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Say, Comrade

Considering the difficulty of finding a theme acceptable to both governments, there is a certain logic in the choice of a story about Soviet and American scientists working together as the subject for a movie to be produced by Soviet and American film makers working together. Both governments can only agree that cooperation between the two countries is good, otherwise there would be no making the movie in the first place. And it is the official view of each government that its quarrel is not with the people of the other country, only with the other government.

The agreement to produce the film, signed earlier this year, is between Mosfilm Studio, located near Moscow, and Lester Cowan, an independent American producer. It calls for four starring roles, two to be played by Americans and two by Russians, with part of the film shot here and part in the Soviet Union. The film is to be distributed in both countries in identical versions, except for language dubbing to make it intelligible to both audiences. The movie is to be based on the novel *Meeting at a Far Meridian*, which is itself a kind of cooperative venture. The book was written by an American, Mitchell Wilson, but has found, in translation, its most appreciative readers in the Soviet Union.

In the book, an American physicist and a Soviet physicist, working independently on the same problem in cosmic ray physics, have come up with opposing conclusions. They know each other's work, it being in the open literature, and have great respect for each other's abilities. In fact, the American, from whose viewpoint the story is told, feels a kind of mystical identification with his Russian counterpart. Neither scientist, however, can explain the discrepancy. They are able to meet through an exchange program and they seek to settle their scientific differences. They also seek to understand each other as persons.

Mitchell Wilson never explores any really fundamental political issue, such as possible differences in motivation of the Soviet Union and the United States in promoting exchange. But he does have his two heroes work their way through misunderstandings that arise from differences in background, from different loyalties, and even from the different ways that they try to spare each other's feelings.

The book is based on a good idea and it offers a solution to the problem of a theme acceptable to both governments. Its value as a piece of literature, however, is something else again. There are also romantic entanglements, and if no character ever says, "Let me take you away from all this," the omission is more an indication of Mitchell Wilson's ability to avoid anything with political overtones than it is of his originality of style. This does not mean that there is no hope for the movie. After all, the merits of *The Brothers Karamazov* did not assure success when, with the aid of Yul Brynner, it was made into a movie, while *Gone with the Wind* improved considerably in the filming.

Soviet and American scientists have shown that they can get together to produce science. It remains to be seen whether Soviet and American actors and film makers can get together to produce art, or at least good Hollywood fare. If they succeed on either level, the next step is clear. Like Richard Bissell writing the musical "Say, Darling" about the production of his earlier musical "The Pajama Game," the next step can be a movie about producing a movie on an exchange basis, to be titled, perhaps, "Say, Comrade."—J.T.