

ERIC
MARGOLIS



Fairytales from Russia

September was not a good issue for the *Soviet Military Review*. This Russian magazine comes to us each month in a big, manila envelope, postmarked *Mockba*. Its articles usually range from tedious to boring; however, this month was different.

Emblazoned on the cover were two young, intense Russian pilots. Featured inside was the lead story on the glorious Soviet Air Force and its "heroic mission to defend the motherland." This article could not have come at a worse time — right in the middle of the Korean airliner incident.

We read: "It is very important now to cultivate in the pilots the ability to display staunchness in any circumstances, to quickly and correctly assess the situation . . . and to behave with poise in seemingly hopeless circumstances."

Then we were told, "the pilot should be ready to view any unforeseen situation as though he expected it and regard any critical situation as almost a routine one." The savage irony of these words must now be causing the Russians some discomfort.

Not only did the Russian ground controllers and pilots who shot down the Korean airliner fail to show "poise" and correct assessment, we now know that their air-defence system proved inept and confused. The pilot who shot down the civilian plane looked far more like a typical Siberian woodcutter than the clean-shaven, wholesome pilots shown on the magazine cover. We may suspect that editor Chikhachiov is now running a small newspaper in Kamchatka.

No place like home

The next article is enormously amusing. "House-warming Parties All Over The Country." It seems that the Russians are celebrating their excellent housing while feeling deep sympathy for wretchedly-housed Westerners. "Palaces for the rich and humble abodes for the working people," is how our capitalist housing is described.

Of course, anyone who has ever been to Russia or who reads the Soviet press knows that Russian housing is abominable by any standards. Moscow newspapers are full of stories of shoddy work, collapsing walls and long waiting lines for apartments. Unrestrained by this reality, the review proudly reports that 80% of Russians live in "self-contained flats, i.e. they do not share flats with other families." Even accepting such a dubious claim, this means that some 54-million Russians still have to share their apartments with other families.

The best part comes last, in a review of capitalist housing. In the U.S.: "The high cost of modern housing keeps it out of reach for six Americans out of seven." Then, in a note of deep shock, we are informed that "only 12% of U.S. apartments cost less than \$100 per month. The bulk of the housing exceeds \$150 a month!" These rents must be truly disturbing to Russians who earn \$30 monthly.

Canadians are told they are experiencing one of the worst housing crises in their history. "Several hundred thousand blocks of flats and houses in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver do not meet the sanitary standards and are, therefore, not fit for dwelling." Interesting news indeed, especially to welfare recipients here who live in far better accommodations than highly paid bureaucrats in Moscow.

Russian-Afghan friendship

Turning to foreign news, the review has a charming little article entitled "Growing Friendship." It relates the warm, close ties between the Afghan people and their Russian friends. "When Afghans wish to thank Soviet people for the aid rendered, they say: *Tashakur shuravi*." This expression seems to be falling into disuse of late; most Afghans are expressing their feeling towards the Russians with bullets rather than traditional endearments.

"Soviet-Afghan friendship has made further progress today, when the Afghan people are solving complicated internal and external problems." Solving the internal problems means having killed 500,000 people and creating three million refugees. The review just fails to mention the war, the poison gas, the booby traps disguised as children's toys, and the continuing carnage in Afghanistan.

We may deride these examples of clumsy, obtuse Soviet propaganda, but they are generally believed by Russia's 270-million people and by communist supporters around the world, not a few of whom live in Canada. Anyone who contends that our press is not free should consider the above examples. It is inconceivable that any Western medium, no matter how much influenced by special interest groups, would ever parrot such simple-minded claptrap.

As our own government moves swiftly and inexorably to bring the Canadian media under its control, we should keep in mind the example of "socialist truth." For the communists, the media's sole function is to promote the interests of the party. Reading Russian publications, such as the *Soviet Military Review* or *Pravda* (truth), makes us uncomfortably aware of the vital importance and fragility of our own free press.