

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JH - 7

Stalin's Birthplace and a Visit
to a Georgian Collective Farm

7 August 1959

Hotel Intourist
Tbilisi, Georgian S.S.R.
U.S.S.R.

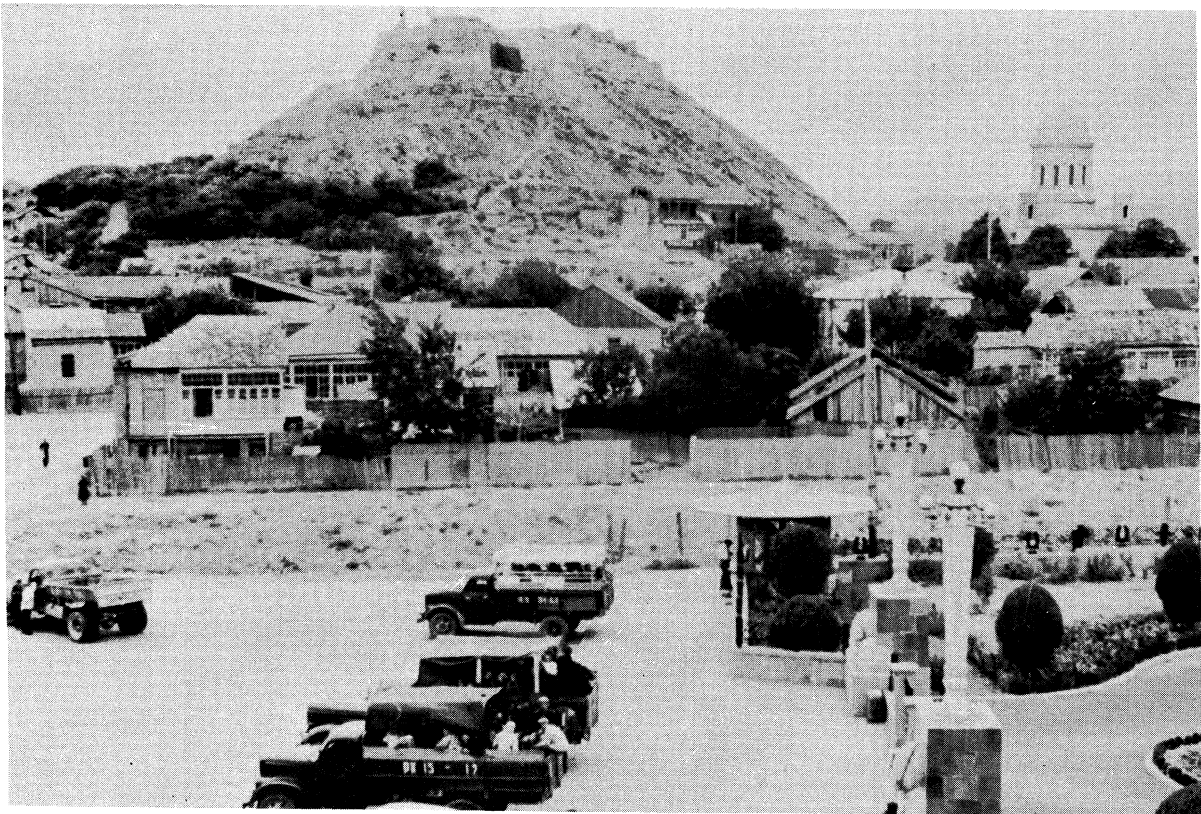
Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Thirty miles west of the capital of Georgia lies the small town of Gori, now famous as the birthplace of Josef Stalin. We drove up early this morning to have a look, and also to visit one of the "show-place" collective farms.

As the Tbilisi hotel had refused to serve breakfast prior to 9 A.M., we dined in regal splendor at the Gori Hotel. The manager took our order, returning every few minutes to check on just how we wanted our eggs. They had no coffee, but would we take hot chocolate instead?

Our dining room was in reality a small private salon. It was adjacent to a spacious but sparsely furnished lobby, which was inhabited by four



Gori, Georgia



Manager, Gori Hotel & Friend

members of the local population seriously playing backgammon. As we waited for breakfast, I strolled over and watched. Soon I was invited to join, which I did for a few minutes. I left with much backslapping and noisy hilarity.

Our breakfast turned out to be the tastiest we have experienced in the U.S.S.R. to date. It was accompanied by the appetizing local bread and followed by a bottle of very dark red dry Georgian wine called "Moukouzhani." This was our first experience of drinking wine after breakfast - but, "when in Rome....." And I must admit that it tasted just fine.

We paid a quick visit to the marble memorial across the street, which has been built around Stalin's wooden birthplace, and then started off for the collective farm a few kilometers outside Gori.

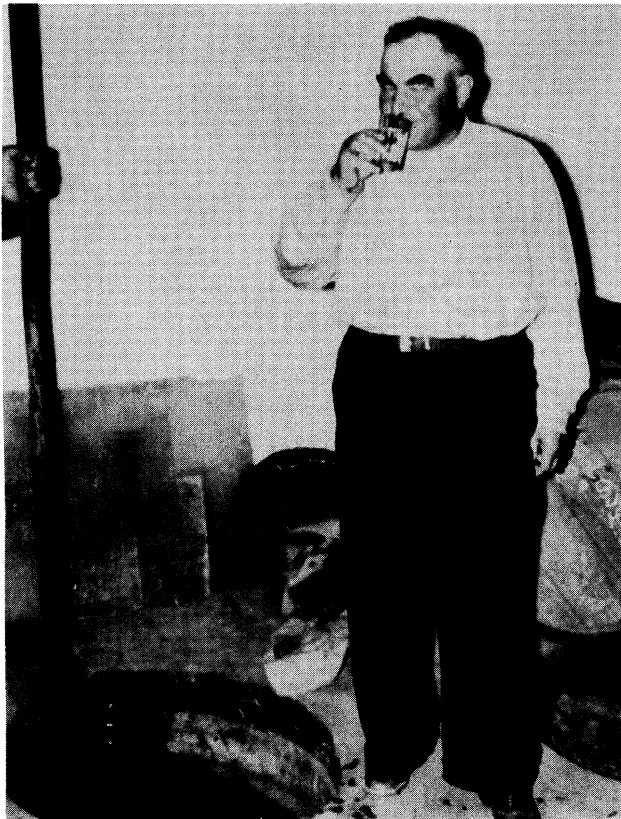
Other than the hotel, the few paved streets and the marble and stone memorial to Stalin, there just is not much to see in Gori. The townspeople have taken their "notoriety" calmly - not allowing it to disturb their ancient slow and comfortable way of life in the least.



Stalin's Birthplace Surrounded by Museum

We were met at the entrance of the farm by the manager, a Turk-estani with the surname Piran. He waved us into his office, where we were joined by the farm's agronomist, the general secretary and an administrative assistant for a general chat before being shown around.

Mr. Piran led off with a short informal speech full of statistics and percentages. We all sat comfortably around a large green-colored felt-topped table in front of his desk, which was flanked by eight-foot portraits of Stalin on one side and Lenin on the other. A television set and shortwave receiver were prominently displayed with an array of telephones.



Collective Farm Manager Piran

Following the manager's little speech, we were invited to ask questions, a challenge which we accepted with great relish.

This particular collective farm emphasizes the cultivation of vineyards (some 150^{acres} of a total of 2000 belonging to the farm.) The farm, established in 1930 with 300 families, now includes 500 families with a total population of 1500. It is growing at the rate of 40 people annually. "Membership" in the farm is open to those over 18 years of age. Group member meetings are held monthly.

The farm owns 1000 head of cattle, 2000 sheep, 300 pigs, 3000 chickens. Some 140 hectares are devoted to fruit orchards - peaches, apples and pears. Some vegetables and other products are also grown.

Mr. Piran reviewed these statistics with great pride, particularly emphasizing that the farm also owned 10 tractors, 25 trucks, two combines and 14 passenger cars as well as operating its own power station.

We asked the manager to tell us a little about himself. With some hesitation he was persuaded to inform us that he had come to the area in 1923 at the age of 16. He joined the farm at its inception, remaining as its manager since 1936. He is married, has two children, has the use of a private car and has a salary of 3000 rubles per month (3 times the national average), a figure which varies somewhat depending on production.

This collective farm divides its 800 productive workers into "production brigades," each having about 28 members. In 1958 the workers on this farm accumulated a total of 160,000 "unit-days"* of productive labor or an average of 200 "unit-days" per worker.**

The Government returns all income to the farm from the sale (back to the Government at Government-fixed prices) of its wines and fruit products. From this fund some 60% is distributed among the workers (4,000,000 rubles in 1958), 38% is ploughed back into capital assets and 2% is devoted to the care of elderly people.

In recent years payment has been made at the rate of 25 rubles plus six kilograms of grain, potatoes and other crops for each "unit-day" accumulated. Thus, the average worker on this farm was paid in 1958 some 5000 rubles (in monthly installments throughout the year) and given an additional 150 kilograms of grain and food in kind.***

At this farm the collective workers are allowed to build their own homes with help from other workers. They are also permitted to sell their homes (valued at an average of 1700 rubles) should they decide to leave the farm (this is largely fictitious since, in replying to our question, the manager admitted that very few people had ever left the farm - "Why should they? They have everything here they need.")

* Each job on a collective farm is evaluated in terms of "unit-days." The definition of a "unit-day" for a particular job depends on the complexity and importance of this job to the collective farm. Payment to the collective farmer is determined by the quality and quantity of work expended, and is measured by the number of "unit-days" he manages to accumulate during the year. The total productive expectation from the farm is calculated by the Government on the basis of standard "norms" which have been previously established. Consideration is taken of any special features that a collective farm may have,

In any one work day a collective farmer may accumulate from 0.5 to 4.0 "unit-days", and in some cases, such as with highly skilled tractor operators, these figures may run as high as from 4.0 to 7.0 "unit-days," all these figures depending on the "norms" set for his particular farm. Income per "unit-day" varies from about 10 to 30 rubles plus from 3 to 6 kilograms in kind.

** On one brigade, whose figures I examined, four members accumulated from 177 - 192 "unit-days," 16 members from 208 to 285, and eight members managed to gather more than 300, with the highest being 530.

***This compares well with a city laborer, who averages perhaps 10,000 rubles annually, but who must buy all his food and pay rent. On the same brigade mentioned above incomes ranged from 4250 to 13,500 rubles per year, with an average of 6500 rubles.

Families are allowed to maintain private plots (totalling some 200 hectares on this farm, or about $2/5$ hectare per family) and to sell their produce in the neighboring villages or in Gori. Each family pays about 1000 rubles tax annually to the Government.

The manager has a full-time staff of 15, mostly administrative. In addition, he reported, the farm has three physicians, three nurses and "certain" medical facilities.

Although he declined to show us these facilities or to introduce us to his medical staff, the manager quickly led the way to the cellar, where we were given numerous samples of the vodka and wines prepared at the farm.



Children on the Collective Farm

Following this bit of hospitality, he proceeded to take us on a very carefully guided tour of the farm. The first stop was a "typical" homestead with earthen floors, large grain bins (most families here make their own bread daily), two bedrooms, some primitive furniture, a crude kitchen (but with running water and electricity) and an apiary in the front yard effectively managed by a large dog.

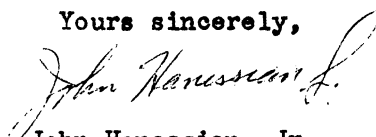
Most homes have electricity, many have radios, some even have tiny refrigerators, but very few have any semblance of sanitary plumbing. We visited one outdoor "public convenience", which was indescribably filthy. There is no church, but the collective "members" are encouraged to form "clubs." There are free weekly movies and wrestling on Sundays. The farm has several Government owned and managed shops, which supply those items not produced on the farm.

At our repeated request we were finally taken to the school. The manager informed us that the farm had 45 school teachers (paid by the Government) and some 400 primary and secondary pupils. The building is extremely dilapidated, portions appeared to be in danger of imminent collapse - although some repair work was taking place.

The school had about five useable rooms for instruction, a "library" of about 200 volumes in the "office" (a cubbyhole of about 10 feet by 10.) Facilities and equipment were very poor. We expressed wonder that 45 teachers could use this building. The manager (by this time becoming somewhat embarrassed at our questions) explained that the students came in several shifts.

As we left the school building to continue our tour, Mr. Piran suddenly decided that enough was enough. He stalked off with a mere nod. We stayed on a bit to give some candy to a crowd of children and to pass the time of day with a workman. But our guide, who had become visibly distressed at the departure of our host, insisted we leave. As we drove down the dirt road, narrowly escaping potholes, we passed the manager, who turned and stared at his questioners.

Yours sincerely,



John Hanessian, Jr.

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