



PROGRESS QUARTERLY

Critical Introductions to the Reissued Classics

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MARXISM

On Historical Materialism: A Collection

The founding texts of historical materialism in one volume: the Theses on Feuerbach, the 1859 Preface, The German Ideology, Engels's late letters, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, and a large selection from Lenin. Primary sources, not commentary.

Karl Marx and others

Introduction to the 1972 Edition

This is not a Soviet textbook. It is a box of primary sources, and that distinction governs everything that follows. On *Historical Materialism: A Collection*, compiled by T. Borodulina and issued by Progress Publishers in 1972, gathers under one cover the founding texts of the materialist conception of history — Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* and the 1859 *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, long passages from *The German Ideology*, Engels's late letters on historical materialism, the whole of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and much of Ludwig Feuerbach, and then, filling the second and larger half of the book, Lenin. The translations are lifted straight from Progress's own *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* and the 45-volume *Collected Works of Lenin*. There is nothing here to refute, because almost nothing here was written in Moscow in 1972. What was made in Moscow in 1972 is the container: the selection, the order, the notes at the back, the name index. That container is the proper object of a critical introduction, and it turns out to be a more revealing object than one might expect — because the texts it holds are, again and again, an argument against the frame it puts around them.

A word on the date, because it means something different here than in most volumes of this kind. The texts range from the 1840s to the early 1920s; the thing made in 1972 is the compilation and its apparatus. And 1972 was a particular moment for Soviet ideological publishing. It was the year of détente, of the first strategic-arms treaty with Washington, and the fourth year after Warsaw Pact tanks had ended the Prague Spring — a season in which the Soviet academy liked to present itself abroad not as a party of upheaval but as the sober custodian of a classical heritage. Progress's English-language anthologies of the founders were export objects and teaching objects at once, assembled out of the standing *Selected Works* and *Collected Works*, fitted with editorial notes and a name index, and made to carry the outward furniture of a scholarly edition. The commission behind this book is therefore not the

loud one of the doctrinal textbooks, which argue a case; it is the quieter work of curating a canon — deciding which of the classics' own words the student meets, in what sequence, and with what marginalia at the foot of the page. That quietness is exactly what makes the choices worth reading closely. No thesis is stated in the front matter, so the thesis has to be inferred from what was gathered and what was written around it.

Take the material first, on its own terms, because it deserves that. The 1859 *Preface* is one of the few pages in the history of social thought that can honestly be called foundational. In a paragraph Marx compresses a whole method: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." The productive forces develop; the relations of production that once fostered them turn into "their fetters"; "then begins an epoch of social revolution." Read cold, it is still startling — the claim that the way a society reproduces its material life sets the terms on which its members can think at all. The *German Ideology*, drafted more than a decade earlier and unpublished in Marx's lifetime, states the corollary that has never lost its edge: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas." And *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels's most widely read pamphlet, does the work of turning a philosophical insight into a research programme, locating "the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions ... not in men's brains, not in men's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange." A reader who came to this book knowing none of it would come away with the real thing, in the authors' own words. The compiler earns that much credit at once.

She earns more, and here the volume's quiet integrity begins to show. The decisive question one brings to any historical-materialism reader assembled under Soviet auspices is whether it presents the method as Marx and Engels actually left it — open, provisional, self-correcting — or as the closed mechanism that Stalin's 1938 essay *Dialectical and Historical*

Materialism had frozen it into: society climbing a fixed staircase of five formations, each nation mounting the same steps in the same order, the economic "base" grinding out its "superstructure" like a mill. The test is not abstract. It can be run against the printed page, and the outcome is not what a reader schooled to expect the worst of Progress Publishers would predict.

Run it first on the letters. Engels spent the last five years of his life writing, to correspondents who had misunderstood him, a series of warnings against exactly the mechanical caricature that would later be sold as orthodoxy. All the central ones are here, printed in full and not buried: to Bloch, to Schmidt, to Mehring, to Borgius. The letter to Bloch of September 1890 is the heart of it, and Borodulina prints the passage that matters most:

According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.

The superstructure — political forms, law, "even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants" — reacts back on the base; "there is an interaction of all these elements." And then the admission that no catechism could contain, kept intact in this edition: "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it." Engels goes on to name the disease directly — the young "Marxists" who think they can apply the theory "without more ado from the moment they have assimilated its main principles" — and to pronounce that "the most amazing rubbish has been produced in this quarter, too." To the letter to Borgius (correctly attributed here to Borgius, not to Starkenburg under whose name it circulated for decades — a sign the textual scholarship in this book is competent when nothing political is at stake) Engels adds the case against economic determinism at the level of persons: great men are necessary but interchangeable, and "the man was always found as soon as he became necessary: Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell, etc." This is the anti-mechanical Engels in full voice, and the 1972 volume gives him that voice without a muffler.

The letter to Mehring of July 1893 completes the sequence and is, if anything, the subtlest of the four. There Engels gives the classic short account of ideology, and it is the reverse of a

crude reflex theory: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process." The thinker, not knowing his real motives, "imagines false or seeming motive forces" and takes his material from the stock of inherited thought. This is an argument about why ideas acquire an apparent life of their own — why the historian must reconstruct the material sources that the thinker himself cannot see — and it is the opposite of the notion that consciousness is a passive readout of the economy. That Borodulina printed it in full, next to the Bloch letter's insistence on "an interaction of all these elements," means the volume genuinely arms its reader against the mechanical reading. The founders' own correspondence, gathered here, is a running warning against the thing their names would later be made to license.

Now run the test on the single sentence where Soviet editing most often showed its hand. The 1859 Preface, listing the "progressive epochs in the economic formation of society," names four: "In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society." The Asiatic mode of production is the sentence that the five-formations schema could not digest — a mode that fitted no rung of the universal ladder, that implied history need not run everywhere through the same stations, and that Stalin's 1938 codification simply legislated out of existence. A collection loyal to the catechism over the classics would have found ways around it. This one does not. The sentence stands, unabridged, in the Preface as printed — and it stands a second time inside Lenin's *Karl Marx*, where Lenin quotes the same passage in full, Asiatic mode and all, and a third time where it is quoted again later in the volume. Three times the offending word survives. Whatever else can be said about the frame around these texts, the texts were not gutted to fit it.

The point can be pressed one turn further, because Lenin himself, in this very book, supplies the sharpest weapon against the use to which his name would be put. The collection includes his short 1910 piece *Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism* and his *Marxism and Revisionism*, and in them Lenin says, of the people who would later be his official interpreters, everything a critic of the catechism could wish. "It is precisely because Marxism is not a lifeless dogma, not a completed, ready-made, immutable doctrine, but a living guide to action," he writes, that it registers every abrupt change in social life. His contempt is reserved for those who "had learnt by rote certain 'slogans', certain answers to tactical

questions, without having understood the Marxist criteria for these answers," and for the revisionists who, following the professors, replaced "'artful' (and revolutionary) dialectics by 'simple' (and tranquil) 'evolution'." Read in 1972, in a state whose universities taught historical materialism from numbered study-questions and examined it by rote, those lines are not a period piece. They are a description of the reader's own surroundings, printed by the state that produced them.

So the criticism of this volume cannot be the usual one. It is not that the texts were falsified; on the evidence of the page, they were not. The criticism has to fall precisely where the brief for such a book always warned it might — on the apparatus, the part Moscow actually wrote in 1972 — and there it lands hard, because the apparatus argues against its own contents.

Begin with the shape of the book, which is itself a thesis. Historical materialism was founded by Marx and Engels; Lenin was its greatest twentieth-century practitioner but added no new first principle to it. Yet in this collection Lenin's half runs longer than Marx's and Engels's combined, and it is weighted, heavily, toward the texts of state and power rather than the texts of method: long extracts from *The State and Revolution*, from *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, from the writings on self-determination, on imperialism and the split in socialism, on the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the tasks of the Soviet government. These are major works, and several bear directly on historical materialism. But the cumulative effect of the selection is to bend a book about a method of historical explanation toward a book about the legitimacy of a particular state — to make the theory of how societies change culminate, as if by the logic of the subject itself, in the institutions of 1918. The compiler's own framing sentence gives the game its vocabulary: her aim, she writes, was "to collect the most important writings of the classics of Marxism-Leninism on questions of historical materialism." Marxism-Leninism is not a term Marx or Engels or Lenin could have used of themselves; it is the name of the fusion, minted after Lenin's death, that the arrangement of this book is built to naturalise.

Then the notes and the name index, where the real editorial voice — the 1972 voice — speaks plainly, and where the open method of the texts meets the closed politics of the frame. In three hundred thousand words of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the name Trotsky appears exactly once, and not in a classic text: it appears in an editorial note, attached to a Lenin passage, informing the reader that "permanent revolution" is "Trotsky's theory ... a revolution without the peasantry, which was

counterposed to Lenin's theory." This is the standard Soviet falsification, and it should be corrected in plain terms, because the note states as settled fact a thing that is not true. Trotsky's actual theory, argued in *Results and Prospects* (1906) and restated in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), did not dispense with the peasantry; it held that in a backward country the proletariat would come to power at the head of the peasant masses, precisely because the weak native bourgeoisie could not carry through its own revolution — and that having taken power it could not stop at bourgeois tasks. Whatever one makes of that argument, "a revolution without the peasantry" is not a summary of it but a slogan against it, and the single appearance of Trotsky's name in this entire volume is a slogan supplied by the editors and dressed as information.

The name index does quieter work of the same kind. Its purpose is to identify the people the texts mention, and for most of them it does so serviceably. But turn to the Left Oppositionists — the men who fought these very questions out with Lenin and were destroyed for losing — and the entries thin into euphemism. Pyatakov is present in the texts because Lenin polemicised against his position on self-determination; the index dates him "(1890–1937)" and then narrates his life to its edge and no further: he "was reinstated, and in 1936 expelled again for his anti-Party activity." Radek, "(1885–1939)," is "expelled again in 1936." The bracketed death-years are exact, and in both cases they are the years of the thing the entry declines to name: Pyatakov was shot in January 1937 after the second Moscow trial; Radek, sentenced at the same trial, died in a labour camp in 1939. The index prints the date of the execution and suppresses the fact of it. This is the apparatus at its most characteristic — not lying about the record so much as arranging its silences, so that the men who worked at the foundations of historical materialism appear in the book only as negative space, defined entirely by the Party they were expelled from and never by the deaths the state gave them.

Set the two halves side by side and the volume divides against itself. The letter to Bloch, printed here, says that anyone who reduces history to the economic factor "transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase." The note on permanent revolution, printed here, reduces a rival theory to a phrase in order to dismiss it. Lenin, printed here, mocks those who learn "slogans" by rote without the criteria behind them; the name index feeds the reader slogans — "anti-Party activity" — in place of criteria. The texts model an open, self-critical method; the frame enacts a closed one. A careful reader does not need an outside authority to see the contradiction. It is legible within the covers, between the body

of the book and its back matter.

What the frame cannot admit — and what the twentieth century, including the Soviet century, actually demonstrated — is the thing the frozen schema was built to exclude: that history does not run everywhere through the same stations in the same order. This is not a heresy imported from outside Marxism; it is Marxism used rather than recited, and its fullest statement comes from the man the apparatus reduces to a slogan. Trotsky's law of uneven and combined development, worked out in the opening chapter of his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932), takes the 1859 Preface's "progressive epochs" and refuses to read them as a staircase every nation must climb tread by tread. Backward countries, forced into contact with advanced ones, do not repeat the sequence; they telescope it, adopting the latest results before passing through the intervening stages. "To jump over intermediate stages," Trotsky wrote, "is the way of backward countries." In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) he states the principle in a sentence: "The law of uneven development is supplemented throughout the whole course of history by the law of combined development." That is historical materialism doing what the 1859 Preface asked of it — explaining a real transformation, in this case the improbable one that put a socialist revolution first in the least industrial of the great powers — rather than sorting societies into predetermined bins. The Stalinist five-formations catechism, by contrast, took the same Preface and made it a machine for producing the answer already known. The Asiatic mode had to go from that machine because it was a mode that would not fit the bins; it is a small, sharp irony that the 1972 compiler let the word back onto the page while the schema built on its suppression still governed the classrooms the book was printed for.

It is worth being clear about why the schema was frozen in the first place, because the freezing was not mere academic dullness. A method that is open — that admits interaction, accident, the relative weight of politics and ideas, the possibility that history skips stages — is a method whose conclusions cannot be known in advance. A closed law of five inevitable formations, by contrast, delivers its verdict before the evidence is in: socialism is the next rung, the state that stands on it is history's own product, and to oppose that state is to oppose the laws of development themselves. The anti-Stalinist tradition made this point at the moment the schema was hardening. Trotsky's argument in *The Revolution Betrayed* is that the Soviet bureaucracy, having won its independence from the working class, needed a theory that presented its own rule as necessity rather than as one contested outcome among others — and a historical materialism reduced

to an escalator of stages was precisely such a theory. The same closure that struck the Asiatic mode from the schema and reduced Pyatakov and Radek to expulsion dates is at work here: a doctrine that cannot be turned back on the state that teaches it, cannot register the state's own contradictions, and cannot name what became of the men who insisted it should. The open method in these pages could do all three. That is the measure of what the frame took away.

None of this is reason to leave the volume on the shelf — the opposite. It remains one of the most useful single-volume gatherings of the primary texts of historical materialism in English, drawn from competent translations, and for the Engels letters alone it earns its place; nowhere else are the anti-mechanical warnings to Bloch, Schmidt, Mehring and Borgius so conveniently assembled. Read the texts and trust them. Read the notes and the name index as a second document bound in with the first — a record, precise in its own way, of what a mature Soviet institution in 1972 wanted the method to become, and of the distance between that wish and the open, unfinished thing Marx and Engels actually built. The best short guide to that distance is not hidden in the archives; it is on page 447 of this very book, in Lenin's own words, warning against turning a living guide to action into "something one-sided, distorted and lifeless." The apparatus around him did exactly that. The texts he sits among are the standing refutation of it.

HISTORY

Southeast Asia

The Soviet survey of Southeast Asia written while the outcome in Indochina was still open: eight countries, a documented indictment of the war, and the doctrine of the non-capitalist path applied - including to a military coup in Burma.

Dmitry Chasovennikov

Introduction to the 1972 Edition

Southeast Asia: History, Economy, Policy opens on a hymn. "For a quarter of a century," its first page declares, "progressive people throughout the world have been following developments in Vietnam, a courageous country which is waging a grim and just struggle against imperialism." The chapter is called "Invincible Vietnam," and the book that follows is a country-by-country survey of the region at the moment of maximum heat: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, each treated in turn by an unnamed hand, the whole issued in English by Progress Publishers in 1972 and carrying no editor's name, no list of contributors, only the imprint and the standing invitation on the last page to send comments to Zubovsky Boulevard. It is a collective product of the Soviet Orientalist establishment — the Institute of Oriental Studies and its neighbours — assembled for export, and it should be read as what it is: the case the Soviet state wished to put, in the language of international circulation, about a region where its case was being tested to destruction.

The date on the spine is, for once, the date of the argument. The latest events the book records are from the middle of 1971 — the three million tons of bombs dropped on Laos "from May 1964 to August 1971," the seven-point proposal introduced by Nguyen Thi Binh "at the 119th meeting on July 1, 1971." This is a book finished in late 1971 or early 1972, before the Christmas bombing of Hanoi, before the Paris Accords of January 1973, at a point where the outcome in Indochina was still in the balance and the Soviet Union was pouring economic and military aid into North Vietnam. Its purpose was double. Outward, it was ammunition: a documented indictment of American and colonial conduct in Southeast Asia, for readers in the West and the non-aligned world. Inward to the doctrine, it was a demonstration — proof that the Soviet model of anti-colonial advance worked, offered at the very moment when, a few hundred miles south of Hanoi, that model had produced the worst single defeat the world

communist movement suffered between the Spanish war and the fall of the Wall.

The doctrine the book applies

The theory that organises every chapter is rarely named but never absent. It is the doctrine of the national-liberation movement and the non-capitalist path of development — the Soviet strategy for the former colonial world as it stood in the Brezhnev years. In its schema the revolution in a backward, colonial or newly independent country proceeds in two stages. First comes the national-democratic revolution, in which the working class, the peasantry and the "progressive" or "national" bourgeoisie form a bloc against imperialism and feudal reaction; only later, and only after the anti-imperialist tasks are complete, is the socialist revolution to be posed. In the interval a country may be steered onto a "non-capitalist path" — advancing toward socialism while bypassing the stage of capitalist development, under the wing of the socialist camp and the guidance, where it exists, of a Communist party or a friendly "revolutionary democracy." The doctrine is a direct descendant of the Comintern's "bloc of four classes" of the 1920s, and its decisive practical injunction is that the workers' movement must subordinate its own independent aims, for a whole historical stage, to an alliance with a section of the propertied classes.

The book applies this with a clear conscience and shows exactly what it means in practice. Burma is the purest case. There the army seizes power in March 1962 — "the people took no part in the coup," the text concedes — and yet the coup "cannot be assessed simply as a military putsch." General Ne Win's Revolutionary Council "began to steer the country along a new road of development," and its declaration, the Burmese Way to Socialism, is presented as evidence that "the Burmese Army... still included influential patriotic and revolutionary forces." A military junta becomes a vehicle of socialism because it is anti-imperialist and adopts the right vocabulary; the class character of the state is read off its

foreign policy. The same logic praises Sukarno's "guided democracy" and the NASAKOM front in Indonesia, and treats Cambodia's Sihanouk, Laos's neutralist princes, and the "revolutionary democrat" Aung San as the natural partners of the Left. The question the doctrine forbids itself to ask is whether a movement that hands the leadership of the revolution to such partners retains the power to protect itself when the partnership turns. The book was written, and this is its tragedy, in the shadow of the country where that question had already been answered in blood.

Correcting the record I: Indonesia, 1965

The Indonesian chapter is the most important thing in this book, and the most revealing. In 1965 the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) was the largest Communist party in the world outside the states that were already ruled by one — more than three million members, the book says, "which guided the activities of multi-million mass organisations." Within months of the events of September–October 1965 it had ceased to exist, its cadre and its peasant base slaughtered in one of the great massacres of the century.

To its credit the book does not pretend the massacre did not happen. It records that "by mid-October the country had become a scene of an extensive campaign of terrorism against the Communists," and that "More than 300,000 Communists, including D.N. Aidit, Njoto, Lukman and other Central Committee members, were brutally assassinated." But the figure is the floor of the estimates, not the truth. Serious historical scholarship — from the early studies through to the reckoning that produced Indonesia's own 2016 tribunal — puts the dead at between half a million and more than a million. The book gives the smallest number that could be called honest, and it gives it in the passive voice: the Communists "were brutally assassinated," by no one the sentence names. The generals who organised the killing, the Muslim militias who carried much of it out, and the Western governments that watched with satisfaction are, at the moment of the killing itself, absent from the grammar.

More telling than the undercount is the explanation. The book cannot say the strategy was wrong, because the strategy was the doctrine, and so it reaches for two other culprits. The first is Peking. Through 1963–65, we read, the PKI leadership drifted toward the Maoists, attacked the CPSU as "modern revisionism," and was "spurred... towards further Right- and Left-wing opportunist blunders"; Sukarno proclaimed a "Djakarta-Peking axis." The second is the adventurism of the September 30 movement itself — a "palace conspiracy, which

was to take place without the support of the masses and which was aimed at individuals." Both charges shift the weight of the catastrophe onto the PKI's China connection and onto a botched putsch, and away from the years of class collaboration that the doctrine had prescribed.

Yet the book cannot fully suppress the real story, and in two passages it tells the truth against itself. It records that the PKI had accepted a "co-operation cabinet" of "all major parties, including the Communist Party," and that its Central Committee had endorsed Sukarno's programme on the ground that "democracy should be expanded for the people and restricted for their enemies" — the language of a party that has made a bourgeois nationalist the arbiter of who its enemies are. And it records the decisive surrender: "in December 1964, the Communist Party leadership gave in to pressure from the Government and certain political parties and promised to settle all matters connected with agrarian relations in a peaceful way. In effect this was a fundamental and very serious concession to exploiters in the countryside, at the expense of the toiling peasants." That is the whole disaster in one sentence — a mass revolutionary party disarming the peasant struggle at the very moment the landlords and the army were preparing to strike — and the book, having written it, walks past it to blame Peking.

The Fourth International had named the cause, precisely and contemporaneously, in the documents of its Eighth World Congress, printed in the SWP's *International Socialist Review* in the spring of 1966 — months after the killing, not decades. The PKI, it wrote, "has been collaborating for some years up to the governmental level with the wing of the national bourgeoisie represented by Sukarno. Such a policy, inspired by the concept of a democratic stage of the revolution in which it will be necessary to collaborate with the so-called national bourgeoisie, has resulted in the party deliberately not trying to take advantage of the revolutionary crisis." The strategy of stages, the coalition with Sukarno, the braking of the mass movement, the imprisonment of the workers within "Nasakom" — this, and not the September 30 adventure and not the quarrel with Peking, "paved the way to the bitter defeat suffered by the biggest Communist party in the capitalist world." And the reply makes the point the book most needs buried: the Sukarno alliance was not a Chinese deviation at all. The PKI pursued it "even before the beginning of the Sino-Soviet conflict, in agreement just as much with the Soviet leadership as the Chinese, both of which were eager to reach an alliance with Sukarno." The line that destroyed the PKI was the common property of Moscow and Peking. Assigning it to Peking alone, as this book does, is not analysis; it is the Sino-Soviet split rewriting the history of a graveyard. The

Fourth International weighed the result without euphemism: "The crushing of the Indonesian Communist Party represents an even greater victory for imperialism and setback to the colonial revolution than the counterrevolutionary coup d'etat in Brazil in April 1964." The book grieves the dead; it will not examine the doctrine that led them to the pit, because it is still recommending that doctrine to every other country in the volume.

Correcting the record II: the road that ran over the Trotskyists

There is a second Indonesia in this book, and it is Vietnam in 1945. The volume's longest chapter narrates the August Revolution almost day by day — the People's Congress of August 16, the victory in Hanoi on August 19, the abdication of Bao Dai, and then, in a single line, the moment the revolution "swept victorious into Saigon in South Vietnam." Of what happened in Saigon in those weeks, the book says nothing, and the silence is not casual. Search its whole length and the name Trotsky does not occur once; neither does Ta Thu Thau, nor La Lutte, nor any hint that the Vietnamese revolutionary movement of the 1930s contained a large indigenous current that took the socialist revolution seriously and was destroyed for it.

The facts are not obscure; they are recorded by the movement's own survivors — the Saigon historian Ngo Van above all — and were reported in the Fourth International's press across four decades. In the 1930s Saigon possessed one of the strongest Trotskyist movements anywhere in the colonial world. Around Ta Thu Thau and the newspaper La Lutte ("The Struggle"), Trotskyists and Communists cooperated for several years in a united front that at moments outpolled the Stalinists in the city's municipal elections and had a serious base among its workers. Then, in the autumn of 1945, as the August Revolution unfolded and the Trotskyists pressed to arm the workers' committees and carry the revolution past its bourgeois-democratic limits, the Viet Minh turned on them and killed them. Ta Thu Thau — who had spent much of the previous decade in French prisons — was seized in the central provinces and shot. He was one of hundreds.

This is not a charge invented by later critics. The Fourth International named the murders as they became known and mourned Ta Thu Thau as one of its own. Its International Executive Committee, in an appeal "Against the War in Indo-China!" printed in Fourth International in June 1947, sent its "fraternal greetings to the courageous fighters of Viet-Nam" and, in the same breath, recorded that the Indo-Chinese section

"on the morrow of the country's 'Liberation' and at the very beginning of the Indochinese revolution, was deprived by the criminal hands of Stalin's GPU of many of its leading elements, among them the heroic figure of comrade Ta-Thu-Thau." The appeal closed by calling on the section to continue its struggle "both against French imperialism and against all betrayal of the revolution from within by the Stalinist agents, leading the Viet Minh." That the Vietnamese revolution the book celebrates was, at its very starting point, purchased in part with the blood of Vietnamese revolutionaries murdered by the party this book praises is exactly the kind of fact a survey of "History, Economy, Policy" exists to erase. The reader who wants the fuller record will find it in Ngo Van's own history of the period and in the documentary collection Revolutionary History (vol. 3, no. 2, 1990); it is set out at length in this series' companion introductions to Divilkovsky and Ognetrov's The Road to Victory and Kobelev's Ho Chi Minh, both of which are silent on Ta Thu Thau in exactly the way this book is silent.

What the book gets right, and where its value lies

None of this touches the reality that the book was written to expose, and on that reality it is often a serviceable and even a valuable witness. The crimes it documents were real, the aggression it charges was committed, and a critical reader gains nothing by pretending otherwise.

The account of French colonial rule in Vietnam is accurate in its essentials: the conquest "by the beginning of the 1880s, after thirty years of resistance," and the deliberate fracturing of the country under the "usual policy of 'divide and rule'," splitting it "into three parts: Tonkin (northern part), Annam (central part) and Chochin-China (southern part)." The book's ledger of American conduct in South Vietnam is grim and, in its broad lines, supported by the historical record: the wrecking of the Geneva settlement, the installation of Ngo Dinh Diem, and a machinery of repression under which, "by 1960, as a result of repressions, 200,000 patriots had been killed in South Vietnam, about 800,000 were wounded or crippled by torture and some 400,000 were languishing in more than a thousand prisons and concentration camps." On Laos the book delivers the single most useful figure it holds: "From May 1964 to August 1971 US Air Force dropped 3,000,000 tons of bombs on Laos" — a tonnage that would later be confirmed as making Laos, per head, the most heavily bombed country in the history of warfare.

The economic chapters, where the doctrine's demands press

least hard, are the strongest in the volume. On post-1965 Indonesia the book is precise and damning about the terms of the counter-revolution's economic surrender to the West: the return of nationalised property "to the United States, British and Dutch monopolies," the legislation of December 1966 and December 1967 opening the country to foreign capital and foreign banks, the formation in 1966 of the creditors' "Tokyo Consortium," and the result — "By the end of May 1970, the Indonesian Government had allowed foreigners to invest a total of \$1,339,900,000 in the Indonesian economy," almost 80 per cent of it in extractive industries "yielding raw materials and foodstuffs which are in short supply in the developed capitalist countries." The book's note that the rupiah "depreciated by 100,000 times in relation to the dollar from 1950 to 1967, which is a world record in inflation," and its account of the cabiers, the "capitalist-bureaucrats" who enriched themselves on the nationalised enterprises, are genuine contributions: a Marxist analysis of how a state sector without workers' control becomes a trough for a new bourgeoisie. Here the Soviet Orientalists were doing real work, and it holds up.

The reply the book was written to bury

What defeats the book is not its facts but its theory, and the theory it needs and never states by name is the one the Soviet tradition spent forty years suppressing: the theory of permanent revolution. Trotsky had put the colonial case in the second thesis of *The Permanent Revolution* (1930) in terms that read as though addressed to this volume across the decades: "With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses." The claim was not that the democratic and socialist tasks could be legislated apart in advance; it was that they could not — that a movement which subordinates the working class to the "progressive" bourgeoisie for a whole stage forfeits the one force capable of carrying the anti-imperialist revolution through, and delivers its own base, disarmed, to the reaction.

Southeast Asia between 1945 and 1972 was the doctrine's laboratory, and it returned the verdict permanent revolution had predicted. In Saigon in 1945 the movement that pressed to carry the revolution beyond its bourgeois limits was physically eliminated. In Djakarta in 1965 the largest Communist party in the non-socialist world, having spent a decade holding the

masses "prisoner to 'Nasakom'" and having promised the landlords to settle the land question "in a peaceful way," was annihilated in a season. This book records both catastrophes — the second at length, the first not at all — and in both it looks everywhere for the cause except the strategy it is still selling. That is the reason to reprint it. It is a clear, confident, documented statement of the Soviet doctrine of the national-liberation movement, offered in 1972 as settled Leninism, by authors who had before them the freshest and most terrible evidence of where that doctrine led and who could not permit themselves to see it. Read it for its facts, which are often good, and against its theory, which the graves it steps over had already refuted.

SOVIET SOCIETY

The Scientific and Technological Revolution: Social Effects and Prospects

Sixteen senior Soviet scientists and economists on the scientific and technological revolution - including a Nobel laureate and the chairman of Gosplan defending his own planning system. The flagship concept of 1970s Soviet ideology, set out for export.

M. Millionshchikov and others

Introduction to the 1972 Edition

The Scientific and Technological Revolution: Social Effects and Prospects is the Soviet Union announcing, in sixteen voices, that it had understood the future better than the country that was building it. The book is a collection, "prepared jointly by the Soviet Academy of Sciences Editorial Board of Social Sciences Today and Progress Publishers" and put into English under the editorship of Robert Daglish, and its contributors are not obscure. The opening chapter is by M. Millionshchikov, Vice-President of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The chapter on planning is by N. Baibakov — the Chairman of the State Planning Committee itself, the man who actually ran the Soviet economy, writing in defence of the way he ran it. Between them come economists, philosophers and sociologists of rank, arguing a single thesis from a dozen angles. That thesis is the doctrine this book exists to broadcast: the scientific and technological revolution (in Russian *nauchno-tekhnicheskaya revolyutsiya*, the NTR), the flagship concept of Soviet ideology in the 1970s, and the claim that its social benefits could be gathered in fully only under socialism.

Establish the date first, because for once the spine tells the truth. The English is 1972 and the Russian is barely older: the book's horizon closes at the 24th Congress of the CPSU (March–April 1971) and the Ninth Five-Year Plan the Congress adopted, both quoted as the newest word, together with the 1969 International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow. Nothing later intrudes. This is a document of the Brezhnev high noon — after the tanks in Prague in 1968, in the first flush of détente, in the years when "developed socialism" was becoming the regime's name for its own indefinite present. And the book's animating formula is Brezhnev's own. Its authors quote, and build upon, the task he set the 24th Congress: one "of historical importance: organically to fuse the achievements of the scientific and technical revolution with the advantages of the socialist

economic system." That sentence is the commission. This book is its elaboration for export.

What the book was for is legible in that lineage. By 1971 the capitalist world had spent a decade talking about its own technological future in a confident new vocabulary — Daniel Bell's "post-industrial society," John Kenneth Galbraith's *New Industrial State*, W. W. Rostow's stages of growth, the convergence theory of Jan Tinbergen and Raymond Aron, and, from the dissident wing, Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. All of it claimed that advanced technology was remaking industrial society according to imperatives that had nothing to do with whether the society called itself capitalist or socialist. This was, for Moscow, an intolerable claim, because it dissolved the one distinction on which Soviet legitimacy rested. The NTR doctrine was the answer: yes, there is a world-historical technological revolution; no, it does not make the two systems alike; it makes their difference sharper, and it is destined to be won by us. This volume is a Soviet entry in a global argument about who owned the future — the same argument its Progress siblings were fielding at the same moment. The *Future of Society* (1973) took on Western futurology and convergence directly; *The American Utopia* (1985) dissected the technocratic dream a decade on. Read the three together and you are watching one state try, book by book, to prove that only Marxism could see tomorrow.

The doctrine deserves to be stated precisely, because it is more coherent than the sneer it usually earns. The NTR, for these authors, is a real and objective process — "a natural outcome of the development of the productive forces" in the epoch of transition from capitalism to communism, not anyone's policy but a fact of history like the industrial revolution before it. Its social meaning, however, is not given by the technology. Here the book says something a Marxist can defend, and defends it well. Against "technological determinism" — the doctrine that a given technology produces the same social results everywhere — Chekharin puts the decisive objection plainly:

"the application of a certain kind of technology under capitalism produces diametrically different social results from what the same technology produces under socialism." The same computer that plans production for use in one system rationalises the extraction of profit in another. Technology has no politics of its own; the social relations decide what it does. This is the genuine Marxist kernel of the whole book, and it is worth rescuing intact, because it remains true and because the Western literature the book attacks really did tend to hide a politics inside a machine and call the result inevitability.

From that true premise the book draws its triumphant conclusion. If social relations decide, then the socialist relations decide better. "Socialism alone provides the adequate social pattern for present-day technological advance," Chekharin writes; under capitalism the same advance breeds "a polarisation of society, intensification of the class struggle." Millionschikov states the wager in its purest form, in the sentence the Foreword lifts to the front of the book: "in the final analysis, the scientific and technological revolution is incompatible with social injustice; it will emerge as the crucial test in the great school of human history which, in our profound belief, socialism alone is able to pass." The planned economy is the instrument that will pass it. Baibakov's chapter, and Bregel's and Sorokin's, all turn on the claim that only a plan can direct the NTR to human ends rather than private ones — that "state administration is a major condition of rapid scientific and technological progress in socialist society," indeed "one of the great advantages of the socialist system over capitalism."

Convergence is refused on the same ground, and refused hardest exactly where it is strongest — which is the first thing a modern reader should notice. Enokh Bregel's chapter, "Two Economic Systems: Theory of Convergence," concedes with real intellectual honesty that the theory "reflects some actual features of the modern capitalist economy," and even that "the capitalist system coming nearer to socialism" is, in a sense, true. What it will not concede is the reciprocal: that socialism might be acquiring features of the capitalist West. That door is bolted. Convergence, Bregel concludes, is "a smokescreen thrown up to conceal the intended absorption of socialism by capitalism," and "the future belongs not to any visionary mixed-type economic system but to socialism and communism." The book's entire case against convergence rests on the form of ownership: the West is private property, the East is public property, and no resemblance in planning technique, computer modelling or managerial hierarchy can bridge that gulf. But ownership on paper is a claim about title, not about control — about who commands the labour process

and disposes of its surplus — and the serious version of the convergence question was always about control. Did a bureaucratically planned, hierarchical, expert-managed industrial order grow up in the East that shared real features with the managed capitalism of the West? The book cannot ask, because to ask would be to look at what the Soviet Union actually was. So convergence is refused where it names the resemblance, and the subject is changed to the title deeds.

Before pressing that point, credit what the book earns, because its best chapter is genuinely good. The closing essay, Y. Zamoshkin and N. Motroshilova on Marcuse — "Man in the 'Industrial Society'" — is not a folder of clippings. Its authors have read *One-Dimensional Man* in the original, cite it by page, and grant its force without flinching: "the criticism to which Marcuse has subjected the present-day forms of concrete social knowledge in the capitalist countries is relevant." They agree that Western social science often "serve[s] certain practical and pragmatically utilitarian aims of the predominant social organisation" — "Yes, it is," they answer their own question, twice. Their charge against Marcuse is a sharp Marxist one: that his critique is itself "one-dimensional," that in tracing everything to technology he "borrows most uncritically from, and reproduces in his conception, the logic of argument typical of Rostow." And they name the disease with a phrase worth holding onto: "any apology for present-day bureaucracy, conscious or unconscious, is usually based on the logic of technological determinism." The bureaucracy that presents its own rule as the necessary price of efficiency — that is the target, and it is well hit. Hold that sentence. We will need it.

There is a second point on which the book draws real blood, and it should be stated because it is the kind of thing a reader told everything here is worthless would miss. The Western "end of ideology" thesis — the announcement, fashionable from Bell and Aron through the 1960s, that the great political doctrines were spent and only technical management remained — the book treats, correctly, as an ideological act masquerading as the end of ideology. The convergence and "deideologisation" theories, Chekharin argues, use the neutral-sounding language of technique to "deny the necessity for revolutionary reorganisation of capitalist society," smuggling a defence of the existing order in under cover of having risen above all orders. That is a sound observation and an old one: to declare politics obsolete is itself a political move, and usually a conservative one. The Western left would arrive at the same criticism of the post-industrial literature within a few years. A Soviet economist saw it early, and the sight is not spoiled by the irony that a state whose every

textbook proclaimed the science of history had its own overwhelming interest in which ideologies ended and which did not.

Because the trouble with this book is not that its arguments are stupid. It is that every one of them stops at a frontier and does not cross it, and in hindsight the frontier is always the same. The Marcuse chapter can anatomise "the state-monopoly bureaucracy," can show at length how a planning, administering, expert stratum stands above the producers and manages their consciousness — and can do all of it only about the United States. The word "bureaucracy" appears dozens of times in this collection as the characteristic pathology of the capitalist West. It is never once permitted to travel east. The effect is at its most acute where the book relays Marcuse approvingly. It endorses his showing that "present-day culture in the United States is in the hands of the bureaucracy, an 'instrument of social conformism' and manipulation of human lives," that culture there "has dissolved into mass propaganda" and become "one-dimensional." Read that description with no country attached and a Soviet citizen of 1972 would recognise it instantly — it is, almost word for word, the dissident's account of culture under Glavlit, the censorship office. The book prints the diagnosis and forbids the patient to look in the mirror. The identical administrative apparatus — a stratum standing above the producers, commanding the plan, disposing of the surplus — is, in Washington, the disease; in Moscow, it is "state administration," "one of the great advantages of the socialist system." Same organ, named as a tumour in the adversary and an advantage in the self. That asymmetry is the tell. This series has learned to apply a simple reflexivity test to the Soviet volumes: can the book's own central category ever be turned on the book's own side? Here the category is bureaucracy, and the answer is a flat no. The stratum that is convicted of everything in the West is, in the East, the hero of the plan.

Now the deeper irony, the one the passage of fifty years makes unbearable. This is a book, published in 1972, whose organising claim is that socialism is uniquely fitted to master the scientific and technological revolution — appearing at the precise historical moment when the Soviet economy began to fall irreversibly behind in the revolution's own core domains. The book knows what those domains are. It says so, in one of its most confident sentences: "Today no country can successfully develop its economy, technology or science unless it possesses up-to-date computers for purposes of management, information, and so on." Read that sentence with the calendar open. In 1969 the Soviet leadership had taken the decision that would define its computing future: to abandon its

own original machine designs and reverse-engineer the IBM System/360, producing the ES EVM (Ryad) series whose first models were rolling out in the very year this book appeared. The choice guaranteed that Soviet computing would spend the rest of the state's life a generation behind the West by design — copying yesterday's Western machines while the microelectronics revolution, the true heart of the NTR, accelerated out of reach. Automation, microelectronics, computing power at the point of production: these were exactly the arenas the doctrine named as decisive, and exactly the arenas in which the planned economy proved least able to compete. The book's confidence is not merely wrong in retrospect. It is wrong about the specific thing it was most confident about.

And nowhere in ninety thousand words is that confidence examined. There is no chapter, no paragraph, no aside that asks whether the Soviet plan might be worse at absorbing rapid technological change than the market it despised — whether the very "state administration" praised as an advantage might be the thing that could not keep up, because a plan drawn a year in advance cannot chase an innovation that arrives in a quarter. The one man in the book with the standing to raise the question is Baibakov, who ran Gosplan for twenty years; his chapter instead supplies the reassurance. When the book does discuss productivity, it is disarmingly frank about the stakes without ever suspecting they might be lost: "Higher labour productivity is, in the final analysis, the crucial source of the growth of accumulation and the national product at large." That is written of the developing countries. It is never turned into a question about the USSR, whose own rate of productivity growth was, in these very years, beginning the long deceleration that would end in stagnation and then in collapse. The book stakes everything on a race it is certain of winning, in the years it started to lose it.

Which is why the answer to this book was written thirty-six years before it, and could not be improved on. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), Trotsky made productivity of labour the whole test of the Soviet regime's fate — the same test this book invokes and then declines to apply to itself. "These two problems, state and money," he wrote, "reduce themselves in the last analysis to the problem of problems: productivity of labor" (ch. 4, "Productivity of Labor"). The idiom is worth pausing on. The Soviet book reaches, again and again, for the phrase "in the final analysis" — Millionshchikov's test that socialism "in the final analysis" must pass, Kollontai's productivity that is "in the final analysis" the source of all growth. It is Trotsky's phrase, "in the last analysis," turned to the opposite purpose: he used it to

convict the regime by the very measure the regime's economists used to acquit it. Marx's oldest definition of history — that all economy "comes down in the last analysis to an economy of time" — becomes, in Trotsky's hands, the criterion by which socialism must be judged and by which it had not yet passed. Socialism, he wrote, "could not be justified by the abolition of exploitation alone; it must guarantee to society a higher economy of time than is guaranteed by capitalism... In that sense, decisive for all civilization, socialism has not yet triumphed. It has shown that it can and should triumph. But it has not yet triumphed. All assertions to the contrary are the fruit of ignorance and charlatanism." Set that beside Millionshchikov's serene certainty that socialism "alone is able to pass" the test, and the distance between the tradition and its Stalinised offspring is the whole distance of this series. Trotsky held that Soviet forms of property resting on a low productivity of labour "mean only a transitional regime whose destiny history has not yet finally weighed" (ch. 3). The 1972 volume declares the weighing already done, in socialism's favour, and calls the verdict a law of history.

Trotsky also named the mechanism this book cannot see. The bureaucracy that the Marcuse chapter can only find in America was, for the Fourth International's tradition, the specific brake on the Soviet productive forces — a privileged stratum whose "autocratic rule is coming into greater and greater contradiction with the development of the productive forces of the country," as *The Revolution Betrayed* puts it (ch. 11), "just as absolute monarchy became in its time irreconcilable with the development of the bourgeois market." That is the analysis the NTR doctrine was built to forestall. Where the Soviet economists saw the plan as the frictionless conductor of technological advance, the anti-Stalinist left saw a caste that guarded its own position against the disruptions any real technological revolution demands — and that would, in the end, rather import yesterday's machines than risk the upheaval of building tomorrow's. The productivity race the book was so sure of was lost in exactly the way Trotsky's category predicted: not for want of Soviet science, which was formidable, but because the social relations the book called an advantage were in fact the fetter.

None of this makes the volume worthless — the opposite. Its genuine argument against technological determinism survives; its reading of Marcuse is serious; Bregel's honesty about what convergence gets right is more than the export list usually allowed. And as a historical specimen it is close to perfect: here is the Soviet order at the summit of its self-belief, its most senior economic and scientific officials setting their names to the promise that the machine age belonged to them, in the year

the machine age began to leave them behind. The tragedy is not that they lied. Much of what they wrote they plainly believed, and some of it was true. The tragedy is in the one question a book about the future of technology under socialism never thought to ask about itself — and in the fact that the answer was already lying, in print, in a book its authors were forbidden to open.

SOVIET SOCIETY

The Soviet Form of Popular Government

How the Soviet system of representation actually worked, described step by step: nomination, elections, standing commissions, the deputy's mandate. Written as an export primer in answer to foreign readers' letters, by the director of the Academy's Institute of State and Law.

Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Chkhikvadze

Introduction to the 1972 Edition

This book was written to answer letters. Its preface explains that "readers abroad have shown a keen interest in the day-to-day functions of the Soviets, as is apparent from the numerous letters sent to Progress Publishers," and that "it is in response to these requests that the present book was published." That single sentence tells us what kind of object we are holding. It is not the internal polemic that its close sibling in this series, Topornin and Machulsky's *Socialism and Democracy* (Progress, 1974), turned out to be — a "Reply to Opportunists" aimed at reform communists inside the bloc. It is an export primer: a patient, procedural, almost administrative description of how the Soviets of Working People's Deputies are elected, convened and run, prepared for the sympathetic foreign inquirer who wanted to know how the system actually works. That difference of address matters, because it changes where the finding lies. *Socialism and Democracy* argues, and can be caught arguing badly. The *Soviet Form of Popular Government* mostly describes — and it is in what the description includes and what it silently leaves out that the book gives itself away.

It is a collective work with a named front man. The title page presents V. M. Chkhikvadze, Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences and Director of the Academy's Institute of State and Law, as principal editor; the book, its own note says, "was compiled under the direction of" Chkhikvadze, with contributions from "experts on Soviet state law and the organisation of Soviets" — assistant professors M. A. Shafir and Y. N. Umansky, and candidates of law B. V. Chernov, V. M. Koldayev and O. Y. Kutafin. It was translated by James Riordan and edited by Murad Saifulin, who also edited this series' *Soviet Socialist Democracy and Socialism and Democracy* — the same hand shaping the whole cluster of "socialist democracy" titles for English readers. The Russian original, given on the reverse of the title page, was *Sovety* — *organy narodovlastiya v SSSR*: "the Soviets — organs of the people's rule in the USSR." The English title softens

narodovlastie, "the people's rule," into "popular government," but the claim is the hard one: that here the people actually govern.

For once the date can be taken more or less at face value. There is no printing history in the front matter and no earlier edition announced in the text; the copyright line reads simply "© Progress Publishers 1972," "First printing 1972." The internal evidence agrees. The latest Party congress the book leans on is the Twenty-Fourth (1971), whose decisions on "extend[ing] greatly the powers of the Soviets" it repeatedly invokes; it cites the 1970 elections to the Eighth Supreme Soviet and the June 1971 local elections as recent facts; its one forward date is the 1971–1975 Five-Year Plan, correctly named as current. This is a genuine document of 1972, not an older manuscript in a newer jacket — which fixes the world against which it should be read. Notably, and unlike its 1974 sibling, the book never once uses the phrase "developed socialism," the Brezhnev-era formula that became the theoretical spine of *Socialism and Democracy*. Its organising category is older and simpler: the Soviet itself, and the doctrine that the dictatorship of the proletariat has "become the political organisation of the whole nation under the guidance of the working class."

The test this book invites

The book's central claim is that the Soviets are "the most explicit expression and personification of socialist democracy... the most simple, most democratic and, at the same time, the most sovereign and effective system of representative institutions the world has ever known." Democracy here means real popular power — "government of the people and for the people," in which "life's creators had become its masters." That is the highest claim a state can make about itself, and it invites the test this series has come to rest its judgements on, in preference to word-counts or missing footnotes: error is admissible, the category is not. A Soviet book may concede that this or that official blundered, that

methods were "formal and bureaucratic," that harsh measures were taken; what it will never do is let the analytic category it wields against its enemies — that behind formal power can lie real powerlessness — be turned on its own state. So the questions are two. Does the book's own idea of democracy, real popular power against merely formal rights, ever get pointed homeward, at a one-party state that permitted no opposition, no contested election, no free press, no independent union and no right to strike? And when the book names the dictatorship of the proletariat, does it ever allow that this might have become a dictatorship over the proletariat, a bureaucracy ruling in the workers' name?

To both, the book's answer is not a bad argument. It is silence. And because this is a descriptive book, the silence is unusually clean and unusually total. Socialism and Democracy at least named the Prague Spring, if only to invert it; it staged the multi-party objection in order to knock it down; it let the Austrian communist Franz Marek state the case that the Party rules over the workers, in order to wave it away. Chkhikvadze's volume does none of this. It runs the words one-party, multi-party, opposition (in the political sense), Czechoslovakia, Prague, dissent, Trotsky, Stalin and self-management to almost nothing. It does not argue with its critics because it does not admit that they exist. The reader who wrote in from abroad is shown a working model of a democracy with no friction in it anywhere.

What "no opposition" means here

The word "opposition" occurs exactly once in the book, and its single use is worth the whole vocabulary it displaces. It appears in a passage on the federal structure: "the USSR contains no opposition of centre to localities; there exists no contradiction between the highest and lowest authorities." Opposition, in this book, is a purely spatial notion — friction between tiers of an administrative machine — and its absence is a boast. Political opposition, opposition as the right to organise against the government of the day, is not denied or refuted; it is simply not a category the book possesses. A volume on democracy in which the only opposition conceivable is the kind you would want to eliminate has told you, in one sentence, what it means by the word.

The same evacuation governs the treatment of 1968. The year appears fifteen times in the text, and every one is domestic housekeeping: the recall of 541 local Soviet deputies "in 1968"; the Presidium Ordinance of 12 April 1968 on the handling of citizens' complaints; the "new legislative

enactments on the rural and township Soviets adopted in 1968." Czechoslovakia — the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968 that crushed an attempt to build the very "socialism with a human face" this book claims already to embody, four years before it went to press — is absent. This is not a book that could not know. It is a book by Soviet jurists, published in Moscow, in which 1968 means an ordinance on paperwork and never means Prague. Where its sibling inverted the event, this one deletes it. The finding, as the brief for this series puts it, is not any single falsehood but the asymmetry: across the whole volume the Party and its Soviets are only ever the subject perfecting democracy, never the object of a doubt about it.

The machinery, described against itself

Because the book is a manual, its most revealing passages are not arguments but instructions — and it is here, in the loving procedural detail, that it convicts itself without meaning to. Take the chapter on elections, the longest sustained description in the volume. It sets out, correctly and at length, the guarantees of Soviet suffrage: universal, equal, direct, by secret ballot; single-member districts of equal population; no property deposit; polling on a non-working day from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.; screened booths that even electoral-commission members may not enter. And it reports the results with pride: "in June 1971, 99.95 per cent of all electors voted in the elections to local Soviets; over 99 per cent voted for candidates of the popular bloc of Communists and non-Party people"; in the 1970 Supreme Soviet elections "153,172,213 persons, or 99.96" of the electorate. A figure of 99.96 per cent is offered as "positive proof of their political consciousness." It is nothing of the kind. A turnout that never varies and a vote that is never divided are not measures of participation but of its abolition; the number is high precisely because there was nothing to decide.

The book knows this objection is coming, and — to its credit for candour, and its cost for the argument — it states it in the reader's own words. "The fact that only one candidate is nominated," it writes, "may cause people to wonder whether this in any way inhibits electoral freedom." Its answer is that "the number of candidates nominated in electoral districts is legally unlimited," and that "the various organisations can and do nominate several candidates for one and the same electoral district." Then the turn: "But, by virtue of the fact that the USSR contains no hostile classes and no competing political rivals, mass organisations are able to agree on a single candidate." So there is no legal bar to a second candidate; there

is simply, always, only one. "The upshot of all these preparations is that only one nominee is registered in each electoral district... This in no way infringes upon the citizens' freedom of choice." The reader is asked to accept that a ballot with one name on it is the fullest form of choice because society has grown too harmonious to want a second.

That "no hostile classes and no competing political rivals" is the load-bearing clause of the whole book, and it is not the authors' invention. It is Stalin's, almost word for word, and it was demolished in advance — which is the discovery that makes this volume more interesting than its blandness suggests.

Rescue: the soviet form is a real democratic idea

Before the demolition, the book deserves the credit this series owes any volume, because a reader told everything here is worthless learns nothing. The soviet form that Chkhikvadze describes is not a Stalinist fabrication. It is one of the genuine democratic inventions of the modern workers' movement, and revolutionary Marxists hold it dear. The book is right that the Soviets grew out of the strike committees of 1905 and 1917 — "from being strike-leading bodies the Soviets grew... into organs of the general revolutionary struggle" — and right that this origin gave them a form superior, in principle, to parliamentarism. It quotes Lenin accurately on the point. In the soviet type of body, "the parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents... there is no parliamentarism here as a special system, as the division of labour between the legislative and the executive, as a privileged position for the deputies." Deputies who keep their jobs and serve unpaid; the fusion of legislature and executive; the binding mandate; the right of recall that Lenin called "the truly popular nature of the Soviets" — these are the features of the Paris Commune that Marx praised and that Lenin sought to revive, and the book is entitled to claim them as a higher democratic idea than a parliament of professional politicians insulated from those they govern.

The book's negative case has the same real content. Its critique of purely formal democracy — that political equality can coexist with, and mask, economic domination; that the soviet form dissolves the separation of powers behind which "an omnipotent state apparatus actually decides affairs of state behind a facade of representative bodies" — is a serious argument with a long Marxist pedigree, and it is not answered by indignation. The freedom of the press is, in large measure,

the freedom of those who own presses; a parliament can be a screen. Revolutionary socialists made these arguments before there was a Soviet Union and make them still. The council idea, and the critique of the parliamentary shell, are the honest core of the book.

The bait-and-switch

The trouble is not that this instrument is blunt. It is that it is sharp, and only ever pointed one way. Every one of the commune-democratic features the book celebrates is described as a living reality of the USSR of 1972, when each had been hollowed into its opposite. The recall right that expresses "the truly popular nature of the Soviets" is exercised against individual local deputies "who betray their trust" — 541 of them in 1968 — but never against the apparatus that selects the single candidate in the first place; you may recall the man on the ballot, not the hand that wrote the ballot. The Lenin formula that there is "no privileged position for the deputies" is printed by a state whose managerial-political stratum, the nomenklatura, was precisely a privileged position, with access to goods and housing the ordinary voter never saw. The soviets that grew out of strike committees belong to the one industrial state on earth where a strike was not a right but a punishable act — the word "strike" occurs nine times in this book and every occurrence is the pre-revolutionary or foreign kind, the thing workers did to create the Soviets, never a thing they might do under them. The institution born of the strike had outlawed the strike, and the book does not notice.

This is the bait-and-switch on which the volume runs, and it is the same one its 1974 sibling runs, arrived at from the other direction: establish that formal rights can conceal real powerlessness, exhibit the genuine superiority of the council form, and then forbid anyone to ask whether Soviet rights and Soviet councils had themselves become formal. The critique of the parliamentary facade is pressed into service to gild a facade of its own.

The reply that was already in print

The answer to this book was written in 1936, and it answers not its conclusions in general but its machinery in particular. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, composed in the months the Stalin Constitution was being drafted, Trotsky devoted the chapter "In the Mirror of the New Constitution" to exactly the electoral apparatus Chkhikvadze would describe with pride thirty-six years later. Against the single candidate defended by the withering of classes, Trotsky had already set down Stalin's

own version of the argument — "there can be no nourishing soil for the creation of parties struggling among themselves. Where there are not several classes, there cannot be several parties" — and turned it inside out: "If the nourishing soil for political parties has really disappeared, then there is no reason to forbid them." The book's claim that the absence of rival candidates proves social harmony is met by the observation that a harmony requiring the prohibition of any alternative is the proof of its own falsity. And where Chkhikvadze insists the single nominee is genuinely the people's, Trotsky named the mechanism plainly: "the Soviet people will have the right to choose their 'representatives' only from among candidates whom the central and local leaders present to them under the flag of the party."

Trotsky answers the secret ballot, too — the book's proudest procedural guarantee, its "prime guarantee of the expression of the electorate's free choice." He asks the question the book cannot: in a society said to be without exploiters, "from whom is it necessary to defend the Soviet citizens? The answer is clear: from the bureaucracy." And he quotes Stalin conceding it — the secret ballot is needed "because we intend to give the Soviet people full freedom to vote for those whom they want to elect" — with the retort that "today the 'Soviet people' cannot yet vote for those whom they want to elect." Chkhikvadze celebrates the very reform whose necessity is an admission of unfreedom. Even the book's roster of nominating bodies — the trade unions, co-operatives, youth leagues and cultural societies through which candidates are "put forward" — Trotsky had disposed of: these organisations "do not in the least represent the interests of different 'little strata', for they all have one and the same hierarchical structure," and "the last word remains with the 'party' — that is, the bureaucracy." "The constitution merely refers the elector from Pontius to Pilate." His verdict on the equality of rights the book advertises is the sentence that answers the whole volume: "the equality of the rights of workers and peasants means, in reality, an equal lack of rights before the bureaucracy." Victor Serge, whom Trotsky quotes in the same chapter, supplies the epigraph the book earns: "What remains of the October Revolution... if every worker who permits himself to make a demand, or express a critical judgment, is subject to imprisonment? Oh, after that you can establish as many secret ballots as you please!"

None of this was despair. Trotsky's conclusion was not that the soviet form was worthless — he prized it as this book does — but that it had been usurped, and that its restoration required a political revolution against the caste that had captured it. That is the standard this series treats as the measure of every Soviet account of Soviet society, and it is worth adding that the

tradition Trotsky founded did not stop at critique. It gave the constructive answer the book's whole framing dares its opponents to give: that genuine workers' power requires the plurality of parties and tendencies the book forbids, not as a concession to liberalism but as the condition of soviet democracy itself. That case was set out at programmatic length in the Fourth International's resolution Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Socialist Democracy, drafted by Ernest Mandel and adopted in 1979 and, revised, in 1985 — a document that postdates this book and is offered as the tradition's considered reply, not a contemporaneous one, but whose target is precisely the doctrine that a single party expresses the unity of a classless society. Where Chkhikvadze offers the soviet form or a plurality of candidates and files the second under bourgeois deviation, that tradition demands the soviet form and the freedom of tendencies, press and organisation.

1972, in the other column

The book has one final silence, and it is the loudest, because the reality it omits was arriving weekly, in English, in the press of the tradition Trotsky founded, in the very months Chkhikvadze's manuscript was being set in type. On 5 January 1972 — a fortnight before Intercontinental Press put him on its cover — a Moscow court, in what the paper called a "hidden, virtually secret, one-day trial," sentenced Vladimir Bukovsky to "seven years confinement (two in prison, five in a strict-regime labor camp), plus five years enforced exile," the maximum penalty under Article 70 of the Russian Republic's criminal code (Intercontinental Press, vol. 10, no. 3, 24 January 1972). His crime was to have assembled and smuggled abroad the documents "showing the Kremlin misuse of psychiatric facilities to incarcerate political opponents," among them the former Red Army general Pyotr Grigorenko. The issue carried Bukovsky's own words on its cover: "People who are convinced of the injustice of an existing social system cannot have their views changed by techniques of political persecution." Through the same spring the paper tracked Grigorenko in his psychiatric prison-hospital, the confinement of the biologist Zhores Medvedev, the trials of Pyotr Yakir and Victor Krasin, and the samizdat Chronicle of Current Events case by case. Two bodies of print describe the same state, in the same year, and touch at not a single point. One calls the Soviets "the most democratic... system of representative institutions the world has ever known." The other reports, name by name, what that system did to citizens who exercised the "complete freedom to vote for whoever they wish" the book promises them — and what became of a man who documented the hospitals.

That Article 70, the instrument of Bukovsky's twelve years, is the same criminal legality the book praises for its "safeguarding" of "civil liberties" is not a coincidence to be exposed; it is the whole relation between the two columns. The book is not lying about the procedures. The booths are screened; the ballots are secret; the recall is real; the deputies do keep their jobs. What the procedures cannot do — what they were reshaped precisely so as not to do — is threaten the monopoly of the apparatus that stands behind the single name on every ballot. The category the book applies without limit to the capitalist West, that formal rights can mask real powerlessness, is the one thing it was built never to turn toward home. Read *The Soviet Form of Popular Government*, then, for exactly what it is: the calmest, most detailed official account in English of the machinery of Soviet democracy, produced at the moment — Bukovsky in the dock, the *Chronicle* counting the arrests — when the machinery's own admirers could most clearly have seen what it was for. The authors chose the ground and described it in full. On their own terms, and by their own definition of what democracy is, the description refutes the claim.

HISTORY

A History of India, Volume I

Ancient and medieval India from the Harappan cities to the Mughals, by two of the Soviet Union's leading Indologists - archaeology, epigraphy and the Sanskrit sources handled with real care, and an unusual willingness to say when the evidence settles nothing.

Koka Aleksandrovna Antonova and others

Introduction to the 1973 Edition

A reader who opens this book expecting a tract will be disarmed within a few pages. A History of India, Volume One is a work of real learning. It carries the ancient and medieval history of the subcontinent — the Stone Age, the Harappan cities, the Vedic age, the rise of Magadha, the Mauryan and Gupta empires, the long medieval centuries down through the Delhi Sultanate, Vijayanagar and the Mughals — and it carries them with a command of the archaeology, the epigraphy and the Sanskrit and Pali sources that few single-volume histories in any language could match in 1973. Its first part is the work of Grigory Bongard-Levin, one of the Soviet Union's most distinguished Indologists and Sanskritists; the medieval sections are K. Antonova's, the modern ones (in the companion volume) Grigory Kotovsky's. Behind them stood the four-volume Soviet History of India compiled between 1959 and 1969, "some of whose authors and editors have contributed to the present study as well." This is not apparatus-committee prose. It is scholarship, and it deserves to be read as such before it is read against the grain.

It also deserves to be dated correctly. The catalogue calls it 1973, and the Russian original — issued by Mysl in Moscow — does carry that year. But the English text in front of us is something later. Its copyright page reads "First printing 1979," with the Russian imprint given twice: Mysl 1973 and Progress 1979, the second marked *c izmeneniyami* — "with changes." The English translation, by Katharine Judelson, is © Progress Publishers 1979. So the book we hold is a revised English edition prepared at the end of the decade from a text first written in the early 1970s. Nothing in a history of the Guptas turns on six years, and I will speak of it as a book of the 1970s; but the distinction matters for placing it, because the 1970s were the years in which Soviet writing about India was doing a very particular kind of work.

The Preface says so without embarrassment. The book's stated purpose is to "provide the reader with a deeper knowledge of

India and the history and culture of its peoples, and thus promote friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union." It speaks of "a deep affection for the peoples of India and a sense of international solidarity," of "the broad political, economic and cultural ties which have grown up between the USSR and India." This was written in the wake of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of August 1971 — the treaty that anchored Soviet policy in South Asia for two decades and that framed the USSR's alignment with New Delhi against Pakistan, China and, behind them, the United States. Soviet Indology in these years was, among other things, an instrument of that alignment. A generous, respectful, deeply researched history of India was a diplomatic good, and everyone involved understood it as one. The Preface's warmth is genuine, and it is also policy. Both things are true at once, and the book is more interesting when they are held together than when either is denied.

So let us begin with what is genuinely good, because there is a great deal of it and because the criticism that follows depends on the credit being honest. Bongard-Levin's chapters on the deep past are the strongest thing here. The account of the Palaeolithic and the Harappan civilisation is careful, current for its date, and — this is the tell of a real scholar — repeatedly willing to say that the evidence does not settle the question. On the vexed matter of who ruled the Indus cities and how, the book lays out the competing hypotheses (V. V. Struve and Walter Ruben's guess that the Harappan order rested on slave-ownership; the priestly-landlord analogy with Mesopotamia; a republican-oligarchic reading) and then declines to choose: "as yet the data and evidence in support of this theory are inadequate," "again evidence is inconclusive." That restraint runs through the ancient sections. The treatment of Vedic society, of the varna order, of the Mauryan state and its administration, of Ashoka's edicts and the spread of Buddhism, is sober and source-anchored; where the sources are thin the book says so. On the slavery of the Magadha–Mauryan age it draws on specialised Soviet work — G. F. Ilyin's — and reconstructs the categories of bondage, the manumission rules of the Arthashastra, and the price of a slave

from the Buddhist texts, with genuine philological care. The medieval chapters carry the political narrative of the Sultanate and the Mughals, the revenue systems, Akbar's religious experiment, the Maratha ascent, with the same competence. None of this is propaganda, and a reader will come away from it knowing more about ancient India than most Western textbooks of the period would have taught.

The book is also, in one important respect, ahead of much of the scholarship of its day. On caste, it refuses the racial theory that European Indology had built into the very word. It notes that caste is a Portuguese import — "in Portuguese means race or lineage" — laid over the Sanskrit *jati*, and it carefully separates *jati* from *varna*, treating the four *varnas* as social estates that hardened only gradually into caste-like rigidity. Above all it rejects the old colonial fable that caste encodes the conquest of dark-skinned natives by fair Aryans: the idea "of Aryan superiority, their racial purity, of suppression by the Aryans of coloured natives" is set out and then dismantled, with the plain observation that "the word *varna* is not used to designate skin colour." To have written that in 1973 was to be on the right side of an argument that still had defenders. The book's instinct — to read caste as a social and economic institution rather than a racial one — is sound, and it is Marxist in the best, most usable sense.

And here we reach the seam where the scholarship meets the doctrine, because the way this book handles the shape of Indian history — its periodisation — is where a Soviet text of this vintage cannot be neutral, and where its silences are loudest.

Begin with an irony that the book never acknowledges and perhaps could not. The single most influential Marxist analysis of India ever written was Marx's own — the articles on British rule in India he sent the New York Daily Tribune in the summer of 1853, and the letters he exchanged with Engels that June. And the concept Marx built that analysis on was the one this book never uses. Marx read India through what he came to call the Asiatic mode of production: a society of self-sufficient, inward-looking village communities; an absence of private property in landed property, with the state as universal landlord standing above the villages; land-rent and state-tax merged into a single levy; and, resting on all this, the centralised "Oriental despotism" that Marx thought had made Indian history so strangely static. In their letters of that June, Marx and Engels agreed that the absence of private property in land was the key to the whole of the East. Whatever one thinks of that framework today — and it has been criticised, from within Marxism and outside it, as an Orientalist residue that

mistook colonial disruption for timeless changelessness — it was Marx's, it was specifically about India, and it is the natural theoretical home for exactly the phenomena this book spends its central chapters describing.

Now search this history for the term. "Asiatic mode of production" does not appear in it. Neither does "Asiatic" in any cognate sense; the word is simply absent from 117,000 words on the very civilisation for which Marx coined it. That absence is not an oversight. It is the fingerprint of a decision taken far above the authors' heads and decades before they wrote. In the theoretical debates of the late 1920s and early 1930s — the Leningrad discussion of 1931 was the decisive moment — the Asiatic mode was condemned and effectively banned in Soviet scholarship. It implied that a large part of humanity had followed a distinct, non-European, and above all non-progressive road, and that offended both the universal five-stage scheme then being canonised (primitive-communal → slave-owning → feudal → capitalist → socialist) and, not incidentally, the political needs of a state that wished to tell the colonial world its future was open. Stalin's 1938 codification, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, fixed the five stages as the universal ladder every society climbs. After that, Soviet historians of Asia had one permitted task: to find slavery and feudalism where Marx had found something he thought was neither.

Watch this book perform that task, and watch how honestly it strains against it. For ancient India the required category is the slave-owning formation, and the book duly supplies the verdict: in Magadha, "the most advanced part of the country," "it was evidently the socio-economic formation based on slave-ownership that was dominant in the complex social structure." But read the sentence that immediately follows. "Although the labour of free members of village communities, tenant farmers and hired labourers played a dominant role in the main spheres of production," the book concedes, slavery "was not the only form of exploitation, yet at the same time it was the most important one." The evidence the authors themselves have assembled says the opposite of their conclusion: by their own account, free and hired labour, not slave labour, dominated production. Elsewhere they are franker still. The "specific features of slavery as found in ancient Indian society were first and foremost its immaturity and its patriarchal character. Slave labour came very close to the labour of free hired labourers." Vedic slavery is "undeveloped, patriarchal"; the *Arthashastra* brackets slaves and hired men together; Megasthenes' report that "all Indians were free and not one of them was a slave" is dismissed as a mistake, but it is the kind of mistake an outsider makes about a

society where slavery is real but marginal. A scholar reading the evidence without the ladder would conclude that ancient India was not a slave society in any strong sense. The ladder requires that it be one, so the label is applied and the evidence quietly filed under "specific features."

The medieval half of the book contains the sharpest instance of all — sharp because here the authors come to the very edge of naming what they are forbidden to name. Under the heading "Indian Feudalism," the book records that "most Soviet Indologists regard the period from the seventh to the eighteenth century as the age of Indian history dominated by feudalism," and then, with striking candour, notes that "this assertion is questioned by a number of scholars in view of the fact that the socio-economic order of medieval India differed from that of medieval Europe." It then lists the differences — and the list is, point for point, Marx's description of the Asiatic mode. In India "the hierarchical structure of the ruling class was weakly developed, and at certain periods was lacking altogether." "Rent was usually exacted from the peasants in the form of a fixed state tax." "There was also no serfdom in India." And, most tellingly: "One of the specific factors distinguishing the Indian form of feudalism from the European variety was the predominance of state-owned land." No private property in land; rent and tax fused; no serfdom; a state that is the universal landlord — this is the Asiatic mode, enumerated feature by feature. The authors even devote a paragraph to "the state ownership of land in India" as a distinct object of Soviet debate. And having assembled the entire case, they close it thus: "This explains why the term feudalism is used with reference to India although it must be emphasised that certain of its features were quite distinct from the European model." The concept is present in all but name. The word is the one thing that cannot be written.

The village community completes the picture. Marx's Asiatic society was, above all, a mosaic of self-sufficient villages, and the book describes exactly that — the grama with its combination of handicraft and cultivation, its "inward-looking, patriarchal character," its long isolation: "for a long period the village communities were isolated one from the other, remaining self-sufficient institutions." This is Marx's village community to the letter. What is missing is only the name Marx gave to the whole formation it belonged to. The scholarship reaches the Asiatic mode from every direction and stops just short of the word, like a compass needle held away from north by a magnet under the table.

None of this makes the book worthless; it makes it a document of constrained intelligence, which is more valuable. The reader

who knows the constraint can read straight through it. Where the book insists on feudalism while itemising the predominance of state-owned land, the absence of serfdom and the missing hierarchy, the reader may supply the category the authors were not allowed to use, and lose nothing. The forced periodisation is a tax levied on the prose, not a corruption of the underlying research — which is precisely why it can be detected: the evidence keeps contradicting the label, in the authors' own sentences.

The cost is subtler on caste. Here the book's Marxism is mostly an asset — the rejection of the racial theory, the insistence on social and economic explanation — but the same stage-ladder flattens what it illuminates. Caste is subordinated to property differentiation and to a developmental sequence: varna arises from "the break-up of primitive communal relations and the development of inequality based on differences in property ownership," and caste itself is glossed, on Marx's authority, as "a vestigial form of tribal organisation." (The book attributes the phrase to Marx; I have not been able to verify Marx's exact wording against a text I hold, and flag it as the authors' citation rather than a checked quotation.) Read caste as a vestige and a by-product of class formation and you explain a great deal — but you also explain away the thing that most needs explaining: why a ritual order of purity and pollution, endogamy and hereditary occupation, should have proved so durable, so productive of its own hierarchy, so resistant to the levelling that "mere" property relations undergo. The living structure gets absorbed into the sequence. This is not falsification; it is the characteristic thinness of an analysis that must make every society tell the same story.

What the book cannot do, the tradition this series writes from could and did. The anti-Stalinist Marxists never accepted that history was a single staircase every nation must climb in the same order. Trotsky's law of uneven and combined development — that backward societies do not repeat the advanced ones' path but fuse archaic and modern forms into something new — was formulated precisely against the unilinear stagism that Stalinism turned into dogma, and it is a far better instrument for a subcontinent where, on this book's own showing, "archaic institutions and features of primitive communal organisation endured for a long period" alongside empire, coinage and long-distance trade. The Asiatic mode itself was kept alive as a live question in the West and among independent Marxists long after Moscow had closed the file; the debate the book cannot join was flourishing elsewhere throughout the years it was written.

And there is a second, blunter irony, one that reaches past

method into politics. This is a history published to "promote friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union" — a book of the 1971 treaty, of state-to-state solidarity with the government of India. It is worth remembering what Soviet solidarity with India had meant a generation earlier, when the object was not a friendly government but a colonial revolution. In his Open Letter to the Workers of India of July 1939, Trotsky charged that Stalin's Comintern "has completely renounced revolutionary struggle for India's independence," reduced to demanding on its knees that British imperialism grant "democratic liberties" — that "as regards the colonies of England and France the Comintern has completely gone over to Gandhi's position." Moscow subordinated the Indian masses to its diplomacy then, courting the imperial powers; it subordinated them again in the 1970s, courting the Indian bourgeois state that Trotsky had said could never lead the struggle because it was "closely bound up with and dependent upon" capital and stood "in fear of the masses." A warm history of India's glorious antiquity is the friendly face of a policy whose consistent content, across four decades, was *raison d'état*. The book flatters India's past; the tradition it comes out of had, in living memory, declined to fight for India's future.

That is the frame to bring to it, and it takes nothing away from the learning. *A History of India, Volume One* is the work of serious scholars doing serious work inside a cage they did not build and could not name. The archaeology is real; the philology is real; the refusal of the racial theory of caste is a genuine and creditable act of Marxist good sense. Read it for the Harappan cities and the Mauryan state and the Sultanate's revenue and you will be well repaid. Read the periodisation as what it is — an ideological fingerprint pressed into an otherwise honest text, the place where a banned idea leaves its outline in the shape of its own absence — and the book teaches something its authors could not say: that Marx's India would not fit into Stalin's staircase, and that the men and women who knew India best kept discovering the fact, sentence by sentence, even as they were obliged to deny it.

HISTORY

A History of India, Volume II

The British conquest to the Janata government: the drain of wealth, the destruction of Indian manufacture, the famines of 1770 and 1943, and the national movement - by the head of the India department at the Institute of Oriental Studies.

Koka Aleksandrovna Antonova and others

Introduction to the 1973 Edition

The spine and the catalogue say 1973. The book in your hands is later than that, and it matters. The copyright page carries two dates: the Russian original, © Mysl, 1973, and beneath it a second line — "English translation of revised Russian text. © Progress Publishers 1979," first printing 1978. This is not the 1973 book put into English. It is a revised and extended text, and the revision runs a long way. Its final chapters carry India through Indira Gandhi's Emergency of 1975–77, the lifting of that Emergency, the Congress rout of March 1977 and the swearing-in of Morarji Desai's Janata government, closing on the thirtieth anniversary of independence and the sixtieth of the October Revolution in the autumn of 1977. When you read its judgements, date them to the end of the 1970s, not to 1973.

This is the second of the two volumes — India in modern times, from the collapse of the Moghul empire and the British conquest through to the mid-1970s. The eighteenth-century chapters are by K. A. Antonova; everything from the 1860s forward — which is to say the whole of the national movement, independence, partition and the Nehru and Indira Gandhi years — is signed by G. G. Kotovsky. Grigory Kotovsky headed the India department at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and he was among the most substantial of Soviet Indologists. That is worth saying at the outset, because this is not a hack's compilation. It is a serious work of scholarship, and it is also, in its later chapters, a work of Soviet foreign policy. Both things are true, and the interest of the book lies in watching where the first turns into the second.

What the book gets right

Begin with what should be conceded plainly, because the book earns it. The account of British colonial exploitation is real history, carefully sourced, and often powerful. Antonova's chapters on the conquest of Bengal are unsentimental about

what the East India Company did. The plunder of the Bengal treasury after Plassey is called what it was: "the beginning of shameless pumping of India's riches over to Britain," and the figure is given — "between 1757 and 1780 Britain drained from India commodities and coins amounting to a total value of 38 million pounds." This is the "drain of wealth" that Indian nationalist economists — Dadabhai Naoroji, R. C. Dutt — spent their lives documenting, and the book puts it at the centre where it belongs.

So too the destruction of Indian manufacture. The book traces the ruin of the Dacca weavers, the deindustrialisation of Bengal, and the tariff regime that engineered it: a duty of two to three and a half per cent on British cloth entering India against twenty to thirty per cent on Indian cloth entering Britain, "as a result [of which] India was forced to start importing cloth instead of exporting it as before." And it does not flinch from the famines. On the Bengal famine of 1770 it writes that "millions of people died of hunger, food prices rose to astronomic heights, while the gentlemen of London would not even hear of a reduction in taxes." On the far greater Bengal famine of 1943 it records over five million dead, and identifies the cause precisely — not a shortfall in the harvest but "the poor distribution machinery of the British administration and the continuing export of cereals despite the harvest failure: when India herself was short of four million tons, a million tons of food grain was exported."

None of this is Soviet invention. It is the ground Marx himself worked in his 1853 articles for the New-York Daily Tribune — "The British Rule in India" and "The Future Results of British Rule in India" — where he set down both the drain and the smashing of the handloom, and where he argued, with a dialectician's ambivalence that the nationalist schools never quite forgave him, that British imperialism was at once wrecking the old India and, against its own will, laying the material foundations on which a new one might be built. The revolutionary tradition against which this series measures Progress does not dispute the record of colonial exploitation; it insists on it. When Kotovsky's chapters reach the twentieth

century they are on the same ground: the Fourth International's own analysts, writing in 1944, described the 1943 Bengal famine in almost the same terms as the book does — as the point at which "British imperialism transferred onto the backs of the always poverty-stricken Indian masses an intolerable proportion of the burden of its war effort." On the crime of colonialism the book and its critics are not far apart. The parting of the ways comes over who was to end it, and how.

The national bourgeoisie and the "non-capitalist path"

Here is the doctrine that organises the whole second half of the book. In the Soviet reading, the Indian National Congress was the political expression of a national bourgeoisie — a bourgeoisie whose interests, because it was itself oppressed by imperialism, pointed it in an objectively anti-imperialist and therefore progressive direction. Gandhi is handled with striking gentleness; Nehru is very nearly a hero. And Nehru's India — the expanding state sector, the Planning Commission and the five-year plans, the "society on the socialist pattern" adopted at Avadi in 1955, non-alignment, panchsheel and Bandung — is presented as a genuinely progressive road, one that might even open onto something beyond capitalism. The book says so almost explicitly. It describes the state sector as being "of an undeniably anti-imperialist character," reports that the "progressive aspects of Indian economic policy ... were welcomed by the peoples of the Soviet Union and the entire socialist community," and, most tellingly, notes that the Indian big bourgeoisie feared the state sector precisely because it "might in the future become the economic base for a shift in the direction of non-capitalist development."

That phrase — "non-capitalist development" — is the tell. It is the same doctrine of "socialist orientation" that runs through the other national-liberation volumes in this series, the theory that a state led by radical nationalists, leaning on a state economic sector and allied to Moscow, could bypass a capitalist stage of development altogether. The reader who wants to see the machinery running elsewhere should look at the companion Progress titles on Kaysone Phomvihane's Laos (Revolution in Laos, 1981) and the collective USSR and Countries of Africa (1980), where the same categories — the progressive national bourgeoisie, the non-capitalist path, the state sector as anti-imperialist lever — are applied to societies with far less industry and far less of a proletariat than India ever had. In each case the theory did the same political work: it identified a bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist regime as an ally, and it counselled the local Communists to support it.

To the book's credit, Kotovsky is too good an economist to pretend the results were what the theory promised. He records that the creation of the state sector "did not change the socio-economic character of Indian society, on the contrary, it stimulated the expansion of private capitalist enterprise"; he watches the Birla, Tata and Mafatlal groups swell under the protection of the plans; he notes that a handful of monopoly houses ended up owning three-quarters of the assets of India's private joint-stock companies. The facts are all there. What survives them, unchanged, is the political valuation: Congress remains progressive, its bourgeoisie national, its road one that Soviet readers should applaud.

The revolutionary answer to this was old, and it was specifically about India. In his Open Letter to the Workers of India of July 1939 — published in the New Internationalist that September, on the very eve of the war — Trotsky wrote flatly that "the Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with and dependent upon British capitalism. They tremble for their own property. They stand in fear of the masses." Of the figure this book treats so tenderly he was merciless: "The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi. A fake leader and a false prophet!" The theory of permanent revolution — which the Soviet volumes attack by name and never state — held that in a belated colonial country the bourgeoisie could not carry through even its own democratic tasks, that only the proletariat, drawing the peasant masses behind it, could complete the national and agrarian revolution, and that it could not stop at the bourgeois stage once it had taken power. The book's own hero, M. N. Roy, learned this the hard way and is punished for it in these pages: Roy's "sectarian" error, we are told, lay in "his rejection of any role for the national bourgeoisie in the freedom movement," and for it he was expelled from the Comintern in 1929. The category that convicts Roy is the same one that acquits Nehru.

The record the book cannot state: 1942

Now to the sharpest matter, and the place where a scholar's candour and a state's requirements pull hardest against each other.

In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and the war the world's Communist parties had been calling an imperialist war became, overnight, a just war of anti-fascist defence. In India the Communist Party followed Moscow into a line it called "People's War." What that meant in practice the book states without appearing to notice what it has stated. The CPI, it writes, began "advocating turning the war against the Axis

powers into a people's war," which "led it to oppose any interruption of arms production." When the Congress launched the Quit India movement in August 1942 — the largest anti-colonial upsurge of the war, met by the Raj with more than two thousand killed and some sixty thousand arrested — the CPI's Central Committee, the book concedes, "took a negative view of the 'August Revolution'." The British authorities legalised the Party in July 1942, and the book explains why with devastating frankness: legalisation "undeniably promoted the consolidation of the Asian rear for the Allies," and "represented a positive gesture towards the Soviet Union." "Unlike the Congress," it adds, "the CPI had not made its support of the British war effort conditional upon the establishment of a responsible government." Its newspaper, *People's War*, "continued to spread the ideas of scientific communism among the masses of the working people."

Read those sentences again. A Communist party opposed the interruption of arms production, opposed the mass movement for independence, was legalised by the colonial state as a reward, and gave the British war effort a support more unconditional than the bourgeois Congress would offer — and the book records every fact and calls the sum of them "certain mistakes ... as was later acknowledged by the Communist Party of India." The word doing the work there is "acknowledged": the judgement is subcontracted to the CPI's own later self-criticism, so that the author never has to make it himself. And note what is missing. The whole reversal is attributed to the changed character of the war after June 1941; its author is never named. Stalin does not appear once in this book, in 148,000 words; the words "Comintern" and "Moscow" carry the weight, and the decision that turned the Indian Communists against India's own rebellion is presented as a spontaneous response to events rather than a line handed down.

The contemporaneous verdict of the revolutionary movement is on the record, and it is not gentle. In October 1944 the Fourth International's journal published the assessment of its Indian co-thinkers: "The Communist Party of India, pursuant to its policy of unconditional support of the British imperialist war effort, openly and actively opposed the mass struggle, thus making themselves the tool of British imperialism in India." It spoke of "the traitorous support of the trade union bureaucracy and the Stalinists, who everywhere act openly as British imperialism's agencies within the working class." One may think that harsh; one cannot think it uninformed, for it was written in the moment, by people being jailed in the same country. And it was not hindsight: Trotsky had forecast the whole thing in 1939, warning that on Stalin's instructions "the

Indian people must support their present slave owners, the British imperialists." The book's own facts confirm the prediction. It simply declines to draw the conclusion.

The Trotskyists, present as a phantom

Who were these co-thinkers? The book will not quite say. In its single glancing reference, the fierce ideological struggle over the People's War line ran "between the Communists and various other Left groups, mainly those of Trotskyite leanings." That half-clause is the only trace in the whole volume of a real current in Indian politics. The Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India, Burma and Ceylon was founded at a conference in May 1942 — the very month the crisis broke — fusing Trotskyist groups from Bengal, the United Provinces and Bihar with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party of Ceylon. It was small, it was hunted, and it took the theory of permanent revolution directly to the Indian question. Crucially, on the decisive issue it stood where the CPI did not: the BLPI supported the August 1942 rising, and by its own account emerged from it as "the recognized extreme left-wing of the Indian labor movement," while its members were rounded up in police raids set off, they charged, by a "Stalinist stool-pigeon." Its programmatic documents — a class analysis of India, a transitional programme — were published in the pages of the Fourth International in 1942 and after.

This is why the book cannot name them. To name the BLPI would be to record that there existed, in 1942, an Indian Marxist current that backed the anti-colonial upsurge which the official Communist Party opposed — and that this current called itself Trotskyist. The silence is not an oversight in a work this thorough. It is structural. A history written to vindicate the CPI's alliance with Moscow cannot afford to let the reader meet the Marxists who broke with Moscow over precisely the moment the CPI is least able to defend.

Telangana: the crushed alternative, half-told

The other great silence concerns Telangana. Here the book is more forthcoming than one might expect — and then stops one step short. It describes the Telangana peasant uprising vividly and sympathetically: begun in 1946 against the Nizam of Hyderabad, spreading across a huge area, throwing up village councils (panchayats) and self-defence detachments, redistributing over 1,200,000 acres. It even records, without apparent discomfort, that when Hyderabad was absorbed into the Indian Union in September 1948 the army of independent India turned on the peasants: "Regular Indian troops not only

wiped out the razakar detachments, but also embarked on action against the insurgent peasants in Telengana." "In 1949 units of the regular Indian army, sent to Telengana to put down the uprising, entered Hyderabad. After that the uprising developed into a guerilla war, which lasted until 1951."

What ended it? The book's answer is sociological: "a split within the insurgents' camp took place," as the more prosperous peasants, satisfied by land reform, abandoned a movement increasingly led by the poor. That is part of the truth. The part the book omits is political. The Telangana armed struggle was called off in October 1951 by decision of the Communist Party of India — a decision taken after the Party's leaders had consulted Moscow, and in line with the turn away from insurrection that Soviet counsel then favoured. The largest armed peasant movement in modern Indian history, the nearest thing the subcontinent produced to a rural red base, was wound up on advice from abroad. A book that can describe the Indian army crushing the peasants cannot bring itself to describe the Communist Party ordering them to lay down their arms. Once again the silence falls exactly where Soviet direction of the Indian movement would have to be admitted.

The same optic governs the book's treatment of everything to its left thereafter. When the Communist Party split in 1964, the book writes from the standpoint of the pro-Moscow CPI: the breakaway Communist Party of India (Marxist) is the "parallel" party, guilty of "splitting tactics," which had the temerity of "accusing the leadership of the CPI of revisionism." And the peasant revolt that erupted at Naxalbari in 1967 and gave the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) its name appears only as the work of "the Naxalites (Left extremists)" — a phrase that lumps armed landless peasants together, a few pages later, with the RSS and the Ananda Marg as "extremist organisations" of left and right to be banned. A reader would never guess from these pages that the Naxalite revolt was a Communist rising against exactly the Congress order the book spends its final chapters praising.

The book as an instrument of the alliance

Why this shape? Because of when and for what the revised text was made. By 1978 the Soviet Union and India were bound by the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation of August 1971; the alliance had been sealed in blood in the Bangladesh war of that December, and consecrated by Brezhnev's state visit to Delhi in November 1973, which the book recounts at reverent length. India's "underground nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes" of 1974 is noted with

approval; the Bhilai and Bokaro steel plants, built with Soviet aid, are a recurring point of pride. The last twenty-odd pages are, frankly, a hymn to Soviet-Indian friendship, culminating in Morarji Desai's Moscow visit of October 1977. This is Soviet Indology working in the service of the alliance, and the alliance required a particular history: one in which Congress is a friend, Nehru's road is progressive, and the Communist Party of India is a loyal supporting player whose worst moments — 1942, 1951 — can be recorded in fragments but never judged, because to judge them would be to admit that the CPI's compass pointed to Moscow rather than to the Indian revolution.

That is the book's limit, and it is a real one. But a serious reader is not told to throw it away. Kotovsky and Antonova have given us a colonial economic history of India that holds up — on the drain, the deindustrialisation, the famines, the agrarian structure, the mechanics of the plans — and that remains, in places, among the fuller Marxist treatments available in English of its period. Take the economic history and use it. Read the political narrative of the twentieth century against the grain, watching for the sentences that state a fact and withhold its meaning, and for the two or three names — the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, Stalin, the CPI's decision of October 1951 — that a book this thorough could only have left out on purpose.

A History of Realism

Three long essays on realism from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, by a critic who reads Balzac, Nietzsche, Sartre and Heidegger in the original and quotes them with page numbers. The Balzac and Stendhal comparison alone repays the book.

Boris Suchkov

Introduction to the 1973 Edition

The English title is Progress Publishers' invention. The Russian title page, which survives in the copy this text was scanned from, reads *Istoricheskiye sud'by realizma*, the historical destinies of realism, and that is the more honest description, because this is not a history. It is three long essays: "Realism and Reality" (some 17,000 words on what realism is), "History and Realism" (54,000 words, from the Renaissance to Tolstoi), and "Contemporary Realism" (62,000 words on the twentieth century). A reader who opens it expecting a chronological survey will be disorientated for about ten pages and then will realise that Boris Suchkov is arguing a single thesis at book length, and that the thesis is worth arguing with.

Start with the date, because the front matter did not survive. The copy digitised for this edition was a Los Angeles Public Library copy; what reached the scanner was the borrower's slip, a fragment of the dust jacket, the Russian title page and the contents. There is no copyright page and no printing history, so the text has to be dated from inside. It dates cleanly. Lyndon Johnson appears as "US ex-president", which puts the writing after January 1969. Pitirim Sorokin is "the late", and he died in February 1968. The most recent editions Suchkov quotes from are Moscow printings of *Anti-Dühring* (1969) and the three-volume *Marx and Engels Selected Works* (1970) — quotation editions, not sources. There is no reference to any event after about 1970, and the latest literary matter in the book is a remark by the Italian novelist Guido Piovene at a symposium on the novel held in Leningrad. This is a manuscript closed around 1970 and published in English three years later: a book of the last Khrushchev afterglow, appearing in the Brezhnev settlement.

About its author the volume says almost nothing, and this series has been unable to establish more from the archives it holds. The name Suchkov returns nothing across the whole reply corpus — the Fourth International run, The New

International, International Socialist Review, the 763 issues of Intercontinental Press, the Trotsky archive. What the jacket copy claims is that "In Boris Suchkov's book the reader will also find a fascinating analysis of the works of Gorky, Sholokhov, Fadeyev, Serafimovich, Leonov and other masters of Soviet literature", and the library card gives the patronymic, Leontevich. Nothing in this introduction rests on any biographical claim, because none can be sourced.

Take the scholarship first, and take it seriously, because a good deal of this book is very good and the criticism that follows is worthless if that is not said plainly.

Suchkov reads. He reads Balzac in a Brussels edition of 1831, Bulwer-Lytton in the original, Nietzsche in German, Sartre's *L'être et le néant* in the Paris edition of 1943 with a page number, Jaspers's *Rechenenschaft und Ausblick* (Munich, 1951), Heidegger's *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Stefan Zweig, Winckelmann, Thomas Mann's *Zwei Festreden*, and the proceedings of the 1938 Paris conference of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture. When he attacks existentialism he attacks it out of its own books, and he concedes at the outset that "the existentialists have provided a pretty convincing description of the modern world and contemporary bourgeois society as it appears to the bourgeois perception." That is not a straw man; it is a thesis, and he then has to work for his objection. Progress volumes in this series have repeatedly been caught naming an opponent scores of times without ever citing a work of his — Adorno in Batalov, Habermas in Naletov. Suchkov inverts the pattern. The philosophers he is fighting are read in the original and quoted with references.

The comparative criticism is the best thing in the book. His long parallel between Balzac and Stendhal is genuinely illuminating: Balzac's heroes struggle inside the system and can be reconciled to it — the escaped convict Vautrin ends as a pillar of the society whose laws he broke — while the conflict between Julien Sorel and his social environment "cannot, for it is based on class antagonism, which will last as long as the

existing system of social relations persists." He is exact about Balzac's method, "the penetration of self-interest into all spheres of private and public life", pursued "with a historian's thoroughness", and equally exact about its limit: Balzac saw social atomisation and missed capitalism's "unifying role", the way the new relations created "the objective conditions in the capitalist system for the poor to unite against the rich". He notices that Stendhal "compared the novel to a mirror placed along the highway and reflecting both the azure sky and the roadside mud", and observes that the same could be said of Stendhal's characters. He is good on Dickens's method of building character by heightening a single trait, on Walter Scott's placing of the individual at the intersection of class forces, on Pushkin's compression, on Tolstoi's inner monologue, and on the difference between Tolstoi's use of it and Joyce's. On Proust he is generous in a way Soviet criticism of the period rarely was — "undoubtedly one of the greatest bourgeois writers of the century" — and gives him twenty-nine pages of attention.

The survey of post-war Western writing in the last essay is wider than anything else of its kind published in English by this house. Böll, Grass, Koeppen, Hans Werner Richter, Kirst, Schalluck, Andersch, Weisenborn; Amis, Wain, Osborne and C. P. Snow; Greene, Čapek, Feuchtwanger, Mann's Doktor Faustus; Lanoux, Hériat, Pierre de Lescure; Pavese, Moravia, Calvino, Cassola. Much of this is read at first hand and some of it is acute — the reading of Doktor Faustus as Mann settling accounts with the German cultural inheritance that prepared fascism is a real piece of criticism, and the verdict on the Angry Young Men, that they "had nothing to oppose to the society which they hated, except their own anger", is a fair judgement fairly earned. He also gets things wrong: he calls Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon "Jimmy Dixon" and a postgraduate student, which he is not. The errors are the errors of a man reading very widely at a distance, not of a man reading nothing.

So this is a serious critic. Now the thesis.

Suchkov's argument is that realism is a method of cognition, that the great critical realists of the nineteenth century achieved a "synthetic" grasp of society which no other method could achieve, that they were nonetheless limited by their inability to see the masses as an active historical force, and that socialist realism is the resolution of that limitation and therefore realism's continuation and culmination. What defines it is not subject matter and not style but what he calls conscious historicism: "conscious historicism is the main, determining feature and sine qua non of socialist realism and

its creative method."

That is a real definition, and it should be credited as one, because the alternative doctrine on offer at the time was worse. The companion volume in this series, Avner Zis's *Foundations of Marxist Aesthetics* (Progress, 1977), founds socialist realism on Lenin's 1905 article "Party Organisation and Party Literature" and completes it with commitment and Party guidance. Suchkov does no such thing. In 134,000 words the phrases Party guidance and Party leadership do not occur; neither does *partiinnost*; the word commitment occurs once, in an unrelated sense; Lenin's 1905 article is never cited at all. He insists instead, more than once, that the method prescribes nothing: "The new literary method is based on the individual freedom of the writer in understanding and hence depicting those aspects of life he examines and submits to aesthetic interpretation." And: "Without prescribing any rules or any particular expressive devices to the writer, or restricting him in any way in his quest for new expressive means, socialist realism enables him to perceive and understand the truth of history."

That is the strongest form the case can take, and it is worth putting to the reader in its strongest form. It is also, precisely because it is epistemological rather than administrative, a doctrine that can be stated without any institutional history whatever. And that is what happens.

Where did socialist realism come from? Suchkov's answer is four words: "Socialist realism was born in Russia." It was born of Russian literature's tradition of service to the masses, of the accumulated revolutionary energy of centuries, and above all of one man: Gorky is "the founder of socialist realism", named as such twice. That is the whole genealogy.

Now the counts, which are the finding. In this book the year 1934 does not appear. The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, which in August 1934 wrote socialist realism into the statutes of a single compulsory Union, is not mentioned. The Union of Soviet Writers is not mentioned — the phrase does not occur, nor does "Writers' Union". The Central Committee decree of 23 April 1932 dissolving the literary groupings is not mentioned. RAPP: zero. The decree of 14 August 1946 against Zvezda and Leningrad: not mentioned. Zhdanov: zero. Stalin: zero — not once in a book that covers the whole Stalin period of Soviet literature. Mayakovsky: zero. Meyerhold: zero. Babel: zero. Mandelstam: zero. Pilnyak occurs once, in a list. Trotsky: zero.

Set this beside the two neighbouring volumes on the same

export list. Zis in 1977 at least prints his opponents' question — "where and in which works did Marx, Engels and Lenin write that the creative method for socialist literature should be socialist realism?" — and answers that the search will fail but the method is vindicated "by the whole philosophical structure of Marxist-Leninist theory". Kornely Zelinsky, in *Soviet Literature: Problems and People* (Progress, 1970), was in the room and said so: "In October 1932... a meeting was held in Gorky's house which was attended by Stalin and other Party and Government leaders. I was present at that meeting and was one of the speakers there. It was then that Stalin gave the Soviet writers' artistic method the definition of socialist realism." Suchkov's book was written in the same years as Zelinsky's and never lets the question arise at all. Where Zis argues that nothing was prescribed, Suchkov simply never mentions that there was an occasion on which anything could have been.

The anti-Stalinist left had the story, in outline, thirty years earlier and from two directions. Writing to *Partisan Review* on 18 June 1938, Trotsky observed that "The style of present-day official Soviet painting is called 'socialist realism.' The name itself has evidently been invented by some high functionary in the department of the arts" — a guess, and slightly low; Zelinsky supplies the functionary. Four months later, reviewing Kurt London's *The Seven Soviet Arts* in *The New Internationalist* for October 1938, Edna Margolin reported a version of the same scene: "a delegation of writers and critics visited Stalin and promised that henceforth the approach to art would be based on realism. He replied: 'Say, rather, Socialist Realism.'" (That issue is from the run of *The New Internationalist* which was still Trotskyist; the magazine went to Shachtman's minority in April 1940.) Margolin's account is second-hand and should be read as such. What is not second-hand is her diagnosis of the consequence: the name arrived "from on high without any definition or clue for its meaning", and "unformulated, it makes a better weapon against those who fall from grace. It can be woven to fit any figure."

Suchkov's book is, among other things, the eventual answer to that charge. He does formulate it. He gives socialist realism a content — conscious historicism — which is arguable, falsifiable in principle, and free of the police. He has supplied the definition Margolin said would never be supplied. He has simply left out the thirty-eight years during which the undefined term did the work she described.

There is one omission inside the scholarship that shows how the operation runs at the level of a footnote. Suchkov twice

cites Engels's letter to Margaret Harkness — "a famous letter on realism", he calls it — and both times he quotes exactly one thing from it, the sentence about *City Girl* in which "The working class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even showing (making) any attempt at striving to help itself." That sentence supports his thesis: it shows the limit of critical realism, which is exactly what socialist realism is said to transcend. The rest of the letter, which is the reason anyone remembers it, is the passage on Balzac — that Balzac's political sympathies ran against the grain of what his novels actually showed, and that this is realism's triumph over the author's own opinions. Michael Harrington, writing in *The New Internationalist* for Spring 1956, quoted the letter's governing dictum: "The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better the work of art." (Harrington was by then writing for Shachtman's magazine, not for the tradition this series writes from; the quotation is his rendering and is used here for that reason with the label attached.) Suchkov uses the phrase "triumph of realism" three times in his own voice, without attribution, and never once about Balzac, and never quotes the paragraph the phrase comes from. He could not. His whole book argues that the decisive thing about the modern writer is a conscious socialist outlook. Engels's sentence says that the less of the author's opinion shows, the better. The letter he cites twice contains the strongest available objection to his thesis, and he takes from it only the half that helps.

The larger version of the same absence is a person. Georg Lukács is not in this book: not under that spelling, not under any, not once in 134,000 words. He was the major Marxist theorist of realism in the twentieth century, he was alive while Suchkov was writing and died in June 1971, and the architecture of this book is his — Walter Scott and the historical novel, Balzac against Flaubert and Zola, critical realism as a cognitive achievement, the passage from critical to socialist realism, "typicality" as the central category. It is not that Suchkov agrees with Lukács on everything; nobody had to. It is that the argument is conducted in a vocabulary Lukács largely made, against opponents Lukács largely chose, without the name. What made him unmentionable is not obscure. He had recanted publicly more than once — his self-criticisms were notorious enough that Michael Harrington, introducing the first English translation of "What Is Orthodox Marxism?" in *The New Internationalist* for Summer 1957, could note that the most recent of them had come "only some seven or eight years ago", and consisted of "the confession of not having been sufficiently aware of contemporary Russian literature". Then, in October 1956, he joined Imre Nagy's government; when it fell he "went into exile along with Imre Nagy", as Harrington

put it in the same note.

The Fourth International's assessment appeared within weeks of his death, and it is not an obituary tribute. Alan Jones, in *Intercontinental Press* of 12 July 1971 (reprinted from *The Red Mole*, London, 15 June), granted him "perhaps the most significant question asked in Marxism, outside the writings of Lenin and Trotsky" and then convicted him on the aesthetics: from the late 1920s his writings became "tinged with another theme, which was to lead to intellectual decay and compromise with Stalin and the bourgeoisie. This was the theory of phenomenal, as opposed to structural, realism in art, which is made most explicit in *The Historical Novel*. This theory was used in an attempt to show how the products of high bourgeois art and the art of Stalinist Russia, with its 'socialist realism,' its threnodies to departed tractors, the struggle for production on a collective farm, etc., could be combined." Jones's conclusion — that Lukács "was, of course, far too intelligent to accept all the grosser aspects of Stalinism, but all he was prepared to do about it was to keep up an irregular sniping fire at some of its aspects in the aesthetic field" — is a hard judgement on a man who had by then been deported once and recanted repeatedly, and it should be read with that in mind. But the analytical charge is the one that matters here, because it is a description of Suchkov's book written the year Suchkov finished it, by someone who had never heard of him. The continuity thesis — high bourgeois art and Soviet official art as two stages of one method — is exactly what *A History of Realism* exists to establish.

What Suchkov does concede is worth setting out, because it is more than most and because it shows precisely where the line runs. He is candid about the Stalin years' damage to literature. The revival of the "hero and the crowd" theory, he writes, "which is totally alien to Marxism, as a result of the personality cult, had an extremely adverse effect on the historical novel, as indeed on the development of other genres in Soviet literature", producing an idealisation of even Ivan the Terrible. He names and condemns the no-conflict doctrine: it "banished class conflicts from the historical novel and adjusted the past to the burning topics of the day: the role of the State was excessively idealised" and "the masses, the makers of history, were relegated to the role of executors of the designs of individual personalities towering above them." That is a sharper sentence about Stalinist culture than anything in Zis, who seven years later would rebuild the no-conflict theory as philosophy, holding that socialist society "provides no scope for tragedies resulting from the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters."

But watch the next clause, because it is the whole mechanism in nine words: "these views that are alien to Marxism and socialist realism were opposed by the entire experience of Soviet literature." The damage is admitted; the category is protected. The no-conflict theory was not a corruption of socialist realism, it was socialist realism's official doctrine, promulgated by the men who ran the Union; but by the time Suchkov writes, it has been reclassified as something alien that socialist realism resisted. The rule this series keeps meeting holds here exactly: error is admissible, the category is not. A Soviet writer may have been wrong, a period may have been bad, the personality cult may have done "extremely adverse" damage — and the method itself is never in the dock, because everything done in its name that failed is retrospectively defined as not having been it. The single reference to the Twentieth Congress does the same work in the opposite direction: its decisions "removed the vestiges of the personality cult and restored the true Leninist norms of social life", and the consequence in literature is stated as an increase in "the objective value of the individual". The problem is closed by having been solved.

Which brings the argument to the year the manuscript was finished, and to the last silence.

Contemporary Soviet literature is barely in this book. The Soviet writers Suchkov discusses are Gorky, Serafimovich, Fadeyev, Nikolai Ostrovsky, Sholokhov, Tvardovsky's Vasily Tyorkin, and the novelists of the war — Bek, Kazakevich, Panova, Leonov, Simonov. Of the generation that made Soviet literature an argument again after 1956 there is almost nothing: Solzhenitsyn zero, and the roll of the thaw and after — Aitmatov, Bondarev, Trifonov, Abramov, Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, Zalygin, Granin — is empty or nearly so. Tvardovsky is quoted three times, always as the poet of Vasily Tyorkin, never as the editor of *Novy Mir*. The manuscript was being closed in the months around February 1970, when Tvardovsky was forced out of that editorship.

And the doctrine this book defines as a cognitive achievement was, in those same years, being used as an administrative instrument in the way Margolin had predicted in 1938. *Intercontinental Press* of 24 March 1969 printed the record of the Writers' Union Secretariat session of 22 September 1967, chaired by Konstantin Fedin, which considered Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*. One secretary after another spoke against the book; one of them concluded: "Even if this novel were put into some kind of shape, it would not be a novel of socialist realism, but only an ordinarily competent work." *Intercontinental Press's* own comment, two years before

Suchkov finished writing, was this: "Although realism is the official literary canon in the Soviet Union, it is seldom to be found in the works the bureaucracy allows to be published. The official realism is only cardboard decoration for the bureaucratic system."

That is a hard sentence and it is not fair to the whole of this book — Suchkov's realism is not cardboard, and his pages on Balzac and Stendhal are not decoration. But it names what the term had become as an operative category in Moscow while he was defining it as a method of knowledge, and he does not mention that it had any operative existence at all.

The reply this series rests on is older and goes to the root rather than the practice. In the letter of 18 June 1938 Trotsky set against the whole enterprise a rival first principle — that "a protest against reality, either conscious or unconscious, active or passive, optimistic or pessimistic, always forms part of a really creative piece of work" — and drew from it the conclusion that Suchkov's third essay exists to deny without ever engaging: "a truly revolutionary party is neither able nor willing to take upon itself the task of 'leading' and even less of commanding art, either before or after the conquest of power... Art, like science, not only does not seek orders, but by its very essence, cannot tolerate them." Honesty requires adding that in the same essay Trotsky wrote that it was "impossible to read Soviet verse and prose without physical disgust" and consigned the art of the Stalin period wholesale to the record of decline. That verdict does not survive *And Quiet Flows the Don*, which Suchkov reads well, or Vasily Tyorkin, which he reads better. A tradition that holds Progress Publishers to the evidence has to hold itself to it. Trotsky's own book on these questions, *Literature and Revolution* (1923), written by a member of the Politburo and published in Moscow, is the great suppressed Soviet work on exactly the ground Suchkov's first essay covers — what art is for, what a party may and may not do to a writer, whether a class can be handed a method. It had been out of Soviet intellectual life for forty years by the time this manuscript was finished, and its absence here is not an argument that failed but a book that could not be picked up.

What, then, is this volume?

It is the most intellectually respectable statement of the continuity thesis available in English from this publisher, and it is worth reading for the nineteenth-century essay alone. Suchkov was a real critic with a very large library and an ear. He wanted socialist realism to be a claim about knowledge rather than a set of instructions, and he wrote 134,000 words in which it is treated as one, with no Party guidance, no

partiinost, no decree, no congress and no Stalin. That is not evasion in the ordinary sense; it is closer to a rescue attempt, conducted by a man who plainly believed the method could be stated as an intellectual position and survive. The cost of the attempt is measurable, and the measure is what had to be left outside the covers: the year the doctrine was named, the institution that enforced it, the decrees that gave it teeth, the writers it destroyed, and the theorist whose argument it is. He ends with a sentence he means: "Man liberating himself from the fetters of captivity, injustice, and exploitation, to achieve real freedom—this is the hero to whom the future belongs." Read it against the roll of names that are not in his index, and it is the truest thing in the book and the least defended.