SERGEANT PRISHIBEYEV

Anton Chekhov

"SERGEANT PRISHIBEYEV : you are hereby charged that on the third day of this present September you did make use of insulting words and behaviour towards Police Constable Zhigin, Village Elder Alyapov, Sotsky* Yefimov, the witnesses Ivanov and Gavrilov, and six other peasants ; and that you did subject the three first-mentioned of the said persons to insult in the course of their official duties. Do you admit your guilt ?"

Prishibeyev, a wrinkled, craggy-featured NCO, placed his thumbs in line with the seams of his trousers and replied in a throaty, choking voice, articulating each word distinctly, as though issuing a command.

" Your Honour ! Mr. Justice of the Peace ! Sir ! Whereas it is a statutory obligation to reciprocate every circumstance. It is not me that is the guilty one. It is all the others. The whole affair arises out of the corpse of a dead man, the kingdom of heaven be his. As I was proceeding on a stroll with Anfisa my lawful spouse, in a decent and orderly manner, I observed a concourse of people, persons of all sorts and descriptions, assembled on the bank of the river. ' What authority have all these populace got to be gathered together ?' I asked myself. ' What's up now ? There's no law to the effect that populace can swarm about in herds.' I thereupon shouted out : ' Move along there.' I commenced to shove these persons on, to get them dispersed to their homes. I instructed the sotsky to hustle them off by the scruff of their necks."

" One moment. You are not a policeman, or a headman, surely, are you ? What business was it of yours to make the people disperse ?"

" Hear, hear ! " " None of his business ! " " That's right ! " Voices rang out from different parts of the courtroom. " He never gives us a moment's peace, Your Honour." " We've been putting up with him for fifteen years." " It's been like this ever since he came out of the army." " You can only escape from him by leaving the village."

" That is true, Your Honour," said the village headman. " We have all got complaints against him. Everyone in the commune. It is not possible to live in the same place as him. If we have a procession with ikons, or a wedding, or anything else, whatever it is he comes up shouting and roaring to establish order. He boxes the children's ears, and he spies on the women to see they don't do anything they shouldn't, as though he was the father-in-law of the whole lot. The other day he went from one cottage to another ordering us all not to sing or to light fires. He said there wasn't any law saying we might sing."

" One moment, please. You will have an opportunity to make your statement later on," interrupted the Justice of the Peace. " Let Prishibeyev go on with his own statement now. Continue, Prishibeyev."

" Sir ! " rasped the NCO. " Your Honour pleases to say it was none of my business to make the crowd disperse. Very well then. And what if there was to be some disorder ? Have subjects got to be condoned in all sorts of shocking goings-on ? Is it in the statute book for subjects to be let do as they please ? I can't be party to that, Your Honour. If I wasn't to make them disperse, who would ? Tell me that. No one in the village except me don't know the meaning of order. If I may say so, Your Honour, I understand the procedure for dealing with the lower classes. I know all about them, Your Honour. I am not

* The *sotsky* was a peasant appointed to carry official forms and documents from one authority to another and to the landowners and peasants of a given area.

a muzhik.* Non-commissioned officer. Quartermaster-sergeant, retired. Served at Warsaw. At Headquarters, Sir. And after that, if I may say so, when I got my ticket, I went in the fire service, Sir. And then, due to the unsatisfactory condition of my health, I quit the fire service. I was a porter at a classical preparatory school for boys. For two years. So I know all about maintaining order, Sir. A muzhik is a low, common fellow. Ignorant. It's his duty to obey me. Good for his character. You take this here affair, for instance. There was I, making the populace disperse. And there was a drowned corpse of a dead man on the bank, laying on the sand. What call had it got to be laying there, I'd like to know ? Is that what you'd call good order ? So what was the copper doing ? ' Why don't you inform the authorities ?' I asks him. The said found drowned might have deceased by a-drowning itself. Or it might be there was a whiff of Siberia about this here affair, like. Might have been a case of criminal murder. But Constable Zhigin don't pay attention. He stands there puffing away at his cigarette. ' What's up with you ?' he says. ' You in charge, or what ? What's it got to do with you, anyway ? We know what to do without any help from you, don't we ?' So I says ' No,' I says. 'Anyone can see you don't know what to do, you oaf, seeing as you're standing there not taking any notice.' ' Reported it to the district police chief yesterday,' says he. ' Why him ?' says I. ' Which regulation says that's the correct procedure ? Tell me that. You ought to know cases of drowning and hanging and suchlike doings aren't a matter for the district police chief. This is a serious crime, this is. A criminal matter. A civil matter. That's what it is,' I says. ' Now then,' I says to him, ' you send off a runner to His Honour the Examining Magistrate straight away. And to the court, too. And,' I says, ' before you do anything else, you want to draw up a formal statement to be forwarded to His Honour the Justice of the Peace.' But that there copper he just listens and laughs his head off. So do the muzhiks. They all laughed, Your Honour. Swear to that, I will. On my affidavy. That one over there laughed. And that one there. And Zhigin too. ' What's all this ?' says I. ' Think it's funny, do you ?' And then the policeman he says : ' This sort of thing,' he says, ' isn't for the JP.' Well, that properly made me see red. You there : policeman : you did utter them words I mentioned, didn't you ? " demanded the NCO, turning to Constable Zhigin.

" I did. Yes."

" Everyone heard you utter them exact words, in front of all them low, common people. ' This sort of thing isn't for the JP.' Everyone heard you say it, didn't they ? I got mad, Your Honour. I was fair flabbergasted, what's more. ' Just you repeat that,' I said. ' You say that again, you so-and-so. Just you repeat what you said just now.' And he did. Uttered the same exact words all over again. So I went for him. ' How dare you talk about His Honour like that ?' I said. 'A police officer going against the authorities, heh ? Do you realise,' I says, ' His Honour could hand you over to the provincial gendarmerie, if he so desired, for such untrustworthy conduct ? Do you realise how far His Honour could get you transported to for using of such political language ?' And then the Elder spoke up. He said : ' The JP can't deal with things outside his jurisdiction. It's only petty matters he deals with.' That's what he said, I tell you. Everyone heard him. ' What's this ?' I says. ' Belittle the authorities, would you ? Well,' says I, ' you're not going to play none of your little games with me, you're not. You've put your foot in it good and proper this time, friend,' says I. When I was in Warsaw, and when I was porter at the classical preparatory school for boys, if I was to hear any improper statements of that sort, I used to take a look out into the street to see if I could spot a gendarme. ' Come over here, officer,' I used to say. Used to report the

* Peasant.

whole affair, I did. Only who can you report to in these here rural areas? Well, I was wild, I can tell you. Beside myself with indignation. I got very agitated seeing these populace forgetting themselves like that. Puffed up with insubordination. So I pasted him one. Not hard. Course not. I give him what for, that's all. Bit of a tap. So's he wouldn't go saying such things about Your Honour again, like. And then the policemen went and backed him up. So I give him one, too. Then it got going. I got fair worked up, Your Honour. That's the way things are. Can't maintain order without a bit of bashing. If you was to let some oaf get away without a bashing you wouldn't have a clear conscience. Specially when he deserves it. When it's a case of conduct prejudiciary to good order——"

"One moment. There are those whose job it is to deal with breaches of the peace. That purpose is served by the policeman, the headman and the sotsky."

"The policeman can't be everywhere at once. And he hasn't got special knowledge like what I have."

"You admit, however, that it was in fact no concern of yours, do you?"

"What? Not my business, isn't it? Well! I'm fair taken aback. Populace going on in shocking fashion, and it mustn't be no concern of mine? Expect me to pat 'em on the head, or what? And now they've been and gone and complained about me instructing them not to sing songs. What use are songs, I'd like to know? They sing instead of getting on with their work. And another thing. They've taken to sitting round fires in the evenings. Instead of going to bed, they sit about talking and laughing. Mind you, I always keep note."

"Keep note? Of what?"

"Who it is sits round fires."

Prishibeyev pulled a dirty scrap of paper out of his pocket, put on his spectacles, and read aloud.

"Inasmuch as the said peasants sitting round fires are hereinafter as follows. Ivan Prokhorov. Savva Nikiforov. Pyotr Petrov. Soldier's wife Shustrova, status widow, illicitly cohabiting in profligation with Semyon Kislov. Ignat Sverchok practises sorcery. His wife Mavra is a witch: milks other people's cows by night. And——"

"That will do," interrupted the judge. He began to examine the witnesses.

Sergeant Prishibeyev pushed his glasses up on his forehead and gazed dumbfounded at this JP who did not seem to be on his side. His bulging eyes glistened. His nose turned crimson. He stared first at the magistrate and then at the witnesses. He could not make out why the magistrate was growing so indignant, or why subdued mutterings and smothered laughter kept coming from every corner of the courtroom.

The sentence of one month's imprisonment baffled him completely.

"What for?" he demanded, throwing out his hands in bewilderment. "What regulation lays that down?"

He saw clearly that the world had changed. It was no longer fit to live in. Gloomy and despondent thoughts engulfed him. But as he left the courtroom he saw the muzhiks gathered together talking to each other. Force of habit was too much for him. He placed his thumbs in line with the seams of his trousers, and bawled out in his fierce rasping voice.

"Populace, dis-perse! No crowds! Go back home!"

1885.

Translated by Brian Pearce and Stella Jackson.

SOVIET TECHNICAL EDUCATION

J. G. Crowther

THE Soviet achievements of producing the first large-scale thermonuclear reaction and the first atomic power-station supplying electricity to the local grid, and the construction of the giant synchro-phasotron with a 36,000-ton magnet, for atomic research, have proved that Soviet science and technology have not only caught up with science and technology in capitalist countries, but in certain directions are in advance of them. Everyone not blinded by prejudice knows that these concrete achievements imply the existence of an immense and efficient system of scientific and technical education. Consequently the wiser, though not necessarily friendlier, elements in both American and British official circles have begun to take a serious interest in the Soviet system of scientific and technical education. Under the auspices of the United States National Research Council, Mr. Nicholas de Witt has compiled a large monograph on *Soviet Professional Manpower, its Education, Training and Supply* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955). This volume runs to 400 closely printed pages. The method employed by the author resembles that of an intelligence organisation which pieces together information learned about an enemy country, and derives conclusions of varying weight from incomplete data by the application of the technique of statistics. Even with this method, the author has arrived at the conclusion that Soviet data on educational and manpower statistics " mirror the real situation to a great extent ". In other words, Soviet official reports on scientific and technical education mean what they say. The British Government in its recent White Paper on *Technical Education* (HMSO, February 1956) has adopted a similar attitude, and has given various figures on the number of engineers being trained in the Soviet Union which are derived from Mr. de Witt's work. In the White Paper it is stated that in 1955, " with a population of 214,000,000, the USSR claims to be producing per annum 60,000 professional engineers—280 per million of the population ". But in the USA in 1954, with a population of 162,000,000, only 22,000 engineering graduates were produced, or 136 per million of the population. As for Britain in 1954, 2,800 graduated in engineering and the applied sciences, or about fifty-seven per million of the population.

The White Paper states further that in the USSR engineers who have secured a qualification of the middle grade, lower than a university degree, are produced at the rate of 70,000 per annum, or about 326 per million of the population. Comparable figures for the USA are not available, but it is stated that not enough engineers of the middle grade are produced to provide the " three to five " engineering aides who should, on the average, assist each engineer with university or equivalent qualification.

For Britain, the Higher National Certificate, or equivalent qualification, is regarded as the qualification of the middle grade. Of these 8,100 are awarded yearly or 164 per million of the population.

As the White Paper says, in the USSR " the number of engineers turned out is well ahead of any other country, both in absolute figures and per head of the population ".

The disparity in numbers of engineers and scientists produced by the USSR and Britain has been used by the Government as its chief argument for expanding the British system of technical education. It is a tribute to the reality of the immense Soviet achievement in this direction. Nevertehless, bad though the situation is in Britain as revealed by the comparative figures, it is necessary to accept their implications with some caution. At least, Soviet experts do so.