

The Book Trail

MEN AND POLITICS

By Louis Fischer

Duell, Sloan and Pearce, \$3.50

Louis Fischer's autobiography covers the past twenty years of his service as a foreign correspondent in Europe. Fourteen years were spent in Soviet Russia. Approximately one half of this book is devoted to the Spanish Civil War, where Mr. Fischer spent some two years. The tragic picture of Europe in decay between two wars is realistically drawn. The thirst for power and privilege seemed the strongest universal urge. The idealism of the League of Nations was thwarted and finally dissipated by the perfidy of nations unwilling, or unable, to live up to their democratic creeds.

This volume contains interesting descriptions of famous political leaders, and reports of their conversations which the author was not allowed to print at the time. His acquaintance with Soviet personalities and later with Spanish Loyalist leaders was wide and in many cases intimate. His dispatches from Russia for many years were couched in a language that led many readers to suspect their semi-official origin. Without doubt Mr. Fischer believed in the cause for which he wrote.

Journalists assigned to Russia were in most cases bitten by the Soviet virus. Mr. Fischer's infection lasted until the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact. The trials and purges caused grave doubts in his mind, and he found solace by leaving Russia for Spain and immersing himself in a Republican cause. (His explanation of the confessions by Bolshevik leaders is convincing.)

Although the degeneracy and bureaucracy of the Bolshevik regime was apparent to other observers long before the purges, Mr. Fischer does not even touch on such matters as the great famine of 1932-33 resulting from the forced collectivization of farms, the imprisonment at hard labor under unbelievable liv-

ing conditions in the Arctic timber camps of hundreds of thousands of men, the building of the white sea canal by prison labor, etc.

Estimates of deaths resulting from the great famine run from four to ten million; the number of political prisoners has been estimated as high as five million; a political offence was a vague term used by the G.P.U. to conscript cheap labor; the method of rehabilitation was to deprive a man of all his rights as a human being. A present item (New York Times, June 24th) states that three hundred thousand prisoners were used recently to build Russia's defenses along its border.

One can understand that Mr. Fischer's enthusiasm for Russia and its five year plan blinded him momentarily, but in this volume there is no admission of this.

Stalin is accordingly assigned the role of the 'devil.' The author now abhors all forms of dictatorship. His suggestions for a better society contain such Socialistic measures as competition between government and private industry in order to prevent monopoly or control by either side.

Max Hirsch's prognostications about Socialism first spoken in 1904 come to mind. They have been borne out to the letter. The end product of Socialism is always slavery.

V. STRACH

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