

Woman Without a Country?

A fantastic chase is now under way in the Swiss Alps as hundreds of reporters, photographers, publishers' representatives and, presumably, intelligence agents seek to locate the elusive Svetlana Stalin. Already this pursuit has produced scenes worthy of a James Bond farce, but there are serious issues involved.

It is evident that the United States Government found itself in a major quandary when, as the State Department has now admitted, Miss Stalin asked for political asylum here. In the heyday of the cold war there would have been no problem. The propaganda and intelligence value of much more obscure figures has won them refuge in this country and Government-sponsored access to communications media. But Miss Stalin had the bad luck, from her standpoint, of making her request just when President Johnson is in the midst of a major effort to build bridges to the East, an effort that might be compromised by resentment in Moscow at American exploitation of Miss Stalin.

The United States has followed a compromise course in dealing with its dilemma. It arranged to transport Miss Stalin from India and found her a temporary sanctuary in Switzerland. Apparently a part of this arrangement was agreement by the central figure—whether voluntary or under pressure is unrevealed—that she would remain incommunicado.

But the intense worldwide interest aroused by her defection makes it unlikely that she can be kept away from newspapermen indefinitely—provided she is not locked in a *de facto* jail or otherwise artificially and uncomfortably isolated.

This history is in sorry contrast to the oft-repeated United States declarations in favor of free speech, free movement and all the other freedoms. Moreover, the United States Government assumed a clear obligation to Miss Stalin when it decided to make possible her exit from India. The makeshift arrangement now adopted hardly satisfies that obligation.

If Miss Stalin still wants to come to this country, then she should be allowed to do so. And she is entitled to say what she wishes to the people of the world. We do not pretend to know what Miss Stalin might say if given the opportunity, but to gag her for reasons of political expediency violates her rights as a human being.

To continue on the present course is to follow the Soviet principle that the rights of the individual are subordinate to the needs of the state. That is not a principle Americans want to live with.