

# Russians Value Friendship: Unregulated Aspect of Life

*I am skeptical of socialism in general. I don't find that socialism has brought anything new in the theoretical plane or a better social order . . . We have the same kinds of problems as the capitalist world: criminality and alienation. The difference is that our society is an extreme case, with maximum lack of freedom, maximum ideological rigidity, and — this is most typical — with maximum pretensions about being the best society, although it certainly is not that.*

—Andrei Sakharov, father of the Soviet H-bomb, in 1973

This could be the best book on Russia by an American — not counting what the CIA's got — since John Reed wrote "Ten Days That Shock the World."

Hedrick Smith spent three years in Russia, 1971 through 1974, as Moscow Bureau Chief for the New York Times, and one must agree that he has pieced together a compelling contemporary portrait of Russia that we in the West seldom get to glimpse, let alone stare at.

Experts, Smith agrees, can and have studied various facets of the Soviet system at their leisure from a distance.

Speaking the language, and on the scene, what Smith provides is the tactile sense, the feel of what it's like to sit and talk to the Russians in their apartments, to go with them to their bath houses and hear their jokes, to stand with them in the endless lines in stores, to see the dacha country houses of the elite, to experience the mind blowing contrasts of the colossus that has put



## Books of the Times

by George Vukelich

### The Russians

by Hedrick Smith  
Quadrangle  
527 pp. \$12.50

men — and women — into space — and countless millions into political prisons.

"As a police state," Smith writes, "Russia poses special problems for a journalist, not only while he is reporting, but also when he sits down to write. Many of the important insights I gained came from people I cannot name or portray in detail because they would face reprisals for their candor.

The Russians, Smith reports, are almost schizophrenic, so forced by climate, history and the police state. In public: indifferent, stolid, cold. In private with friends and family: caring and kind.

"Friends are the one thing we have which are all our own," one mathematician confides. "They are the one part of our lives where we can make our own choice completely for ourselves. We cannot do that in politics, religion, literature, work. Always, someone above influences our choice. But not with friends. We make that choice for ourselves."

It is as friend to friend that trusting

Russians finally speak to Smith and their confidences are shattering.

• **A Leningrad school teacher in her late 30s:** "The older generation really believed in Lenin and they felt this was the way to build a new society. But my generation doesn't believe it at all. We know it's false. We have no religion; so we have to have Lenin. We can't change the system. I have my family and my children . . ."

• **A young biologist:** "You Americans really don't understand how our system works. You assume that detente will automatically open up our system. For the reliable 'Party' scientists, it is a good thing. They get to travel again and again. The rest of us have to be on our best behavior if we want to stand any chance. So you see, detente gives the authorities a new way to reward and punish us."

• **A movie script writer:** "People are cautious, not so much from fear of being thrown into prison, but because of more subtle pressures — jobs, travel, little privileges and opportunities. The system works — quietly, quietly."

This, I think, is an honest report. It would help things if every American would read it. And every Russian.

\* \* \*

Hedrick Smith, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for coverage from Moscow, is a co-author of "The Pentagon Papers" and a veteran Times correspondent who has reported from Saigon, Paris, Cairo, Washington, and the South. He is now Deputy National Editor of The New York Times.