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MARXISM

Engels—Lafargue Correspondence, Volume Two (1887–1890)

1887 to 1890: the years in which the Second International was built out of nothing, watched at close range in Engels's letters to the Lafargues. Congress politics in real time - mandates, factions, the first May Day.
Translated by Yvonne Kapp.

Friedrich Engels and others

Introduction to the 1960 Edition

Most of the books in this series are Soviet arguments, and an introduction to them is a reply. This one is different. What sits between these covers is not a Moscow textbook but a run of private letters written between 1887 and 1890 by Frederick Engels in London and Paul and Laura Lafargue in and around Paris — Laura being Marx's second daughter, Paul her husband and one of the founders of French Marxism. The letters are the thing itself: first-rank primary material, the unguarded working correspondence of the man who, in these very years, was steering the international socialist movement by post from a house on Regent's Park Road while correcting the manuscript of the third volume of *Capital*. You cannot refute a primary source, and this introduction does not try. It does three things instead. It says what the correspondence is and why this particular stretch of it matters. It turns a critical eye on the Moscow packaging — the selection, the note apparatus, the silent editorial hand — rather than on Engels. And it offers an honest assessment of Engels as these letters actually show him, strengths and blind spots together, because the tradition that produced this series is entitled to read its own founders soberly.

Take the period first, because it is the reason this volume is more than a family album. The years 1887 to 1890 are the hinge on which the modern socialist movement turns. When the correspondence opens, the workers' movement is a scatter of national parties, sects and trade-union federations with no common instrument; the First International is fifteen years dead. When it closes, the Second International exists, its founding congress has met in Paris in July 1889, and the first international May Day has been called for 1890. Almost every letter here is, at some level, about building that instrument — and about the squalid, exhausting, indispensable manoeuvre it took to build it.

It should be said at once what these letters are like to read, because their value is partly in their texture. This is not a statesman dictating for the record. The Lafargues call Engels "the General," a household nickname; he signs himself, on occasion, "Kakadou." High international politics arrives interleaved with the price of wine, the health of the dogs, the grandchildren, and a long-running joke about the tapeworm Paul is trying to expel — Engels prescribing "a dose of filix mas or couso" for the "intimate friend inside" with the same brisk confidence he brings to the congress negotiations. The intimacy is not incidental. It is why the letters are trustworthy in a way a memoir is not: Engels is thinking aloud to the two people he trusts most, and the strategic judgements come out unpolished, with the hesitations and the swearing left in. When he is uncertain he says so; when he is exultant he is undignified about it. A reader gets the man deliberating, not the monument.

The central drama is the fight over the founding congress, and it is a more humiliating and human affair than the commemorative version allows. There were two rival congresses in Paris in July 1889, meeting in the same city at the same time: the Marxist congress that the Lafargues, the Germans and Engels organised, and the congress of the French Possibilists — the reformist wing led by Brousse — allied with Hyndman's people in London. Each claimed to be the International. Engels ran his side of the negotiation from London, and the letters are a masterclass in what organisation actually consists of when there is no authority to enforce anything. He nails down a prior agreement at a preparatory meeting at The Hague; he leans on Bebel and Liebknecht in Germany; and above all he spends letter after letter restraining his own comrades, the Lafargues and the French Guesdists, whose sectarian instinct was to turn every question into a trial of strength. In March 1889 he writes to Paul Lafargue almost pleadingly: "Be reasonable; carry out loyally what has been passed, do not make it impossible for your best friends to

support you, 'give and take,' use the position won at The Hague as a starting point scoring the first victory over the enemy and as a base for future triumphs. But do not force down the throat of the other nationalities things which they certainly will not swallow." That sentence is the whole of Engels's internationalism in miniature: the refusal to let any one national party, even the one he agreed with, dictate to the others.

What is striking — and what the celebratory framing tends to bury — is that Engels did not think his own side was obviously right on the tactics. He told Lafargue plainly that, left to his own preference, he would have done the opposite: "Were the matter still open to discussion, I personally would incline to your view that the congress should be held side by side with that of the Poss[ibilists], even at the risk of a fight with them." He submitted his own judgement to a collective decision already taken, because holding the coalition together mattered more than winning the argument. This is Engels the organiser at his best, and it is the opposite of the caricature of the doctrinaire.

The congress met, and it worked. Paul Lafargue's letter of 23 July 1889, written in the wreckage of a fortnight of eighteen-hour days, has the authentic exhaustion of someone who has just pulled off something difficult: "The congress is over at last! I can sleep to my heart's content." A proposal to merge the two congresses had nearly detonated the whole thing — "had the fusion taken place there would have been a pugilistic set-to" — but it was averted, and what Lafargue remembered was not the manoeuvring but the mood: "The most genuine fraternity prevailed at our congress; the French, who are so eager to speak, showed the greatest deference to the foreigners, above all to the Germans." One German delegate told him at the banquet, "I am not pleased, I am gladdened to the depths of my heart." Out of that congress came the call for the demonstration of 1 May 1890 — the birth of international May Day, still the movement's one universal festival — and here again Engels's tactical patience is on display. Rather than keep fighting the Possibilists head-on, the strategy was to let them rot: "Our congresses have come off gloriously," he wrote, "and when we compare them with the Possibilists, they come out in still bolder relief... Il faut qu'ils cuisent dans leur propre jus" — let them stew in their own juice. Do not attack them, he insisted repeatedly; attacking a disintegrating rival only arrests its disintegration.

The second great theme is Germany, and it culminates in one of the most quoted lines Engels ever wrote to Laura. Through 1887–89 the German Social-Democrats are still living under

Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law, campaigning half-illegally, their press driven abroad and their meetings broken up; the correspondence tracks the two-yearly ritual by which the law was renewed and, in January 1890, the collapse of the parliamentary cartel that had sustained it. The law, un-renewed, "ceased to be in force from October 1st, 1890," and with it went Bismarck himself, resigned that March. By the February 1890 elections the party has won a million and a half votes in the teeth of a decade of persecution. Engels's letter of 26 February 1890, written as the election telegrams "came raining in here thick and fast," is drunk on it: the party had taken 1,341,500 votes, and he pronounces the verdict that would echo through the whole subsequent history of the movement — "The 20th February 1890 is the opening day of the German revolution." "The old stability," he adds, "is gone for ever." A week later he signs off to Lafargue: "vive la révolution allemande!"

This is Engels at his most exhilarated and, one has to say, at his most fallible — and it is worth being exact about why, because it is the single point in this volume where the sober assessment the series owes its founders has real work to do. The optimism was not naïve gradualism. In the same February letter Engels sees, with cold clarity, the danger that the state will not wait to be voted out: the ruling powers may "provoke riot and fighting and crush us before we are too strong, and then alter the Constitution. That is evidently what we are drifting to, and the chief danger to be avoided... we may be forced to fight before we are fully prepared, and there is the danger." He was not the fatalist that some of his epigones became. And yet the metric has quietly shifted under his feet. The "opening day of the German revolution" is an election day, and its evidence is a vote count. The steady climb of the German ballot had become, for Engels as for the party he loved, the visible proof that history was moving their way on a rising line. That habit of mind — history as an escalator, the revolution as the terminus of an electoral curve — is exactly what the Second International would harden, after Engels's death, into the fatalist gradualism of Kautskyan orthodoxy, the conviction that the movement had only to grow and wait. Engels's own famous 1895 introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*, written five years after these letters and edited down by nervous party leaders into a testament to legality, sits at the head of that road. It would take the collapse of August 1914 — the same German party voting the war credits — to show what the escalator had carried the movement into. None of that is Engels's fault in any simple sense; he warned against the coup and never surrendered the expectation of a "decisive crisis." But the correspondence lets you watch the reflex forming, and an honest reader should

watch it rather than cheer.

There are other tensions worth naming, in the same spirit. Engels's factional heat in these letters is real and not always attractive. The Possibilists are, across hundreds of pages, "opportunists," "carpet-baggers" — Paul Lafargue's phrase, that they "use socialism to obtain political positions and municipal grants" — and "those perfect lackeys." Some of that is deserved; Brousse's people really did trade socialist votes for municipal advantage. But the ferocity of the split ran ahead of the issues that formally divided the two congresses, which were procedural — the validation of delegates' credentials, whether the congress should be open or closed. Engels, who elsewhere was sharply critical of the narrowness of the French Guesdists (it was of their brand of doctrine that he made his celebrated remark that if that was Marxism, then he himself was no Marxist), here largely indulged that narrowness because the Guesdists were on his side of the barricade. His readings of the French scene are shrewd — his running analysis of Boulangism is a small masterpiece of contempt, dismissing the general with the observation that "he takes Paris and leaves to the Monarchists all the provinces," and tracing his war-chest to Russian money — but he backed a French faction that was itself a sect, and the correspondence does not pretend otherwise.

Set against these, the strengths are overwhelming and should be stated as plainly. The organisational genius is the obvious one: a man past sixty, running an international coalition by letter across four languages, holding Germans, French, Belgians, Danes and Americans in a single frame by sheer tactical intelligence and the moral authority of Marx's oldest friend. The internationalism is genuine and not merely rhetorical — the insistence, against his own closest allies, that no national party impose on the rest. There is his feel for the workers' own movement as against the manoeuvres of leaders: the letters of autumn 1889 follow the great London dock strike almost hour by hour, Engels reading the strikers' tactics like a general and worrying, correctly, that a bluffed general-strike threat was "a declaration of despair" that could hand the companies victory. And there is the quiet fact that runs under everything — that all this was being done by the man who was simultaneously the executor of Marx's unfinished life's work. In the middle of the congress fight he reports, almost in passing, "Of Capital III Vol. I finished Section IV yesterday." He is the movement's living memory as well as its organiser, and the register drops, once, into something unbearably human when he describes Eleanor planting the family grave at Highgate: "If Mohr had lived to see this!" That is the private cost of being the last man standing from the founding

generation, and it is why this correspondence is worth reading even by people with no interest in the politics.

Which brings us to the Moscow packaging, and to the one respect in which this volume genuinely differs from most in the series: the apparatus is largely good. This English edition of 1960, published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House — the house that three years later became Progress — is a translation of the French Correspondance edited by Émile Bottigelli for Éditions Sociales in Paris, and Bottigelli was a serious scholar. His footnotes are overwhelmingly what footnotes should be: dates, identifications, the tracing of newspaper references. The translation is by Yvonne Kapp, later the biographer of Eleanor Marx, and it is superb — idiomatic, alert to Engels's jokes and his macaronic slides between English, German and French. Point three of this series' standing brief is to credit real scholarship where it exists, and here it plainly does. A reader is far better served by this volume than by the average Progress polemic.

The criticism is therefore of a subtler kind, and it is about ownership, omission and framing rather than falsification. Begin with ownership. Again and again a footnote records that a given letter is printed "transcribed from the original in French, by the Moscow Institute of Marxism-Leninism, which owns the original." That formula — repeated for letter after letter — is the whole Soviet relationship to the Marx-Engels heritage compressed into a phrase. The manuscripts of the founders of the movement sat in a state institute in Moscow; access to them was a grant, not a right; and the definitive editions of the world's socialist inheritance were, in consequence, a monopoly of the party that claimed to be that inheritance's sole legitimate heir. The scholarship is real; the proprietorship behind it is the point.

Then omission. The Publisher's Note states that "Editorial notes follow the French edition, except for certain notes found unnecessary for the English reader." That is a small sentence carrying a large licence. The English reader is not told which of Bottigelli's notes were dropped, or on what principle "unnecessary" was judged, and so cannot know whether the pruning was innocent housekeeping or something more directed. In a series built on the study of what Soviet editors chose to include and leave out, an admitted, unspecified excision is exactly the kind of thing to register rather than wave through.

The framing is the most interesting point, because it works almost entirely by silence. The 1889 congress is presented throughout — in the running heads, in the very "our

congress"/"their congress" grammar that the apparatus leaves unglossed — as a clean Marxist victory over opportunism. On the letters' own terms it largely was. But an edition issued from Moscow in 1960 is celebrating the foundation of the Second International without a syllable of acknowledgement that the same International would, within a quarter-century, become in Moscow's own account the very type of opportunist betrayal — the parties that voted for the war in 1914, the tradition that Lenin spent the rest of his life denouncing and against which the Communist International was founded as a deliberate repudiation. A 1960 volume can honour Engels for building the Second International and can honour Lenin for burying it, but it cannot do both on the same shelf without a word about the trajectory that connects them, and this one does not try. The silence is congenial to its moment. 1960 was the year the Soviet line on the "parliamentary road" and peaceful coexistence was being consolidated, and a volume that foregrounds Engels the electoral triumphalist — the million and a half votes, the "opening day of the German revolution" reached through the ballot box, the May Day demonstration — while letting his warnings about the coming resort to force pass without emphasis, leans, however gently, in a serviceable direction. Nothing is falsified. The letters are all here, the alarming ones with the hopeful ones. But the apparatus supplies no counter-weight, and in the choosing of what to underline and what to leave mute, a 1960 reader was quietly encouraged to find in Engels the ancestor the moment wanted.

That is a light charge compared with the wholesale rewriting this series has had to document elsewhere, and it should be stated as the light charge it is. The honest summary is that the Foreign Languages Publishing House did something valuable here — it put Engels's own words, well translated and largely well annotated, into English — and that the Soviet fingerprints are on the frame rather than the picture: in the monopoly the recurring credit line advertises, in the unspecified cuts the Publisher's Note concedes, and in a curatorial silence about where the road that opens in these letters was going to lead. Read the correspondence for what it is: the finest close-up we have of how the international workers' movement was actually assembled, by a very great organiser who was also, by 1890, beginning to mistake the rising line of the German vote for the road to power. Both halves of that sentence are in the letters. This edition prints them faithfully and lets you draw the second for yourself, which is more than can be said for most of what Moscow published, and a good deal less than a candid apparatus would have done.

MARXISM

Communist Morality

A book credited to Marx, Engels and Lenin in which Khrushchev is the largest contributor by word count - and therefore the fullest surviving statement of what the Soviet state wanted morality to mean, built around the 1961 Moral Code of the Builder of Communism.

Karl Marx and others

Introduction to the 1962 Edition

The title page of this book names three authors: Marx, Engels and Lenin. The book contains eight. Counted in words, the largest single contributor to Communist Morality is Nikita Khrushchev, who supplies 10,790 of its roughly 47,000 words of text — more than Marx and Engels together, who supply 6,823, and more than Lenin, who supplies 9,971. Add the extracts from the 1961 Party Programme, which Khrushchev presented, and the sitting First Secretary accounts for very nearly a third of a volume attributed to three men who had been dead for between thirty-eight and seventy-nine years.

The book does not conceal this. Its own blurb promises "the more important statements on problems of communist morality by Marx, Engels, Lenin and prominent Soviet statesmen, including N. S. Khrushchov, M. I. Kalinin, S. M. Kirov and others." The concealment is on the spine, and it is worth naming at the start, because the whole operation of the volume is contained in that gap. This is not an anthology of classical Marxist writing on ethics. It is a device for delivering a document issued in October 1961 — the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism — with a pedigree attached.

The date

The catalogue records 1962. The book's front matter did not survive digitisation: there is no copyright page, no printing history, no translator's note. So the date has to be argued from the inside, and three lines of evidence converge.

The internal terminus is April 1962. The latest dateline printed anywhere in the volume is 14 December 1961, but the contents list two Khrushchev items after it, the last being "From the Speech at the Fourteenth Congress of the Komsomol" — a congress held in April 1962. Nothing in the book postdates it. The imprint is Progress: the back-matter reader's card reads "Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design", giving the Zubovsky

Boulevard address. Since the brief for this series asked specifically that the imprint be counted, here is the count. "Progress Publishers" occurs once in the text, in that card. "F.L.P.H." also occurs once — but it is not an imprint, it is a footnote citing an edition of "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder. This volume is therefore, unlike two others in this catalogue, genuinely a Progress book and not a Foreign Languages Publishing House book wearing the wrong jacket. Third, the Russian original is visible in the scanned front matter under its own title. The scanner has rendered the Cyrillic in Latin glyphs, but it reconstructs unambiguously as Мораль, как её понимают коммунисты — morality as the communists understand it — which is not what the English spine says either.

The safe statement is this: the manuscript closes in the spring of 1962, and the English edition belongs to the very short window in which Moscow's export house was changing its name. That window is the whole point. In October 1961 the Twenty-Second Congress had adopted a new Party Programme, reopened the denunciation of Stalin begun in 1956, and removed Stalin's body from the Mausoleum. In November 1962 One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich appeared in Novy Mir. This book was assembled between those two events, and it is a document of that moment in a way that most Progress titles, which lag their originals by years, are not.

What the excerpting does

Of roughly 120 items in the contents, 98 are marked "From the..." — excerpts. That is over eighty per cent, a far higher proportion than the comparable Lenin anthology in this series, where 18 of about 40 items were cut. Every one of these texts has a canonical version, so the question of what the scissors removed is answerable rather than rhetorical. It was worth answering, and the answer is not the one this series has learned to expect.

Start with the case that goes the other way, because it disciplines everything else. The extract from Anti-Dühring (pp. 30–35) is essentially complete. It prints the three simultaneous moralities — Christian-feudal, bourgeois, and "the proletarian morality of the future" — and Engels's answer to which is true: "Not one of them, in the sense of absolute finality". It prints the derivation of ethical ideas "from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange". It prints "Thou shalt not steal" as a historically contingent injunction. And it prints, entire and unabridged, the paragraph one would most expect a Soviet editor of 1962 to lose:

We therefore reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and for ever immutable ethical law on the pretext that the moral world, too, has its permanent principles which stand above history and the differences between nations.

It even prints the terminus: a "really human morality" becomes possible only at a stage of society "which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life." Only Engels's personal jibes at Dühring are dropped. That is economy, not suppression, and it must be said plainly.

The same generosity appears where one would least predict it. Lenin's letters to Inessa Armand of January 1915 run to eight pages — the longest single Lenin item in the book — and are printed nearly whole, including the enumerated list of things "free love" might mean, down to "(10) freedom of adultery?", and including the passage preferring "a fleeting passion and liaison" to the "loveless kisses" of a settled marriage. A Soviet volume for the general reader in 1962 did not have to print that. It did.

So the cuts that do bite are the more telling for being selective, and they share a shape.

The German Ideology is absent altogether. Not excerpted, not abridged — the phrase does not occur anywhere in the book, and neither does Feuerbach or Stirner. In an anthology of a hundred and twenty items on communist morality, the one text in which Marx and Engels turn their ridicule on moral preaching itself, rather than on the preaching of other classes, is not represented.

The extract from the Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (p. 19) keeps "Religion is the opium of the people" and the surrounding image. It opens after Marx's premises — that the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of

all criticism, and that man makes religion rather than religion man, neither of which appears anywhere in this book — and it stops before the conclusion, in which criticism ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, and hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased and abandoned being. (I paraphrase the omitted sentences rather than quoting them: marxists.org has withdrawn the Collected Works translation of this Introduction under a copyright claim, and I have not been able to verify their exact wording against a text I hold.) The anti-clerical maxim is kept; the humanist imperative, which is unconditional and addressed to all such relations without a class qualifier, is not.

And the treatment of the speech that is the whole subject's founding text — Lenin to the Third Komsomol Congress, 2 October 1920 — is instructive precisely because the expected censorship is absent. Lenin's repudiation of a morality "derived from God's commandments" is printed. So is "We repudiate all morality taken apart from human society and classes" and "We do not believe in an eternal morality, and we expose the deceit of all the fables about morality." Nothing embarrassing is hidden. What is removed is the reasoning. The book prints:

We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. Our morality is derived from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. . . . The class struggle is continuing and it is our task to subordinate all interests to this struggle.

Those four dots cover six consecutive paragraphs of the original, in which Lenin explains what the class struggle at that moment consisted of: the abolition of classes as against the mere expulsion of rulers, the winning-over of the working peasant in order to crush the profiteering one, and the placing of the whole under what he calls the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Lenin the maxim is the conclusion of an argument about a specific society at a specific date. In the anthology it is a free-standing sentence, and the speech as a whole is broken into eight detached fragments, each opening and closing on an ellipsis.

That is the pattern, and it is a pattern rather than three economies: the anthology is open-handed with anti-moralism directed outward — at God, at the clergy, at the bourgeoisie, at eternal truths — and closes its hand on anti-moralism that is unconditional, or that could be turned inward.

Which brings us to the thing the cutting was protecting. Fifty pages after Engels rejects "any moral dogma whatsoever as an

eternal, ultimate and for ever immutable ethical law", the book prints this:

The Party holds that the moral code of the builder of communism should comprise the following principles...

— and there follow twelve of them, running from "devotion to the communist cause" to "fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries". The contradiction is flat, it is fifty pages wide, and no editorial scissors created it. It is legible from the table of contents. What the excisions do is remove the texts a reader might have used to name it.

What a book on morality says about the terror

The word Stalin occurs once in this volume. It occurs inside the phrase "the cult of Stalin's person", in Khrushchev's report to the Twenty-Second Congress of 17 October 1961, and the whole of the book's reckoning with the terror is contained in that one passage of a few hundred words. Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Yezhov, Yagoda and Rykov do not appear at all. Those niles are real: I checked them with the project's damage-tolerant name checker and by hand against the standard scan substitutions, and nothing surfaced.

The passage itself repays close reading, because it is candid about the acts and precise about the categories.

The careful analysis and profound study of a number of records, undertaken after the exposure of that inveterate enemy and adventurer, Beria, fully revealed to the Central Committee the flagrant violations of socialist legality, abuses of power, arbitrary acts and repressive measures that had been perpetrated against many honest people, including prominent Party and government officials.

Note the machinery. The crimes are conceded, and in strong words — flagrant violations, arbitrary acts, repressive measures. But the agency is displaced onto Beria, who is expelled from the collective by being classified as "that inveterate enemy and adventurer": not a Bolshevik who did wrong, but an enemy who had got inside. And the victims are "many honest people, including prominent Party and government officials" — a formula which both restricts the injury to the Party's own cadre and quietly leaves room for the others to have been something less than honest.

This is the sharpened form of the test this series applies to Soviet books, and it survives contact with a candid text. Error is admissible here; the category is not. Nobody who stayed

inside is ever given the name of the kind of person who does such things. The doer is either an enemy (Beria) or an abstraction (the cult of the individual, which the book treats as a thing that happened rather than a person who acted).

Then comes the reason for the reckoning, and this is the passage that should be read twice, because the book is about morality:

What would have become of the Party and the country had the cult of the individual not been condemned...? The result would have been a cleavage between Party and people, grave violations of Soviet democracy and revolutionary legality, slower economic progress, a lower rate of communist construction and hence a deterioration of the people's standard of living. In the sphere of international relations, the result would have been a weakening of Soviet positions in world affairs and a worsening of relations with other countries...

Every item is a cost to the Party's programme or its standing abroad. The dead are not among them. There is one moral sentence in the passage — "It was a moral requirement, the duty, of the Party and its leadership" — and its object is the disclosure, not the killing. The book is capable of moral language and spends it on the act of admitting.

Two silences complete the picture, and both are the book's own arrangement rather than an accident of period.

Sergei Kirov is given a section, and his dates: "KIROV, SERGEI MIRONOVICH (1886-1934)". That is all. His death is a naked parenthesis in a volume published months after Khrushchev, at the same Twenty-Second Congress the book quotes, had publicly reopened the question of how Kirov died. And Felix Dzerzhinsky, who ran the political police, appears in a book on morality almost entirely as a prisoner and a philanthropist: a diary from Tsarist gaol, letters to his relatives, and an article on rescuing homeless children. His post is given in full euphemism — "permanent Chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Sabotage" — and the footnote defining the Vecheka calls it "an organ of the workers' and peasants' power, to defend the state security of the Soviet Republic", with no mention of the Red Terror.

And yet the book is not sanitised into uplift, which is why it is more interesting than a whitewash. It prints Dzerzhinsky writing that the Cheka should be turned onto child homelessness because it works well and because "People reckon with it. They are rather afraid of it." It prints him

promising bribe-takers a tribunal "whose punitive hammer will fall with all the devastating might and anger of which it is capable". Kalinin is printed on the qualities of the new socialist man over a dateline of 28 December 1938, at the close of the Yezhov years, and the book supplies no gloss. The coercion is on the page. What is missing is any vocabulary in which it could be judged.

The code as an instrument

The last item in the volume is Khrushchev at the Fourteenth Komsomol Congress in the spring of 1962, and it shows what the Moral Code was for. He praises the Komsomol for taking the code as its basis, calls it "imbued with noble ideas of humanism and collectivism", quotes its warmest principles — "One for all and all for one!", "Man is to man a friend, comrade and brother" — and then, within the same passage, turns them round:

We must intensify the struggle against the idlers, against all sorts of swindlers, hooligans and antisocial elements... Our task is to rid society of such people...

This is the book's true classifying vocabulary, and it is worth noting that the older one has almost vanished. Opportunism occurs three times in the whole volume and every occurrence is inside Lenin's own text or an editorial footnote about Lenin; no Soviet editor uses it in his own voice, and revisionism, dogmatism and sectarianism are at zero. What has replaced them is moral rather than political: parasites, idlers, spongers, swindlers, hooligans, anti-social elements, survivals of capitalism in the minds of people. A code of twelve virtues, in a state, is also a schedule of twelve offences, and the volume closes by saying so.

One further detail deserves its own sentence, because it is the whole book in miniature. The subject index carries the entry "Personality cult, its criticism-29, 187-190". Page 29 is Marx's letter to Wilhelm Blos of 1877 — "Because I am opposed to every kind of personality cult, during the existence of the International I have never allowed to be made public the numerous messages, expressing recognition of my services, with which I was pestered from various countries." Pages 187–190 are Khrushchev on Stalin. The index files them under one heading, and in doing so converts a rupture into a continuity: not a party discovering in 1956 what it had done, but a doctrine that had always held the correct view and was now restating it.

What is worth keeping

A reader told that all of this is worthless learns nothing. The translations are good and in several cases the volume is the most accessible English source for what it prints. The Anti-Dühring extract is a clean and generous presentation of the single best short statement of the historical-materialist account of morality, and it is printed without the cuts one would predict. The Armand letters are here in a fullness that Soviet publishing did not owe anyone in 1962. Dzerzhinsky's prison diary is a real document by a man who spent eleven years in Tsarist gaols and wrote well about it. Krupskaya's recollections include a small, unforced detail — Lenin going through back numbers of journals to defend a colleague unjustly attacked during a party purge — that no propagandist would have invented, because it concedes that party purges attacked people unjustly.

And the underlying philosophical claim is not a cynicism. That moral codes have a class history, that "Thou shalt not steal" presupposes property to steal, that an ethics claiming to stand outside society is usually the ethics of somebody in particular — these are serious positions, argued by Engels with more care than most of his critics have brought against him, and this book puts the argument in a reader's hands.

The difficulty is not the argument. It is that the argument is used here to license exactly what it forbids.

The reply

The tradition this series writes from produced its own major text on this precise question, and we hold it. Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours* was published in *The New International* vol. IV no. 6, June 1938, pp. 163–173 — the pre-split, orthodox Trotskyist *New International*, before the magazine went with Shachtman's minority in April 1940, so it can be cited without qualification as the tradition's own. It was written against the charge that Bolshevism and Stalinism shared an amorality, and it concedes the premise the Progress volume rests on:

...morality is a product of social development; that there is nothing invariable about it; that it serves social interests; that these interests are contradictory; that morality more than any other form of ideology has a class character.

That is the same proposition as Engels's, and the same one this book prints. What Trotsky then does is the thing the anthology's cuts make impossible. He asks what follows, and answers that it is not permission:

"We are to understand then that in achieving this end anything is permissible?" sarcastically demands the Philistine, demonstrating that he understood nothing. That is permissible, we answer, which really leads to the liberation of mankind.

Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle. Precisely from this it flows that not all means are permissible.

And on the regime this book speaks for, in 1938, while the trials were running:

Stalinism reestablished the most offensive forms of privileges, imbued inequality with a provocative character, strangled mass self-activity under police absolutism, transformed administration into a monopoly of the Kremlin oligarchy and regenerated the fetishism of power in forms that absolute monarchy dared not dream of.

Verily boundless intellectual and moral obtuseness is required to identify the reactionary police morality of Stalinism with the revolutionary morality of the Bolsheviks.

The tradition did not agree with itself about this, and the disagreement is worth showing rather than smoothing. John Dewey, who had chaired the commission of inquiry into the Moscow Trials and whose verdict Trotsky cites gratefully in the same essay, replied in *The New Internationalist* two months later. He granted the ground — "I hold that the end in the sense of consequences provides the only basis for moral ideas and action" — and then objected that Trotsky derived his means not from examining their actual consequences but from "an alleged law of history which is the law of all laws of social development", concluding: "in avoiding one kind of absolutism Mr. Trotsky has plunged into another kind of absolutism." (Our copy of Dewey's reply carries no volume or issue line of its own; the August 1938 attribution comes from the index.)

There is also a contemporaneous answer to this book's actual occasion. George Novack, writing as William F. Warde, reviewed the 1961 Draft Programme in the *International Socialist Review* in the autumn of that year, and identified the manoeuvre the anthology exists to perform:

And despite the silence on Stalin, it reaffirms and formally sanctions the cardinal points where Stalinism broke with Bolshevism.

Murry Weiss followed in the same journal, vol. 23 no. 1, Winter 1962, on the Congress itself — "Stalin had to be exhumed from the Lenin Tomb at Red Square" — and drew the sociological conclusion the Progress volume cannot draw, that what had been disclosed was "not bureaucratic errors or bureaucratic crimes but a social and historical development of a parasitic bureaucratic caste."

Two honest qualifications. Novack's article is misfiled in our index: it is placed at vol. 22 no. 4, Fall 1961, while the article's own provenance line says vol. 22 no. 3. I have not resolved that and cite it by season only. And the specific object of this book — the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism — appears to have gone unanswered by name: a search of the whole *International Socialist Review* run returns no article treating it. That is a fact about our holdings, not a verdict on the book.

The sharpest anticipation is older than any of them. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, in 1936, describing the reversal on the family, Trotsky wrote that "The stupid and stale prejudices of uncultured philistines are resurrected in the name of a new morale", and that "The Soviet moralists have only to change the phraseology slightly." Twenty-five years later the phraseology was changed, printed in twelve numbered clauses, bound between Engels's rejection of all immutable moral law and a call to rid society of idlers, and issued in English under the names of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

That is what this book is, and it is why it is worth reading. It is the most complete surviving statement of what the Soviet state, at the one moment when it was telling part of the truth about itself, wanted morality to mean.

MARXISM

Fundamentals of Marxism–Leninism • Manual

The fullest statement of post-Stalin Soviet Marxism-Leninism in English, some 950 pages, written to replace the Short Course by a group under Otto Kuusinen - a man who had known Lenin and went on to serve Khrushchev. English edition edited by Clemens Dutt.

Otto Wille Kuusinen and others

Introduction to the 1963 Edition

The preface to this book is two pages long and it does something the Short Course never did: it names the authors. The second edition, it says, was prepared principally by O. V. Kuusinen, "leader of the group of authors", with Arbatov, Belyakov, Vygodsky, Mileikovsky and Sheydin, and revisions to individual chapters by Burlatsky, Ivanov, Leibzon, Makarovskiy and Sitkovskiy. It states plainly what the revision was for: the book has been "enriched by the valuable new ideas" of the Programme of the CPSU adopted at the Twenty-Second Congress in 1961, and by the conclusions of the Moscow Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties of 1960. This is a commissioned textbook, revised to a specification, and it says so.

The specification matters, and so does the man at the head of the list. Otto Wille Kuusinen was one of the leaders of the Finnish workers' revolution of January 1918; he fled to Soviet Russia when it was crushed, spent the interwar decades as a secretary of the Communist International, headed the puppet "Finnish Democratic Republic" set up at Terijoki during the Winter War, and — almost uniquely among the Comintern's foreign cadre — survived the years in which most of his colleagues were shot. By 1961 he sat on the Presidium and the Secretariat of the Central Committee, one of the very few men alive who had known Lenin and now served Khrushchev. He died in 1964, the year after this English edition appeared. He is the connective tissue between the two régimes, and this book is the doctrine he was asked to write for the second.

The English text is credited to Clemens Dutt, brother of R. Palme Dutt of the British party. His name is on the title page and nowhere in the seven hundred pages that follow; the rendering is careful, idiomatic and unshowy, and it is one of the reasons this volume mattered.

Date the text, not the spine. The English appeared in 1963; the manuscript behind it did not. Its footnotes cite the Foreign

Languages Publishing House — F.L.P.H., a hundred and seventy-five times — and Progress Publishers not once, in the very year the one became the other. The list of quoted literature runs to 447 items and stops dead in 1962, which is also by far its heaviest year: 78 references, against 30 for 1961. Not one item is dated 1963. The latest event anywhere in the book is the Twenty-Second Congress of October 1961, and its standing proposal on Germany is still to "turn West Berlin into a demilitarised free city". Nothing in these 316,000 words knows that the Cuban missile crisis has happened. A manuscript closed in 1962 thus reached English readers in 1963 telling them that war is no longer fatally inevitable — months after the autumn in which many of them had wondered whether there would be a 1963 at all. The book's confidence was overtaken between the typesetting and the shelf.

Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism was the Short Course's replacement. When the 1938 history was quietly withdrawn after 1956, the world movement was left without a catechism, and this is what filled the gap: over three hundred thousand words, in twenty-seven chapters, running from the concept of matter to the future of communist society. It is the largest and most ambitious thing the Moscow house ever put into English, and for a generation of Communist Party members in Britain, India, Australia and the United States it simply was Marxism. That is the reason to read it now. It is also the reason to read it against the book it replaced.

What was subtracted

Begin with the arithmetic. Stalin is named twenty-seven times in this book. The passage that accounts for what he did — the whole reckoning, from "J. V. Stalin, for instance, rose to a position of leadership" to the conclusion that Soviet successes "would have been even greater but for Stalin's mistakes and the cult of the individual" — runs to about 515 words. In a book of more than 300,000, the years 1934 to 1953 are settled in a page and a half.

What that page and a half says is worth quoting, because it is the high-water mark of official de-Stalinisation in a text meant for export:

This gave rise to certain phenomena which were deeply alien to Marxism-Leninism and socialism as a social system: departure from democratic principles in a number of important questions of policy, grave violations of socialist legality, mass acts of repression against honest Soviet people, the promotion to important posts of certain people completely unsuitable for the Party and alien to it, who wormed their way into positions of trust by means of flattery and servility.

Note the adjective. Honest Soviet people were repressed. The sentence is constructed so that the reader may continue to believe that the others — the dishonest ones, the ones the Short Course had called spies and wreckers — got what was coming to them. Nothing in the book disturbs that belief, because nothing in the book returns to the subject.

Set beside the Short Course, though, the subtractions are enormous and they are real. Lenin's suppressed dictation of 1922–23 is here, quoted directly — "Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated boundless authority in his hands", "Stalin is too harsh" — although the word Testament never appears and the reader is not told that the document was withheld from the party for thirty years or that its operative proposal was Stalin's removal. Trotsky, who in 1938 had been the organising demon of Soviet history, is not named once in this volume. The Trotskyists appear three times, and appear as politicians who held a mistaken position: they "denied the dual nature of the peasantry and claimed it was a wholly reactionary mass incapable of taking part in building socialism". Wrong, in the book's view; not spies. Bukharin is named twice, as the source of an erroneous line on the peasantry, in the phrase "The Right-wing opportunists, followers of Bukharin", and not as a traitor. Zinoviev survives only in the adjective Zinovievists.

This is the single largest doctrinal change between 1938 and 1963, and it should be stated precisely, because it is easy to overstate in either direction. The reclassification of political opposition as espionage — the Short Course's characteristic method — has been abandoned. But the Moscow Trials have not been repudiated. They have been deleted. Search this book for Kirov, for the NKVD, for Yagoda or Yezhov or Vyshinsky, for a confession, an arrest or an execution, and you will find nothing. The word innocent does not occur. Rehabilitation occurs three times: of Keynes's proposals for

capitalism, of peasant farms under the New Economic Policy, and of the Soviet economy after the civil war. Never of a person — in a book written while the commissions were sitting. The only people described as shot in these 300,000 words are the demonstrators fired on by the Provisional Government in July 1917 and the defeated Finnish Reds of 1918, of whom the book reports that "some 20,000 people, according to official statistics, were either shot or done to death in the concentration camps". The book can be exact about a white terror in Helsinki. About a red one in Moscow it has no vocabulary at all. It is hard to read that sentence without thinking of the man whose name heads the list of authors, and of the comrades he lost in 1918 and the comrades he lost twenty years later.

The other silences follow the pattern of the book it replaced. There is no famine. The word does not occur once in 316,000 words — though hunger, starvation and starving occur seventeen times between them, and every single one is about capitalism, colonialism or feudalism. The manual has the vocabulary. It simply has no occasion to use it at home. Collectivisation is expounded as doctrine, with a long and genuinely faithful account of Lenin's co-operative plan and a warning against any attempt "to violate the Leninist principle of complete voluntariness" — and no acknowledgement anywhere that the Soviet Union violated it. On the fate of the kulaks (well-to-do peasants) the manual offers a formula of some delicacy: "It is not a question, of course, of the physical destruction of the representatives of this class, but of the abolition of the social and economic conditions" that allowed them to exploit — after which, because they resisted, "the peasant masses and the proletarian government were compelled to take measures to suppress them." What those measures were is not said. Well over a million and a half people were deported to "special settlements" in 1930–31 alone, and excess deaths in the famine of 1932–33 are generally placed at five to seven million across the USSR, concentrated in Ukraine, the Kuban and Kazakhstan; historians remain genuinely divided over whether the Ukrainian catastrophe is best described as a genocide or as the lethal result of grain extraction pursued without regard to who died. None of it is here.

The year 1937 appears exactly twice in this book. Both times it is a production statistic: by 1937, the reader learns, 98.7 per cent of production facilities were public property, and "in 1937 this class group disappeared completely." The class group is the capitalists. The sentence is true in its own terms. It is also, in that year, a sentence about people.

The Nazi–Soviet Pact does not appear. Hungary in 1956 appears five times, and it is the fifth that matters. Four are formulae: "the counterrevolutionary revolt in Hungary in October 1956", filed alongside the fourteen-power intervention of 1918 and the armed provocations against Cuba as evidence of imperialist method; and "the unanimous support the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries rendered the working people of Hungary during the counter-revolutionary uprising provoked by foreign imperialism", which is how the manual describes the invasion. The fifth is not a formula but a lesson. Weighing the balance a socialist state must strike between persuasion and coercion, the book writes: "The 1956 events in Hungary give an idea of the consequences that may result from a violation of this principle. Reactionary onslaughts there were not suppressed resolutely enough, while at the same time the democratic rights of the working people were seriously infringed." A rising in which several thousand people died, and after which Imre Nagy was tried in secret and hanged, is entered in the ledger as a case of insufficient repression. Nagy is not named. The Communist International, to which most of this book's readers' parties had belonged, is mentioned once by that name, in a paragraph explaining that by 1943 it had "outlived its usefulness".

The theory that keeps the record safe

The interesting question is not what the book omits but how it is built so that the omissions hold. The answer is in Chapter 6, "The Role of the Masses and the Individual in History", where the cult of the individual is theorised as a problem of personal character. Stalin possessed the qualities of a leader and also "other personal traits which, though secondary, may in certain circumstances have a harmful influence". The circumstances were difficult. The traits got worse. Therefore:

Stalin's violation of these standards was in direct contradiction to the laws of life of socialist society and was not at all a result of them.

And therefore: "These negative phenomena did not, of course, change the socialist nature of Soviet society." The Twentieth Congress becomes not a reckoning but a credential — "an act of great political courage, a new proof of the high political maturity of the C.P.S.U." A killing apparatus operated for two decades and the institution that operated it emerges from the analysis with its authority enhanced.

Watch what happens next. Chapter 13 reaffirms democratic centralism and the Tenth Congress ban on factions in full — and then uses it. The anti-Party group of 1957, "a handful of

ossified conservatives, who had hopelessly sullied themselves in the past, and were fearful of personal responsibility for crimes committed by them in the period of the cult of Stalin's personality", is condemned for "violating the resolution of the Tenth Congress". Molotov, Kaganovich and Malenkov are the only individuals in this book accused by name of crimes, and the charge against them is factionalism. The book condemns Stalin, defends without qualification the organisational mechanism that made Stalin possible, and turns that mechanism against the survivors of his Politburo. It is a closed circle, and the book does not notice it.

The same architecture governs the treatment of the state. Following the 1961 Programme, the dictatorship of the proletariat has "fulfilled its historic mission" and the Soviet state has "become a state of the entire people"; the chief function of the state, class suppression, is declared to have disappeared. Coercion is now applied only "against individuals who violate the laws of socialist society". The withering away of the state, the book says, "is, in effect, already going on" — written in 1962, in a country with a functioning political-prisoner system, by authors who three chapters later explain that the state must retain organs to combat "spies, saboteurs, and other subversive elements sent in by the imperialists". The theory of the withering-away is stated accurately and at length, out of Engels and Lenin, and then attached to a state that was doing nothing of the kind. That is the characteristic operation of this book: the doctrine is often correct and the referent is false.

Watch the move made once more, on the one category that could have pointed homeward. The manual is not evasive about bureaucracy in the abstract. It warns against "formalism and callousness, separation from the masses and red tape"; it quotes Lenin distinguishing democratic from bureaucratic centralism; it grants that "Centralism without democracy or with inadequately developed democracy results in deadening bureaucracy." Then it closes the question in one sentence: "It is obvious that bureaucracy is not an inherent feature of the working-class state, for this state is established by the people, serves its interests and is under its control." Obvious — by definition. And whatever bureaucracy remains has an external origin: "Bureaucratic distortions under the proletarian dictatorship are survivals of the capitalist system." A privileged administrative stratum with interests of its own is not argued against here. It is ruled out in advance by the terms in which the subject is set up.

A comprehensive manual is the fairest place to test that habit, because like a dictionary it must state its categories in the

abstract, where they can be inspected. Two questions are worth putting. First: is a deviation ever cashed out into a specified act that could be shown not to have happened? Sometimes, and it should be said plainly. The charge against the Yugoslav revisionists is quoted from the League of Communists' own programme — that in capitalism today there appear "new elements in the economy which are socialist in their objective tendency". The charge against the liquidators after 1905 is a checkable claim about a named proposal to replace the party with a "labour association". Those are refutable, and refutable is the standard.

The definitions are another matter. "Whatever form it may take, opportunism always aims — frankly or in a disguised manner — at reconciling the working class to capitalism": frankly or in disguise, so nothing observable can count against it. "The danger of revisionism is precisely that it rejects Marxism under the guise of developing it" — which converts any proposed development into evidence. Which brings the second and decisive question: could the category, as this book defines it, ever apply to the author's own side? It could not, and the manual says why in the passage that opens the subject. Opportunism reaches a Communist Party from outside it. The bourgeoisie "pins great hopes on utilising for its aims inner-Party differences"; the ranks grow with "people insufficiently mature politically", from "different intermediate strata", who "bring their prejudices and delusions into the Party"; and so "bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences, various opportunist views, despondent moods and disbelief in victory may penetrate into the Communist Parties." Penetrate — from without. The Party combats the disease and cannot be its source, exactly as socialist society could not generate Stalin and a workers' state cannot generate a bureaucracy.

None of this is an argument about how often the words appear; the counts here are unremarkable, and the vocabulary is not a Soviet monopoly — the Fourth International's own congress documents use the same terms at much the same rate. What separates them is whether the charge can be turned around. Those documents record a section's dated self-criticism ("The POR accepted that criticism in its self-criticism of April 1, 1972") and warn that the International's own youth work might "transmit into the Fourth International itself the pressures coming from a petty-bourgeois social origin". In three hundred thousand words defining the party, democratic centralism, the state and bureaucracy, this manual contains not one sentence that could ever be read against the C.P.S.U. Note too which word carries the load: opportunism and its cognates occur 56 times, revisionism and its cognates 82. The label that grew was the one aimed at people who claimed to be developing

Marxism.

1963

The date explains the rest. When this English edition appeared, the Sino-Soviet quarrel had become open warfare, and the manual fights it in the only way a doctrinal textbook can — by naming a proxy. China is praised throughout: Mao is quoted with respect on what the October Revolution brought to Asia, the land reform of 1949–52 is described admiringly. The Albanian Party of Labour takes the beating instead, condemned for nationalism advanced "under cover of 'revolutionary' phraseology". The general charge is filed under "Dogmatism and Sectarianism Lead to Isolation from the Masses": "Instead of studying actual life, dogmatists proceed from a scheme, and if the facts do not fit into the scheme they ignore the facts." Peking knew precisely who was meant, and said so.

The doctrines Peking attacked as revisionism are all here, and they are set out with more care than their opponents usually allowed. War is no longer "fatally inevitable". A peaceful transition to socialism is now possible; the Twentieth Congress resolution is quoted at length, concluding that the working class may "win a solid majority in parliament and turn it from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of the people's will". But the chapter that develops this is not the complacent thing its critics described. It warns against "parliamentary cretinism"; it insists that the parliamentary road "ensures transition to socialism only if it is supported by the mass revolutionary movement"; it observes that ruling classes faced with defeat "introduce crafty electoral systems, curtail the rights of the parliament"; and it states flatly that if they refuse to submit, "the peaceful course of the revolution may become non-peaceful." Ten years later, in Santiago, every one of those warnings was vindicated and every one of them had been ignored by the parties that took the doctrine as a licence. The manual's hedges were real. They were also, as a guide to what its readers would actually do, useless — which is a fair description of a great deal of what is in this book.

What is worth reading

A reader told that all of this is worthless will not be able to explain why intelligent people used it for twenty years. It repays honesty.

The first four hundred pages are not a catechism. Where Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" reduced a

tradition to a list of numbered features for memorisation, the philosophical chapters here argue: on causality and determinism in modern science, on the relation of absolute and relative truth, on the difference between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. They are orthodox and they are frequently tendentious about their opponents, but they are recognisably philosophy, written by people who had read the books they attack. The political economy is better still. The chapters on state-monopoly capitalism, on the militarisation of the economy, on capitalist nationalisation, are a serious attempt to describe the post-war Western economy, and the polemic against Keynes and against Right-wing social democracy engages real arguments rather than caricatures.

One thing is missing from those four hundred pages, and the absence is shared with every Soviet philosophy manual this series has examined since. There is no history of Soviet philosophy in them at all. No Deborin, no Mitin, no Zhdanov, no Lysenko, no genetics; no account of the campaigns by which Soviet philosophers were disciplined and some of them destroyed. The Sheptulin, Afanasyev and Krapivin volumes later in this series manage that silence by periodising the 1930s and 1940s away as a kind of agentless weather. This one does not even do that: the subject is not raised. The manual that is by some distance the most candid of the family about Stalin the politician has nothing whatever to say about what was done to philosophy in his name.

More surprising is how much of the book is devoted to criticising Stalin as a theorist, in detail, on the record. His thesis that class struggle necessarily sharpens as socialism advances is rejected. Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. is repudiated twice — on commodity-money relations under socialism and on the absorption of collective-farm property — and named each time. His strategic doctrine of the main blow against the social-democratic parties, and his 1928 declaration that the Left Social-Democrats were "the most dangerous carriers of bourgeois policy in the working class", are described as having forced the Communist International into a false position. Whatever else this is, it is not evasion; it is a Moscow textbook telling Communist Parties that the line they were made to follow into the 1930s was wrong. The chapters on unity of action with socialist workers, which follow from it, are the most humane pages in the volume.

And there is the sentence the book inherits from its predecessor, printed in the introductory remarks without any sign that anyone noticed: "the Marxist-Leninist theory is not a dogma, it is a guide to action." It appeared in the conclusion of

the Short Course too. Twenty-five years and one repudiated tyrant later, it is still doing the same work.

The reply

The anti-Stalinist left answered this doctrine as it was being drafted, and the answers are locatable. The fullest are in Fourth International, the English-language journal of the International Secretariat, where Ernest Mandel wrote as Ernest Germain. He took the measure of the two congresses preceding this revision in "The USSR from the XXth to the XXIst Congress of the CPSU" (no. 5), and then took apart the 1961 Programme — the document this second edition was rewritten to accommodate — in "The New Programme of the CPSU" (no. 14), which carries in the same issue the International Secretariat's resolution "The Repercussions of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU" and its open letter to that congress. He returned to it in "The World Crisis of Stalinism after 22nd Congress" (no. 15). The method of his earlier "Thirty Questions and Thirty Answers about the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" (nos. 10 and 11) is the one to imitate: he refuted the official history out of the official archive. On the 1960 Moscow Meeting whose conclusions this preface cites as authority, see Livio Maitan, "A Revolutionary Criticism of the Theses of the Moscow Conference" (no. 13); on the quarrel the book fights through Albania, Maitan again in "Problems and Prospects of Our Time in the Mirror of the Sino-Soviet Polemics" (no. 11) and "Once More on the Positions of the Chinese CP and Some Conjunctural Problems" (no. 18). The surviving run of this journal carries no dependable issue dates, so it is cited here by issue number alone.

The sharpest answer to the specific architecture of this book — Stalin as a defect of character, Molotov and Kaganovich as the named criminals, the institution left unexamined — was published in New York while the Russian manuscript was being closed. Murry Weiss, "Stalinism and the Twenty-Second Congress", in the American Socialist Workers Party's International Socialist Review, vol. 23 no. 1 (whole no. 158), Winter 1962, sets Khrushchev's denunciation of the anti-Party group beside Khrushchev's own record in the Ukraine: Tukhachevsky was "a traitor that the party had unmasked and liquidated, throwing him like dust to the winds so that no trace should be left", and at the congress "a distinguished military leader". Weiss then asks why Molotov was not allowed to reply, and answers with the argument this manual is built to prevent. If both records were read out, what would stand exposed is "not one pack of scoundrels or another pack but a

sociological phenomenon: a bureaucracy" — "not bureaucratic errors or bureaucratic crimes but a social and historical development of a parasitic bureaucratic caste." Set that against the manual's assurance that bureaucracy is not an inherent feature of a workers' state, and the two texts are arguing directly, in the same season, about the same congress.

And there is a small item in Fourth International no. 14 that says as much as any of them: "Trotsky's Rehabilitation Requested by 62 Ceylon M.P.s". What the journal printed is the text of their letter, dated 23 November 1961, asking the Soviet government to revise a verdict passed in absence in March 1938 on the man it describes as Lenin's co-leader in October and a principal builder of the Red Army. Sixty-two members of a parliament in the Indian Ocean thought the moment had arrived. Two years later this manual would not print his name. He was rehabilitated in 2001.

MARXISM

Engels—Lafargue Correspondence, Volume Three (1891–1895)

Engels's last years, to the summer of 1895 - and the volume in which he writes to the Lafargues about the cutting of his own "political testament", making these letters a primary document in one of the socialist tradition's longest arguments.

Friedrich Engels and others

Introduction

Of the three volumes of Engels's correspondence with Paul and Laura Lafargue, this is the one that ends in a death. It opens in January 1891, with the Second International barely eighteen months old and the French socialists still splintered into warring chapels; it closes in the summer of 1895, weeks before the cancer of the throat that killed Engels on 5 August. In between it holds the richest strategic thinking of his last years — on the Erfurt Programme, on the electoral breakthrough of the French workers' party, and, above all, on the single document that has shadowed his reputation ever since: the 1895 introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*, the so-called political testament that the German party leadership cut to make its author look like a prophet of peaceful, parliamentary, evolutionary progress. This volume is the place to read what Engels himself thought of that operation, because he wrote about it to the Lafargues while it was happening, in language he never meant for publication. That is the first thing to say about the book, and it is the reason the volume matters out of all proportion to its bulk.

The book's own provenance should be established before its contents. What the reader holds is an English translation, published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow — the export house then in the very act of being folded into Progress Publishers — of the third volume of Friedrich Engels. *Paul et Laura Lafargue. Correspondance*, compiled with footnotes by Émile Bottigelli and issued in 1959 by Éditions Sociales, the publishing arm of the French Communist Party. The translation is Yvonne Kapp's, and it is worth pausing on that name: Kapp was the biographer of Eleanor Marx, and no one has ever written with more feeling about the Marx circle in its London years. The apparatus, though, is not simply Bottigelli's. The Publisher's Note records that the editorial notes "follow the French edition except for certain notes found unnecessary for the English reader" — an

admission worth marking, since it means Bottigelli's apparatus reached the English reader already pruned by a second hand. Bottigelli's long introductory essay, meanwhile, has been moved to the back of the volume as an "Afterword," where a headnote explains that the English text "has, however, been edited by Mrs. Yvonne Kapp, the translator, and by Mr. Andrew Rothstein," that "a few passages which would be of lesser interest to English readers have been omitted," and that "a new section on the working-class movement in Britain, by Andrew Rothstein" has been added. Rothstein was a founder-generation member of the British Communist Party and one of its most durable Moscow-line intellectuals. So the frame around these letters was built in two workshops — Paris 1959 and a London-Moscow collaboration for the English edition — and the reader is entitled to know whose hands were on it.

Within that frame the letters themselves are first-rank material, and they should be credited warmly and concretely before any of the packaging is questioned. What the correspondence gives, and gives on almost every page, is Engels unbuttoned: the movement's living memory and its most trusted strategist, writing to two people he loved — Marx's daughter Laura and her husband Paul, the effective leaders of the French Parti Ouvrier — with the guard entirely down. He sends cheques to keep the Lafargues' landlady at bay and articles for Laura's almanac; he gossips about the English Social-Democrats ("muffs though they be as Socialists"); he grumbles that London had been "thrown back into barbarism" by a month of hard frost. And threaded through the domestic detail is a running seminar on European politics conducted at the highest level. When Lafargue faces prosecution and a hostile prefect in 1891, Engels's counsel is pure tactical temperament: "put your trust in the historical luck of our Party and keep your powder dry."

The political spine of the volume is the arrival, at last, of the French workers' party as an electoral force. Lafargue himself

was returned to the Chamber for Lille in the autumn of 1891 — a socialist deputy elected while the Fourmies shootings were still raw — and the letters follow the campaign week by week from the platforms of Lille, Roubaix and Beauvais. The by-election victory at Carmaux, the municipal gains, the mounting vote: Engels watches it all with a delight that is unmistakably genuine. "The fruits of your peregrinations through France begin to ripen," he tells Lafargue in November 1892, "and all of us are pleased to see the progress made in France." He is already looking to the general election of 1893, when the socialist group in the Chamber would indeed multiply. This was the moment the mass workers' parties came of age simultaneously — Erfurt had given the German party a fully Marxist programme in 1891, the year Engels finally published Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme to clear away the last Lassalleian debris — and the correspondence is the private record of the man who, more than any other, had willed that outcome into being and now had to think hard about what to do with it.

The same letters catch the first tremors of the fault that would one day split that achievement. In 1891 the Bavarian deputy Georg von Vollmar had begun to argue, in public, that German socialists would do their patriotic duty in the event of war — the opening shot of the party's long internal war over reformism and national defence, which ran until the Erfurt Congress and long past it. Engels saw the danger, and the correspondence shows his handling of it at its shrewdest: he declined to be drawn. "I should not like just now to speak about matters connected with the Vollmar affair while the thing is being thrashed out in Germany," he tells the Lafargues; "anything I said in France might be used, misused and abused against them in Germany, and render their position more difficult." It is a small moment, but a revealing one — the movement's most authoritative voice deliberately holding his tongue in one country so as not to hand a weapon to the reactionaries in another. The internationalist was also a tactician of when not to speak.

Thinking hard about what to do with it is exactly what produced the strategic crux of the volume, and here the letters must be quoted at length, because they are the evidence on which everything else turns. On 3 November 1892, having read the newspaper reports of the new melinite projectiles used in the French campaign in Dahomey, Engels drew a military conclusion with political teeth:

The era of barricades and street fighting has gone for good; if the military fight, resistance becomes madness. Hence the necessity to find new revolutionary tactics. I

have pondered over this for some time and am not yet settled in my mind.

Nine days later, on 12 November, he sketched what the new tactics might be:

Do you realise now what a splendid weapon you in France have had in your hands for forty years in universal suffrage; if only people had known how to use it! It's slower and more boring than the call to revolution, but it's ten times more sure, and what is even better, it indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made; it's even ten to one that universal suffrage, intelligently used by the workers, will drive the rulers to overthrow legality, that is, to put us in the most favourable position to make the revolution.

Read whole, and in Engels's own unhurried private voice, these two passages are strikingly two-edged. The ballot is a weapon precisely because it forces the ruling class to strike first — to "overthrow legality" — and so to fight the decisive battle on the workers' ground; but in the same breath Engels imagines a socialist majority in the Chamber able "to dictate terms," and confesses, of the whole question, that he is "not yet settled in my mind." The ambiguity is not a later reader's invention. It is in the founder, and he says so.

That ambiguity is what the German leadership exploited in the spring of 1895, and this volume is where we catch Engels reacting to it in real time. He had written a new introduction for the Berlin reprint of Marx's articles on France of 1848–50. On 28 March 1895 he told Laura that the piece "has suffered somewhat from the, as I think, exaggerated desires of our Berlin friends not to say anything which might be used as a means to assist in the passing of the Umsturzvorlage" — the anti-subversion bill then before the Reichstag — and that, under the circumstances, "I had to give way." Six days later, on 3 April, the tone hardens into open anger. Writing to Lafargue, he reports:

Liebkecht has just played me a fine trick. He has taken from my introduction to Marx's articles on France 1848-50 everything that could serve his purpose in support of peaceful and anti-violent tactics at any price, which he has chosen to preach for some time now, particularly at this juncture when coercive laws are being drawn up in Berlin. But, I preach those tactics only for the Germany of to-day and even then with many reservations. For France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, such tactics could not be followed as a whole and, for Germany, they could become

inapplicable to-morrow.

No summary of the "testament" controversy is worth as much as those two sentences from the man himself. Engels did consent to soften the text — "I had to give way" — and he was then furious to find the softened version quarried for a doctrine of legality "at any price" that he explicitly held to be provisional, national, and reversible "to-morrow." Both halves are true, and the volume gives us both.

The question the brief for this series asks is what the Moscow edition does with all this — whether the apparatus enlists Engels for a parliamentary, "peaceful" line of its own, in the way one has learned to expect of Soviet editions issued in the era of peaceful coexistence. On the central point, the honest answer is a surprise, and it should be stated plainly, because credibility depends on it: this apparatus confronts the bowdlerisation rather than exploiting it. Bottigelli's Afterword meets the issue head-on. "It is well known," it says, "how the importance that Engels attached to universal suffrage has been misused to make him appear as a supporter of 'peaceful tactics.' The distortion to which the German Social-Democratic Party lent itself in publishing his preface to Marx's *Class Struggles in France* in 1895 is also known." It states flatly that "Liebknecht had no compunction in mutilating Engels' text," it prints the 3 April letter as its proof, and it draws the sober general moral that to make Engels "an advocate of reformist tactics" was to deprive scientific socialism "of its richness and its flexibility, and Marxism was transformed into a rigid dogma." The footnotes are candid in the same direction: one records that even the French socialists, reprinting the offending paragraph in *Le Socialiste* in 1900, quietly dropped Liebknecht's name. An editor bent on drafting Engels into a gradualist coalition would not have written any of this. On its declared subject, the apparatus tells the truth.

Nor does the apparatus mute Engels's criticisms of the German party, as one might have feared it would. The Afterword names the SPD's "opportunist tendencies" without softening, records that "when it came to a question of national defence, the principles of proletarian internationalism were brushed aside," and states baldly that "the threat of a fresh Anti-Socialist Law encouraged the concealment of the proletariat's revolutionary aims." But this candour is worth reading with one eye on its date. By 1959 the German Social Democracy was no longer a fraternal party gone astray but the standing adversary of the Cold-War division of Europe, the party that had just adopted the Bad Godesberg programme and renounced Marxism outright. Exposing the reformism of the 1890s German leadership cost a Moscow editor of 1959

nothing and served him a good deal; the honesty is real, but it is not disinterested. It runs with the grain of the line, not against it — which is precisely why it is safe to indulge.

The manipulation, where it exists, is subtler and runs the other way — not toward gradualism but toward Bolshevism, and it takes the form of resolving Engels's genuine uncertainty into a certainty he did not possess. The Afterword reads the 1892 letters as the settled programme of a man who had found "that new revolutionary tactics he had been seeking," when the letters themselves end on "I am not yet settled in my mind." It routes the whole story teleologically toward 1914: after Engels's death "revolutionary dialectics yielded to Bernstein's theories," revisionism "led Social-Democracy to its betrayal," and the line runs straight to "the well-known defection in 1914." And it quietly installs the Leninist yardstick as the measure of everyone in the story — a footnote faults even Kautsky's celebrated commentary on the Erfurt Programme because, "as Lenin pointed out," it "did not proclaim the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat." This is a real editorial thumb on the scale, but it is worth being precise about its nature. It does not falsify what Engels wrote; it over-determines what he meant, closing an ambiguity he left open and enlisting him, retrospectively, in a quarrel — Bolshevik against Second International — that postdated his death by a generation.

The same retrospective stamp lies over the volume's biographical index, which is the apparatus at its most reflexive. The entries are not neutral identifications but verdicts: Lassalle "was the first of the opportunists in the modern working-class movement"; Clara Zetkin "fought against revisionism and was a member of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party"; Vera Zasulich, having translated Marx into Russian, is dismissed in a clause — "After the split she joined the Mensheviks." A reader who took the index as a guide would arrive at each letter already knowing who is a hero and who a renegade, sorted by a schema fixed decades after the correspondence closed. This is where the détente-era pressure the brief anticipated actually surfaces, and it surfaces not as an argument but as an emphasis. Bottigelli's Afterword ends by dwelling on Engels's "horror of human suffering and his love of peace," on his dread of "the frightful holocaust of the war to come," and it closes the case for the defence with Engels's own line, "I am for 'peace at any price' since it is not we who will pay the price." Every word of that is real and quotable from the letters. But the choice to make Engels-the-peace-lover the final note of a 1959 edition, at the height of the coexistence line, is a choice — and it sits a little awkwardly beside the same essay's insistence, twenty pages earlier, that the ballot's whole virtue

was to bring on the day of "a call to armed revolution." The apparatus wants Engels militant against the German gradualists and Engels peaceable for the readers of 1959, and does not quite reconcile them.

That unreconciled Engels is, in fact, the real Engels of these years, and it brings us to the last thing an honest introduction owes the book: an assessment of the man the letters reveal, strengths and weaknesses named without flinching, because this is a tradition reckoning with its own founder and not a court either prosecuting or canonising him. The strengths are overwhelming and they are on display constantly. There is the strategic realism of the barricades letter, which grasped before almost anyone that the industrialisation of firepower had permanently changed the arithmetic of insurrection — a judgement the twentieth century only confirmed. There is the internationalism that was not a slogan but a working method: Engels corrects the French on the peasant question, warns the Germans against chauvinism, tracks the English municipal socialists and the Spanish and the Italians, and holds the whole in one field of vision. There is his insistence, against every sectarian temptation, that emancipation had to be the workers' own act, won through their own organisation and their own votes — "intelligently used by the workers." And there is the human generosity that Kapp's translation renders so well: the patience, the humour, the unfeigned joy at the Lafargues' victories, the quiet subsidies, the refusal to stand on his own authority even as everyone around him deferred to it.

The weaknesses are of a piece with the strengths, and the volume does not let us pretend otherwise. The deepest is the one the whole book circles: the parliamentary optimism of the 1890s was genuinely ambiguous, and Engels, by his own admission, had not resolved it. He could see that universal suffrage was a detonator; he could also half-see it as a road to a governing majority "able to dictate terms," and he did not, before he died, force the two visions to a decision. The Second International seized the reassuring half and let the revolutionary half wither into the fatalism that August 1914 blew apart — and while the SPD leaders who cut his introduction bear the guilt of the mutilation, the raw material for their misreading was, in part, his own unsettled prose. It does no service to Engels to deny this; he would have denied it least of all. Nor was his judgement of persons and parties infallible. The correspondence shows him a committed partisan of the Lafargues' Parti Ouvrier in the French factional wars, quick to see the sectarianism of the rival Possibilists and slower to see the Guesdists' own rigidity — a doctrinaire streak in French Marxism that would cost it dearly within the decade. He backed his friends, as friends do, and the

movement's living memory was not always the movement's most detached referee.

None of this diminishes the book; it is the reason to read it. Two things are here at once, and both are valuable. There is Engels in his last years, thinking aloud to the two people he trusted most, at the exact moment when the strategy of the modern workers' movement was being decided — and there is the record, in the apparatus wrapped around him, of how a later movement chose to remember, edit, and enlist him. The correspondence is a primary source of the first importance; the Afterword, the footnotes and the index are a secondary source almost as instructive, a document of the Moscow of 1959 as surely as the letters are a document of the London of 1895. Read together, and read critically in both directions, they let us watch the founder and his heirs at the same time — the founder honest about his own uncertainty, the heirs busy resolving it for him. That is a rare and useful thing to have between two covers, and it is why this volume, of the three, is the one to read first.

HISTORY

Letters From the Dead

Last letters written by Soviet soldiers, partisans and civilians who did not survive the war - to wives, parents and children, from dugouts and prison cells. Ordinary voices in extremity, needing no advocacy. Translated by James Riordan.

V. A. Kondratyev and Zakhar Nikolaevich Politov

Introduction to the 1965 Edition

On 18 September 1942, in the factory district of Stalingrad, a regimental commissar named Dmitri Petrakov was knocked unconscious by a blast. When he came round in a medical tent he wrote to his daughter:

My little black-eyed Mila, I'm sending you a cornflower.... Just imagine—the battle's on, enemy shells bursting all around, craters around us and a flower growing here.... And suddenly an explosion ... the cornflower is torn off. I picked it up and put it in my pocket.... The flower had grown, reached for the sun but had been torn off by an explosion, and if I hadn't picked it up it would have been trampled upon.

He was killed the following summer on the way into Orel. There are ninety-odd documents in this book and most of them are like that one: written on a knee, on a scrap, on the back of a Party card, by people who knew they had hours left and used them to say something to one person. A nineteen-year-old in Slutsk, whose name is not known, wrote to a boy called Borya: "Yesterday, when they walloped me very hard, I whispered to myself 'Borya, dear' and told them nothing—I don't want them to hear your name." Vera Porshneva, twenty-four, who had had needles driven under her fingernails in a barn cellar near Borisovka, wrote to her mother: "I've been without food now for two days and nights, but it's easier to die on an empty stomach. You know, Mum, it's such a pity to die." Bina Lurje of the 1st Latvian Volunteer Regiment, dying in the street fighting for Tallinn in August 1941: "It's hard to die at 24, but for such a worthy cause, when millions of lives are held in the balance of history, I, too, give my life."

The three lines scratched on the walls of the Brest Fortress between 22 June and 20 July 1941 are among the shortest texts in the history of the war and among the hardest to read without stopping:

There were five of us: Sedov, I. Grutov, Bogolyub,

Mikhailov, V. Selivanov. We fought the first attack on 22.VI.1941 at 3.15. We shall die but not retreat! We'll die but won't desert the fortress. I am dying but won't surrender! Farewell, my country. 20/VII-41.

This is primary testimony of the largest and most destructive campaign ever fought. Between June 1941 and May 1945 the Soviet Union lost something in the region of twenty-seven million people, soldiers and civilians together—the overwhelming majority of all Allied deaths in Europe, and a share of the whole war's dead that no other belligerent approaches. The great majority of German military deaths in the war—by most estimates three-quarters or more—were inflicted on the Eastern Front. Every serious account of the war rests on that arithmetic, and the people in this book are the arithmetic: the border guards on the Zhitomir–Kiev highway who fought sixteen tanks for an hour and a half with rifles and were buried, 136 of them, by peasants from the neighbouring villages; the sailors on the Takhkun horn of Dago Island who put their farewell in a bottle and threw it into the sea, where a Soviet patrol vessel found it that winter; Katya Susanina in Liozno, a slave to a German landowner, who wrote to her father on her fifteenth birthday and hanged herself, having sewn the envelope into the brickwork of an oven where it was found after the liberation. Whatever one concludes about the state that published this collection, those things happened and these are the words of the people they happened to. That is the book's first and permanent value, and it does not depend on the frame around it.

It is worth saying plainly what the frame is, because the frame is where an introduction's business lies.

The book appeared in 1965, and 1965 is not an accidental year. Khrushchev, who had reasons of his own for keeping the war at arm's length, had allowed the anniversary to pass quietly through the late fifties. Within months of his removal in October 1964 the new leadership restored 9 May as a public holiday and staged the first Victory parade on Red Square since 1945. The twentieth anniversary became a state occasion,

and remained one; the cult of the war that would define Brezhnev's Soviet Union for the next eighteen years dates from that spring. *Letters From the Dead* is an export edition timed to it, put out in English by Progress for readers abroad. That does not make the documents in it false. It does explain the apparatus.

The apparatus consists of an unsigned introduction, "To Those Who Survived", and a headnote after each document giving the writer's biography and the circumstances. The headnotes are, on the whole, good—researched, specific, and often restrained, telling you where a letter was found and in whose pocket. The introduction is another matter. It reads the letters as evidence for a thesis: "Through the innumerable acts of heroism we can feel the unbroken spirit, the intrepid faith in victory over fascism, the supremacy of communist over fascist ideas." Many of these people were indeed Communists and Komsomol members and say so; the state that mobilised them, armed them and evacuated its industry beyond the Urals was a real state and its capacity was real. But a book that has just quoted a girl saying it is easier to die on an empty stomach does not need to be told what her death proves.

Four things about the frame are worth reporting.

The first is what the introduction does with the catastrophe of 1941. It says: "At first losses were many and defeats common. In defence Soviet troops stood firm, then switched to the offensive." Nothing more. The destruction of the Soviet air force on the ground in the opening days, the encirclements at Minsk, Smolensk and Kiev, the millions taken prisoner in the first six months—none of it is explained, and no one is responsible for it. The reason is not in the book because it could not be. Stalin had beheaded his own officer corps in 1937–38; he had refused to credit the intelligence that reached him about the concentration facing the frontier; and he had treated the pact of August 1939 as a settled orientation rather than a manoeuvre. The Fourth International said so at the time. In June 1942, in an assessment of the war's first year, James Cadman wrote that while "lack of fighting spirit was certainly not one of the causes of the Red Army defeats," it was "on the shoulders of the Stalinist bureaucracy that the responsibility for the defeats lie"—the Soviet press having, days before the attack, been "vehemently denying all reports of the impending clash" (Fourth International, vol. III no. 6, June 1942). Ernest Mandel put the same judgement in its longer form forty years later: the purges "decapitated the Red Army, disorganised the defences of the country, delivered Poland and Europe to Hitler, and facilitated the Nazi attack on the USSR," while the industrial base built by the Five Year Plans "enabled the Soviet

Union to survive in the end" (The Meaning of the Second World War, ch. 2, "The Immediate Causes", p. 33). Both halves of that sentence matter. (Mandel's own text misdates the signature of the Secret Additional Protocol by four days; it was signed on the night of 23 August 1939.)

The second is a name that is not here. Stalin does not appear in this book. Not once—not in the introduction, not in a headnote, not in a letter. "Stalingrad" appears; the man does not. In 1965 he had been out of the Mausoleum for four years and was not yet back in the war's official story, and the compilers evidently found it safest to write a book about the Soviet war in which the Soviet commander-in-chief has no existence at all. It is a strange silence and readers should notice it, because it is the clearest single indication of how much of this volume is a document of 1965 rather than of 1941.

The third is the one place where the book prints something that is not true. The introduction invokes "the famous 28 Panfilov men who fought to the last man" at Dubosekovo. The episode was a newspaper invention: the Soviet Chief Military Prosecutor's office investigated it in 1948, established that the Krasnaya Zvezda correspondents had constructed the story, found that several of the twenty-eight were alive, and filed a report that was suppressed and only published in the 1990s. The compilers of this book cannot be blamed for believing it—every Soviet schoolchild was taught it, and it is still defended in Russia today. But the contrast is instructive, and it is the strongest argument for reading this collection: Vinogradov's note counting off his dead comrades one by one is a real piece of paper and it did not need improving.

The fourth concerns who is counted. Jews are mentioned twice in this book, both times in a single headnote, as one of the categories—"Soviet officers, Communists, Jews or Russians"—that the Germans picked out for killing at the hospital Leonid Silin ran under false pretences at Kremenchug. Something on the order of two and a half million Jews were murdered on Soviet soil, most of them shot in pits within walking distance of their homes in the first eighteen months of the occupation. They appear here, when they appear, as Soviet citizens, and the specific machinery that hunted them is not described. The introduction mentions the "Death Fortress" the Germans set up outside Kaunas, and mentions it as a place where anti-fascists of many nations were held together—which is true, and which is also the site where tens of thousands of Lithuanian Jews and Jews deported from western Europe were shot. That erasure was Soviet policy, not the compilers' private choice, and it deserves to be named without being turned into a stick.

Prisoners of war are the one place where the book is braver than one expects. Soviet POWs are here in numbers and they are here honourably—the note from the Chistyakov camp, Boris Nozdrin's diary from Vespren, written weeks before he was shot with thousands of others as the front approached, dreaming of Siberia and a woman called Masha. This matters because for years after the war captivity was itself treated as a stain in the Soviet Union, and returning prisoners were filtered, and many were sent on to camps of their own. That story is nowhere in the volume. Its shadow, however, falls across the book's most famous inclusion. Musa Jalil, the Tatar poet, was taken wounded near Myasnoi Bor in 1942 and worked inside the Idel-Ural legion the Germans raised from Soviet Muslim prisoners—the headnote says so, calling it the "'Ideal Urals' committee," and says he was there "on instructions from the underground." He was arrested in August 1943, condemned, and executed in Berlin in 1944, having copied out sixty of his prison poems and left them with a request:

If this little book comes into your hands, write out a fair copy carefully and accurately, keep it in a safe place and after the war get it to Kazan, have it published as the poems of the Tatar people's dead poet. That is my dying wish.

The book records, without dates, that he was "posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union" and the Lenin Prize. What it does not record is the interval. For years after the war Jalil was carried on Soviet lists as a suspected traitor because of the legion, and his family lived under that; the notebooks—one handed to the Tatar Union of Writers in 1946, one delivered to the Soviet consulate in Brussels in 1947 by André Timmermans, the Belgian who had shared his cell—had to argue his case for him before the honours came in the mid-1950s. A man wrote poems in Moabit prison asking that they be got to Kazan, and it was the poems that eventually cleared his name. The book prints the request and passes over the reason it was necessary.

None of that is a charge against anyone in these pages. It is a description of what a 1965 anniversary volume could and could not say, and it should be held apart from the documents, which owe the frame nothing. Mandel, who was unsparing about Stalin, was equally clear about who won the war: "No amount of exhortation by the state, party or military leadership would have succeeded without this determination of the Soviet masses to fight and win the war" (The Meaning of the Second World War, ch. 3, "The Social Forces", pp. 37–38). That is the right way round, and it is what this book, read against its own introduction, actually shows. The Soviet people were not the instruments of the victory. They were the victory, and they

paid for it at a rate no other people paid, partly because of what their own government had done to them beforehand.

Read the letters. They are short, and there is nothing in them that needs an editor's help.

HISTORY

Patrice Lumumba: Fighter for Africa's Freedom

Lumumba's own speeches and letters, including the last one written from a Katanga prison, with memoirs of him and the United Nations inquiry into his murder. A memorial volume, and the primary material is the reason to have it.

Patrice Lumumba

Introduction to the 1966 Edition

This is not a biography. Its own opening page says what it is: "This is a collection of speeches and letters by Patrice Lumumba, reminiscences of meetings with the fearless fighter for Africa's freedom, and official documents." A short biographical sketch opens the volume; after that the book is a documentary anthology in four movements — Lumumba's own speeches and correspondence ("Lumumba Speaks for the Congo"), memoirs by those who met him ("An Unforgettable Personality"), the United Nations inquiry into his murder ("How the Crime Was Perpetrated"), and a closing chapter of Soviet state papers, "Soviet Union, True Friend of the Congo." It is, in form and in feeling, a memorial — a wreath laid by Progress Publishers on the grave of a man murdered five years before the English edition appeared.

And here, unusually for this series, the plain duty of an introduction is to endorse most of what the book contains before it questions any of it. Patrice Lumumba was the first Prime Minister of the independent Congo, installed by an electoral victory in June 1960 and destroyed within weeks. Dismissed unconstitutionally in September, handed by his own army's chief of staff to the secessionists of Katanga, he was murdered on 17 January 1961 — beaten, shot, and his body dissolved in acid — with the connivance of Belgium, of the departing colonial power's business houses, of the men in Léopoldville who had risen with him and then sold him, and (as later inquiry would establish, though this book could not yet know it) of Washington. His killing is one of the defining crimes of decolonisation: a democratically installed African head of government destroyed by the empire that was supposedly handing him power. On all of this the Soviet Union stood, in 1960–61, on the right side — against the murderers. That must be said without a shadow of irony, because it is true, and because the point of a critical introduction is not to manufacture an even-handedness the facts do not support.

Dating the text

The spine reads 1966; the book was "translated from the Russian." But the latest event anywhere in its pages is the Soviet Government's statement of 14 February 1961 and Khrushchev's condolence telegram to Lumumba's widow of the same date, which close the volume. Nothing datable inside it is later than February 1961. The years 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1965 do not occur in the text at all. Its documents — Lumumba's speeches of 1960, his prison letters, the UN Commission report of November 1961, the Soviet notes of 1960–61 — belong entirely to the ten months of the Congo crisis and its immediate aftermath. This is a book assembled at the hour of Lumumba's death and issued, in English, five years later.

That gap matters, because of what fell into it. When the Russian material was gathered, Lumumba's murder was raw and the Lumumbist cause looked open: his deputy Antoine Gizenga held a rival government in Stanleyville, and the Soviet statement printed here could still promise that his blood "will rouse new national-liberation forces." By the time the English edition reached its readers in 1966, the sequel had been written. The Stanleyville regime had collapsed; the great Lumumbist rebellions of 1964 in Kwilu and the east had been crushed with Belgian paratroops and American aircraft; and in November 1965 Colonel — by then General — Joseph Mobutu, the officer who in September 1960 had seized power and delivered Lumumba to his captors, had made himself absolute master of the Congo. The book cannot be faulted for failing to describe events that had not happened when its material was compiled; a reader should not mistake the absence of 1964 or 1965 for evasion. But the editorial decision to export this 1961 memorial unchanged in 1966 — to keep it frozen at the graveside while the man who dug the grave sat in the presidential palace — is itself a choice, and it keeps the volume pure as martyrology precisely by declining to look at the five years since.

What the book gets right, and gives whole

The core of the book is Lumumba's own voice, and its first virtue is that it does not curate that voice into a Soviet ventriloquist's dummy. Test the volume by the one measure that matters for an anthology — does it give the man's words in full, or trim them to fit? — and it largely passes.

The centrepiece is the independence-day speech of 30 June 1960, retitled here, blandly, "My Government Serves the People." It is printed complete. It is one of the great documents of African liberation, and the book lets it run: the eighty years of colonial rule "filled with tears, fire and blood"; the daily humiliation remembered in a single grammatical wound — "the black was addressed as tu, not because he was a friend, but because the polite vous was reserved for the white man"; the forced labour, the seized lands, the law "never the same for the white and the black." A more cynical editor would have stopped there. This one prints the passages that cut against the Cold-War frame too — Lumumba's conciliatory hand to the former ruler ("Even Belgium, which has finally learned the lessons of history, has no grounds for opposing our independence"), his pledge to protect foreign residents, his appeal to accept co-operation from "numerous foreign states" without naming any. The speech is left as Lumumba gave it, and that is to the book's credit.

What the book supplies around the speech, however, is nothing. The reader is not told the scene: that this address was Lumumba's unscheduled reply, from the floor, to King Baudouin, who had just praised the "genius" of Leopold II and the civilising work of Belgian colonialism to the faces of the Congolese it had ruled. The drama that made the speech immortal — a subject people's leader answering a king's condescension to his face — is absent. Baudouin appears in the book only in the biographical sketch and the memoirs, never as the man Lumumba was rebuking. The words are preserved; the confrontation that gave them their edge is quietly removed, and with it the sense that Lumumba's defiance was aimed not only at colonialism in the abstract but at the departing sovereign in the room.

The same generosity governs the rest of the anthology. It prints Lumumba's letters to the UN Secretary-General and even Hammarskjöld's chilly replies; his secret letter from Thysville prison, written "on bad paper," cataloguing his starvation and the thirty-five days his clothes had gone unwashed; his address to Congolese youth; his last message on the radio. And it prints, complete, the letter that is the book's true climax — the "Will," the letter to his wife Pauline written from prison in the

certainty of death. It is beyond any commentary a critic could add:

"My dear wife, I am writing these words to you, not knowing whether they will ever reach you, or whether I shall be alive when you read them."

"The day will come when history will speak. But it will not be the history which will be taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations. It will be the history that will be taught in the countries which have won freedom from colonialism and its puppets."

"Do not weep for me. I know that my tormented country will be able to defend its freedom and its independence."

A book that prints that letter in full has earned the right to be called a memorial to Lumumba rather than a mere instrument. Whatever else is said here, this remains: Progress put these documents into English and kept them in the world, and they are worth having.

The appropriation, stated fairly

The instrumental element is real, but it lies in the framing, not in any falsification of Lumumba's words — and it is important to locate it precisely, because the shared cause here is genuine and the temptation to overstate the critique should be resisted.

The frame is the fifth chapter, "Soviet Union, True Friend of the Congo," and the running insistence, throughout, that the decisive external fact of the Congo crisis was Soviet friendship. The reminiscences that "re-create his unforgettable personality" are written substantially by Soviet visitors — the publicist Yuri Zhukov foremost — and they return, again and again, to the Soviet aircraft bringing food, the Soviet lorries landing at Matadi, the gift consignments. The closing chapter frames the USSR as "the first country" to the Republic's defence and "a sincere and selfless friend."

Two things need saying about this. First, Moscow's solidarity was not invented. Lumumba himself, in an interview reproduced here, calls the Soviet Union "the only Great Power whose stand conformed to our people's will and desire" — and in the summer of 1960, with the United States backing his enemies and the UN operation turning against him, that was simply accurate. The USSR did recognise the Republic, did denounce the Belgian aggression, did send food and vehicles, did offer scholarships. A murdered anti-colonial leader was honoured in Moscow when the West was arranging his

destruction; the Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow was renamed for him within days of the news of his death. The solidarity was genuine and it was honourable.

Second, it was also thin, and the book's own documents quietly say so. What the Soviet Union actually delivered, on the evidence gathered here, was moral and diplomatic support, food, and a "consignment of motor vehicles and equipment" — real, welcome, and wholly insufficient to alter the balance of force in a country garrisoned by Belgian officers and policed by a UN operation hostile to its Prime Minister. When the crisis came, Moscow could protest and it could mourn; it could not save him. The most striking admission is in the Soviet Government's own statement of 14 February 1961, which the book prints as its indictment of the West: "Everyone knows that a word from these governments to their retainer Hammarskjöld would have sufficed to turn the course of events in the Congo and save the life of the Congolese national hero." Read closely, that sentence concedes everything. The power to save Lumumba lay entirely with Washington, Brussels and the UN; the statement nowhere claims that the Soviet Union could have done it and was thwarted. The frame displaces all agency onto the enemy — which is honest about Soviet impotence even as it is silent about the reasons for it. Moscow would not risk a distant confrontation over the Congo, and did not.

So the appropriation is not a lie about what the USSR did. It is the quieter operation of converting a murdered non-aligned nationalist into a trophy of Soviet friendship — of making the story of Lumumba a chapter in the story of the Soviet Union's benevolence toward Africa. And the book's own contents resist this, if the reader lets them. The Lumumba of these pages is not a communist and not a Soviet client. He is a radical nationalist who stretched out his hand, in Zhukov's own reminiscence, "to everybody who desires such co-operation, to the Americans and to the Russians, to the French and the British, and even to the Belgians, if they are prepared to stop their intervention." His creed was national independence and pan-African unity, not the class struggle; his tragedy was that non-alignment offered no protection against a determined empire. The frame would make him Moscow's man. His words, printed here, show a man who wanted to be no great power's man at all — and this is worth stating in 1966, at the height of the Sino-Soviet competition for African allegiance, when a dead Lumumba was an asset both Moscow and Peking wished to claim.

The United Nations, doubled

The one place where the book's framing and Lumumba's own convictions genuinely converge is the United Nations — and even here the convergence is worth examining, because the volume's handling of the UN is not single but double.

There is no omission of the UN to complain of; on the contrary, Hammarskjöld's ONUC operation is the villain of the piece, arraigned by Lumumba and by Moscow alike. Lumumba's grievance was concrete and, on the record, largely just: he had called in UN forces to expel the Belgians and end the Katanga secession, and Hammarskjöld's men had instead treated with the secessionist Tshombe, declined to place their troops at the legal government's disposal, and stood by — or worse — as that government was overthrown. Lumumba's letters here document the quarrel in his own hand; his Will names "some highly placed officials of the United Nations, the body upon which we placed all our hope," among those who betrayed him. The Soviet statement is harsher still, calling Hammarskjöld's conduct "a foul betrayal" and demanding his removal — which was Soviet policy, the "troika" campaign to replace the Secretary-General with a three-man body, and which the book advances without disclosing that this was a broader Soviet institutional offensive against the office itself.

But set beside this is Chapter IV, and here the book performs a manoeuvre it does not acknowledge. To document the murder, it reprints — "in abridged form" — the report of the UN's own Commission of Investigation of November 1961, and introduces it by calling the Commission's work "undoubtedly conscientious and impartial." So the United Nations is, within one volume, both the treacherous instrument of the colonialists and the impartial tribunal whose findings establish the crime. The reconciliation is never stated, because it cannot be stated without admitting the criterion: the UN is conscientious when it indicts Belgium and the West, and a colonialist lackey when its operation fails the Lumumba government. That is an instrumental relation to the institution, and it is visible on the book's own pages — the anti-UN memorial resting its case for the prosecution on a UN document it elsewhere teaches the reader to despise.

The reply: honour, and a harder reading

The Fourth International honoured Lumumba too, and it is important to record that the anti-Stalinist left did not treat his murder as a Cold-War talking point but as a crime and a lesson. Writing in the *International Socialist Review* (vol. 24, no. 2, whole no. 163, Spring 1963), Carolyn Kerry reviewed

the posthumous Congo, My Country and reproduced the same testament to his wife that this book prints as the "Will" — in a different English translation, but the same document, ending "Long live the Congo! Long live Africa!" Kerry's verdict on the killing is as unqualified as Moscow's: "The treacherous role of the United Nations played no small part in facilitating this dastardly act." On the crime, and on the UN, our tradition and this book agree.

Where they part is in the reading of why Lumumba fell — and here the reply corpus offers something the Progress volume withholds. For the Soviet frame, Lumumba's destruction is wholly external: an imperialist crime, executed through a bought army and a corrupt Secretary-General. That is true as far as it goes, and it goes a long way. But it stops exactly where analysis should begin. Kerry's review reads Lumumba's own political development as the evidence: the Lumumba of 1956 had advocated a gradual "Belgo-Congolese Community" under Belgian "tutelage," and under the pressure of the revolution "did not hesitate to jettison the reformist views" — because "history today has placed on the agenda tasks which cry out for revolutionary solutions." This is the Fourth International's long-held theory of the colonial revolution applied to the Congo: that in a country held down by imperialism, the democratic and national tasks — independence, unity, land, an end to the looting of the mines — cannot be carried through to completion by nationalism alone, however brave, but only by a movement willing to strike at the property relations that made the Congo, in the words of the book Lumumba himself read, "a source of colossal superprofits." Lumumba's non-alignment, his appeals to Washington and to the UN, his hope that juridical independence might be defended by international law — these were not personal errors so much as the limits of a nationalism that had no answer when the empire refused to abide by its own rules. The reply corpus honours the martyr and refuses the consolation: the reliance on the UN that Lumumba's own Will came to curse was, in the Trotskyist reading, of a piece with the reliance on a "national" solution that the class enemy would never permit.

The second thing the reply supplies is precisely what the frozen 1961 memorial cannot: an account of the aftermath. The same journal, reviewing René Lemarchand's study in 1965 ("Political Awakening in the Congo," ISR vol. 26, no. 2, whole no. 171, Spring 1965), was already probing the "class divisions between the Congolese leaders themselves" that a purely anti-imperialist frame leaves out of focus — the divisions that turned Mobutu, Kasavubu and Tshombe from Lumumba's colleagues into his executioners. A reader who wants to know

what became of the cause this book memorialises — the Stanleyville government, the 1964 risings and their bloody suppression, the consolidation of Mobutu — will not find it here, and should be sent to that literature. It is not a failing of a book compiled in 1961 that it does not contain 1965. It is a limit of reading only this book in 1966, and beyond, that one would never learn the decolonisation it celebrates had, in the Congo, so wholly miscarried.

One honest caveat about the reply. The immediate reaction of the Fourth International's own press to the murder — the weeklies of 1961 — is not in the holdings consulted here; the contemporaneous socialist commentary available is the quarterly ISR from 1963 onward. The judgement recorded above is therefore the movement's considered verdict at two years' and four years' distance, not its first cry. It does not differ, on the essentials, from what Moscow said in February 1961: that this was a colonialist murder, and that the UN operation was complicit in it. The difference is that the reply refused to let the crime stand in for the whole explanation.

What to take from it

Read this book for Lumumba, and it is indispensable. The independence speech, the prison letters, the Will — these are the words of one of the twentieth century's authentic liberation martyrs, printed generously and, in the main, without expurgation. On the crime itself the book is not wrong: Lumumba was murdered by the empire and its servants, and the outrage that fills these pages is earned. The Soviet solidarity it records was, in this instance, real and creditable; there is no call to sneer at it, and a critic who did would be doing tribalism, not history.

What the book cannot give — because it is a memorial and not an analysis, and because it is a Soviet memorial with a use for its subject — is the harder truth that runs alongside the crime: that Moscow's friendship, however genuine, was late, limited and powerless to save him; that the Cold-War frame which makes the Congo a chapter in Soviet virtue also makes a non-aligned nationalist into an asset he never was; and that the reliance on outside guarantors which the frame celebrates was the very thing Lumumba's Will, written in a Katanga prison, had learned to distrust. "It will not be the history which will be taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations," he wrote. He might have added Moscow to the list — not because the Soviet Union was among his murderers, for it was not, but because the history taught there, too, had its own reasons for the shape it gave his life. This edition keeps his

words. Read them past the frame, and they say more than the frame allows.

FICTION

Ordeal, Book One: The Sisters

Petersburg on the eve of 1914, and two sisters carried into the revolution. Book One of the trilogy, translated by Ivy Litvinov. With a new critical introduction.

Alexei Tolstoy

Introduction to the 1965 Edition

The novel opens by inviting you to hate the city it is set in.

A stranger of a thoughtful turn of mind, newly arrived in Petersburg from the leafy side streets of some suburban resort, would have experienced complex sensations of mental excitement and spiritual oppression.

He walks the straight misty streets past bleak unlighted houses, each with a drowsing porter at the gate; he looks at the Neva and the "grim cheerless palaces with pillared façades"; he looks up at the Peter-Paul Cathedral, "so un-Russian in its dizzying height", and down at barges of damp logs along the granite quays; he looks into the faces of passers-by, "pale and careworn, with eyes as sombre as the city itself". And then Tolstoy offers him two options, and only two:

the stranger would, if well-disposed, have merely huddled deeper into his coat-collar, or, if disaffected, have told himself that it wouldn't be a bad idea to deliver a crashing blow, and shatter all this petrified magic into smithereens.

That is the first page of a trilogy about the Russian revolution, and the sentence is doing something careful. The impulse to smash Petersburg is not given to a revolutionary. It is given to any disaffected visitor, as an entirely natural response to the place — and the place is then described for four pages as a hallucination that deserves it. Two centuries "passed like a dream"; palace coups, regicides and bloody executions "flitted by like hallucinations"; weak-minded women held almost divine authority; "the country was being drained of its lifeblood to feed the insatiable spectres haunting Petersburg." The poet Bessonov, crossing a bridge in a rubber-tired droshky, decides that the lamps and the sleeping city behind him "were but a dream, a chimera, a figment of his brain, sodden with drink, love-making and boredom."

Hold on to that opening, because of who wrote it and when. It was not written by a Bolshevik. It was written in Paris, by a count who had left Russia after the revolution, for readers who

had left with him.

The edition, and the fault line running through it

Three dates, and the third is the interesting one.

Alexei Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1883–1945) wrote *The Sisters* in emigration between 1918 and 1921. The last line of this volume is its own date: August 1921. It first reached readers in the émigré press, and it was written for them. Tolstoy broke with the emigration the following year and returned to Soviet Russia in 1923.

The other two books of the trilogy were written afterwards, and inside: *Nineteen Eighteen* in 1927–28, *Bleak Morning* in 1940–41. In 1943 the completed trilogy took the State Prize, which this volume announces on its own half-title page. Tolstoy went on to become the most decorated writer in the Soviet Union and died in 1945.

So *Ordeal* is a trilogy that changes sides in the middle. Book One is an émigré's novel, written abroad for exiles, ending in the summer of 1921. Books Two and Three are the work of a Soviet laureate writing socialist realism. The English reader of this volume is holding the pre-conversion book, and nothing in the volume says so.

This Progress edition is the second printing, 1965, of a translation first published in 1953, with book design by Y. Kogan and illuminations and tailpieces by V. Sveshnikov. The Russian title is *Хождение по мукам* — literally a walking through torments, the apocryphal Virgin's tour of hell, usually Englished as *The Road to Calvary*. Progress went with *Ordeal*.

The translators

The title page credits Ivy and Tatiana Litvinov, and this is not a detail to pass over.

Ivy Litvinov was born Ivy Therese Low in England in 1889. In

1916 she married Maxim Litvinov, then a revolutionary exile in London, who would become the Soviet Union's Commissar for Foreign Affairs — the public face of Soviet diplomacy through the 1930s, the architect of collective security against Hitler, and the man dismissed in May 1939 immediately before the pact with Germany. Tatiana was their daughter, born 1918, herself a translator and a fine graphic artist.

Maxim Litvinov died in 1951. Ivy turned seriously to translation afterwards, and in that decade produced some twenty-five volumes of Russian fiction in English, a good many of them with Tatiana. The first printing of this *Ordeal* is 1953. It belongs to that burst of work.

What it means for the book is this. The English prose here was made by a woman who had grown up in England reading English novels, who had then spent thirty-five years inside the Soviet state at the very top of it, and who was translating an émigré's portrait of the world she had married into. The result is an English that is genuinely literary rather than serviceable — the Petersburg overture is carried in long balanced sentences that most house translations of the period could not have managed — and an ear for social comedy that the Progress list rarely got to use.

What Book One is

It is Dasha's book. Darya Dmitrevna Bulavina, a law student newly arrived from Samara, is named seven hundred and thirty-three times; her married sister Katya two hundred and sixty-six. Everything else — the poet Bessonov, the engineer Telegin, the officer Roshchin — is arranged around the two of them.

What happens is almost nothing, for a long time, and that is the design. Petersburg in 1914 is a city of literary evenings, futurist provocations, adultery discussed as a philosophical position, and an atmosphere of exhausted permission. Katya has had an affair and tells her husband, who cannot decide whether to be modern about it. Dasha falls into and out of infatuation with Bessonov, who is a genuinely good piece of work: a decadent poet of real celebrity and no centre, hollow in a way the novel observes rather than denounces, sitting erect at his restaurant table refusing food. Tolstoy knew these people. He had been one of them.

Then the war arrives and the book changes speed. And here the émigré's eye is worth more than a Bolshevik's would have been, because Tolstoy is not describing a system he opposes; he is describing his own class discovering that the floor has

gone. The mood is not indignation. It is bewilderment among people who had assumed their world was permanent and had spent its last decade being clever about it.

That is the achievement of *The Sisters* and it survives its author's politics entirely. A reader who wants to understand why February 1917 happened, and why the educated classes were no use when it did, will learn more from this novel than from a shelf of analysis, and will learn it from a witness who was on the other side.

What it sees

The novel's method is to describe a society's symptoms without diagnosing them, and to trust the reader. Three specimens.

The city, in the months before the war. Tolstoy sets down, in a single paragraph and without a word of comment, what Petersburg was doing with itself:

Engineers and financiers worked on plans for the building of a new capital of unprecedented luxury on an island not far from Petersburg which had never yet been inhabited or built on. There was an outbreak of suicides in the town. The law courts were thronged with hysterical women, greedily imbibing the gory details of sensational trials. Everything was to be obtained for money — luxury and women. Depravity was everywhere, it spread to the Court like a plague.

A new capital on an uninhabited island; an outbreak of suicides; the courts as entertainment; and the Court itself infected. No analysis is offered and none is needed. Four sentences carry the argument that the regime had stopped being able to imagine anything except more of itself.

The intelligentsia, arguing. At the Philosophical Evenings Society — divinity professor, historian, philosopher, "that astute writer Sakunin", all seated behind a long table lit by two five-branched sconces — the old men are under siege:

That winter, the "Philosophical Evenings Society" had undergone violent assaults from certain little known but extremely vituperative young people. These attacked the venerable writers and respected philosophers with such virulence, and uttered sentiments so audacious and alluring, that the old mansion on the Fontanka...

The futurists are arriving, and Tolstoy declines to take a side.

He is interested in the fact that the venerable are frightened and that the audacious are alluring — that the attraction is the point, not the argument.

And the best of it, which is about Katya buying paintings. She goes to exhibitions and buys futurist canvases, which her husband dislikes because he prefers pictures "with an idea behind them". Then Tolstoy gives the real reason she buys them:

Ekaterina Dmitrevna, with feminine ardour, preferred suffering in the cause of the new art to the risk of being considered old-fashioned.

That is as exact an account of cultural radicalism in a doomed class as anyone has written. Not conviction: the management of the fear of being left behind. Dasha, who is younger and more honest, admires the pictures while "admitting sadly" that she cannot make out the figures.

And then the war, which changes the book's subject entirely. Antoshka Arnoldov, a journalist, is talking to peasants by a railway line. One of them has heard the Tsar is fighting another tsar and is corrected from behind a pile of logs: "It isn't another tsar — we're at war with the Germans." Arnoldov offers a cigarette and picks his words carefully:

*"Tell me, did they go to war willingly from your village?"
"Many went willingly, sir." "Was there much eagerness?"
"There was. Why not go? They'll have a look and see how things are there. If they're killed — well, people die here, too. Our lands are poor, we live from hand to mouth. And everybody says you're given meat twice a day there, and sugar and tea, and tobacco — you can smoke as much as you like." "But isn't fighting terrible?" "Of course it is. There's no denying that."*

Meat twice a day. That is the recruiting sergeant of 1914 in rural Russia, given in six lines of dialogue by a novelist who does not editorialise and does not need to. Everything the Petersburg chapters have been circling — the unreality, the talk, the futurist paintings bought against the fear of seeming old-fashioned — is answered by a man who will go to be killed because the food is better there.

And the chapter that follows opens on the army itself:

Like an avalanche, the Russian army advanced ponderously through rain and mud, to the accompaniment of shouts and oaths, the cracking of whips and the creaking of axles. On either side of the road lay horses dead and dying, and

overturned carts, their wheels protruding.

Tolstoy could write that because he had been in those rooms. He is not satirising from outside; he is remembering. And it is why the first book of this trilogy is worth more as history than the two that follow it, where he knew in advance what everything meant.

The apparatus

This volume carries a short unsigned "About the Author" note, and it is a small masterpiece of the form. It has one job — to explain how a count who left Russia after the revolution became a Soviet classic — and it does the job in a single word.

However, the whole course of historical events, and his enormous love for his Motherland, made him alter his views. Breaking with the émigrés in 1922, Tolstoy published a unique literary manifesto dictated by patriotism and a desire to do his share in building up his country.

Before that sentence comes the one that has to do the hardest work, and it does it in nine words. Tolstoy left Russia in 1918 and spent five years abroad, part of that time in the orbit of men who were arming against the Soviet state. The note puts it like this:

But still, he did not immediately understand the revolution, and left the country in 1918.

Did not immediately understand. A whole political history — a count's flight, the émigré press, the years in Paris and Berlin — rendered as a delay in comprehension, as though the man had been slow to follow an argument. Nothing in that sentence is false. Everything in it is arranged so that no reader need ask what he was doing in Paris.

Then comes the explanation proper:

Patriotism. Not class, not analysis, not the argument that the Bolsheviks were right. The explanation offered to the foreign reader for the reconciliation of an aristocrat with the workers' state is love of the Motherland — and the note repeats the word, quoting Tolstoy's own credo:

There are four epochs I want to portray: the reign of Ivan the Terrible, that of Peter the Great, the period of the Civil War 1918–20, and our own modern times.

Ivan, Peter, the Civil War, today: a single national story with the revolution as one of its chapters rather than its rupture. And

the credo goes on to say what the study of the past is for:

In order to understand the secret of the Russian people, their greatness, one must make a profound study of the past — our history, its main turning points and the tragic and creative epochs when the Russian character was being formed.

History as the formation of a national character. That is not a Marxist sentence and was never meant to be. The note concludes that "Alexei Tolstoy was the founder of the new, Soviet historical novel", which is exactly right, and the emphasis belongs on historical.

Readers of this series will recognise the operation, because it was official policy. From the mid-1930s the Soviet state rehabilitated the Russian national past wholesale — the tsars as state-builders, the generals as ancestors, the nation as the unit of history — and Tolstoy was among the chief literary instruments of it. His Peter the First made an autocratic moderniser into a hero at precisely the moment when a comparison was available and unmistakable. The internationalism of 1917 had been an embarrassment for a decade by the time this note's framing was settled.

We say this without triumph, because the alternative account is not simply the opposite. Tolstoy's love of Russia was real and it produced real work; his war journalism in 1941–45 was read by millions and did not need a lie in it. But the note in front of you explains a political conversion by national feeling, in a volume issued by a publishing house founded on the proposition that the workers have no country, and the contradiction is not the reader's fault for noticing it.

One more thing about the note, which is a caution rather than a charge. Our text derivation of this page produced "In 1943, Tolstoy returned to the Soviet Union", which would be a startling error. The printed page reads 1923. The scan was wrong, not the house.

One last quotation from the note, because the house says the thing itself, and more plainly than we would have dared to put it:

The book, begun abroad as a story of one family or a small group of Russian intellectuals, developed into a narrative about the Russian land, and about the Russian people who had attained their freedom.

Begun abroad. The apparatus concedes the fact we began with, and in the same breath describes the trilogy's trajectory: from a

family, to the land, to the people. That is an accurate account of what happens across the three books, and it is also an accurate account of what happened to their author. A novel about four people in Petersburg became a national epic, and the man who began it as an exile finished it as a laureate.

The last page

The novel ends in the summer of 1917 on a Moscow street, and it ends better than a first volume needs to.

Katya and Roshchin are walking in the evening. Roshchin — an officer, a man of the old army, who in the next book will fight for the Whites — takes her hand and offers her the consolation of his class:

"The years will pass, wars will die out, revolutions will calm down, and only one thing will be left — your kind, tender, loving heart...."

They pass a bowed figure in a torn straw hat carrying a paste pail. He has been putting up notices along the street. One of them, caught in the light of a lamp, reads:

"Attention, everyone! The revolution is in danger!"

He pastes up another, turns, and from under the brim of the hat "eyes burning with hatred fixed a steady glance at them."

Then: August 1921.

That is the whole of the twentieth century in eleven lines. A gentleman tells a woman that revolutions calm down and love remains. The man with the paste pail, who has no name and one line of print, looks at them with hatred and goes on working. Tolstoy gives the last word to the notice and the last look to the bill-sticker, and he did it in Paris, as an émigré, four years before he went home.

A novelist who could write that ending was not a man who had misunderstood what was happening. He had understood it precisely and had not yet decided what to do about it.

What is living

The record of a class that could not see.

The Sisters is the best account in this series of the people the revolution happened to rather than the people who made it — the lawyers, poets, engineers and officers who filled

Petersburg with talk until 1914 and were swept off the board within four years. It was written by one of them, while the wound was open, before its author had a position to protect or a prize to earn.

Read it before the other two books, and read it knowing what the other two books became. Then read the last page again, and note that the man with the paste pail is the only character in the novel who knows what time it is.