of OGPU and was held for some time.”

⁷⁷ See Young, “C. George McCullagh and the Leadership League.”

⁷⁸ King Diary, 27 February 1939.

⁷⁹ George Drew, “Morale of Russia’s Army Was Destroyed by Purges,” *Saturday Night*, 9 December 1939, 10-11.



Figure 6: *Submission is written on their faces and in their bearing. Or, so Drew thought in 1939 when this 1937 photograph was published. Photograph illustrating George Drew, "How Powerful is Russia?" Saturday Night, 11 November 1939, 2.*

ervation that "laughter dies hard when one is young," Drew now recalled that "even among the young people [in Moscow] smiles are rare. There is no spirit of enthusiasm in their expressions, no suggestion of initiative of any kind. Submission is written on their faces and in their bearing" (Figure 6). Moscow had become more unpleasant than it had been when Drew described it in 1937. Now, in 1939, Drew recalled that the city was "dull and

tawdry beyond belief."⁸⁰ Stalin, however, remained "the very spirit of evil incarnate on this earth."⁸¹ While "our first enemy is Germany," Drew advised his Canadian readers, "...We can and must deal effectively with Russia as part of any settlement of this war."⁸²

For Drew, the Cold War began before and continued during the Second World War. In this as with many of the other ideas expressed in his travelogues,

⁸⁰ Drew, "How Powerful is Russia?" 2; and "If You Want Real Communism, Don't Go to Russia," *Saturday Night*, 18 November 1939, 2-3.

⁸¹ George Drew, "How Serious is the Russian Threat to the World?" *Saturday Night*, 23 December 1939, 2.

⁸² Drew, "How Serious is the Russian Threat," 2.

Drew was only a particularly vocal exponent of opinions commonly held on the Right in 1930s Canada. Don Nerbas has shown how significant the support of the idea of “National Government” was among Canada’s business leaders beginning in 1934 and persisting through the decade.⁸³ On the USSR, too, Drew’s views were widely shared. Outside of the *Toronto Star*, stories akin to the ones Drew told in 1937 and 1939 could be regularly found in the Canadian press. There is ample evidence of this in Drew’s clippings files. Drew could have written his reports without having left home.

That Drew felt the need to visit the USSR is suggestive of the power of the first-hand observational narrative as a propaganda device. To counter an eyewitness account such as that of Margaret Gould *required* Drew to also become a witness. Whether or not Drew found a fourth for Bridge on the train from Warsaw to Moscow, his travels gave him a trump card in his battles against communism at home: he had seen these horrors with his own eyes. Drew’s travels are also indicative of the lively Canadian public interest in the USSR in this period. In addition to Gould’s book, *Toronto Star* readers had earlier in the decade encountered a long series of articles by reporter Frederick Griffin that had resulted in the publication of his *Soviet Scene* (1932).⁸⁴ Thus, the prominent placement and attention given to Drew’s travel articles in the *Globe and Mail* was not unprec-

edented. Public interest is suggested by the reiteration of the articles about the USSR in *Maclean’s* and *Saturday Night* (unlike Griffin or Gould, Drew could not compile articles into a monograph, since it would consist of only one chapter repeated with minor variations). In Drew’s speeches about his travels to a variety of groups in the fall of 1937, he spoke almost exclusively about the USSR—the clubs, if they had any choice in the matter, seemed more interested in life under Stalin than under Mussolini or Hitler.

International comparison and, particularly, discussion of conditions in the USSR was of major discursive significance in arguments about Canadian domestic issues in the 1930s for both the Left and the Right. While figures on the Left would cite the USSR in making arguments for socialized medicine, expanded access to education, and other policies associated with the ‘welfare state’, Drew’s USSR pointed not only against those policies but towards legally repressing the Communist Party and unions such as the CIO, expanding religious instruction in Ontario classrooms, and strengthening the Canadian military to support the British Empire. Drew used his travel experiences to argue that neither communism nor fascism was appropriate for a British country such as Canada. Rather Canada should follow Britain in creating a “National” government. Aside from the fact that this prescription neatly coincided with Drew’s

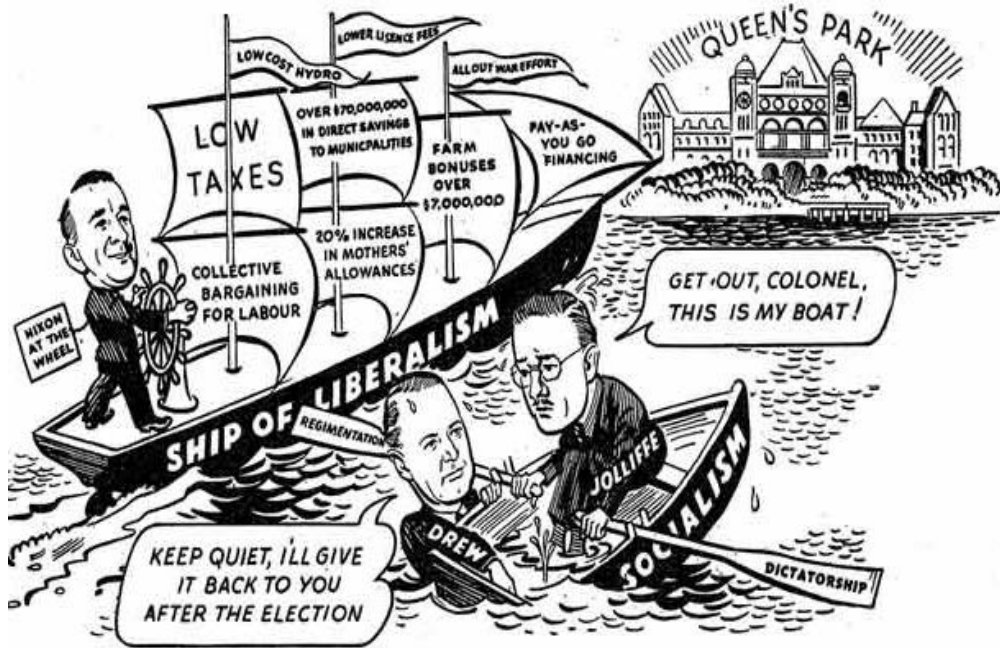
⁸³ Nerbas, *Dominion of Capital*.

⁸⁴ Frederick Griffin, *Soviet Scene: A Newspaperman’s Close-ups of New Russia* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1932).

domestic politics, it is worth noting how central “Britishness” was to Drew’s self-perception and the ways in which this self-perception both subtly and explicitly racialized his descriptions of many “others,” both those encountered in foreign lands or organizing CIO-affiliated unions in Ontario.

Finally, it might be noted that Drew’s “imagined community,” the British, Tory, anti-communist Canada for whom he presumed to speak, was well represented

in the press but had limited popular appeal. Drew lost in the provincial campaign of 1937. When Hepburn joined him in rebuking the federal government in January 1940, Mackenzie King responded by winning a resounding new mandate. If Drew’s support for “National Government” stemmed from a suspicion that his ideals could not be enacted by parties in need of support from the electorate, his suspicion appears to have had some foundation. When Drew was elected premier



"The election promises of the Conservatives and the Socialists have so much in common that Messrs. Drew and Joliffe are squabbling over the ownership of the 'Socialism' boat".

—HON. H. C. NIXON

Figure 7: 1943 Ontario Liberal campaign advertisement. Ultimately, the ad proved unsuccessful as Harry Nixon sailed the governing Liberals to a 15-seat third place electoral trouncing. Drew’s Progressive Conservatives and Edward (Ted) Joliffe’s CCF won 38 and 34 seats respectively. The advertisement, published in the *Globe and Mail*, 28 July 1943, is reproduced at <<http://torontoist.com/2011/10/historicist-shuffling-the-provincial-political-deck/>>

of Ontario in 1943, it was on the basis of his “22-point” platform that promised the expansion of Ontario’s welfare state, labour legislation acknowledging collective bargaining rights, and a series of reforms that placed Drew, apparently, on the progressive side of the Progressive-Conservative spectrum. While Drew’s vocal anti-communism and Red baiting of the CCF were undiminished, there is considerable irony in the fact that Drew was in 1943 championing similar policies to those “parlour pinks” who had been “duped” during their trip to the USSR

in the 1930s (Figure 7). A further irony: in 1948, after the Cold War had actually begun, Drew’s party won a majority government but he lost his own Toronto seat in the legislature to a CCF candidate. Political “reality” in Ontario was shifting and complex. Even more so was the Soviet reality that Drew believed he understood perfectly. Instead, the USSR was for Drew, as it was for so many visitors, a kind of distorting mirror reflecting back ideas in such a way that visitors did not always recognize them as those with which they had arrived.
