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PHILOSOPHY

Georgi Plekhanov Selected Philosophical Works (Volume II)

Plekhanov's two philosophical masterworks complete - The Role of the Individual in History and the Essays on the History of Materialism - with the polemics against Bernstein and the Russian legal Marxists that surrounded them.

Georgi Plekhanov

Introduction to the 1976 Edition

The companion to this book made a claim that has to be qualified for the second volume before anything else is said: that whatever one concludes about Plekhanov after 1903, the case for reading the texts does not depend on the verdict. That was true of Volume I, which collected the founding pamphlets of Russian Marxism. It is even truer here, because Volume II contains the two works on which Plekhanov's standing as a philosopher — as against a pamphleteer or a party leader — actually rests. Everything else in the series can be argued over. These two cannot. On the Question of the Individual's Role in History, better known in English simply as *The Role of the Individual in History*, and the *Essays on the History of Materialism* — on Holbach, Helvétius and Marx — are the works a reader who has heard the name Plekhanov and wants to know why has been sent to for a century. They are printed here complete, in Julius Katzer's 1976 translation, and for most English readers this remains where they live.

The rest of the volume is a running battle. It gathers Plekhanov's writings of the later 1890s and the first years of the new century — the second half of the phase Volume I opened — and its enemy has changed. Volume I fought the Narodniks (Populists), who denied that Russia would take the capitalist road at all. Volume II fights the revisionists, who accepted Marxism and then set about hollowing it out from within: Eduard Bernstein in Germany, calling the movement back to Kant; Conrad Schmidt, Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky and Bulgakov, the Russian "legal Marxists" who wanted the economics without the dialectics; and behind them the neo-Kantian professors. The titles read like a duellist's log — Bernstein and Materialism, Cant Against Kant, or Herr Bernstein's Will and Testament, Conrad Schmidt Versus Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Materialism or Kantianism, A Critique of Our Critics. This is Plekhanov as the appointed guardian of Marxist orthodoxy against its friendly dismantlers,

and much of the writing is superb of its kind: quick, contemptuous, learned, unfair in the way a good prosecutor is unfair.

A word on what the book in your hands actually is, because the series exists to get this right. The Russian texts are Plekhanov's own, composed between roughly 1893 and 1903. The English is new — "First printing 1976," the translation copyright Progress Publishers' — so the object is a set of turn-of-the-century polemics in a bicentennial-year jacket. What sits in front of them, and what this introduction is finally about, is the editorial frame: a long essay by B. A. Chagin and a substantial apparatus of notes. Chagin's own footnotes cite the 1974 Volume I, so the frame was at least finalised in the mid-1970s, whatever it owes to the earlier Russian editions. The frame is not Plekhanov. It is the Soviet state deciding, in the Brezhnev years, how the one indispensable Menshevik should be presented to the world, and its decisions are legible.

Begin with the philosophy, because the philosophy is the reason to own the book. *The Role of the Individual in History* is Plekhanov's answer to a question the Narodnik subjectivists had botched and their positivist opponents had answered by abolishing it: if history is law-governed, what is left for the great man to do? Plekhanov refuses both exits. Against the subjectivists, who made "critically thinking individuals" a free-standing force pulling history along, and against the mechanists who reduced the individual to une quantité négligeable, he sets a dialectical resolution: "To sacrifice the thesis to the antithesis is just as groundless as forgetting the antithesis for the sake of the thesis. The correct point of view will be found only when we are able to blend in a synthesis the elements of truth they contain." The synthesis is worked out through a long, delighted excursion into eighteenth-century France — Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour, the incompetent generals of the Seven Years War, the deaths of Mirabeau and Robespierre, the "good sword" the Directory needed and found in Bonaparte. The play of accident is granted its due: had a

brick fallen on Robespierre in January 1793, "his place would of course have been taken by somebody else." Yet the general trend holds. "Whatever the qualities of a particular individual may be, he cannot eliminate the given economic relations if the latter correspond to a definite state of the productive forces." The great man is neither the author of his age nor its puppet:

A great man is great, not in his personal features lending an individual complexion to historic events but in his possession of traits which make him the most capable of serving his time's great social needs.... In his well-known book on heroes and hero worship, Carlyle calls great men Beginners. This is a very apt description. A great man is precisely a Beginner because he sees farther than others do and his desires are stronger than in others.... He is a hero, not in the sense that he can halt or change the natural course of things, but in the sense that his activities are the conscious and free expression of that necessary and unconscious course.

This is first-rate. It is also, as we shall see, the sentence Plekhanov's own end would test to destruction — but that is for later. Note only, for now, how directly the essay carries forward Volume I. There, Plekhanov's demolition of the Narodnik worship of the hero was a pamphleteer's point scored against a Russian sect. Here it becomes a general theory of the relation between necessity and human agency, and the Russian "subjectivists" are only one instance of a confusion he tracks through Carlyle, the French historians of the Restoration, and the German philistines. The polemic of the 1880s has matured into philosophy.

The Essays on the History of Materialism are the volume's other genuine contribution, and their method is one this series has learned to value: Plekhanov rescues thinkers his own tradition had been content to sneer at. Holbach and Helvétius, he insists, are "in many respects outstanding thinkers who have not been duly appreciated to this day," and he means to appreciate them properly — not as quaint mechanists to be patronised on the way to Marx, but as men who reached, with the tools they had, for a materialist account of morals and society, and failed only where their eighteenth-century method forced them to fail. When he faults Helvétius for reducing every human motive to the pursuit of sensual pleasure, the fault is located precisely, in the metaphysical structure of the man's thought, and the credit is returned in the same breath: "it is necessary merely to understand the 'Spirit' of dialectical materialism to see that the latter is insured against the errors made by its metaphysical forerunner." This is how intellectual

history is supposed to be written, and it is the same generosity of attention that makes the Role of the Individual worth reading — an attention conspicuously absent, as we shall find, from the way the Soviet edition treats Plekhanov himself.

The anti-revisionist polemics are lower art but often lethal. Against Bernstein, who had pronounced the dialectic an "almost anthropological" survival, Plekhanov is merciless about a critic who has never read the author he demolishes: Bernstein "has nowhere to get" his proofs "from, since he himself has not made so bold as to assert that he has ever studied Hegel." Against the whole revisionist drift he is sharper still, and here a passage deserves to be quoted at length, because the reader who reaches the end of this introduction will want to have it in mind. Plekhanov, in *A Critique of Our Critics*, is diagnosing why Bernstein has not been expelled from the German party despite deserting its programme:

For reasons we cannot go into in this article, opportunism has won many supporters in the ranks of Social-Democracy in various countries. This spread of opportunism presents the main danger threatening it today. Social-Democrats who have remained loyal to the revolutionary spirit of their programme ... will be making an irreparable mistake if they do not take timely and decisive action to counter the danger.

Chagin's own introduction records that Plekhanov "demanded Bernstein's expulsion from the Social-Democratic Party." Hold that thought.

The longest of the polemics, *A Critique of Our Critics*, is where Plekhanov's historical materialism is on its fullest and most rigorous display, and it repays attention for a reason that only becomes clear at the end of this introduction. Answering Struve, Plekhanov drives everything back to a single relation: "the contradiction between society's productive forces and its property relations has always been focal in Marx's theory of social development," he insists, quoting the famous Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* — no social order perishes "before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed" — as the master key. He is careful, and the care is genuine philosophy: he distinguishes real historical materialism from the shallow "economic materialism" of the day, noting sharply that "economic materialism does not yet preclude historical idealism," since a writer can grant the economy first place and still treat that economy as the product of human ideas. It is a fine discrimination, and it shows Plekhanov at the height of his

powers. It also shows the habit of mind that the reply tradition would name as his undoing. To read every question, including the character of a coming revolution, off the "definite state of the productive forces" is a discipline that keeps a philosopher honest against a Struve and can leave a politician stranded before a February. The rigour and the limitation are the same rigour.

Now the frame. Chagin's essay is titled "G. V. Plekhanov's Defence and Substantiation of Dialectical and Historical Materialism in the Struggle Against Revisionism," and the title is the argument: Plekhanov is defined by a struggle, and the struggle is against revisionism, the word that in this catalogue does the work "opportunism" does elsewhere — the interchangeable label under which a heretic is filed. The essay is intelligent and, on the philosophy, scrupulous to a degree that has to be credited. It is also built to perform a specific operation, and the operation is visible the moment one asks where it stops.

It stops in 1903. The opening sentence dates Plekhanov's achievement to "the first two decades of his Marxist activities (1883–1903)," and the essay honours that boundary with a rigour it applies to nothing else. The turn is narrated in three short paragraphs near the close: on the eve of the Second Congress Plekhanov "showed certain departures from revolutionary Marxism in political questions," "overestimated the liberal bourgeoisie's role," and so "assuming the position of Menshevism — that opportunist trend in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party." Then the essay simply ends, on Lenin. There is no First World War in it. There is no 1917. There is no death. The words "social-chauvinist" and "1914" do not occur anywhere in Chagin's essay — in the whole volume they appear only in the Name Index, attached to other men. Plekhanov's support for the Entente, his public break with Lenin, his denunciation of October as a violation of the laws of history, his death near Petrograd in 1918 — none of it is present. The man is a figure of 1883 to 1903, and the clock is stopped at the exact year the trouble starts.

This is worth setting beside the companion volume, because the two editions handle the same catastrophe differently and the difference is instructive. Volume I's essay, by V. Fomina, at least narrated the fall: it gave a sentence each to the war, to October, to the burial near Belinsky, muting the arguments but admitting the events. Chagin does not narrate the fall at all. He removes it. Where Fomina built a bell curve that rose and declined, Chagin draws a line that rises and is cut off. It is the more complete containment of the two.

And the technique is exposed by a single asymmetry. Chagin is not squeamish about Plekhanov's errors as such. On the contrary, he catalogues the philosophical ones with real forensic care. He records that Plekhanov gave "an erroneous proposition regarding the origin and essence of the state," misreading Antonio Labriola's definition of the state as class domination. He records that Plekhanov "made concessions to agnosticism," that "in his polemic with Bernstein and Schmidt, he gave an erroneous formulation of the incognisability of the essence of matter," and that in "Materialism Yet Again" (1899) he "again advanced certain propositions in the spirit of the 'theory of hieroglyphics'" — the notion that our sensations are mere signs, not copies, of the external world, the very error Lenin would later single out in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Each philosophical fault is named, dated, and tied to a specific text. This is honest, and it is more than honest: it is the apparatus admitting, against interest, that its hero's epistemology was in places defective. The reader can look the errors up and judge them.

Set that beside the political ending and the operation stands revealed. The philosophy gets a coroner's report; the politics gets a full stop. Plekhanov's mistaken theory of the state earns a paragraph of specifics; his support of an imperialist war earns nothing, because it is not mentioned; his opposition to the workers' revolution earns nothing, because the essay has already closed. The reader is handed everything needed to weigh the "theory of hieroglyphics" and nothing whatever with which to weigh 1917. That is not an oversight in an essay this careful. It is the design. The philosophical Plekhanov can be examined precisely because the political Plekhanov has been sealed off — reduced to two labels, "opportunism" and "Menshevism," with no argument attached and no biography allowed to run past the point where the labels would have to be cashed.

The apparatus does, in fairness, keep its editorial candour where the philosophy is concerned, and this deserves the same credit the companion volume earned. The notes flag Plekhanov's agnostic slips rather than quietly correcting them; they let his errors on the state stand in the text and dissent beneath. This is argument, not excision, and set against what the same publisher did to the historical record elsewhere in this catalogue it is a different order of editorial conduct. The point is not that the editors lie. They do not. The point is what a scrupulous editor can nonetheless be made to leave out.

There is an irony the frame cannot absorb, and it sits in the volume's own pages. In 1898 Plekhanov demanded the expulsion of Bernstein and warned that "the spread of

opportunism presents the main danger threatening" Social-Democracy. In Chagin's essay, five years further on, Plekhanov has himself arrived at "the position of Menshevism — that opportunist trend." The prosecutor of opportunism is convicted, by the same word, of the same crime. The book prints the indictment; the introduction files the same charge against the man who drew it up; and no one remarks on the symmetry. As in the companion volume, where an 1883 pamphlet predicting rule by a "socialist caste" was printed in Moscow without comment, Volume II is more candid than the essay that frames it — it simply lays the evidence out and trusts no one to connect it.

What the frame withholds, the reply tradition supplied, and for this volume it supplied something better than a verdict: it supplied the argument, and located it inside Plekhanov's own method rather than outside it. The essential text is Trotsky's "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution," written in 1940 for the suppressed biography of Stalin and printed in the American Fourth International, vol. 3 no. 11, November 1942. It is not a denunciation. It credits Plekhanov with founding the entire framework: he "established as long ago as the early eighties ... that Russia had no reason whatever to expect a privileged path of development," that "she would have to pass through the purgatory of capitalism." And it insists — against Chagin's tidy quarantine of "Menshevism" as a deviation — that the premise was common property: "Within these limits Lenin followed Plekhanov. The bourgeois character of the revolution served both factions of the Russian Social Democracy as their starting point." The break was not that Plekhanov held a false theory Lenin never touched. It was what Plekhanov deduced from a theory Lenin shared: that because the coming revolution was bourgeois, the proletariat must subordinate itself to the liberal bourgeoisie and postpone its own power to a distant future. From that deduction flowed the tactic Trotsky quotes with contempt — "We must cherish the support of non-proletarian parties ... and not repel them from us by tactless actions" — and against it Trotsky's judgement is exact and, once made, unanswerable: "By monotonous preachments of this sort, the philosopher of Marxism indicated that the living dynamics of society was unattainable to him." The economism was not a stain on the method. It was the method, drawn to its logical end.

This is where the rescue and the tragedy meet, and where reading the volume closely pays a dividend no summary can. The Role of the Individual in History teaches that the great man is the one who "sees farther than others do," whose gift is to grasp "his time's great social needs" and assume "the initiative in meeting those needs." By that measure —

Plekhanov's own — 1917 is the moment his theory indicts its author. The social need was there; a Beginner was required; and the founder of Russian Marxism, the man who had taught a generation how to read history, could not see the need his own moment had thrown up, and set himself against the men who could. His finest instrument, the essay in this very book, is the one that convicts him. The companion volume's reply drew on Trotsky's 1922 Note on Plekhanov and on the later writers — Löwy and Mandel — who traced the theory of permanent revolution to a break with "the economism ... of Plekhanov's Marxism." That thread is there; this volume simply carries it into the concrete of 1905 and 1917, where the abstract deduction became a living tactic and failed.

So read the book — read it for the two masterworks first, then for the polemics, which are the best exhibition Progress ever exported of what a Marxist demolition of neo-Kantian revisionism looks like. Then read Chagin's essay, but read it for what it is: not an account of Plekhanov, but a demonstration of how a state that could not do without him kept him by cutting him in half. It gives the reader every tool to judge his epistemology and none to judge his politics, and it does so by the simple, unimprovable device of ending the story in 1903. Lenin's own words, which Chagin quotes as his last line, are the perfect cover for the operation: "you cannot hope to become a real, intelligent Communist without making a study — and I mean study — of all of Plekhanov's philosophical writings, because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world." It is true, and it is why the book exists. It is also, placed where Chagin places it, the sentence that lets the war and the revolution go unmentioned — the encomium doing the work of the epitaph the editors declined to write.

PHILOSOPHY

Georgi Plekhanov Selected Philosophical Works (Volume III)

Plekhanov after the split: Fundamental Problems of Marxism, the three letters against the Russian Machists that Lenin was fighting in the same months, and lethal short essays on Bergson, Rickert and Windelband.

Georgi Plekhanov

Introduction to the 1976 Edition

The two companion volumes to this book could each open on a reassurance: whatever one concludes about Plekhanov after 1903, the case for reading the texts does not depend on the verdict. Volume I collected the founding pamphlets of Russian Marxism, written before the split; Volume II collected the two philosophical masterworks, mostly finished before it. This third volume cannot borrow that reassurance, and the difference is the whole interest of the book. Everything in it was written after the break — "material written by him mainly between 1904 and 1913," as the editor's own first sentence says, writing of the Menshevik period that, in his dating, began at the end of 1903. This is the volume of Plekhanov the Menshevik. And it is also, by the plain testimony of the man whose party won, the volume of Plekhanov at his most useful. Lenin told cadres to study these particular writings. The double character this series has traced across the first two volumes — the Marxist philosopher and the political apostate — is not, here, a matter of before and after. It runs down the middle of the same years, the same books, and in places the same page.

The object in your hands is a set of turn-of-the-century Russian polemics in a new English dress. The Russian material dates from roughly 1904 to 1913; the translation is fresh — "First printing 1976," the copyright Progress Publishers' — so the book is a bicentennial-decade export of writing composed two generations earlier. It was prepared, like its companions, by the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and it carries a long introductory essay by A. Maslin and a substantial apparatus of factual notes. The contents are the record of a man fighting on every front at once. The centrepieces are *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (1908), Plekhanov's compact statement of the whole system, and *Materialismus Militans* (1908–10), three open letters demolishing the Russian followers of Ernst Mach — the physicist-philosopher whose doctrine that the world is a

bundle of our own sensations had become fashionable among Social-Democrats after the defeat of 1905. Around these sit *On the So-Called Religious Seekings in Russia* (1909), against the vogue for "god-building" among left intellectuals; a run of short, lethal review-essays on the neo-Kantian and positivist philosophers of the day — Petzoldt, Rickert, Windelband, Boutroux, Bergson, Guyau; two long studies of the utopian socialists; the essay *From Idealism to Materialism* on Hegel's radical heirs; a preface to Deborin's textbook of dialectical materialism; and the short, sharp *On the Study of Philosophy*. It is a formidable table of contents, and most of it is Plekhanov near the top of his powers.

Begin with the rescue, because it is large and it is specific. *Materialismus Militans* is Plekhanov doing exactly what Lenin was doing in the very same months — Lenin's own *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was written in 1908 and published in 1909 — against exactly the same opponents, Bogdanov and Lunacharsky and the other "Machists" who claimed to be modernising Marxism and were in fact dissolving it into idealism. The two men were, on this front, allies; and the writing is superb of its combative kind. Plekhanov refuses Bogdanov even the courtesy of the word "comrade": the two of them hold "two directly opposed world-outlooks," and "you are, in relation to me, not a comrade, but the most resolute and irreconcilable opponent." The argument beneath the invective is the durable materialist case that there is a world, and it was here before we were. "We are aware," he writes, "that at one time there were no people on our planet. And if there were no people, neither was there their experience. Yet the earth was there. And this means that it (also a thing-in-itself!) existed outside human experience." That sentence has not aged. It is the answer to every philosophy that makes the knowing mind the condition of the thing known, and Plekhanov presses it with a wit the translation preserves — against Bogdanov's claim that reality is only what people's coordinated experience agrees upon, he replies that on such a test hobgoblins are real too, since whole

villages once agreed on them.

Fundamental Problems of Marxism is the other pillar, and it is where Plekhanov states, more clearly than almost anyone had in a short compass, what the materialist conception of history is for. It is a method, not a set of results: "not to the arithmetic of social development, but to its algebra; not to the causes of individual phenomena, but to how the discovery of those causes should be approached. And that means that the materialist explanation of history was primarily of a methodological significance." The dialectic he defends is not a formula to be recited but a way of catching reality in motion — where formal logic says "yea—yea and nay—nay," a body actually in motion "is in a given place and at the same time is not in it," and can be judged only by the other formula, "yea—nay and nay—yea." And the point of turning Hegel's dialectic materialist is not decorum but detonation: "Materialism puts dialectics 'the right way up' and thereby removes the mystical veil in which Hegel had it wrapped. By the very fact of this it brings to light the revolutionary character of dialectics." A reader who has been told that Soviet "diamat" was always a catechism should sit with these pages, which are the live thing the catechism was made from.

There is a passage in this volume that ought to embarrass its own publisher, and it is worth dwelling on. Against a certain Shulyatkov, who had tried to read every philosophical term as a coded name for a social class — Kant's "noumena," on this account, secretly meaning the bourgeoisie — Plekhanov turns the full force of his contempt on vulgar Marxism, the crude reduction of every idea directly to economics. To claim that all philosophical terms merely designate classes and their interests, he writes, "is to reduce an extremely important question to a simplicity that can only be characterised by the epithet: 'Suzdalian'." This word denotes neither a 'social class', nor a 'group', nor a 'nucleus', but simply a vast woodenheadedness." Economic development conditions the rest "in the last instance," he insists, quoting Engels' famous qualifier — but "in the last instance" concedes "the existence of many other intermediate 'instances', each of which influences all the others." This is Plekhanov defending the relative independence of ideas against the mechanical materialism that Soviet textbook philosophy would spend decades lapsing back into. The apparatus that files him as a deviationist is reprinting his defence of the very subtlety it so often lacked.

The essays on religion carry the same double gift — a materialist account that is also a genuine feeling for its object. On the So-Called Religious Seekings in Russia traces belief

back to the helplessness of early societies before nature, and it does so with real learning and real humour. "The Greek philosopher Xenophanes was mistaken when he said that man always creates his god in his own image and likeness. No, at the beginning he creates his god in the image and likeness of an animal." When bourgeois society sets out to limit the power of kings, Plekhanov notes, its theology follows: it turns to a God whose power is "restricted on all sides by the laws of Nature. Deism is celestial parliamentarism." And against the "god-building" of Lunacharsky and the early Gorky — the attempt to dress socialism as a new religion of humanity — he is merciless without being coarse, borrowing a phrase to call the whole enterprise "the padded-jacket of modern despondency," a warm coat for intellectuals who had lost their nerve after 1905. This is the intellectual-historical generosity Volume II praised in Plekhanov's handling of Holbach and Helvétius, carried into a new decade: he rescues even the thinkers he demolishes, and he demolishes even the causes he half-admires. The short piece On the Study of Philosophy states the pedagogy behind it all. Workers should read, but read the right teachers: "Neither Mach nor Avenarius, neither Windelband nor Wundt, nor even Kant must lead us to the sanctuary of philosophical truth, but only Engels, Marx, Feuerbach, and Hegel. Only from these teachers can we learn what we need to know."

Now the frame, and here this volume gives the series its most instructive editor. Volume I's essay, by V. Fomina, narrated Plekhanov's fall in a few muted sentences: one line each for the war, for October, for the burial. Volume II's essay, by B. A. Chagin, did not narrate the fall at all — it ended the story in 1903, before the trouble began, and the words "1914" and "social-chauvinist" never appear in it. Maslin is the third variant, and at first he looks like the bravest of the three. He names the thing. "Plekhanov changed his position and, in 1914, went over entirely to opportunism and social-chauvinism, opposing the socialist revolution in Russia." That is more than Chagin conceded and blunter than Fomina; it puts the date and the charge on the page in the essay's second paragraph. A reader might think this the one volume that faces the break squarely.

It is not, and the way it draws back is the finding. Having named 1914, the essay stops there. No wartime writing of Plekhanov's is named, quoted, dated, or answered — not one line of the man who supported the Entente and denounced the revolution is set before the reader to be judged. The narration reaches the war and halts three years short of October: the words "October Revolution" do not occur anywhere in this volume, in any form. Plekhanov's death near Petrograd in 1918

is absent; the only 1918s in the book are the closing dates of St Petersburg magazines in the factual notes. And the cause assigned to the fall is, once again, external to the man's own thinking. His political "dissidence," Maslin writes, "may be explained primarily by his misunderstanding of the nature and peculiarities of the new historical epoch — the epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolutions." He did not decide; he failed to understand a period that acted upon him. This is Fomina's causal arrow — the West, the epoch, reformism, everything but Plekhanov — drawn once more.

What is new in Maslin, and worth naming precisely, is the device that lets the volume exist at all. Chagin sealed the politics off by ending the story; Maslin cannot end the story in 1903, because his volume is made of writing from 1904 to 1913, every page of it Menshevik by his own dating. So he partitions the man instead. "As Lenin said," he writes, "Plekhanov combined in himself radicalism in theory and opportunism in practice"; and again, "a change of his political views did not bring about an immediate, automatic, fundamental change of his philosophical world-outlook." Theory on one side, practice on the other, and a wall between them — so that a book of Menshevik-period philosophy can be presented as philosophy unspoiled by Menshevism. The partition is the permit under which the whole volume is published. It is also, as we shall see, exactly the joint at which Plekhanov's ablest critics broke him.

To the apparatus's real credit — and this series has recorded the same credit for both companion volumes — Maslin does not hide the philosophical errors. He flags Plekhanov's lapse toward agnosticism and his notorious "theory of hieroglyphs," the idea that our sensations are conventional signs rather than copies of things, notes that Plekhanov himself renounced it in 1905, and cites Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* against it by volume and page. (That hieroglyph error is a thread the whole edition follows: Volume I's notes flagged its 1892 form, Volume II's essay flagged its return in 1899, and here Maslin traces its recantation — three volumes tracking one mistake, honestly.) He records that Plekhanov overestimated the role of the geographical environment; that his "five-point formula" of base and superstructure has "serious shortcomings"; that he misread Marx's relation to Feuerbach. Each fault is named, dated, tied to a text the reader can turn to. This is argument, not excision, and set beside what the same publisher did to the historical record elsewhere in this catalogue it is a different and better order of editorial conduct.

But set that candour beside the political silence and the old asymmetry stands out sharper than ever. The philosophy gets a

coroner's report; the politics gets a date and two labels. Plekhanov's mistaken theory of the state, his agnostic slips, his errors on Feuerbach — each earns a paragraph of specifics. His support for an imperialist war earns the single word "social-chauvinism," with no writing behind it; his opposition to the workers' revolution earns "opportunism," with no argument attached. And here Maslin's own text contains the fact that dissolves his partition. Discussing *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, he concedes that in his *Notes* to that very book Plekhanov "relapsed into an opportunist position," leaning toward the Second International — arguing that Russia's productive forces were too undeveloped for a socialist revolution. So the politics is not, after all, walled off from the philosophy. It is in the philosophy, in the flagship text of the volume, at the exact point where the method is applied to Russia. The apparatus locates it there once, in a single sentence, and quarantines it everywhere else.

That single sentence is the door through which the reply tradition has always come, and this series has walked through it in both companion volumes. The economism was not a stain on Plekhanov's method; it was his method, drawn to its logical end. From the correct premise that Russia's coming revolution would be bourgeois in its tasks, Plekhanov deduced that its outcome must be a long capitalist development, and that the workers must therefore subordinate themselves and wait. Michael Löwy identified Trotsky's rejection of the economism he regarded as one of the essential traits of Plekhanov's Marxism as a founding premise of the theory of permanent revolution ("Trotsky 60 years on," *International Viewpoint* 324, September–October 2000). Ernest Mandel put the pedigree more bluntly still, answering Doug Jenness in *Intercontinental Press* (vol. 21 no. 15, 8 August 1983): the expectation of a long capitalist stage after the democratic revolution was, he argued, the old thesis of the whole of Russian Social-Democracy — first formulated by Plekhanov, reasserted in the party programme that Lenin and Plekhanov drafted jointly, and challenged before 1917 only by Trotsky, in 1905–06. The rigour that made Plekhanov lethal against a Bogdanov and the fatalism that left him stranded before 1917 were the same rigour, and Volume II said so in nearly these words. This volume simply supplies the smoking document — a philosophy book in which the author, applying his own algebra to his own country, reads off the wrong future.

Which is why Maslin's partition — radicalism in theory, opportunism in practice, and a wall between — will not hold, and why the sharpest answer to it is the oldest. Trotsky wrote his note on Plekhanov in April 1922, four years after the man's death (translated in the *American Fourth International*, vol. 4

no. 3, whole no. 31, March 1943). It is not a demolition; it grants that Plekhanov "introduced" historical materialism "into Russian life." But where Maslin makes the theory-and-practice split a container that keeps the philosophy safe, Trotsky makes the very same split the disease: Plekhanov was a theoretician without a party and without practice, and "this disturbance of the balance between theory and practice, which arose from the whole circumstances of Plekhanov's life, proved fatal for him." Maslin's containment and Trotsky's diagnosis point at the identical fracture; they differ only on whether it can be sealed off or is the wound itself. Trotsky thought it the wound, and he still claimed the man: "The great Plekhanov, the true one, belongs entirely and wholly to us."

Lenin's own words are the frame the whole series keeps returning to, and this volume is where they bite hardest. Maslin quotes Lenin from 1908 — Plekhanov was "the only Marxist in the international Social-Democratic movement to criticise the incredible platitudes of the revisionists from the standpoint of consistent dialectical materialism" — and from May 1914, on the eve of the collapse: "We are sorry for Plekhanov.... he deserves a better fate." And it was Lenin who, three years after Plekhanov's death, told a generation of Communists — in "Once Again on the Trade Unions" (1921) — that they could not become real Marxists "without making a study — and I mean study — of all of Plekhanov's philosophical writings, because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world." That instruction is the reason this volume exists. But Lenin drew his distinction between Plekhanov's theory and his politics in the heat of a living fight, as a fighter's judgment about which weapons to keep from a fallen enemy. Maslin freezes that living judgment into a filing system. The same volume that lets Lenin praise the philosophy also lets Lenin note, in a line Maslin honestly reprints, that "Plekhanov in his criticism of Machism was less concerned with refuting Mach than with dealing a factional blow at Bolshevism." Even the alliance was factional. Even here, on the one front where Plekhanov and Lenin stood together, the Menshevik was fighting the Bolsheviks with his left hand. Theory and practice were never in separate rooms.

So read the book, and read it for the philosophy first — for *Materialismus Militans*, which is the best short demonstration Progress ever exported of what a materialist takes apart an idealist fashion, and for *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, which states the method that the man could not, in the end, apply to his own moment. Then read Maslin's essay, and read it as the third and most revealing of this edition's three strategies for keeping an indispensable Menshevik in print. Fomina muted the fall; Chagin removed it; Maslin alone

names the year 1914 out loud — and he is the one editor who had to find a new device, because his is the one volume where the great philosophy and the political apostasy are demonstrably the same man, working in the same years, sometimes in the same book. His answer was to cut Plekhanov in two lengthwise and hand the reader only the theoretical half. The book, as in both companion volumes, is more honest than its frame. It prints the philosophy and the fatal deduction side by side, on facing pages, and trusts no one to notice that they were written by one hand.

HISTORY

History of the USA since World War I

The American century as taught at Moscow State University, by two professors who had worked in the US National Archives - with a closing chapter on Soviet Americanism that names its scholars and admits its gaps.

N. Sivachyov and Evgenii Fedorovich Yazkov

Introduction to the 1976 Edition

This is a university textbook. The authors say so themselves, in the last paragraph of their introduction: "The work is based on a lecture course in the history of the United States given at the history department of Moscow State University for several years." N. V. Sivachyov and E. F. Yazkov were professors there, and the note Progress printed at the back describes them as "two Moscow University professors who on several occasions visited the United States of America to study documentary sources in the US National Archive and in the libraries of the Columbia, Harvard, Wisconsin and other universities." That is not a boast a Progress blurb could have made in 1950, and it is worth pausing on. These men had read in American archives. It shows on almost every page.

Unusually for this series, the date on the spine is close to honest. Most Progress translations lag their Russian originals by years, and several volumes we have republished carry a jacket a decade younger than the text inside. Here the internal evidence points where the imprint does: the narrative runs to Gerald Ford's speech of 18 May 1975 and his "State of the World Address" of 10 April 1975, to the reorganisation of the Atomic Energy Commission in January 1975, to the "Rally For Jobs Now" of 26 April 1975 and to a Communist Party conference of late February 1975. The Russian imprint codes on the copyright page read 1976. Read this as a book of 1975–76: a détente-era survey, written at Moscow State University for Soviet students, and exported in English to explain the citadel of capitalism to readers in Delhi, Lagos and London.

What it was commissioned to do is stated plainly at the front. The introduction announces that "the socialist system has convincingly demonstrated its superiority over modern state-monopoly capitalism," and that influential parts of the American ruling class are being compelled "to move toward the normalization of Soviet-American relations and to recognize the principles of peaceful coexistence." That is the

Brezhnev-era foreign-policy line converted into a periodisation of American history, and it governs the shape of the book: American politics is presented throughout as a contest between reactionary adventurism and a "more realistic approach," with the second gaining ground because the world balance of forces obliges it to. It is a thesis with a diplomatic purpose. It is also, as a way of reading Nixon and Ford, not a stupid one.

Chapter XI, and a discipline describing itself

The eleventh chapter is called "Soviet Studies of the Recent History of the USA," and it is the most useful thing in the book for anyone who wants to know how Soviet Americanism actually worked. It gives the institutional history: the first monographs in the 1930s by A. V. Yefimov, L. I. Zubok and V. I. Lan; the Sector on US and Canadian History founded in 1953 at the Institute of World History; the Institute of US studies established in Moscow in 1968 and renamed the Institute of US and Canadian Studies in 1974. It credits, by name, dozens of working scholars. It is candid about gaps — it admits that the study of the major parties, of third-party movements and of representative institutions is underdeveloped, and that "the postwar ideological struggle in the USA has yet to be given full coverage by Soviet historians."

It is also, quietly, a chapter in which the authors review themselves. Sivachyov's own work appears three times in the third person: research on the law of labour relations "has been successfully continued by N. V. Sivachyov, with the publication in 1972 of a study of US labor relations from the 1930s to the present time"; monographs on the 1930s "by V. L. Malkov, D. G. Nadzhafov and N. V. Sivachyov" are commended; Sivachyov is listed again among those who have written on postwar ideology. Yazkov appears in the same register — work on the farmers' movement "written by V. P. Zolotukhin and E. F. Yazkov." Nowhere does the chapter say that two of the scholars being praised are holding the pen. The convention is not fraud; it is the etiquette of a collective, in which individual authorship is dissolved into the achievements

of the field. But the reader should know that when this book tells you Soviet scholarship has made progress, the scholarship is partly its own.

One entry in that survey will interest readers of this series: "a monograph by V. A. Nikitin on the emergence of the ultra-right in the USA during the postwar period." That is the Russian original of *The Ultras in the USA*, which Progress issued in English in 1981 and which we have republished with an introduction of its own. Here it is, in 1976, already a standard citation. The two books belong to one workshop, and — as will become clear — they have one hole in common.

What is good, and it is a great deal

Soviet Americanism had a structural advantage over much of the American academy of the same date: it took for granted that class conflict, racism and imperial expansion were the organising facts of American life, and it went looking for them with American sources in hand. Applied mechanically that assumption distorts. Applied to this period it produced a survey that covers, as a matter of course, subjects US textbooks of 1976 covered thinly or not at all.

The account of Black America is the clearest case. The book records that Ku Klux Klan membership "had reached 4.5 million by 1924" and that "In the period 1919–1922 alone 239 Blacks were lynched." It notes that the steel companies broke the 1919 strike partly by importing strikebreakers, "primarily Blacks, who, as a rule, were outside the ranks of the organized labor movement" — a fact about the racial structure of American industrial defeat that a good deal of union-friendly writing has preferred to leave alone. It gives the Communist Party proper credit for Scottsboro: "Of particular significance was the 1931 campaign to save the lives of nine Black youths in Scottsboro, Alabama, falsely accused of the rape of white women." And it notices the anti-lynching bill killed in the Senate in 1938 by Southern Democrats "with the support of reactionary Republicans" — the coalition that shaped American social policy for a generation.

The New Deal chapter is better than its reputation would predict. It is not a Third Period tract; nobody here is called a social fascist. Roosevelt "went down in history as one of the most important, far-seeing and realistic of American political figures," and the reforms are treated as real. What the book denies is the interpretation, not the facts: "In point of fact Roosevelt's New Deal was merely a variety of bourgeois reformism, directed at retaining the influence of bourgeois ideology over the masses of populace, deflecting them from

the struggle against capitalism and in this way consolidating the class dominance of the US monopoly bourgeoisie." The political mission of the New Deal, it says, "consisted in using the methods of social maneuver to blunt the mass workers' and farmers' movement that rolled over the country during the crisis period of 1929–1933."

A reader from this tradition should be honest about how familiar that sounds. George Novack, writing as William F. Warde in *Fourth International* in March 1943 — "Ten Years of the New Deal" — reached the same conclusion from the other side of the split, and put it better. Roosevelt, he wrote, "took the road of reform rather than the road of fascist reaction," and the reason "lies, not in the greater kindness and devotion to democracy of the American plutocracy, but in their favored material circumstances": being the richest bourgeoisie on earth, "the rulers of America could still afford to buy their way out of the crisis by throwing certain sops to the labor and farmer aristocracy." Novack also noted what Sivachyov and Yazkov do not — that "Hitler came to power in Germany at the same time as Roosevelt in the United States, and as a result of the same world crisis of capitalism." On the class content of the New Deal the anti-Stalinist and the Soviet accounts converge almost completely. That convergence is a fair measure of how much of this book is simply Marxist history done competently, and it should make the reader more attentive, not less, to the places where the two accounts part.

The book is also good on the wartime no-strike pledge, and refreshingly unsentimental. It calls the December 1941 agreement "a complex matter which had ambiguous consequences," and then makes the argument: "the agreement was clearly unbalanced in the benefits it yielded," since a promise not to lock out, "in a period of radical expansion in industry and of acute manpower shortages," cost employers nothing while a promise not to strike cost workers everything. It records the revolt — the Michigan CIO council declaring itself unbound in June 1943, the referendums, Emil Rieve resigning from the War Labor Board in February 1945 calling it "little more than a rubber stamp" — and it concedes, in one sentence more candid than the Party's own histories, that "The leadership of the CIO and AFL and of the Communist Party observed it to the end of the war, but among the locals it was unwelcome on more than one occasion."

And the chapter on McCarthyism is genuinely strong. Its opening move is to refuse the personalisation: "to reduce McCarthyism to the activity of one errant senator, as is the habit of bourgeois historians, is to understate the depth of the socio-political crisis giving fuel to this movement." It traces

the Taft following into the McCarthy base, notes that Joseph Kennedy was McCarthy's friend, that John F. Kennedy "far from opposing the demagogue, actually lent his support to the reactionary crusaders in his public speeches," and that Robert Kennedy served as counsel on McCarthy's committee — details American liberal historiography of the period was inclined to hurry past. It records Eisenhower cutting the paragraph defending George Marshall from his Wisconsin speech. Its verdict, that "the collusion between conservative Republicans and McCarthyites, who were urging the country in a fascist direction, was a manifestation of a crisis in the entire political and constitutional structure of the US government," is arguable but seriously argued.

That is the case for the book. Everything that follows depends on the reader accepting it.

1934: three strikes, one survivor

Now the failures, and the first is specific enough to be checked in an afternoon.

The book knows that 1934 was the hinge year. It gives the figures — 1,467,000 strikers in 1934, 4.5 million across 1933–36 — and it names a decisive event: "The San Francisco general strike of July 1934 represented a high point in and served as a spur to the labor movement in the United States." It credits Harry Bridges by name. It then goes on to the textile general strike of September 1934 and the miners in 1935.

There were three great strikes in 1934, not one. The Auto-Lite strike in Toledo in the spring was led by the Musteites of the American Workers Party through their Unemployed League. The Minneapolis truckers' strikes — three of them, through the summer — were led by Trotskyists: Vincent, Miles and Grant Dunne, Carl Skoglund, Farrell Dobbs, working through Teamsters Local 574. Together with San Francisco these three broke the deadlock of the early Depression and made the industrial union upsurge, and the CIO, possible.

Search this volume for the other two and you find nothing. "Toledo" does not appear. "Auto-Lite" does not appear. The American Workers Party does not appear; neither does the word "Musteite." "Minneapolis" occurs twice — once as the city of which Hubert Humphrey was mayor, once as a place of publication in the bibliography. Local 574 is absent, and so is Local 544, which it became. The Dunne brothers, Skoglund, Dobbs and James P. Cannon are not in the book. The chronological appendix at the back lists, for the whole of 1934, one labour event: "1934 General strike begins in San

Francisco."

Of the three strikes of 1934, the book has kept exactly the one whose best-known leader was aligned with the Communist Party, and dropped the two led by the Communist Party's rivals on the left. That is not a gap in the sources. Cannon's own narrative, "The Great Minneapolis Strikes," was published in Fourth International in May 1944, and it is not a coy document. He explains that the Trotskyists were too new in the union to hold office — "not a single one of our people ... was an official of the union during the three strikes. But they organized and led the strikes just the same," through an "Organizing Committee," a body he calls "a sort of extra-legal body." He recounts the extraordinary spectacle of a Farmer-Labor governor, Floyd Olson, declaring martial law against the strike and then raiding its headquarters: "A Farmer-Labor governor proclaimed martial law and stopped the trucks from running." And he sets out precisely the fact the Soviet chronology suppresses: "Toledo and Minneapolis had become linked as twin symbols of the two highest points of proletarian militancy and conscious leadership."

A textbook may abbreviate. But a textbook that returns to the Farmer-Labor tradition on page after page, that discusses Minnesota's Congressman Lundeen and the Workers' Bill, and that reaches for the 1934 strike wave as evidence that the New Deal failed to buy class peace, and still contrives not to mention the strikes that made Minneapolis a byword, is not abbreviating. It is selecting.

The Smith Act, deferred

The second failure is the same erasure performed by a different technique, and this series has now watched three books do it three different ways.

Sivachyov and Yazkov introduce the Act in their chapter on the war, in a passage dealing with 1941. They give it accurately and even quote the statute: the second and third articles punish anyone who "knowingly or willfully advocate(s), abet(s), advise(s), or teach(es) the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence, or by the assassination of any officer of any such government." And then comes the sentence that does the work: "Yet another piece of legislation initiated by Smith was already adopted back in 1940. The Smith Act, an amendment to the Alien Registration Act, was destined to acquire considerable importance in postwar America."

Postwar. The Act's importance is dispatched into the future in the middle of a chapter about 1941 — the year the Act was first used. A grand jury empanelled at St Paul, Minnesota, returned an indictment dated 15 July 1941 against twenty-nine leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and of Teamsters Local 544 — the first name on it Vincent Ray Dunne, the third James P. Cannon — charging them with conspiring "to overthrow, put down, and to destroy by force the Government of the United States of America." Eighteen were convicted and imprisoned. The full text was printed in *Fourth International*, vol. 2 no. 7, August 1941. They were the first Smith Act defendants in American history, and the precedent their conviction established was the one used against the Communist Party's own leaders in 1949 — a prosecution this book does narrate, at line after line, with entire justice, and with the observation that Truman "brought 12 leaders of the CPUS A before the courts under the Smith Act" to remove an election-year weapon from his opponents' hand.

Set the three volumes side by side. The *Ultras in the USA* (1981) names the Act in 1940 and then jumps to the Foley Square trial of 1949, leaving the intervening years blank. *Recent History of the Labor Movement in the USA* (1979) fills the blank with a falsehood, stating that during the war the Act "was directed against espionage and subversive organizations of the fascist countries." This book, the earliest of the three and the most scholarly, does something subtler and in some ways more revealing: it tells the truth about the statute, in the correct chapter, and then relocates its significance to a decade in which the defendants were Communists. Three books, three methods, one hole — which suggests the hole was in the field rather than in any one author.

The contemporaneous reply is available and was written by a serious historian. Novack, again as William F. Warde, covered the trial for *Fourth International* in December 1941. He noted that the prosecution's evidence consisted largely of the Marxist classics: "Suddenly, in 1941 these writings become converted into flaming bombs for blowing up the Capitol at Washington." He observed that "The Smith Act is the American equivalent of the Japanese law forbidding 'dangerous thoughts.'" And he recorded, with a precision that has not dated, the judge's chosen analogy: "in language more familiar to Moscow than Minneapolis, Judge Joyce compared the Socialist Workers Party to Hitler's followers."

The Communist Party of the United States welcomed that prosecution. Sivachyov and Yazkov do not mention the prosecution, and so are not obliged to mention the welcome.

They do mention the Socialist Workers Party — once, thirty years out of position. It appears in the chapter on the 1960s, among the "petty-bourgeois ideologists" who exploited the theoretical weakness of the New Left: "The Socialist Workers Party, a Trotskyite organization, expanded its activities and the Progressive Labor Party (Maoist) appeared. Their chief weapon was slandering the socialist countries and communist parties as well as the advocacy of petty-bourgeois fractiousness." The party can be named when it can be dismissed. It cannot be named in 1934, when it led a strike, or in 1941, when its leaders went to prison.

1939, and the year that is missing

The fifth chapter opens: "World War II like World War I began far from the United States." It sets its own frame explicitly — "from September 1, 1939, until Japan's raid on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941" — and then gives twenty pages of genuinely good diplomatic history: the Neutrality Act fight, cash-and-carry, the Welles mission, the destroyers-for-bases deal of 2 September 1940, Lend-Lease, the America First Committee and Robert E. Wood, the collapse of the isolationists at the 1940 Republican convention. It is candid about awkward things. It says outright that during the phoney war "many internationalists and isolationists were united in their condemnation of the Soviet Union which until March 1940 was engaged in a war with Finland," and that Roosevelt kept Moscow off Welles's itinerary "to placate the anti-Soviet circles."

What it never says is why the war began on 1 September 1939. The German–Soviet non-aggression treaty of 23 August 1939 does not appear in this chapter, or in the chapter on the 1930s, or anywhere in the book. The word "pact" is used of Munich, and of George Meany's proposed "non-aggression pact" between labour and management in the 1950s. A book that will discuss the Winter War in a paragraph about American public opinion will not discuss the agreement that preceded it.

The consequence for the American story is exact. Between September 1939 and June 1941 the Communist Party of the United States opposed American involvement in what it called the second imperialist war, and campaigned against Roosevelt's foreign policy; after 22 June 1941 it became the most militant advocate of intervention in American public life. That reversal is the central political fact about the American left in those twenty-two months. This book's account of those twenty-two months does not contain the Communist Party at all. It sorts American opinion into internationalists and isolationists, places anti-fascist workers among the former, and

moves on. Where the sibling volume of 1979 falsified the date of the turn — backdating it to "the second half of 1940" so that it could be presented as ripening rather than instruction — this volume simply declines to record that there was a party with a line.

The same reticence governs Browder. The whole of the CPUSA's greatest internal crisis is given five sentences: "At the initiative of Earl Browder the party was transformed in 1944 into the American Communist Political Association with a program calling for purely educational measures. Far from a mere reorganization, this amounted to the liquidation of the party. In the summer of 1944, the steadfast elements of the party led by William Foster restored the Communist Party of the USA but the damage inflicted in 1944–1945 had far-reaching consequences." That is the whole of it, and the chronology is wrong. The party was dissolved into the Communist Political Association in May 1944; Jacques Duclos's article criticising Browder appeared in April 1945; the Communist Party was reconstituted in July 1945, not in the summer of 1944; Browder was expelled in February 1946. The book's dating collapses fourteen months and makes the correction look spontaneous. Duclos is not named — which is the point, since naming him would locate the initiative in Paris and, behind Paris, in Moscow. Browder's expulsion is not mentioned. His name appears exactly once in the index. The man who led the American party for fifteen years is a single subordinate clause about a reorganisation.

The mirror nobody holds up

Chapter VII is a sustained indictment of a state that punished opinion. It is correct in that indictment, and the material is well chosen. It quotes the Communist Party's 1954 programme with evident approval — "McCarthyism aims to impose fascism on the country ... It burns books and destroys art and culture ... McCarthyism seeks to turn America into a land of yes-men and informers, a land where patriotism is replaced with jingoism, independent thought with conformity, courage with servility." It records Bob Thompson, a Lincoln Brigade veteran, telling the judge who had just given him seven years that the campaign to outlaw the Communist Party and "the current bold bid for national power by the McCarthy mob are two sides of the same coin." It notes that after 1949 "the courts and the prisons were virtually the only institutions with their doors remaining open for Communists."

Every one of those sentences describes something that happened. Every one of them also describes, more exactly, the

state that commissioned the book. There is no acknowledgement of this anywhere. Stalin appears six times, always as a wartime diplomatic counterpart receiving messages from Roosevelt. The phrase "cult of personality" does not occur. The Twentieth Congress does not occur. The Moscow Trials do not occur. Hungary does not occur. Czechoslovakia is mentioned once. The year 1937 recurs throughout, always in connection with American events. Article 190-1 of the RSFSR Criminal Code — circulation of fabrications known to be false which defame the Soviet state and social system, added in 1966 and used against writers throughout the years these lectures were being delivered — could not appear and does not.

The asymmetry is worth stating without relish, because the book itself supplies the evidence for it. Sivachyov and Yazkov's account of the American witch-hunt has an ending, and the ending is that the witch-hunters lost — beaten in the courts, in the press and at the ballot box by American citizens using American institutions. They report the strike statistics that prove the labour movement was never subdued: 26,862 strikes between 1949 and 1954, with 15,130,000 participants. A system whose repression can be defeated by its own citizens is not the same kind of system as one whose citizens have no such recourse. The authors have every fact needed for that conclusion and are professionally unable to write it down.

How to read it

Read the research. On the economics of state-monopoly capitalism, on the structure of American industrial concentration, on strike statistics and union membership, on the Black movement, on the mechanics of the two-party system and the third-party attempts that failed against it, on McCarthyism as a social phenomenon rather than a biography, and on the diplomacy of 1939–41, this is a competent survey built out of American sources by scholars who had used American archives. There were American textbooks in 1976 that told a reader less about the class structure of their own country.

Read the silences as evidence of a different kind. They are not random. They cluster on exactly two subjects: the rivals of the Communist Party on the American left, and the conduct of the Soviet state. Minneapolis in 1934, Toledo in 1934, the Smith Act in 1941, the party line between September 1939 and June 1941, Duclos in 1945, Browder's expulsion in 1946 — each removal protects the same proposition, that the Communist Party was the continuous revolutionary thread in American life

and that its record requires no explanation.

The record is available and was written down as it happened. James P. Cannon's "The Great Minneapolis Strikes," *Fourth International*, May 1944, is the account of 1934 by one of the people who directed it. The indictment of the eighteen is printed in full in *Fourth International*, vol. 2 no. 7, August 1941, and George Novack's report on the trial is in the issue for December 1941; *Fourth International* returned to the case in February 1945. Novack's "Ten Years of the New Deal," in the issue for March 1943, is the analysis this book's fourth chapter shadows without knowing it, and is the fairer test of whether Marxist history of the United States required the omissions this volume made. Art Preis's *Labor's Giant Step* (1964) carries the industrial history at length from the same side. For the war itself, Ernest Mandel's *The Meaning of the Second World War* (1986) is the *Fourth International's* full-length reply to the Soviet account — and, since this series holds its own tradition to the standard it applies to *Progress*, it should be said that Mandel's text misdates the Secret Additional Protocol by four days; it was signed on the night of 23 August 1939, the date this book does not print at all.

USSR: For Peace Against Aggression

The official Soviet account of the diplomacy of 1933 to 1941 - collective security, the Eastern pact, Spain, Munich - assembled from the state's own documentary series, and written to give détente a forty-year pedigree.

Ivan Kuzmich Koblyakov

Introduction to the 1976 Edition

I. K. Koblyakov's *The USSR for Peace Against Aggression* is a book with a very exact subject and a very large claim. The exact subject is eight years: the volume opens in 1933, with Hitler's arrival in power and the Soviet turn toward the League of Nations, and closes in June 1941, when the German army crossed the border the book had spent two hundred pages insisting was safe. The large claim is that across those eight years the Soviet Union did only one thing in the world — struggle for peace — and that everyone else, the "aggressive powers" and the "Western powers" alike, did the opposite. The Russian original and this Progress translation both carry 1976. The latest events it cites are the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975 and the "Peace Programme" of the Party's 24th Congress; there is no sign of the 25th Congress of February–March 1976. So this is a book finished in 1975, at the high-water mark of détente, looking back forty years to argue that détente is not a new departure but the oldest thing the Soviet state does. The history of 1933–1941 is offered as the proof.

That is worth stating plainly at the start, because it tells you what the book is for. Koblyakov was a Soviet diplomatic historian who worked from the official documentary series — his footnotes lean throughout on the multi-volume *History of Soviet Foreign Policy* produced under the Foreign Ministry and the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. This is not a maverick's book or a scholar's private argument; it is a synthesis of the state's own account of itself, written to a settled brief. In 1975 the brief was to give détente a pedigree. The Foreword sets the frame in Brezhnev's own voice, quoting his June 1973 broadcast "over American television," and the Conclusion is not a conclusion about 1941 at all but a restatement of the current Peace Programme — the Middle East, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, "long-term mutually-advantageous co-operation" with the United States, France, the FRG and the rest. The pre-war years are the long runway; Helsinki is the takeoff. A reader who wants to understand the book should read the Conclusion first and then watch the history being bent to reach it.

The doctrine: peace by nature

The load-bearing sentence is in the Foreword, and it is a metaphysical one. The Second World War, Koblyakov writes, "was unleashed by Hitler Germany" but "the ground had been prepared by the forces of international imperialist reaction: imperialism was the true culprit." Then the pivot: "Wars are alien to the very social nature of the Soviet socialist state." This is the doctrine on which the whole book rests. Soviet foreign policy is not to be judged act by act, because its character is fixed in advance by the character of Soviet society. A socialist state cannot be an aggressor, in the way that a triangle cannot have four sides. What remains for the historian is to show the theorem worked out across the events.

Everything follows from this. Because aggression is by definition what imperialism does, the word "aggression" in this book has a wiring diagram: it points outward, and it can only point outward. The book's title is the doctrine in miniature. "The USSR for peace" and "against aggression" are not two findings that happened to line up; they are the same proposition said twice, because in this system the second is contained in the first. And this is where the argument has to be tested, not admired — because a category that can point in only one direction is not a historical finding. It is a rule about what may be seen.

The vocabulary of the doctrine is Leninist, and here the book meets a test this series has now applied to several Soviet foreign-policy volumes. The phrase that carries the modern weight is "peaceful coexistence." Koblyakov calls it, four times, "the Leninist principle of peaceful coexistence," and the Conclusion promises to pursue détente "in line with the principles of peaceful co-existence." The claim is that the doctrine descends directly from Lenin. But in a book that quotes Lenin some seventy times, the phrase "peaceful coexistence" never once appears inside a quotation from Lenin. It is always asserted in Koblyakov's own voice and attached to Lenin by adjective. What Lenin is actually quoted saying is something narrower and harder: that one must "take political advantage of the differences among our opponents,"

that the task is "to use the discord between the imperialist bandits," that a given retreat "was indeed a compromise with the imperialists, but... a compromise which, under the circumstances, had to be made." That is a doctrine of manoeuvre among enemies, not of coexistence with them. The gap between the two is exactly the gap this series keeps finding: the pedigree is asserted where the citation is missing. Tomashevsky's *Lenin's Ideas and Modern International Relations* (1974) did the same thing with the same phrase, and honestly recorded elsewhere that the earliest attested use of "peaceful coexistence" is Chicherin's, in June 1920 — the Commissar, not Lenin. Koblyakov offers no such honesty; he simply lets the adjective do the work.

The history that cannot see itself

The doctrine has a cost, and the cost is the last third of the book. So long as Koblyakov is describing 1933–1938 — the years when the Soviet Union genuinely was the loudest voice in Geneva for collective security, and the Western powers genuinely were appeasing Hitler — the doctrine and the evidence pull the same way, and the book is at its strongest. The trouble begins in August 1939, when the peace state signs a pact with the aggressor, and then in September, when it marches into Poland, and then in November, when it attacks Finland. A history organised around the axiom that the USSR is peace and imperialism is aggression must now narrate three Soviet uses of force. Watch what the axiom does to them.

The Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939 is defended, at length and with some skill, as a forced last resort: after the Anglo-French negotiations in Moscow had failed and the danger of a united capitalist front against the USSR was real, "it was necessary to conclude a treaty with Germany. Only in this way was it possible to prolong the peace period, to delay the imminent war with Germany, gain time to prepare for defence and to remove the danger of a war on two fronts." As an argument about Soviet security interests in the summer of 1939 this is not frivolous, and honest historians outside the Soviet tradition have made versions of it. But notice two things the book cannot say. It cannot say what was actually signed. The Secret Additional Protocol of the night of 23 August 1939 — which divided Poland along the Narew–Vistula–San line, assigned Finland, Estonia and Latvia to the Soviet "sphere of influence," and is the document that turned a non-aggression treaty into a partition agreement — does not appear in this book at all. It is not denied; it is absent. (Its existence was Soviet state secret until 1989, when the Congress of People's Deputies at last acknowledged the protocol on the report of the

Yakovlev commission; the German copy had been in the published Western record since 1948. Koblyakov, writing in 1975, was working within the denial, not around a fact he weighed and rejected.) And so the demarcation line drawn by the protocol is presented in the book with its purpose reversed: the Soviet Government, we are told, "obtained agreement that Hitler's army would not go further East" — the line that partitioned Poland becomes a shield the USSR wrested from Hitler.

The entry into Poland on 17 September 1939 is the clearest case of the wiring. Seventeen days after the German invasion, the Red Army crossed into a state that still existed and was still fighting. Koblyakov's sentence: "The Red Army moved 250–350 km westwards and liberated the whole of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia." Liberated. The territories "had belonged to Russia from time immemorial"; "democratic elections were held and popular assemblies formed"; the assemblies "proclaimed Soviet power." There is no invasion in this book, because by the axiom there cannot be one. The same act performed by Germany two weeks earlier is aggression; performed by the USSR it is liberation, and the difference is not in anything that happened on the ground but in the identity of the actor. This is the doctrine showing its hand.

The Winter War is handled the same way, and here the reversal is starkest, because the Soviet Union was the state that opened fire. The book gives the conflict a whole passage under the neutral heading "The Soviet–Finnish Conflict 1939–1940," and its account of the origins is entirely about Finnish intransigence and foreign incitement: Finland rejecting Soviet offers of a mutual-assistance pact and of island leases, rearming with "American loans and Anglo-French deliveries," building the "Mannerheim line" under German engineers. The Soviet attack of 30 November 1939 — the bombing of Helsinki, the invasion across the whole frontier, the puppet "Democratic Republic of Finland" set up at Terijoki under Otto Kuusinen, the expulsion of the USSR from the League of Nations that December for waging aggressive war — none of this is in the passage. Instead the entire conflict is laid at another door: "the Finnish Government was incited by Western diplomacy to provoke armed conflict between Finland and the USSR." Finland provoked; the West incited; the state whose army crossed the border is the one thing the sentence cannot name. And the peace of March 1940, which took the Karelian Isthmus and a thirty-year lease on the Hanko peninsula, is pronounced to have "contained nothing incompatible with Finland's honour and independence."

There is a silence inside this passage that is worth isolating,

because it is the kind of omission that gives the game away. Koblyakov's book treats the Soviet entry into the League of Nations in 1934 as a summit of the peace policy — the moment the USSR carried the banner of collective security onto the world's central stage. He does not mention that on 14 December 1939 the League expelled the Soviet Union, for the attack on Finland, as an aggressor state. That is the one League verdict a book about Soviet policy at the League could not afford to print, because it is the League — Koblyakov's own witness for the prosecution against everybody else — turning the word "aggression" back on Moscow. The membership is a triumph; the expulsion has vanished. A reader is told the court exists and is told its judgements of Germany, Italy and Japan; the single judgement it passed on the USSR is the one the book omits. The same asymmetry governs the disappearance of Litvinov himself. His removal as Foreign Commissar on 3 May 1939 — the sacking of the man who was the collective-security policy, three months before the Pact — is recorded in the book as a bare date, with no word of why the architect of the peace line was dropped at the exact moment the line reversed. The fact is admitted; its meaning is not.

This is the finding, and it is not that Koblyakov lies about particular facts — many of his facts about Finnish rearmament and Anglo-French intrigue are real. It is that the book is structurally incapable of registering a Soviet act of force as one. A history of peace initiatives that cannot see its own three interventions of 1939–40 has not proved that the USSR was a peace power; it has defined "aggression" so that the question can never come up. (The two later interventions this series routinely tests — Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 — fall outside the book's 1933–1941 frame, and their absence here is chronology, not concealment. Koblyakov's Czechoslovakia is Munich's Czechoslovakia, named more than a hundred times as the victim of Western betrayal in 1938. It is the same wiring: Czechoslovakia can be seen when it is imperialism's victim, and would vanish were it the USSR's.)

What is real, and worth keeping

None of this means the book is worthless, and to say so would be to make the opposite error to Koblyakov's. The great merit of *The USSR for Peace Against Aggression* is that for the years 1933 to 1938 the record it defends is largely a true one, and it is a record too often forgotten by readers who know only 1939. The Soviet Union did join the League of Nations in 1934 and did make it, for a few years, a genuine platform for collective security against Germany and Italy. Litvinov's diplomacy — the Convention on the Definition of Aggression

of 1933, the doctrine that "peace is indivisible," the mutual-assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935, the consistent Soviet vote at Geneva for sanctions and for arms embargoes on the aggressor — was real, and it was, for that stretch, more far-sighted than the appeasement being conducted from London and Paris. Koblyakov's chapters on 1938 are a serious indictment of Munich, and they are right that the Western powers spent those years hoping to turn Hitler eastward. Where the book documents the diplomacy of collective security from the Soviet side, it is a usable source, and a reader should take that documentation seriously. The failure of collective security in the 1930s was a real catastrophe, and the Soviet Union was not its principal author.

The distortion is not in the facts of 1933–1938; it is in what the book makes them mean. It presents that half-decade of collective-security diplomacy as the eternal, Leninist essence of Soviet policy, briefly interrupted by a tactical pact. The truth is closer to the reverse, and the sharpest statement of it was already in print before the events the book narrates had finished happening.

The reply, written as it happened

This series can answer Koblyakov from his own decade, in the words of the man the book never names. Leon Trotsky wrote about Soviet foreign policy continuously from Turkish and Mexican exile through the whole period Koblyakov covers, and two of his judgements go to the root of the book.

The first is on the meaning of the collective-security turn itself. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, finished in 1936 — at the very peak of Litvinov's Geneva years — Trotsky argued that the embrace of the League was not the flowering of a Leninist peace principle but its abandonment: a conservative bureaucracy insuring itself by joining the international status quo. "The leaders of those days," he wrote of the Bolsheviks under Lenin, "were especially implacable in relation to all kinds of pacifist illusions — League of Nations, collective security, courts of arbitration, disarmament, etc." — seeing in them "only a method of lulling the toiling masses." The bureaucracy of the 1930s, he wrote, had come to seek "the inviolability of the Soviet Union" by folding it into the European status quo: "What could be finer, when all is said and done, than an eternal pact of non-aggression between socialism and capitalism?" That is precisely the "Leninist principle" Koblyakov derives; Trotsky's point is that Lenin's party held the opposite, and that the substitution of collective security for world revolution was the measure of how far the state had travelled from October. Of Litvinov himself,

embodiment of the whole "peace policy," Trotsky wrote that at Geneva he was "a shadow of Laval" — a witness that the policy Koblyakov celebrates looked, to a contemporary Marxist, like subordination to the French right, not independence from imperialism. A reader need not accept Trotsky's every judgement to see that he has named the real question the book suppresses: whether "peace policy" was a principle or a retreat.

The second judgement is on the Pact, and it is the more devastating because it is a prediction on the record. Koblyakov's whole case is that the agreement with Hitler was forced on the USSR only in the last days of August 1939, after every alternative had failed. Trotsky had been saying since Munich that Stalin was aiming at exactly such an agreement, and wanted it. On 1 October 1938, days after the Munich settlement, he wrote that "the collapse of Czechoslovakia is the collapse of Stalin's international policy of the last five years," that "Moscow's idea of 'an alliance of democracies'... is a lifeless fiction," and that Stalin would now seek an understanding with Berlin. The Pact came ten months later. Writing on 2 September 1939, the day after Germany invaded Poland, Trotsky set the record down himself: "From 1933 on I declared continually in the world press that the fundamental aim of Stalin's foreign policy was the reaching of an agreement with Hitler." Where Koblyakov presents the collective-security years and the Pact as opposites — the principle and its reluctant tactical suspension — Trotsky, watching in real time, saw one continuous line running toward Berlin, with the "struggle for democracy" as its cover. One of these two accounts was published as the events occurred and forecast the next one correctly. It was not the one printed in Moscow.

That is the honest use of this book. Read for its documents of 1933–1938, it preserves a real and creditable record of Soviet collective-security diplomacy that the West would prefer to forget. Read as what it claims to be — a demonstration that the Soviet state is peace by its nature, that "aggression" is a thing only imperialism can commit, that a straight Leninist line runs from the Decree on Peace through Litvinov to Helsinki — it is a period document of a different kind: the record of a state that had learned to describe its own uses of force in a vocabulary that made them, by construction, invisible. The most telling thing in *The USSR for Peace Against Aggression* is not any single sentence about Poland or Finland. It is the title, and the confidence that the two halves of it could never come apart.