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Dialectics in Modern Physics

Soviet philosophy of physics addressed to Western colleagues - measurement, causality, the wave function, the relation of classical to quantum description - by the head of the Academy's department for the philosophy of science.

Mikhail E. Omelyanovsky

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

Search the whole of this book — a hundred and thirty-nine thousand words on relativity, quantum mechanics, causality and measurement, written by a man who ran the department of philosophical problems of science at the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences — and the following words do not occur once: Lysenko. Stalin. Zhdanov. Prezent. Deborin. Mitin. The phrase "physical idealism" occurs exactly once, in scare quotes, borrowed from Paul Langevin, and it is pointed at Western physicists.

That last detail is the book in miniature. "Physical idealism" was the name of a campaign, and the campaign was Soviet. It ran from the 1930s into the early 1950s; its targets were the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics and, at its edges, the theory of relativity and Einstein himself. M. E. Omelyanovsky lived and worked inside it. In this book the term appears once, describing something that happened in Paris and Göttingen.

The date

The English spine says 1979. The author says otherwise, in his first sentence: "This is an English translation of my monograph *Dialectics in Modern Physics* published in Russian by Nauka Publishers in 1973." He adds that "Its substance remains, for the most part, as in the Russian original, except for the addition of a short chapter 'In Lieu of a Conclusion'".

That is nearly right and worth checking, because the exception is larger than he says. Post-1973 citations appear in seven of the book's twelve chapters. Some are innocent — the translator swapping in the Progress editions of *Anti-Dühring* (1975), *Dialectics of Nature* (1976) and *Capital* volume I (1977) for the Russian ones. Others are the author's own hand: his article in *Voprosy filosofii* 1976 no. 10; *Lenin and Modern Natural Science*, the Progress collection he edited, published in 1978 and cited five times; and, at the very end of the new

concluding chapter, a long quotation from a speech Brezhnev gave in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses on 7 October 1975. So: argue the body of the book from 1973, and the first chapter's closing pages and the whole of "In Lieu of a Conclusion" from 1976–78. The difference matters, because it is in the newer material that the book does both its best and its worst work.

The commission is legible. This is a détente-era export title aimed at Western physicists and philosophers of science — the same readership, and very nearly the same argument, as *Philosophy in the USSR* (Progress, 1977), already in this series. Omelyanovsky's own preface lists the international venues where he had presented parts of it: the world philosophy congresses at Vienna (1968) and Varna (1973), *Foundations of Physics* in 1972, a colloquium of the Belgian Academy of Sciences in Brussels in 1975. He wanted to be read abroad as a colleague. The book was written to make that possible.

And it was written under difficulty. "I had to finish the book while seriously ill," he says in the Russian preface, "and therefore had to omit many interesting, important topics." (The scanned text reads "man?"; the sense is not in doubt.) The same paragraph thanks V. A. Fock — the physicist who did more than anyone to keep quantum mechanics defensible in Soviet conditions — as "an outstanding physicist, man of principle, and kind friend of everyone who takes the philosophical issues of science as his basic field of research." In a book that will not name a single episode of the coercion of Soviet science, "man of principle" is a phrase doing quiet work.

The history the book tells

Chapter I gives the official account of Soviet physics and philosophy, and it is one long sentence of falsification:

From the very beginning Soviet physicists resolutely opposed the idealistic and positivist interpretations of

quantum and relativist theories that were fashionable in the West.

Around it, the picture is of harmony: in the 1920s "the young Soviet country's science developed at an accelerated pace", and physicists — "S. I. Vavilov, D. S. Rozhdestvensky, A. F. Ioffe, I. E. Tamm, and others" — met the strangeness of the new physics with dialectical materialism in hand. (The scan renders Ioffe as "lofffe" throughout, an l-for-I substitution; it is corrected here and wherever else the extracted text is obviously damaged.) There was, on this telling, never a conflict between Soviet philosophy and Soviet physics. There was only a united Soviet front against Western idealism.

Chapter I then closes by denying the charge outright:

Bourgeois ideologists ascribe rejection of the theory of relativity and other leading theories of modern science to Marxists as allegedly idealistic constructions, ascribe an ignoring of modern formal logic to them, and so on and so forth.

The trouble is that the ascription is accurate, and the evidence for it is partly in this book's own footnotes.

Omelyanovsky cites, without comment and as an ordinary scientific reference, D. I. Blokhintsev's paper "A Critique of the Idealist Understanding of Quantum Theory", *Uspekhi fizicheskikh nauk*, 1951. A paper with that title, in that journal, in that year, was not a contribution to a seminar. He also cites, twice, a volume he co-edited with I. V. Kuznetsov, *Filosofskie voprosy sovremennoi fiziki* — Philosophical Questions of Modern Physics — from the late 1950s, in which Fock published a piece called "A Critique of Bohr's Views on Quantum Mechanics." The apparatus of this book is, in places, a bibliography of the campaign it declines to describe.

For what the campaign actually did, we have to go outside. In Intercontinental Press of 16 April 1973 — the same year as this book's Russian edition — George Novack reviewed Robert Havemann's *Questions Answers Questions* under the title "Havemann's Stand Against Stalinism", and recorded this in passing:

In June 1948, during the Zhdanov cultural terrorism, Kedrov had been dismissed as editor of Problems of Philosophy, the leading Soviet organ, for his positive evaluation of Bohr's contributions to quantum mechanics.

(The scan breaks "dismissed" and "contributions" across columns; the words are whole in the original.) Problems of

Philosophy is *Voprosy filosofii* — the journal in which Omelyanovsky published throughout his career, and in which he published in 1976, in a footnote of this very book. Its editor was removed for saying about Bohr something close to what Omelyanovsky says about Bohr here.

Three years later, in the issue of 23 February 1976, Novack put the whole pattern on the record in a talk called "In Defense of Engels":

The advances made in relativity physics, genetics, the resonance theory in chemistry, and cybernetics were rejected on the false ground that they failed to conform to the arbitrary specifications of all-powerful arbiters of Soviet thought like Zhdanov. Under the guise of defending materialist dialectics these discoveries were castigated and banned as idealistic aberrations.

And on 19 April 1976 the same paper carried an interview with the Ukrainian mathematician Leonid Plyushch, newly released from a Soviet psychiatric prison, conducted by George Saunders on 2 April. Asked what motivates the dissident intelligentsia, Plyushch answered that even the natural sciences need freedom of publication, and gave his examples:

Everyone knows the fate of genetics in the Soviet Union, and the fate of cybernetics. The same type of thing happened at one time, under Stalin, in regard to relativity theory: For a time relativity theory was called a "bourgeois science."

That is the sentence Omelyanovsky's Chapter I says bourgeois ideologists made up.

The brother who is in the book

The introduction to Philosophy in the USSR in this series found that Fedoseyev's honour roll of Soviet natural scientists was substantially a list of survivors of campaigns the book would not name. The pattern recurs here, in a sharper form.

S. I. Vavilov is cited six times in this book — on Newton's atomism, on Lenin and modern physics, on the development of the idea of matter — always as a physicist and an authority, which is what he was. He became President of the Academy of Sciences in 1945. His elder brother Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov, the greatest geneticist Russia produced and the head of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, was arrested in 1940 and died in Saratov prison in January 1943, having been

destroyed by Lysenko. He is not in this book. He could not be: the word genetics occurs exactly once in it, in a neutral list of twentieth-century achievements.

The two Vavilovs must not be confused, and this book gives no occasion to confuse them — it simply prints the one who survived and omits the one who did not. That omission is the argument of the whole volume compressed into a bibliography.

A note on our own tradition's record here, since this series does not get to hold Progress to a standard it will not meet itself. R. H. Monroe and Joseph Hansen's two-part "The Lysenko Case", in Fourth International vol. XII nos. 1 and 2 (whole nos. 108 and 109, January–February and March–April 1951), is the best contemporaneous account in our archives and it opens with a sentence that has held up: "The Stalinist outlawing of genetics in the Soviet Union in 1948 profoundly stirred the scientific world." But it states that Nikolai Vavilov "died in northeast Siberia in 1942". The place and the year are both wrong; he died at Saratov, on the Volga, in January 1943. Correcting it here is cheaper than pretending we never printed it.

What the book is good at, and it is genuinely good

A reader given only the above would be badly served, because the philosophy of physics in this book is often first-rate, and in one respect it is braver than it looks.

The best chapter is the second, "The Problem of Objective Reality in Quantum Theory", and its third section, "The Philosophical Evolution of the Copenhagen School", is a serious close reading of Bohr. Omelyanovsky's move is to prise apart two things usually run together: Heisenberg's "uncontrollability in principle" — the claim that the disturbance of the object by the measurement cannot even in principle be accounted for — and Bohr's complementarity. He argues they are not equivalent, that Bohr leaned on the language of "uncontrollable interaction" in the 1930s and 1940s, and that he abandoned it in his late essay "Quantum Physics and Philosophy". His verdict on the uncontrollability doctrine is sharp and, as physics, defensible: "The term 'uncontrollable interaction', taken in its literal sense, is wrong: all phenomena of nature are cognisable and hence controllable in principle." His verdict on the late Bohr is this:

Thus, one can find explicit expression in Bohr's essay Quantum Physics and Philosophy of a position that is basically materialist and dialectical.

Notice what that sentence is actually doing. In a system where "idealist" was a charge with career-ending and sometimes life-ending consequences, declaring the founder of the Copenhagen interpretation a materialist was not a concession — it was a rescue. Omelyanovsky performs the same operation on Einstein, quoting his 1948 paper in *Dialectica* at length and concluding: "There is no doubt that he adopted a materialist standpoint of recognising the objective reality of the external world cognised by physicists, although he did not always express it clearly and distinctly enough." The mild condescension of that last clause is the price of admission. Having paid it, he can teach Einstein.

This is worth stating plainly, because it is the most interesting thing about the book. The standard account of why Soviet physics escaped what Soviet biology suffered is that the physicists were shielded by the bomb project — agriculture had no equivalent, and so Lysenko was able to destroy genetics while relativity survived. That account is an argument from circumstance and it is probably right as far as it goes. But this book is evidence of a second mechanism working alongside the first, one that operated in the texts rather than in the corridors: a philosophical technique for declaring the new physics to be dialectical materialism already, so that no purge was needed. The physicists did not have to be defended against the doctrine if the doctrine could be shown to have arrived at the same conclusions independently. Omelyanovsky and Fock spent their careers doing exactly that, and it worked. It is not a heroic story and it is not a shameful one. It is what accommodation looks like from the inside.

The quality holds elsewhere. Chapter VI on determinism in quantum theory is careful, unpolemical analysis. Omelyanovsky separates causality from determinism, and both from mere lawful simultaneity — a charge is the source of an electromagnetic field, but that is not a causal relation — and states the general point with real economy: "a causal connection is only a tiny part of the world connection between phenomena." He runs Aristotle's four causes against modern usage and corrects Engels's employment of *causa finalis* in *Dialectics of Nature*, gently but in public. Chapter I contains the sentence "theoretical ideas and theories should not be converted into dogmas", and in context it is meant.

And "In Lieu of a Conclusion" — the chapter written for this English edition — turns to Popper, Lakatos and Kuhn, and reads them accurately before dismissing them. Omelyanovsky sees exactly what is new in post-positivist philosophy of science: that "the most recent trends in the bourgeois philosophy of science aim at identifying the forms and

methods that make it possible to bring out the developing content of scientific knowledge", where positivism had only ever analysed knowledge already established. His objections are compressed to the point of curtness — "Kuhn denied regularities in the transition between 'paradigms'" — but he has read the books. In 1979, that was not nothing.

The page where it breaks

And then, on the last page of that same new chapter, the book destroys itself.

Omelyanovsky quotes Heisenberg twice from his late writings. The second quotation is the charge, put by one of the founders of quantum mechanics, in print, in 1973:

it is difficult for Soviet philosophy to come to terms with the theory of relativity and quantum theory

Here is the reply, in full:

There is no need here for a polemic against Heisenberg on these issues. The development of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and modern physics has adequately refuted him and other voluntary or involuntary opponents of dialectical materialism. The philosophy of dialectical materialism is the only true philosophy of modern physics and of all contemporary science.

There is no need here for a polemic. Two hundred pages of the most patient argument about measurement, causality and complementarity — argument that repeatedly grants Heisenberg his physics and disputes only his philosophy — and at the one point where the question turns on the author's own institution and his own life, the argument stops. The charge is not answered. It is declared already refuted, by history.

And then, immediately, the book's final substantive paragraph quotes Brezhnev on the Party commitment of Soviet science:

The Soviet scientist (if, certainly, it is a truly Soviet scientist) bases his whole scientific activity on the scientific ideology of Marxism-Leninism, is an active champion of communism, fights any reactionary and obscurantist forces.

The parenthesis is the whole apparatus in six words. There are scientists, and there are truly Soviet scientists, and somebody decides which. Nikolai Vavilov was found not to be one. Kedrov was found not to be one in June 1948, for having praised Bohr as Omelyanovsky praises Bohr in Chapter II.

Omelyanovsky prints that criterion, approvingly, as the last word of a book whose entire method depends on it never having been applied to him.

The reply

The anti-Stalinist left never reviewed this book, and no purpose is served by pretending otherwise. A search of the complete English Trotsky, the Bulletin of the Opposition, the run of Fourth International from 1940 to 1956, all 763 issues of Intercontinental Press, the International Viewpoint database and the collected George Novack returns not one mention of Omelyanovsky, of Blokhintsev, of Fock the physicist, of "physical idealism", or of the Copenhagen debate in any form. Heisenberg is named once in some thirty thousand documents; Bohr twice. The tradition tracked Lysenko, and later it tracked Sakharov, and it did not track the philosophy of physics. That absence is a fact about our own archive and should be said before anything else.

What the tradition did have was the argument, made without a state behind it — which is the only condition under which it can be tested.

George Novack delivered nine lectures on dialectical logic to members of the Socialist Workers Party in 1942, while the party was under Smith Act prosecution. In the third, "Once Again on the Limitations of Formal Logic", he sets out the fourth defect of the formal laws of thought:

They rule the world of thought in totalitarian fashion, exacting unquestionable obedience from all things, claiming unlimited authority for their sovereign sway.

He means formal logic. He would have been appalled to find the sentence fitting the dialectical laws as they were administered in Moscow, and it fits them exactly. The test he proposes in the same lecture is one Omelyanovsky would accept and his institution would not: "Absolute laws can no longer find any foothold in the physical world." In the first lecture he had already described what happens when they try, using Galileo and the Inquisition — "These servants of official authority sought to silence the arguments, ban the books, terrorise and even kill their scientific opponents." He is writing about the seventeenth century. The lectures are cited here from An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism, 5th ed. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971), the text as Novack revised it in 1963.

Twenty years later, in "Is Nature Dialectical?", Novack reported a debate held in Paris on 7 December 1961, before six

thousand people, on the question: "Is the dialectic solely a law of history or is it also a law of nature?" Sartre and Jean Hyppolite argued no; Roger Garaudy and the physicist Jean-Pierre Vigier argued yes. Vigier's case, as Novack reports it, is startlingly close to Omelyanovsky's — that matter has no ultimate constituents, that "There are in principle no irreducible or immutable elements in nature", that each level of structure discloses further structure beneath it. Omelyanovsky devotes an entire chapter to that proposition, under the name Lenin gave it, the inexhaustibility of the electron.

The two men were arguing the same thing. One was doing it in an auditorium against opponents free to answer him. The other was doing it in a monograph whose final page quotes the General Secretary on what a truly Soviet scientist is. Novack, who had no illusions about which was which, named the cost in the same essay: the reputation of dialectics among scientists had been wrecked by "the arbitrary and ignorant interference of the Stalinist bureaucrats with scientific theory, along with their narrowly schematic, distorted, and dogmatic interpretation of Marxist method". In "In Defense of Engels" he put it more bluntly still: "In this way Stalinism has cast the same discredit on dialectics in nature as on the name of socialism."

Two things should be said about Novack's own conduct here, because they are to his credit and they sharpen the point. First, he did not use the record to write off Soviet philosophy. In the same 1976 talk he calls Kedrov "one of the most perceptive" of Soviet natural scientists, says his writings on the development of scientific thought "are superior in insight to most productions of the Western scholars on this subject", and acknowledges a debt to him — while recording, in the same breath, that Kedrov "under Stalin was removed in 1948 as editor of the chief Soviet philosophical journal". He also quotes at length Loren Graham's judgement that Soviet dialectical materialism "is an impressive intellectual achievement". An anti-Stalinist in New York could praise Soviet philosophy of science and name what had been done to Soviet philosophers of science, in one paragraph, without strain. Omelyanovsky in Moscow could do only the first half. (Novack's talk gives Kedrov's initials as "B.F."; they are B. M., and Novack himself had them right in 1973 — "Bonifati Kedrov".)

Second, the deepest objection to this book is not that it lies about 1948 but that its method is wrong, and the tradition made that objection in the right place. Closing "The Lysenko Case", Monroe and Hansen refuse to concede dialectical materialism to Lysenko — "The truth is that the findings in

biology as in all other sciences speak for dialectical materialism and not against it" — and then quote Engels against the whole procedure of legislating for the sciences from philosophy:

The mistake lies in the fact that these laws (dialectics) are foisted on nature and history as laws of thought, and not deduced from them.

That is the charge against the tradition to which this book belongs, and it is Engels's. Omelyanovsky is at his best precisely where he deduces — where he reads Bohr's late essays closely enough to find the change in them, where he pulls causality apart from determinism, where he insists theories must not become dogmas. He is at his worst where he foists: where relativity and quantum mechanics are announced in advance to have arrived at dialectical materialism, where a philosophy is "the only true philosophy" of a science, where the Party's General Secretary certifies who is a real scientist.

Read this book for its second chapter and its sixth, which are the work of a fine mind on hard problems. Read its first chapter and its last page together, and you have the exact shape of what that mind was not allowed to think about — which was itself, its journal, its institute, and the men who had sat in its chairs before it.

The Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy

The complete official Soviet philosophy textbook in twenty-two chapters - the one every student was examined on - in its revised form, closed in the last full year of Brezhnev's life.

Fedor Vasilyevich Konstantinov

Introduction to the 1982 Edition

The catalogue calls this a book of 1979, and the copyright page, as it survives in scanning, reads "© Progress Publishers 1979". The book itself says otherwise on almost every page of its social chapters. It quotes the Twenty-Sixth Congress of the CPSU — held in February and March 1981 — at least six times, and cites it from the printed Documents and Resolutions. It reports that "by early December 1981 there was a total of 8.5 million unemployed in the USA", notes the Thirty-Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain of November 1981, follows Brezhnev's visit to West Germany of 23–24 November 1981, and projects world unemployment forward "by mid-1983". Brezhnev is alive throughout, "that tireless fighter for peace"; he died in November 1982. A manuscript cannot cite a congress two years after its own copyright date. What a reader holds is the revised English edition of 1982, prepared after the Twenty-Sixth Congress and closed in the last full year of Brezhnev's life, whatever date the front matter carries. That is the date this introduction argues from, because it is the date the text keeps.

Placing it there matters, because it fixes what the book is for. This is the standard Soviet textbook of dialectical and historical materialism — diamat and histmat, the philosophy every Soviet student sat examinations in — issued under the name of the academician F. V. Konstantinov, who had headed the official manuals of Marxist-Leninist philosophy for a quarter of a century, and written, as its title page concedes with "et al.", by a committee of the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Philosophy. It is orthodoxy in its most systematic and official form, refreshed for the horizon the Twenty-Sixth Congress had just reaffirmed: "developed socialism", "mature socialism", a society that had reached its settled adult state and was advancing, without further upheaval, toward communism. The book uses the phrase thirteen times. It is the horizon of the whole volume, and, as we shall see, the point at which its method stops.

That fixed date also explains what the second half of the book is doing. A treatise on matter, consciousness and the categories has no obvious need of the current five-year unemployment forecast, yet the social chapters are dense with it: the December 1981 American jobless total, the debts of the developing countries "in 1981", the "Peace Programme for the 1980s" the Twenty-Sixth Congress "proposed", Brezhnev's replies to *Der Spiegel*. The philosophy is a container; the current Party line is the contents, decanted fresh at each congress. This is the deepest sense in which the book had ceased to think — not that it argues badly, but that its content is renewed on a political schedule while its form never moves. Between one printing and the next the statistics change, the congress number rises, the peace programme is updated; the twenty-two chapters, the three laws, the settled answers, stand exactly where Stalin's generation left them. A living philosophy revises its questions. This one revises only its footnotes.

The philosophy that had ceased to think

The book announces itself, in its Preface, as the opposite of a catechism. Marxist philosophy "is a creative, revolutionary doctrine, a doctrine that is constantly being enriched and tested by historical practice. It is opposed to any kind of dogmatism." Chapter I calls Marxism-Leninism "a harmonious, integrated theory" whose "unity, the wholeness, and consistency ... are acknowledged even by its opponents." Note the pairing. A doctrine advertises itself as anti-dogmatic in one sentence and as harmonious, whole and consistent in the next — and it is the second set of adjectives the book actually delivers. Twenty-two chapters proceed from the basic question of philosophy through matter, consciousness, the three laws of dialectics, the categories, the theory of knowledge, and then the whole of history, to end with two chapters demolishing contemporary bourgeois philosophy and sociology. Every question has an answer. Every answer has a quotation certifying it. There are no open problems, no unfinished arguments, nothing the authors confess they do not know.

This is the form Leszek Kołakowski called "the philosophy that had ceased to think" — a living method frozen into a syllabus. Its architecture is not Konstantinov's invention. The numbered laws, the lettered categories, the examinable body of settled doctrine, are the shape Stalin gave the discipline in the 1938 chapter "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", the single most reproduced philosophical text of the Soviet century. Konstantinov's volume inherits that shape three decades on, and the inheritance is visible in Chapter V, which opens by calling dialectics "the heart and soul of Marxism-Leninism, its theoretical foundation" and then sets out, as laws, propositions that Marx and Engels advanced as a method of inquiry.

To its credit — and an honest introduction must say so, because the easy version of this criticism is wrong — the book knows the danger and names it. Expounding the negation of the negation, it warns that the law "is often reduced to a purely formal and external device by means of which all the richness and complexity of objective development is arbitrarily subordinated to a rigid scheme", and insists: "Materialist dialectics is fundamentally opposed to any such formalistic approach or schematisation ... it merely guides inquiry in the right direction." It even enlists Hegel against the thesis–antithesis–synthesis trinity. This is not the writing of men who do not understand the objection. It is the writing of men who understand it perfectly and cannot act on it, because the one inquiry a state textbook may not guide is the inquiry into the state that publishes it. The disclaimer against schematism is itself recited, in the place where the schematism is at its most exposed, and then the exposition proceeds exactly as before.

The test the book will not take

Dialectics, as this book teaches it, is the science of contradiction, negation and supersession. Everything that exists carries the seeds of its own overcoming; quantity accumulates until it converts into quality; every established order "logically prepares its own negation" and gives way to a higher form. The book applies this with real energy across the whole of nature and the whole of history — to the primitive commune, to slavery, to feudalism, to capitalism, which "reveals itself in the cataclysms of the spontaneous capitalist economy". The question that decides everything is whether the method is ever turned on the society the authors live in.

The crude expectation — that a Soviet textbook simply denies contradiction under socialism — is false, and it is worth being precise about why, because the truth is sharper than the

caricature. Konstantinov's book does not deny that socialist society has contradictions. It affirms them, at length, and it attacks the denial as an error. "The historical practice of the development of socialism," it says, "has revealed all the harmfulness of the illusion that in the new conditions society is liberated of all contradictions." There arise "in the process of development of socialist society itself certain contradictions that are peculiar to that society; in fact, there could be no progress without them." It even invokes, against complacency, "socialist criticism and self-criticism". Error is admissible. The book will concede that mistakes were made, that policy can go wrong, that Soviet society is not yet perfect.

What is not admissible is the category. The concession is made safe in advance by a single doctrinal device: the contradictions of socialism are non-antagonistic. They "arise between classes, between social forces whose conditions of life determine the community of their fundamental goals and interests"; they can be overcome "gradually, by means of planned economic activity ... by means of educational work, and so on." And the crucial sentence, which fixes the limit of the whole book: "It may be assumed that only with the building of developed socialism will non-antagonistic contradictions never turn into antagonistic." Developed socialism — the horizon of 1982, the stage the USSR has reached — is precisely the stage at which contradiction loses the power to become antagonism. From there Chapter XIII draws the conclusion the method has been steered toward all along: "The contradictions arising in socialist society are resolved without social revolution."

There is the suspension, stated in the book's own words. Negation of the negation, the transformation of quantity into quality, the supersession of every existing order — the machinery runs through primitive communism, antiquity, feudalism and capitalism, and switches off on contact with the society doing the analysis. Capitalism prepares its own negation; developed socialism does not. Every prior order was a transient moment in a process; the Soviet order is the process arriving at its rest. The word "contradiction" is retained, and even multiplied, but it has been drained of the one property that made it dialectical — its tendency to burst the form that hosts it. A contradiction that cannot, by definition, become antagonistic, and is resolved without revolution by planning and education, is not a contradiction in Marx's sense at all. It is an administrative problem with a reassuring name.

The Fourth International's philosophical tradition answered this argument in the act of making it, and from inside the same categories. In "The ABC of Materialist Dialectics" — written in December 1939, at the height of his defence of dialectics

against those in his own movement who wished to drop it — Trotsky put the point that Konstantinov's book is built to avoid: "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, "must apply the idea of evolution to his own forms of thinking" and to his own state; whoever "has learned finally to apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself ... is a dialectician, as distinguished from vulgar evolutionists." The vulgar evolutionist, by contrast, recognises development "in only certain spheres" and treats the rest as fixed. Konstantinov's textbook is a monument of exactly that selective evolutionism: development everywhere, except at home.

Trotsky drew the reflexive conclusion the textbook forbids in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), the book against which every Soviet account of Soviet society must be read. The USSR, he argued, is "not a socialist regime, but a preparatory regime transitional from capitalism to socialism", and precisely because it is transitional "its development does not proceed harmoniously, but in contradictions. Economic contradictions produce social antagonisms, which in turn develop their own logic, not awaiting the further growth of the productive forces." Where Konstantinov guarantees in advance that the non-antagonistic will never turn antagonistic, Trotsky insists the outcome cannot be guaranteed at all: it "depends upon a struggle of living social forces ... not on a national scale, either, but on an international scale." And he named the contradiction the textbook cannot name — the privileged bureaucratic stratum itself: "Bureaucracy and social harmony are inversely proportional to each other." One can accept or reject Trotsky's specific diagnosis. What cannot be denied is that it is the dialectical method carried through to its own society, and that Konstantinov's book, for all its chapters on contradiction, declines to carry it there.

The suspension has a concrete institutional form, and it is the one every reader of Marx would test first: the state. Marxism holds that the proletarian state is transitional and prepares its own dissolution — it withers away. The Soviet state of 1982, on the book's own account, was doing the reverse. Chapter XII reports that "the political organisation of society under socialism is preserved, acquiring an ever greater role in social life", and then makes the move that gives the whole doctrine away: "This by no means contradicts the thesis on the withering away of the state." A state growing more powerful is squared with a theory that it should be growing weaker by the simple expedient of postponing the withering to "the relatively

distant future, in conditions of developed communism", and by redescribing the present growth, in Brezhnev's words quoted approvingly, as a process in which "our statehood is gradually being transformed into communist social self-government." Set that beside Trotsky's flat observation of the same institution: the Soviet state "does not die away, but grows more and more despotic", the bureaucracy "rises above the new society". Konstantinov's authors see the identical fact — a state of ever greater reach — and are obliged by their office to read its growth as its withering. The dialectical category of the transitional state, which points toward its own supersession, is preserved as a phrase and inverted in substance.

The history the book erases

A textbook on the birth and development of Marxist philosophy might be expected to say something about the development of Marxist philosophy in the country that made it a state doctrine. It does not. The great philosophical battle of the Soviet 1920s — between the "Mechanists", who wanted to dissolve philosophy into natural science, and the Deborinites around Abram Deborin, who defended the Hegelian dialectic, before both schools were liquidated by the Party intervention of 1930–31 that branded Deborin's group guilty of "Menshevizing idealism" — has left no trace in these pages. Deborin's name occurs zero times. The nine appearances of "mechanist" are all about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century materialism or "theories of equilibrium"; not one concerns the Soviet debate in which the phrase acquired its lethal charge. The history of Soviet philosophy is told as a smooth ascent from Lenin to the present, with the decade in which philosophy was actually subordinated to the Party line simply removed.

The removal has a companion in the way the book handles the men that decade destroyed. Here Konstantinov's volume is more forthcoming than its sibling textbooks — A. P. Sheptulin's *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* of 1978 prints the names Stalin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Deborin exactly zero times each — and the difference is instructive, because naming turns out to be another way of containing. Stalin appears, but only as the "cult of personality": a phenomenon the CPSU "severely criticised ... as something that contradicted the nature of socialism and the principles of Marxism-Leninism, as a departure from Leninist standards of inner-party life", traceable to "the negative traits in Stalin's own character ... rudeness, disloyalty to comrades, intolerance of criticism". This is the reflexivity failure in miniature. The largest catastrophe in Soviet history is admitted as error — a matter of

one man's character, certified against Lenin's Testament — and by the same stroke sealed off from the system: it "contradicted the nature of socialism", so socialism itself is never in the dock. The Terror becomes a personality defect. Nobody who stayed inside the Party is ever assigned to a category the book cannot recuperate.

Bukharin fares similarly. He appears four times, always as a foil for Lenin's philosophical corrections — the marginal notes on his *Economics of the Transition Period* — and never as a man shot in 1938. Trotsky appears three times. Once as the title of a Lenin polemic; once bracketed with Herbert Marcuse and the anarchists as a purveyor of "ideas derived from anarchism" (the characterise-but-never-cite treatment the whole series has learned to watch for — no work of Trotsky's is quoted or footnoted anywhere in the book); and once, substantively, in the chapter on the individual in history, where "the opposition in the party, led by Trotsky, maintained that the attempt to build socialism in one country, and a backward one at that, confronted by conservative Europe, was a hopeless task." This is the standard amalgam, and it disposes of an argument Trotsky never made. His position was not that building socialism in the USSR was "hopeless" but that it could be begun nationally and only completed internationally — that the fate of an isolated workers' state hung on the world revolution. The two decisive theses of *The Permanent Revolution* (1930) say exactly this: the revolution "begins on the national arena ... and is completed on the world arena." The Soviet operation, here as elsewhere in this catalogue, is to collapse completion into beginning, so that a theory of the international dependence of socialist construction can be read out as a denial that construction is possible at all. *The Revolution Betrayed* is the sustained reply, and it turns the textbook's own boast — socialism achieved in one country — into the question the textbook cannot ask: at what cultural and material level, and with what social consequences, was it achieved?

One erasure the book does not commit deserves recording, because the honest credit is what makes the criticism trustworthy. The brief for this series expected the Hegelian, questioning Lenin of the *Philosophical Notebooks* to be suppressed in favour of the canonised, polemical Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. In citation frequency that is true — the *Notebooks* are named once, *Empirio-Criticism* thirteen times. But the book does not hide the *Notebooks*; it honours them, explicitly, as "of tremendous significance", the place where Lenin "gives us some splendid examples of how to elaborate the laws and categories of materialist dialectics", and it praises "On the Significance of Militant Materialism" —

Lenin's call for an alliance with natural science and for "the critical and creative assimilation of ... Hegel's dialectics" — as "his philosophical testament". The open Lenin is not denied. He is embalmed. His programme for the further development of the theory of knowledge is quoted as a completed achievement rather than taken up as an unfinished task, which is precisely the difference between a method and a catechism.

What is worth keeping

None of this makes the book worthless, and a reader told that everything in it is propaganda would be misled twice over. Marxism is a philosophy, and worth teaching as one; where this volume expounds it rather than polices it, it has real content.

Its strongest ground is the defence of materialism against idealism and, especially, against positivism — the argument it was built to win. Drawing steadily on *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, it holds the line that the objects of knowledge exist independently of consciousness, and it does so against live opponents: Bertrand Russell, for whom "the spiritual and the material are merely logical constructs"; the "physical" idealism read out of the crisis in early twentieth-century physics; the neopositivism and structural-functionalism dissected in the closing chapters, where Talcott Parsons's sociology is fairly identified as an apparatus for representing "the 'integrity' and 'stability', the equilibrium of the system of capitalist social relations". Whatever one thinks of the verdicts, these are arguments with named positions, and the reduction of philosophy to the logic of science is a real target the book hits.

Its treatment of the concept of matter is genuinely careful — the insistence that there is "no 'matter as such'" behind concrete objects, no "primary structureless substance", is a real philosophical advance over mechanical materialism and is argued, not asserted. Hegel is engaged seriously and often (some sixty times), not merely name-checked; the exposition of causality as reciprocal rather than one-directional, and of chance and necessity against Laplacean determinism, has the texture of thought rather than recitation. And on contradiction under socialism the book does draw, accurately, on the genuine dialectical Lenin — the marginal remarks on Bukharin in which Lenin distinguished antagonism from contradiction and held that "the former disappears under socialism while the latter remains". The tragedy of the volume is legible in that very citation: the authors possessed the living material and used it to build a wall. They took Lenin's real distinction and made of it a guarantee, where Lenin had left a warning.

That is the measure to leave a reader with. Set beside George Novack's *An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism* — the anti-Stalinist tradition's own lectures on the same subject, delivered in 1942 and insisting throughout on "the living spirit of dialectics as a method of thought" — or beside Trotsky's dictum that "the dialectic is not a magic master key for all questions ... but it directs this analysis along the correct road", Konstantinov's *Fundamentals* reads as the same philosophy with its motor removed. The parts are all present and many of them are sound. What has been taken out is the one operation that made it dialectics: the readiness to turn the method on oneself. A book that finds negation and supersession in every order of nature and history, and exempts a single order — its own — has not made a small local exception. It has suspended its method at the exact point where the method would have cost something. That the authors saw the danger, named it, and could not escape it, is the most eloquent thing about the book, and the truest record it leaves of the year it was written.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth

Thirty pieces of reporting on the Khmer Rouge and its overthrow, assembled in Moscow in 1979 - Soviet correspondents alongside Granma, Der Spiegel, Akahata, Wilfred Burchett and Reader's Digest.

Evgenii Vasilevich Kobelev

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

Everything that is true in this book was true for four years before Progress Publishers printed a word of it.

That sentence is the whole problem, and it needs stating at the start because nothing else in this introduction is intended to cast doubt on what the volume describes. The Khmer Rouge did empty Phnom Penh at gunpoint on 17 April 1975. They did abolish money, markets, schools, hospitals, postal services and the practice of medicine. They did work, starve and beat to death a substantial fraction of the Cambodian population between 1975 and the end of 1978. The Tuol Sleng interrogation centre, which this book calls "the former Tuolsleng school", did exist, and its photographic archive survives. The reportage collected here is, in its substance, accurate. It was among the earliest sustained accounts available in English from a socialist publisher, and a reader who comes to it expecting fabrication will not find much. The falsification in this volume is not in what it says happened in Cambodia. It is in the dates, in the framing, and in what is left out — and each of those is visible without leaving the book itself.

What the volume is

Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth is not a monograph. It is a clippings dossier: roughly thirty pieces of journalism, reprinted and translated, arranged in two parts. Part I, "The Tragedy of the Kampuchean People", gathers atrocity reporting. Part II, "The Rebirth of Kampuchea", prints the founding documents of the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation, the Manifesto of the People's Revolutionary Council, Heng Samrin's victory speech, and then a run of Soviet correspondents filing from a Phnom Penh they had just been allowed to enter.

The Soviet contributors are staff foreign correspondents — A. Usvatov and G. Shmelyov of New Times, I. Shchedrov, A. Levin of Komsomolskaya Pravda, M. Ilyinsky of Izvestia, M.

Ozerov of October. The foreign contributors are a deliberately assorted set: Martha Rojas of Granma, Tiziano Terzani of Der Spiegel and Corriere della Sera, Isao Takano of the Japanese Communist Party's Akahata, Wilfred Burchett writing in the Paris Afrique-Asie, and — the striking inclusion — John Barron and Anthony Paul of Reader's Digest.

The commission is not hard to reconstruct. This is a rush job, assembled in Moscow in the first months of 1979 and published inside the year, in English, for export. Its purpose is stated in its own vocabulary. The word "Peking" occurs 143 times in about fifty-nine thousand words; "Maoist" or "Maoism" occurs forty-nine times. A whole section of Part I is headed "Socialism. Peking Style". Brezhnev is quoted setting the thesis: Kampuchea was "ruled by a pro-Peking regime, modelled on the Chinese political system, and the mass extermination of people in Kampuchea is nothing but a Chinese-style 'cultural revolution' in action outside China". The closing essay states the conclusion plainly: "A powerful blow had been dealt at Maoism in Kampuchea."

That is the commission. Cambodia was the raw material; the target was Beijing. The book is a document of the Sino-Soviet split before it is a document about Cambodia, and it is worth reading first as evidence of how completely one atrocity could be metabolised into another quarrel.

The word that does not appear

On 25 December 1978 the Vietnamese army crossed the border in force. Phnom Penh fell on 7 January 1979. Vietnamese troops remained in the country for the next ten years.

None of that is what this book says. Search it for "invasion" and the word turns up three times. Twice it is in scare quotes, and both times it is being denied. Wilfred Burchett, in "Bloody Terror against the Vietnamese Community", writes: "The role of the Vietnamese in the Kampuchean events is sometimes called an 'invasion', if not a 'conquest'." He then argues it away

— Hanoi never concealed its support for the KUFNS, and "irrespective of Vietnam's actions, the opposition movement would have emerged in Kampuchea, and done everything possible to overthrow the terrorist regime." M. Ozerov, in "They Know What Hell Means", is blunter: "Vietnam an invader? Wait a minute, gentlemen, surely all the indications are that it was the Khmers themselves, rather than anyone from outside, who rose against the Pol Pot regime." The third occurrence, "the Peking invaders", is about China's February 1979 attack on Vietnam. Invasion is a thing that happens to Vietnam, never a thing Vietnam does.

Burchett goes further, and it is the low point of the volume. Quoting a Pol Pot interview of 23 December 1978, he asks: "Is this not an admission that, in December 1978, there were no Vietnamese troops to be found on Kampuchean territory and that, on the contrary, it was the Pol Pot regime that was mounting 'preventive' attacks?" The Vietnamese general offensive began two days after the interview he is citing.

The book's own material dismantles the account. The KUFNS was founded, by the volume's reckoning, at a congress in early December 1978; Akahata dates the announcement to 2 December. Five weeks later this organisation had taken the capital of a country the size of Cambodia. In the interview with Kaarle Nordenstreng of the International Organisation of Journalists, printed in Part II, Hun Sen — then twenty-six, and later the country's ruler for nearly four decades — is asked where the liberated districts were. His answer: "Primarily in the northeast of Kampuchea", in "the areas bordering on Laos and Vietnam."

The honest version is not complicated, and it does not require any concession to Washington or Beijing. Vietnam invaded Cambodia, for reasons of its own security after a year of murderous Khmer Rouge border raids, and in doing so it ended the Cambodian genocide. Nobody else was going to. That is a defensible thing to have done and a defensible thing to say. This book cannot say it, because in the doctrine it is written to serve, socialist states do not invade, and so a real deliverance has to be dressed as a spontaneous national uprising — which reduces the actual Cambodian survivors to extras in someone else's script, and leaves the volume unable to explain the single most important fact about the country it is describing.

What the datelines show

The second falsification is one the book commits by omission, and it can be read straight off the source lines under the article titles.

Set them out in order. The earliest item in the volume is Barron and Paul, Reader's Digest, March 1977. Then Time, 21 November 1977. Then Der Spiegel, 10 April 1978. The earliest Soviet item is Usvatov and Shmelyov in New Times, no. 37, 1978 — a weekly, so about September of that year. Then Literaturnaya Gazeta, no. 40, 1978. Then Pravda, 4 December 1978. Everything else in the book — and it is the great bulk of the book — is dated between January and March 1979.

So the volume's own apparatus records that the Soviet press began covering the destruction of Cambodian society in the autumn of 1978, roughly three and a half years after it started, some months after Hanoi and Phnom Penh had gone to open war, and about eighteen months after the story had been carried in an American mass-circulation monthly. The killing did not become reportable when it began. It became reportable when it became useful.

The book knows this and cannot say it. The nearest it comes is a phrase in the KUFNS delegation's statement after its visit to Moscow, in which Roh Samay expresses joy "that solidarity and friendship have been re-established between the USSR and Kampuchea for all time". Re-established. Something had lapsed. What Soviet policy toward Democratic Kampuchea actually was between April 1975 and late 1978, why Moscow's press was silent through those years, and what if anything was said to Beijing about a client conducting mass killing — on all of this a book-length anthology has not one sentence. The silence is the finding.

The company it keeps

Which brings us to Barron and Paul. John Barron was a Reader's Digest editor whose other subject was the KGB; with Anthony Paul he wrote *Murder of a Gentle Land* (1977), from which the piece here, "Untold Sufferings of the People", is condensed. In 1977 the Digest was the most reliably anti-communist mass magazine in the United States. A Progress Publishers anthology reprinting it, without comment on what it is, is a very deliberate act.

It is not a lapse. It is the volume's core evidentiary tactic, and it is pursued at length. Part I also draws on Time, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, the St Louis Post-Dispatch, the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and President Carter's statement of 21 April 1978. The argument being built is: do not take our word for it, take theirs. Moscow borrows the credibility of its enemies precisely because it has none of

its own on this subject, having spent three years saying nothing.

And then — this is the sharp part, and it is the book's best argument — it turns the borrowed testimony around. The volume points out that having called the Pol Pot regime the worst human-rights violator in the world, "in the Security Council, Washington came to the defence of the regime, thereby demonstrating to the whole world the true worth of its hypocritical 'defence of human rights' campaign". Burchett makes the same point with a specific: Senator McGovern had publicly called for UN military action to remove Pol Pot, and "if McGovern's words had been heeded and if UN troops had ousted Pol Pot, the 'free world' would have claimed the credit for liberating Kampuchea."

On this the book was right, and history was crueller to its opponents than it could have known in 1979. Democratic Kampuchea kept Cambodia's United Nations seat after it had ceased to govern anything, and it and its successor coalition held it into 1990, with American and Chinese votes. Writing in *International Viewpoint* no. 183 (April 1990), a decade on, the Fourth International's press recorded what that meant materially: the Khmer Rouge rebuilt their army in Thai sanctuary and made "good use of the massive aid which they have received above all from China, but also from Bangkok, other countries of ASEAN, from the West and, via the refugee camps that they administer, from the UN." The same article notes, without ideological difficulty, that this history "explains why the Vietnamese army was welcomed by the population, with suspicion certainly, but also with relief, when it intervened in 1978". Note the verb. It is possible to say intervened and still be glad it happened. That was never available to Progress Publishers.

Corrections, and what survives them

Three specific claims should be marked before a reader goes in.

The death toll. The book repeatedly gives "about three million", the figure adopted by the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and one contributor attributes to Pol Pot the statement that of eight million Cambodians "we only need one million". The toll is genuinely contested and the honest range in the scholarship is roughly 1.5 to 2 million dead from execution, starvation, overwork and disease — Ben Kiernan's much-cited estimate is around 1.7 million, from a population of perhaps 7.9 million. The three-million figure is an overstatement produced by a government that needed one.

Saying so is not minimisation: a fifth of a nation is what the lower figure means.

The monocausal thesis. Everything in this book is explained by Maoism and Beijing. Chinese material and political support for Democratic Kampuchea was real and substantial, and the book is right to insist on it. But the Khmer Rouge's ultranationalism, its racial hatred of the Vietnamese, its French-educated leadership cadre, its cult of the pre-modern peasantry and its extraordinary internal purges were not Chinese imports, and the Cultural Revolution, whatever else it was, did not empty Beijing at gunpoint or abolish currency. The "Peking-style" formula explains the regime by naming Moscow's rival, which is not an explanation.

The provenance of the new government. The book prints, in the *New Times* biography "Heng Samrin Assumes Leadership", the following: "In 1976, he became political commissar and commander of the Fourth Division in Kampong Cham. After that he was Deputy Chief of Staff of the Eastern Military Zone and a member of its Party Committee." Those are Democratic Kampuchea posts, held at the height of the killing, and the volume records them without a flicker. The Front that overthrew Pol Pot was built substantially out of Eastern Zone cadres who broke with him in 1977–78, as the book half-concedes when it describes the mutiny of the 280th and 290th divisions in May 1978. This is knowable from the text; it is simply never joined up.

What survives is considerable. The eyewitness reporting in Part I — Levin's "According to an Old Gestapo Recipe", Ilyinsky's "Total Genocide", the accounts of the Chup plantation and the Tuol Sleng courtyard — is the work of journalists who went and looked, and it holds. Burchett's own passage is the most honest thing in the book, because it is an admission: "Like most progressives who supported the Kampucheans in their struggle against American imperialism and the bloody Lon Nol regime, at first I couldn't believe the Kampuchean refugees' terrible accounts." It should be said too that Isao Takano, whose piece appears here, was killed at Lang Son in March 1979 while covering the Chinese attack on Vietnam; a Progress editor's footnote records it.

The reply, including where the reply failed

The anti-Stalinist left answered this material, and the record is not one anybody should present as a clean vindication.

In *Inprecor* no. 53 (10 June 1976), Pierre Rousset published "Questions on the Cambodian Revolution". It opens by

describing the Western coverage as "an intense anticommunist slander campaign", correctly exposes two faked photographs in *Paris-Match* and *Le Figaro*, and treats refugee testimony from the Thai camps with heavy scepticism. It was too sceptical. The photographs were fakes; the substance was not.

By the following spring Rousset had reversed himself in public. In an article from *Rouge* of 22 April 1977, translated in *Intercontinental Press* of 6 June 1977 as "Cambodia—The Nationalist Relapse of a Communist Current", he asks directly whether the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh was necessary and answers: "The answer is no." He identifies the regime's autarky as a choice rather than a necessity, and writes that "the bureaucratism of Cambodia's political structure is unparalleled in other Asian revolutions." He still underestimated the executions. But this was published in June 1977 — fifteen months before the first Soviet article in this anthology — and it was published as a self-correction, under a signature, in the same press that had got it wrong.

That contrast is the point of reading this book. Both traditions were slow. One of them corrected itself in the open, while its subject was still alive to be argued about, and could therefore say a decade later that Vietnam intervened and that the intervention was a relief. The other waited until a state interest required speech, then produced, in a matter of months, a handsome anthology in which it had always known, the Vietnamese army was never there, and the whole catastrophe belonged to somebody else's ideology.

Read *Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth* for the reporting, which is real, and for the reckoning with the UN seat, which was justified. Read the datelines for everything else.

INTERNATIONALISM

Recent History of the Labor Movement in the United States 1939--1965

American labour from 1939 to 1965 - the War Labor Board, Taft-Hartley, the expulsion of the left-led unions, the AFL-CIO merger - researched in the US National Archives and the unions' own collections, with every chapter attributed.

Boris Mikhailov and others

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

This is the second of two volumes, and it is not a pamphlet.

It runs to more than two hundred thousand words, sixteen chapters, a bibliography of several hundred titles, a subject index and a name index. It was produced by a named editorial board — B. Y. Mikhailov as editor-in-chief, with N. V. Mostovets and G. N. Sevostyanov — and, unusually for a Progress title, the preface tells you exactly who wrote what. Mikhailov took the preface, Chapters I–IV, VI, XVI and the conclusion; I. I. Zhmykhova took Chapters V, IX, XIV and part of VI; V. A. Korolkov Chapters VII and VIII; A. P. Medvedev X and XI; P. A. Shishkin XII, XIII, XV and part of XVI; A. N. Shlepakov part of XIII. The preface also corrects the attribution of Volume I, because the English edition reorganised its chapters. These are academic historians of the Academy of Sciences establishment, and the preface says they worked in the National Archives of the United States, in the archives and libraries of the major American unions, and at the Catholic University in Washington, Cornell, Wisconsin and California. The bibliography bears this out: it cites Record Group 202, the records of the National War Labor Board, down to the individual folder.

Volume I ended in 1939. This one covers late 1939 to 1965, and the preface says a third volume on the postwar period was "presently in preparation."

The date on the spine is 1979. The date of the text is not. The Russian title page reproduced in the front matter reads *Istoriya rabocheho dvizheniya v SShA v noveishee vremya, tom vtoroi (1939–1965)*, and everything inside the book points to the turn of the 1970s. The American secondary literature in the bibliography effectively closes around 1968–70; the latest American item is the New Program of the Communist Party U.S.A., New York, 1970. The conclusion carries the narrative down to a Teamsters–UAW conference of May 1969 and then

says so explicitly: "Events in 1965–1970, which go beyond the chronological bounds of the present study, only confirm the need to take this development into account." The apparent exceptions prove the rule — the Marx, Engels and Lenin citations run to Progress English editions of 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1976, which is the ordinary translation-desk practice of swapping Russian references for whatever English Progress volumes were on the shelf when the translator sat down. Strip those out and you have a text finished around 1970 or 1971, in the early Brezhnev years, and exported in English nine years later. Read it as a book of about 1970. It reads like one: the last living presence in it is George Meany, and the future it gestures at is the Alliance for Labor Action.

What is good in it

A great deal, and the reader should have that first.

Soviet labour history of the United States had one large structural advantage over most of what was being written in American history departments at the same date: it assumed that class conflict was the organising fact of American life and went looking for it. That assumption is a distortion when it is applied mechanically. Applied to the American 1940s, it produced narrative history of a subject that American academic historiography was, at the time, largely neglecting. The chapters on the wartime strike wave, on the Little Steel formula and the wage freeze, on the 1943 coal crisis and the passage of the Smith–Connally Act over Roosevelt's veto, on the government seizure of Montgomery Ward, on the great strike upsurge of 1945–46 and on Taft-Hartley are researched, dated, sourced from The CIO News, the AFL Proceedings, the union press and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and they are readable. When the authors say that in 1943 there were 3,752 work stoppages, of which 430 were in coal, accounting for nearly seventy per cent of all man-days lost, they footnote it. That is what a working historian does.

The book is also, on its own terms, honest about the limits of what labour won. It does not pretend the strikes succeeded. Its verdict on Taft-Hartley is that "reaction succeeded in imposing the Taft-Hartley Act on the working class. This was a serious defeat for the broad masses of working people," and it lays the defeat at the door of a labour movement that was politically too weak to stop it.

The treatment of Black workers is better than the period's reputation would suggest, and better than a good deal of the American labour history then in print. The book gives the constitutional colour bars of twelve AFL international unions, sets them against the 1940 UAW constitution, and then goes to the wage data: of 9,825 Black workers at Ford, 6,457 were on the heaviest jobs, in the foundry, the rolling shops and at the open furnaces; at Ford-owned Briggs the rates for jobs that had become the "privilege" of Negroes ran between 25 and 60 cents an hour against a Ford average of 90 cents. It gives the founding of the National Negro Labor Council at Cincinnati in 1951, an organisation that would wait decades for serious American scholarly attention. It records that of the twenty-nine members of the AFL-CIO executive council only two were Black, and it reports A. Philip Randolph's three resolutions at the 1959 convention and Meany's answer to him: "Who the hell appointed you guardian of the Black members of America?" (The book is retranslating from Russian; the phrasing American accounts give is slightly different. The substance is not in dispute, and Meany's outburst is the single most quoted sentence of that convention.)

And there is Chapter VIII, "US Labor in the Cold War Period. The CIO Purge," which is the best chapter in the book and one of the reasons this volume is worth republishing. It narrates the destruction of the CIO left in 1949–50 as what it was: a purge, carried out by a bureaucracy, at the behest of a foreign policy. It quotes the 1949 convention resolution against the United Electrical Workers — "We can no longer tolerate within the family of CIO the Communist Party masquerading as a labor union" — and calls it what it is. It gives the constitutional amendment that armed the executive board with a power of expulsion. It notes Harry Bridges's warning that the amendment "put an end to real democracy in the CIO," and it draws the parallel the expelled unions themselves drew, that the Murrys and Haywoods were now doing to them exactly what the Greens and Wolls had done to the CIO thirteen years earlier. The conclusion counts the cost: "the expulsion of progressive unions, with a total of over a million members." A reader who wants to know what was done to the eleven unions, and who does not want it minimised, will find the account here more forthright than in a good deal of mid-century American

writing.

That is the case for the book. It should be taken seriously, because everything that follows depends on the reader believing that this introduction is not simply hostile.

The hole where 1941 should be

Turn to Chapter I, where the Smith Act is introduced. The book gives the date correctly — the Alien Registration Act, passed 28 June 1940 — names Howard W. Smith of Virginia, summarises the provisions, and then says this:

During World War II it was directed against espionage and subversive organizations of the fascist countries; however, it was later used by reactionary circles in the struggle against progressive, democratic working-class organizations, particularly the Communist Party.

Every clause of that sentence is false in the same direction. The Smith Act was not, during the war, "directed against espionage and subversive organizations of the fascist countries." Its first use was against a trade union. On 1 April 1941 a federal grand jury at St Paul, Minnesota, returned an indictment naming twenty-nine people, beginning: "one Vincent Ray Dunne, Carl Skoglund, James P. Cannon, Farrell Dobbs, Miles B. Dunne, Felix Morrow, Grace Carlson, Oscar Coover, Harry DeBoer, Jake Cooper, Max Geldman, Carlos Hudson, Alfred Russell, Edward Palmquist, Rose Seiler, Albert Goldman, Oscar Schoenfeld, George Frosig, Emil Hanson, Dorothy Schultz, Kelly Postal, Clarence Hamel, Carl Kuehn, Roy Orgon, Ray Rainbolt, Grant Dunne, Harold Swanson, Walter Hagstrom and Nick Wagner" — officers and members of the Socialist Workers Party and of Minneapolis Teamsters Local 544. The text of that indictment was printed in Fourth International, vol. 2 no. 7, August 1941. Eighteen of them were convicted. They were sentenced, as the Fourth International editorial of February 1945 records, "on the very day that the United States declared war," and they served thirteen months; six came out of Danbury and Sandstone in October 1944 and the remaining twelve were paroled on 24 January 1945.

These were not obscure people. Local 544 had been Local 574, and in 1934 its leadership — the Dunne brothers and Carl Skoglund, working through an extra-legal organising committee because they were too new in the union to hold office — had led the Minneapolis truck drivers through the three strikes that, with Toledo and San Francisco, broke the deadlock of the early Depression and made the industrial union

upsurge possible. James P. Cannon's account of it, "The Great Minneapolis Strikes," appeared in Fourth International in May 1944 and is the eighth chapter of his History of American Trotskyism. What brought the prosecution in 1941 was that Local 544 had voted to leave the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, that Daniel Tobin appealed to the White House, and that the administration wanted the leading organised opponents of its war policy off the board before the war began.

Searching this volume for any of it returns nothing. "Minneapolis" appears twice — once as a city where a peace committee was formed in the late 1940s, once as a place of publication in the bibliography. "Local 544" appears once, and it is a General Motors local in Pittsburgh. Dunne, Skoglund, Cannon and Dobbs are not in the name index. The Socialist Workers Party is not in the subject index; the two entries under "Socialist Workers' Party" refer to an Italian split of 1947.

There is a reason for the silence sharper than mere neglect, and the reader is entitled to it. On 16 August 1941 the Daily Worker published its judgement on the Minnesota indictments. Fourth International quoted it the following October:

The American people, whose independence as a nation, together with that of the people of Great Britain and the Soviet Union is endangered and at stake in the fight for the defeat of Nazi Germany, can find no objection to the destruction of the Fifth Column in this country. On the contrary, they must insist upon it. The leaders of the Trotskyist organization which operates under the false name of 'Socialist Workers Party,' deserve no more support from labor and friends of national security than do the Nazis who camouflage their party under the false name of 'National Socialist Working Party.'

The Communist Party of the United States welcomed the first prosecution under the Smith Act. Eight years later, in 1948 and 1949, its own leaders were indicted and convicted under the same statute, and this book narrates those trials at length, with real indignation and with a proper eye for Judge Medina's slum properties. It also narrates, sympathetically and in detail, Earl Browder's own imprisonment: "On March 27, 1941, he was arrested and sentenced to four years in jail." March 1941 — the same season, the same administration, the same Attorney General. One prosecution is in the book. The other is not. That is not an oversight in a work of this scale, with this apparatus, by historians who had read the American union press.

The turn nobody made

The second problem is the 1939–41 line, and here the falsification is done not by an assertion but by a chronology.

The book's Chapter I is titled "Labor and the War in Europe. 'Keep America Out!'" and it argues, accurately, that isolationism was the dominant mood of American workers in 1939–41. It then places the Communist Party inside that mood while claiming it stood outside it. "From the very first days of the war it condemned isolationism and passiveness and demanded vigorous US action to restore peace." Two sentences later: "Time and again it declared that the war in Europe was the second imperialist war." Both statements are in the same paragraph. The 1940 platform is quoted straight: "Not a cent, not a gun, not a man for war preparations and the imperialist war. Resist the militarization and armaments program."

What the book will not say is when, or why, that stopped being the line. It manages this with one sentence: "In the second half of 1940, transformation of the imperialist war into an anti-fascist, people's war became increasingly apparent." The date is wrong and is wrong on purpose. The Communist International held that the war was an imperialist war until 22 June 1941. The American party's line changed when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and it changed within days. Backdating the transformation to "the second half of 1940" allows the reversal to be described as the gradual ripening of an objective process rather than as an instruction. The word "pact" does appear, in a single defensive paragraph — the Soviet Union, having been failed at Munich, "was left with no other alternative than to delay a confrontation with fascist Germany by concluding a nonaggression treaty with it." There is nothing about the secret additional protocol signed on the night of 23 August 1939, or about Poland, or about what the Comintern's sections were told to do with the line they had been carrying since 1935.

The point is not that the Soviet Union should have had no diplomacy. It is that a book about the American labour movement in 1939–41 which cannot name the day the American party changed sides on the central political question of those years has disqualified itself as a guide to those years.

The pledge

Chapter VI narrates the no-strike pledge fairly at the level of institutions — Hillman's memorandum of 24 November 1941, the December conference, the founding of the War Labor Board on 12 January 1942, the Combined Labor War Board. It even concedes the resistance:

However, it would be an oversimplification to say that all American workers were enthusiastic about making the sacrifices involved on the no-strike decision. There were those who did not agree with this decision and demanded that work be stopped if employers rejected union demands... Even in this militant union, where democratic traditions were always strong, the politically conscious workers and their leaders had to work hard to gain acceptance of the decision not to strike during wartime. Resolutions to that effect twice failed to pass at UAW conventions.

Read that again with the vocabulary of the book in mind. "The politically conscious workers and their leaders" is this book's standing phrase for the Communists and those around them. The sentence therefore says, without meaning to, exactly what the American Trotskyists said at the time: that the left in the UAW spent the war working to hold the ranks to a pledge the ranks did not want. What the book omits is everything that made the charge stick — the Communist-backed "incentive pay" proposal beaten at the October 1943 UAW convention, the Party's denunciation of the 1943 miners, the manoeuvres at the 1944 convention where a rank-and-file caucus took thirty-six per cent of the vote for outright repudiation of the pledge and was then out-procured. That last account was written up in Fourth International, vol. 5 no. 10, October 1944, by Art Preis, who described "the Addes-Frankensteen-Stalinist unpopular proposal to approve the speedup 'incentive pay' system" and the "shyster trick" by which reaffirmation was finally carried.

Art Preis is the one American Trotskyist this book acknowledges, and it does not know that it is doing so. In the historiography chapter it takes up Labor's Giant Step: Twenty Years of the CIO (New York, 1964), notes that Preis was "a long-time contributor to the weekly Militant, in which the first nine chapters of his book were published," and then explains: "The weekly was the mouthpiece of the Socialist Party, once influential in the American labor movement." It was not. The Militant was, and is, the paper of the Socialist Workers Party — the party of the eighteen Minneapolis defendants — and Preis was a member of it and its labour editor. The book goes on to say that his views were "formed under the influence of right-wing Socialists and avowed Trotskyites," which loses the affiliation a second time, and to complain that "primitively and slanderously he divides the CIO leaders into 'Stalinists' and their opponents."

Whether this is a translation slip or a deliberate laundering, the effect is one and the same. The book has picked up the single

most substantial history of the CIO written from the American revolutionary left, a book which devotes considerable space to the Minneapolis strikes and to the Smith Act prosecution — and has managed to review it without the word "Socialist Workers Party" appearing anywhere. Then the conclusion lists the standard-bearers of the American revolutionary tradition: "Eugene Debs, William Haywood, John Reed, Charles Ruthenberg, William Foster, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Eugene Dennis, Henry Winston and Gus Hall." Two of those men were still alive and running the Communist Party when the list was drawn up. None of the men who led the Minneapolis strikes is on it.

Browder, and the trouble with personal deviations

The book's account of the Browder crisis is its longest sustained piece of political history, and much of the detail is accurate: the Bridgeport speech of 12 December 1943, the January 1944 National Committee sessions, Browder's Madison Square Garden speech of 10 January, the dissolution of the Party into the Communist Political Association at the twelfth convention on 20 May 1944, Foster's isolation, the Duclos article in Cahiers du communisme in April 1945, its republication in the Daily Worker on 24 May, the reconstitution of the Party at the thirteenth convention in July, and Browder's expulsion in February 1946. It gives the membership loss: 63,044 in mid-1944, 52,824 by January 1946.

The frame around the detail is a fiction, and it is the standard one. Browder is a personal deviation — "Browder and his followers proved to be deserters of this kind," a right-opportunist faction analogous to Lovestone in 1927, whose "almost dictatorial behavior" stunned an unprepared membership, and against whom a healthy party eventually asserted itself with fraternal help from the French comrades. On this account the Party's wartime line was never in question; only Browder's postwar perspective was.

The contemporaneous answer to precisely this account was published in Fourth International, vol. 6 no. 7, July 1945, while the American party was still conducting the discussion. It makes two points that this book cannot. The first is that the Daily Worker had acclaimed the line before it reviled it: on 12 January 1944 the paper called Browder's programme "creative Marxism — unhampered by ritual mechanical orthodoxy — a free Marxist mind at work," and Browder himself, presenting it to the May 1944 convention, said it contained "no element of socialism in it." The convention gave him an ovation and endorsed it unanimously. The second is that Foster and Duclos

both approved the general line of Browder's wartime policy and confined their objection to the postwar forecast — that the American party's real turn had come in June 1941, "after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union," and that neither the critique of 1945 nor the reconstitution of 1946 touched it. Whatever one makes of the polemic, the documentary point stands on its own: a party that unanimously endorses a policy in May 1944 and unanimously condemns it as a betrayal fourteen months later has told you something about how its decisions were arrived at, and this book's chronology is arranged so that the reader will not notice.

Why the purge succeeded

Which returns us to the best chapter. Chapter VIII describes the expulsion of the CIO left with real force but cannot answer the question it raises. Eleven unions with over a million members, entrenched in electrical manufacturing, on the waterfront, in metal mining, in furs, were broken in about a year with very little resistance from the rest of the movement. The book's explanation is external — the cold war, the anti-Communist hysteria, the Taft-Hartley affidavits, a working class "disoriented" and standing "on the sidelines." All of that is true and none of it is sufficient.

The answer that the book cannot print was printed in Fourth International, vol. 10 no. 11, December 1949, in an editorial review of the Cleveland convention. It defends the expelled unions without reservation — the expulsions were a bureaucratic seizure of the CIO, the "thought-control" precedent would be turned next on anyone who fought the leadership on purely trade union grounds, and the National Maritime Union proved it within weeks. And then it says why the left had no defence:

The measure of Stalinist betrayal can be gauged from the direction of the attack against them at the CIO convention. It came from the left! The Stalinists were pilloried for their strikebreaking at Montgomery-Ward during the war, for their proposal for a permanent no-strike pledge, for the miserable agreements signed by UE, for lack of democracy in their unions, for serving the interests of the Soviet foreign office rather than the American workers.

And: "The Stalinists have been struck down with a weapon they themselves fashioned — slavish obedience to 'CIO policy.'" A movement that had spent a decade teaching that opposition to the leadership was disloyalty could not appeal to the right of opposition when the leadership turned on it. That is the causal link between Chapter VI and Chapter VIII of this

book, and it is the link the book is constructed to break.

One further silence deserves naming, because the book's record on Black workers is otherwise so much better than average. The hate strikes of 1943 and the Detroit riot of June 1943 — the largest violent event in American domestic life during the war, fought out in and around the war plants — are absent. The word "riot" is applied only to the 1960s.

How to read it

Take the research and discard the chronology. The chapters on wages, on the Little Steel formula, on the strike statistics, on Taft-Hartley, on the scientific and technological revolution and its effect on employment, on discrimination in hiring and in the unions, and above all on the CIO purge, are the work of historians who did the reading and went to the archives. The chapters that touch the Communist Party's own conduct — Chapters I, III and VI, and the historiography chapter — are the work of the same historians writing under a constraint they could not name, and should be read against the record.

The record is available. Art Preis, *Labor's Giant Step: Twenty Years of the CIO* (1964), is the book this volume attacks and misattributes, and it is where the American reader will find the Minneapolis strikes, the wartime revolt against the pledge and the Smith Act case set out at length by a participant. James P. Cannon's *The History of American Trotskyism* carries the 1934 strikes in the words of one of the people who directed them. The files of Fourth International between 1940 and 1956 run exactly parallel to this book's subject, month by month, and are cited above by volume, number and date; the Minneapolis indictment is printed in full in the issue for August 1941.

What this volume was for is not obscure. Somebody in Moscow at the end of the 1960s wanted a full-dress scholarly history of the American working class that would establish two things: that the United States was riven by class conflict its own historians would not describe, and that the Communist Party of the United States, whatever its misfortunes, had been the continuous revolutionary thread through all of it. The first proposition is largely true and the book proves it well. The second required removing a union, a strike, a prosecution and a party from the historical record, and it is in the removals — not in the arguments — that the book tells you most about the institution that commissioned it.

FICTION The Impatient Ones

A Soviet novel about the assassins of Alexander II that ends on the scaffold and draws no line to 1917. Trifonov at his most careful. With a new critical introduction.

Yuri Trifonov

Introduction to the 1978 Edition

This is a novel about people who killed a tsar, published by the state that descended from them, and it ends on a scaffold with nothing said about what any of it was for.

Andrei Zhelyabov is driven through the Petersburg streets to his execution. The crowd shouts; fists are waved; Mikhailov in the second cart strains against his straps and shouts something that the drums drown. Then a young woman perched on the pediment of a street lamp makes "a timid, welcoming gesture" and is pulled down at once; Zhelyabov catches a glimpse of her face and it vanishes, and "it looked as if she was being beaten." The carts come out into the square, the sky clears, and there rises from the earth "the smell of melting snow and puddles that had always gone to his head when he was a child". That is the last sentence of the book.

There is no forward look. No 1905, no 1917, no line drawn from this gallows to the Finland Station. A Soviet novel of 1978 about the People's Will ends with a man smelling the spring he remembers from childhood, on his way to be hanged, and stops.

Everything worth saying about this book follows from noticing that.

The structure is the argument

The Impatient Ones is built out of three kinds of writing, alternating.

There are twelve chapters of narrative, following the Executive Committee of Narodnaya Volya — the People's Will — from the split in Land and Freedom through the long hunt for Alexander II to the bombs on the Catherine Canal on 1 March 1881, the trial and the executions.

Between them are the Voices: first-person testimonies, set out as if transcribed, from people who knew the conspirators. P. P.

Semenyuta, who taught with Zhelyabov. M. F. Frolenko. A. I. Sitsyanko, described as a forgotten voice. M. P. Dragomanov, writing from Geneva. And — this is the one that matters — N. I. Rysakov.

And between those are five sections headed Clio—72, in which the muse of history speaks from the author's own present. Here is how she introduces herself:

Nothing but events, facts, names, years, minutes, hours, days, decades, centuries, millennia constantly disappearing in the eternal flux that I, Clio, observe, a flux that knows neither grief nor passion, that is neither slow nor swift, not devoid of meaning and yet without any goal, the flux in which all is ultimately submerged.

Read that again with an eye on the doctrine. History here is not devoid of meaning and yet without any goal. In 1978, in a book issued by the state publishing house for export, the muse of history announces that history has no goal. She then proceeds, in a flat administrative register, to recite what became of people: who was expelled from France, who married an Italian anarchist, who died where. The Clio sections are an obituary column. They do not point anywhere. That is their point.

The Voices do something equally awkward. They disagree with each other, they are self-serving, and they are given no adjudication. Most remarkably, Rysakov — who threw the first bomb, was caught, and informed on his comrades — is handed the first person and allowed to explain himself:

Why did I have to throw first? We had made no such agreement. It was a tragic misunderstanding. I, being the youngest, should have been standing in reserve, so to speak, as number three or four and carrying a bomb just in case, but Mikhailov got cold feet or perhaps he played a trick on us, and the numbers got mixed up, that was how it happened.

A Soviet historical novel about heroic revolutionaries gives the

informer a voice and lets him blame the scheduling. Nobody corrects him. The reader is left to weigh a man's excuse for himself, which is what the reader would have to do in life.

Put the three devices together and you have a novel that systematically declines to close. It refuses the summary, refuses the verdict, refuses the arrow from 1881 to 1917. Trifonov has built into the form of the book the one thing the official account of the revolutionary tradition could not tolerate: an open ending.

Why that matters, and what the tradition actually thinks

Let us be clear about the politics, because a reader coming to this from the left may expect a celebration and will not find one, and a reader coming from the right may expect an apology for terrorism and will not find that either.

The Marxist position on the tactic these people adopted has been settled and public for over a century, and it is not admiring. Writing in 1909, in the wreckage of the Azef affair — the discovery that the head of the Socialist Revolutionaries' terrorist organisation had been a police agent throughout — Trotsky summed it up in an essay whose title is its argument: "The Bankruptcy of Individual Terrorism". His case was not moral squeamishness. It was that the individual bomb substitutes the hero for the class, teaches the masses to wait for a deliverer, and leaves the machinery of the state untouched while wrecking the organisation that threw it. Azef was the proof: a conspiracy small enough to be heroic is small enough to be bought.

And yet the same tradition claimed these people as ancestors, unembarrassed. Speaking in December 1925 on the twentieth anniversary of the first revolution, Trotsky drew the line of descent explicitly — "Without Radishchev there would not have been Pestel. Without Pestel, no Zhelyabov. Without Zhelyabov we would not have had Alexander Ul'yanov. And without Alexander there would not have been Vladimir" — and concluded: "In Leninism live the Decembrists, the teachers of the 1860s, the Populists and the People's Will."

And here is the thing that makes this novel better than its reputation: it contains the objection, spoken aloud, by a character. Arguing with Zhelyabov about whether to kill, Ivan puts to him the precise difficulty — not a moral one, a social one:

"Blood is a serious business. You're from peasant stock,

you know what they'll say, 'The gentry's begun shooting 'mongst 'emselves!' At best they'll just be indifferent..."

That is Trotsky's case, in dialogue, in a Soviet novel of 1978. The peasants will read the killing of the tsar as a quarrel among gentlemen and will not stir. And it is aimed at Zhelyabov specifically because of who he is — the son of a serf among the children of the gentry, the one member of the Executive Committee who might have known what the villages would actually think.

Trifonov builds the whole book on that contrast and does not resolve it either. Awaiting trial, Zhelyabov looks round at his co-defendants and thinks: "What scoundrels, what bandits! They had been driven by a sense of duty. They yearned to give the people what they owed them, what their parents, their remote ancestors owed them." Sofya Perovskaya is the daughter of a former Governor-General of St Petersburg whose family descends from Count Alexei Razumovsky; Kolya Morozov is a wealthy Yaroslavl landowner's son. These are people discharging an inherited debt to a class they do not belong to, and the novel knows it.

Both things at once, then: the tactic was bankrupt, and the people who practised it are ours. This series has had occasion to make the same point before, introducing Fyodorov's collection on the Decembrists, and the distinction that mattered there matters here. It is not whether the genealogy is drawn — everyone draws it — but whether it is drawn open or closed. Trotsky's chain is a record of heroic insufficiencies, each one defeated, each one paid for, each redeemed only by what came after and never by itself. The official Soviet version is a ramp: every stage a step up, the whole sequence graded by its arrival at a finished state, the argument concluded by a monument.

Trifonov's novel is on the open side of that line, and it gets there by sheer refusal. He will not say what Zhelyabov was for. He gives you the man, the impatience — "to give history a push", as they said of themselves — the tremendous courage, the amateurishness, the informer, the rope, and the smell of melting snow. Then he stops.

One more thing the novel does that its packaging cannot. It opens not on a character but on a diagnosis:

By the end of the seventies it was quite obvious to those who were living at the time that Russia was sick. The only debatable points were what the sickness was and how it could be cured.

That is the frame of the entire book: not here is what they did

but here is an argument nobody had settled. Trifonov then spends twelve chapters, five documentary interludes and five appearances by a goal-less muse declining to settle it.

The apparatus, and one particular silence

The volume carries an introduction by A. Svobodin, and it is an intelligent piece of criticism. Svobodin is good on Trifonov's subject, which he identifies correctly as time — "its passage through each of us" — and good on the quality of attention that makes the novel work: Trifonov "avoids anything that cannot be thoroughly documented, he dislikes romantic colours and is deliberately unemotional."

He is also good, up to a point, on where the book comes from. "Trifonov comes from a family of revolutionaries," he writes, "revolutionaries of a generation that was a concentrated charge of historical energy. His father entered the struggle in the 1900s, he was one of those who were later to be called the Lenin Guard." He tells us about Trifonov's documentary book on his father, *Reflection from a Fire* (1966), and praises it justly as "one of the finest and most highly emotional books ever written about the revolution and Civil War in Russia". He describes it as reconstructing the father's biography "from the beginning of his conscious life to the end of the Civil War."

To the end of the Civil War. That is where the introduction leaves Valentin Trifonov, and it is not where his life left him. He was arrested in the Terror and shot. The generation Svobodin calls "a concentrated charge of historical energy", the men who "had the feeling, which we can only envy, that they were seeing history in the making" — that generation was destroyed, in very large part, by the state that later commissioned introductions about it.

This is not an inference about Trifonov's private grief. It is the declared subject of his work. His unfinished novel *The Disappearance*, published after his death, is about precisely this: the repression in the thirties of the men who had made 1917. Roy Medvedev, writing the standard history of the Terror, drew on Valentin Trifonov's papers from his son's personal archive, and quotes his letters from the Civil War fronts — including, as it happens, a furious complaint about Trotsky's conduct of the Southern Front, which is worth recording here rather than quietly dropping, since this introduction is written from the tradition Trifonov senior was rude about. The father was a real man with real opinions, not a symbol, and the opinion is worth quoting at its full length rather than trimmed to an insult:

The Southern Front is Trotsky's "favored child," and flesh of the flesh ... of this extremely untalented organizer. It was not Trotsky who built the army but we, the rank and file army workers. Wherever Trotsky has tried to work, the most tremendous confusion has immediately arisen. There is no place for a muddle head in an organism that must operate precisely and efficiently, and the military machine is such an organism.

That is not factional abuse; it is a line commander's complaint about resource allocation and command competence, written from a front that was not the favoured one, and this series has no interest in suppressing it. Valentin Trifonov was killed by the faction he had sided with.

So: a novel about revolutionaries destroyed by the state they fought, written by the son of a revolutionary destroyed by the state he built, introduced by a critic who follows the father to 1921 and then changes the subject. The silence is not Svobodin's alone and there is no point being sanctimonious about it — he wrote what could be printed in 1978, and what he did print, about time and about documentation, is true and useful. But the shape of the omission tells you exactly what the apparatus was for. It could praise the Lenin Guard. It could not say what happened to them.

Was the state consistent?

Put the question this series puts to every volume: can the category the book celebrates ever be turned homeward?

The People's Will are honoured here for conspiring against an autocracy — for the illegal press, the false passports, the safe houses, the refusal to accept that the existing order was permanent. Every one of those activities was a serious criminal offence in the Soviet Union of 1978, and the apparatus that prosecuted them was a direct institutional descendant of the one that hanged Zhelyabov. The novel is published in the year that Soviet dissidents were being tried under Article 70. Its heroes are people who would have been, in the state that honoured them, defendants.

Trifonov cannot say this, and does not try to. What he does instead is more interesting than an aesopian wink. He removes the machinery by which the comparison would be forbidden. A closed genealogy protects the present: if the line runs from Zhelyabov to 1917 and stops in triumph, then the revolutionaries are safely historical and their methods safely superseded. Trifonov's *Clio* has no goal and his novel has no terminus, and a history without a terminus cannot certify

anybody. Once the arrow is gone, the reader is free to ask what this story has to do with now, and the book neither prompts the question nor prevents it.

That is as far as a novel could go, and it is further than most went.

What is living

Not the tactic. Trotsky was right in 1909 and the century since has not produced a counter-example; the bomb has never once delivered what its throwers promised, and the organisations that relied on it have been penetrated, as Azef penetrated the SRs, with a regularity that looks less like bad luck than like a property of the method.

What is living is the seriousness with which Trifonov treats the question of impatience, which is the book's real title and subject. These are people who could see what needed to happen and could not wait for the conditions under which it could happen. That is not a nineteenth-century problem. It recurs wherever a small number of people see clearly and the many are not yet moving, and the temptation it produces — to substitute one's own resolve for the movement that does not yet exist — is permanent. Trifonov neither condemns it nor excuses it. He shows what it is like from inside, which is the one thing a political argument cannot do and a novel can.

And what is living, finally, is the book's refusal to tell you what it means. That refusal was a political act in 1978, performed by a man who had particular reason to distrust histories that arrive at monuments. Read it for Zhelyabov, and for Rysakov, who is harder. Read it above all for Clio, who observes the flux, declines to find a goal in it, and goes on reciting what became of people.

FICTION

People of the Marsh

A Belarusian village sealed in by bog for half the year, and what collectivisation looked like from inside it. Book one of A Polesye Chronicle. With a new critical introduction.

Ivan Melezh

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

The village in this novel stands on an island, and the sea around it is mud.

The houses stood on an island, not immediately recognisable as such, for there were no sea-waves, not even the ripples of a lake, washing against its shores: it was surrounded by a wilderness of slimy tussocks and the rustling of eternally sodden forests.

For most of the year Kureni cannot be reached. A letter arrives in the bag of a chance traveller, because nobody would cross that bog without a pressing reason, and a long fall of rain is enough to cut even that. In autumn and winter the village is sealed for months, and Melezh gives you the sensation exactly: the people live "as though on a raft that dirty weather had torn from its moorings and carried out to sea, waiting for the wind to change and bring them back to land."

Then the sun comes up over the Teremossky Forest, smoke rises, milk zings into buckets, and a sleepy boy walks down the empty street leaving dark prints in the dew, cracking a whip woven from string and shouting hoarsely, "Cows! Send out your cows!" The gates open, the cows come out "self-important as a court procession", and at the last yard a slim dark girl drives out a brown cow with a white patch and goes quickly back to the house.

That is the first page, and everything the book will spend five hundred more pages on is on it. The girl is Hanna Chernushka. The boy with the whip is the writer himself, the child who rose before dawn to herd swine in the village of Glinischi in the Khoiniki district, two rows of houses in what he called "a boundless sea of marshland and forest."

The edition

Three dates govern this volume. Ivan Melezh finished *People of the Marsh* in the autumn of 1961, writing in Belarusian; it is

the first novel of *A Polesye Chronicle*, whose second part, *A Breath of Thunder*, followed in 1965. The two together won the Lenin Prize in 1972. Natalie Ward's English translation, the first of any part of the *Chronicle*, was made for Progress and published in this 1979 printing in the Progress Soviet Authors Library, with illustrations by Georgy Poplavsky. Melezh had died three years before it appeared, in 1976, leaving the *Chronicle's* third volume unfinished; it was assembled from his manuscripts and published posthumously in 1978. No further part reached English in this series.

Ward's translation deserves more than a credit line. She keeps the Belarusian shapes of the names, which a Russian-mediated version would have smoothed away: Hanna and not Anna, Evhim, Mikanor, Vasil Dyatel, Kureni, Oleshniki. And she finds an English habit for a Belarusian conversational filler and lets it run: "it's no secret" occurs thirty-five times, settling into Mikanor's mouth in particular, and it is the last thing said in the book. It should be irritating and it is not. It does what a peasant tag ought to do, which is to make a claim sound like common knowledge whether or not it is.

What the novel is about, which is a strip of land

There are no heroic deeds in *People of the Marsh*. The commissioned foreword says so approvingly and it is true. What there is instead is a land redivision, and a young man who wants a particular field.

The Soviet authorities have decreed a reallocation of the strips around Kureni, taking from those with too much and adding to those with too little. Vasil Dyatel is to be one of the gainers. He has already chosen his field, in his head, long before anyone else thought of it. Melezh writes his longing for it with no irony at all and no contempt:

He stood there happily for a while: the land was free, no-one had taken it! He could take it and become its owner, its lord and master. Here, alone in the field and the darkness, alone with his boundless dreams...

For a moment, standing in the wet grass in the dark, he stops distinguishing between what is possible and what has happened, and owns the field. Then the cold gets into him and the joy goes "in a moment, leaving no trace," and he walks home feeling as though he had been shown a treasure so that people could laugh at him and take it back. That is Vasil for the whole novel: a boy whose capacity for hope is entirely bound up in a piece of ground, and who is therefore permanently afraid.

What happens to the redivision is the most interesting thing in the book, and the foreword does not describe it. An armed band under a man named Maslak, sent in from across the Polish border, comes to break the reallocation up. Vasil, with a shotgun at his chest, shows them the way. Afterwards he is taken in and questioned, and a security man named Harchev works him over on exactly the point that matters: wasn't it you who showed Maslak's men the way when they came to break it up? Vasil has no answer. He is, at this moment, one signature away from being an accomplice of an anti-Soviet band, which in the decade that followed would have been the end of him.

What saves him is a sentence from Apeika, the head of the district:

*"You're not a bandit!" repeated Apeika in a harsher tone.
"You're just a coward!"*

Melezh notes that neither the words nor the contempt in them offended Vasil, who looked up "no longer guarded, but hopeful". The reader understands why. A coward can be let go. A bandit cannot. Apeika has just refused to make an enemy out of a frightened man, and the refusal is an act of political judgement, delivered as an insult because that is the only register in which Vasil can receive it.

Vasil, being Vasil, is furious about it afterwards, and his fury is the second-best thing in the novel:

"I'd like to see you with a shotgun in your chest, see what you'd have to say for yourself then! Here in town, in your offices, nicely protected by your militiamen, you're all heroes out here!"

And the redivision fails. Zubrich, a "special delegate from the District Committee" whose kindly smile the old rich peasant Glushak distrusts on sight, uses Vasil's having taken the law into his own hands as the reason to stop the whole business; and when the causeway is finally finished and the villagers have their road, Vasil looks around and says what the novel has been building towards:

"But Korch is still occupying the best land, just as he always did!"

"Why are you so obsessed with that land of his?" retorted Honya.

"Why? Because he's settled like a fat turnip on the best land, and there's no getting him off it! And he doesn't give a damn for reallocation of the fields! There's no touching him! The Soviet authorities themselves are all on his side!"

Mikanor denies it, and the denial is thin, because the facts are Vasil's. A Soviet novel published in 1961, set around 1926, ends with the village's rich peasant on the best strip, the redivision abandoned, and a poor peasant saying that the state is on the rich man's side. That is not a concession wrung out of the book. It is the plot.

The two roads, and the one collective farm in the novel

Against that, Melezh sets what is actually working, and it is worth being precise about what he shows, because the whole argument of this introduction turns on it.

Mikanor, the young activist of Kureni, asks his district chief for permission to apply pressure. Apeika refuses:

"Only if we need to give someone a bit of a scare, put some pressure on them."

"You try to get them going by playing on their sense of responsibility, not by force. Organise some activists to help. Choose a group of sensible, honest people, and talk it all over. Raise them up above the level of the marsh and show them what's going on all around and what's ahead!"

Mikanor says he has tried, and that the villagers are impervious, ignorant. Apeika answers: "We're all ignorant until we learn to see. We must work with them patiently, believing in them, with love! As Lenin taught. Don't lose heart right at the beginning: there's years of work ahead of you here." The same conversation produces spades and axes sent to Kureni by the workers of Rechitsa: the alliance of town and country arriving as a gift of tools rather than a grain quota.

And in the neighbouring village of Oleshniki it is bearing fruit. Gailis reels off the news: Machinery Leagues at Oleshniki and Glinischi, a Milking League as well, a club open every evening with a library and "evening classes in agronomy, atheism and drama", a Yanka Kupala comedy taken on tour to two other

villages. His one complaint about Kureni is that "half your villagers haven't even joined the co-operative!"

That is the co-operative road: voluntary, slow, materially useful, and visibly succeeding. It is what the peasantry of the marsh is being offered in this book, and Melezh makes it attractive.

Now the other thing. The words "collective farm" appear exactly once in five hundred pages. They are painted on a notice nailed to a canvas stall at a fair, over a hand-shake and the slogan "The unification of town and country!" The stall is selling meat, and a slim young lad in a white overall is weighing it out; the peasants stop and stare, and Larivon says, "Like a doctor!" The collective farm enters People of the Marsh as an advertisement. It is a sign at a market, glimpsed by villagers from an island, and it is the last they see of it.

The word "collectivisation" does not appear in this book at all. Neither does "kolkhoz". "Kulak" occurs twice, once as a taunt thrown at a rich man's child and once in the phrase "the hated kulak class", spoken at Evhim by a man whose meaning he cannot follow: "The longer Evhim listened, the less he understood." Stalin's name does not occur once, in the novel or in its apparatus.

This is a novel that stops on the threshold. It was designed to: the Chronicle was to carry these people forward volume by volume, as the jacket says, "right down to the present day". Melezh got as far as the eve of the thing, and then spent the last eleven years of his life on the volume that would have had to describe it, and died without finishing it. Whatever else is true, the collectivisation of Polesye is the book Ivan Melezh did not write.

The apparatus

Which brings us to the eight pages at the front of this volume, signed Grant Martirosyan.

It is 2,542 words long. In it, the word "collectivisation" does not appear. Nor does "kulak". Nor, in a foreword to a Soviet novel that quotes Lenin in its own text, does the name Lenin. The word "class" occurs twice, and one of those is "Russian classics". Political class, in a foreword to a novel about the differentiation of the peasantry, is named once.

Here is where it is named:

Vasil's cowardice at a decisive moment (in one of the

episodes depicting class clashes in the village) links the characters' lives closely with the political situation of the time.

The politics of the novel is inside the brackets. And the sentence commits a second, quieter theft. Apeika says "coward" as a reprieve; it is the word that keeps Vasil out of the hands of the men who would rather have had a bandit. Martirosyan lifts the word out of Apeika's mouth, drops the gun and the interrogation and the band from Poland, and re-files it as a defect in Vasil's character. The foreword's reader learns that the young man was a coward at a decisive moment. He does not learn what the moment was.

Everything else in the foreword is displacement, and it is skilfully done. Polesye is evoked at length. Melezh's childhood, his wound, his first story in a Buguruslan newspaper in September 1943, his philology degree, his work in the Party apparatus and on the journal Flame — all of that is there. The novel is praised for its "ethnographer's exactitude and the artist's fire", which is fair, and for the fair-scene's "bright colours, noise and motley crowds", which is also fair. The village "gradually sloughs off its centuries-old shackles after the breath of fresh air that was the October Revolution." The period is "the '20s and '30s, when Byelorussia along with the rest of the country witnessed such unprecedented social changes."

Unprecedented social changes. Read that again with the dates in it. A foreword written for a 1979 English edition describes the Belarusian countryside of the 1920s and 1930s in a phrase that would serve equally for the building of a causeway and for the deportation of a class.

The jacket completes the job by inverting the book:

These were years of change for the villages of Byelorussia. A new life came to Polesye, where the peasants had always been destitute, and the old life was forced to retreat, unwilling and resisting change with all its might.

In the novel the old life does not retreat. Korch keeps the best strip, the redivision is called off by the man from the district, and the causeway, which is a real achievement, is a road across a bog. The blurb describes the volume Melezh did not live to write, and attaches it to the one he did.

The series, and what a Belarusian chronicle is

The rear flap of this printing carries the Progress Soviet

Authors Library's own account of itself. Launched in 1973, it aims "to give the foreign reader a comprehensive picture of Soviet literature in its many forms", and it is "a living chronicle of the life of the various nationalities of the Soviet Union, their past and their present."

Two things follow. The first is on the same flap. The 1979 list includes Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*. In one year, in one series, the house issued Melezh's novel, which reaches the edge of collectivisation and declines to cross it, and Sholokhov's, which crosses it and supplies the authorised version: the dekulakisation as drama, Davydov and Nagulnov, the liquidation of a class rendered as a plot with a resolution. The series did not need Martirosyan to answer the question *People of the Marsh* refuses to ask. It had already commissioned the answer and shelved it alongside. (Sholokhov's novel is not among the titles reissued here; no unrestricted scan of the Progress English text exists. The reader who wants the official version of what happened next to villages like Kureni will have to find it elsewhere, and should know that is what they are reading.)

The second follows from the phrase "living chronicle" applied to Belarus. Melezh enrolled at the Belarusian University in October 1943, returned with it to liberated Minsk in 1944, and from 1945 lectured there in Belarusian literature. On the night of 29–30 October 1937, in Minsk, over a hundred members of the Belarusian intelligentsia had been shot, at least twenty of them writers; through the 1930s some thirty members of the republic's Academy of Sciences were repressed; and in 1933 the written language itself had been reformed by decree to bring it closer to Russian. The literature the young lecturer was appointed to teach had had its previous generation killed eight years earlier and its orthography rewritten by administrative order. Martirosyan's account of Melezh's formation records the wound, the newspaper, the degree, the Party apparatus, the journal — and passes over that in complete silence. The chronicle is living. Someone had to arrange for it to be so short.

Melezh himself, without recruitment

None of which makes Melezh a dissident, and this introduction is not going to pretend he was one.

He worked in the Party apparatus after the war. He took the Lenin Prize. His novel's most likeable character, Gailis, a lame Latvian with a child's blue eyes and a soft accent that the village laughs at, is admired by the young activist because he is "the amazing Latvian who had taken Kronstadt after the

mutiny and seen Lenin close too." That is how the sentence stands in the book: the suppression of Kronstadt as a credential, the sailors' rising as a mutiny, the whole thing worn lightly by the gentlest man in the village. Readers of this series will know what we think of that, and it is better to print the sentence than to walk around it. Melezh wrote inside the given account of the revolution, and where that account was a lie he did not know it was one.

What he did was narrower and harder. He rendered a poor peasant's hunger for a strip of land from the inside, without contempt, at a length that makes it impossible to dismiss; and having done so, he made it the thing that destroys the man. Vasil loses Hanna because he takes the marriage that secures the field. The novel's last exchange is Mikanor telling him what a girl she was, Vasil losing his temper — "All right, I let her go! What is it to you?" — and Mikanor, embarrassed, offering the only comfort available: "Never mind, perhaps that's not the end of it! Anything can happen, it's no secret!"

That is where a five-hundred-page novel of the revolutionary countryside ends: two young men on a finished causeway, talking about a girl, with the rich peasant still on the best land. Socialist realism required a positive hero and a resolution that pointed forward. Melezh delivered a district secretary who counsels patience, an activist who is refused permission to bully, and an ending with nothing settled at all. Whatever the doctrine demanded, it did not get it here.

And there is one more thing, which is the whole reason this novel belongs in a series with critical introductions rather than a series without them. The position Melezh gives his most authoritative character is the pre-1929 position. Voluntary co-operation, material aid from the towns, machinery, literacy, years of patient work, and an explicit refusal of force: "not by force", "as Lenin taught". That was the common ground of Soviet agrarian policy before the turn, and the argument of the 1920s — the argument the Left Opposition fought and lost — was about how to industrialise fast enough to make that road real, by taxing the strong peasant and building the industry that could supply the village, rather than by leaning on the strong peasant as Bukharin proposed or by smashing the whole peasantry as was done in 1929. Nobody in *People of the Marsh* says any of that; Melezh had no access to it. But he wrote a novel in which the coercive road is asked for by a young activist and refused by his superior, and in which the co-operative road is shown working in the next village, and he published it in 1961 in the one window when such a book could appear.

Read the foreword's "unprecedented social changes" against Apeika's "years of work ahead of you here", and the distance between them is the history of the Soviet countryside.

Afterward

Melezh dedicated the novel "To my father, my mother and my country," and said of it: "This book is about my native land as it was fifty years ago. Now much has changed, the marsh, the fields and the people... But even if today we are sending ships into space, the roots of what we are now and what we know go back a long way."

Seven years after this printing, on 26 April 1986, the reactor at Chernobyl went up eighty kilometres from Glinischi. The first evacuations from the Khoyniki district began on 4 May; by September, 24,700 people had been removed from 108 settlements in that district alone. Part of Melezh's Polesye is now inside the Polesie State Radioecological Reserve, which is to say that the marsh, the forests and the sandy fields between them have been closed to the people who lived there.

The novel was written to repay a filial debt to a place. It is worth saying plainly that the place is gone, and that it was not the marsh that took it.