



PROGRESS QUARTERLY

Critical Introductions to the Reissued Classics

VOLUME I · NUMBER 3

ПРОГРЕСС · МОСКВА

IN THIS ISSUE

SO

THE LAND OF SOCIALISM TODAY TOMORROW

AR

UNADDRESSED LETTERS AND ART AND SOCIAL LIFE

ML

ENGELS—LAFARGUE CORRESPONDENCE, VOLUME ONE (1868—1886)

FI

THE ROUT

and 3 more · introductions by Dmitry Chasovennikov

Volume I, Number 3

SO	THE LAND OF SOCIALISM TODAY TOMORROW Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)	3
AR	UNADDRESSED LETTERS AND ART AND SOCIAL LIFE Georgi Plekhanov	8
ML	ENGELS—LAFARGUE CORRESPONDENCE, VOLUME ONE (1868—1886) Friedrich Engels and others	11
FI	THE ROUT Alexander Fadeyev	15
FI	HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED, PART ONE Nikolai Ostrovsky	20
FI	HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED, PART TWO Nikolai Ostrovsky	24
FI	THE YOUNG GUARD Alexander Fadeyev	29

SOVIET SOCIETY

The Land of Socialism Today Tomorrow

The 1939 congress of the party that survived the Terror, in the official English record: the Third Five-Year Plan, the eve of war, and the speeches of men who had watched most of the previous congress disappear. A scarce primary source for the moment the purge was declared over.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)

Introduction to the 1939 Edition

Molotov opened the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) on 10 March 1939 with a piece of arithmetic. "Comrades, 1,574 delegates with vote have been elected to the Congress, of whom 1,567 are present." Then the applause, and the declaration that the congress was open.

Five years and one month earlier, the Seventeenth Congress had met in the same hall and called itself the Congress of Victors. Of the 1,966 delegates to that congress, Khrushchev told the Twentieth Congress in February 1956, 1,108 were arrested on counter-revolutionary charges; of the 139 members and candidate members of the Central Committee it elected, 98 were shot. That is the fact this book exists to talk around. The Eighteenth Congress is the first congress of the surviving party, and this volume — the reports and speeches, issued in English in Moscow in the same year as the Short Course — is the record of what the survivors said to each other about it.

The two books are one operation in two forms. The Short Course, authorised by the Central Committee in 1938, supplied the history that made the killings intelligible. This volume, produced from the congress that met the following March, supplies the present tense: the same men, the new plan, the party rules rewritten, the Third Five-Year Plan, and the announcement that the thing is over. That the two are a matched pair can be read off the back of this book without any commentary at all. In the list of the Central Committee elected by the Eighteenth Congress, printed here in full, sit "Pospelov, P. N." and "Yaroslavsky, E." — the two men who drafted the Short Course, promoted into the body that had authorised it. Also on that list: "Vyshinsky, A. Y.", who had prosecuted the Moscow trials, and "Beria, L. P.", who had run the NKVD since the previous November. The volume is not a commentary on the Terror. It is a group photograph of the people who conducted it, taken while they were still in the room.

Who is here and who is not

Read the speakers' list as a document in its own right. Molotov opens and delivers the Third Five-Year Plan. Stalin reports for the Central Committee. Manuilsky reports for the Soviet delegation to the Executive Committee of the Comintern. Zhdanov moves the amendments to the party rules. Then Andreyev, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Kalinin, Mikoyan, Khrushchev, Beria, Shvernik. Twelve men. Every one of them died in bed or in office.

Now the absences. Rudzutak, a full member of the Politburo, had been shot in July 1938. Postyshev, Kosior and Chubar — all three Politburo members or candidates who had sat on the platform in 1934 — were shot on 26 February 1939, twelve days before this congress opened. Eikhe was in prison and would be shot in 1940. None of them is named anywhere in this volume. Neither, more remarkably, is Nikolai Yezhov, who had directed the mass operations of 1937 and 1938 and whose name does not occur once in this volume. He had been replaced at the NKVD by Beria in November 1938 and was arrested a month after the congress closed. The man who ran the Terror is the one figure the congress justifying the Terror cannot mention.

The names were not unmentionable everywhere. Trotsky's survey of the whole process, written in 1938 and printed in English in Fourth International (vol. VI no. 3, March 1945), puts the point this book exists to prevent anyone putting: that the contradiction between October and the bureaucracy "found its most dramatic expression in the annihilation of the old generation of the Bolsheviks", and that no serious person believed "that hundreds of old revolutionists, leaders of the Bolshevik Party under [Czarist] illegality, leaders of the Civil War, revolutionary Soviet diplomats, military heads of the Red Army, heads of 30 national Soviet Republics, became all at once and as if by command-agents of fascism." He then does the thing the congress cannot do, and lists them: Zinoviev, Kamenev, Smirnov, Pyatakov, Serebryakov, Sokolnikov, Radek, Rakovsky, Krestinsky, Tukhachevsky "and hundreds of

others".

Two men from the Seventeenth Congress are named here with warmth, and it is worth noticing which two. Kaganovich, arguing about the railways, recalls that "the backward state of the railways was sharply emphasized in the speeches of Comrades Molotov, Kirov and Orjonikidze", and refers a few pages later to "our late Comrade Orjonikidze". Kirov was murdered in December 1934. Ordzhonikidze died in February 1937, in circumstances the party did not then discuss. They can be praised because they were dead before they could be charged. Everyone else who spoke at the Congress of Victors has become unmentionable, and the book does not explain why, because explaining why would require naming them.

The accounting

The congress does address the purges, and the language is worth having exactly. Molotov, in the opening speech, gives the official theory in a single sentence: the foreign powers had attempted "a sort of intervention in our internal affairs", conducted through "people who but yesterday covered up their vile perfidy and treason with the Communist Party membership card they carried". Their method, he says, "in which all these Trotskys, Rykovs, Bukharins, Zinovievs, Tukhachevskys, Radeks, Ikramovs and Lubchenkos played the contemptible role of wrecker stool pigeons and filthy agents of foreign espionage services, has suffered complete shipwreck."

Stalin's report handles the same material as a debating point against the foreign press:

Certain foreign pressmen have been talking drivel to the effect that the purging of the Soviet organizations of spies, assassins and wreckers like Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Yakir, Tukhachevsky, Rosengoltz, Bukharin and other fiends has "shaken" the Soviet system and caused its "demoralization." One can only laugh at such cheap drivel.

The proof offered is electoral, and the passage should be read slowly, because it is the whole regime's theory of legitimacy in five lines:

In 1937 Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Uborevich and other fiends were sentenced to be shot. After that, the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. were held. In these elections, 98.6 per cent of the total vote was cast for the Soviet power. At the beginning of 1938 Rosengoltz, Rykov, Bukharin and other fiends were sentenced to be shot. After that, the elections to the Supreme Soviets of the Union

Republics were held. In these elections 99.4 per cent of the total vote was cast for the Soviet power.

An unopposed single-list ballot is offered as the audit of a series of executions. The three generals named in the first sentence — Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Uborevich — were tried in secret and shot in June 1937, together with most of the Soviet high command, on evidence that no historian now defends. All the principal defendants of the 1936–38 Moscow trials had their convictions quashed by the Supreme Court of the USSR in 1988.

Then comes the admission, and it is a real one, of a narrow kind. Discussing the party purge that ran from 1933 to 1936, Stalin says: "It cannot be said that the purge was not accompanied by grave mistakes. There were unfortunately more mistakes than might have been expected." Two sentences later: "Nevertheless, the purge of 1933-36 was unavoidable and its results, on the whole, were beneficial." The membership figures are given plainly: 1,874,488 members represented at the Seventeenth Congress, "about 1,600,000" at the Eighteenth, "which is 270,000 less than were represented at the Seventeenth Congress. But there is nothing bad in that."

Note the dates in that admission. The purge conceded is the one that ended in 1936. The mass operations of 1937 and 1938, in which something on the order of 680,000 people were executed according to the NKVD's own accounting released from the archives in the 1990s, are not what is being apologised for; they are the "purging of Soviet organizations" that the same report defends as an unmixed good.

The most extraordinary passage in the book on this subject is not Stalin's but Zhdanov's, in the section of his report headed "Abolition of Mass Purges". Zhdanov is arguing that the mass purge as an instrument should be written out of the party rules, and to make the case he describes, in detail and at length, what actually happened in the party organisations during 1937 and 1938. A district secretary named Kalyakaikin expelled 58 of the 175 members of his organisation, using what Zhdanov calls a "belt" system: expel a man, then call to account "all Communists who had had any relations whatever with the expelled person". A man named Priluchny in Archangel "had filed statements against one hundred and forty-two Communists, not a single one of which was substantiated". A woman named Peskovskaya in Aktyubinsk Region "brought about the expulsion from the Party of one hundred and fifty-six Communists, or sixty-four per cent of the membership of the organization". A party consultant in Krasnoyarsk Territory kept a denunciation ledger with four columns: "big

enemy"; "little enemy"; "wee enemy"; "tiny enemy." The congress laughs. The stenographer records the laughter.

Zhdanov's summary is that "the slandering of honest people under the guise of 'vigilance' is at the present time the most widespread method used to mask and screen hostile activities. If you want to discover still unexposed enemy wasps' nests, look for them above all among the slanderers." That is the trap sprung shut. The denunciations were real; the ruined lives were real; Zhdanov describes them with precision. But the denunciations are attributed to the enemy, so that the machinery of terror becomes further evidence of the conspiracy that terror was needed to defeat. The remedy is more unmasking. The congress duly resolves that "periodical mass purges of the Party shall be abolished" — and the whole apparatus of individual investigation is left standing, under a new commissar.

The doctrine

Stalin's report closes with a section called "Some Questions of Theory", and this is the part of the volume with the longest afterlife. He takes the classical passage from Engels on the withering away of the state and argues that it holds only if socialism has triumphed in all or most countries. In one country, encircled, the state must instead be strengthened, "must have at its disposal a well-trained army, well-organized punitive organs, and a strong intelligence service".

He then periodises. In the second phase, from the elimination of the capitalist elements to the new Constitution:

The function of military suppression inside the country ceased, died away; for exploitation had been abolished, there were no more exploiters left, and so there was no one to suppress.

And of the coercive organs: "their edge is no longer turned to the inside of the country but to the outside, against external enemies."

This was said in March 1939, to a hall from which more than a thousand of the previous congress's delegates were missing, by the head of a state then holding well over a million people in corrective-labour camps and colonies. It is not a lie about a fact; it is a definition constructed so that no fact can reach it. Repression that is directed at spies is by definition not internal suppression, because spies are not a class. Trotsky's reply, written within weeks — the essay published as "The Bonapartist Philosophy of the State" — fastened on exactly

this: that a state which must be strengthened without limit in the name of a classless society has told you what class it serves. The Revolution Betrayed (1936) had already supplied the framework, and The Stalin School of Falsification (English edition, 1937) the documentary method. Trotsky was killed in Coyoacán on 21 August 1940 by an NKVD agent, seventeen months after this congress. The doctrine outlived him and hardened. Reading the Soviet press seven years later, Fourth International (vol. VII no. 4, April 1946) quoted Pravda of 22 January 1946 announcing that "the greatest theoretical and political conquest of Leninism" was "the doctrine of the development and strengthening of the state under socialism and communism in the conditions of the victory of socialism in one country", and drew the inference: it was now "counterrevolutionary" to cite in the USSR "not alone Marx and Engels but also Lenin on the withering away of the state." What is offered here as an emendation of Engels had become, inside a decade, a prohibition on reading him.

March 1939

Now the calendar, because this congress sits in one of the tightest corners of the century. It opened on 10 March 1939. On 15 March, while it was still sitting, German troops entered Prague and destroyed what was left of Czechoslovakia. It closed on 21 March. On 28 March, Madrid fell to Franco. On 31 March, Britain guaranteed Poland. On 3 May, Litvinov — elected to the Central Committee by this congress, his name printed in the list at the back — was dismissed as Foreign Commissar and replaced by Molotov. On 23 August, the Soviet Union and Germany signed a pact of non-aggression.

Stalin's foreign-policy section is therefore read backwards by everyone who reads it. He describes the Western powers as pursuing non-intervention in order to see Germany and the USSR exhaust each other: they let Hitler have Austria and the Sudetenland, he says, "egging the Germans on to march farther east, promising them easy pickings, and prompting them: 'Just start war on the Bolsheviks, and everything will be all right.'" On the press campaign about German designs on Soviet Ukraine, he is contemptuous and funny — "It is quite possible, of course, that there are madmen in Germany who dream of annexing the elephant, that is, the Soviet Ukraine, to the gnat, namely, the so-called Carpathian Ukraine" — and he closes the section with the sentence that has been quoted ever since. Among the tasks of the party in foreign policy:

To be cautious and not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.

Whether that was a coded offer to Berlin is genuinely contested and probably unresolvable. Ribbentrop and German commentators later treated it as the first signal; a number of historians read it more modestly, as a warning to London and Paris that Soviet participation in an anti-German front could not be assumed after Munich. What is not contested is that the analysis is, on its own terms, largely accurate — appeasement really was in part an attempt to turn Germany eastwards — and that Stalin's conclusion was not to build the anti-fascist alliance the Comintern was simultaneously demanding, but to keep both doors open. He also says, of the policy of non-intervention: "Far be it from me to moralize on the policy of non-intervention, to talk of treason, treachery and so on. It would be naive to preach morals to people who recognize no human morality. Politics is politics." Five months later the same reasoning was applied in the other direction.

One contemporaneous reader took the Ukraine passage as the load-bearing one. Trotsky's "Problem of the Ukraine", dated 22 April 1939 and first printed in the *Socialist Appeal* of 9 May 1939 — reprinted in *Fourth International*, vol. X no. 10, November 1949 — notes that Hitler had just handed Carpatho-Ukraine "as a gift to the Hungarian butchers", and reads that as a message: "If I were preparing to attack Soviet Ukraine tomorrow I should have kept Carpatho-Ukraine in my own hands." Hence, Trotsky writes, "In reply, Stalin at the 18th Party Congress openly came to Hitler's defense against the slanders of the 'Western Democracies.'" On that reading the elephant-and-gnat joke is not comic relief but an answer given in public to a question asked in public. It was written a month after the congress rose and four months before the pact, by a man with access to neither chancellery.

What the pact then bought was audited from the Soviet press itself. John G. Wright, working from Pravda files that reached New York a year late, opened his account in *Fourth International* (vol. II no. 9, November 1941) with the claim he meant to destroy: "One of Stalin's most brazen lies is that by signing the pact with Hitler he had gained and used precious breathing space to bolster the industry and defenses of the USSR." From Malenkov's report to the Eighteenth Party Conference of February 1941 he took the cement figures — capacity rising every year from 1936 to 1940, capacity actually used falling from 88 per cent to 64 — and concluded that "the chaos into which Stalin had plunged the country was known to Hitler." His sequel (vol. II no. 10, December 1941) records what became of the men elected here: at that same conference "six members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (among them Maxim Litvinov), 15 alternates and 9 members of the Central Auditing Commission were expelled

on the charge of 'incompetence' and 'failure to fulfill their duties.'" The Central Committee list printed at the back of this volume had a working life of under two years.

Manuilsky's report on the Comintern shows the cost. It is, for its first fifty pages, a serious and even moving account of the anti-fascist movement: the Popular Front victories, the International Brigades, the "tens of thousands of Communists who are languishing in prisons and concentration camps", and the Spanish Republic which, "betrayed by the so-called bourgeois-democratic states, has been waging an unequal and heroic struggle for its independence". Britain and France had recognised Franco on 27 February; the Republic had a fortnight to live as Manuilsky spoke. And then the same report explains that "in Spain the Trotskyites act as spies for fascist Germany and Italy and as agents of the Fifth Column, engineering counter-revolutionary revolts in the rear of the People's Army." That sentence is the charge under which the POUM was suppressed after the Barcelona May Days of 1937 and under which Andreu Nin was abducted and murdered in June 1937 by agents working with Soviet advisers. Manuilsky repeats it to a Soviet party congress five weeks before the Republic's surrender. Whatever the Comintern was for by 1939, this report is the evidence. Trotsky, in the same April 1939 article, drew from it the conclusion a Soviet reader could not: that "Manuilsky, one of the most revolting renegades of Ukrainian communism, quite openly explained that not only the USSR but also the Comintern ... refused to demand the emancipation of oppressed peoples whenever their oppressors are not the enemies of the ruling Moscow clique." Western Ukraine, on that showing, had become "small change in its international combinations with imperialist governments."

What is real here

A reader who concludes that everything in this book is false will have learned nothing and will be unable to explain why the volume worked.

Much of it is not false. The Third Five-Year Plan, presented by Molotov and printed here with the congress resolution, is a genuine planning document and the best English-language source for what Soviet planners intended between 1938 and 1942: the targets for machine-building, electric power, the "Second Baku" oilfield between the Volga and the Urals, the fuel and railway programmes argued over at length by Kaganovich. Stalin's comparison of Soviet and British output per head is honest arithmetic used against his own case — 87 kilograms of pig iron per head in the USSR against 145 in Great Britain, 107 kilograms of steel against 226 — and the

conclusion drawn from it, that the USSR had overtaken the capitalist countries in rate of growth but not in economic power, is a fair statement of the position. The industrialisation these pages describe happened. So did the expansion of schooling: the plan's commitment that "full secondary education be made universal in the cities and towns, and that education up to and including the seventh class be made universal in the rural districts and in all the national republics", and the projected rise in personnel with higher education from 750,000 to 1,290,000, describe a real and rapid transformation, whatever one thinks of the regime that carried it out and of the human cost recorded nowhere in this book. Where the volume is checkable against later Soviet and post-Soviet statistics, its industrial series are broadly the series the planners themselves worked from; they are propaganda in their framing, not in their arithmetic. The population figure Stalin cites — 170,000,000 — comes from the January 1939 census, taken after the census of January 1937 had been suppressed and several of its organisers arrested for producing a total the leadership would not accept.

The volume is also, unlike the Short Course, a book in which the Communist International exists. Manuilsky's survey of the sections — the growth of the French party, the weakness of the British and Italian parties, the losses under fascism — is a source, and the party rules adopted here still describe the CPSU(B) on their title page as a "Section of the Communist International", four years before that International was dissolved.

And there is the congress's own closing note, which no critic could improve on. Beria, newly installed at the NKVD, ends his speech to the applause of the delegates with a salute — and the stenographer takes down the shout from the floor: "Long live the Soviet intelligence service, hurrah!" Two months earlier, three of the men who had sat in that hall in 1934 had been shot. The congress cheered the organisation that shot them, and passed on to the Third Five-Year Plan.

Unaddressed Letters and Art and Social Life

The founder of Russian Marxism on where art comes from: five letters from Geneva exile in 1899-1900 and the mature 1912 lecture. Erudite, argumentative and alive - and the foundation of everything durable in later Marxist thinking about culture.

Georgi Plekhanov

Introduction to This Edition

The two works in this volume were written more than a decade apart, and they read like the opening and the summing-up of a single long argument. The Unaddressed Letters — five of them; a sixth exists only as a fragment the author never finished, and the fourth he barely began — appeared in Russian legal journals in 1899 and 1900, when Georgi Plekhanov was in his forties and already the acknowledged founder of Russian Marxism, writing from exile in Geneva. Art and Social Life is the mature statement: a lecture Plekhanov delivered in Liège and Paris in 1912 and then reworked for the journal *Sovremennik* ("The Contemporary"), where it ran in 1912–13. Between them the two texts do something that had not been done before in the Russian language, and had scarcely been done anywhere: they try to explain art — its origins, its changing forms, its recurring quarrels about its own purpose — from the standpoint of the materialist conception of history. Plekhanov is not writing criticism. He is founding a discipline. The present edition prints A. Fineberg's English translation, published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow in 1957 — the house that six years later would be renamed Progress Publishers.

Plekhanov states his method on the first page of the first letter, and states it without apology: "I look upon art, as upon all social phenomena, from the standpoint of the materialist conception of history." The sentence he keeps returning to is even shorter — "Art is a social phenomenon." The Letters set out to prove it against the biologists and the aesthetes alike: art has a history, that history is bound up with the development of the productive forces and the social relations they carry, and even the sense of beauty, which looks most like a fact of nature, is shaped by the conditions of social life. The reasoning ranges enormously — over Darwin and the ethnographers, over the dances and ornaments and hunting songs of peoples the anthropology of his day called "primitive," over Karl Bücher's theory that work and rhythm are the parents of art. It

is erudite, argumentative, and alive; whatever else the reader takes from it, the sheer reach of the mind at work is unmistakable.

The heart of the Letters is a running quarrel with the economist Karl Bücher, who had derived work from play — who held that play is the older thing and labour its later, grimmer offspring. Plekhanov turns the order around. Watching the hunting dances of primitive peoples, dances that mime the stalking and the kill and so drill the young in the skills the group lives by, he concludes that "work must have necessarily preceded the dance," and confesses that he "simply cannot understand how Bücher can assert that play is older than work." Labour is the ground; the dance, the song, the ornament grow out of the productive life of the group and only afterwards float free of it. It is a bold and characteristic stroke — the whole materialist wager staked on the one province, the aesthetic, that his opponents held to be furthest from the sphere of material need — and even where the ethnography of 1900 has dated, and much of it has, the shape of the argument still stands.

Art and Social Life narrows the focus to a single question, the one that gives the essay its enduring interest: the recurring war between those who hold that "society is not made for the artist, but the artist for society," and those for whom "art is an aim in itself." Plekhanov refuses to settle the quarrel by taste. He asks instead a historian's question — under what conditions does each view take hold? — and gives an answer of real elegance. "The belief in art for art's sake," he writes, "arises wherever the artist is out of harmony with his social environment"; where, on the contrary, "there is mutual sympathy between a considerable section of society and people who have a more or less active interest in creative art," the utilitarian view, art as a servant of life, comes into its own. The doctrine of pure art, in other words, is not eternal and not a mistake; it is what artists reach for when the world around them has become, in his word, hopeless. That is a genuinely dialectical insight, and it is the reason the essay has outlived almost everything else written on the subject in its generation.

It is worth saying plainly what is strong here, because the strength is the thing the later history obscured. Plekhanov's central move — treating the demand for art-for-art's-sake as itself a social symptom, to be explained rather than praised or condemned — is a permanent acquisition. It dissolves a false eternity. The Parnassian who thinks his contempt for the "bourgeois" is a timeless artistic principle, and the radical critic who thinks utility is art's timeless duty, are shown to be two weather-readings of the same barometer, each produced by a particular relation between artists and their society. Plekhanov does this without crude debunking. He does not say the pure-art poets wrote badly; he says their stance had conditions, and he goes looking for them. When he cites Chernyshevsky's flat verdict — that "the idea of 'art for art's sake' is as strange in our times as 'wealth for wealth's sake,' 'science for science's sake'" — he cites it not as his own conclusion but as a document of the eighteen-sixties, a view with its own social address. That is the historian's discipline, and it is admirable.

The weaknesses are the defects of those same qualities, and honesty requires naming them. The first is a pull toward the mechanical. Plekhanov is so determined to anchor art in the social base that he sometimes lets the anchor do the work the sails should do; the passage from economic condition to artistic form can come too fast, too directly, as though the poem were a readout of the mode of production. He knows better — his best pages are full of mediations — but the reductive temptation is real, and later Marxist writing on art, from Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* onward, spent much of its energy putting back the layers of relative autonomy that Plekhanov's tidier formulations flattened. The second weakness is more consequential, because the future seized on it. Plekhanov tends to grade works by their content — by the seriousness and the progressive tendency of the ideas they carry. He is careful, far more careful than his heirs would be, to insist that a correct idea does not make a good poem and that art must be judged as art. But the habit of asking first what a work says, and whether what it says is socially useful, is planted in him; and it was that habit, torn loose from his subtlety and his historical tact, that a later state would weaponise. The scholar who explained why the utilitarian view of art arises would furnish, against his every intention, the vocabulary for imposing it by decree.

Which brings us to the question this series always asks of a

canonised text: was the state that enshrined it faithful to it? With Plekhanov the irony is sharper than usual, and it runs on two levels at once.

Consider first the man being canonised. Plekhanov was the teacher of Russian Marxism — Lenin's teacher, among others — but after the split of 1903 he was a Menshevik, and in 1917 he opposed the October Revolution outright, warning the Petrograd workers in an open letter that Russia was not ready for a seizure of power. He died in 1918, unreconciled. The Soviet state that made his aesthetics a foundation stone had, at the level of politics, defined itself against him. Its solution was a quiet division of the man. Plekhanov-the-philosopher and Plekhanov-the-founder-of-Marxist-criticism were embraced; Plekhanov-the-Menshevik, the opponent of the Revolution, was walled off. Lenin himself had licensed exactly this separation: having broken with him without mercy in politics, Lenin still ruled that Plekhanov's philosophical writings were among the best in the whole literature of Marxism and that no one could become a conscious communist without studying them. So the works survived by being severed from the life. This very edition is a monument to the operation — it gives you the aesthetician in full and leaves the Menshevik offstage, mentioned, if at all, only to be regretted.

Then consider the doctrine. Plekhanov's aesthetics is descriptive and explanatory at its core: it seeks to understand why art takes the forms it does, why the quarrels about its function recur, what social ground each artistic tendency grows from. It is a sociology of art, not a set of orders to artists. Yet in the decades after his death his name was fixed to the wall of an enterprise that inverted him completely. "Socialist realism," codified in 1934 and enforced with rising ferocity thereafter, did not explain the relation of art to social life; it prescribed one, by administrative fiat, on pain of silence or worse. Where Plekhanov had shown that the utilitarian view of art arises spontaneously when artists and their public are in sympathy, the Zhdanov years — named for Andrei Zhdanov, who in 1946 arraigned the poet Anna Akhmatova and the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko before a Party resolution, and in 1948 did the same to Shostakovich and Prokofiev — simply commanded that sympathy into being and jailed or hounded those who withheld it. The very falling "out of harmony with his social environment" that Plekhanov had studied as a historical fact was now redefined as a crime against the state. He had written the natural history of a phenomenon; his heirs made the phenomenon illegal and put his portrait over the courtroom door.

The apparatus of this edition offers a small, telling glimpse of

the machinery. In the Institute of Marxism-Leninism's notes at the back, where Plekhanov discusses the radical critic Pisarev, the editors step in to correct him: Plekhanov's assessment, the note says, "is not quite correct," for Pisarev in truth opposed art for art's sake and held that art should be filled with serious thought and reflect the progressive ideas of its time. It is a modest scholarly caveat, and on its own terms not unfair. But watch what it does. The founder of Marxist criticism is being gently overruled in the direction of the reigning doctrine — the direction of content, tendency, "progressive ideas" — by the institution that guarded the doctrine. The living critic, who weighed and hesitated and distinguished, is being edited into line with the catechism assembled in his name. That the editing is quiet does not make it less revealing; it is the reflex of a culture that could no longer read even its own founder without steadying his hand.

There is one further irony, and it belongs to the date. This translation appeared in 1957, in the first thaw after Stalin's death, when the worst of the Zhdanovshchina was being cautiously disowned and the reading public was being given back some of what the terror had taken. To reissue Plekhanov on art in that year was, whether the publishers fully meant it or not, to reopen a question the state had spent twenty years pretending was closed — the question of how art actually stands to society, as against how the authorities decree it must. The book is more subversive of its own moment than its imprint could admit.

Read now, with the state that misused him gone, Plekhanov's argument recovers its edge, and it cuts in exactly the opposite direction from Zhdanov. His whole achievement is to have shown that the relation of art to social life is something to be understood — patiently, historically, from below — and never something to be legislated. A doctrine that arises from the real sympathy between a society and its artists cannot be manufactured by a resolution of the Central Committee; the attempt to manufacture it produces not the utilitarian art Plekhanov described but its lifeless double, art conscripted, which fools no one and outlives nothing. His pages are, in this sense, the standing refutation of the aesthetic bureaucracy that claimed him. The best of the Marxist tradition understood this from within. Trotsky, in *Literature and Revolution* — written in 1924, before the freeze — had already insisted that the Party had no business decreeing artistic schools or manufacturing a "proletarian culture" to order, that art must find its own road by its own means; it is the same instinct as Plekhanov's, the refusal to confuse explanation with command, and it was

buried under the same avalanche.

What lasts, then, is not a set of verdicts on particular poets — some of Plekhanov's have dated, as he would have expected them to — but the method and the temper: the conviction that art is a social and historical phenomenon with a real history, that its quarrels about itself are worth explaining rather than merely joining, and that the critic's first duty is to understand. That conviction has fed everything durable in later Marxist thinking about culture, and it remains a corrective to dogma of every stripe — the market's dogma that art is merely a commodity, no less than the commissar's that it is merely a message. Plekhanov opened a door that the bureaucracy spent a generation trying to nail shut, and could not. The reader who comes to these letters and this essay for the first time will find, beneath the period furniture, a mind insisting on the one thing his self-appointed heirs could never abide: that living art, like a living doctrine, keeps faith with society not by taking orders from it but by belonging to it.

MARXISM

Engels—Lafargue Correspondence, Volume One (1868–1886)

Engels and the Lafargues, 1868-1886, in Yvonne Kapp's translation: the unguarded working correspondence of the man steering the international socialist movement by post - beginning with Paul Lafargue asking him to witness his marriage to Marx's daughter.

Friedrich Engels and others

Introduction to the 1959 Edition

Most of the books in this series are Soviet productions, and the introductions to them are quarrels — with a falsified history, a doctored quotation, a silence where a name should be. This volume is different, and the difference should be stated at the outset. What the Foreign Languages Publishing House issued in Moscow in 1959, in Yvonne Kapp's translation, is not a Soviet argument at all. It is a primary source: the letters that passed between Frederick Engels and Paul and Laura Lafargue between 1868 and 1886, the first of three volumes, translated from the French edition compiled and annotated by Émile Bottigelli for Éditions Sociales in Paris. One cannot refute Engels's correspondence, and there is no reason to want to. What can be examined is the packaging Moscow put around it, and what the letters themselves show of the man who wrote most of them — a man this tradition claims as a founder, and can therefore afford to read without flattery.

Taken simply as documents, these letters are first-rank material, and the pleasure of them survives everything. They begin with a courtship. In March 1868, Paul Lafargue — a Creole medical student from Bordeaux, twenty-six, recently expelled from English medical registers for his part in the International — wrote to Engels in Manchester to ask him to be a witness at his wedding. The letter is a small comic masterpiece. It opens by hailing Engels, in French, as "the great beheader of champagne bottles, fathomless swallower of ale and other adulterated trash, secretary to the Spaniards," and wishing him the protection of "the god of good carousals." It then announces that "Mr. Lafargue, medical student, bachelor, is about to marry Miss J. Laura Marx, spinster" — a stringer, Paul adds, "of metaphysical pearls" — apologises for the bother, and explains that although Engels is "far from having all the moral qualities requisite to the fulfilling of this respectable bourgeois function in a respectable way," still,

"there is no man whom I should like better than yourself to stand by me during so formidable a ceremony." The tone — mock-heroic, affectionate, faintly drunk on its own high spirits — is the tone of a young man writing to an older one he half-worships and wholly trusts. It sets the key for the twenty-seven years the correspondence would run. Engels was the couple's witness, their banker, their editor, their strategist, and finally, after Marx's death in 1883, the nearest thing they had to a father. Laura had grown up with him; Paul had married into him. The letters are unguarded precisely because the relationship was familial, and they let us watch the transmission of a politics across a generation, in the domestic register where such things are actually handed on.

The volume's years are the years of aftermath and refounding. It opens with the First International still alive and closes with organised French socialism just clearing the ground. The largest political drama of the early letters is the war inside the International against Bakunin and his followers — the fight that would break the Association apart at the Hague in 1872 and effectively end it. Lafargue is Engels's man on the Spanish front of that war, and his reports from the peninsula are among the sharpest things in the book. "Spain is where you can appraise Bakunin's influence," he writes in 1871; "it is he who has inoculated the people of this country not to concern themselves with politics, which does them the greatest harm." Engels answers as a field commander reading a map. "The victory gained in Spain," he writes that December, "greatly reduces the field of struggle." He tracks the defections and adherences country by country, works Italy through the press, times his blows. And when the moment comes to finish the anti-authoritarian wing he does not hesitate: "We must now make an end of this sect."

It is worth pausing on that word, because the modern reader, especially one reading in the shadow of the twentieth century, will hear in the Bakunin fight an early rehearsal of later and darker things — the centralist against the federalist, the

General Council against the autonomous section, the charge of "conspiracy" against a dissenting current. The letters do not sustain the darker reading, and it would be anachronistic to press it. What they show is a genuine political argument fought with the weapons of the time: pamphlets, resolutions, congress votes, the capture of newspapers. And they show, alongside the ruthlessness, a striking tactical generosity. Of the Spanish comrades who mixed sound organisation with insurrectionary rhetoric, Engels writes: "We must make a full allowance for their position. The Bakunist rubbish cannot be cleared away in one day." This is not the voice of a man who thinks the line settles everything. It is the voice of someone who distinguishes between an opponent's doctrine and an opponent's usefulness, and who knows that a movement is built out of imperfect materials.

The second great arc of the volume is the birth of a French party. Out of the wreckage of the Commune and the International, Jules Guesde, Lafargue and Marx himself assembled the Parti Ouvrier — the French Workers' Party — around the programme adopted at Le Havre in 1880, whose principles, as Lafargue notes with pride, were "drafted in Regent's Park Road," which is to say at Engels's own house, from a preamble Marx dictated. This is the famous "minimum programme," the first attempt to give French socialism a Marxist rather than a Proudhonist or Blanquist spine. And almost at once it split. In September 1882, at the Saint-Étienne congress, the party broke in two: the Marxist "Guesdists" walking out to hold their own counter-congress at Roanne, the reformist majority — Paul Brousse, Benoît Malon and their followers — keeping the machinery. Lafargue's long letter of 10 October 1882 is the best contemporary account of that rupture we have from the inside, complete with the lecture fees that paid the delegates' fares and the war council held in a shared hotel. His verdict on the reformists is blunt: "we shall beat the Possibilists, who are nothing but Lassalleans." The Possibilists took their name from their willingness to make the movement's demands "possible" — winnable, immediate, municipal — and to Lafargue this was simple capitulation.

The finest single letter in the volume, and the one that shows Engels at the height of his powers, comes from the far end of these years, in March 1886. A workers' group had appeared in the Chamber of Deputies, and the Decazeville miners' strike had thrown it into sudden prominence. Engels writes to Laura with an exhilaration he rarely let himself show: "To me, this appearance of a parti ouvrier in the Palais-Bourbon is the great event of the year. The ice is now broken with which the Radicals had so far succeeded to cover the working masses of France." He grasps at once that the event is international —

that "the reappearance of France on the scene of the proletarian movement ... will have a tremendous effect everywhere especially in Germany and America" — and he tells us he has already forwarded the speeches to Bebel in Berlin. But the analytical heart of the letter is a lesson in patience. He praises the French Marxists precisely for their restraint, for "their forbearance towards the Possibilists," for limiting their attacks to the points that exposed Brousse as an obstacle to unity rather than making war on the whole reformist wing. "Savoir attendre" — knowing how to wait — "that is what our friends have learnt at last, and that will carry them through." It is a remarkable thing to find under the pen of the man who, four years earlier, had blessed the Roanne split: the strategist correcting the sectarian, and correcting him in the direction of unity.

So much for the correspondence, which needs no defending. The question this series is bound to ask is a different one: what did Moscow do with it, and what does the doing tell us? Here the honest answer is that the Foreign Languages Publishing House did remarkably little, and that the little it did is still worth naming. The scholarly spine of the edition is not Soviet at all. The annotation is Bottigelli's, carried over from the French Communist Party's Éditions Sociales; the translation is by Yvonne Kapp, who would go on to write the standard life of Eleanor Marx and who renders the letters — their French tags, their private jokes, their code-names for the hunted Communards — with a fidelity and an ear that no state house could manufacture on command. As a piece of book-making this is a genuine service to English readers, and it should be credited plainly. For most of its length it is simply a good edition of an important text.

The Soviet hand shows in three quieter places. The first is a single sentence in the Publisher's Note. The editorial notes, it says, "follow the French edition except for certain notes found unnecessary for the English reader." The reader is not told which notes were dropped, or on what principle, or how many. It is a small thing and probably an innocent one — a house trimming what it judged redundant — but it is exactly the small thing the study of these editions teaches one to mark. An apparatus that silently removes what it finds "unnecessary," and supplies no list, has reserved to itself a power the reader cannot audit. In a volume of documents whose whole value is completeness, the unannounced cut is a habit worth noticing wherever it appears, and it appears here at the very threshold.

The second is the vocabulary of the notes, and it is subtler than falsification. Consider how Bottigelli's note — printed here without demur — glosses the Saint-Étienne split. The

Possibilists, it explains, sought to present the workers' demands "in such a way as to render them 'possible'" which "amounted to the abandonment of a theoretical standpoint," and it records that "Guesde, in *L'Égalité*, called this attitude opportunism." The note does not merely report the quarrel; it adopts one side's verdict as its own summary, and it plants the word opportunism — the master-term of a century of orthodox anathema — as the natural name for the reformist position. Nothing in the note allows that the Possibilists were the pioneers of French municipal socialism, that they carried real working-class districts, or that the Guesdists' doctrinaire abstentionism was itself a sectarian vice that Marx and Engels repeatedly had to restrain. For a Moscow house in 1959, this framing required no effort at all; it was simply the ambient grammar. The reformist is the opportunist, the Marxist is orthodoxy, and the label does the analysis. That the letters themselves — Engels's 1886 praise of "forbearance," his impatience with sectarian narrowness — cut against the note's confidence is precisely the sort of tension the apparatus is built not to notice.

The third is the treatment of Bakunin, and here the point is one of omission rather than distortion. The note that introduces the anti-authoritarian current describes the Alliance of Socialist Democracy flatly as "a secret society which Bakunin had started and fostered within the International," whose members were duly expelled "at the Hague Congress of 1872," and stops. The expulsion is presented as a matter of hygiene: a conspiracy exposed, a verdict delivered, an end made of a sect. What no note anywhere in the volume concedes is that the split turned on a real and unresolved question — the question of centralisation and autonomy, of how much authority the workers' movement should concentrate in a single directing body. That was the substance of the anti-authoritarian objection, and it was not a frivolous one. A reader opening this book in Moscow in 1959, three years after Soviet tanks had answered the workers' councils of Budapest, might have found that buried question uncomfortably alive. The apparatus keeps it buried, not by lying about it but by declining to raise it. The silence is the editorial act.

It should be said, against the temptation to make more of this than the evidence bears, that the 1959 volume does not strain to enlist Engels for any contemporary Soviet line. The great set-piece of that kind — Engels's 1895 introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*, the "testament" that the German party bowdlerised into an endorsement of the purely parliamentary road, and that a state preaching "peaceful coexistence" would have every motive to enlist — lies outside this volume's dates entirely; it belongs to the third. Here the

letters run only to 1886, and the apparatus mostly lets them run. What one finds is not a heavy Stalinist frame but a light one: a scholarly French edition, competently Englished, gently pruned, and glossed in the reflexive vocabulary of its publisher. That is a more accurate and more interesting finding than a manufactured scandal would be, and the credibility of the harder judgements this series makes elsewhere depends on saying so.

Which leaves the third and last task, the one the letters make both possible and obligatory: to read Engels himself, plainly, as this tradition's own founder rather than as its icon. The strengths are the ones the correspondence puts on almost every page. First among them is strategic acuity — not cleverness in the abstract, but the capacity to read a concrete conjuncture and act on it. The 1886 letter on the Decazeville strike is a model of the thing: Engels sees in a single parliamentary group the breaking of the ice over the French masses, dates the turn, weighs the forbearance that produced it, and forwards the evidence to Berlin the same night. Bound up with this is an internationalism that was not a slogan but a working method. Engels does not follow the French movement, the German, the Spanish and the English as separate stories; he holds them in one field, relays each to the others, and measures a local event by its continental echo. He is, in these decades, the movement's living memory and its clearing-house, the point through which Marseilles reaches Berlin and Madrid reaches London.

Two further virtues deserve naming because the caricature of Engels misses them. One is his insistence on the workers' own movement as the real thing — his delight, in 1886, is at the independent appearance of the class in the Chamber, not at a doctrine's triumph. The other is a generosity, moral and literal, that runs quietly under the whole correspondence. Engels bankrolled the Lafargues for years; the requests — "Would you please advance me 300 francs" — are constant, and constantly met, and this material fact underwrites the intellectual one. He could afford to be the movement's treasurer, and he chose to be. The mentorship the letters record is patient, unstinting and, at its best, self-correcting: it was Engels, not the younger militants, who kept insisting that a movement is built by waiting as well as by fighting.

The death of Marx in 1883 falls squarely inside this volume, and it changes the correspondence from within. Until then Engels had written as the junior partner of a partnership, the practical man beside the theorist. After it he is the sole surviving authority of the founding generation, the last man who could say what he and Marx had actually meant, and the

letters register the new weight without ever announcing it. He becomes the executor of the manuscripts, the finisher of Capital, the arbiter of a hundred disputes about what the doctrine required; and Laura, who had grown up translating for her father, becomes his indispensable collaborator in French, correcting the "rickety French" of the very letters he was sending into the movement. The relationship that began as a young man's joke about witnesses to a wedding had become, by the mid-1880s, one of the load-bearing joints of European socialism — and the reader watches it bear the load in real time, in the ordinary currency of requests for money, corrected proofs and forwarded newspapers.

The weaknesses are real too, and this tradition does itself no service by pretending otherwise. The plainest is sectarianism — or rather a divided mind about it. Engels blessed the Guesdist rupture of 1882 and shared, in the letters, the contempt in which the Lafargues held the Possibilists; the correspondence is thick with the confident dismissal of persons — Brousse, Malon, Hyndman, at moments even his own kinsman Longuet — and the "great man" verdict too often stands in for the analysis it should follow. The party he helped Guesde and Lafargue to build was, for all Marx's programme, a narrow and doctrinaire formation, and Marx's own weary mot about the French disciples — that if their system was Marxism, then he for one was no Marxist — was aimed at exactly the rigidity these letters document. The 1886 sermon on *savoir attendre* is so striking precisely because it is Engels arguing against a tendency he had elsewhere indulged. He was the corrective to the Lafargues' factionalism; he was also, when it suited the fight, its sponsor.

The deeper tension is one the reader can only see by standing at the end of the road. The confidence that runs through the letters — "whatever is done, must turn out to our benefit," the sense that events themselves were driving the masses toward the Marxist party — was earned, in 1886, by a movement genuinely on the rise. But that same confidence in the objective logic of history, projected forward and inherited by lesser men, would harden in the Second International into a fatalism of gradual and inevitable advance, the faith that the ballot and the census would deliver socialism on their own. It was that faith, not Engels's letters, that August 1914 shattered. Nothing in this volume commits him to it; the parliamentary optimism that his 1895 "testament" would be twisted to license is a later chapter. But the seed is here, in the temperament as much as the theory — in a mind so sure that the future belonged to it that it could underrate what waiting might one day be made to mean. To say this is not to convict Engels of his epigones' errors. It is to read him as he would have wanted

to be read: as a strategist to be argued with, not a scripture to be recited. On that footing the letters are inexhaustible, and this edition, whatever the small marks its makers left on it, is the door to them.

FICTION The Rout

A partisan commander in the Far East poisons his own wounded man and robs a starving family of its pig. Fadeyev at twenty-five, before he rewrote himself. With a new critical introduction.

Alexander Fadeyev

Introduction to the 1950 Edition

A partisan detachment in the Far East is retreating, and it has a man with a bullet in his abdomen who cannot be moved and will not recover. The commander and the doctor discuss him.

"In short—is there any hope of his getting better?" "No hope at all. But is that the chief thing?" "Still, it makes it easier," Levinson confessed.

He feels ashamed of that in the same instant — ashamed of the relief, ashamed of having tried to deceive himself with it — and then gives the order anyway. The doctor works out the method: "It'll soon be time to give him bromide, so instead of bromide...." Levinson asks whether it could be done today, and whether anyone will suspect, and above all whether the man himself will know. Then he seeks reassurance from the doctor, who needs it more than he does.

That is the commander of this novel, and he is its hero. He is a Bolshevik, he is Jewish, he is small and red-bearded and physically unimpressive, and over nineteen chapters he holds a detachment together by force of will, loses almost all of it, and ends the book weeping in front of strangers. He also poisons his own wounded man and robs a starving peasant family of the pig that was to feed them through the winter.

Fadeyev wrote this in 1925–26, when he was in his middle twenties. Twenty-five years later he was General Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers, and was rewriting his own war novel to insert the Party's guiding hand. The Rout is the measure of the distance, and the most useful thing about having it in this series is that both books are here.

The three hard things

A novel of the Civil War published in 1927 could have been an adventure. This one is organised around three scenes that no adventure would contain.

The pig. The detachment, a hundred and fifty hungry men, reaches a Korean farm where the family has one pig, "about ten poods", their meat for the whole winter. Levinson goes to find the farmer:

The trembling grey-haired Korean, wearing a dented wire hat, at once began imploring them not to touch his pig. Levinson, conscious of a hundred and fifty hungry mouths behind him and pitying the Korean, tried to prove to him that he had no choice except to take the pig. The man, not understanding a single word, continued to plead, clasping his hands in prayer and repeating, "Don't eatee-eatee it.... Don't...." "It's all the same ... shoot the pig!" Levinson said, and his face wrinkled up as if it were himself, not the pig, that was going to be shot.

Note what Fadeyev does and does not do. He does not make the Korean a class enemy, or the requisition a lesson, or Levinson unfeeling. He gives you the man on his knees weeping, the commander's face wrinkling as though he were the one to be shot, and the order given regardless. Both things are true and the book does not resolve them.

The poisoning. Above. The novel takes four pages over a decision that a later Soviet novel would have taken as read or omitted entirely, and it spends them on the two men's shame rather than on the necessity.

Morozka and Metchik. The book opens with Morozka — a miner, a thief, a drunk, married to a nurse everyone has slept with — saving the life of a wounded student. He dislikes him instantly: "Morozka had no love for nice, clean people. He knew them to be uncertain, good-for-nothing, untrustworthy creatures."

The novel then spends three hundred pages testing that judgement, and confirms it. Metchik, the clean young intellectual who joined the partisans out of an idea of himself, is not a villain; he is fastidious, self-pitying, and frightened, and Fadeyev tracks his deterioration with a precision that is close to cruel. At the end, scouting ahead of the detachment, he

sees the Cossack ambush and rides away. Morozka, riding behind him, fires the three agreed warning shots and is killed for it, thinking not of himself but of "those tired, unsuspecting men who had entrusted themselves to him".

The thief dies for the detachment. The educated boy saves himself. Nineteen men come out of the taiga.

Metelitsa and the shepherd boy

There is a fourth scene, and it is the best thing in the book.

Metelitsa, the detachment's scout — a herdsman by origin, illiterate, the most purely capable man in the novel — rides into an occupied village at night and is taken. In the morning the Cossacks assemble the village to identify him. A peasant pushes through the crowd, leading a child:

he was leading a thin, black-haired boy in a long jacket, terrified and resisting, his dark eyes skipping from Metelitsa to the squadron commander.

It is the shepherd to whom Metelitsa had handed his horse the night before. The peasant, hoping to be useful to the new authorities, bends down and asks him, pointing: "That's him, eh?"

For a few moments the shepherd boy and Metelitsa stared straight into each other's eyes—Metelitsa with affected indifference, the boy with fear, sympathy, and pity. Then the boy's eyes turned to the squadron commander and rested on him for the fraction of a second as if glued to the Cossack officer's face; then his eyes passed on to the peasant, who was holding him by the hand and leaning expectantly towards him. He drew a deep sigh and heavily shook his head to show that he could not identify the man.

The crowd goes so quiet that "everybody could hear a calf move in the churchwarden's barn". And then the adult denounces Metelitsa anyway — frightened, fidgeting, squeezing his cap obsequiously, reasoning aloud about the saddle and the holster, and turning on the child who would not help him: "Say it's him, don't be afraid ... ah, you viper!"

Consider what Fadeyev has built. The illiterate child is the one with courage; the grown peasant is the one who informs; and the informing is done not out of conviction but out of a servile wish to be seen to be helpful, which is worse and truer. There is no speech, no lesson, and no consolation. A boy shakes his head, and it is not enough.

This is a twenty-five-year-old writing in 1926, and it is better than almost anything in the Soviet fiction of the next thirty years, because nobody in it is where the doctrine would later have required them to be.

Levinson, and the pretty little birds

The draft of this introduction that stopped at the three hard scenes was missing the passage that holds the novel together, and it is not an action scene at all. It comes at night, after Levinson has walked out to inspect his sentries and found Metchik, the young intellectual, standing guard with an unloiled rifle whose bolt has jammed.

Metchik breaks down and asks to be sent away. He is useless, nobody will be his friend, he approached everyone with an open heart and got "coarseness, mockery, and contempt" — and then he says the thing that decides his fate in the book: it sometimes seems to him that if these men "happened to fall into Kolchak's hands tomorrow, they'd serve Kolchak just as readily, and they'd treat everybody just as cruelly."

Levinson tells him that is completely wrong, and begins to explain why. Then Fadeyev writes this:

The longer he spoke the more clearly he saw that he was wasting his words. The occasional remarks Metchik threw in made him realize that he ought to be speaking of something which was more fundamental and elementary, something which he himself in his time had come to understand not without difficulty, and which was now part of his flesh and blood. But this was not the proper time to speak of these things because every moment demanded swift and resolute action.

That is an astonishing thing for a Bolshevik novel to admit, and it would not have survived the doctrine ten years later. The commander knows that what this boy needs is political education, that he himself acquired it slowly and with difficulty, and that the war makes it impossible to give. The detachment cannot make communists; it can only use the ones it has. Everything that happens to Metchik afterwards follows from a conversation that both men know was the wrong conversation, held at the only time available.

Then Levinson walks back through the taiga and Fadeyev gives us his history in a single image.

The only thing he could clearly see in the past was an old photograph of a skinny Jewish boy with large, ingenious

eyes, wearing a black jacket, who looked with surprising, unchildish intentness at the spot in the camera where he had been told a pretty little bird would fly out. The bird didn't fly out, and he remembered that he had almost cried with disappointment.

And from that, the whole of his politics:

he understood what untold misery men suffer because of these lying tales about pretty little birds — pretty little birds which are expected to fly out from somewhere or other and which never do appear, though many people spend their lives waiting for them. No, he had no further need for them! Relentlessly he had suppressed all sweet and vain regrets for them — all that he had inherited from past generations brought up on these lying tales of pretty little birds. To see everything as it is, in order to change everything that is, to hasten what must be born and must be — this wisdom, the simplest and most difficult of all, Levinson had finally achieved.

To see everything as it is, in order to change everything that is. A twenty-five-year-old put the materialist position in eleven words and then built a novel that obeys it, which is why the pig is taken and the wounded man is poisoned and the book is called what it is called. The same man is permitted his private reason for it all: that he wants "to live to see men become stronger, kinder, and more beautiful", and that "there would have been no Levinson at all, but someone else" without that wish.

Two things follow that belong in an introduction to this volume rather than to the novel in general.

The first is that "Jewish" occurs exactly once in *The Rout*, in that photograph, and it is the origin of the detachment commander's entire outlook. Fadeyev in 1926 made a Jewish revolutionary the moral and intellectual centre of his book and traced his materialism to a Jewish childhood, without apology, explanation or defensiveness.

Now look at the imprint. This English edition was printed in Moscow in 1950. By then Solomon Mikhoels had been murdered in a staged traffic accident in Minsk in January 1948; the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee had been dissolved and its leaders arrested; the campaign against "rootless cosmopolitanism" was in full run in the Soviet press; and the Committee's leadership was in prison awaiting the secret trial that ended with their execution in August 1952. In the middle of that, the Foreign Languages Publishing House sent abroad, in English, a novel whose hero is a Jewish commander named

Levinson and whose finest passage is about a photograph of a Jewish boy. We do not know whether anybody in the house noticed. It is the sort of contradiction a state publishing programme generates when the canon is fixed and the line has moved, and it is worth recording, because the same volume that carries this passage was issued by the same apparatus that was at that moment destroying Soviet Jewish culture.

The second is smaller and more cheerful. The best piece of Marxist analysis in the book is delivered on horseback by a demolition man. Morozka has been saying he cannot stand peasants — they are stingy and cunning, and what good does it do them, since they are beggars anyway. Goncharenko, who listens well, answers that if you scratched any of them — "me, say, or you, or Dubov there — you'll find a peasant in everyone", and then argues it out: half the men at the pit go home to their villages in summer, everyone has a garden, their wives work the plots, and for thousands of versts there is nothing but villages. Does that have an influence? "Of course it has!" The conclusion is that "we — and you, too, Morozka — ought not to put on airs in front of the peasant. Why, without the peasant we would...." and he shakes his head and stops.

That is the composition of the Russian working class, and the worker-peasant alliance, established from the inside by a man who cannot read, with Morozka admiring the debating rather than the argument. Nobody explains it to the reader. No commissar arrives to confirm it. It is simply true, and the novel lets a blaster say it.

What the book is doing

The Rout is a novel about whether revolutionary authority can be exercised without becoming monstrous, and its answer is that it cannot be exercised cleanly and must be exercised anyway. Levinson's authority is real and it costs. Fadeyev is interested in exactly the place where necessity and decency come apart, and he keeps the reader there rather than talking him out of it.

The same evenness governs the one scene of revolutionary justice. Morozka is tried by a village assembly for stealing melons, and Fadeyev lets the peasants argue it out. Someone objects that the thief should be punished; someone else says the lad "has been fighting these six years—what if he did take a fancy to a melon?"; a third is baffled that anyone would steal something so trivial rather than ask — "we feed the pigs with them, so why grudge such dung to a good man!" What Fadeyev records is the sentence that matters: "There was no

anger in the peasants' voices. The majority agreed that the old laws did not hold good any longer and the matter had to be dealt with in a new way." That is what a revolution looks like from below, and it is neither a tribunal nor a riot. It is a room full of people working out, without much heat, that the rules have changed and nobody has written the new ones yet.

The book is also, and this matters for what came later, uninterested in the Party as an institution. There is no district committee. There is no political instructor whose judgement settles anything. Levinson's decisions are his own and he has no one to refer them to — which is why the poisoning scene has to be a conversation between two exhausted men rather than an instruction carried out. The organisation in this novel is nineteen survivors and a commander who has run out of everything except the requirement to go on.

And it ends on that note, in a paragraph that is one of the best things in Soviet fiction:

Levinson looked silently, with moist eyes, at the vast sky and earth, which promised bread and rest, at these alien people on the threshing-ground whom he would soon have to make his own—as near and dear to him as were the eighteen who followed him in silence; and he ceased crying. A man has to live and do his duty.

No victory. No vindication. A defeat named in the title, a commander crying and stopping, and a last sentence of six words that declines every consolation available to it.

This edition

The volume is a Foreign Languages Publishing House printing in the Library of Selected Soviet Literature, translated by O. Gorchakov and designed by O. Vereisky — the artist who would later illustrate Tvardovsky's Vassili Tyorkin. There is no introduction, no editorial note, no date of composition, and no indication of where the book stands in its author's career or in the literary politics of the country that produced it. The reader is handed seventeen chapters and left to it.

For once that reticence does no harm, and may be a mercy. A commissioned foreword of the period would have had to explain what the novel means, and the novel's virtue is that it declines to mean tidily.

What the silence does conceal is the position of the book by 1950. The Rout had become a classic — set, taught, canonical — and its author was by then the chief administrator of Soviet

letters. An English reader in 1950 is being handed the founding text of a reputation without being told what the reputation had become.

Was the state consistent?

Put the question this series puts to every volume, and the answer arrives from an unusual direction: from the author's own later conduct.

The doctrine that governed Soviet fiction from 1934 required the leading role of the Party to be visible, required the positive hero, and required the arc to arrive somewhere. The Rout fails all three tests. Its Party is a single man improvising without reference to anyone; its most admirable character is a thieving drunk; and it arrives at a threshing-ground with nineteen men and no promises. Written seven years before the doctrine was codified, it would not have passed after.

Its author administered the code. And in 1951, when The Young Guard was attacked for showing young people acting on their own initiative, Fadeyev rewrote it to install an underground district committee as their guiding hand — adding two Party figures who between them are named over four hundred times in the revised text. He knew exactly what he was doing, because he had written The Rout. He had produced, at twenty-five, the strongest available demonstration that a novel about Bolsheviks does not need a Party apparatus in it to be true; and at fifty he was supplying one, to his own book, under instruction.

The tradition this introduction is written from had described the machinery in 1936. In The Revolution Betrayed Trotsky wrote that under the bureaucracy "Gifted writers who cannot do sufficient violence to themselves are pursued by a pack of instructors armed with shamelessness and dozens of quotations," and that "The most eminent artists either commit suicide, or find their material in the remote past, or become silent." Fadeyev did the violence to himself, and in May 1956, three months after Sholokhov attacked him from the rostrum of the Twentieth Congress, he shot himself.

One correction is owed, in the same breath, because this series applies its standards at home. In the same chapter Trotsky also wrote that "Mediocre but 'right-thinking' storytellers like Serafimovich or Gladkov are inaugurated as classics", and predicted that the epoch would be remembered "pre-eminently as an epoch of mediocrities, laureates and toadies". Fadeyev became a laureate and an official, and the verdict fits the career. It does not fit this book. The Rout is not the work of a

mediocrity, and a tradition that reads Soviet literature honestly has to be able to say so about a man whose later record it condemns.

What is living

The refusal to make it easy.

Every difficulty this novel raises is one the revolutionary tradition still has: what a commander owes a man he cannot save; what an army owes a peasant it is feeding itself on; whether the people who turn out to be reliable under pressure are the ones anybody expected. Fadeyev at twenty-five had no settled answers and did not pretend to. He put Levinson in front of the Korean and let both faces wrinkle up.

Read *The Rout* first, before *The Young Guard*, and the second book becomes legible in a way it is not on its own. Read them the other way round and you will simply think the young Fadeyev was better. He was — but the more exact statement is that he was permitted, in 1927, to write a book that he himself would later have been required to correct.

FICTION

How the Steel Was Tempered, Part One

The book that taught a generation how to be a Bolshevik, written by a man already blind and immobilised. Part One, complete with the publisher foreword. With a new critical introduction.

Nikolai Ostrovsky

Introduction to the 1952 Edition, Part One

In the third year of the civil war in the Ukraine, a consumptive compositor takes a boy aside in a printshop and puts a withered yellow hand on his shoulder.

"There's going to be a pogrom — that's a fact. The Jews are going to be beaten up. What I want to know is this — will you help your comrades in this calamity or not?"

The boy is Sergei Bruzzhak, one of the three friends the novel opens with. He has spent a year turning the wheel of a hand press twelve hours a day for Mr. Blumstein, and in that year the fourteen printers have struck repeatedly against their employer, who is himself a Jew. Mendel the compositor asks Sergei to go home and ask his father to hide old men and women, and to find out who else will. "The Russians will be safe from these bandits for the time being."

Note what Ostrovsky has done in half a page. The class line inside the Jewish community is drawn — the sweatshop proprietor is not spared by his workers, and the strike is not forgotten because a pogrom is coming. And the pogrom is not a metaphor. Eighteen times in Part One the word appears, and the novel goes through with it: the town, the bluff above the river, the overcrowded hovels, the three days, the men who proposed the thing "to provide a little diversion". Whatever else is true of this book, and a great deal is, it is one of the very few widely circulated accounts in any language of what the Ataman's men did to the Jews of the Ukraine in 1919, written by someone who was a boy in Shepetovka while they did it.

That is where an introduction to *How the Steel Was Tempered* has to start, because this is the most successful novel the Soviet Union ever produced and it is generally discussed as though it were an instruction manual. It became one. It did not begin as one.

The edition

Three dates. Nikolai Ostrovsky began the novel in November 1930, blind and immobilised, and finished it in June 1933; it reached Soviet readers through the magazine *Molodaya Gvardiya* and then in book form, and by the end of the decade it was the most reprinted book in the country. The English translation reissued here was published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow in 1952, in two parts, in the series the half-title page names as the Library of Selected Soviet Literature. This is that 1952 printing, not the later one: the work reappeared in Progress's Soviet Authors Library, advertised on the series jackets of the mid-1970s, and a reader who knows the novel from a Progress edition of that vintage has a different book in their hands from this one in at least one respect that matters, which is the foreword.

No translator is named. The copyright leaf of this printing gives none, and we have not invented one. The English is competent, plain, and slightly stiff in the speeches, which may be the translator or may be Ostrovsky; the dialogue between boys is markedly better than the dialogue at meetings, and that is certainly Ostrovsky.

Ostrovsky

The facts of his life, in outline, are not in dispute, and this volume's foreword gives them.

He was born in 1904 in the village of Viliya, in what is now western Ukraine, to a seasonal worker whose earnings were so small that his wife and daughters hired out as field labourers. He was a shepherd at nine. At eleven he was a kitchen boy in the buffet of the Shepetovka railway station, where the family had moved after the outbreak of the world war, and he escaped the buffet by spending his time with his brother in the railway depot, which is where he first heard Bolsheviks talk about Lenin. He was expelled from a two-year school at the insistence of the priest who taught Scripture, "whom the inquisitive lad had harassed with discomfiting questions". He was among the first five Komsomol members in Shepetovka. In August 1919 he ran away from home and joined the Red

Army; at Lvov he was badly wounded and lost the sight of his right eye.

Then the part that makes the book what it is. In 1921 he went to Kiev, worked as an electrician in the railway workshops, studied, and led a brigade of young workers building a spur line to bring firewood into the city. The job was finished and it cost him his health. The following autumn, barely recovered, he went into the Dnieper floods to salvage rafted timber, working knee-deep in icy water. Between the battle wound, typhus and acute rheumatism he was finished as a worker at eighteen. He would not accept being invalidated out, insisted on being given work, and was sent to Berezdov on the old western border. He joined the Party in 1924. By the end of 1926 it was clear he would be bedridden for life. In 1929 he went completely blind. By 1930 every joint but his hands and elbows had fused.

In November 1930, blind and unable to move, he began the novel. Part of it he wrote himself, through pain the foreword does not attempt to describe; the rest he dictated to his wife, his sister, and his friends. He was twenty-six. He finished in June 1933, and he died in December 1936, aged thirty-two.

It is worth being exact about that chronology, because it settles something. Whatever *How the Steel Was Tempered* went on to be used for, Ostrovsky was not a careerist and there was no career available to him. He was a disabled ex-worker who could not see, could not stand, and had been told he had nothing ahead, and who decided that the way back into the world was a book. The most famous passage in Soviet literature is his. It comes in Part Two of the novel, at a graveside, with Pavel's cap in his hand, and it is quoted here because it is the shortest way to say who wrote this book:

Man's dearest possession is life, and it is given to him to live but once. He must live so as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he can say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world — the fight for the Liberation of Mankind. And one must make use of every moment of life, lest some sudden illness or tragic accident cut it short.

Two generations of Soviet schoolchildren copied that out. It is a young man's sentence, and it was written by someone for whom every clause of it was literal.

What Part One is

Part One is the making of Pavel Korchagin, and it is a good deal better as a novel than its reputation allows.

The kitchen boy at the station buffet, sacked for flooding the place; the three friends; the sailor Zhukhray, who teaches Pavel to fight and gives him his politics; the Petlyura occupation, which the novel names sixty-five times and renders as what it was, a squalid and murderous chaos of atamans and uniforms; the pogrom; the rescue of Zhukhray from a patrol, for which Pavel is arrested; the Red Army, the cavalry, and the head wound that nearly kills him and costs him the sight of one eye.

There is one scene in Part One that explains the whole book, and it is not a battle. Eleven scouts are sitting round a campfire and Korchagin is reading aloud to them.

"The book is called The Gadfly, Comrades. The Battalion Commissar gave it to me. It's got me, Comrades. If you'll sit quietly I'll read it to you."

Puzyrevsky, the regimental commander, rides up unnoticed and finds eleven pairs of eyes fixed on the reader. He identifies Korchagin and his friend Zharky for the Commissar, says that what they are doing is political work "and very effective it is too", and adds: "I hear these youngsters are called 'the young guard.' Most appropriate, in my opinion." Then he gets off his horse, sends the Commissar on ahead, rolls a cigarette, sits down next to Korchagin and says, "Go on reading, I'll listen too." Pavel reads to the end. Nobody speaks. The commander smokes and waits for the discussion, and Sereda starts it. "A grim story that," he says. "So there are people like that in the world. Few men could stand what he did. But when a man has an idea to fight for he's strong enough to stand anything."

The Gadfly is Ethel Voynich's 1897 novel about an Italian conspirator who is tortured and shot. Readers of this series will want to sit with that for a moment. The model for the most widely imitated hero in the literature of the Russian revolution was supplied by an Englishwoman, born in Cork, the daughter of the mathematician George Boole, in a book about endurance under interrogation; and the transmission happened by a battalion commissar handing a volume to a scout who read it aloud round a fire. Later, in a nurse's ward diary, comes the entry that settles it: "I know now why he never groans. I asked him, and he replied: 'Read The Gadfly and you'll know.'" That is the actual genealogy of Pavel Korchagin, and it is a great deal more interesting than the one the doctrine later supplied for him.

Puzyrevsky's phrase is worth a footnote of its own. "The young guard" was common Komsomol currency, not

Ostrovsky's coinage and not Fadeyev's: it was already the name of the Komsomol's publishing house and of the magazine *Molodaya Gvardiya*, which is where *How the Steel Was Tempered* first reached its readers. Fadeyev's *The Young Guard*, also in this series, draws on the same stock phrase rather than on this line. Three things in the strand carry the name, and all three are drawing on one piece of Komsomol vocabulary.

And Tonya. Pavel's first love is the daughter of a forestry official, and the novel does not resolve her cheaply. She is generous, brave at the right moments, and irreducibly of another class; the break, when it comes, comes because she will not be absorbed and he cannot see why she would want anything of her own. The foreword files this under "wholesale rejection of private life", which is accurate as description and complacent as judgement. Ostrovsky writes it as a loss. He was better at loss than the doctrine that later claimed him had any use for.

Part One ends with the Korchagin brothers reunited in their mother's room, both alive against the odds, and Pavel going back to Kiev after two weeks because his work is waiting. The politics of the 1920s have not yet arrived. They arrive in Part Two, and so does the reason this novel needs an introduction rather than merely a reprint.

The apparatus, which in this printing is dated

Every volume in this series carries a commissioned framing, and they are evidence. This one, eight pages headed "Nikolai Ostrovsky and His Novel", is a 1952 document and makes no attempt to be anything else.

It quotes "J. V. Stalin" on the Ukraine in the civil war. It quotes the History of the C.P.S.U.(B.), Short Course on the first Five-Year Plan. It credits Ostrovsky's political education to "the role played by the Party of Lenin and Stalin". It refers twice to "the First Stalin Five-Year Plan", and notes with satisfaction that brigades of young Stakhanov workers "at the great Stalin construction works" are named after the author and his hero. It states that Korchagin becomes "a fiery organizer of collectivization in the countryside" — the novel was finished in June 1933 — and offers this as praise, in a sentence that also lists his fight against slackers and against workers careless with their tools.

Set that beside the foreword Progress commissioned for Ivan Melezh's *People of the Marsh*, reissued in this same series of ours. In the 1979 volume, Stalin's name does not occur once;

the word "collectivisation" does not occur once; the political content of the novel is confined to a single parenthesis. The house did not become more honest between 1952 and 1979. It stopped naming things. The 1952 foreword tells you what it wants you to believe and who told it so. The 1979 foreword tells you about the marsh.

Two further things in it are worth marking, because they are the doctrine describing itself in its own words.

The first is the foreword's account of the relation between Ostrovsky and Korchagin. It concedes the obvious likeness, quotes Ostrovsky's own insistence that the book "is a novel, and not simply the biography of Komsomol member Ostrovsky", and then says this: "the private, social and creative lives of both hero and author form one organic whole subordinated to service of the people. This is a feature common to all Soviet writers and one that lends convincing power and veracity to the characters they depict."

Read the second sentence again. The collapse of the distance between a writer and his hero is not being noticed; it is being required, of all Soviet writers, and offered as the source of veracity. That is the aesthetic doctrine of the period stated with unusual candour, and it is the exact opposite of what makes fiction able to tell the truth. A novelist who cannot stand at a distance from his protagonist cannot show you anything the protagonist does not already believe. Ostrovsky, as it happens, was better than the prescription: Tonya exists, Dubava exists, and both of them see things Korchagin cannot. But the prescription is what the house was recommending to its readers in 1952, and it is what the next generation of Soviet novelists had to write against.

The second is a reading list, and it is a gift to anyone working through this series. The foreword records what Ostrovsky read. As a boy: Garibaldi and the Gadfly, the poetry of Taras Shevchenko, Gogol's *Taras Bulba*. As a young Communist, in a correspondence course at the Communist University: Marx and Lenin, then the Russian classics — Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekhov — "and, above all, Gorky", whose *Mother* he had read to him when he could no longer read, and from whom he had friends copy out passages on the tasks of the proletarian writer. And on the Civil War specifically, three books: Furmanov's *Chapayev*, Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood*, and Fadeyev's *Debacle*.

Three of those are in this series of reissues. Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood* is here; Fadeyev's *Debacle* is here under the title *The Rout*; Shevchenko's poems are here, in two separate printings; Gogol is here and Turgenev is here. A reader who

wants to know what made Pavel Korchagin can put the actual books on a shelf. We recommend doing it, and we recommend starting with *The Rout*, because Fadeyev wrote it at twenty-five, before he was anybody, and it is the one book on Ostrovsky's list that refuses every consolation this novel accepts.

One sentence in this 1952 foreword requires separate handling, and it is this:

The novel condemns all that is sordid and degrading to human dignity, as may be seen from Pavel's attitude towards the depraved Trotskyite Dubava, his encounter with the lewd Failo, and from the author's treatment of what passed between Razvalikhin and Lida. Nikolai Ostrovsky shows how political double-dealing goes hand in hand with moral dissipation.

Dubava is Korchagin's oldest friend and one of the best-drawn characters in the book. What happens to him in Part Two, and what that sentence is doing when it files an oppositionist between a lecher and a seducer, is the subject of the introduction to Part Two of this edition, where it belongs. Readers who have only this volume should know that the second half of *How the Steel Was Tempered* contains an extended dramatisation of the Party discussion of 1923 and 1924, in which the Left Opposition appears as the enemy; that our house has reissued it uncut; and that we have said in that volume exactly what we think of it.

How to read Part One

There is a way of handling a book like this that we want no part of, which is to read it only as a symptom. *How the Steel Was Tempered* is not a forgery and Ostrovsky was not a liar. He was a worker who gave a wrecked body to the revolution, believed what his Party told him, and wrote down what he had seen with more honesty than the doctrine could comfortably absorb — which is why the pogrom chapter is in it, and why Tonya is a person rather than a class label, and why the book's grip on readers who have no interest in Bolshevism at all has never really loosened.

What was done to the novel afterwards was not done by him. He was dead within three years of finishing it, before the Terror, before the men his Dubava was modelled on were shot, before the book became a school subject and his hero became a set of instructions. Part One is the part of *How the Steel Was Tempered* where that has not happened yet: a boy in a railway town, a pogrom, a sailor teaching him to use his fists, and a

cause worth a life.

Read it that way. Then read Part Two with the introduction we have put in front of it.

FICTION

How the Steel Was Tempered, Part Two

The half where the politics are stated rather than implied: the Party discussion of 1923, with the Left Opposition as the enemy. Reissued without cuts. With a new critical introduction.

Nikolai Ostrovsky

Introduction to the 1952 Edition, Part Two

The foreword to Part One of this edition contains the following sentence:

The novel condemns all that is sordid and degrading to human dignity, as may be seen from Pavel's attitude towards the depraved Trotskyite Dubava, his encounter with the lewd Failo, and from the author's treatment of what passed between Razvalikhin and Lida. Nikolai Ostrovsky shows how political double-dealing goes hand in hand with moral dissipation.

We have reissued this novel without cuts, and we are not going to pretend that sentence is not in front of it. Part Two of *How the Steel Was Tempered* contains a sustained dramatisation of the Party discussion of 1923 and 1924, in which the Left Opposition is the enemy; and this introduction exists because a publishing house in the tradition of the Fourth International cannot put that book into a reader's hands with a note about the marsh.

We think you should read it. We think it is one of the most valuable documents in this series, and that its value depends entirely on its not having been cut.

The graveside

Before any of that, Part Two contains the passage every Soviet schoolchild copied out, and it needs to be read in its place rather than on a poster.

Pavel walks out past the gossiping housewives of his home town, who take him for a consumptive scarecrow in a stolen jacket, and finds himself at the pine woods. To the right is the old prison behind its spiked fence. He stops on the broad common where the hangman's noose "had choked the warm life out of Valya and her comrades", stands in silence on the spot where the gallows had been, then goes down the bluff to the little cemetery where the victims of the White terror lie in

common graves. Someone has laid spruce branches on them and built a green fence. The trees whisper, the young grass is coming up, and it was here that his comrades died so "that life might be beautiful for those born in poverty, those for whom birth itself had been but the beginning of slavery."

Slowly Pavel raised his hand and removed his cap, and an overpowering sadness pervaded his whole being.

Man's dearest possession is life, and it is given to him to live but once. He must live so as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he can say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world — the fight for the Liberation of Mankind. And one must make use of every moment of life, lest some sudden illness or tragic accident cut it short.

Detached from the graves, that becomes an exhortation to production quotas, and it was used as one for fifty years. In place, it is something else: a man who has lost his sight and the use of his body standing over the graves of friends who were hanged at twenty, working out what a life is for. The last clause — "lest some sudden illness or tragic accident cut it short" — is not rhetoric. It is the author's own case, and he knew it.

Hold that page in mind through what follows. The same novel, the same narrator and very nearly the same chapter produce both this and Pankratov's speech. Anyone who wants to read *How the Steel Was Tempered* as a tract has to explain the cemetery, and anyone who wants to read it as a masterpiece has to explain the conference. We are not going to do either. Both are in the book because both were in the movement.

Who Dubava is

Dmitri Dubava, called Mityai, is Korchagin's closest friend. He is a worker from the arsenal, a Komsomol veteran known to the Solomenka railwaymen, a student at the Kharkov Communist University, and one of the two or three most

convincingly drawn people in the book. He is married to Anna Borhart. Ostrovsky gives him energy, stubbornness and physical presence, and gives him lines that land.

In 1923 he joins the opposition, and the novel tells you the pedigree it wants you to notice. Talya, speaking from the rostrum of a city Party conference, reminds the hall:

"Three years ago in this very theatre Dubava came back to us with the former 'Workers' Opposition.' Remember? And do you remember what he said then: 'Never shall we let the Party banner fall from our hands.' But hardly three years have passed and Dubava has done just that."

That is the amalgam being built in public: yesterday's Workers' Opposition is today's Trotskyism, one continuous thread of unreliability running through the same man. And a few pages earlier the novel has named the actual document at issue. Zharky, Dubava's friend at the university, "had sharply censured the declaration of the 'forty-six' at a meeting of the Party bureau."

So this is not a vague fiction about deviationists. The Declaration of the 46 was a real letter, sent to the Politburo on 15 October 1923 by forty-six leading Bolsheviks, and what it asked for was a Party conference to reconsider the ban on factions adopted at the Tenth Congress, together with a serious economic plan. Ostrovsky is dramatising a real event, and the reader of Part Two is watching the conference the 46 asked for being used to finish them.

The conference

The scene runs for several pages and it is worth reading slowly, because almost every rhetorical device of the next fifteen years is in it already, in the mouths of sympathetic characters, at a Komsomol meeting in a provincial theatre.

Talya opens:

"Today we are very glad to note that in our organization Trotsky's followers have been defeated. They cannot complain that they were not given a hearing. On the contrary: they have had every opportunity to express their point of view. As a matter of fact they have abused the freedom we gave them and committed a number of gross violations of Party discipline."

Freedom granted and then abused; the hearing generously extended and then forfeited. She goes on to explain that the

districts "deliberately sent them here to give us another opportunity to hear them out", and that "it is not our fault if they are not making full use of this opportunity." Dubava calls out from the right-hand corner, "We haven't had our say yet!" Talya answers, "All right, Dubava, come up here now and speak, we'll listen to you," and Dubava — who was crushed in his own district the day before and knows exactly what the platform is for — refuses: "We'll talk when the time comes!"

Ostrovsky is a better writer than his purpose. He lets you see that the invitation is a trap and that Dubava sees it too, and he gives Pankratov the shout from the floor that tells you what the room is actually for: "Going to try shaking up the Party again, eh?" Then the hall: "Are they going to stop fighting the Party or not? Let them answer that!" and "Let them tell us who wrote that anti-Party declaration!" The chairman rings his bell "long and insistently" and Talya's voice is drowned out.

A letter is read aloud from a Komsomol organiser in an outlying area, and it supplies the scene's decisive detail. In a nucleus of forty-two members where the opposition had gathered its forces, "one of the Military Commissariat members got up and said outright: 'If the Party apparatus doesn't give in, we will smash it by force.'" The oppositionists applauded. Korchagin took the floor: "How can you applaud that fascist and call yourselves Party members?" — and could not be heard for the uproar.

Consider what has been done there in three sentences. An anonymous member, at an unnamed meeting, reported in a letter read out by someone else, is made to say the one thing that converts a political argument about the Party regime into a threat of armed force against it. The opposition applauds him. And the hero, in 1923, calls him a fascist. The word is doing work a decade early.

Pankratov's speech

Then Pankratov goes to the rostrum, and the novel gives him the floor for two pages. This is the passage this whole introduction is really about, and we quote it at length because paraphrase would be a favour to it.

"Comrades! For nine days we have listened to the speeches of the opposition, and I must say quite frankly that they spoke here not as fellow fighters, revolutionaries, our comrades in the class struggle. Their speeches were hostile, implacable, malicious and slanderous. Yes, Comrades, slanderous! They have tried to represent us Bolsheviks as supporters of a mailed-fist regime in the Party, as people

who are betraying the interests of their class and the revolution. They have attempted to brand as Party bureaucrats the best, the most tried and trusty section of our Party, the glorious old guard of Bolsheviks, men who built up the Russian Communist Party, men who suffered in tsarist prisons, men who with Comrade Lenin at their head have waged a relentless struggle against world Menshevism and Trotsky. Could anyone but an enemy make such statements? Is the Party and its functionaries not one single whole?"

Take the moves in order.

The expulsion from the category. The oppositionists "spoke here not as fellow fighters, revolutionaries, our comrades in the class struggle." Before any argument is answered, the arguers are removed from the community that could be argued with. Everything afterwards is easier.

The charge of slander for accurate description. They "tried to represent us Bolsheviks as supporters of a mailed-fist regime in the Party." That is, near enough, what the Declaration of the 46 said: that the Party was being run by an apparatus that had substituted itself for the membership. Pankratov does not answer the description. He classes it as a lie about the character of good men, which converts a question about institutions into an insult to individuals — and individuals who "suffered in tsarist prisons", so that the answer to a charge about 1923 is a claim about 1905.

The invented history. "Men who with Comrade Lenin at their head have waged a relentless struggle against world Menshevism and Trotsky." In 1923 this was a novelty; by 1938 it was the Short Course. Later Pankratov makes it a programme: "Let the old Bolsheviks tell us about Trotsky's 'Bolshevism.' It is very important for the youth to know the history of Trotsky's struggle against the Bolsheviks, about his constant shifting from one camp to another." That is the literary campaign of 1924 being announced at a Komsomol meeting as a curriculum. It worked. It is the reason the readers of this series have to be told things about 1917 that everyone knew in 1920.

The identification of apparatus with Party. "Is the Party and its functionaries not one single whole?" This is the question at issue, presented as its own answer. If the two are one, criticism of the officials is an attack on the Party, and the argument is over before it starts. The sentence is the hinge of the entire subsequent history, and Ostrovsky puts it in as a rhetorical flourish that needs no defence.

The state of emergency. "What would we say of men who would try to incite young Red Army men against their commanders and commissars, against army headquarters — and at a time when the unit was surrounded by the enemy?" The Party is an army under fire, therefore discussion is mutiny. Any moment can be shown to be such a moment. This one was 1923, with the civil war three years won.

The amalgam by grievance. Pankratov lists oppositionists who had been removed from posts — Tufta for bureaucracy, Tsvetayev, Afanasyev three times for high-handedness — and concludes: "It turns out that all those whom the Party has punished have united to fight the Party." The opposition is not wrong; it is aggrieved. Its politics is a symptom of its demotions. There is no reply to this, which is the point of it.

And then the forecast. "The hysterical panicmongers of the opposition are predicting complete economic and political collapse. Our tomorrow will show how much these prophecies are worth."

We would not dress the 1923 Opposition in prophetic robes. Its economic warnings were about the scissors between industrial and agricultural prices and about the absence of a plan; they were not a forecast of everything that came, and on several questions the Opposition was wrong or divided. But on the question actually before that conference — whether the Party and its functionaries were "one single whole" — the answer arrived, and it arrived on the bodies of the men in the hall. Of the forty-six who signed the declaration Zharky censured, almost none were alive in 1940. Preobrazhensky, who drafted it, was arrested in December 1936 and shot in July 1937. Serebryakov was shot in February 1937. Muralov, Smirnov, Sapronov, Drobnis, Beloborodov: the same years, the same end. Our tomorrow did show how much the prophecies were worth.

What the novel does to Dubava instead of answering him

Here is the part that a Marxist reader should attend to most closely, because it is a technique and not an opinion.

After the conference, the novel never argues with Dubava again. It rots him.

Korchagin calls at the flat in Kiev and finds him on the landing, ashen, dark under the eyes, smelling of onions and alcohol, a woman's leg and shoulder visible on the bed through the half-open door, which Dubava kicks shut. Anna has gone.

Dubava, belching, suggests that Pavel has come to fill the vacancy. Pavel, with difficulty: "What are you doing to yourself, Mityai! I never thought you'd fall so low. You weren't a bad fellow once. Why are you letting yourself go to the dogs?" The door opens and a face with swollen eyes and puffy cheeks says, "Come back in, duckie, what're you standing out there for?" Dubava shouts, "Run along and tell them all that Dubava has taken to drink and sleeping with loose women." Pavel asks once more, quietly — "Mityai, get rid of that woman. I want to talk to you, for the last time...." — and Dubava turns and goes inside. "The swine!" Pavel mutters, and walks down the stairs.

Two years later we learn the rest in passing. Zharky has married Anna. Dubava has been expelled from the Party and has left the university; he is at the Bauman Institute in Moscow. "I hear he's been reinstated. Too bad, if it's true. He's rotten through and through...."

That is the whole treatment. The oppositionist loses his politics, his Party, his university, his wife — to the loyal man — and finally his moral standing, and the last word on him from his oldest comrades is that his readmission would be regrettable. Not one line of his political position is stated after the conference so that it might be refuted. He does not need refuting. He stinks.

This is the sentence in the 1952 foreword doing its work: "Nikolai Ostrovsky shows how political double-dealing goes hand in hand with moral dissipation." The foreword is not misreading the novel. It is describing, with satisfaction, the most consequential literary device of the Stalin era — the one that made the show trials writable, and then watchable. Once dissent is a symptom of degeneracy, the confession of sabotage is merely the degeneracy becoming explicit; and a reader who has learned to feel about Dubava what Ostrovsky teaches him to feel has been prepared for 1937 by a novel published in 1932.

1926, in a sanatorium

There is a coda to the Dubava story that most accounts of this novel pass over, and it shows how closely Ostrovsky was tracking the real chronology.

Pavel, by now badly ill, is in a sanatorium when Dora brings several people into his room. She glances at the decoration on the jacket of his visitor Zharky and asks whether he is a Party member and where he works; told, she says: "Good... Then he can remain." The newcomers, all old Bolsheviks but for Pavel

and Zharky, have just come from Moscow to hold "a sort of closed Party meeting" and give the latest news. Bartashev, a member of the Moscow Control Commission, tells them about "the new opposition headed by Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev."

"At this critical moment we ought to be at our posts," Bartashev said in conclusion. "I am leaving tomorrow."

Three days later the sanatorium is deserted. Pavel leaves too, before his time is up, and is given a Komsomol secretaryship in an industrial region; within a week he is addressing a city meeting. That autumn the car he is travelling in overturns, his right knee is crushed, and the descent into total immobility begins.

Four things in that half-page. The United Opposition of 1926 is named accurately, with all three of its leaders. A room is vetted for Party membership before the news is given, and the reader is expected to find that proper. The response of the loyal is to abandon medical treatment and return to their posts, which is presented as devotion and which in Pavel's case directly produces the accident that finishes him. And a man from the Control Commission — the body that would shortly be expelling oppositionists by the thousand — is the one who carries the word.

Ostrovsky is not hiding the sequence. He is proud of it. The reader in the 1950s was meant to take from this that a Bolshevik leaves the sanatorium when the Party is threatened. The reader now can see that the threat was a political disagreement, that the mobilisation against it broke the health of the men mobilised, and that the Control Commission was already the instrument it later became.

Ostrovsky's position, stated fairly

None of which makes Nikolai Ostrovsky the author of that outcome, and this house does not deal in retrospective indictments of the dead.

He was blind and paralysed when he wrote this. He had been a Komsomol organiser in a border town during the discussion he is describing, on the side he depicts as right, believing what he had been told by the people who had recruited him to the revolution. He died on 22 December 1936 — four months after the first Moscow trial, weeks before the second, and before the annihilation of the Party generation whose politics he had helped to caricature. He never learned what "rotten through and through" was going to mean administratively. He was

thirty-two.

And he left, in the character of Dubava, more than he intended. Dubava is not a puppet. He is a worker whose defeat is rendered with enough physical particularity that a reader can still feel what it is to be in that hall, shouted down, offered a rostrum as a humiliation, with the friends of one's youth on the other side. Ostrovsky was too good a writer to make the man contemptible from the start, which is precisely why he had to make him contemptible later.

One last thing, and it is the perfect image of the relation between this novel and the institution that produced it. How the Steel Was Tempered does not end with a battle, a death, or a declaration. It ends with the arrival of a telegram:

"Novel heartily approved turned over to publishers congratulations on your victory."

His heart beat fast. His cherished dream was realized! The steel trap had been rent asunder, and now, armed with a new weapon, he had returned to the fighting ranks and to life.

The last event in the most influential novel of the Soviet Union is a favourable decision by a Party committee on a manuscript. The weapon is the book, and the book is a weapon only once a committee has said so. Ostrovsky wrote that as triumph, and it is one — a blind man on his back had got back into the world. It is also the whole problem, set down in six words by the person least able to see it.

How to read Part Two

Not as evidence against Ostrovsky. As evidence about the thing he was inside.

We have hundreds of pages of documents from the 1923 Opposition, and they tell us what the Left said. What they cannot tell us is what the campaign against it felt like to a twenty-year-old worker who believed it: the relief of unanimity, the excitement in the hall, the certainty that the friend who dissents has begun to smell. For that, there is this novel, written from inside a mind the apparatus had formed, by a man too honest to fake the details and too loyal to question the frame.

Read Pankratov's speech with the dates in your hand. Read what is done to Dubava and notice that nothing is refuted. Then read the last sentence of the book again.

Our tomorrow will show how much these prophecies are worth.

It did.

FICTION The Young Guard

A Komsomol underground in the occupied Donbass, and the novel Fadeyev was made to rewrite in 1951 to install the Party as its guiding hand. This is the second version. With a new critical introduction.

Alexander Fadeyev

Introduction to the 1955 Edition

Two names in this novel will tell the reader, before anything else, what kind of book it has become. Filipp Petrovich Lyutikov, "secretary of the underground district committee", is named two hundred and thirty-five times. Protsenko, the Party official who plants him in occupied Krasnodon, is named two hundred and thirty-two. Between them they are the adult Bolshevik underground that directs the boys and girls whose story this is.

They were not in the book when it was first published.

The Young Guard appeared in 1945, about a real thing: a clandestine Komsomol organisation in the mining town of Krasnodon in the occupied Donbass, whose members — most of them still at school — printed leaflets, burned a German labour exchange, and were caught, tortured and thrown down a mineshaft in the winter of 1943. Fadeyev wrote it fast, from the scene and from the survivors' families, and it made him the most widely read novelist in the Soviet Union.

Then, at the end of 1947, the novel was attacked in the Party press for a specific fault: it had shown the young people acting largely on their own, and had failed to show the leading role of the Party. Fadeyev rewrote it. The second version, with the underground Party organisation installed as the organisation's guiding hand, came out in 1951 and superseded the first. This English edition is the second version, and nowhere says so.

There is no edition statement. There is no preface. The copyright page credits the translator, Violet Dutt, the editor, David Skvirsky, and two designers, and tells the foreign reader nothing else at all. A reader in London or Delhi in 1955 was handed a rewritten book as though it had only ever had one shape.

What the rewriting actually did

It is worth being precise, because the short version — that he

was forced to insert the Party — is too crude and does the argument no favours.

Lyutikov is not a cardboard commissar. Fadeyev was a real novelist and he built the man properly: a Donets miner in his fifties, grey at the temples, who fought in the Civil War against the Germans and Denikin, and who refuses to go under cover for a reason that is entirely practical and rather good — "I'm so well known here that it's not possible for me to go under cover... The Germans would immediately discover us; what's more we'd arouse their suspicions if we tried to hide." That is written by someone who knows how a man in that position would think.

The damage is not to the characterisation. It is to the shape of the story, and therefore to its meaning.

The 1945 book was about the young discovering, under occupation, that they had to act, and acting, and being destroyed. The 1951 book is about the young being guided. Once an experienced Party underground stands behind them, everything they do acquires a supervisor, and the central fact of the real Krasnodon story — that these were schoolchildren improvising a resistance and paying for it with their lives — is converted into an illustration of correct leadership. The martyrdom stays. The initiative moves.

And the revision cannot be confined, because the guiding hand has to be present continuously to be a guiding hand. That is why the two added names occur more than four hundred times between them. This was not a patch. It was a re-plumbing.

The novel underneath

Before going further into what was done to this book, it is worth establishing what the book is, because the account in which the revision is the only interesting thing about it is both lazy and unjust to the dead.

The Young Guard runs to a quarter of a million words and it is, for long stretches, the work of a serious novelist. Fadeyev's

subject is a mining town in the weeks when the front reaches it, and he is very good on the particular quality of that waiting. The girls, before the Germans come, "would flock together like birds and, drooping with heat and the lack of occupation, sit about for hours in some half-dark room, or under an apple-tree; or they would run down to the shady wooded gully by the river, filled with a secret premonition of disaster which was beyond their power to realize fully with either heart or mind." That last clause is exactly right about adolescents in front of a catastrophe, and it is not the sort of sentence a hack produces.

The children are individuated rather than typed. Valya, clever and convinced her life has already failed, worries in the same breath about the underground, about school, about never having managed to fall in love, and about her father — "Valya's father was Jewish". Sergei Tyulenin is reckless where Oleg Koshevoi is deliberate. Lyuba Shevtsova is a showoff whose showing off turns out to be useful. Fadeyev had talked to the surviving families and it shows: these read as particular teenagers rather than as a composite Soviet youth.

And the novel does something in 1945 that Soviet publishing would spend the next four decades avoiding. It names the killing of the Jews, plainly, and at the level of a household's daily fear. Grandma reports "that the Germans were hunting out the Jewish townfolk and taking them to Voroshilovgrad where a ghetto was said to have been set up. But many people maintained that in actual fact they were only taken as far as the Verkhneduvannaya Grove where they were killed and buried." Maria Borts hides her husband and talks, with "a sad, almost aggrieved expression", about whether he can pass: "He doesn't really look very Jewish—don't you agree?" When Fadeyev lists the prisoners in the German cells he includes "people who had concealed their Jewish origin". Four brief passages, but they are there, they are specific, and they are more than most Soviet war fiction managed on the subject at any point before the 1980s.

And Fadeyev can write the thing the novel exists for. Here is the mass burial, watched by a captured Party man from the top of the mound — not the Young Guard's own deaths but the killing that precedes them, which is the event the whole book is answering:

Fettered hand and foot, stumbling and falling they silently clambered to the top of the mound. All that could be heard was the heavy breathing of the soldiers and the rustling of the wind-lashed foliage. ... He could see by the light of the flashing torches how the people dropped into the pit; some

were leaping, others stumbling silently or with cries of protest or distress. ... Statsenko was bowing to the people as they were pushed into the pit. He had been drinking. Shulga again caught a glimpse of the woman with the child bound to her body. The infant neither saw nor heard what was taking place; it was still sleeping, nestled against the warmth of its mother's body.

The sleeping baby is the detail a lesser writer would not have risked and a propagandist would not have thought of. So is Statsenko — the local collaborator, drunk, bowing to the people he is helping to bury. Fadeyev gives the worst man in the scene a courtesy, and it is far more frightening than brutality would have been.

None of that was removed by the revision. Whatever else the rewriting did, it did not turn a good book into a worthless one, and an introduction that implied otherwise would be repaying one distortion with another.

The man who made the revision

Here the book becomes something more interesting than a damaged novel, because of who Fadeyev was.

He was not a writer who fell foul of the apparatus. He was the apparatus. Alexander Fadeyev was General Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers — the official who presided over the machinery of approval, expulsion and silence that governed every writer in the country. He administered the doctrine. When the doctrine was turned on his own novel, he did to himself what his office did to others, and did it thoroughly.

There is no need to invent an inner life for him, and no need to go outside this series for the evidence. At the Twentieth Congress in February 1956, Sholokhov stood up and took Fadeyev apart by name and to his face — and Progress published the speech in English, in *At the Bidding of the Heart*, which is also in our list. The house printed its own indictment.

What did Fadeyev do these last fifteen years? Did he guide the Union of Writers ideologically and politically? No, we have always believed with good reason that it's the Party that guides us. For years Fadeyev kept busy attending literary discussions, delivering reports, distributing the flats among writers and never wrote a word. He had no time for such "nonsense" as writing books.

Sholokhov's account of how it happened is better than any

paraphrase. The Union, he said, was "gradually changing from the creative association which it was supposed to be into an administrative organisation", with the secretariat and its sections meeting regularly and the messengers rushed here and there, and no books appearing. Fadeyev "turned out to be a sufficiently ambitious General Secretary and refused to reckon with the principle of collective leadership", and it "dragged on for fifteen years". Then the sentence that should be set in stone over the door of every writers' union that has ever existed:

By joint effort we robbed Fadeyev of the fifteen best years of his creative life, and as a result we have neither a General Secretary nor a writer.

And what Sholokhov says they should have told him in time: "A lust for power is no use at all in the writing business. The Union of Writers is not an army unit and even less so a punishment battalion, and none of the writers are going to stand at attention before you, Comrade Fadeyev."

Two things about that speech deserve emphasis, because they cut against the easy version of this story. The first is that Sholokhov's charge is not that Fadeyev wrote badly; it is that the office stopped him writing at all. The second is that he praised this novel. Fadeyev, he said, was relieved of his secretarial duties for a few years from 1944, "got down to work immediately and in a very short space of time produced an excellent book about the Young Guard in Krasnodon" — and "none of us prose writers have anything like Fadeyev's wonderful gift for writing about young people with such stirring emotion." That is a judgement on the 1945 book by the one contemporary with standing to make it, delivered eleven years later, from the rostrum of a Party congress, in front of the author.

Three months after it, Fadeyev shot himself.

The tradition this introduction is written from had described the mechanism twenty years before it closed on him. In the seventh chapter of *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936, Trotsky set out what the bureaucracy's command over literature would produce: "Gifted writers who cannot do sufficient violence to themselves are pursued by a pack of instructors armed with shamelessness and dozens of quotations. The most eminent artists either commit suicide, or find their material in the remote past, or become silent."

Fadeyev did sufficient violence to himself. He rewrote the book. Then he took the first road anyway.

What he could do, and this series can prove it

The strongest evidence against the second Young Guard is not an argument. It is another book by the same man, printed in the same series.

The Rout — Fadeyev's first novel, written in 1925–26 — is about a small partisan detachment in the Far East that is hunted, worn down and finally destroyed, and it ends like this. Levinson, the commander, having brought nineteen men out of a detachment that no longer exists, looks at a threshing-ground where people are working:

Levinson looked silently, with moist eyes, at the vast sky and earth, which promised bread and rest, at these alien people on the threshing-ground whom he would soon have to make his own—as near and dear to him as were the eighteen who followed him in silence; and he ceased crying. A man has to live and do his duty.

A defeat. A commander in tears who stops crying because there is nothing else to do. No Party organisation visible anywhere in the frame, no vindication, no assurance that the sacrifice was correctly supervised. The last sentence is six words long and refuses every consolation it could have offered.

The young Fadeyev could write that. The General Secretary could not have published it, and by 1951 he was revising his own war novel to make sure nobody else did either.

What survives in the book you are holding

What is set out above survives intact, and so does the opening — two girls by a creek, one of them transfixed by a water-lily, "not white, I mean it is white, but so many shades: yellow, pink, sky blue", and the war about to come over the horizon into that. The events were real, the deaths were real, and Fadeyev had talked to the families. Whatever was done to the book afterwards, it is not a fabrication, and the young people in it existed and died as it says they did.

The novel also carries, without meaning to, the most complete available record of what the doctrine required. Read it beside *The Rout* and the specification is legible line by line: what has to be added, what has to be supervised, what may not be left to chance.

Was the state consistent?

Ask the question this series asks of every volume.

The novel honours young people who organised in secret against an occupying power, printed illegal leaflets, and refused the authority of the administration over them. It honours them precisely for acting without permission — and then, in its revised form, it takes care to establish that they did in fact have permission, from the district committee, all along. The book cannot celebrate unauthorised initiative; it has to convert it into authorised initiative before it can be published. That is the whole doctrine in one editorial operation.

And the state's treatment of its own Krasnodon dead follows the same logic. The organisation was honoured; the honours were distributed according to a version of events that the novel was made to match; and the argument about who had really led what went on for decades afterwards in a country where it could not be conducted in public. A resistance is a difficult thing to remember accurately, and this one was remembered through a novel that had been altered to a specification.

The name that is not in this book

There is one more thing the reader of a 1955 English printing has no way of knowing, and it is the gravest charge in this introduction.

The Young Guard has a traitor. Yevgeny Stakhovich, a Komsomol from Krasnodon who arrives from outside, cultured and restrained and "interested in social problems", is named ninety times; the novel plants suspicion on him almost as soon as he appears — Protsenko frowns at the mention of his name, asks whether he has been with them all along or came from elsewhere, and says, "You be careful in your dealings..." Under interrogation he gives the organisation away.

Now the name that does not appear. Viktor Tretyakevich was one of the founders of the real Young Guard and, by the evidence, its commissar. He was arrested with the others and killed, thrown alive down a shaft. He is not in this novel at all — not as himself, not under an alias the text acknowledges. Fadeyev gave the leading role to Oleg Koshevoi, who through this book became the organisation's national hero, and gave the betrayal to Stakhovich.

In Krasnodon the identification was made immediately and it stuck: the invented traitor was read as the omitted commissar. Tretyakevich was treated as the man who had given up his comrades. His family lived with that. Only at the end of the

1950s, when the case was examined again, was it established that he had betrayed nobody, and he was decorated. We do not know what Fadeyev intended by Stakhovich and we are not going to guess; what is beyond dispute is the sequence, which is that a novel was written and revised to a political specification, the novel became the accepted account of the events, and a dead seventeen-year-old carried the character of a traitor for a decade and a half because a book needed one.

This is what it costs when fiction is assigned the work of the historical record. The doctrine that required the district committee to be visible in chapter after chapter is the same doctrine that made this novel authoritative, and an authoritative novel about real people with real families cannot be corrected by literary criticism. It has to be corrected by an investigation, and investigations of that kind were not available in the Soviet Union until the author was dead.

The afterlife has not finished. Krasnodon is in the Luhansk region, and in 2022 the Russian state, prosecuting a war across that ground, posthumously decorated Tretyakevich again, as a Hero of Russia. The children of Krasnodon fought an occupying army and were murdered for it. Their memory has now been conscripted three times: first by a novel rewritten to show correct leadership, then by the rehabilitation that the novel had made necessary, and now by a state that has found the story useful once more. Readers of this series will want to keep the first fact in view through all of it, which is that they were schoolchildren and they did it themselves.

What is living

The dead of Krasnodon, who are not in dispute.

And the book's unintended function as evidence. The Young Guard is the clearest surviving demonstration of what socialist realism actually did to a text, because we can see both states of the same novel by the same author, and because the author was the man in charge of the process. There is no other case in this series where the machinery is so completely exposed: the doctrine, the correction, the compliance, the compliant officer, and the revolver.

Read it for the children, who deserve it. Read it, too, as the most honest document the Soviet literary bureaucracy ever produced about itself — honest not by intention but by construction, because Fadeyev left the seams where anyone who has read his first novel can find them.