THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

5 OCT 1969

P—Mannes, Marya
P-Stalina, Svetlana
Soc. 4.01.2 Only One Year

Only One Year

By Svetlana Alliluyeva. Translated from the Russian by Paul Chavchavadze. 444 pp. New York: Harper & Row. $7.95.

By MARYA MANNES

Possibly the most interesting fact about Svetlana Alliluyeva is that this daughter of Stalin, whom Svetlana herself calls "a moral and spiritual monster" is a human being; and has somehow remained honest, open-minded and compassionate for over 40 years in a society deliberately designed not only to discourage but to penalize these attributes.

The story of her survival and defection to the United States electrified the world and occupied the news two years ago. Although her first published writing, "Twenty Letters to a Friend" had no pretensions to being a work of literature, it did sustain a lively interest in this friendly and vital woman who had cut herself off from her country, her children, and her entire past to be a free soul after a half-life of suffocation and frustration. Now, after self-imposed isolation in her Princeton home in order to write a full account of this new life, a revival of curiosity could be expected—perhaps not so much in her Soviet past as in her American present, in the impact of a free society on a former inmate of the huge prison that calls itself the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Yet the greater part of her book is about this prison: about the horrors of Stalinism, about the brief breath of air under Khrushchev, about the clanking of the gates again in the stifling bureaucracy of the present regime. She speaks in detail about the acute suffering of her friends, who were mostly creative individuals, of a way of life in which free thought, free speech, free action are crimes against the government, and in which mere survival becomes a process of [illegible]

Svetlana asks her readers not to expect of her "historical and political articles and formulations." And indeed her personal observations and reactions speak for themselves. Among the most illuminating are her portraits of the new masters of the Kremlin—rigid, small-minded, grim, humorless men of little education, who have no contact not only with the rest of the world but with their own people and particularly their own youth. Locked in the party dogma and their own relentless suspicions and limitations, they are fossilized barriers against the present.

Her descriptions of her visit to India with the ashes of her husband, Brajesh Singh, are also revealing. Her deep sentiments for that country, derived from marriage with a man who seems to have been more a surrogate father than a mate, shed a less favorable light on India than Mrs. Alliluyeva may have intended. The still immense gap, through the caste system, between the Raj way of life and the enormous mass of the poor, the devious diplomatic dances between the Indian Government and its lowering neighbor—these constantly shadow the beauty and calm and grace that so enchanted a woman starved for them in her bleak homeland.

It may, in a sense, be unfortunate for Svetlana's new book that Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's magnificent "First Circle" preceded it, and that Anatoly Kuznetzov's thundering indictments of his Soviet tormentors now accompany it. Although they are supportive evidence, if any more were needed of everything Mrs. Alliluyeva tells of her unhappy land, one chapter in which Solzhenitsyn describes a day with the disintegrating Stalin in the Kremlin says more about that horrifying man than anything his own daughter has written. And Kuznetsov's defection (bought by informing on his friends) now supersedes her own.

Mrs. Alliluyeva speaks from the heart, yet somehow fails to fire it. This could be simply because she is not a gifted writer: her prose trudges along sturdily on the flat heels of an English games-mistress. It is simple, direct, alternately sentimental and indignant, and somehow devoid of the nuances, the depth and the diversity of a complex intelligence. Her editors, moreover, have not curbed her repetitions nor imposed the necessary organization of her material.

Few American readers could fail to bask in the warmth and joy which this country inspires in her even though they might not recognize themselves in some of her descriptions. In her last chapter she says: "Yes, I definitely prefer the rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed guilelessness of America to the premature physical and spiritual decay of the 'average Soviet man'. . . . But do not try to convince us, who have left Russia, that Russia has achieved great progress in the last 50 years. We respect and love your sweet innocence, but when it comes to 'progress,' kindly allow us to know better."

If there is indeed "guilelessness" and "innocence" in those Americans who keep hoping (for the salvation of the world) that some progress in human liberties had indeed been made in the U.S.S.R., both have been brutally dispelled by the take-over of Czechoslovakia and the absolute cynicism of a Soviet leadership that continues to deny its citizens the basic rights without which no human being can call himself one.

Svetlana Alliluyeva is one more valuable witness for the prosecution of these leaders and for the defense of her great and helpless people. In spite of their plight, one small thread of hope winds its way through the shroud of despair in her book. "Lies are keenly felt by this generation," she writes. "It does not tolerate them. It wants a truthful, natural, free life. It believes in reality, not in philosophy. Marxism and all other 'isms' do not attract these young minds; 'isms' have outlived their day."

The young are not like the old, she is saying. And the old will die. ■

Miss Mannes is a social critic and novelist, her most recent novel being "They?"