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SOVIET SOCIETY

# V. Sukhomlinsky on Education

*The Ukrainian village schoolmaster whose pedagogy of attention to the individual child made him the most loved teacher in the Soviet Union - on study, work, beauty and the collective, drawn from a lifetime of notebooks.*

Vasily Aleksandrovich Sukhomlinsky

## Introduction to the 1977 Edition

**This is one of the gentlest books in the whole Progress Publishers list, and it needs to be read with that in mind before anything critical is said about it.** It gathers the writings of Vasily Sukhomlinsky (1918–1970), the village schoolmaster of Pavlysh in central Ukraine, into a single English volume, translated by Katharine Judelson and prefaced by the journalist Simon Soloveichik's warm essay "Sukhomlinsky's Paradox." The man it presents spent his working life in one rural school, kept notebooks that ran, on his own count, to "three thousand seven hundred pages and each one of those pages is devoted to one person and one person only— my pupil," and believed to the point of certainty that "everything that goes by the name of education is a wondrous recreation of oneself in Man." Whatever else is true of this book, it is the record of a genuinely humane life spent among children, and no reader should come away doubting that.

It is worth being exact about what the object in front of us is. The spine says 1977, but Sukhomlinsky had been dead for seven years by then and the writings themselves belong to the 1950s and 1960s — his major books ran from *Fostering the Collective Spirit among Schoolchildren* (1956) through *I Give My Heart to Children* (1969) to *The Birth of a Citizen*, published a month after his death in 1970. So the text is older than its date; what is 1977 is the act of selection and framing. Somebody in Moscow chose which passages of a much-loved dead teacher to set before the English-reading world, arranged them under six headings — Education, Study, Work, Beauty, The Collective, Morals and Convictions — and had Soloveichik write an introduction explaining what they mean. The critical interest of this edition lies almost entirely in that editorial act, not in the man, and the distinction between the two is the whole argument of what follows.

It helps to ask what a book like this was for in 1977. Progress Publishers issued its English titles as the export arm of Soviet ideological production, and by the mid-1970s — the high

Brezhnev years of "developed socialism" and détente — the most useful face Soviet education could show the West was not the drill-sergeant collective but exactly this: a tender, book-loving, nature-loving village schoolmaster whom any humane teacher in London or New York could admire. Sukhomlinsky was, by 1977, safely dead and being gently canonised, his school at Pavlysh already a place of pilgrimage. He made an ideal export precisely because his gentleness was real; a reader charmed by the fairy-tales and the Thinking Room would absorb, along with them, the Communist upbringing and the Soviet patriotism in which the edition carefully embeds them. That is not a reason to distrust the man. It is a reason to read the frame with open eyes.

## The humanism is real, and it is the reason to read the book

Start with what is best here, because it is considerable and because a reader told to be suspicious of everything learns nothing. Sukhomlinsky's pedagogy is built on attention to the individual child — not the class, not the year-group, but the particular boy or girl in front of him — and on the conviction that a child's feelings are the ground everything else grows from. He begins his teaching, Soloveichik notes, "not in the classroom but outside in meadows or woodland," leading children first to the beauty of nature, then of art, then of one another. He built a library of only three hundred books, the "Thinking Room," and asked his pupils to read and reread the finest of them. He laid on eighty different hobbies for five hundred children, from poker-work to radio-electronics, so that every child could find one field in which to feel "strong and intelligent." He collected the fairy-tales his pupils invented and bound them into folders. One of his chapter titles is "Music Keeps the Heart Straight," and he means it literally.

Most of all he refused cruelty. He "eradicated with methodical consistency all the hundred and one things which can humiliate even a single child," disliked competitive sport because it manufactures losers, and would not let a teacher

shout at a weak pupil. His deepest practical insight is disarmingly simple and still not widely acted on: "Before a child can be educated he has to be rendered educable." A child who cannot yet listen is not to be scolded for not listening; his capacity to listen has first to be patiently grown. From this follows a whole ethic of the teacher's love — the readiness to wait years for the moment when a particular child is at last struck by the beauty of a spring meadow, and the refusal to count a good deed unless the child felt joy in doing it, since "education of emotions can only be discussed in terms of emotions." His formula for what a school is for could be carved over any schoolhouse door: a school is only worthy of the name "if the main subject taught in it is the Science of Man, when knowledge of the world starts out from knowledge of man's soul."

The book's signature idea, the one Soloveichik builds his whole essay around, grows straight out of this refusal to humiliate. Sukhomlinsky noticed that a child's desire to learn does not come first and produce success; it comes second, in the wake of success. "The desire to learn," Soloveichik summarises, "comes only in the wake of success in study" — from which it follows, absurdly, that "in order for a child to make good progress at school ... he must make good progress at school." Sukhomlinsky's answer to the circle is not to break it but to prime it: give even the weakest child some real, hard-won victory, "some sphere of activity for each child, where he can come into his own," so that "each child should outstrip his fellows at least in something and feel himself strong and intelligent." Interest then follows ability rather than preceding it. "Without curiosity there can be no school," he wrote, and he meant it as an engineering problem — how do you manufacture curiosity in a child who has none? — rather than a platitude. Anyone who has taught a discouraged child will recognise that this is true and hard to do, and that Sukhomlinsky did it.

His account of work and of the collective belongs to the same humane instinct. He was scornful of make-work: "Labour as such has no interest for children," he wrote, and cared nothing for the size of a harvest, only for "the number of difficulties that have been overcome." Enthusiasm, for him, was contagious rather than teachable — "Children cannot be taught to enjoy work, but they can be infected with that enjoyment" — and the collective's real force was atmospheric, "the disciplinary impact of intelligent, happy work in a collective," not the pressure of commands or punishments. It is telling that when the American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Two Worlds of Childhood: US and USSR* is invoked in the framing essay, Sukhomlinsky's editors bridle at its central term:

children, they insist, are not shaped by copying "models" but by "collective impulses in an overall creative atmosphere." Whatever one thinks of the claim, it is a real and generous picture of how a group can carry an individual along, and it is worlds away from the barked drill that the word "collective" can suggest.

Behind the doctrine stands a life that earns it. Sukhomlinsky was a peasant carpenter's son who nearly starved as a student and set out for his studies with "a few potato scones and two glasses of fried soya beans" to his name. He was gravely wounded at the front near Moscow in 1941 and carried shell splinters near his heart for the rest of his life; they eventually killed him, and in his last years he went on teaching while knowing it. His young wife, Vera Povsha, helped the partisans under German occupation, was captured, tortured, and hanged, after a Nazi officer had used their newborn son to try to make her inform. Out of that grief Sukhomlinsky wrote the sentence that anchors the whole book: "I am filled with two emotions—love and hate. Love for children and hatred for fascism." When a small girl came to him in tears because her father had abandoned the family and other children were taunting her, he told her, "I shall be your father. You can tell that to everyone: I am your father" — and he already had a family of his own. A pedagogy of tenderness written by a man with that much cause for hardness is not sentimental. It is a decision.

## **A humane man inside, and against, a regimented system**

Here the historical texture begins to complicate, and it is worth drawing out slowly because the 1977 edition works hard to keep it smooth. Sukhomlinsky's stress on the single child, on the inner emotional life, on beauty and the fairy-tale, sat awkwardly with the dominant orthodoxy of Soviet education, which descended from Anton Makarenko — the great pedagogue of the 1920s and 1930s who had rebuilt orphaned and delinquent children through the discipline of the collective. Makarenko's collective was a demanding thing: the group formed the individual, and the individual was answerable to the group. Sukhomlinsky's instinct ran the other way, toward the individual child's feelings, and in the 1960s that instinct drew fire. He was accused, in effect, of an "abstract humanism" — of a softness that neglected the collective and the hard business of forming Soviet citizens.

The 1977 volume knows this and disarms it. Soloveichik's essay concedes that "attempts were made to contrast the work of Sukhomlinsky and Makarenko, and indeed they still occur

today," and then spends several pages insisting the contrast is superficial, that Sukhomlinsky is Makarenko's faithful "continuator," that "collective education does not in any way undermine individuality." That the framing essay needs to make this argument at such length is itself the evidence: there was a live controversy, and the edition's job is to settle it in the direction of orthodoxy. It is a fair enough reading of Sukhomlinsky — his collective genuinely is a reciprocal, gentle thing, one where the group exists to serve the child at least as much as the reverse ("the potential of any working collective is measured by the development of the individual capacities of each individual member"). But the reader should notice the operation. A teacher who was, in his own time, a mild dissenter from the reigning method is here enrolled posthumously as its confirming instance. The tension is real; the framing exists to dissolve it.

### **The narrow edge: what a pedagogy of the heart is asked to carry**

The critical point in this book is narrow, and it is structural rather than personal. It is not that Sukhomlinsky was a hypocrite or a propagandist — he was manifestly neither. It is that every pedagogy in the Soviet Union, however humane, was required to arrive at the same destination: the formation of a loyal Communist citizen, and the passages where Sukhomlinsky's education of the heart is made to carry that freight are where the book quietly strains.

They are easy to find. The Communist upbringing is explicit and constant. He read his pupils "extracts from Lenin's life and his works" from their first days at school, taught them that "the Communist Party represents the flower of our people, its finest sons and daughters," and set out to make them "heirs to the communist ideals of their fathers and grandfathers." Patriotic education is stated in the strongest terms: the aim is to "educate a true patriot ready to lay down his life for the independence of his Soviet Homeland." And a series of talks called "Men with Ardent Hearts" held up model Communists for the children to love, among them "Felix Dzerzhinsky" — a choice that repays a pause. Dzerzhinsky founded the Cheka, the first Soviet political police, and the machinery of terror is a strange thing to find inside a curriculum whose governing principle is the cultivation of kindness. Sukhomlinsky presents him, in perfect good faith, as proof that "supreme happiness for the Communist consists in loyal service to his people." The pedagogy of tenderness is being asked to underwrite a figure whose historical work was the opposite of tender, and it does so without noticing the seam.

The seam shows most plainly in one remarkable passage on the emotions. Having built his whole method on sensitivity, Sukhomlinsky writes that "our main goal in education is to foster in the heart of citizens of the future an irreconcilable hostility to the enemies of our country," to school them in "lessons in noble hatred," and to end with "man's heart" able to embrace everything "from sensitive tender concern for a mother to hatred for the enemy or uncompromising rejection of ideological opponents." He resolves this for himself with a beautiful and dangerous sentence — "courage is the supreme expression of human kindness, and hatred for the enemy is an expression of real humanity" — which makes love and hatred continuous, the same faculty pointed in two directions. As a description of a soldier who has watched fascism murder his wife, it is unanswerable. As a principle of universal schooling it hands something over: it lets the definition of "the enemy" and "ideological opponents" be filled in from outside, by the party-state, while the teacher supplies the emotional intensity. Sukhomlinsky trains the heart; who the heart is to hate is decided elsewhere.

This is the limit of a child-centred humanism operating under those conditions, and it is worth naming precisely. Sukhomlinsky can teach a child to feel deeply, to love beauty, to be sensitive to another's suffering. What he cannot do, within this frame, is turn that sensitivity back onto the society the child is being formed for — to ask whether the "Homeland" the child is to die for is just, whether the "enemies" are really enemies, whether an "ideological opponent" might be right. The "revolutionary scientific-materialist world outlook" is offered as the settled destination of all this feeling, never as one of its possible objects. A pedagogy that awakens the emotions and then forbids them their most important application — judgement of the order they live under — is doing something genuinely valuable and something quietly circumscribed at the same time. The 1977 selection, by placing "Morals and Convictions" as the culmination toward which "Beauty" and "The Collective" build, presents the circumscription as the fulfilment. That is the framing's deepest move, and it is worth seeing through even while honouring everything the book contains.

### **The reply: education and the whole human being**

The tradition this series writes from — the anti-Stalinist Marxism of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International — thought about exactly this problem, and, interestingly, it did not answer Sukhomlinsky's humanism with more humanism. It

answered with more honesty about the gap the 1977 framing closes.

In August 1923, writing on "The Tasks of Communist Education," Leon Trotsky warned against precisely the move this book performs. He cautioned "not to permit any formless humanitarian interpretation of the conception 'new man.'" The transitional society, he argued, could not yet manufacture the finished, harmonious human being by careful schooling: "we do not create the abstractly harmonious and perfect citizen of the commune, but we form the concrete human beings of our epoch," people "who have still to fight for the creation of the conditions out of which the harmonious citizen of the commune may emerge." The point is not a colder pedagogy — Trotsky's essay is about liberating the mind from "ignorance and superstition" — but an insistence on telling the truth about where one is standing. You cannot form the free human being of the future inside an unfree present and pretend the present has already delivered him. To claim otherwise, Trotsky thought, was "a wretchedly childish Utopia." (International Press Correspondence, vol. 3 no. 56, 16 August 1923.)

The irony is sharp and worth stating plainly. The revolutionary is less willing than the beloved village schoolmaster to promise a finished, harmonious soul, because the revolutionary insists on measuring the promise against the actual society and finding it wanting. What the 1977 edition offers as Sukhomlinsky's crowning achievement — the seamless production of the good child who is also the loyal citizen — is exactly the seamlessness Trotsky refused, on the grounds that the seam is where the truth lives. Behind them both stands Marx's oldest hope for education, the "all-round development of the individual," the human being freed to develop every capacity — a hope that Marx always tied to the transformation of the society that stunts people, never to schooling alone. Sukhomlinsky has the hope in full; what his position cannot supply, and what the framing is designed to make him not need, is the second half — the standing question of whether the society around the school deserves the citizens it is asking the school to produce.

## How to read it

None of this diminishes the book, and it should not be read as if it did. Sukhomlinsky's attention to the whole child, his refusal of humiliation, his patience, his conviction that beauty and the emotions are the foundation and not the decoration of an education — these are real contributions, and English-speaking teachers have drawn on them for half a century with good reason. The most moving pages here would

lose nothing if the Soviet frame around them fell away tomorrow; much of what he says about children could be said, and has been said, by humane teachers in any society. Read this volume for the pedagogy of the heart, which is genuine, and read the framing — the placing of "Convictions" at the summit, the enrolment of a gentle dissenter as an orthodox witness, the lessons in noble hatred set beside the lessons in kindness — as the price a humane teacher paid, and a dead one was made to keep paying in 1977, for working where he worked. The tenderness was his own. The uses it was put to were not always his to choose.

PHILOSOPHY

# Nihilism Today

*Two Soviet moral philosophers anatomise Western disenchantment - manufactured contentment, absurdism, the gap between proclaimed and lived values - written in Moscow at the onset of the stagnation years.*

Yurii Vaganovich Sogomonov and Petr Abramovich Landesman

## Introduction to the 1977 Edition

**A book about the crisis of belief is a delicate thing to publish**, because the reader is entitled to ask whether the author himself believes. *Nihilism Today* — Y. Sogomonov and P. Landesman's study of the pessimism, disenchantment and moral vertigo of the Western world, issued by Progress Publishers in Moscow in 1977 in David Skvirsky's translation — is a work of exactly this hazardous kind. It sets out to diagnose a society in which, the authors say, the proclaimed values and the lived ones have come apart; in which official optimism is manufactured while private despair spreads underneath it; in which people go through the motions of a creed they no longer inhabit. It is a sharp book, better than its worst pages, and it was written in the capital of a state then entering the deepest phase of precisely the condition it describes. The interest of reading it now lies in watching a genuinely acute instrument being held very carefully so that it never turns around.

The date matters, and it is not in doubt. The latest event the book cites is the 25th Congress of the CPSU, held in February 1976; its closing chapter quotes Leonid Brezhnev's Report to that Congress at length, and every internal reference points to 1975 or 1976. This is a mid-decade Brezhnev text, composed in the years the Soviet Union itself now remembers as the height of *zastoi*, stagnation — the era of the widening gap between what was said at meetings and what was thought on the way home, of the private cynicism that later memoirists made the defining note of "developed socialism." The same year the Russian original was being finished, the Soviet leadership was drafting the new Constitution it would adopt in October 1977, the "Brezhnev Constitution" that proclaimed the arrival of a society of unprecedented moral unity. *Nihilism Today* is a document of that moment, and it should be read as one.

Its authors were Soviet philosophers of morals, and the book belongs to a recognisable Soviet genre: the critique of "bourgeois consciousness," produced by academics of the

Institute of Philosophy and its satellites for export to Western readers and for the ideological armament of cadres at home. But it is a cut above the genre's average. Sogomonov and Landesman are not writing a denunciation with footnotes; they are attempting a real phenomenology of demoralisation, and where they attend closely to their material they see a great deal.

## What the book gets right

The strongest part of *Nihilism Today* is its opening account of what the authors call the "sense of contentedness" — the manufactured optimism of the post-war capitalist West. Their claim is that the ruling order, unable to deliver either meaning or security, produces a synthetic well-being to keep the population quiet: "The dilemma is—either perish or bourgeoisify the masses." This "bourgeoisification" is not, they are careful to say, the literal enrichment of everyone; it is the manufacture of a consciousness — of individuals who "would objectively remain wage workers" while their outlook becomes that of small proprietors, contented, apolitical, and lost to any project of change.

The machinery of this manufacture is the mass media, and here the book is genuinely incisive. The culture industry, the authors argue, does not persuade so much as it stupefies; "the system of mass media is called a machine of indoctrination, not of persuasion," in which "logical argumentation is conspicuously absent" and the trend is "towards irrationalism, towards rubberstamp decisions of problems, towards appealing to prejudices and base instincts." Behind this stands an "idealistic understanding of history," the maxim that "opinions rule the world" — the belief that a society's contradictions can be dissolved by managing what people feel about them. Whoever has read Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, or Adorno and Horkheimer on the culture industry, will recognise the terrain; the authors are drawing, without much acknowledgement, on the same Western Marxist analysis of consumer society, and they hold their own on it. Their portrait of a public trained to care more about a serial's romance or

"the next boxing champion" than "the arms race, the strike struggle or political debates" has aged into something close to prophecy.

The book is at its best when it insists that the contentment is hollow. "The contented consciousness is no more than false optimism," they write; the manufactured well-being and the private despair are two faces of one thing, and "the sense of contentedness and wretchedness complement rather than exclude each other." This is a real dialectical observation, and it is the pivot of the whole book. The nihilist and the consumer, the desperate and the satisfied, are products of the same social vacuum.

Even the book's treatment of the 1960s counterculture — the section it labels "anarcho-hedonism" — has flashes of this insight. The authors are hostile, sometimes crudely so, to the sexual revolution, the drug culture and the hippie communes, which they read as psychopathological, as an "anti-labour revolution of social parasitism." But they see something that a purely dismissive account would miss: that the counterculture's cult of "collectivism" was "a perverted reaction to the dominance of bourgeois pseudo-collectivism and bureaucracy," a real revolt against a real deformation, misdirected. And they are honest enough to exempt the political folk tradition from the charge, naming "Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Elton John and John Lennon" as carriers of "a cogent political folklore with strong undertones of democracy and independence." A book that can tell the New Left's music from its narcotics is not a stupid book.

It is worth being precise about the debt, because the authors half-acknowledge it themselves. The apparatus of the "sense of wretchedness" — the "borderline situations," the dread that "does not directly menace a person's health or his property" and yet haunts, the flight into everyday routine and preoccupation — is drawn straight from the existentialist analysis of anxiety, transposed into the language of mass sociology. And in a footnote to the chapter on stoicism the authors cite a Soviet study of "Existentialism and the Frankfurt School," which is as near as the book comes to naming the sources it is working from. This is a book that knows it is standing on Western Marxism's account of one-dimensional man and the culture industry, and on the existentialists' account of dread, even as its stated method spares it from citing either. The concealment is not dishonest so much as generic: the Soviet critique of "bourgeois consciousness" habitually absorbed the sharpest Western self-criticism and re-presented it as an external diagnosis, the patient's own symptoms read back to him as news. What the book calls the

post-war West's descent from "contentedness" into "wretchedness" is, stripped of the euphemism, the disenchantment of 1968 and after — the exhaustion of the boom, the souring of the counterculture, the turn to private survival — seen with real acuity and named in a private vocabulary.

One further point of method deserves credit, though it will also be the hinge of the criticism. The authors deliberately refuse to conduct their argument as a tour of philosophers. They announce in the introduction that they will not name "the names, schools and orientations that would have had to be given in an academic analysis," because their subject is not the theory of nihilism but its diffusion into "the bourgeois mass consciousness." This is why *Nihilism Today* never once mentions Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, Kierkegaard or Marcuse, though its whole apparatus — dread, the absurd, the "borderline situations," the "know yourself," the road to Calvary — is built from their vocabulary. As an account of how existentialist despair migrated from the seminar room into a general mood, this is a defensible and even sophisticated choice. As we shall see, it is also convenient.

## The category that cannot turn around

The test to apply to a book like this is not whether it uses harsh words about capitalism; our own tradition used harsh words about capitalism. The test is reflexive. *Nihilism Today* builds a powerful analytic instrument — the manufacture of false optimism, the gap between proclaimed and lived values, the hollow contented consciousness, the citizen who performs a belief he does not hold. The question is whether that instrument is ever, even once, allowed to swing toward the society that built it.

It is not. And the book's fifth chapter, "In Face of the New Social Reality," is remarkable because the authors take the instrument all the way to the edge and then, deliberately, set it down.

The chapter turns to "existing socialism," and its candour is real up to a point. The authors concede that Soviet society still carries "the economic and moral traditions, habits, traces and birthmarks of capitalism"; that "red tape and formalism have not been weeded out"; that there persist "social boils such as irresponsibility in the fulfilment of social duty, embezzlement, drunkenness, abuse of office for mercenary aims, an anti-humane attitude to people and, lastly, crime." This is more than the genre usually admits. But every admission is immediately quarantined. These are "remnants of the past,"

"survivals," "birthmarks" — never products of the present order, never structural, always residues fading on their own.

Then comes the decisive passage, the one the whole book is organised to reach and to deflect. The authors report, in order to reject, the charge that

*"in the socialist world the official ideology and morality are lifeless and receive only outward approval, while the actual—mainly consumer—ideology and morality have 'silent' support and that society has reconciled itself to this duality."*

This is a precise, almost clinical description of Soviet dvoemyslie — the double-consciousness of the late-Brezhnev years, the split between the ritual language of the meeting and the private cynicism of the kitchen. Sogomonov and Landesman name it exactly. And then they attribute the description to "bourgeois ideologists" who "grossly exaggerate," and dismiss it as slander. The one place in the book where the analysis of value-collapse is turned toward Soviet reality is the place where the authors work hardest to slam the door.

The irony is not that they were unaware of the phenomenon. It is that they had, in the first four chapters, built the perfect tool for anatomising it — and then declared, by fiat, that the tool did not apply on their side of the line. "False optimism," "the contented consciousness," the "philistine, apologetic thinking" that "embellishes reality" and clings to "stereotype views doomed to decay": every phrase they minted to convict Western culture of manufactured contentment describes, with uncanny accuracy, the official optimism of zastoi. The book even reaches, in its closing pages, for the language of self-criticism — warning against "servile contentedness, moral dogmatism, fear of criticism, placidity, complacency, the lulling pseudo-optimistic belief in the philosophy of letting things drift." But the warning is addressed to individual failings within a healthy system, backed by a Brezhnev quotation, and never to the system's own production of exactly that complacency. The category can be applied to persons. It can never be applied to the order.

The same asymmetry runs through the book's vocabulary. "Bureaucracy" and "pseudo-collectivism" are among its favourite terms of indictment — and its index attaches them, without exception, to capitalism. Bureaucracy is what the state-monopoly order imposes; pseudo-collectivism is the false togetherness of the consumer herd. That the words might describe the ministries of Zubovsky Boulevard, or the compulsory collectivism of the Soviet workplace, is not a

possibility the book entertains; the terms are the property of the enemy by definition. It is the reflexive block again, working now at the level of the dictionary.

Nowhere is the block more visible than on alienation, the concept that carries more weight in this book than any other. The authors state flatly that "socialism destroys the economic roots of labour alienation," that under it "the individual is no longer compelled to materialise, to dehumanise his relations" with others. And yet, a few pages on, describing the persistence of money and wage differentials in Soviet society, they concede that these "do not allow closing all roads to egoistic concentration on one's own advancement, to self-alienation, to a market attitude to oneself." Self-alienation, a market attitude to oneself: the very conditions the book has just declared abolished at the root. The contradiction is not hidden — it sits within a single chapter — but it is never confronted, because to confront it would be to ask whether socialist alienation has its own roots, structural and present, rather than being a "birthmark" fading from the skin of the past. The authors reach the edge of their own best idea and decline to cross it.

That is the finding, and it is worth stating plainly: the book's diagnosis is not wrong about the West so much as it is unfalsifiable in one direction. Everything that hollows out belief is capitalism doing it to its victims; nothing that hollows out belief could be socialism doing it to its own. The concluding vision — that "elements of the sense of contentedness and the sense of wretchedness, of false optimism and disastrous nihilism, which are historically transient, will recede into the past" as communism advances — is offered as science. It reads, in 1977, as the very "false optimism" the book spent four chapters exposing.

## The reply

The tradition of anti-Stalinist Marxism had been making exactly this observation, about exactly this society, for forty years by the time Nihilism Today appeared, and it made it with the book's own weapons.

Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) is, among other things, a study of manufactured optimism and official cynicism in a workers' state. Writing of the very phenomenon Sogomonov and Landesman treat as a bourgeois fantasy, Trotsky described the moral trajectory of the Soviet bureaucracy without euphemism: "Parallel with the political degeneration of the party, there occurred a moral decay of the uncontrolled apparatus." When he came to the 1936

Constitution — the direct ancestor of the 1977 document being drafted as our book went to press — he found in its solemn proclamations "the lie with which, as a mirror of the ruling stratum, the new constitution is imbued," and concluded that "whatever concerns freedom and democracy is saturated through and through with the spirit of usurpation and cynicism." This is the gap between proclaimed and lived values applied without exemption — the same tool Nihilism Today forbids itself to use at home, turned on the Soviet Constitution four decades before Sogomonov and Landesman praised its successor. A reader who wants to know what an honest version of the book's fifth chapter would have looked like should read the tenth chapter of *The Revolution Betrayed*, "In the Mirror of the New Constitution."

The deeper answer is to the book's real subject, which is morality itself — the question of what happens to values in a society of decline. Trotsky addressed it directly in *Their Morals and Ours* (1938), and his argument cuts beneath Sogomonov and Landesman's on precisely the point where they are strongest and least self-aware. Every ruling order, Trotsky wrote, secretes an official morality to hold itself together: "Such a regime could not have endured for even a week through force alone. It needs the cement of morality." And the function of that cement is exactly what the Progress authors describe the Western media performing — except that Trotsky refuses to make it a capitalist monopoly. "The ruling class forces its ends upon society and habituates it into considering all those means which contradict its ends as immoral. That is the chief function of official morality." A book issued by the ideological export house of the Soviet state, teaching millions of readers which values are healthy and which are decadent, is itself an instance of official morality doing its office. That it cannot see this is not an oversight; it is the condition of its employment.

Trotsky had a name, too, for the tone of the book's smoother passages — the reassurance that history is on track, that the contradictions are residual, that the confident reader need not trouble himself. Against the complacency that dresses itself as realism, he wrote that "there is nothing more flat, stale, self-satisfied and cynical than the moral rules of common sense." It is a sentence Nihilism Today could usefully have quoted against itself.

None of this is to say the anti-Stalinist tradition dismissed the Western malaise the book describes. The Fourth International's own theorists took the alienation of consumer society seriously as a Marxist problem, not a propaganda target; the difference is that they were willing to ask whether a bureaucratically

commanded economy produced its own alienation, its own hollow rituals, its own double-think — and to answer yes. The category, for them, could turn around. That willingness is the whole distance between an analysis and an alibi.

## What to keep

A reader should not close this book having learned that it is worthless, because it is not. Its account of the manufacture of consent in advanced capitalism — the media as an engine of stupefaction, the consumer trained into political apathy, the official cheerfulness laid over a real despair — is serious Marxist cultural criticism, and much of it holds up. Its refusal to reduce the 1960s revolt to mere delinquency, its ear for the difference between a protest song and a marketing gimmick, its recognition that the counterculture's confusions were reactions to genuine deformations of bourgeois life: these are the marks of authors who were looking, not merely labelling. Where Nihilism Today describes a civilisation losing its capacity to believe its own promises, it is often exactly right.

The trouble is only that it was published in a society doing the same thing, by writers who had built the perfect apparatus for saying so and were required to prove it inapplicable. The book's title asks after nihilism "today." Its most honest chapter, had it been permitted to write it, would have found the subject a good deal closer to Zubovsky Boulevard than to the boulevards of the West. Read it, then, as a mirror its authors could not look into — a diagnosis of the crisis of belief, composed in good faith and considerable talent, in the years when the faith it defended was quietly emptying out around them.

# Marxist-Leninist Philosophy

*The clearest systematic exposition of Soviet philosophical doctrine in English - matter, knowledge, the categories of dialectics, historical materialism - and a text that the years 1978 to 1980 did not alter by a single sentence.*

Aleksandr Petrovich Sheptulin

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**Progress Publishers issued A. P. Sheptulin's** Marxist-Leninist Philosophy in English twice, in 1978 and again in 1980. That second printing offered something a textbook rarely does: a controlled before-and-after of the same official doctrine, from the same house, across one of the sharpest breaks in the post-war history of the Soviet state. Between the two printings fall the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the internal exile of Andrei Sakharov in January 1980, and the strike wave in the Baltic shipyards that produced Solidarity in the summer of 1980. What did official philosophy do about any of it?

The 1980 printing has been collated against the text you are holding, line by line. The answer is: nothing whatever. Not a sentence was added, cut or reworded. That turns out to be a more interesting finding than a revision would have been, and because it is a claim about an absence it is worth setting out how it was established.

## The 1980 reprint changed nothing

The two printings were initially catalogued as separate editions, on a similarity measure that scored them at 74 per cent — near-duplicates, but far enough apart to look like genuinely different books. They were not. The 74 per cent was an artefact of the scanning, and once the artefact is removed the two texts are the same book. The 1980 printing has since been withdrawn from this collection as a duplicate.

The 1980 scan preserves the running head at the top of every page; the 1978 scan discards it. That single difference generates almost all of the apparent divergence. The word dialectics appears 47 more times in the 1980 file than in the 1978 file — an increase that looks, at first glance, like a doctrinal reweighting. It is not. The 1980 file carries the running head CATEGORIES OF MATERIALIST DIALECTICS 34 times and THE BASIC LAWS OF

DIALECTICS 17 times, against two of each in the 1978 file;  $34 + 17 - 4 = 47$ , exactly. Consciousness gains 42 by the same mechanism, materialism 19, idealism 15. Every one of these is a page header, not a sentence.

Strip the running heads and the folios, and the two texts run to 115,464 and 115,758 words — a difference of 294 words in 116,000, a quarter of one per cent. A token-level alignment of the two puts 90 per cent of the 1978 text in runs identical to the 1980 text, and inspection of the remaining hunks finds not one substantive editorial change. What the alignment reports as insertions and deletions are, without exception, of three kinds. Footnotes migrate: the Bacon reference to Novum Organum, the Descartes from the Principia Philosophiae, the Spinoza, the Holbach, the Lomonosov, each appears at a slightly different point in the text stream because the page break falls elsewhere in a differently set edition, and each is deleted in one place and reinserted verbatim a hundred tokens later. The contents pages differ because the 1980 scan captured the page numbers and the 1978 scan did not. And the rest is optical noise: *systeme* for *système*, *illam* for *ilium*, self-criticism against selfcriticism, slaveowners against slave-owners, Ghernyshevsky for Chernyshevsky.

A vocabulary test confirms it. Of roughly 116,000 tokens, some 1,378 appear in the 1978 text and not the 1980, and 1,493 the other way — about 1.2 per cent, and the words concerned are development, society, another, forces, chapter. Not one doctrinal term, and not one proper name, occurs in one printing and not the other. The two are typographically distinct — they ran to 519 and 494 pages, so Progress reset the type more tightly the second time — and textually identical.

So the diff is empty, and the emptiness is the evidence. The 1980 was not a second edition. It was a reprint, and a reprint of something already old.

## The date of the text

Both printings say so themselves, in a foreword that is

word-for-word the same in each. The book "is a translation from the Russian of" — and here both scans mangle the Cyrillic — Sheptulin's *Философия марксизма-ленинизма*, Politizdat, 1970. The foreword adds that "The author has revised and supplemented the Russian edition", which is the standard Progress formula and is not evidence of much. The highest authority either printing cites is the Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 25th Party Congress, delivered by Brezhnev in 1976 — quoted identically in both, down to the footnote. Nothing in either book is dated later than 1976. The 26th Congress of February 1981 is of course absent from the 1980 printing, which is fair enough; but so is 1977, 1978 and 1979.

One caution, recorded because it nearly produced a false result. The scanned 1980 file appears at first pass to cite events up to 1980. It does not. Every occurrence of the string "1980" in that file belongs to the digitiser's own archival path, stamped into the header of each extracted section by the volunteer who scanned it. The book's latest citation is 1976, in both printings.

The right way to describe what a reader holds, then, is this: a Soviet university textbook written in Russian and published in Moscow in 1970, lightly refreshed for the 25th Congress, translated into English and exported in 1978, and exported again unchanged in 1980. The spine says 1978. The mind says 1970.

## A note on the author's name

The author is Alexander Petrovich Sheptulin — A. P. Sheptulin. This needs saying because catalogue records deriving from the 1978 printing, including the filename under which this volume is stored, give his initials as "A. F.", and that is a scanner's mistake rather than a genuine variant.

The mistake is diagnosable. This printing gives the author's name on the copyright page only in Cyrillic, and the scan renders it "A. FI. IllenTVJIHH" — reading Cyrillic *П* as the Latin letter-pair *FI*, and *Ш* as the letter-triple *III*, so that *Шептулин* comes out as "IllenTVJIHH". Someone downstream then read "FI" as "F". Nothing in the 1978 printing sets the initials in Latin type, which is why the error survived. The 1980 reprint does, and settles it: it carries the author's name in plain Latin capitals as a running head on every verso, printing A. P. SHEPTULIN 193 times. (One passage of the book interpolates an editorial gloss signed "A. S." — a single inconsistency against 193 running heads, and not a reason to doubt them.)

## What the book does not contain

Sheptulin's textbook runs to 116,000 words on the nature of matter, consciousness, cognition, contradiction, class, the state and social progress. Searched with word-boundary matching in both printings, the following occur exactly zero times in each: Stalin. Trotsky. Bukharin. Deborin. Lysenko. Sakharov. Afghanistan. Czechoslovakia. Eurocommunism. "Bourgeois falsifiers". The word China occurs four times in each, and every occurrence concerns materialist schools of the first millennium BC. Poland occurs once, and Hungary once, neither politically. Genetics does not appear at all.

Some of these silences are ordinary — a textbook of general philosophy need not discuss Afghanistan. Others are not, and three deserve naming.

The first is Stalin. A comprehensive Soviet textbook of dialectical and historical materialism that never once prints his name is a strange object. It is not simply that he has been written out; it is that the thing he built has been left standing with the architect's name filed off. The form of this book — philosophy as a settled body of doctrine, arranged in numbered laws with lettered sub-clauses, each certified by a quotation from an authority, the whole examinable — is the form Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* gave the discipline in 1938. Sheptulin inherits the shape and cannot mention its source. After 1956 the name was unprintable; the structure was not revisable.

The second is Deborin, and behind him Lysenko. These are the two catastrophes of Soviet philosophy's own institutional history: the destruction of the Deborin school in 1931 as "Menshevising idealism", and the alliance of philosophy with Lysenko's biology that outlawed genetics in 1948. A book that teaches Soviet students what dialectical materialism is, with no account of the two occasions on which dialectical materialism was used to break a discipline, is teaching them something false by omission. That the book also contains no occurrence of the word genetics completes the picture.

The third is the one that the reprint makes damning rather than merely regrettable. Discussing antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions, Sheptulin writes — and the sentence stands in both printings, identical from the second clause onward, the only difference being that the 1980 compositor set slave-owners where this one sets slaveowners:

*Contradictions between slaves and slaveowners, peasants and landlords, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are antagonistic, while contradictions between the working*

*class and the peasantry, and between various socialist countries, are non-antagonistic.*

He goes on: "Antagonistic contradictions are resolved through an acute class struggle, whereas non-antagonistic contradictions are overcome by persuasion, criticism and self-criticism."

Written in Russian in 1970, that was already an evasion: Soviet and Chinese troops had shot at each other along the Ussuri in March 1969. Reprinted in English in 1978 it was worse. Reprinted again in 1980 it was indefensible — China had invaded Vietnam in February 1979, the Soviet army had been in Afghanistan since December 1979, and the theory on the page said that contradictions between socialist countries are resolved by persuasion and self-criticism. Nobody at Progress changed the sentence. Nobody, so far as the text shows, read it.

This is what a nil return is worth. The book was not revised in 1979–80 because the genre does not respond to events. Official philosophy of this kind is not a description of the world that could be falsified by the world; it is a body of certified formulations whose function is to be transmitted. The historian's temptation is to read Soviet textbooks as coded weather reports on the leadership's mood. Sheptulin's two printings are a caution against that. Between them the state fought a war, exiled its most famous scientist and lost control of the Polish working class, and the philosophy did not move a comma.

## What is genuinely good here

It would be a poor service to the reader to leave it there, because this is a better book than the preceding paragraphs suggest, and its best parts are good by any standard.

The strongest passage is the discussion of the social and epistemological roots of idealism in Chapter I. Sheptulin's argument is that idealism is not simply an error to be refuted but a phenomenon with material conditions, and that these are of two kinds. The social roots he locates first of all in "the separation of mental from physical labour and their transformation into opposites", supported by a properly cited passage from *The German Ideology* on how, once ruling ideas are detached from ruling individuals, "it is very easy to abstract from these various ideas 'the idea', the thought, etc., as the dominant force in history". The epistemological roots he finds in the structure of cognition itself: knowledge is "a complex and contradictory process", and idealism arises from

"exaggerating any aspect of knowledge, depriving it of bonds with its other aspects and with matter, and absolutising it". That is a real and useful thought, it is argued rather than asserted, and it is more sophisticated than most Anglophone materialism of the period. A reader can take it away and use it.

The treatment of freedom and necessity is likewise honest. Sheptulin concludes that "freedom lies not in independence from any necessity and the laws of reality, but rather in their cognition", glossing Engels on the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. One may think this account of freedom is inadequate to the political facts of the society that produced it — it is — but as an exposition of the classical Marxist position it is accurate and clearly done.

The historical chapters are competent. The coverage of Lomonosov, Radishchev, and then Herzen, Belinsky and Chernyshevsky is substantial and cited to Russian editions with volume and page. For an English-language reader this material is not easy to come by, and Sheptulin's summary of the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary democrats — their refusal, unlike Feuerbach, to discard Hegel's dialectic, their attempt "to combine it with materialism and give it a materialist interpretation" — is a genuine contribution in translation.

Finally, and worth noting given the discipline's history, the passages on cybernetics are calm. Sheptulin observes that "The role of model-building in knowledge and practice has especially increased now that cybernetics and mathematical logic have developed", and treats computing and information theory as ordinary scientific developments. Given that Soviet philosophy had denounced cybernetics as a bourgeois pseudo-science within living memory, the absence of hysteria here represents a real recovery, and it should be credited.

## The reply

Sheptulin's book is one long answer to a question it never states: can the dialectic be written down as a finished doctrine and taught? The anti-Stalinist Marxist tradition answered no, and answered it in detail, and the answer is worth setting beside this volume because it comes from people who took dialectics entirely seriously.

In 1942, in New York, George Novack delivered nine lectures on dialectical logic to members of the Socialist Workers Party. He opens Lecture I by remarking on the strangeness of the occasion:

*Here are members and sympathisers of a revolutionary political party under government persecution in the midst of World War II, the biggest war in world history. These industrial workers, these professional revolutionists, have come together, not to discuss matters and decide upon measures requiring immediate action, but for the purpose of studying a science which seems to be as remote as higher mathematics from everyday political struggle.*

The persecution was real: the party's leadership had been convicted under the Smith Act in 1941, and two of the men in the room are named in the lectures. The contrast with Sheptulin's readership — students in a state where this philosophy was the examinable state doctrine — is the whole point, and it is not a rhetorical contrast. It shaped what each set of lectures could say.

Novack's Lecture V goes directly at the genre Sheptulin is writing in:

*Dialectical thinking, therefore, cannot be completely comprised in any fixed set of formulas, nor can dialectics be codified in the same way and to the same extent as formal logic. To address such a demand to dialectics, to seek to impose perfect formulas upon its processes, betrays a captivity to the method of formal thinking. It is alien to the essential nature, to the living spirit of dialectics as a method of thought.*

And, in the same lecture, he stages the objection in the voice of the person who wants a textbook:

*The critics of dialectics ask disapprovingly what the student of dialectics sometimes asks anxiously: "Where is the authoritative treatise on dialectics?" When we direct them to the works of the outstanding Marxists — Marx, Engels, Mehring, Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky, etc. — they recoil in horror and cry out: "These books are not like the textbooks we are accustomed to in the schools and universities. The ideas are not tabulated, enumerated, cut-and-dried."*

Sheptulin's book is precisely the object Novack says cannot exist: tabulated, enumerated, its laws set down "each with fixed rank and proper title, like officers in the army hierarchy". Chapter VIII of Novack's lectures makes the structural objection exactly: each law of dialectics "is organically connected with the others", so that one may enter the whole through any of them — which is not how a syllabus with numbered sections and lettered sub-clauses can be built.

Novack should be quoted honestly, though, because he does

not say codification is worthless. Considering what a "written 'constitution' of dialectical logic" would amount to, he grants that "Such a codification is important, necessary and useful" — before adding that it "does not and cannot replace the most careful and direct attention to the material realities and conflicting forces upon which dialectics bases itself". The objection is not to the existence of a textbook. It is to a textbook that has become the thing itself. He puts the limit plainly: the laws of dialectics "have reality only as approximations, tendencies, averages", and "No one can provide you with a cookbook of the dialectics."

Trotsky had made the same point more sharply in December 1939, in the passage known as the ABC of Materialist Dialectics: "The dialectic is not a magic master key for all questions. It does not replace concrete scientific analysis. But it directs this analysis along the correct road, securing it against sterile wanderings in the desert of subjectivism and scholasticism."

Honesty requires one complication. Trotsky was not a libertarian about philosophy, and a reader who goes looking will find him saying so. Writing in June 1933, two years after the destruction of the Deborin school, he held that objections "to the effect that by the 'dogmatization' and 'canonization' of dialectical materialism, the party prevents the free development of philosophical and scientific thought, do not deserve serious attention." He defended a party position in philosophy. But in the same paragraph he set the limit that Sheptulin's genre crosses: "But least of all does this signify that in the sphere of philosophy the party can act as if all questions have already been resolved for it, and that it has nothing to expect from the further development of scientific thought." Party authority without closure. A textbook that changes nothing in ten years, across a war and a revolution in Poland, is closure.

Novack drew the historical conclusion twice. In December 1940 he wrote that Marxist thought, "banished from politics", had "shrivelled from a vigorously growing ideological movement into a sterile scholasticism" — and, with a candour worth repeating in an introduction to a Progress volume, acknowledged that we owe the publication of Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* to the Stalinists, who preserved such texts "as the medieval schoolmen preserved the writings of Aristotle", exhibiting past glories "while violating their spirit in the present". That is the right posture towards the book in the reader's hands. Later, surveying the state philosophy directly, Novack wrote that "Under Stalin, in fact, it became scholasticised and ossified" — and recorded Henri Lefebvre's

story of the French Communist official who told him complacently: "The house [of dialectical thought] is finished; there is nothing left to do but put up the tapestries."

That is Sheptulin's book. The house is finished. Two printings, two years apart, and not a tapestry moved.

## What could not be found

One negative result should be recorded, because it cuts against the tradition this introduction is written from as much as against Progress. A search of 231 issues of Intercontinental Press covering 1978 to 1982 — the years in which these two printings were on sale — finds no coverage whatsoever of Soviet academic philosophy. No mention of the Institute of Philosophy, no review of a Soviet philosophy textbook, no notice of Sheptulin, no discussion of the discipline at all. The paper covered Afghanistan and Solidarity at enormous length, and reported Sakharov's exile to Gorky in January 1980 as a civil-liberties outrage. What it tracked in the Soviet intellectual world was dissidence: Tatyana Goricheva, the Praxis group in Yugoslavia, Heller and Fehér in Hungary, János Kis. The official apparatus went unexamined.

So the two sides did not read each other. Sheptulin's textbook does not name a single living opponent, and the Fourth International's press did not review Sheptulin. The reply assembled above is a reply in substance, drawn from 1939, 1940 and 1942, and it is not a reply anyone made at the time. Readers should know that. The argument holds; the encounter never happened.

Both printings survive only as scans, and the optical recognition is imperfect. Where the extracted text was corrupted — a dropped letter, a run-together word, a mis-read character — the damage has been corrected silently in the quotations above rather than reproduced. Nothing has been altered except to restore what the printed page evidently said, and no scanner artefact has been presented as the author's or the translator's wording. The book itself is more carefully made than its digital remains suggest.

# MARXISM Triumph of Lenin's Ideas

*The stenographic record of the Kremlin's sixtieth-anniversary conference, November 1977 - Suslov, Ponomarev, Gus Hall, Corvalan and two dozen fraternal party leaders speaking in turn, a month after the Brezhnev Constitution.*

P. N. Fedoseyev and others

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**This book is not a book. It is a ceremony, set in type.**

Behind the English title *Triumph of Lenin's Ideas* stands the stenographic record of a state occasion: the International Scientific Conference on the 60th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, held in Moscow from 10 to 12 November 1977 under the joint auspices of four institutions of the Soviet ideological apparatus — the USSR Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee, the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee, and the Higher Party School. Its Russian title, *Torzhество leninskikh idei*, could equally be rendered as the celebration of Lenin's ideas, and celebration is the exact register. The editorial board — P. N. Fedoseyev, A. G. Yegorov, M. T. Iovchuk and E. M. Chekharin — were not authors but masters of ceremonies; Fedoseyev, Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences and one of the CPSU's senior academician-ideologues, closes the volume himself with a set-piece on international solidarity. What lies between the covers is a succession of speeches, opened by Mikhail Suslov, the Politburo's grey cardinal of ideology, and delivered in turn by Boris Ponomarev, by Gus Hall of the American party, by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez of Cuba, by Luis Corvalán of Chile, and by two dozen leaders of the fraternal parties. To read it is to sit in the hall.

For this series the dating question is usually the first puzzle, because Progress translations lag their Russian originals by years and the catalogue records only the translation. Here there is no puzzle. The text is fixed to a fortnight in November 1977 and issued in English in 1978, and everything in it turns on two events barely a month old: the adoption of the new Soviet Constitution — the "Brezhnev Constitution" — on 7 October 1977, and Brezhnev's own anniversary report. This is the rare volume where the date on the spine and the date of the thought are the same. That precision is a gift, because it lets us read the book's confidence against the calendar of what was actually happening to the society it praises.

And what was happening, in November 1977, was the quiet beginning of the end. The Soviet economists would later have a name for the Brezhnev years — *zastoi*, stagnation — but it was a name the regime could not use while the years were in progress, and this book is the sound of the regime at the top of its voice just as the deceleration set in. Growth rates were falling; the leadership was ageing into the gerontocracy that would bury three general secretaries in twenty-eight months; the invasion of Afghanistan that would shatter the *détente* the speeches celebrate was two years off and wholly unforeseen here. Georges Cogniot of the French party, recalling his first visit half a century before, tells the hall that the Soviet economy "was developing at unprecedented rates and was free of crises." He is describing, in the present tense, an economy that had entered its long slide. The book's certainty is not a lie so much as a dated instrument: it reads the present moment as the threshold of "the century of worldwide victories," and announces that "the October Revolution will be the victorious banner not only of the twentieth, but also of the twenty-first century." We are now well into that century, and the state whose triumph the book proclaims did not survive to see its own seventy-fourth anniversary.

The doctrine the volume exists to broadcast has a name of its own: developed socialism, or "mature socialism." This was the Brezhnev leadership's central theoretical innovation, and one should be clear about what it was for. Khrushchev had promised, at the 22nd Congress in 1961, that the present generation of Soviet people would "live under communism" — that communism would be substantially built by 1980. That promise was visibly not going to be kept. "Developed socialism" was the doctrine that let the leadership retire the deadline without admitting a failure: the USSR was declared to have reached a durable, mature stage between socialism and communism, a plateau that could be occupied indefinitely. Brezhnev's own formula, quoted approvingly in the volume, defines it as the "stage of maturity of the new society at which the restructuring of the entire system of social relations on the collectivist principles intrinsic to socialism is being completed." The word "completed" is doing heavy lifting: it

converts an unfulfilled prophecy into an accomplished condition. The new Constitution is the doctrine's monument, and the speeches return to it again and again — as the charter that "confirms that socialism alone guarantees human rights," as the "Fundamental Law" in which even the foreign policy of peaceful coexistence has now been inscribed.

It is on the question of the state that the volume walks, unknowing, straight into Lenin. The Constitution it celebrates gives legal form to a phrase repeated throughout the book as a doctrinal advance: the transformation of "the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat into a socialist state of the whole people." Suslov calls the "growth of the Party's influence and enhancement of its leading role" the "key factor in the progress of our society," and names the Party "the organising nucleus and backbone of the country's entire socio-political life." Here the book is at its proudest — and here it is furthest from the man in whose name it is assembled.

Turn to Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, written in the weeks before October 1917, the text that more than any other defined what the revolution was for. Its argument is that the proletarian revolution is distinguished precisely by its assault on the state as a machine standing above society — that it will, in Lenin's words as his sharpest reader reproduced them, "abolish the necessity of a bureaucratic apparatus raised above society — and above all, a police and standing army." Lenin's programme for the officials of the new order was concrete and severe: "not only election but recall at any time," and "payment no higher than the wages of a worker," so that administration should never harden into a separate caste. The state was to begin withering from the morning after the seizure of power. Measure the volume against that standard. It celebrates not the withering of the state but its consecration in a new Constitution; not the recall of officials but the "enhancement" of the Party's monopoly; not administrators on a worker's wage but a permanent apparatus — the very "state of the whole people" that Lenin's argument says should by now scarcely exist. The book flies the banner of a text whose every demand its own subject has reversed.

That reversal did not go unanswered in its own time; it was answered forty years before this conference sat, by the one contemporary who had watched the transformation from inside and been exiled and hunted for describing it. Leon Trotsky — chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917, organiser of the insurrection and of the Red Army, and after 1923 the leader of the Left Opposition against the rising bureaucracy — set out in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) the analysis this volume is constructed to forbid. Trotsky had read the same State and

Revolution, and he saw exactly the cult that this book performs: "the Soviet idolators," he wrote, "with their cult of a bureaucratic state which has not the slightest intention of 'dying away.'" Against the previous Soviet Constitution, Stalin's of 1936 — celebrated in its day in the same language this volume lavishes on the Constitution of 1977 — Trotsky wrote that it marked "an immense step back from socialist to bourgeois principles," of a piece with "the resurrection of ranks and decorations, and the growth of inequality." His portrait of the society beneath the phrases is the direct rejoinder to every claim in this book about the "state of the whole people": a stratum whose members "occupy lordly apartments, enjoy several summer homes in various parts of the country, have the best automobiles at their disposal, and have long ago forgotten how to shine their own shoes," set against those who "do not shine their own shoes only because they go barefoot." A volume that proclaims a state of the whole people is answered, before it speaks, by the demonstration that the state belonged to a part of the people and served that part. This is not the introduction's invention; it is the standing reply of the tradition from which this series is written, and it was in print, in most of the languages of the world, four decades before the delegates took their seats.

There is a second way the book betrays its own subject, and it is a matter of who is not in the room. This is a 55,000-word volume on the history and world significance of the October Revolution. The name Trotsky does not appear in it once. Nor, as the leader of a rival tendency airbrushed from the record — that would at least be an argument — but as a non-person: the man who chaired the soviet that took power and commanded the army that held it has been removed from the story of the revolution he helped to make. The erasure is not selective spite; it is systemic. Search the volume for Stalin, the leader under whom the state now being celebrated was in fact built into its mature form, and you find him exactly once — inside the place-name "Stalingrad." Both the co-leader of October and the builder of the system have been edited out, and what remains is a Leninism suspended in mid-air, claimed by a leadership that traces its authority to a revolution it cannot narrate and a construction it cannot name. The book knows Lenin had a testament — his final dictated "Letter to the Congress" of the winter of 1922–23, which warned the Party against the concentration of power in Stalin's hands and urged his removal from the post of General Secretary — but that document belongs to the same suppressed history, and the volume that celebrates "the Party of Lenin" and hails "that outstanding Marxist-Leninist, Comrade Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev" cannot afford to remember it.

Where the book does allow conflict onto the page, it does so in the language of anathema, and this is the most historically revealing thing in it — because the movement it calls united is audibly coming apart in its own table of contents. Two dissents are named and cursed. The first is China: the "great-power and chauvinist policies of the Chinese leaders" are denounced as "their betrayal of Marxism-Leninism and of proletarian internationalism," Maoism as a doctrine that failed and turned to collusion with imperialism. The second is Eurocommunism — the assertion by the large Western parties, above all the Italian, Spanish and French, of independent national roads and a break with the Soviet model. Ponomarev dismisses it as "the propaganda ballyhoo about Eurocommunism, a concept invented by the bourgeoisie," a fiction manufactured to sow discord where only unity exists.

But listen to the speeches themselves. Georges Cogniot, for the French Communist Party, tells the Moscow hall that his party intends "to establish a socialist system with the 'national colours of France' in our country, excluding any mechanical copying of various models and patterns." Leonte Rautu, for the Romanians, insists that relations between parties rest "on the basis of their full equality, mutual respect, autonomy, and independence." These are Eurocommunist and national-communist propositions, stated to Moscow's face at Moscow's own jubilee. The "unity" the conference exists to affirm is fracturing along the very seam the organisers deny exists; the heresy Ponomarev calls a bourgeois invention is being professed from the rostrum by the fraternal delegates. Fedoseyev's closing insistence that "there has never been, nor can there be ... any antagonistic contradiction between the national interests of a people, of a Communist Party, and the international interests of the world revolutionary movement" is not a description of the movement in the hall. It is a wish, contradicted by the transcript it concludes. Within thirteen years the movement it presided over would have no centre to be loyal to.

The book's handling of the invasions that held that centre together is the same erasure by vocabulary. Hungary 1956 appears only as a "counter-revolutionary uprising" corrected by "the new leadership headed by Comrade Janos Kadar" — the leadership Soviet tanks installed. Czechoslovakia 1968 appears as the work of "right-wing opportunists in the Party, who made use of the counter-revolutionary forces still remaining in our society" and sought "to corrupt the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and turn it into a petty-bourgeois reformist party of a social-democratic type." In neither account does a Soviet soldier appear. The Warsaw Pact intervention of August 1968 — the largest military

operation in Europe since 1945, the event that made the word "normalisation" a euphemism — is simply not present; the reform movement that half a million troops were sent to crush is dissolved into "opportunism," and the crushing is not mentioned at all. The silence about the tanks is the finding.

Two of this series' standing tests apply, and both return the expected result. The first concerns peaceful coexistence, the doctrine the volume repeatedly presents as Lenin's foreign policy, now written into the Constitution. Across the book the phrase appears ten times — attributed to the 24th Congress's Peace Programme, to Brezhnev's reports, to the Fundamental Law — and not once inside a quotation from Lenin. The nearest the volume comes is a paraphrase in an author's own voice, that Lenin foresaw "a whole epoch of confrontations and coexistence between these states and the capitalist world" — which is not the slogan and not a quotation. This is now the third Soviet foreign-policy volume in which the pedigree of "peaceful coexistence" is asserted in the editors' voice and never demonstrated from Lenin's pen; the doctrine is real Soviet policy, but its Leninist parentage is a claim the books cannot cash. The second test is reflexive. The volume deploys "opportunism" freely — against the Chinese, against social-democrats, against unnamed deviations of "right and 'left'" — but the category is never once turned on the speaker. The Party is always the subject combating opportunism and never the object of the charge; the accusation is never attached to a described act of the CPSU's own that could be shown not to have happened. A word that can be aimed only outward is a badge, not an analysis.

None of this means the volume is worthless, and this series does not pretend that it is. As a document it is of the first importance: a dated photograph of the world communist movement at its numerical height and its political noon, with the fracture lines already visible to anyone willing to read the delegates against their host. And where the book transmits real Lenin, it should be credited. Its insistence that the revolutionary process would be "longer and more tortuous" than the nineteenth-century image of a single continental upheaval, that it would proceed through "a series of revolutions in different countries" beginning in lands "backward economically" — that is a genuine and important correction of ultra-left immediatism, and it is Lenin's own. Its anti-colonial dimension is not merely rhetorical: the solidarity the speeches voice with the liberation struggles of southern Africa, and the material support the Soviet state actually gave them, belong to the real and creditable side of this history. And the book preserves, in Fedoseyev's closing speech, a defensible point buried under the pieties — that internationalism did not

lose its class content by widening its base. A reader who is told the whole volume is fraud learns nothing; the honest account is that a real strand of Lenin runs through it, wrapped around a doctrine of the state that is Lenin turned inside out.

That doctrine is the thing to read the book for, and to read it against. The reply the volume forbids itself is not obscure and not lost. It is Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, whose demands the "state of the whole people" quietly annuls; it is Lenin's suppressed "Letter to the Congress," which named the danger the book cannot; and it is above all Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, the sustained analysis of how a workers' state acquired a ruling bureaucracy that called its own rule the people's, and its own permanence the withering-away of the state. Set the two texts side by side and the triumph the title announces resolves into something more precise and more melancholy: the triumph of the apparatus over the revolution it claimed, spoken in the confident present tense at the very moment the ground beneath it had begun, silently, to give way.

## HISTORY

# Man and Sea Warfare

*How the Soviet Navy made and maintained its sailors: a political officers' manual on morale, nerve and endurance below decks, written at the height of Admiral Gorshkov's ocean-going fleet.*

V. M. Grishanov

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

The English title **Man and Sea Warfare** rearranges a blunter Russian original — *Voina. Okean. Chelovek*: War. Ocean. Man. That is the more honest ordering, because the book is not about the sea and not really about warfare. It is a manual for the political officers of the Soviet Navy on how to build, and keep intact, the mind of a sailor who may spend months submerged beneath an ocean he cannot see, waiting for an order he hopes never comes. Its subject is what Soviet military writing called the "human factor": morale, nerve, discipline, ideological conviction, the psychology of a crew under strain. Progress Publishers issued it in English in 1978, translated by Yuri Sviridov, with no named author — the text refers throughout to "the authors," a collective of naval political-education specialists of the kind the Main Political Administration of the Army and Navy produced in quantity. It is, in the most exact sense, a book about the manufacture of men for a fleet.

It is worth being clear about the date. The spine says 1978 and, unusually for this series, the spine is close to right. The book calls Marshal Andrei Grechko "the late Marshal Grechko" — Grechko, the Minister of Defence, died in April 1976 — and cites an imprint of his *The Armed Forces of the Soviet Union* dated 1977; it quotes the decisions of the 25th Congress of the CPSU, held in February 1976, as recent. This is a text of 1977, translated and printed in 1978. There is no glasnost jacket on an older book here, no reprint lag to correct. What the reader holds is a document of the exact moment it claims.

That moment matters, because it is the high summer of Admiral Sergei Gorshkov's navy. Gorshkov had been Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy since 1956, and across those two decades he had turned a coastal-defence force — a fleet built to guard approaches and little more — into a service with warships in every ocean of the world. By the mid-1970s the Soviet Union maintained a standing squadron in the Mediterranean (the Fifth Operational Squadron, established in 1967), a squadron in the Indian Ocean, port calls in Cuba

and West Africa, and a role in the sealift that carried the Angolan intervention of 1975–76. In 1970 the navy staged Okean, a global exercise coordinating operations across the Atlantic, Pacific, Mediterranean and Norwegian seas at once — an exercise this very book cites in a footnote as evidence of the fleet's reach. In 1976 Gorshkov published *The Sea Power of the State*, the doctrinal summa of the whole build-up. *Man and Sea Warfare* is the same enterprise seen from below decks: not the strategy of the ocean-going fleet but the making of the men who crew it, and it carries Gorshkov's own words as scripture. "The creation of an ocean fleet worthy of the world's first socialist country," he is quoted as saying, "is the embodiment of the will of the Communist Party and of the Soviet people to see their country a great sea power, as well as a great continental power."

Who was the book for? Progress printed it in English, in London-facing English, at precisely the years when Western naval staffs were most alarmed by the Soviet flag appearing in waters it had never troubled before. A reader in the West was meant to meet, in these pages, not a menace but a moral community: disciplined, cultured, devoted, peaceable. The book is the soft complement to Gorshkov's hard doctrine — the human face of the fleet, offered abroad while the fleet itself was doing the thing that frightened people. And it is in the join between those two things, the face and the fleet, that the book gives itself away.

For the doctrine the book preaches is that navies are aggressive when imperialists build them and defensive when socialists do. "The transition of the world's advanced countries from capitalism to imperialism at the end of the 19th century," it explains, produced expansionism and arms races; the imperialist powers, "not surprisingly," now attribute "prime importance to the Navy" and are shifting from a land-based strategy to an "ocean-oriented one." Western navalism is greed, gunboats, the ICBM moved out to sea to shield the aggressor's homeland. The men who serve those navies are drawn as mercenaries: bourgeois morality, the book says, teaches the sailor to see "his tour of duty as a means of making money," and trains him on the principle of *homo homini lupus*

est — man is a wolf to man. The talk of a Soviet naval threat is a "myth," a slander "exploited by the military of certain imperialist powers to justify their own actions which create tension in some parts of the world."

Then, a page later, comes the sentence the whole book is written not to notice. Describing the change in the fleet since the Second World War, the authors declare: "The domination of the World Ocean by the imperialist navies has been ended once and for all. Soviet warships are now present in different parts of the World Ocean, where the national interests of the Soviet Union and the cause of international security demand it."

Read those two clauses together. Navalism — the projection of naval force worldwide in the service of a great power's interests — is denounced as the imperialist vice on one page and announced as the socialist achievement on the next. The tell is not that the book is wrong about Western navies; the United States Navy was indeed a global instrument of American power. The tell is that the book cannot see that it is describing its own fleet in the language it reserves for the enemy's. When American carriers appear off a foreign coast it is gunboat diplomacy; when Soviet warships appear "in different parts of the World Ocean" it is the defence of "international security." The category of navalism, in this book, is defined so that it can never apply to the navy that published it. This is the recurring signature of the whole Progress series, tested across dozens of its volumes: the accusation is built so that it cannot be turned on the speaker. A navy is imperialist by its owner's class, never by its conduct — and so the same act, the same squadron in the same sea, changes moral colour depending on whose flag it flies.

What makes the point unanswerable is that the book supplies its own counter-evidence, guilelessly, because to its authors it is not evidence of anything. On the long cruises the fleet now made, we are told, "Soviet naval vessels often call at foreign ports where the crewmen meet local people and get to know their customs and traditions. They see for themselves the tremendous prestige enjoyed by the Soviet Union throughout the world." Showing the flag in foreign ports to advertise the prestige of the state — this is a textbook definition of the naval diplomacy the book spends its early chapters condemning. The authors describe it as a wholesome exercise in international friendship because they are physically incapable of describing their own navy as doing what navies do.

What the book documents best, almost in passing, is the machinery by which this fleet was kept ideologically loyal at

sea — and here the artefact is more valuable than the argument. Every Soviet warship carried, alongside its commander, a deputy commander for political work, the zampolit (the ship's political officer), described here as "the immediate organiser of Party and political work among the crew"; beneath him a shipboard Party organisation and a Komsomol (Young Communist League) branch reaching into every duty shift. The book details the whole apparatus with a functionary's love of procedure: the "political sessions," the study circles in Marxism-Leninism for officers, the agitators briefed daily, the closed-circuit radio ("Closed circuit radio broadcasts are a standard feature of everyday routine in the Soviet Navy," with programmes planned a month ahead and cleared by the political deputy), the wall newspapers, the shipboard library councils. Quoting Brezhnev, the authors call all this a weapon: Party and political work "have always been and remain a potent weapon of our Party." What the reader is being shown, without the authors quite meaning to show it, is that Gorshkov's real innovation was not only a blue-water fleet but a floating political apparatus — the Party's machinery of ideological control, carried to the far oceans in the hull of every ship. The genuinely novel object in this book is the propaganda system afloat, and it is documented here with a candour no outside analyst could have matched.

The reply to this was written forty years before the book, by a man who watched the officer caste it celebrates being born. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), Leon Trotsky devoted a chapter, "Foreign Policy and the Army," to exactly the process Man and Sea Warfare is the mature product of. The Bolshevik programme, he recalled, had demanded "a replacement of the standing army by an armed people" and "in no case a privileged officer caste." What the bureaucracy built instead was the opposite: "The army not only has not been replaced by an armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers' caste, crowned with marshals." When in September 1935 the Red Army restored the graded hierarchy of ranks it had abolished in the revolution — lieutenant up to marshal — Trotsky saw the purpose plainly. The reform, he wrote, "pursues a purely political aim: to give a new social weight to the officers," binding the commanding cadres "closer together with the ruling circles." *Man and Sea Warfare* is that officer caste's self-portrait, two generations on and afloat. Its unquestioned hero is the commander, whose authority over his crew is to be total; in combat, the book instructs, everything depends on "cast-iron discipline and the commander's total authority." Naval service, for the officer, is "a life-time occupation" — a career, a station, a caste position. The armed people of the 1919 programme have become the crew of a nuclear submarine, and the men set over them are a hierarchy

running "from a ship's commander to a petty officer," each rung its own privilege. Trotsky's forty-year-old sentence reads as a caption to this book.

Trotsky also named the deeper thing the book cannot: that the bureaucracy's foreign policy served the bureaucracy's own conservation, not the world revolution in whose name it spoke. The Soviet ruling stratum, he wrote, values "the help and friendship of those who are kin to it in social type" and has "lost every trace of the faculty of revolutionary education of the masses." Its instinct is order, status, the international standing of the state. A generation later Ernest Mandel, writing for the Fourth International in the *International Socialist Review* ("Peaceful Coexistence and World Revolution," March–April 1970), drew out the consequence for precisely the doctrine *Man and Sea Warfare* rests on. The bureaucracy, Mandel argued, is "instinctively afraid of any upsetting of the international status quo," and the doctrine of peaceful coexistence, far from being a strategy for revolution, is at best "an armistice — and a temporary one — on one of the fronts of the international class war." The fleet in this book is the armed guarantor of that status quo: a great-power navy defending a great power's interests and calling the defence "international security." It is the physical form of the conservatism Trotsky and Mandel diagnosed — not the revolution reaching outward, but the state protecting what it holds.

The framing is visible from the book's first page, which opens not on the sea but on "the CPSU's Peace Programme" and the "relaxation of world tensions" — the détente-era vocabulary of the mid-1970s, in which the arms build-up is always the other side's and one's own forces are a "reliable bulwark of world peace." (The one enemy named in that opening besides the imperialists is "the Peking leaders," who "have in effect made common cause with the imperialist reactionaries" — a reminder that in 1977 the Sino-Soviet split ran through every Soviet account of who threatened the peace.) Trotsky had heard this music before. Writing in 1936, as the Soviet bureaucracy embraced the League of Nations and the language of collective security, he observed that the discredited war-slogans of 1914 — "the last war," "war for democracy" — had simply been given new names: "'Collective security' and 'general disarmament' are their substitutes." Behind the peace vocabulary, he warned, the leaders of the workers' movement were preparing "a new edition of the 'sacred union'" — the patriotic closing of ranks that had sent the workers of Europe to slaughter each other in 1914. A navy sold to the world as the servant of peace, crewed by men trained to see their country's global reach as the guarantee of that peace, is the

naval chapter of exactly the story Trotsky told: the revolution's internationalism converted into a great power's patriotism, and the conversion concealed behind the word "peace."

None of this makes the book worthless, and it would be a poor introduction that stopped at the ideology, because the ideology is not, in fact, most of the book. *Man and Sea Warfare* is at bottom a work of military psychology, and over long stretches — chapters three and four above all — it is a genuine one. Its real subject is a real problem: what happens to human beings confined for months in a steel hull, far from home, under sustained stress, and how to keep them functioning. On this the authors are observant and, at moments, unexpectedly candid. They describe the degradation of performance under psychological overload with clinical care — the "mental, sensory and motor" impairment, the tremor and faulty coordination, the man who "loses his ability to think straight" and "may even fall prey to illusions and hallucination," the graded curve (the book prints it as a figure) by which rising stress first spoils complex tasks and then simple ones until "the man breaks down completely." They do not pretend Soviet sailors are immune. "The more psychologically unstable of the crewmen may panic and believe rumours," they write; caution gives way to fear; a man "has failed to withstand the difficulties" and, in the crews' own word, has "broken up." This is honest writing about combat stress, and it is more forthcoming than a triumphalist state was obliged to be. The material on the psychology of the prolonged submarine cruise — the monotony, the sensory deprivation, the deliberate provision of leisure, sport and reading to "break the monotony" — is a real contribution to a subject the world's navies were all wrestling with as patrols lengthened, and it can be read with profit as a period document of how one of them thought about it.

Where the book turns its observation into doctrine, though, the same reflex closes over it. Having described breakdown accurately, the authors insist on a single cause. "The basic cause of these unfavourable consequences," they write, "is inadequate moral and political education of the crewman." And the conclusion is absolute: "no psychological training, however skilfully conducted, can compensate for serious drawbacks in the moral and political education of the individual." Here a genuine phenomenon — the physiological and psychological limits of the human nervous system under extreme stress, which the book itself has just charted as a curve — is subordinated to ideology. The sailor who panics has failed not his nerves but his political instruction. It is a consoling doctrine for a political-education apparatus, since it makes the apparatus the answer to everything, including the

failures of the apparatus; and it is the point at which the honest psychologist in the book is overruled by the commissar. The reader who wants to know what the Soviet Navy actually understood about the human costs of Gorshkov's long-range fleet will find it here — but will have to read the observation and discount the moral.

That, in the end, is how to read *Man and Sea Warfare*: as an unusually revealing artefact rather than an unusually dishonest one. It is not a screed. It is a working manual, most of it concerned with the undramatic real business of keeping a crew sane, competent and disciplined at sea, and on that business it is often shrewd. But it is also the intimate voice of the officer caste Trotsky watched being crowned with marshals, at the moment that caste acquired a global fleet — a book that condemns the projection of naval power across the world's oceans in the very years its own state was carrying out one of the largest such projections in history, and that cannot hear the contradiction because the contradiction is built into the words it thinks with. It teaches its sailors to see "the tremendous prestige enjoyed by the Soviet Union throughout the world" in the foreign harbours their warships now visited. A reader outside the doctrine sees something the sailors were trained not to: a great power's navy, doing what great powers' navies do, wrapped in the language of a revolution it had long since ceased to serve.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

# Present-Day Problems in Asia and Africa

*The theory of the non-capitalist road stated whole by its leading Soviet architect - how backward nations were to reach socialism without capitalism, and on what terms Moscow would help. Revised to take in the fall of the Shah.*

Rostislav Ulyanovsky

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**Most of the Progress volumes in this series apply a theory.**

This one states it. Present-Day Problems in Asia and Africa is the work of Rostislav Ulyanovsky, the Soviet Union's foremost theorist of what Moscow called the "non-capitalist path of development" or "socialist orientation" — the doctrine that a backward, pre-industrial nation, with barely a working class to its name, could cross over to socialism without passing through capitalism, guided by "revolutionary democrats" and underwritten by the USSR. That doctrine is the organising idea of the drafted Indochina and African volumes of this collection: Kaysone Phomvihane's Revolution in Laos, Divilkovsky and Ognetov's The Road to Victory on Vietnam, the anniversary showcase Ten Years of the Ethiopian Revolution, the Academy of Sciences survey USSR and Countries of Africa, and the treatment of "revolutionary democracy" that runs through the History of India. Those books show the theory at work in one country or region. Here is the theory whole, argued in the open by the man who did most to build it. It is therefore the keystone of this part of the series — the place to read the doctrine before reading its applications, and to judge it against what became of its model cases.

Ulyanovsky (1904–1995) was an orientalist and economist by training, a Doctor of Economics, and by general account a senior figure in the apparatus that made Soviet policy toward the decolonising world — he is usually identified as a deputy head of the CPSU Central Committee's International Department. The book's front matter does not carry that post, and this introduction does not rest anything on it; what matters is not verifiable from a title but from the text, which speaks with the confidence of a man setting out an official line rather than probing an open question. He is, in the phrase the series keeps needing, an apparatus intellectual — but an unusually able one, and, as will emerge, a man with a personal reason to know what the guiding state he trusted was capable of.

## Date the text, not the spine

The catalogue records 1978, and the Russian original — Издательство «Наука» — is indeed 1978. But the English is described on its own imprint page as a "translation of the revised Russian text," and it carries a second imprint line, "Progress Publishers 1980." The revision is real and datable. In the chapter on the Iranian upheaval the book discusses the overthrow of the Shah, the general strike of the oil workers, the "Islamic Republic" the Iranian people now expect to complete their revolution, and the fact that "Iran has left CENTO" — events of the winter and spring of 1979, the Republic itself proclaimed in April 1979. A book cannot report the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy in a text closed in 1978. The English Present-Day Problems is a 1979–80 revision of a 1978 Russian book, and where its argument turns on the latest events — Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iran — it is the later date that governs.

This matters for one sentence above all. Among the states Ulyanovsky counts as newly won for the cause, he writes that "recently they were joined by Afghanistan," whose April 1978 coup had installed a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist party. He lists Afghanistan beside Ethiopia as a country that has "chosen socialist orientation." The text carrying that judgement was being finished in the very months before December 1979, when the Soviet army crossed the Amu Darya to shoot one faction of those revolutionary democrats and install another. The doctrine's leading theorist was celebrating Afghanistan's passage to socialism on the eve of the intervention that would become the doctrine's *reductio ad absurdum*. He could not have known. The reader of 1980, holding the freshly printed English edition, was in a position to.

## The doctrine, in his own words

Ulyanovsky states the theory with a clarity the series rarely encounters, and the fairest thing is to quote it. Non-capitalist development, he writes, "or what amounts to the same thing,

socialist orientation, must be sharply distinguished from the building of socialism, insofar as the former is only a transitional stage on the road to the latter." It is a stage available to nations that have no proletarian revolution behind them, on one condition — the character of the ruling force: "If, on the other hand, the country is ruled by revolutionary-democratic anti-capitalist forces, then there arises the political possibility for the country to take the non-capitalist path of development." Even "economically backward states, in which capitalism has already become the most influential mode of production, also can enter the path of socialist orientation."

The decisive feature — the one on which everything turns — is who does the steering. Not a working class, which in these countries scarcely exists. In the socialist-oriented states, Ulyanovsky is candid, "it is not Marxist-Leninist, but left-democratic and nationalist forces that are in power and implement non-capitalist development and that there is no socialist dictatorship of the working class there." The orientation "in the nearly 15 countries of Asia and Africa is carried out under the guidance of revolutionary national-democratic parties," and he adds, of the states that have lately proclaimed themselves Marxist-Leninist — Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Afghanistan — that "there is as yet no fully formed working class in these countries." The revolutionary democrat is, in the plainest terms, a stand-in: a substitute for the proletariat, exercising on its behalf a power the proletariat is too small or too unformed to hold itself.

Nor is Ulyanovsky squeamish about where these substitutes come from. "The national-democratic rulers," he observes, "have usually come to power as the result of military and political coups." He gives the phenomenon a name and a pedigree, invoking a curious figure he calls "anti-imperialist bonapartism, with the military intelligentsia and the democratic petty bourgeoisie at the head" — a regime in which, "as a result of the absence of a clearly defined class structure and of political parties in civil society, the army — the anti-imperialist progressive officer corps supported by the rank-and-file soldiers — assumes political leadership in the formation of the nation and the state." A colonel who overthrows a monarchy is thus enrolled, with Soviet aid, as an agent of the transition to socialism. The task, Ulyanovsky says, is to "turn the military-political dictatorship of the army which brought about the coup into a national-democratic dictatorship of the people." The authority behind all this is Leonid Brezhnev, whom Ulyanovsky paraphrases approvingly: there is "a large group of Arab, African and Asian countries today

that are following the path of socialist orientation — countries which, though not yet socialist, have rejected capitalism as a system."

To his credit, the doctrine is not naïve about failure. Ulyanovsky writes it in a clause that will matter greatly below: "a turn to capitalism is always possible as shown by the example of a number of states which initially entered the path of non-capitalist development." Egypt is his standing example of a state that "turned away." He even has a category for backsliding — national democracy that abandons the anti-imperialist course "gradually becomes what Lenin called 'reactionary democracy,'" and a state that makes its peace with the West commits an act "which is tantamount to national betrayal." Hold on to that word. It is the hinge on which the whole theory is protected from its own evidence.

## What permanent revolution answered, half a century early

The proposition Ulyanovsky defends is not new, and neither is the objection to it. His "national democracy" — an intermediate stage between the bourgeois and the socialist revolutions, governed by a bloc that is neither bourgeois nor proletarian, steering a peasant nation toward socialism by stages fixed in advance — is the lineal descendant of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" that the Communist International prescribed for the East in the 1920s. And it is precisely the theory that Trotsky's *The Permanent Revolution* was written to refute. The refutation was in print in 1930, and it reads as though addressed to this book.

Its second thesis states the colonial case directly: "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 quarrel is not over whether the peasant nations of Asia and Africa can be liberated — Trotsky, no less than Ulyanovsky, held that they must be, and that the peasantry is decisive to it. The quarrel is over the substitute. Can a vanguard that is not the working class, standing in for a working class that barely exists, administer socialism into being from above? Trotsky's sixth thesis denies exactly the intermediate formation that Ulyanovsky's "national democracy" claims to be: "Between Kerenskyism and the Bolshevik power, between the Kuomintang and the

dictatorship of the proletariat, there is not and cannot be any intermediate stage, that is, no democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants." The petty-bourgeois masses on whom Ulyanovsky rests his regimes — the officers, the "military intelligentsia," the peasantry itself — cannot, on this view, play an independent leading role; "the peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois," and a state that suspends this choice in a permanent "national-democratic" middle is a fiction that will resolve, under pressure, toward one pole or the other.

Trotsky's thirteenth thesis names the mechanism of the error and could serve as an epigraph to Ulyanovsky's whole enterprise. The theory of socialism in one country, he wrote, "imposes upon revolutions in backward countries the task of establishing an unrealizable regime of democratic dictatorship, which it counterposes to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thereby this theory introduces illusions and fictions into politics." The "illusions and fictions" here have proper names: fifteen of them, a population of over 150 million, a twenty-year "history" that Ulyanovsky insists has "unquestionably ceased to be merely a theoretical hypothesis."

The point is not that Ulyanovsky failed to answer this objection. It is that he does not engage it at all. In ninety thousand words the words "permanent revolution" do not appear, and neither does the name of Trotsky. This is not an oversight; it is the method. The book attacks "populism," "subjective socialism," "petty-bourgeois radicalism," "national reformism," Fanon's cult of violence, Nkrumah's pan-African utopia — a whole gallery of adversaries characterised and dismissed. The one systematic theory of the colonial revolution produced by the Marxist left that contradicts his own is the one he does not name, quote, or refute. An opponent who is quoted can be checked; an opponent who is not mentioned cannot even be found. The doctrine is stated as if its antithesis had never been formulated.

## The category that is never turned on itself

Here is the deeper failing, and it is a failing of intellectual form rather than of sympathy. Ulyanovsky's theory is built so that no event can disconfirm it. When a socialist-oriented state advances, that is the theory vindicated. When one reverses — Egypt under Sadat, Indonesia after 1965, Ghana after the 1966 coup, Somalia sliding into what he calls a "nationalist, would-be socialist orientation" — that is never the theory disconfirmed; it is "betrayal," a "breakdown," the "duplicitousness of the non-proletarian working masses," the treason of leaders. The reversal is always a moral fact about the actors, never a

predictive fact about the doctrine. The question whether this kind of state can reach socialism is applied relentlessly to the colonial world and never once turned back on the framework that keeps answering yes.

This is the discriminating test this series has learned to apply, and Ulyanovsky fails it cleanly. His accusations of "betrayal" attach to no act that the theory itself could be shown to have mispredicted; the theory has arranged in advance that every outcome confirms it. Success is socialist orientation working. Failure is socialist orientation betrayed. There is no state of the world in which the concept was simply wrong — no result Ulyanovsky would accept as evidence that a peasant nation cannot, in fact, be walked into socialism by a colonel and a foreign patron. A theory that cannot lose is not being tested; it is being professed.

## The verdict of the event

The book invites the test all the same, because it names its cases, and because history supplied the answer within a dozen years of publication. Ulyanovsky's roll of socialist-oriented states — Algeria, Syria, Burma, Guinea, South Yemen, Tanzania among the older cases; Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and "recently" Afghanistan among the newer — is a list that the 1990s went through almost name by name.

Egypt, his model of the doctrine's first great advance, had already reversed under Sadat before he wrote; he admits it. Ghana (Nkrumah, 1966) and Mali (Keita, 1968) he concedes as coups that "interrupted" the road. Guinea's Sékou Touré died in 1984 and the army seized power within a week, opening the country to the market. Burma's "Burmese Way to Socialism" ended in the crushed rising of 1988 and undisguised military rule. Somalia, already downgraded to "would-be socialism," fragmented into state collapse. South Yemen, the one state that pushed furthest toward orthodox Marxism-Leninism, tore itself apart in the party bloodletting of January 1986 and then dissolved into a unified, capitalist Yemen in 1990. Tanzania's ujamaa, the villagisation Ulyanovsky admired, was abandoned as a costly failure and the country turned to market reform from the mid-1980s. Algeria backed away from its socialist course and fell into civil war. Angola and Mozambique — the "far-reaching" socialist orientation of the former Portuguese colonies that Ulyanovsky held up as the doctrine's freshest triumph — formally renounced Marxism-Leninism in 1990–91 after decades of ruinous war, and turned to multiparty capitalism. Ethiopia, the showcase of the sibling volume in this series, collapsed in May

1991: the Derg fell, Mengistu fled, the Workers' Party of Ethiopia evaporated. And Afghanistan, whose accession Ulyanovsky had just recorded, required the Soviet army to survive at all, could not survive with it, and fell in 1992 to the forces its patrons had spent a decade fighting.

Of the roughly fifteen states on which Ulyanovsky rested a twenty-year vindication, essentially none reached socialism. Most reversed to the market; several collapsed into war, coup, or state failure; the fortunes of their peoples ranged from stagnation to catastrophe. This is not the wisdom of hindsight cheaply spent. It is the specific prediction of the specific tradition Ulyanovsky declined to name. The reversals he could categorise only as "betrayal" were, on the permanent-revolution analysis, the foreseeable resolution of a regime that had suspended the class question in a middle that could not hold. What looked to him like a stage on the road to socialism looked to Trotsky's heirs like a military-bureaucratic formation holding down, in the name of an absent working class, the very masses whose struggle had made the revolution — and that is much closer to what the record shows.

## What is worth keeping

None of this touches the part of Ulyanovsky's commitment that was real, and a reader told that the whole book is worthless would be misled. The anti-colonial, anti-imperialist conviction that animates it is genuine and, on its own ground, right. The colonial empires were systems of plunder; their collapse in twenty-five years was one of the great facts of the century; and Ulyanovsky's insistence that political independence without economic independence is a trap — that "neo-colonialist exploitation" through the international monopolies, unequal trade, and aid-as-leverage can reduce a formally free nation to a dependency — has real analytic content and has aged better than much of the modernisation theory that opposed it. On the specific question of who freed these countries, he is a useful corrective to the imperial self-congratulation that held decolonisation to be a gift bestowed; he knew it was taken.

The strongest pages are the closing "Personalities" — the essays on Gandhi, Nehru, Nkrumah, Cabral, and Fanon. These are not tracts but intellectual biographies, and they show a scholar working, not a functionary reciting. The Nkrumah essay in particular is candid in ways the doctrinal chapters are not. Ulyanovsky faults Nkrumah for the "personality cult," for having "got used to governing single-handed and to settling issues by decree," and — most strikingly, from a Soviet author — for lacking "the courage, the faculty of self-criticism and

the ability to take an objective, fearless look at his own mistakes." He credits Nkrumah's evolution toward scientific socialism while refusing to pretend the two were identical, and he treats Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism as a serious book. A reader who wants a sympathetic, informed Soviet reading of the mid-century African and Asian nationalist thinkers will find one here, and it is better than the theory it serves.

There is, finally, a biographical fact that gives the whole book its shadow. Ulyanovsky is recorded among the Soviet orientalists who were themselves victims of political repression under Stalin — he appears in the standard biographical dictionary of "orientalists — victims of political terror in the Soviet period." The specifics of his arrest and imprisonment are outside the scope of what can be verified here, and are not asserted; the fact of his inclusion is documented. It is worth stating plainly, and without cruelty. The theory this book advances is a theory of trust in the guiding state — trust that a benevolent apparatus, a vanguard standing above society, can be relied on to carry a people to socialism from above. It was written by a man who had felt, in his own life, what that apparatus was capable of doing to the people in its charge. That is not a debating point against him. It is the human core of the tragedy the series exists to document: the survivors of the machine who went on to theorise its export.

## Where the answer is

The reply to this book is not a single passage but a tradition, and the reader should follow it into the sibling volumes. Ten Years of the Ethiopian Revolution carries the doctrine's Ethiopian collapse; Revolution in Laos and The Road to Victory run the same "bypassing capitalism" schema for Indochina; USSR and Countries of Africa applies it across the continent Ulyanovsky theorises. Read against all of them, this volume is the common source, and The Permanent Revolution (1930) — theses 2, 6, and 13 above all — is the common answer, stated in Trotsky's terms before any of these states existed. The Fourth International argued the case contemporaneously as well, on the colonial revolution and the nature of these "workers' and peasants' governments," and the small Trotskyist reviews of African liberation reached, in the 1970s and on the evidence then available, the class characterisation Ulyanovsky could not: not a stage on the road to socialism, but a military-bureaucratic regime wearing socialism's borrowed clothes.

Ulyanovsky was too intelligent a man, and too experienced a one, to have believed this doctrine could not fail. His own text admits that "a turn to capitalism is always possible." What he could not do — what the theory was built to prevent him doing — was to count the turns as evidence rather than as treachery, and to ask whether the fault lay not in the faithless colonels of Mogadishu and Accra but in the idea that had sent the Soviet Union to build socialism through them. The event asked the question for him. Its answer is the subject of this series.

SOVIET SOCIETY

# Soviet Legislation on Women's Rights

*Around a hundred and fifty Soviet statutes, decrees and orders on women's rights - maternity, family law, labour, social insurance - compiled by four women jurists as the Soviet submission for International Women's Year.*

Vera Nikolaevna Tolkunova

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**Soviet Legislation on Women's Rights is a brief for the defence,** filed in an argument the Soviet Union was conducting at the United Nations. It is a compilation of some hundred and fifty statutes, codes, decrees, ministerial orders and trade-union instructions, given almost entirely in extract and arranged under six headings: general provisions, maternity and child protection, women's rights in the family, labour rights, social insurance, and the international conventions the USSR had ratified. Four women jurists compiled it — A. M. Belyakova, Z. S. Beliayeva, N. N. Sheptulina, and Professor V. N. Tolkunova, who also wrote the preface and took Sections I and VI — and Vladimir Barnashov translated it. Tolkunova states the occasion in her first sentence: the 27th General Assembly of the United Nations had proclaimed 1975 International Women's Year. The book is what the Soviet state chose to put in evidence.

Date it before reading it. The spine says 1978 and the copyright page is more candid than most in this series: the Russian original is © Юридическая литература 1975, and the English is a translation "from a revised and enlarged Russian edition." So the book was conceived for International Women's Year and then brought forward — the Brezhnev Constitution of 1977 stands at the head of Section I, and the latest instruments in the collection are the law on elections to the Supreme Soviet of 6 July 1978 and a decision of the Council of Ministers of 25 April 1978 on women's working conditions. What was compiled for one occasion has been re-dressed for the Decade for Women that the UN declared to 1985, and Tolkunova says so: the recommendations "are valid for the decade ending 1985 since the United Nations approved the plan of world action for equality of women."

The commission is stated as plainly. The preface's second authority, after the UN, is the Women's International Democratic Federation, the Soviet-aligned international whose declarations it quotes at length; its third is the conference of

the Communist Parties of the European capitalist countries held in Rome on 15–17 November 1974, whose agenda item was "The Situation of Women in Capitalist Countries" and whose declaration is quoted for the proposition that "only socialism can create real and reliable conditions for equality, completely abolish discrimination for all time, and give every woman opportunities to fully develop her capabilities." This is a book addressed outward, to Western communists, to the women's movement then at its height in the capitalist countries, and to the non-aligned states. Its argument is not made in prose. It is made by the sheer weight of statute: here is the paper, inspect it.

Much of that paper describes something real, and a reader told otherwise would be badly served. The Soviet Union by the late 1970s had built provision for working mothers that most wealthy capitalist states had not: fifty-six days of paid leave before confinement and fifty-six after, extended for complicated births; a job protected by law during that leave and a prohibition on dismissing a pregnant worker or a mother of an infant; paid intervals for nursing counted as working time; free medical care; a network of creches, kindergartens and infant homes with the state carrying most of the cost; allowances to large families and to unmarried mothers; old-age pensions at fifty-five, and earlier for mothers of five. The Constitution of 1977 states the principle without hedging — "Women and men have equal rights in the USSR" — and Article 35 goes on to name the machinery, down to "gradual reduction of working time for mothers with small children." The preface's figures, whatever their provenance, describe a society that had done something no other had: "About as many as 93 per cent of all able-bodied Soviet women are now exercising their right to work," half the labour force, fifty-nine per cent of those with higher and specialised secondary education. Its remark that "This Collection has been compiled by women legal scholars" is not a boast a comparable Western ministry could have made in 1978.

The volume is also, simply as a document, worth having. Compilations of Soviet labour and family law in English are

rare, and this one prints the texts — the underground-work prohibitions, the weight limits, the pension schedules, the Supreme Court's instructions to the lower courts on marriage and family cases — where an English-language reader would otherwise have only commentary. Historians of Soviet social policy can use it as evidence whatever they think of its framing. That is worth saying before the framing is examined, because the framing is where the book fails.

The test this series applies is not whether the achievements were real but whether the law on the page describes the practice, and whether the categories the book uses could ever be turned on the state that wrote them. A collection of statutes is unusually good evidence on the second question, because what has been left out of an extract can be counted.

Begin with the collection's own chronology. This is a book of Soviet legislation on women's rights whose earliest instrument is a resolution of the RSFSR People's Commissariat for Labour of 4 March 1921 on permissible loads, and whose earliest substantive act is a 1931 decision on the working conditions of women tractor-drivers. The years 1917, 1918, 1920 and 1926 do not appear in its 216 pages. The decrees of December 1917 that abolished ecclesiastical marriage and made divorce available on demand; the Family Code of 1918; the decree of 1920 that made Soviet Russia the first state in the world to legalise abortion on request; the Code of 1926 — the legislation that actually earned the claim Lenin is quoted making, that in two years more had been done "to emancipate woman" than in 130 years by all the enlightened republics together — are absent from a collection compiled to prove that claim. Lenin's 1919 sentence is quoted; what he was describing is not printed. The book leaps from him to the five-year plans.

The reason for the gap is on page 43, and the book takes considerable care not to say so. Section II prints a decree "On Abolishing the Prohibition of Abortions," of 23 November 1955. It gives the repeal and not the thing repealed. The preamble is a small masterpiece of the passive voice: the state's measures to encourage maternity and "the constant growth of the consciousness and culture of women" now "make it possible at present to end the legislative prohibition of abortions." No date is given for that prohibition; no organ is named as having enacted it; the nineteen years it ran are not mentioned, nor are the deaths that made the repeal urgent, though the decree glances at them in noting the "great harm caused to the health of women by abortions performed outside of medical establishments and very often by unqualified persons." Look at the numbering. The extract as printed begins

at clause 2. Clause 1 — the operative clause, which repealed the law of 27 June 1936 by name and date — is precisely what the editors cut. The prohibition enters this book only as a grammatical subject with no author, and leaves it repealed by a state that is never identified as the state that imposed it.

That law was answered when it was passed. Trotsky devoted a section of *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) to it, and the passage is the direct reply to the book in your hands. He began where the collection begins, by conceding the achievement: "The October revolution honestly fulfilled its obligations in relation to woman," giving her legal equality and attempting, through creches, kindergartens, communal dining rooms and laundries, "a real liberation from the thousand-year-old fetters." Then he explained the retreat without excusing it. "Society proved too poor and little cultured"; the resources did not match the plans; "the actual liberation of women is unrealizable on a basis of 'generalized want.'" But poverty explained only part of it, because the retreat went "infinitely farther than the iron economic necessity demands," and what carried it further was "the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations." He recorded the drafting of the abortion law, its brief pretence of public consultation, and its enactment: the discussion "was cut off as suddenly as it had been announced, and on June 27th the Central Executive Committee converted the shameful draft into a thrice shameful law." He named what the law had taken away — the right to abortion, "in conditions of want and family distress ... one of her most important civil, political and cultural rights" — and predicted who would be caught by it: "working women, servants, peasant wives, who find it hard to conceal their troubles," while the wives of the ruling stratum would go on doing what they found necessary. Two years later, in "Twenty Years of Stalinist Degeneration" (1938), reprinted in *Fourth International* in 1945, he compressed the whole argument into a sentence this collection could serve as an exhibit for: "The position of woman is the most graphic and telling indicator for evaluating a social regime and state policy." The bureaucracy, he wrote there, had begun "singing panegyrics to the family supper and the family laundry, that is the household slavery of woman," and had "restored criminal punishment for abortions, officially returning women to the status of pack animals."

That the prediction held is on the record in the same journal. In June 1945 *Fourth International* printed an interview with a Soviet citizen who reported plainly what the ban had produced: "The prohibition of abortions resulted in aggravating the material hardships and increasing the number of children. In addition, the growth of secret abortions led to higher mortality rates." The 1955 decree conceded as much in

its own euphemism, ten years later.

The second erasure is larger, and this time the book prints its consequence without printing its cause. Section II gives the decree of 8 July 1944 under its full and generous title — on increased assistance to pregnant women, mothers of several children and unmarried mothers, on greater protection of mother and child, and on the establishment of the Mother-Heroine title, the Maternal Glory Order and the Maternity Medal. The extract opens on a sentence of pure emollient: "Care for children and mothers and for consolidation of the family has always been one of the most important tasks of the Soviet state." Then come the grants, the medals, the regulations for each class of decoration. Follow the numbering again: it runs 1, 2, 3, 4, then jumps to 9, then to 11. What has been cut from a decree presented as the charter of Soviet motherhood is the rest of the decree — the sharp rise in the tax on citizens with few children or none; the withdrawal of legal recognition from unregistered marriage; the conversion of divorce into a two-stage public court proceeding with fees; and, above all, the provision that an unmarried mother could no longer bring an action to establish the father's paternity or claim maintenance from him. The state allowance the book prints so approvingly was the substitute for the father. The collection reproduces the compensation and suppresses the deprivation it compensated for.

You can watch the seam from inside the book. Section III prints the Supreme Court's instructions of 4 December 1969 on the Fundamentals of marriage and family legislation, and there, in a paragraph of dry procedure, the courts are told they "may not accept declarations" on "the establishment of paternity in respect of children born before 1 October 1968." A later paragraph confirms the mirror image: a suit to establish paternity may be brought at any time in respect of a child born after that date. The 1968 Fundamentals restored what 1944 had taken, and restored it only going forward. Every child born to an unmarried mother in the Soviet Union between 1944 and October 1968 — the war years and the two decades after, when the men were dead and the sex ratio was catastrophic — was left permanently fatherless in law, with no claim on the father and no way of acquiring one. The rule is printed here. The reason for the rule is not.

The third thing to read carefully is what the book means by protection. Section IV, the longest in the collection, is genuinely a monument to labour regulation: night work and overtime barred for pregnant women and mothers of infants, transfer to lighter work at retained earnings, weight limits, sanitary rules. It is also a sustained legal machinery for sorting

work by sex. Here is the 1957 decision "that it be considered necessary to discontinue the employment of women's labour on underground jobs," with its schedule of exceptions and its instruction to local Soviets to place the dismissed women in "communal services, trade, public catering, public utilities." Here is a list, approved in 1969 by four separate authorities, of "Jobs and Mechanisms Where Predominantly Female Labour Is Recommended" — seed grading, potato sorting, flax pulling, grapevine grafting. And here, in the schedule of diseases and physical defects which exclude women from strenuous manual work, is a clinical list that runs through cardiovascular disease, tuberculosis and neuroses and then, in the same enumeration and without a change of register, catalogues among the disqualifying conditions of the female organism "normal pregnancy."

The preface does not conceal the principle; it states it with satisfaction. The first of the four lines Soviet law has "invariably pursued" is "the consistent facilitation of working conditions for women, and providing them with relatively easier jobs," and the whole is summarised in a sentence worth setting beside Article 35: Soviet law "establishes a lower quantity of labour for women as compared with men, with equal pay." Real protection and permanent segregation are the same statutes read from two sides, and the book cannot see the second side, because the biological premise — the "anatomic and physiological features of the female organism" and "the social role of women as conditioned by such features" — is treated as settled fact rather than as the thing under argument.

Which brings up the silence that a 216-page collection on the rights of women makes most audible. There is not one clause in it about the division of labour in the home. The plan of 1917 had been to abolish that labour by socialising it; Trotsky's chapter is largely about why the attempt failed, and about how the collective farm, by forcing the family back on its private plot, came to "lay a double burden upon woman." By 1978 the second shift is no longer a problem to be legislated away but the fixed condition around which everything else is scheduled — hence the shortened hours, the priority holidays, the "relatively easier jobs," and the preface's own formulation of what Soviet law is for: it is "humane and democratic, helping woman to combine work in industry with child-bearing." Every provision in Section IV assumes that combining them is her task. Nothing anywhere in the volume asks it of anyone else.

The book's categories, finally, run in one direction only. Discrimination is real and named — in the capitalist countries, where women "are the first to suffer from recessions and

crises," and where the Rome declaration locates the contradiction; International Women's Year is for "the abolition of discrimination against women in countries where it still exists." That last clause does the work of the whole volume. Compliance is likewise settled in advance: the ILO conventions printed in Section VI "are fully observed in the Soviet Union," and "Soviet legislation on the preferential rights of women is strictly observed." The evidence offered for observance is the legislation itself. Even the preface's own numbers describe an ascent that stops: half of those in legal work, half of people's assessors, then 40 per cent of lawyers, 32.2 per cent of people's judges, every fifth prosecutor and investigator — a pyramid whose apex is nowhere in the book, and which no Soviet reader in 1978 needed a foreign critic to complete for her.

The answer was given at the time, in the place the book was written for. When the UN's International Women's Year conference met in Mexico City in June 1975, Intercontinental Press covered it closely. Caroline Lund's report of 14 July 1975 credited the conference as "testimony to the growing influence of the international struggle for women's rights," noted that the World Plan of Action called for equal pay, for socially organised services to lighten work in the home, and — a demand that lands precisely on the decree of 1944 — for equal rights for unmarried mothers and their children, and recorded what the delegations of the workers' states did with the opportunity: they "did nothing to clarify the issue or to explain the stake of women in the fight for a socialist revolution," concentrating instead on attacking each other "and attempting to cover up for the gross inequality that women still face in those countries despite the great gains brought about the revolutions." A week earlier the same journal had printed, from Soviet women political prisoners, an appeal to the UN that opens with a sentence no compilation could answer: "1975, International Women's Year, began on December 12, 1974, in the camp for women political prisoners."

Soviet Legislation on Women's Rights should be read, then, as two documents bound together. It is a reliable record of a real body of law, much of it advanced, some of it still unmatched, which made the working lives of tens of millions of women materially better and which no honest account can wave away. And it is an exhibit in the case Trotsky opened in 1936: that a state may enact magnanimous law and stand on it as proof, while the same statutes carry the marks of everything it has taken back. The repeal is printed and the prohibition is not. The allowance is printed and the abolished paternity suit is not. The protection is printed and the segregation it enforces is not named. What the collection offers as its evidence is, read

closely, the record of its own retreats — which is why it is worth reprinting, and why it cannot be believed on the question it was compiled to settle.

SOVIET SOCIETY

# The Theory of Population

*Soviet demography establishing itself as a science, from Moscow State University's population centre - thirty contributors, the Marxist case against a natural law of population, and a sustained answer to the neo-Malthusian revival.*

Dmitrii Ignatievich Valentei

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**The Theory of Population: Essays in Marxist Research**, edited by Professor D. I. Valentey and issued by Progress Publishers in Herbert C. Creighton's translation, is a collective work — some thirty named contributors — produced under the Centre for Population Studies of the Economics Faculty of Moscow State University. It is not a polemic and it is not a primer. It is the flagship statement of a discipline that the Soviet Union had, until quite recently, refused to let exist under its own name, and which it was now busy building an institutional apparatus to house. Read the credits and the intention is plain: this is Soviet demography announcing that it has become a science, with its own chairs, its own specialities, its own five-year forecasting brief. The Foreword says as much, presenting "the results of a major project in population studies" and noting the recent "institution of the scientific specialities of population economics and demography" as "an outcome of the active theoretical work of Soviet demographers."

Establish first when the book was actually written, because the spine misleads in the usual direction. The English edition is dated 1978, but the argument is anchored a few years earlier. Its most recent political landmark is the 25th Congress of the CPSU of February 1976, quoted approvingly on the fruits of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1971–75); its statistical series run to 1970 and 1971; more than once the text pauses to say that some Soviet population figure has "not yet been reached (at the time of writing)." This is a mid-1970s Russian text in a 1978 export jacket — a document of what Brezhnev-era social science called "developed socialist society," at the confident, becalmed height of that period, before the economy's troubles had become undeniable and while the regime still expected its planners to forecast the population of the year 2000 with precision. What the book is for follows from that. It is at once a domestic charter for a young discipline and an export demonstration that Marxism-Leninism has a rigorous, modern answer to the population anxieties then sweeping the West —

the "population bomb," the Club of Rome, the family-planning campaigns being pressed on the decolonising world. The Malthusian revival of the late 1960s is the book's real antagonist, and much of its best writing is aimed there.

## The doctrine, stated precisely

At the centre of the volume sits a genuine and defensible idea, and it is worth stating exactly, because the book states it well and because the anti-Stalinist tradition has no quarrel with it. There is no natural law of population — no eternal ratio between mouths and food written into the human condition. Every form of society generates its own population dynamics out of its own mode of production. Valentey's Introduction puts Marx's formula at the head of the whole enterprise: "...In fact every special historic mode of production has its own special laws of population, historically valid within its limits alone." From this the rest is drawn. "The economic law of population of capitalism, as the law of relative surplus population, was discovered by Marx." The "overpopulation" that Malthus took for a fact of nature is, on this account, a fact of capitalism: an industrial reserve army of the unemployed, manufactured by accumulation itself and needed by it to hold wages down. The book is careful on the point that matters most, insisting that Marx "never spoke of the industrial reserve army of labour under capitalism as absolute overpopulation" — that "labour power was only surplus in bourgeois society," relative to capital's need for it, and not surplus to the earth's capacity to feed it. From which the political conclusion is that "Every historical social formation has its own specific population laws, proper to it," and that under socialism the "surplus" population simply ceases to exist, because the mechanism that produced it has been abolished.

This is the strong core of the book, and I will return to defend it, because a reader told that everything here is worthless would be learning nothing and would be wrong. The critique of Malthus is real Marxism, competently done. It is the reflexive move that fails — the moment when this confident

science of numbers is asked to turn its instruments on the society that built it.

## The science that may not count its own dead

A demography is a discipline that counts people: the born, the living, the migrating, and the dead. The test of a demography is not whether it can count strangers but whether it can count its own. And the century this book surveys had handed Soviet demographers the largest demographic catastrophes in the modern history of their own country to explain: the famine of 1932–33, in which several million people starved in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the Volga in the course of forced collectivisation; the Terror of 1937–38, with its executions and its camps; and the losses of the Second World War, whose true scale the state itself had spent years concealing. A serious science of Soviet population would have these deaths at its centre. It is the one subject it cannot avoid, because the deaths are in the numbers — they are exactly the discontinuities a population curve is built to register.

They are not here. Search the book for the famine of 1932–33 and it is simply absent. The word "famine" occurs, but only in safe places: famines in the ancient world and under slavery, "pushed into the background" by the growth of agriculture; and the "inevitable threat of world famine" conjured by Paul Ehrlich and the neo-Malthusians, which the book rightly derides. Of the Soviet famine within living memory of the book's own authors — nothing. "Collectivisation" as a demographic event does not appear at all. The year 1937 occurs exactly once in 130,000 words, and it is the imprint date of a book about Japan. The Terror is not a demographic fact in this demography.

The censuses tell the same story by their gaps. The book is proud of Soviet census-taking; it discusses the census of 1926 and returns often to those of 1959 and 1970, from which most of its Soviet data are drawn. Between 1926 and 1959 the Soviet Union took two censuses — in January 1937 and in January 1939. Neither is mentioned. In a treatise whose fourth-largest theme is the methodology of the census, the two interwar Soviet censuses have vanished, and the reader who did not already know why would never guess that anything was missing. This is not an oversight. The 1937 census is the single most sensitive document in the entire history of Soviet statistics, and its absence from a 1976 Soviet demography is a decision, not an accident.

The most revealing passage is the one place the book does confront mass death: the chapter "Wars and Population," by E.

A. Arab-Ogly. It is a capable chapter, and it gives the official war figure without flinching: "As a result of World War II more than twenty million persons were killed or died in the USSR, i.e., 10 per cent of the population." It even gestures at a hidden magnitude, observing that if there had been no war the Soviet population "would now have reached some 350 million" — a counterfactual shortfall of extraordinary size, presented as the pure demographic cost of the war and of nothing else. And then, in a sentence that ought to stop any careful reader cold, the chapter turns to accuse others of the very silence it is keeping. Indirect war losses, it says, "considerably exceed war casualties proper... although they are passed over in silence in the official statistics." Reactionary Western ideologists, it goes on, "try to gloss over the figures of direct war casualties and pass over in silence the indirect war losses."

Here the book indicts itself in its own words. The charge — that a state passes over its dead in silence, glossing the figures to reconcile its people to its policies — is exact. It is simply pointed in the wrong direction. It is the Soviet state, not the capitalist one, that had passed the famine dead over in total silence, that had concealed and then serially revised its own war losses, and that had destroyed a census rather than publish a count it disliked. The "350 million" counterfactual is where this shows most sharply, because a demographer capable of computing the population the USSR "would now have reached" without the war has the tools to compute what it would have reached without the famine and the Terror too — and to notice that a large part of the interwar deficit had nothing to do with any war. The arithmetic is one step away. The book does not take it, and could not have taken it and been published.

## What actually happened to the 1937 census

The historical record here is not in serious dispute, and it can be stated plainly. A census was taken across the Soviet Union on the night of 6 January 1937 — the first since 1926, and one Stalin had personally promised would demonstrate the flourishing of socialist society. It did the opposite. The count came in at roughly 162 million, some millions below the figure the leadership had publicly projected — a deficit that reflected, among other things, the famine deaths of 1932–33 that the state had never acknowledged. The results were suppressed. In September 1937 the census was officially condemned as "defective" and its returns were, for practical purposes, destroyed. The men who had run it were arrested: Olimpiy Kvitkin, who directed the census itself, was shot; Ivan Kraval,

head of the Central Administration of National-Economic Accounting under which it was conducted, was shot; other senior statisticians were arrested and a number of them killed. A fresh census was ordered and taken in January 1939, and this one, conducted under the shadow of what had happened to its predecessor, duly produced a larger and politically acceptable total. That is the sequel a Soviet demographer of the 1970s inherited: a professional discipline that had, within living memory, seen its leaders shot for producing an honest count, and had watched the honest count replaced by a compliant one.

Set that record beside the confident chapters of this book on census methodology, and the silence acquires its full weight. The discipline these authors were building was, quite literally, rebuilt on the graves of the demographers who had tried to practise it two decades earlier. Their caution is not simple dishonesty. It is memory. But the effect, for the reader, is a science of population with a blind spot shaped precisely like its own worst catastrophe.

It is worth adding that this is not one book's private evasion but a structural feature of the whole enterprise, visible wherever a Soviet social science of the period is asked to look at its own society. The companion volume in this series, Gennady Osipov's *Sociology: Problems of Theory and Method* (Progress, 1969) — sociology being another discipline the Stalin years had abolished as a bourgeois pseudo-science and the Khrushchev thaw had readmitted — carries an identical hole in exactly the same place. There too the 1937 census and the fate of its statisticians form the silence at the centre; there too a science built to describe Soviet society is forbidden the one concept — a privileged ruling stratum — that would let it read the society's real divisions. Two neighbouring disciplines, revived in the same years by men who knew what had happened to their predecessors, arrive independently at the same self-censorship. That the pattern replicates across volumes is the strongest evidence that its cause is not the timidity of individual authors but the boundary the state drew around what a Soviet human science was permitted to count.

## The demography the book cannot do

The answer to this book was written before the book's own catastrophe had fully unfolded, and it was written by the man the Soviet state was most determined its demographers should never cite. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, completed in 1936, Trotsky devoted a chapter — "Social Relations in the Soviet Union" — to the census then being prepared, the very count that would be taken on 6 January 1937 and then destroyed. He

printed the official list of social categories the census would use — "worker; clerical worker; collective farmer; individual farmer; individual craftsman; member of the liberal professions; minister of religion; other non-laboring elements" — and quoted the official commentary explaining that no finer categories were needed "only because there are no classes in the Soviet Union." His verdict was that the list "is constructed with the direct intention of concealing the privileged upper strata, and the more deprived lower depths." He was describing a census as a political instrument built to make certain facts uncountable — and he was doing so months before the state discovered that even this carefully designed count would tell it something it could not bear to hear, and had it destroyed.

That is the demography this book cannot perform. Trotsky's account of Soviet society — the bureaucracy as a privileged stratum consuming a disproportionate share of the national product, the USSR as a degenerated workers' state in which socialised property coexisted with grossly unequal distribution — is precisely the account that would let a demographer read the interwar population deficit for what it largely was. A theory that can name a ruling stratum can ask what that stratum did to the peasantry in 1932–33, and can look for the answer in the numbers. A theory forbidden to name it is left counting war casualties and calling the rest of the shortfall an act of war. In the same book Trotsky observed how "everywhere and all the time in the press, in speeches, in statistics... it painstakingly conceals the real relations." He was writing about statistics as concealment forty years before the volume in your hands demonstrated the point without meaning to.

None of this requires the reader to accept Trotsky's politics whole. It requires only the narrower observation that his framework can account for the century's Soviet demographic history and this book's cannot — and that the reason is not scientific but political. The doctrine of the historically specific law of population is entirely sound. It was the historically specific law of population of the Soviet Union itself that could not be written.

## What is worth keeping

It would be a poor service to leave the impression that the volume is only an evasion, because on its stated antagonist it is often good, and the reader who wants a Marxist demolition of Malthus will find a competent one here. B. Y. Smulevich's chapters on "The Evolution of Malthusianism" and the sociological theories of population are a genuine intellectual history of the doctrine, tracing it from Malthus's Essay — with

its famous claim that population "goes on doubling itself every twenty-five years, or increases in a geometrical ratio" while subsistence grows only arithmetically — through its twentieth-century mutations. The book's central objection to Malthus is the right one and is well made: his was a claim about human nature dressed as arithmetic, a law he asserted held "in every age and in every state in which man has existed or does now exist," and it is exactly this trans-historical pretension that Marxism dismantles. The volume is also acute on how readily Malthusianism inverts itself to suit circumstances — how the same anxiety about "overpopulation" that "motivated" fascist demands for living space could reappear, in the postwar League of Nations and after, as a worry about under-population and falling demand. Its treatment of the "vicious circle of poverty" theories then being applied to the decolonising world — the argument that poor countries are poor because they breed, which conveniently relocates the cause of their poverty from imperialism to their own fertility — is the sharpest political writing in the book, and it has dated well. On the substantive point, the chapter on food resources is right to say flatly that Malthus's "pessimistic thesis... has long been refuted by the course of historical development itself," and to show it with the postwar record of cereal output outrunning population growth.

There is real scholarship, too, in the technical chapters: the work of B. T. Ulanis and others on war losses and on the reconstruction of mortality is serious demography, and the sober handling of sex-age pyramids and the long demographic echo of the two world wars is the work of people who knew their craft. The framework — population as a social relation, not a natural quantity; the size and density of a population as conditioned by the mode of production rather than determining it — is Marx correctly understood, and it remains a better starting point for thinking about the world's population than the neo-Malthusianism the book was written to answer. The tragedy of the volume is not that its method is false. It is that a sound method was permitted to operate everywhere except on the one population whose history most needed it, and that the discipline had learned, in the hardest possible school, exactly which counts it must never make.

Read it, then, for two things at once. Read it as the best case Soviet Marxism could make against Malthus, which is a stronger case than its Western critics usually allowed. And read it as an involuntary document of what a science becomes when it may not count its own dead — a demography with a silence at its centre shaped precisely like the graves it was forbidden to number. The book accuses others of passing the

dead over in silence. It is the more honest for having written the sentence, and the more damning.

# MARXISM The Socialist Revolution

*The sources of the Marxist theory of revolution in one volume - The Holy Family, The Civil War in France, the Critique of the Gotha Programme, Engels's late introduction of 1895, and the letters where the theory was worked out privately.*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**The Socialist Revolution is not a book Marx or Engels** wrote. It is a book made out of them: forty-odd extracts, most of them marked "From" in the contents, cut from works spanning half a century — the 1843 critique of Hegel's philosophy of law at one end, Engels's 1895 introduction to *The Class Struggles in France* at the other — and arranged by an unnamed hand at Progress Publishers to tell a single, continuous story about how the working class comes to power. The primary material is of the first rank and needs no defence from anyone. What can and should be examined is the thing built around it: the long unsigned preface, the numbered notes, the name and subject indexes, and, above all, the principle of selection itself. An anthology is an argument made by scissors. This one was assembled in Moscow, carries the line "English translation © Progress Publishers 1978," and closes its preface not on the barricade but on the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and Leonid Brezhnev's report to the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1976. That is where the frame gives itself away, and it is where an honest reading has to begin — not by correcting Marx and Engels, who need no correcting, but by watching what a détente-era editor does with them.

Take the primary texts first, because they are the reason to own the book at all, and because the frame can only be measured against what it frames. The range is genuinely useful. Here, between two covers, are the young Marx of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* — "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses" — and the old Engels of 1895, sixty pages and a lifetime later, coolly calculating the odds of street fighting against breech-loading rifles and railways. Here is *The Holy Family*, with its austere statement that the proletariat is revolutionary not because socialists idealise it but because "it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of

its own life." Here are long stretches of *The Civil War in France*, Marx's incandescent defence of the Paris Commune. Here is the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* entire enough to carry its hardest sentences. Here are letters — to Weydemeyer, to Kugelmann, to Bracke, to Lafargue, to Bernstein — in which the theory is worked out in private, under pressure, without the varnish of the published texts. A reader who wants the sources of the Marxist theory of revolution in one volume is well served. The scholarship of assembly is real, the translations are the standard Moscow ones, and nothing here is forged.

The centre of gravity is the cluster of texts from 1850 to 1875 in which Marx and Engels moved from the general prophecy of the Manifesto to a concrete theory of proletarian power, and it is worth dwelling on three of them, because they are exactly the three the apparatus handles most tellingly. The first is the Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League of March 1850, written in the ashes of the defeated German revolution. Its most famous sentence is a call not to stop: while the petty-bourgeois democrats "wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible," Marx and Engels write, "it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power." The workers are told to arm themselves, to keep their own organisation, to distrust their democratic allies, and never to be bought off with "trifling concessions." It is the most uncompromising short text in the book.

The second is *The Civil War in France* and the writings around it, where Marx draws from the Commune the lesson he thought decisive: "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." The existing state must be broken, not captured. And Engels, in his 1891 introduction to the same work — also printed here — gives the lesson its sharpest form. The state, even the democratic republic, "is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another"; the victorious proletariat,

"just like the Commune," will have to "lop off" its worst features at once, until "a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap." Then the celebrated closing taunt: "Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

The third is the Critique of the Gotha Programme, printed here with the sentence on which a century of argument turned: "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." Set beside Engels's Commune, that phrase has a clear content. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a machinery of a special type sitting above the workers; it is the Commune — the armed people governing themselves through delegates paid a worker's wage and recallable "at any moment," the standing army dissolved, the bureaucracy being lopped away. This is the theory the book's primary texts actually contain. The reader can check it line by line, because the lines are here.

Now the frame. The preface is anonymous, in the house manner of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and it does most of its work not by contradicting the texts but by choosing which of their words survive into its own vocabulary. The clearest case is the 1850 Address. Marx's phrase is "make the revolution permanent." The preface never uses it. Instead it renders the same idea, four times, as "the idea of continuous revolution," and glosses it as a warning: the working class "must strive to make revolution continuous," yes, but Marx and Engels "warned against attempts to by-pass the necessary stages of development," teaching the proletariat "not to be apathetic towards bourgeois revolution" but to carry the democratic revolution "to its conclusion" first. The emphasis has been quietly inverted. Marx's text is a goad against stopping; the preface reads it as a caution against going too fast. The reason for the substitution is not obscure. "Permanent revolution" was Trotsky's banner, and under Stalin it became one of the most heavily anathematised phrases in the Soviet lexicon; the theory of stages the preface here defends — democratic revolution first, socialist revolution later — was the doctrine raised against it. So the editor performs a delicate operation: he keeps Marx's argument, drops Marx's word, and re-poles what remains. Tellingly, the volume's own subject index cannot quite complete the erasure. Turn to the back and

there it is, an entry the preface's prose never speaks: "Revolution, permanent — 40-41, 50-52, 75-76, 80-87." The term is admitted as a bibliographical fact and denied as a living concept. That gap between index and preface is the whole method in miniature.

What makes the quarantine plainer still is that Marx himself soldered "permanence" to the very concept the preface is happy to embrace. The book prints his own words linking the two: revolutionary communism, he writes, "is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally." And in the famous letter to Weydemeyer, also here, Marx lists as his own discovery "that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat" and "that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society." For Marx, the permanence of the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat are one thought: the refusal to stop until classes themselves are gone. The preface keeps the second half of that thought, which the Soviet state had institutionalised, and mutes the first, which it had not. To separate them is to leave the dictatorship without the motion that was its whole point — a permanent transit dressed up as a permanent condition.

The handling of the dictatorship of the proletariat is subtler and, in the end, more consequential, because here the preface does not omit anything so much as shift the weight. Its account leads with coercion and centralisation. Proletarian dictatorship, the preface explains, is "necessary in order to defend the revolution... rebuff attempts by the overthrown classes to restore capitalism"; it exists "to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state"; it "uses force against the enemies of socialism." All of that is in Marx too. But the feature Marx and Engels themselves treated as the essence — that the dictatorship is the self-government of the armed producers, defined precisely by the destruction of the standing army and the bureaucracy — the preface mentions only in passing, in the abstract formula that the working class "must not only smash the state machine of the bourgeoisie, but must also replace it by the dictatorship of the proletariat." The concrete Commune measures that give the phrase its content — recallable delegates, officials on workers' wages, no permanent army, the state being scrapped rather than perfected — are left in the primary texts and kept out of the frame. The reader is guided toward the state as instrument of a ruling class and away from the state as an evil the proletariat begins dismantling on day one. It is the difference between a workers' power that is withering from birth and a workers' state that is

consolidating; and the preface, without ever misquoting a word, leans on the second.

The same thumb rests on the scale wherever the party is concerned. The preface makes the vanguard party the hinge of everything: "Only the party is capable of leading the class struggle, the revolution and the building of a new society." It even supplies a historical verdict the texts do not: "One of the main reasons for the defeat of the Paris Commune was the lack of a proletarian party as the guiding force of the movement." This is Lenin's later diagnosis of the Commune read back into Marx, who in *The Civil War in France* attributed the Commune's fall to quite different things — its military hesitation, its failure to march on Versailles, its scruples about the Bank of France. Marx and Engels did insist, and the book quotes Engels of 1889 insisting, that the workers must "form a separate party distinct from all others." But the party of the Manifesto — "the most advanced and resolute" section of the class — is not yet the disciplined vanguard-state of 1978, and the preface elides the distance between them so smoothly that a reader would never suspect it had to be crossed.

That leaves the document the whole tradition has fought over: Engels's 1895 introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*, the so-called political testament. The story is worth stating plainly, because the book both tells and withholds it. In the spring of 1895 the German Social-Democratic leadership, anxious not to hand the government a pretext while an anti-subversion bill (the *Umsturzvorlage*) was before the Reichstag, cut Engels's introduction so that its author appeared to renounce revolution and embrace the legal, parliamentary road for good. Engels protested bitterly in private that he had been made to look like "a peaceful worshipper of legality at any price." Here the news is genuinely to the volume's credit, and it should be said first: the text printed in this book is not the bowdlerised newspaper version. It keeps the militant passages the party press had softened — the mordant "irony of world history" in which the revolutionists "are thriving far better on legal methods," and the warning that the ballot is a weapon precisely because it forces the ruling class to strike first: "if, therefore, you break the constitution of the Reich, the Social-Democracy is free, and can do as it pleases with regard to you." An editor bent on drafting Engels into pure gradualism would not have printed those lines. The 1978 volume prints them.

But the note attached to the text says nothing at all. Note 112 reads, in its entirety: "The Introduction to Marx's work *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* was written by Engels for a separate edition of this work (Berlin, 1895)." Not a word

about the mutilation, the pressure of the *Umsturzvorlage*, or Engels's fury. The reader of this volume is handed the fuller text and left ignorant that there was ever a controversy — that the most quoted "reformist" document in the Marxist canon is a forgery of omission its author disowned. The silence is not neutral. Because if the reader does not know the testament was doctored, the preface's own closing pages can borrow its authority unchallenged. And borrow they do. Having traced the theory of revolution from 1843 to 1895, the preface pivots in its final movement to the twentieth century — to Lenin, to the doctrine that socialism could triumph first in one country, to October 1917 — and then to the present. Lenin, it says, revealed "the importance of a socialist foreign policy, of consistent implementation of the principles of peaceful coexistence among states with different social systems," and the Soviet Union and its allies are now "waging a tireless struggle in contemporary conditions for peace on earth," for "peaceful coexistence, implementation of detente," and for the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. A book named *The Socialist Revolution*, built from the most insurrectionary texts its authors ever wrote, ends on coexistence and a security conference. The theory of the armed workers smashing the state has been carried, by the smooth motion of the preface, all the way to a foreign policy of stabilising the European status quo. This is not a small irony, and it is not accidental. It is the same operation performed on "permanent revolution" and on the dictatorship of the proletariat, now applied to the arc of the whole book: the militant content is preserved as heritage and neutralised as guidance. Marx and Engels are honoured as ancestors on precisely the condition that nothing they wrote be read as a live instruction to the readers of 1978.

What, then, does the anthology's frame do to Marx's theory of revolution? It performs a quiet transposition. The texts describe a state of a particular and temporary kind — the Commune, "a government of the people by the people," a power that begins abolishing itself the moment it is won. The frame belongs to a state of the opposite kind: a permanent apparatus, a standing bureaucracy and army, a single party that in 1978 had ruled for sixty years and shown no sign of withering. The gap between the two is not a subtlety; it is the central fact of twentieth-century socialist history, and it is precisely the gap the apparatus is built to paper over. When the preface makes the dictatorship of the proletariat a matter of centralising production "in the hands of the state," it is not describing the Commune; it is describing the USSR, and reading it backward into Marx as prophecy fulfilled — "fully confirmed by the practical experience of all the socialist revolutions of the 20th century." The most damning evidence against that claim is bound into the same volume, a few pages

away, in Engels's insistence that the workers' state is "at best an evil" to be scrapped, and in Marx's warning that the working class "cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery." A state that has grown, not withered, over two generations stands condemned by the very texts it reprints to praise itself.

This is not a private grievance of one faction. It was Lenin himself who, in *The State and Revolution* in 1917, built his whole case on these Commune passages — on the smashing of the bureaucratic-military machine, on Engels's "Look at the Paris Commune" — and who insisted that the measure of a workers' state is whether officials are paid workers' wages and whether the armed people, not a separate apparatus, hold power. Measured by that standard, the Soviet order of 1978 had drifted a very long way from the model the book venerates, and the whole anti-Stalinist Marxist tradition — most sharply Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) — made exactly the gap between the Commune-state and the bureaucratic state its point of departure. The 1978 anthology is, without meaning to be, the best short brief for that critique, because it lays the standard and the departure from it side by side and asks the reader not to notice.

None of which diminishes the book. It enlarges it, in a way its compilers did not intend. Read for the primary texts alone, *The Socialist Revolution* is a strong single-volume gathering of the sources, and much of the editorial labour — the collation, the notes on dates and first publication, the cross-references — is sound and genuinely helpful. Read for its frame, it is something rarer: a precise record of how the state that claimed descent from October wished, in the era of détente, to remember its own founding theory — which of Marx's words it could still speak and which it had to translate away, which of Engels's lessons it amplified and which it left mute in a footnote. Both readings are available at once, and they correct each other. The letters and the treatises say what revolution meant to the men who made the theory; the preface, the notes and the indexes say what it had come to mean to their official heirs. Keep the second honest by the first. Marx and Engels are here in full voice, and the surest way to hear them is to read straight past the hand that arranged them — and then to notice, in the gap between the texts and their frame, exactly how much that hand had to leave unsaid.

# ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism

*Soviet philosophy reduced to a primer for the general reader - matter, consciousness, the laws of dialectics, classes and the state - and revealing precisely because a primer must state plainly what a textbook can qualify.*

B. M. Boguslavsky and others

## Introduction to the 1978 Edition

**A note on the date, because the front matter does not settle** it and the text does. The copyright page, as it survives in scanning, prints a tangle: "First printing 1975", "Second printing 1978", "© Издательство «Прогресс», 1977", "English translation © Progress Publishers 1978". A first English printing of 1975 is impossible for the book actually in hand, because this book knows things that had not happened in 1975. It quotes the Soviet Constitution "adopted in 1977", names its Article 48, and cites Leonid Brezhnev's report "The Great October Revolution and Mankind's Progress", delivered on the sixtieth anniversary of the revolution in November 1977. It measures history by "the development of history over the past sixty years" — sixty years from October 1917. Whatever the "1975" line refers to, perhaps a shorter Russian original, the text a reader holds was closed after October 1977 and printed in English in 1978. That is the date this introduction argues from.

The date fixes what the book is. 1977 was the high noon of what Soviet doctrine called "developed socialism" — the formula, repeated across these pages, for a society that had reached its settled adult state and was moving toward communism without further upheaval. It was the year of the new Constitution, the sixtieth-anniversary festivities, the last long plateau of the Brezhnev era before the doubts of the 1980s. Into that moment Progress issued this small book: a popular essay — *populyarny ocherk*, the title page says in Russian — on dialectical and historical materialism, written by a collective of five Soviet philosophers (B. M. Boguslavsky and four colleagues, doctors and candidates of philosophical science) and, in its own words, presenting "in a popular form the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist philosophy". It is not a textbook and does not pretend to be. Its sibling in this catalogue, the Konstantinov Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, is the same doctrine at academic length, in twenty-two chapters, examinable. This is the same doctrine reduced to its "ABC" — the mass-market entry point, addressed in the Foreword to "many people" who are "trying

their best to grasp the meaning of the rapid changes occurring before their eyes" and want to "form a scientific, Marxist world outlook". The book was for the widest possible audience, and it is precisely the reduction to an ABC that makes it worth reading closely. Where the textbook can bury its assumptions in qualifications, the primer must state them plainly. What a doctrine chooses to teach a beginner is what it most wants believed.

## The ABC and the catechism

The title is not neutral, and no reader of the anti-Stalinist tradition can pass it without a start. In December 1939, in the middle of the faction fight that produced *In Defense of Marxism*, Trotsky wrote a short polemic titled "The ABC of Materialist Dialectics". Its argument was that dialectics is a method — a way of holding every concept open to the change that will one day burst it — and that whoever treats its categories as "fixed abstractions" has abandoned it whatever words he keeps. Thirty-eight years later, the Soviet state's own export publisher issued a book called *ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism* that does the opposite of everything Trotsky's essay asked. The coincidence of title is almost certainly innocent. The opposition of method is total, and it is the subject of this introduction.

For this book is a catechism in the exact sense: a body of doctrine organised as questions with settled answers, to be learned. Open the contents and the chapters break into sections phrased as questions — "Faith or Knowledge?", "Is There Matter Without Motion?", "Does Motion Without Matter Exist?", "Can Matter Exist Outside Time and Space?", "Is the World Cognisable?" The prose keeps the same rhythm. A typical passage poses the question and disposes of it in a breath: "Which then derives from which? The material from the spiritual, or vice versa? Does matter originate from consciousness or consciousness from matter? Which is primary, spirit or nature?" — and the two camps of philosophy are named, the materialist and the idealist, and the reader is told which is true. The questions are real questions, and some

of the answers are good answers. But they arrive as answers, closed and certified, each with its quotation from Marx, Engels or Lenin appended like a seal. There are no open problems in this book. There is nothing the five authors confess they do not know. Every question has been asked before and answered already; the reader's task is not to think but to receive.

This is the form Trotsky's essay was written against, and it is worth setting his words beside the book they seem to indict in advance. "Vulgar thought," he wrote, "operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers' state, etc as fixed abstractions... Dialectical thinking analyses all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which 'A' ceases to be 'A', a workers' state ceases to be a workers' state." The dialectician, he insisted, is the one who has "learned finally to apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself"; the "vulgar evolutionists" are those "who limit themselves generally to recognising evolution in only certain spheres, [and] content themselves in all other questions with the banalities of 'common sense'." Recognising development in only certain spheres — that is the precise anatomy of this book, and the next two sections show where the spheres end.

## The one thing that does not change

Dialectics, as the ABC teaches it, is the science of change through contradiction. This is its central and repeated claim, argued with real vigour: everything that exists is a "unity of opposites"; the "source of any object's movement lies in the interaction ('conflict') of opposites which are inherent in it"; and — the book's own summary of the law — "the unity, the equal effect of opposites, is temporary and relative, whereas their conflict is eternal and absolute." Nothing is exempt. Buds break into leaf, seeds burst into plants, quantity accumulates until a "leap" converts it to a new quality, and every mode of production carries within it the antagonisms that will destroy it. The book runs this machinery through the whole of nature and the whole of class history: primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, and above all capitalism, whose "conflict in the mode of production must sooner or later... be expressed as antagonism and conflict between these classes", bringing "social revolution". Conflict is eternal and absolute. It is the engine of everything.

Everything, that is, until the analysis reaches the society the authors live in, at which point the eternal and absolute conflict simply stops. Here the ABC is starker than its own textbook siblings, and the starkness is the finding. The Konstantinov

Fundamentals and the Krapivin primer at least retain the word "contradiction" for socialist society and defang it with a category — the non-antagonistic contradiction, resolved without revolution by planning and persuasion. This book does not even bother with the hedge. The phrase "non-antagonistic" does not occur in it at all. Socialism appears not as a society of managed contradiction but as a society from which contradiction has been abolished: "A socialist society," the book states flatly, "is one in which there are no irreconcilable differences and no struggle is waged between the workers and the peasants, and between these two classes and the people's intelligentsia." Under socialism "society has attained moral and political unity"; the "social basis" of acute struggle "disappears"; the Soviet people has become "a new historical entity... cemented by the unity of its vital interests, political views and moral standards", and "this unity rules out the possibility of class struggle within the people." Conflict eternal and absolute in every prior form of society; unity, pure and unbroken, in this one. The one reality the dialectic of contradiction may not touch is the state that publishes the dialectic.

The suspension has a date and a document, and they are the sharpest thing in the book. Tracing the Soviet state's development, the ABC declares: "The best documentary proof of this process as it developed in the USSR was the adoption of the 1936 Constitution — the Constitution of triumphant socialism." The transition from proletarian dictatorship to "the state of the whole people", it continues, "was completed in the early 1960s as the result of the complete and final triumph of socialism in the Soviet Union." Read those two sentences with a calendar. The 1936 Constitution — "the Constitution of triumphant socialism" — was promulgated in the year the first Moscow show trial opened, and its adoption was followed not by triumph but by the Yezhovshchina, the mass executions of 1937–38, the shooting of the majority of the delegates to the Party congress that had approved the line. Between "the Constitution of triumphant socialism" and the smooth arrival of "the state of the whole people" in "the early 1960s" lies the largest political massacre in the history of a socialist movement, and in this book it does not exist. It is not denied, minimised or explained. It is simply not there. The catechism has no question to which the Terror is the answer.

The Fourth International's tradition answered this book's claim in the act of its being made. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) — written in the very year the ABC dates the triumph of socialism, and the book against which every Soviet account of Soviet society in this series must be read — Trotsky devoted a chapter, "In the Mirror of the New Constitution", to

exactly the document the ABC celebrates. He read the same charter and saw the opposite of unity. Its return to "universal, equal and direct" suffrage was, he argued, "a matter... of juridically liquidating the dictatorship of the proletariat", dissolving a class in "the nation" politically "long before it is economically dissolved in society"; its guarantees of freedom had "the form either of a heavy muzzle or of shackles upon the hands and feet"; and its abolition of the old inequalities meant, in a line that answers the ABC's "moral and political unity" directly, that "the equality of the rights of workers and peasants means, in reality, an equal lack of rights before the bureaucracy." Where the ABC finds a people "cemented by the unity of its vital interests", Trotsky found a stratum: "The Soviet Union is a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism, in which... exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism." One may accept or reject that diagnosis. What cannot be denied is that it is the ABC's own method — contradiction, antagonism, the class content of a state — carried through to the ABC's own society, and that the ABC, for all its chapters on the eternity of conflict, refuses to carry it there. The book even supplies the analytic tool and declines to use it: expounding the state, it describes the special case in which "the warring classes reach an equilibrium which allows the state to become relatively independent of both classes and to act, to all appearances, as a go-between for them" — Bonapartism, the exact category Trotsky used for the Soviet bureaucracy — and applies it only to Bourbon France. The primer names the concept and quarantines it abroad.

## The names that are not there

An erasure of events implies an erasure of people, and the ABC's is comprehensive. Searched in full, the book contains the name Trotsky zero times, Stalin zero times, Bukharin zero times, Deborin zero times. (These are true absences, not scanning damage; the checks were run.) The absences are worth taking one at a time, because each removes something the book would otherwise have to explain.

Trotsky is absent from a book that celebrates the October insurrection and even quotes Lenin's note of 24 October 1917 demanding it be launched "this very evening" — an insurrection Trotsky, as chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, organised. The man is unnameable even where the event is his. Stalin is absent in a way that outdoes even the candid Soviet volumes: the Konstantinov textbook at least admits "the cult of personality", contains and neutralises it as a defect of one

man's character, and moves on. The ABC does not perform even that ritual. There is no cult of personality here because there is no Stalin, no Terror, no 1937 to require the concept. The primer's solution to the hardest fact in Soviet history is not apology but silence. And Deborin and Bukharin are absent from a book whose whole first half narrates the "revolution in philosophy" and the development of dialectical materialism — a development in which the great Soviet philosophical battle of the 1920s, between the "Mechanists" and the Deborin school, both liquidated by Party fiat in 1930–31, was the decisive Soviet episode. The word "mechanist" occurs nine times in the book, every one of them attached to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century materialism; not one concerns the Soviet debate in which the label became a sentence. The history of Soviet philosophy is told as an unbroken ascent from Lenin to the present, with the years in which philosophy was actually subordinated to the state removed from the record.

There is a subtler erasure in the book's handling of Lenin himself, and it cuts the other way from what one might expect. The series has learned to watch for the suppression of the open, questioning, Hegelian Lenin of the Philosophical Notebooks in favour of the canonised, polemical Lenin of Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. In this book the suppression is nearly total. Materialism and Empirio-Criticism is named and quoted approvingly — twice at least, deployed against Mach and against "energism" — as the authority that "conclusively proved" the materialist reading of the crisis in physics. The Philosophical Notebooks are named not once. And yet their substance leaks in anyway: the book's definition of the law of contradiction rests on Lenin's line that "dialectics can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites... This embodies the essence of dialectics" — which is from the Notebooks, from the fragment "On the Question of Dialectics". So the open Lenin is present after all, but stripped and repurposed: his most exploratory text is mined for a single finished formula and never named as what it is, a working philosopher's notebook full of provisional marks and questions to himself. The catechism can use the living Lenin only by embalming him, taking a note he made in the course of thinking and setting it in the wall as a certified result. That operation — a method turned into an inventory — is the whole book in miniature.

## What survives, and it is not nothing

None of this makes the book worthless, and a reader told that everything in it is propaganda would be misled about the thing that matters most: Marxism is a philosophy, materialism is a

defensible position, and over long stretches this little book teaches both competently. Credibility about the erasures depends on saying so plainly.

Its strongest ground is the elementary case for materialism against idealism, and against the religious and positivist evasions that a beginner will actually meet. The chapter "Faith or Knowledge?" is a clean, patient argument that science reaches the "invisible world" the theologian reserves for faith, and that "ignorance is no argument" — a genuinely useful thing to put in front of a young reader. The account of the crisis in physics around 1900 is honest and clear: the atom proved divisible, the electron's properties proved mutable, and materialists who had bolted their philosophy to a particular physical picture watched it come loose. The resolution the book offers is Lenin's real one and a real advance over the mechanical materialism it supersedes — that matter is a philosophical category, not a commitment to any inventory of ultimate particles, so that "there were no immutable things or properties, no immutable form of motion to which motion at all levels could be reduced", and "the electron is as inexhaustible as the atom." The treatment of necessity and chance is better still, and argued rather than asserted: against both fatalism and the mechanistic determinism that "knocked the bottom out" of itself once science met "more complex things than trajectories of individual bodies", the book insists that chance is real and law-governed together, and illustrates it with a detail no catechist would invent — the 1962 American Venus probe destroyed in flight because "a hyphen had been omitted from the computer programme." That is teaching. It earns its abstraction by cashing it out in the world, and a reader who worked through these chapters would come away better equipped to think.

The tragedy of the book is legible in exactly these passages, because they show that the authors possessed the living material and knew how to use it. They could hold a concept open when the concept was matter, or causality, or the crisis in physics. They could not hold it open when the concept was their own society. The same men who insisted that no form of motion is immutable, that every category must yield to the change it cannot contain, wrote that socialist society is "one in which there are no irreconcilable differences" and let the sentence stand. The method was alive in their hands until the moment it would have cost something, and then it went rigid.

## The reply, and the measure to leave

The fair counterweight to a primer is not a treatise but another primer, and one exists. In 1942, in New York, while the

leaders of his party were being prosecuted under the Smith Act, George Novack delivered nine elementary lectures on dialectics to activists — published as *An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism* (5th ed., New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971, from the lectures of 1942). Like the ABC, they are popular, oral, addressed to beginners rather than academics. They are the exact comparison, and they open by refusing the ABC's central move. "We shall approach dialectics not as a closed system," Novack tells his audience. "On the contrary it is an open system and therefore our approach is elastic, concrete, more informal." And the sentence that the whole ABC is built to avoid: "Dialecticians recognise that all formulas must be provisional, limited, approximate, because all forms of existence are transient and limited. This must also apply to the science of dialectics and to the formulations of its laws and ideas." Both men teach the same three laws and the same paired categories; the laws can be taught. The difference is whether they are handed over as an open method a reader is meant to use, including on the society that teaches them, or as a closed inventory a reader is meant to recite. The ABC is the recitation. Trotsky's "ABC of Materialist Dialectics", whose title it unknowingly borrowed, is the method — and the method, applied to a workers' state, is precisely the thing the Soviet primer forbids.

So the book should be read, and kept in print, as two things at once. It is a competent elementary exposition of materialism and of a dialectical view of nature, from which a reader can genuinely learn, and it is a near-perfect specimen of what happens to a critical method when a state adopts it as scripture. The two are not separable; they are the same pages. The ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism teaches, correctly, that everything that exists carries the seeds of its own overcoming — and then names one society, its own, in which nothing does. That single exemption is the book's whole politics, and everything else follows from it: the missing Terror, the four missing names, the missing word "contradiction" in the one place a dialectician was bound to use it. A method that finds negation in every order of the world and suspends it at home has not made a small local exception. It has stopped being a method at the exact point where being one would have mattered.