

IN AMERICA AS IN RUSSIA

By Lancaster M. Greene

The following significant story was told to a few intimates apropos of nothing at the moment. But everyone present knew that names and details must in re-telling be guarded.

Recently an embassy attache at Moscow entered into a lease with the Soviet government for a house at a stipulated rental. On taking possession of the property he set about improving it with a new wing, some plumbing, a tennis court. A USSR agent noted the great improvement in the property. Then he declared that the government had decided to raise the rent 300%. The attache remonstrated that the improvements were the result of his own efforts, and pointed to the rental fixed in the lease.

The agent said that the lease was **only a contract** between a government and an individual. A government can abrogate a contract at will. In America, he pointed out, contracts between government and citizens are abrogated through devaluation. In Russia that fortuitous method was avoided. Besides, many people would be willing to lease the improved property in question. As it was a case of "or else" the attache paid the increased rental.

The USSR agent was quite right in pointing to the common practice of governments of breaking agreements, through devaluation, repudiation, judicial decision, ukase, or other dishonest methods. What has been produced, according to this moral code, belongs to him who has power to take. However, there is a retributive law which cannot be avoided; that if the product of his labor is not assured him, the laborer will not produce.

In America, as in Russia, we see the effects of this retributive law. Capital and labor are idle because possession is insecure. In America they call it depression; in Russia it's sabotage. Either the right of property (production) is recognized, or the benefits of civilization turn to apples of Sodom that crumble at the touch.