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ANTI-IMPERIALISM

USA: Imperialists and Anti-Imperialists

The American argument over empire after 1898, researched in the Library of Congress, the Gompers and Moorfield Storey papers and the socialist press - and arguing by name with LaFeber, Williams and Pratt.

Igor Petrovich Dementyev

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

I. Dementyev's The USA: Imperialists and Anti-Imperialists is a book about the Great Debate — the argument that broke out in the United States after 1898 over whether a republic founded against empire could itself become one. Its spine says Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979, and David Skvirsky's English translation is of that year. But the book itself is older than the jacket. Its footnotes run out in 1972 — the latest works it cites are Philip Foner's *The Spanish-Cuban-American War* and Daniel Schirmer's *Republic or Empire*, both New York, 1972, and Herbert Aptheker's survey of the literature in *Political Affairs* of October 1972. The only later date anywhere in it is in the Foreword, which quotes Leonid Brezhnev's speech to the 1975 Helsinki conference. So what we are reading is a scholarly monograph of the early 1970s — a product of the Vietnam years and of the high tide of détente — carried into English at the end of the decade, with a foreword updated to the diplomacy of the moment. That gap between the manuscript and the imprint is the first thing to hold, and the last line of this introduction will explain why.

The author is worth knowing. Ilya Dementyev was a historian of American historiography at Moscow State University — a specialist not in slogans but in how American scholars had written the history of their own expansion. It shows. This is one of the genuinely researched volumes in the Progress catalogue, and a reader who has learned to expect a pamphlet with a Lenin epigraph will be surprised by it. Dementyev worked from the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Ministry — the dispatches Tsarist envoys sent home from Washington in the 1890s — and from manuscript collections in the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library and the Wisconsin State Historical Society: the Gompers papers, the papers of the anti-imperialist Moorfield Storey, the records of the Social Democratic Party. He read an enormous run of the American labour and socialist press of 1897–1903 in the original. And he read the American historians — Walter LaFeber, William Appleman Williams, David Healy, Julius

Pratt, E. Berkeley Tompkins — and argued with them by name and by page. Whatever else this book is, it is not characterisation from a distance. On the test this series applies hardest — does the author quote the people he judges, or only paraphrase them? — Dementyev passes cleanly. He convicts American imperialism largely out of American mouths.

And the imperialism is real. The book's opening chapters document, soberly and with the receipts, the turn of United States capitalism toward expansion at the close of the nineteenth century. The manufacturers' associations that wanted foreign markets and said so: the National Association of Manufacturers, founded in 1895, whose president told its 1897 convention that "many of our manufacturers have outgrown or are outgrowing their home markets and the expansion of our foreign trade is their only promise of relief." The politicians who put it more brutally — Senator William P. Frye of Maine, on the China trade: "We must have the market ... or we shall have a revolution." Theodore Roosevelt in 1896, contemplating domestic unrest and writing that the sentiment then "animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed, as the Commune in Paris was suppressed, by taking ten or a dozen of their leaders out" and shooting them dead. The "splendid little war" of 1898 — the phrase is Secretary of State John Hay's, and Dementyev is right to fasten on it — and the annexations that followed in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines. The book traces, chapter by chapter, the intellectual machinery built to justify all this: the doctrine of Anglo-Saxon superiority, Josiah Strong's providential Manifest Destiny, Alfred Thayer Mahan's cult of sea power, and the "white man's burden" racism that dressed conquest as uplift — Truxtun Beale and John Proctor in *The Forum*, arguing that "the black and yellow races" were fated "to have their countries parcelled out and administered by efficient races." None of this is invented, and much of it is not even contested. A reader wanting a documented account of how the American ruling class talked itself into empire will find one here, sourced to materials most English-language readers will never see. The chapter on the press is particularly good: Dementyev shows in detail how the Hearst and Pulitzer

"yellow" papers manufactured the war fever of 1898, and he is careful to add, on the authority of the American historian G. W. Auxier, that the sober provincial papers of the mid-West did their quieter share too, by the "unceasing stress on the USA's economic and strategic interests in the Caribbean." He traces the turn from the "classical" British and French colonialism of formal possession toward the American preference for "dollar expansion" — economic control without the flag — across Latin America and the Far East, and he is right that this was the shape United States power would take for the century to come. On the substance of the American record he is a reliable guide.

The other half of the book is its real distinction, and the reason it is worth reprinting. Dementyev takes the American anti-imperialists seriously — more seriously, in some ways, than the American academy of his day did. The Anti-Imperialist League, founded in 1898 against the annexation of the Philippines, is not treated as a footnote of genteel hand-wringing but as "an impressive action against imperialist colonial seizures." He restores the writers: Mark Twain, whose *Following the Equator* stripped the word "civilisation" off colonial plunder and who counted, among the "many humorous things in the world," "the white man's notion that he is less savage than the other savages"; William Dean Howells; the realists and the poets who signed the protests. He gives a full chapter to the workers' organisations and another to the socialists, and his verdict there is unambiguous and, on the evidence, correct: "During the Spanish-American War no political group in the USA was more consistently and uncompromisingly against war and expansion than the Socialists." He credits the Black anti-imperialists, whose experience of racial oppression made the "civilising mission" ring false, and he notes the short-lived National Black Anti-Imperialist League of 1899. This is genuine recovery work. The heritage it recovers — the American tradition of opposition to war and conquest, running from the abolitionists through Twain to the muckrakers and, the book insists, "carried on by broad sections of American society today" — is a real one, and the volume is a serious contribution to knowing it.

It is also honest about that tradition's limits, in a way that reads as scholarship rather than dismissal. Dementyev sees the "petty-bourgeois narrowness" of the League: its leaders wanted to save the republic from the odium of colonies, not to change the system that produced them, and so "the entire question of imperialist policy was often narrowed down to criticism solely of direct colonial expansion." He sees that the socialists' own sectarianism — their contempt for the mass

anti-monopoly movements, their belief that the trusts were simply building socialism for them — "doomed the Socialists to isolation" and kept their anti-war stand from becoming an organising force. These are the judgments of a historian who has read the sources and weighed them, not of a functionary filling a template. Where this book does research, believe it.

The clearest measure of the book's seriousness is its final chapter, a full survey of how American historians had written the Great Debate — and it is here, incidentally, that the volume gives away the constraint it works under. Dementyev moves through the schools with real command: the neo-liberal "psychological" historians (Hofstadter, Schlesinger) who explained the war of 1898 as a fit of mass emotion and treated colonial expansion as a "long since rectified mistake" of national youth; the Filipino historian Maria Lanza, who first reconstructed the Anti-Imperialist League from the archives in the 1930s; Robert Beisner's *Twelve Against Empire*; E. Berkeley Tompkins; Schirmer's *Republic or Empire*, which he rates the most thorough of all. He engages the New Left carefully and critically — LaFeber's *The New Empire*, he says, "convincingly continued the destruction" of the dogma that big business had no hand in the war, while William Appleman Williams over-reached by casting the farmers as empire's leading force — and he is candid that these radical American scholars, "although many of them were familiar with the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin," worked from a method "essentially far from being Marxist." This is a historian arguing inside a living, contested literature. And that is precisely the thing that has no counterpart on his own side. Dementyev could survey a whole shelf of American books re-opening the question of American empire, because in the United States that argument was permitted, published and fought out. No comparable open historiography of Soviet expansion — into the Baltic, into Eastern Europe, into the borderlands — existed for him to survey or to write. The freedom of the American academy to prosecute its own state is the raw material of his thirteenth chapter, and the absence of that freedom at home is the reason the same chapter could never have been written about Moscow.

So the difficulty is not that the book lies about the United States. Mostly it does not. The difficulty is the shape of the searchlight. The category that organises the whole volume — imperialism as great-power expansion, as the export of capital in search of markets and cheap labour, as intervention, annexation and the installation of pliant regimes — is wired to point in exactly one direction. It illuminates Manila and Havana and the dollar diplomacy of the Caribbean, and it cannot be turned to illuminate the state that is holding it. This

is not an accusation Dementyev would have understood as fair, because for most of his book it genuinely is not applicable: a monograph on the American press of 1898 has no natural occasion to discuss the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, and to fault it for that silence would be to invent a finding out of chronology. The reflexive test bites only where the book itself reaches for the present — and it does reach.

It reaches first through its interpretive lineage. The socialists of 1900 are read, throughout, through William Z. Foster's *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York, 1952), which supplies the book's framework for judging where the old Socialist Labor Party and Social-Democratic Party went right and wrong. The living historians Dementyev leans on and praises — Aptheker, Philip Foner, William Pomeroy — are the scholars of the American Communist Party and its orbit. There is nothing dishonest in this; they did real work, and Foner's labour history is indispensable. But it means the American anti-imperialist heritage the book credits is filtered through the one American tradition aligned with Moscow, and the filtering is invisible on the page. The anti-imperialists who counted, in the end, are the forerunners of the party that would carry the line. The point is easier to see by its shadow. This series' companion volume on *The US Two-Party System* was found doing the same thing at close range — applying to every American party the analysis of class management that it exempted, alone, from its own tradition's American party. Here the operation runs backward into history: a whole national tradition of dissent is honoured, and quietly organised so that its true heir is the Communist Party of the United States.

It reaches, second and decisively, through the Foreword and the Conclusion, which are where the book speaks in the present tense. The Foreword frames the entire historical study as ammunition for a contemporary argument: the Vietnam-era peace movement has revived interest in "American democratic traditions," and the scholarship that follows is offered to that movement. And it grounds itself, as such books did, on the authority of Soviet foreign policy. Brezhnev is quoted from Helsinki, in 1975, calling it "very important to proclaim correct and just principles of relations among nations," and no less important "to see that these principles are firmly rooted in present-day international relations, are put to practical use and made the law of international life not to be breached by anyone." The sentence is offered without irony, as the standard against which American conduct is to be judged.

Hold that sentence against the date on the spine. This English edition appeared in 1979. In December 1979 — the very year of its publication — the Soviet Union sent the 40th Army

across the Amu Darya into Afghanistan, stormed the palace of a head of government it had itself installed, killed him, and replaced him with a client flown in for the purpose. It did in Kabul, in the month this book was reaching English shelves, the thing the book spends three hundred pages condemning in Manila: the armed imposition of a great power's will on a smaller nation, the manufacture of a compliant regime, the substitution of an occupying army for a people's own politics. The category of imperialism that Dementyev built so carefully out of the American record — intervention, client government, the metropole's soldiers in another country's capital — described, within months, the conduct of the state that printed his book and quoted its General Secretary on principles "not to be breached by anyone." The searchlight could reach 1898 and 1975. It could not be turned four hundred miles south of the Soviet border, in the year of its own publication. That is not a flaw in Dementyev's archival work, which stands. It is the boundary the whole enterprise was built not to cross, and no volume in this catalogue sits closer to it in time.

The reply this series points to is not a hostile one, and it does not require pretending the American crimes were smaller than Dementyev says. The Fourth International drew its own analysis of United States imperialism from the same root Dementyev drew his — Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, which the book quotes throughout — and it spent those same years, 1979 and 1980, prosecuting American power without pause. The issues of *Intercontinental Press* that carried the news from Afghanistan carried, in the same weeks, the defence of the Nicaraguan revolution, the exposure of Washington's threats against revolutionary Iran, and the tracking of imperialism's hand in Zimbabwe. On the crimes of the United States the two traditions largely agree, and an introduction that pretended otherwise would be doing tribalism rather than criticism.

What separates them is the second half of the sentence — the half Dementyev's frame cannot write. The Fourth International turned the category of great-power domination on Moscow as readily as on Washington, and the clearest proof is what it did with Afghanistan while Dementyev's book was still new. The response was not simple, and it should not be flattened. The majority of the movement's United Secretariat, in its declaration of early 1980, refused the Kremlin any political cover: the Trotskyists, it wrote, "do not give the slightest political support to this intervention, which flows from the overall policy of the bureaucratic caste," even while noting that the intervention happened to deal blows to the reactionary mujahideen. A minority went further and called, without hesitation, "for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops,"

on the ground that a foreign army "far from aiding the struggle against pro-imperialist forces in Afghanistan" could "only hinder it." The two wings disagreed sharply on what to demand — the majority declined to raise the call for withdrawal, reasoning that the invasion, whatever its bureaucratic motives, was for the moment striking the landlords and the clerical reaction; the minority answered that no lasting gain could be built on foreign bayonets. The disagreement is worth stating in full rather than smoothing away, because the argument itself is the point: here was a movement thinking aloud, in print, about whether to back or oppose the very state it descended from, holding that state to a standard it refused to suspend for kinship. What neither wing could do — what the whole tradition was constituted to refuse — was to exempt the workers' state from the analysis. The word "imperialism," in that tradition, is not a searchlight bolted to point only at the class enemy; it is a description of a relation, and the relation can obtain wherever a great power imposes itself on a small one, Moscow's tanks included. That is the exact capacity Dementyev's book lacks, and it is lacking by construction, not by oversight.

The companion volumes in this series make the same point from the same decade. The Progress account of US Neocolonialism in Africa was found doing precisely what Dementyev does: putting to every American dollar the question — what does the giver purchase with it? — and never once putting it to a Soviet rouble, though the aid, the leverage and the client-making were structurally identical. The searchlight there illuminated Washington's hand in the fall of Nkrumah and could not see the bureaucratic rot the Fourth International's own press had described in the same events six years earlier. The pattern is not particular to a subject; it is the signature of the whole imprint. Aid is solidarity when Moscow extends it and imperialism when Washington does; intervention is internationalism on one side of the border and aggression on the other. Dementyev's book is a more distinguished specimen than most — better sourced, more honest about its heroes' failings, written by a real scholar — but it is the same specimen, and the timing makes it the sharpest example the catalogue holds.

Read *The USA: Imperialists and Anti-Imperialists* for what it is at its best, which is considerable. It is a densely documented study of how the United States argued itself into empire at the turn of the twentieth century, and of the movement of writers, workers and socialists who fought that turn — a movement this book takes more seriously, and reconstructs more fully, than much of the scholarship of its day. On the machinery of American expansion, on the racism that clothed it, on the

courage and the limits of the Anti-Imperialist League, on the socialists as the war's most consistent opponents, Dementyev is a source, and a good one; his footnotes to the American archives will outlast the argument they were made to serve. The heritage he recovers is a real inheritance, and the American radical tradition and the Fourth International both claim it.

But read it aware of the year printed on it, and of what that year did. Its indictment of imperialism is accurate and its scholarship is honest, and both were assembled by a state that, in the twelve months the book took to reach its English readers, was carrying out the same act it had taught them to condemn — and quoting its own leader, at the front of the book, on principles "not to be breached by anyone." The crime the book names is a real crime. What it could not name, and was built not to name, was the one its own government was committing while the ink dried.

Nations and Internationalism

A theoretical account of nations and internationalism from pre-class society to the 1970s - strongest on the early Bolshevik record, which it quotes at length and without softening, including Lenin on the right to secede.

V. S. Semyonov

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

For once, the date on the spine is close to honest. V. S. Semyonov's *Nations and Internationalism* was issued in English by Progress Publishers in 1979, translated by Lenina Ilyitskaya, and the internal evidence puts the Russian original barely a year or two earlier. The 1977 Constitution is discussed as new. The Twenty-Fifth Congress of 1976 is the most recent Party gathering. The freshest Brezhnev citation is an article in *World Marxist Review* for December 1977; the bibliography runs to 1978 and 1979. And the book says in its own voice: "It is less than 35 years since the end of the war." Nothing here is a warmed-over text of the 1960s dressed for export. Readers of this series will know that is not the usual finding.

What the book is, is a theoretical treatise. Semyonov states the ambition in his first paragraphs: "In this book the author sets out to give a theoretical exposition of these issues, discussing them in the context of world history and of the diverse forms of the human community." The six chapters move from the emergence of ethnic groups in pre-class society, through the formation of nations in late feudalism, to imperialism, October, the war, "developed socialism", and the world revolutionary process. The biographical note is badly damaged in this scan, but it records a doctoral thesis called 'Nations and Internationalism: a Historical Essay' and earlier books including *By-passing Capitalism* (1966), *Looking into the Future* (1966), a study of Soviet foreign policy (1970) and *Internationalism and Progress* (1978). This is an academic, not a functionary, and it matters — because a theoretical account of nations is held to a higher standard than a constitutional handbook or an anniversary volume. A treatise on the national question that cannot mention the largest forced movements of nations in Soviet history is not merely omitting an awkward fact. It is failing at its own subject.

Begin with what is true, because a great deal here is.

The Bolshevik position on the national question in 1917–23 was the most advanced of any state of its era, and this book

reports much of it accurately and at length. It quotes the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia of 2 November 1917, correctly listing "the right of the peoples of Russia to self-determination, even to the point of secession and the formation of an independent state". It notes that the RSDLP Programme of 1903 already contained the clause on self-determination "up to and including secession". It reproduces, in full and without softening, Lenin's passage from the 'Revision of the Party Programme' of October 1917:

"The Party which uses the Great-Russian language, is obliged to recognise the right to secede. When we win power, we shall immediately and unconditionally recognise this right for Finland, the Ukraine, Armenia, and any other nationality oppressed by tsarism (and the Great-Russian bourgeoisie). ... We want free unification; that is why we must recognise the right to secede (without freedom to secede, unification cannot be called free). The more so must we recognise the right of secession, because tsarism and the Great-Russian bourgeoisie have by their oppression left great bitterness and distrust of the Great Russians generally in the hearts of the neighbouring nations, and these must be eradicated by deeds and not by words."

It quotes the 1919 Party Programme on the special obligations of "the proletariat of the former oppressor nations". It says plainly that Great-Power chauvinism was "the chief menace" the policy had to defeat. It reports Lenin's insistence, against the plan to fold the independent republics into the RSFSR as autonomies, that the task was "not to destroy their independence, but to create another new storey, a federation of equal republics". It records the material achievement without exaggeration where the figures are checkable: literacy among the nine-to-forty-nines in 1926 at 3.7 per cent in Tajikistan, 10.6 in Uzbekistan, 15.1 in Kirghizia; the decision of 1927 to give the Turkic peoples a Romanised alphabet; the state subsidies that met roughly 92 per cent of Tajikistan's budget in 1927 and 80 per cent of Kazakhstan's from 1931 to 1934. The industrialisation of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Soviet North was not a fiction, and *korenizatsiya* did create written

languages, schools and national institutions where none had existed.

The comparative chapters are better than they need to be. Chapter One's survey of national consolidation in Western Europe, among the Slavs, and in Asia, Africa and the Americas is real scholarship — the account of Vietnam's fifteenth-century "golden age" and the displacement of Old Chinese as the written language, or of the formation of the Turkish nationality in Anatolia from the eleventh century, are the work of someone who has read the literature. The Lenin apparatus is scrupulous, giving volume and page throughout so that a reader can check. And there is one footnote in which the author briefly stops performing: describing his travels in Asia and Africa, he writes that he "often had the impression that he was travelling in a time machine", seeing modern mines beside peasants in the natural economy and pre-capitalist usury. That is a man looking at something.

So the doctrine set out in this book is not false, and the record it reports for the early 1920s is largely real. The problem is the sixty years the book has to cross to reach 1979.

The test of the enumeration

This series has learned how to read a Soviet list. The 1968 Progress volume *Soviet Socialist Democracy* enumerated twenty Autonomous Republics and, with no explanation whatever, silently reinstated the Kalmyk, Kabardinian-Balkar and Checheno-Ingush autonomies — abolished in 1943–44 when the peoples who named them were deported wholesale, restored in 1957 — while silently omitting the Crimean and Volga German autonomies, which were never restored. The *State and Nations in the USSR* (1982) failed the same test, and worse, being a book about nations. *History of the USSR Part 3* (1982) reproduced the construction in logic. Semyonov's is a book about the theory of nations, published between the other two.

Here is the result, term by term. Volga German: the phrase does not occur. Meskhetian: does not occur. Crimea occurs once, in a description of the pre-revolutionary economy — the Crimean Tatars are not in this book, and neither is the Crimean Autonomous Republic. Deportation occurs once, in this sentence about the Great Patriotic War: the Soviet people suffered losses "as the result of the deportation of many Soviet citizens to forced labour camps in Germany". Resettlement occurs twice in the relevant sense: Russian colonists resettled to Central Russia in the 1920s, and the Generalplan Ost, under which "Tens of millions of people from Poland and the

western part of the Soviet Union were to be resettled in Siberia and replaced by Germans". The vocabulary is available to the author. It is reserved for tsarism and for Nazism.

Rehabilitation occurs nine times, and every one of them is economic — the rehabilitation of the Ukrainian economy, of the Zaporozhstal works, of factories in Kharkov and Minsk and Riga. In the political language of the USSR after 1956 that word meant the clearing of the falsely convicted. Not once in this book does it refer to a person.

1944 occurs six times: Tuva's entry into the Union, the Paris insurrection, the Hungarian Front, a Pravda citation, wartime funds for Ukrainian reconstruction. Not the deportations.

The peoples themselves are present, but only as figures. The Chechens and Ingush appear first as tsarism's victims, in a passage quoting Lenin on how colonisation drove the natives "out into the wilds". They appear again in a population table comparing the 1926 census with the 1970. The Kalmyks, Karachays and Balkars appear in that table too, and the table is worth reading closely. Between 1926 and 1970 the Soviet population rose from 147.0 to 241.7 million. Over the same forty-four years the Kalmyks went from 132,000 to 137,000 — a rise of four per cent — while the Karachays doubled and the Balkars nearly doubled from their much lower bases. The book prints the figure and passes on.

Then comes the passage that makes this volume's silence something more than an omission. Discussing changes in the ethnic composition of the autonomous republics, Semyonov writes:

"A comparison of 1939 and 1959 census data shows that during and after the war the proportion of the indigenous population in some Autonomous republics fell slightly. For example, Buryats accounted for 20.2 per cent of the total population of the Buryat ASSR in 1959, as against 21.3 per cent in 1939. Similarly, the proportion of indigenous population dropped from 49.6 to 35.1 per cent in the Kalmyk ASSR, from 23.2 to 13.1 per cent in the Karelian ASSR, from 72 to 30.4 per cent in the Komi ASSR..."

And here is the explanation offered: "In all these republics there was a considerable increase in the absolute size of the indigenous population which was, however, coincident with an influx of people of other nationalities, mainly Russians."

The entire Kalmyk people was deported to Siberia and Central Asia in December 1943, its republic abolished, its territory divided among neighbouring provinces and settled by others.

Kalmyks were not permitted to return until 1957, two years before the census Semyonov is citing. That is why the indigenous share of the Kalmyk ASSR fell by fourteen and a half percentage points; the influx of other nationalities is the consequence, not the cause, and it happened because the republic had been emptied. The book supplies the demographic trace of the deportation, in its own table, and reads it as migration. The words it uses for a fourteen-point collapse are "fell slightly".

One more. Arguing that the spread of Russian is voluntary and that Western talk of Russification is falsification, the book lists the proportions of each people with a command of Russian: "62.5 per cent of the Tatars, 58.4 per cent of the Chuvashi, 41.8 per cent of the Kazakhs, 65.7 per cent of the Mordvinians, 53.3 per cent of the Bashkirs, 66.7 per cent of the Chechens..." The Chechens return the highest figure on that list. They spent thirteen years, from February 1944 to 1957, in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, in schools and workplaces that functioned in Russian. Shevtsov's volume three years later would reach for the Chechen-Ingush ASSR for exactly the same purpose. Of all the evidence available, both books chose the case most contaminated by a history neither could name, and presented it as proof of free choice.

Article 72

This book postdates the Constitution of 7 October 1977 and discusses it. It says the new Constitution "not only preserves the former sovereign rights of the Union republics but adds some new ones, with new guarantees", and enumerates: the right of republics to share in all-Union decision-making, and the right to initiate legislation in the Supreme Soviet. It compares Article 70 of 1977 with Article 13 of 1936 and finds the newer text superior, quoting its description of the USSR as an "integral, federal, multinational state formed on the principle of socialist federalism". It cites Article 36 on the equal rights of nationalities.

Article 72 — "Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to secede from the USSR" — is not cited anywhere in this book. The word "secession" appears six times and the word "secede" three, and every occurrence belongs to 1903, 1917 or the Civil War. Shevtsov, writing three years later, affirmed the right a dozen times and could describe no procedure for exercising it; there was none to describe, and none existed until April 1990. Semyonov, writing a theoretical treatise fourteen months after the Constitution was promulgated, does not raise the question at all. He notices

instead that the new Article 70 has added the word "integral" and reads the addition as a strengthening of Leninism.

Trotsky had already written the answer, in April 1939, about the equivalent article of the 1936 Constitution:

"After all, even the constitution of the USSR acknowledges the right of its component federated peoples to self-determination, that is, to separation. Thus, not even the incumbent Kremlin oligarchy dares to deny this principle. To be sure it remains only on paper. The slightest attempt to raise the question of an independent Ukraine openly would mean immediate execution on the charge of treason."

("Problem of the Ukraine", written 22 April 1939, published in the Socialist Appeal of 9 May 1939 and reprinted in Fourth International, vol. X, no. 10, November 1949.)

Ukraine, Georgia, and an honour roll

The Ukraine is named more than thirty times in this volume — as the second republic of the Union, as the site of wartime devastation and postwar reconstruction, as a bearer of literacy statistics. The word famine occurs once, and refers to 1920–21 in the Volga region, attributed to "Bad crop failure in 1920 and 1921". There is no reference of any kind to 1932–33. The historiography of that catastrophe remains genuinely contested — the death tolls in Ukraine and Kazakhstan and the question of intent are argued over by serious historians and the ranges are wide — but no serious account puts the losses below the millions. Semyonov's word for the policy that produced them is this: "This achievement of the Soviet people can rightly be put on a par with such attainments as industrialisation, collectivisation and the cultural revolution." The achievement being praised in that sentence is the claim that "The national question, a legacy of the past, has been solved completely, finally and irrevocably in the Soviet Union."

Georgia occurs twenty-two times. (A companion volume in this series, a full-length biography of Lenin, managed the word once in 202,000 words; Semyonov is not doing that.) But the autonomisation crisis of 1922, Lenin's last political fight, is not here. The book reports that "It was suggested that the Soviet Republics should be unified on an autonomous basis, and join the RSFSR as autonomous republics. Lenin and the Communist Party rejected the idea" — a suggestion with no author, rejected by a unanimity that did not exist. There is no Ordzhonikidze striking a Georgian communist, no dictation of 30–31 December 1922, no "mere scrap of paper", no Mdivani, no Makharadze, no Rakovsky. Ordzhonikidze does appear: in

a footnote, quoted as the authority for the proposition that the Transcaucasian Federation gave political form to a coexistence "that will breed peace and affection among these peoples".

And then there is the honour roll. Arguing that the Soviet people is a community of equals, Semyonov writes that "Lenin's name and cause united prominent representatives of different nations and nationalities in the common struggle for socialism", and lists as "prominent leaders of the Leninist core of the Party" the non-Russians "Dzhaparidze, Dzerzhinsky, Kosior, Manuilsky, Mikoyan, Narimanov, Postyshev, Rudzutak, Stalin, Sverdlov, Snieckus and Uborevich".

That is the only place in this book where Stalin appears as a person; the sole other occurrence of the name is Stalingrad. Four of the eleven men he is listed among were shot on his orders: Ieronim Uborevich in June 1937, Yan Rudzutak in July 1938, Stanislav Kosior and Pavel Postyshev in February 1939. Kosior had been general secretary of the Ukrainian party through 1932–33 and Postyshev was sent to Kiev in 1933 as Moscow's plenipotentiary; they are named here as exemplars of internationalism in a book that does not mention the famine they administered, and they were killed by the man whose name sits between theirs.

The reply, contemporaneous

Semyonov's book went to press while the Fourth International's press was reporting the subject weekly. Intercontinental Press carried, in its issue of 28 March 1977, Marilyn Vogt's summary of the samizdat Chronicle of Current Events: "After Stalin's death, eleven of the fourteen nationalities that had been summarily deported from their homes during World War II were eventually allowed to return to their lands. However, the Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Meskhetians were forced to remain in exile." Its issue of 9 January 1978 noted that Stalin "deported the entire Crimean Tatar population from Crimea in May 1944 and in 1946 abolished their republic that had been established by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in October 1921". Its review of the year on 25 December 1978 recorded that "The campaign of vilification against the entire Crimean Tatar people was revived" — and, in the same paragraph, that mass demonstrations had forced the Kremlin to abandon its attempt to remove the language guarantees of Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis from their republican constitutions, "a new development in the Soviet Union". On 7 May 1979, the year of this book's imprint, the same paper reported that Mustafa Dzhemilev had been sentenced to four years' internal exile — his fifth term — for championing the right of the Crimean Tatars to live in Crimea.

The analysis behind those reports was older. Trotsky, in the April 1939 article quoted above, identified the mechanism: "In his capacity as People's Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin invariably represented the most centralist and bureaucratic tendency. This evinced itself especially on the question of Georgia and on the question of the Ukraine... In order to guarantee 'administrative needs,' i.e., the interests of the bureaucracy, the most legitimate claims of the oppressed nationalities were declared a manifestation of petty-bourgeois nationalism. All these symptoms could be observed as early as 1922-23." The result, he wrote, was the "outright strangulation of any kind of independent national development of the peoples of the USSR", and Soviet Ukraine had become to the bureaucracy "an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR". The unsigned editorial note prefacing the article's reprint in Fourth International in November 1949 added what the intervening decade had supplied: "During the war and since, Stalin has uprooted entire peoples from their ancestral homes and shipped them in cattle cars to the barren wastelands of Siberia."

George Clarke set the whole sequence down in three sentences in Fourth International in 1952: "Stalin's record on the national question leaves no doubt on this score. Lenin on his deathbed broke off all personal relations with Stalin for his brutal treatment of the Georgian people. Subsequently there have been constant purges in the Ukraine; Volga Germans, peoples of the Baltic and the Caucasus have been bodily uprooted from their homes and lands." (Vol. XIII, no. 6, November–December 1952.)

Semyonov's central theoretical construct — "the Soviet people, a social and international community", a society in which classes and nations converge because there is no stratum with an interest in keeping them apart — has its answer in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), and specifically in chapter 9, "Social Relations in the Soviet Union". There Trotsky names what the convergence thesis has to leave out: "The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy," which is "in the full sense of the word the sole privileged and commanding stratum in the Soviet society." A theory of nations under socialism that begins by assuming no such stratum exists will explain the emptying of the Kalmyk ASSR as an influx of Russians, because it has no other category available.

What to keep

Chapters One and Two are a serious, well-sourced comparative history of national formation, and they are worth

reading on their own terms; the treatment of oppressed and oppressor nations quotes Lenin accurately and at length and is the best short statement of that doctrine in the Progress list. Chapter Three's narrative of 1917–22 is documented and largely reliable up to the point where it stops. The census, literacy and budgetary series are real data, drawn from named Soviet sources, and they record real transfers of resource to the peripheries. Chapter Four's account of the anti-fascist Resistance — the French, Greek, Italian, Belgian and Hungarian movements, the Soviet prisoners who joined the maquis — is a genuine contribution, and the figure of more than twenty million Soviet dead is stated without inflation or evasion. And the polemic against theories of the nation founded on blood and soul is a good argument, whatever it is being used to cover.

The point of the criticism is not that the doctrine here is wrong. It is that the doctrine is right and the book is describing a country in which it had ceased to operate. Self-determination including secession was real Bolshevik policy, and the book quotes the proof of it. Lenin's last fight was over precisely this question, against the man this book lists among the Leninist core. What Semyonov cannot say is that Lenin lost; that the federation became a formality administered from Moscow; that between 1941 and 1944 entire nations were loaded onto trains and their republics struck from the map; that three of them had still not been allowed home when he was writing; and that the right of secession, by 1979 fifty-six years old and inscribed in three successive constitutions, had never acquired a procedure and never would until the year before the Union dissolved.

Semantic Philosophy of Art

A Soviet critique of art-as-language theory - Richards, Wittgenstein, Croce, Cassirer, Langer, Peirce and Morris - read in four languages and in their own editions rather than at second hand.

Yevgeny Basin

Introduction to the 1979 Edition

Yevgeny Basin's Semantic Philosophy of Art is the most Western-facing book Progress Publishers issued in its aesthetics list, and the most disconcerting to read against the grain, because it does almost nothing that a reader trained on the rest of the catalogue expects. It is a book-length critique of twentieth-century Anglo-American and European theories of art as language, symbol and sign — the neo-positivist aesthetics of I. A. Richards, the "analytic aesthetics" descended from the later Wittgenstein, the neo-Hegelian expression theory of Croce and Collingwood, Whitehead's philosophy of symbolism, Cassirer's symbolic forms, Susanne Langer's presentational symbol, Peirce's semiotics and Charles Morris's behaviourist theory of signs. And it reads them. Not through Soviet intermediaries and not from digests, but in their own editions, in four languages, with the apparatus of a working historian of philosophy. The polemical frame is entirely orthodox; the scholarship underneath it is real. Learning to hold those two facts together is the whole task of reading the book honestly.

A word first on what the book is and when it was written, because the spine misleads in the usual direction. Progress dated the English translation 1979, but the copyright page and colophon did not survive scanning — the front matter breaks off after the Soviet imprint code and the back is a bare "The End" — so the text must be dated from inside. Its bibliography closes early: the latest Russian-language and Western secondary items it cites are from 1971–72 (M. S. Kozlova's *Filosofiya i yazyk*, Moscow 1972; the *Kommunist* articles of 1971), and the single latest token anywhere is the English Marx–Engels Collected Works volume 1 of 1975, which is the translation apparatus, not the argument. The manuscript is an early-1970s Russian text — on the internal evidence around 1972–73 — carried into English at the end of the decade, a lag of six or seven years in a field that was moving fast enough for the gap to matter: nothing in the book registers the reception of Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (1968), which appears only as two bare index entries, and structuralism enters as a

movement of "the mid-60's" still felt to be current. The author, Yevgeny Basin, presents himself simply as a Soviet philosopher and historian of aesthetics; the text gives no institutional affiliation and I have not tried to supply one. The translation, by Christopher English, is clean and literate throughout.

What the book was for is not hidden. Its closing methodological sentence names the fourth and governing task of the study as "the exposition of the class nature of the semantic philosophy of art, diametrically opposed to materialism, and ultimately expressing the class interests of the bourgeoisie," whose "clearest manifestation" is "the hostility of semantic aesthetic idealism to progressive realistic art and in the theoretical justification of various forms of modernist art." That is the commission. This is a book in the aesthetic theatre of the ideological Cold War, and its ultimate object is not Richards or Peirce but the defence of "progressive realistic art" — which, in a Soviet book of the early 1970s, means socialist realism — against the whole family of twentieth-century modernisms for which the semantic theorists are read as supplying a philosophical licence. Keep that telos in view and everything the book does well and everything it does badly comes from the same place.

The citation test, and its third inversion

This series has learned to run one test before all others on a Soviet book that attacks Western thinkers: does it quote them, from their own works, or does it characterise them from a distance and route every footnote through a Soviet commentator? The test has a sharp form — not whether he cites the enemy but which opponents get read and which get merely relayed. On the aesthetics and philosophy shelf it has now inverted three times. Batalov footnoted Marcuse to Marcuse's own German editions more often than he cited Lenin. Naletov read Popper, Carnap, Quine, Kuhn — and Adorno and Marcuse in the original German. Basin belongs with them, and further along the same line.

His targets are read in their own editions and cited by work. Croce appears in Italian, French, German and English printings — the 1904 Paris *Esthétique*, the 1922 London *Aesthetics as Science of Expression*, the German *Grundriss der Ästhetik*. Cassirer is worked from the German *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* and the papers he delivered to the German aesthetics congresses of 1927 and 1930. Peirce is quoted from the *Collected Papers* by volume and paragraph; Richards from the *Principles of Literary Criticism and Science and Poetry*; Morris from *Signs, Language and Behavior*, section and chapter; Wittgenstein from the *Philosophical Investigations* and the Göttingen lectures on aesthetics. The chapter on Collingwood reconstructs the contents of his *Essays in the Philosophy of Art* down to individual 1925 papers. This is not the apparatus of a man relaying a caricature. Where it thins — Goodman at two mentions, Frege absent — the likeliest cause is the manuscript's early-1970s date rather than avoidance, since both belong to a reception that had barely begun in Russian. On the question the test is built to answer, Basin passes cleanly: he did the reading.

He also reads the Soviet secondary literature, and cites it openly alongside the primaries — Bogomolov, Melvil and Narsky on the integration of bourgeois philosophical schools, Oizerman on the bourgeoisie's turn to "refined idealistic theories," Zis on axiology, Bogdanov on the eclecticism of imperialist-age philosophy. That is the healthy scholarly pattern, not the Batalov relay: the commentary supplements the sources, it does not stand in for them. And the book carries, near the front, the standard Soviet warrant for this kind of reading, quoted from Bogomolov, Melvil and Narsky: to identify the "genuine epistemological, methodological, psychological and social problems" buried in bourgeois philosophy, because "to ignore the ideas of bourgeois authors simply because they are put forward by our ideological opponents or because they contain certain errors would be to hold up the development of Marxist philosophy." It is the same licence Naletov and Boris Suchkov used to justify taking the Western canon seriously, and Basin uses it to earn a genuinely learned book.

The Soviet silence that is not a silence

For a Soviet "semantic philosophy of art" published in 1979 there is a second test, sharper than the first and specific to the subject. Soviet semiotics existed, and it was distinguished and politically exposed: the Tartu–Moscow school under Yuri Lotman, with Uspensky, Ivanov, Toporov and others, tolerated at the margins of official scholarship and never quite trusted by

it. A book that engaged Morris and Langer while stepping around its own country's semioticians would have been telling a revealing silence. Basin does not keep that silence. In the introduction he names the Tartu group directly as "a group of Soviet authors, who constitute an entire movement," singling out "the writings of Yuri Lotman, Boris Uspensky, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Vyacheslav Toporov, Yuri Lekomtsev," and he notes honestly that "the Soviet scholars are divided in their opinion" of the worth of applying exact methods to art — an acknowledgement of a live and unsettled Soviet debate rather than a party line. Later he cites Lotman for the defence: on the inner logic of narrative texts he writes that "correctly argues Yu. M. Lotman," this logic "cannot be defined as self-evident on the basis of the intuition of the scholar, but must be revealed through an analysis of secondary modelling systems," citing the Tartu series *Semiotika i iskusstvometriya* by page. Jakobson — an émigré, and therefore doubly awkward — appears twice as "the well-known western linguist and semiotician," his positions reported without abuse. This is braver than the genre led one to expect, and it should be said plainly.

But look at how the Soviet semioticians are admitted, because the mechanism is the real finding. Basin builds his book on a borrowed classification (from the Yugoslav aesthetician Miloš Damjanović) that sorts semantic theories of art into three groups: special-scientific theories, transitional "analytic" doctrines, and a "symbolic philosophy of art" concerned with epistemology. He then announces that his critique takes as its object "not the material-scientific semantic theories of art, but the philosophical semantic theories" — the third group only. The distinction that saves the Tartu school is the distinction between method and theory. Soviet semiotics is allowed to be legitimate exact method, bracketed out of the indictment before it begins; Western semiotics is convicted as idealist philosophy. The same tools — sign, code, structure, information — are science in Tartu and idealism in Cambridge and Chicago. The line between them is not drawn by anything in the semiotic apparatus itself, which is shared; it is drawn by the prior political sorting and then rationalised through the theory/method cut. That the cut is convenient does not make it empty — as we will see, the argument beneath it is a real one — but the national geography of the verdict is decided before the philosophy is done.

The argument, taken straight

It would be easy, and wrong, to leave the book there. The Marxist objection Basin is pressing is not a slogan, and where

he argues it he argues something that serious non-Soviet critics were arguing at the very same moment. His core charge is that the semantic theories commit a "metaphysical absolutization of one of the aspects of art" — they seize on the fact that art can be treated as a sign system and inflate that one aspect into the whole essence of art, so that "art, when interpreted as language (or some other sign system) becomes the idealistic semanticist's main, if not only, aspect of aesthetic study." The result, he argues, is that art's relation to objective reality and to social life drops out — "without exception," he claims, "all the aestheticians of the semantic school deny that art provides an adequate reflection of objective reality." His own positive statement of the point is careful and, quoting the Soviet scholar Ya. I. Hajikyan, generous to the other side: art "admits the possibility of being viewed in the same aspect in which its sign nature functions," but "its sign nature does not exhaust its essence." That is not a bad sentence to hang a critique of reductive semiotics on.

The best stretch of the book is the methodological argument that a method is never innocent of a theory. Basin insists that when the procedures of linguistics or information theory are carried over to art, "theoretical models are also transferred" — that treating art as a sign system is not a neutral technique but a substantive claim about what art is, smuggled in as if it were only a way of proceeding. The semantic theorists, he notes, like to present their aesthetics as "not a theory, nor a system of interpretation, but a system of methods," and he is right that this is an evasion: the method presupposes the theory. This is, almost exactly, the argument Fredric Jameson was making against structuralism in *The Prison-House of Language* in 1972, and the argument Georg Lukács and the Frankfurt School had long pressed against formalism — that a formalism which brackets the social and historical content of the work has not suspended a metaphysics but concealed one. Where Basin reasons rather than pronounces, he is inside a real and continuing debate, and the introduction to a book we are not endorsing should say so.

What the argument is for

The trouble is not the objection but its destination. The same category — that art's significance cannot be reduced to its form or its sign-function, that it must be judged by its truth to reality and its place in "the progressive development of mankind" — is aimed, in this book, at a fixed political target: it is the philosophical undercarriage of a defence of socialist realism and a blanket verdict against modernism. The reader is never in doubt that the "progressive realistic art" whose

hostility to formalism the book vindicates is the officially licensed art of the Soviet state, and that "modernism" names everything that art turned into once it stopped taking orders. The aesthetic conclusion is settled before the analysis of Peirce begins.

This is exactly the ground on which the anti-Stalinist Marxist tradition broke with the outlook Basin is defending, and it did so on the aesthetic question itself. In "Art and Politics in Our Epoch," a letter to *Partisan Review* written on 18 June 1938, Trotsky put the name "socialist realism" where it belonged: "The name itself has evidently been invented by some high functionary in the department of the arts," and the art it described was "based on lies and deceit," the product of "functionaries armed with pens, brushes, and scissors, under the supervision of functionaries armed with Mausers." Far from treating the succession of modern schools as bourgeois decay to be philosophically liquidated — Basin's "various forms of modernist art" — Trotsky read cubism, futurism, dadaism and surrealism as the genuine, tormented registrations of "the decline and decay of bourgeois society," art that "will rot away inevitably" only if the revolution fails, not because it is formalist. The doctrine of a licensed, content-approved realism was for him the aesthetic face of the bureaucracy, not the answer to it.

The deeper point is that Basin's central formal objection and the tradition that answers him are not, in fact, opposed. Trotsky made the same objection Basin makes. In *Literature and Revolution* (1924) — not held in our archive here, and cited by argument — he took the Russian Formalists seriously enough to devote a chapter to them, granted their attention to the material of art its due, and then denied that form could be the whole account of the work, precisely because it severed art from its social ground. That is Basin's move, forty-nine years earlier and against the direct ancestors of his own Western targets. The difference is not in the philosophy of the sign; it is in the manner and the purpose. As Trent Hutter wrote when *Literature and Revolution* was reissued in the West (*International Socialist Review*, vol. 19 no. 1, Winter 1958), Trotsky criticised the schools of his day sharply but "even at his sharpest he does not swing the club of the bureaucratic policeman." Basin's philosophy is often better than his reputation would suggest; what it is chained to is the club. The same tradition answered the American half of his book in advance: George Novack's long critique of pragmatism — "Dewey's instrumentalism is the highest form of pragmatism," and pragmatism "is not a working class philosophy" but "the theory of middle class progressivism" (*American Philosophy and the Labor Movement*, 1962) — is the materialist reply to

Peirce, Morris and Dewey that Basin's own chapters gesture at, made without a state aesthetics behind it.

A note on the vocabulary, and on what it never touches

One small measurement confirms the book's character. The deviation-words this series has learned to count — opportunism, revisionism — are simply absent: zero occurrences of each in 82,650 words. Basin's policing vocabulary is entirely epistemological: idealism runs to more than two hundred uses, with formalism, modernism, subjectivism, agnosticism and relativism behind it. This is a philosopher disciplining philosophy, not an apparatus disciplining a movement, and it places the book among the minority of the catalogue that reaches for no organisational label at all. It is worth adding what the epistemological vocabulary never does: it never turns inward. "Idealism," "formalism" and "metaphysics" are charges that could in principle be levelled at any thinker, including a Soviet one; in this book they are reserved, by the method/theory sorting described above, for the far side of the ideological border. The one place a Soviet practitioner of the very same semiotic methods appears — the Tartu school — he is pre-cleared as science and exempted from the categories the rest of the book exists to apply. Error, in these pages, is admissible on the bourgeois side and the Soviet side alike; the classification only ever runs one way.

None of which is a reason to dismiss the book. It is, within its constraints, a genuine piece of scholarship — the fullest Russian-language engagement of its day with Anglo-American analytic aesthetics and semiotics, built on real reading, and honest enough to name and quote the Soviet semioticians its own censorship regarded with suspicion. A reader who wants to know how the strongest Soviet philosophy of the 1970s understood Peirce, Cassirer and Langer will learn a great deal here, and will not be lied to about what those thinkers said. What the reader should carry in is only this: the formal argument the book makes against reducing art to its sign-nature is a good one, and it was not the property of the state that commissioned the book. The same argument was made, earlier and more freely, by the tradition the book was written to bury — made by people who drew from it the opposite conclusion about what art, once you refuse to reduce it, is finally for.

HISTORY

Out of the Fire

Three Byelorussian writers with a tape recorder, thirty-five districts, 147 burned villages, more than three hundred survivors - set down in the speakers' own mixed dialect, unsmoothed, the silences left on the page. Among the fullest first-person records of the German village burnings in any language.

Ales Adamovich and others

Introduction to the 1980 Edition

Barbara Adamovna Slesarchuk was sixty years old when three men with a tape recorder came to her village in the Brest Region and asked her to tell them what had happened. She sat with them and she spoke, and what she said is set down in this book almost exactly as it left her mouth — in the local mixture of Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Russian and Polish that the authors could not bring themselves to smooth into standard prose. The Germans had driven her family from their house and were burning the village. She ran with four small children into a shed, and then behind a well, and then into a burning meadow, covering the children with goose-foot weed while the machine guns cut people down on both sides of her. "I didn't think to live," she says. "I didn't think to live. If only he doesn't see us, I thought, if only our skulls are knocked off just like that, if only we don't see our own death." Her two-year-old, Vasil, kept telling her they would not be killed. She lived; the children lived; the village did not. She ends her account by apologising. "There I've told you all my suffering. Maybe I said something I shouldn't? I'm illiterate. Excuse me..."

Nothing in this introduction, and nothing that could be written about this book, touches Barbara Slesarchuk or the truth of a word she said. *Out of the Fire* is a book of that kind of testimony, and it is one of the most important books Progress Publishers ever put into English. Between 1970 and 1973 three Byelorussian writers — Ales Adamovich, Yanka Bryl and Vladimir Kolesnik — travelled thirty-five districts of their republic with a tape recorder, tracking down survivors of the German policy of burning villages whole, with their inhabitants inside them, as a method of anti-partisan terror. They found their witnesses in 147 villages. They recorded, by their own count, "over three hundred direct witnesses of tragedies like Khatyn's" — Khatyn being the Byelorussian village burned with its people in March 1943 whose name the Soviet state later made the emblem of the whole catastrophe. Byelorussia (now Belarus) lost more than two hundred towns and over nine thousand villages destroyed in the war, "many

hundreds of them wiped out together with the people living in them." This book is the recorded voice of the few who came, in the authors' unforgettable phrase, "out of the fire and from under the earth, in the most real and literal sense."

It must be said plainly and first, because everything else in this introduction is narrow beside it: this is authentic, irreplaceable anti-fascist documentation, and its testimonies are beyond criticism. They record one of the great crimes of the twentieth century in the words of the people it was done to — mothers who watched their children burn, children who lay among corpses for days, whole communities murdered in an afternoon because a partisan detachment had passed through the district a week before. The witnesses do not perform. They apologise for crying; they lose the thread; they fall silent, and the authors leave the silence on the page. What they describe is not in dispute among serious historians and was never in dispute: the German occupation of Byelorussia conducted a deliberate campaign of collective extermination against the rural population, and this book is among the fullest first-person records of it in any language. To read it is to be placed in the presence of the thing itself, and the reader owes the men who made it, and the people who spoke to them, an unqualified debt.

What the book is, and when it was made

Get the dates right, because they matter to how the book should be read. The testimonies were gathered on tape in the early 1970s — the datelines run from "Barbarka, June 1970" onward — and the Russian original, *Ya iz ognennoy derevni* (I am from the burning village), appeared in 1975. The volume in your hands is the Progress Publishers English translation of 1980, made by Angelia Graf and Nina Belenkaya for export to the anglophone world. So the text is a mid-1970s work of oral history, offered to Western readers at the turn of the 1980s as evidence, addressed to "new generations, who themselves did not experience the horrors of the Second World War."

Who made it also matters, and it tells against the easy assumption that a Progress book is the work of an official institute. These were not apparatus functionaries. Ales Adamovich had been a teenage partisan in occupied Byelorussia himself; he became one of the most searching writers his republic produced and, a decade after this book, one of the more courageous liberal voices of the glasnost years. Yanka Bryl was a revered Byelorussian prose writer; Vladimir Kolesnik was a literary scholar. They approached the burned villages as writers and as countrymen of the dead, not as a commission executing a brief — and the difference shows on every page, in the refusal to tidy the grammar, in the patience with the digressions, in the decision to record the voice rather than summarise the fact.

That decision founded a method. The technique this book pioneered — the long-form documentary assembled entirely from tape-recorded first-person witness, the author present only to arrange and to listen — became one of the signal forms of late-Soviet and post-Soviet literature. Its direct heir is Svetlana Alexievich, who has named Adamovich as her teacher and who carried this exact method to the Nobel Prize. *Out of the Fire* stands near the head of that lineage. It is, quite apart from its documentary value, a landmark in the history of the form, and the English reader who wants to understand where the "novel of voices" came from should begin here.

The witnesses

The rescue is the whole book, so let the witnesses have this section to themselves. What lifts *Out of the Fire* above even the honourable category of atrocity documentation is the authors' fidelity to the particular human being in front of them. They tell us that Barbara Slesarchuk "speaks at times almost exactly like a teller of fairytales, in a sing-song voice, with repetitions that don't seem superfluous." They notice a woman who warns them, before she begins, "Don't be afraid if I cry out in pain; I have rheumatism." They record the retired collective farmer whose nine-year-old son survived a mass shooting because "My mother, when she was shot down, fell on top of him and covered him a bit," and who then "lay in a haystack for so many days... Without drinking or eating," until the partisans found him. The book is built out of hundreds of such fragments, each one exact, each one a person.

Around the voices the authors set the emptied places, and here their gift as writers does something the bare transcript could not. They reach a village that no longer exists by crossing a lake in a small boat, and find only "a forest, already

full-grown, with a little monument to the inhabitants of an entire village by the roadside." They pass "dead villages where not a soul was left— only a few old trees, still black and scorched, the forlorn sweep of a well and grassgrown streets." Below the new collective farm and its light-filled library where the survivors now speak into the tape recorder, they write, "in the depths of the people's life, in all its generative simplicity, bleed the wounds of memory, for which there is no cure." The landscape passages are not decoration. They are the measure of the absence — the exact acreage of quiet where a community used to be — and they are why the book reads as literature and not only as evidence.

The authors state their purpose exactly, and they meet it. They saw their task, they write, "to lie in preserving the unbearable incandescence of human pain, bewilderment and rage, which are present not only in the words, but also in the voice, eyes and face of the narrators." The people gathered in these pages, they say, came "to bear witness, question, judge, and tell about what it is fearful to know and dangerous to forget." That is the achievement, and it is complete. When Ganna Gribovskaya of the martyred village of Latygovo says, "Nobody even knows that we went through the same torments as in Khatyn. It's good that you came, because I myself... I can't even tell about it—I'm crying...", she names the exact thing the book exists to defeat: the erasure of the small and the unmemorialised, the villages that had no monument and no witness. Against that erasure the book is a permanent act of rescue. Nothing that follows qualifies it.

The one thing the frame will not hold

There is a single critical observation to make, and its object is not the testimonies, not the witnesses, and not the authors' honesty. It concerns the frame the Soviet state placed around this memory in 1980 — what the edition is permitted to treat as the fate of the Byelorussian village, and what it is not.

The book opens, before any witness speaks, with an unsigned editorial preface in the official voice — the voice of "the incorruptible memory," of "the people's memory," of the trial that "did not end at Nuremberg" but "continues in their memory." That preface establishes a category and applies it in one direction only. The category is the deliberate murder of a peaceful rural community — the burning of "villages that were burnt down and destroyed together with their inhabitants." It is the truest category imaginable for what the Germans did, and the book documents it without flinching or exception. But it is turned outward at the invader alone, and the reader is left with

the impression that the destruction of the Byelorussian peasantry as a subject begins and ends with the Wehrmacht and the Einsatzgruppen.

It does not. The same peasantry, in many of the same districts, had passed through a decade of its own before the Germans came — a decade the state that published this book made unspeakable. The eastern regions of Byelorussia had lived through forced collectivisation at the turn of the 1930s: the compulsory herding of peasants into the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), the campaign of "dekulakisation" that destroyed the *kulak* (well-to-do peasant) as a class by deportation and worse, the requisitions, and the deportations north and east carried out by the NKVD (the Soviet political police). The western regions — Brest, Grodno, much of where these very witnesses lived — were Polish until September 1939, then Sovietised at speed between 1939 and 1941, with their own wave of deportations of "class enemies," settlers and Poles into the interior. The rural catastrophe of Byelorussia has two chapters, not one. This book, by the terms of its 1980 frame, may tell only the second.

The first is not wholly invisible in these pages, and that is the remarkable thing — it surfaces, unbidden, in the witnesses' own words, only never to be examined. When Barbara Slesarchuk tries to reason out why the Germans marked her family for death, she reaches for the recent past: "Maybe they'd figured we were in the collective farm in nineteen forty. 'Communist!...' they'd said against us." The western Byelorussian village she is from was collectivised in 1940, in the brief window of Soviet rule between the two occupations, and the fact sits in her testimony as a plain and unelaborated part of her world. The authors record it faithfully, as they record everything. But the frame around the book cannot pick it up, because to follow that thread — to ask what the collective farm of 1940 had meant to these villages, or what the 1930s had meant to the villages a hundred kilometres east — would be to open the second chapter, and the second chapter was closed.

None of this is a criticism of the witnesses, who tell the truth they were asked for, or of the authors, who were recording a real and specific crime and had no obligation to record a different one. It is an observation about what a Soviet edition of 1980 could frame as the murder of a peaceful Byelorussian village and what it could not. The point is sharpened, not softened, by the book's own method. The recording of testimony was, at that moment, the one licensed way to grieve the Byelorussian countryside — provided the testimony concerned the Germans. Testimony about the other decade

existed too, and had been taken, and could not be printed in Moscow. This series has documented the omission from the other side, in the sibling volumes on Soviet rural policy: the Progress editions of Sholokhov's own public prose (*At the Bidding of the Heart*, 1973) and of Yakimenko's study of him carry roughly 104,000 words about the writer of collectivisation and never once print the words famine or starvation in connection with 1932–33; the volume on *The Peoples of the North* (1975) renders the forced collectivisation of the Siberian herders as the over-zeal of local officials and passes over the wartime deportation of whole nations in total silence. The same state that made this book made those, and the same line runs through all of them.

The contemporary reply is worth stating precisely, because for once the anti-Stalinist tradition holds a witness of exactly the book's own type. In June 1945 — while the events these villagers describe were only two and three years old — *Fourth International*, the theoretical journal of the American Trotskyists, printed a long interview with a Soviet citizen who had left the USSR: a man broadly loyal to the regime, who thought the Soviet Union socialist and defended much of it. Asked about the countryside, he gave the plain recorded testimony that the Moscow edition of this book, thirty-five years later, still could not: "The *kolkhozes* (collective farms) were imposed almost exclusively by force, according to plans laid down by members of the Party" (*Fourth International*, vol. VI no. 6, June 1945). One kind of tape-recorded peasant testimony reached print in the West in 1945. The other kind — the kind this book so magnificently preserves — could reach print in Moscow in 1980. Neither state of affairs was an accident, and the gap between them is the whole of the point.

Khatyn, and a near-homonym

There is one further piece of documented context the honest reader should have, and it must be set down carefully, as historical record and not as any claim about the authors or the dead.

In 1969 the Soviet state opened, on the site of the burned village of Khatyn, a vast national memorial complex, and made Khatyn the official emblem of Nazi atrocity for the entire USSR. The choice was in one sense unimpeachable: Khatyn stood for the more than six hundred Byelorussian villages burned with their people, and this book is in part the testimony that memorial could not carry in words. But historians of Soviet memory have long noted a second effect, whatever the intent behind the choice. The name Khatyn is a near-homonym, in Russian and in English transliteration, of

Katyn — the forest near Smolensk where, in the spring of 1940, the NKVD shot some 22,000 captured Polish officers and members of the Polish elite. The Soviet government denied the Katyn massacre for half a century, blamed it on the Germans, and admitted Soviet responsibility only in 1990. The scholarly literature widely observes that the prominence given to Khatyn from 1969 onward had the effect — again, whatever was intended — of crowding its near-twin out of public awareness: the burned village that the state wished remembered stood, by an accident of sound, directly in front of the massacre it wished forgotten.

This is offered as documented context, attributed to the historical record, and for one reason only: so that the reader holds the whole shape of the memory-politics into which this book was released in 1980. It diminishes Khatyn's dead not at all. Their village was burned, their testimony is true, and their memorial is deserved. That the same syllables also served to obscure a Soviet crime of the same years is a fact about the state, not about them — and it belongs beside the framing silence already described as part of the single question this introduction raises: not what the book says, which is true, but what the edition around it was not allowed to let the truth stand next to.

How to read it

Read *Out of the Fire* for the voices, and trust them without reservation. They are the reason the book exists and the reason it will outlast the state that printed it. Barbara Slesarchuk and Ganna Gribovskaya and the collective farmer whose son survived under his shot grandmother's body are telling the plain truth about the worst thing that ever happened to them, and the three writers who found them and let them speak performed a service to human memory that no criticism can reach. As anti-fascist testimony the book is complete, irreplaceable, and beyond argument; as literature it founded a form that later reached the Nobel Prize; as a record of what the German occupation did to the Byelorussian countryside it has few equals in any language.

Read the frame around the voices for something else — for the one thing a 1980 Moscow edition could not let these witnesses say. The murder of the peaceful Byelorussian village is the truest subject in the world, and this book turns it in a single direction. The same villages, the same peasants, the same category of the annihilated rural community had a second history that the state that published this book had spent decades unspeaking, and that surfaces here only in a survivor's

unelaborated aside about the collective farm of 1940. The witnesses withheld nothing. The edition did. Honour the first, and understand the second, and the book will give you both the truth it carries and the truth it was built to carry around.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The Road to Victory

The Soviet account of thirty years of Vietnamese revolution, from 1945 through Dien Bien Phu and Saigon to reunification - finalised in spring 1979, as the Sino-Soviet split became open war between communist states.

S. I. Divilkovsky and I. A. Ognetrov

Introduction to the 1980 Edition

The Road to Victory is a Soviet history of the Vietnamese revolution, written by two Moscow specialists on Indochina, I. Divilkovsky and A. Ognetrov, and issued in English by Progress Publishers as the export account of the most spectacular anti-imperialist victory of the age. Its six chapters run from the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September 1945, through the war against France and the encirclement of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Geneva settlement, the American war and its defeat, the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the reunification of the country, to the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the opening of what the book calls its "transition to socialism." It is a partisan history and an official one — the enemy is always "the imperialists," "the puppet regime," "the Peking hegemonists"; the Party is always wise; the Soviet Union is always the disinterested friend — but the spine of the story it tells is one of the twentieth century's authentic epics, and any criticism that forgets that has disqualified itself before it begins. The questions to put to the book are therefore not only the usual ones about what it falsifies, though it falsifies a great deal. They are also: what does its own theory commit it to, what has the passage of time done to its central prediction, and whose graves lie under the road whose victory it celebrates.

The date of the argument is 1979, not the 1980 of the spine. The English translation is copyright Progress 1980, but the text must be read by the latest events it treats, and those events are very late. The final chapter carries the story past the fall of Saigon into the Third Indochina War: it hails the "revolutionary, patriotic forces of Kampuchea" who in January 1979 "toppled the pro-Peking regime of Pol Pot and Jeng Sary and proclaimed the formation of the People's Republic of Kampuchea" — that is, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia — and it describes how "On February 17, 1979 Chinese troops, supported by armor and artillery, swarmed across the entire length of the Vietnam border," quoting Brezhnev's speech of 3 March 1979 in reply. This is a book finalised in

the spring of 1979, at the exact moment the Sino-Soviet split turned into open war between communist states, and it takes its side without a flicker of hesitation. Progress's decision to send it abroad the following year is itself the commission: with China lost to "Maoism" and Vietnam and Laos bound to Moscow, the Soviet Union was presenting reunified Vietnam as the showcase of its export doctrine — a war-ruined peasant nation passing directly to socialism under Soviet guidance, living proof of what Soviet theory called the advance "to socialism bypassing the stage of capitalist development." It is, in this, the companion volume to Kaysone Phomvihane's Revolution in Laos, also drafted in 1979 and also published by the Soviet state press in 1980–81; the two books share a tradition, a theory, a patron and a war, and they should be read together.

What is true, and it is a great deal

The liberation struggle this book narrates was real, protracted, and waged against overwhelming force. The French did conquer Vietnam in the nineteenth century and rule it, in the book's accurate phrase, split into three — "South Vietnam, a colony, Central Vietnam, an 'empire', and North Vietnam, a protectorate" — for the benefit of Paris; the Japanese did occupy it; and on 2 September 1945 a genuine popular revolution proclaimed independence in the words the book quotes from Ho Chi Minh's Declaration: "Viet Nam has the right to be a free and independent country—and in fact it is so already." The account of the first war is sober and, in its essentials, true. The description of Dien Bien Phu — "the biggest operation carried out by the Vietnam People's Army in the war of Resistance," where "the 16 thousand French garrison was encircled" and broken in the spring of 1954 — is real military history, and the victory it records genuinely ended French rule in Indochina and shook the entire colonial system.

The book's account of the American war is, if anything, understated relative to the crime. Divilkovsky and Ognetrov are right that the United States "did not stop short of employing biological, chemical and other weapons of mass annihilation";

right that General Westmoreland was given "carte blanche to wage an unlimited war of annihilation on everything living" in a five-hundred-kilometre zone, until the American press itself began writing of a "lunar landscape"; right about the saturation bombing of "rural communities and residential quarters of towns and cities, schools, hospitals, temples"; right about napalm and white phosphorus and the "mass shootings of civilians including women, children and old people"; right that the massacre at Son My — My Lai — in March 1968 "was by no means an isolated incident." A reader who came to this book knowing nothing would learn a true and terrible thing: that a poor agrarian nation survived the concentrated fury of the greatest military power on earth and defeated it, and that the reunification of a country the war had torn in two was a real and hard-won achievement. None of what follows is a denial of any of that. The critique that follows lands on the Stalinist leadership of that struggle and on the doctrine this book uses to interpret it — never on the Vietnamese people's fight, which needs no apology from anyone.

The theory: two stages, and the ghost of permanent revolution

The organising idea of the book is the theory of stages, in its late-Soviet colonial dress. The revolution comes in two instalments: first a "national-liberation" or "national people's democratic revolution," completed with reunification, and then a "socialist revolution" that reaches socialism without passing through a capitalist stage. The authors state the doctrine as settled Leninism, quoting an official Vietnamese source that the country's advance is "a realization of the Leninist thesis on the feasibility of a country's advance to socialism bypassing the stage of capitalist development." Le Duan, the Party's General Secretary, supplies the exact formula in his report to the Fourth Congress: "our country is still in the middle of the transition from a society with an economy still dominated by petty-commodity production to socialism bypassing the capitalist stage of development."

This is not a Vietnamese idiosyncrasy but the central theoretical claim of the tradition this series exists to examine. The whole quarrel between Trotsky and his opponents, from 1905 onward, turned on precisely this question: whether the revolution in a backward country must pass through a discrete bourgeois-democratic stage before socialism can be posed, or whether — as the theory of permanent revolution held — the democratic and socialist tasks interpenetrate and can be carried through only by the proletariat taking power. Trotsky put the colonial case in the second thesis of *The Permanent*

Revolution (1930) in terms that read as though written against this book: "With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses." The point of the theory was never that the stages could be legislated in advance; it was that they could not.

The apparatus the book erects on the foundation is orthodox to the letter, and it is the same apparatus, drawn from the same source, that the Laos volume erects. The Fourth Congress of December 1976 is quoted mapping "three simultaneous revolutions—one in the sphere of production relations, another in the field of science and technology, and a third one in the field of ideology and culture" — the identical "three revolutions" formula that Kaysone borrowed wholesale for Laos, here in its native Vietnamese form. The transition from "small-scale production to large-scale socialist production" is "planned by the Congress to be completed over a period of 20 years." And the doctrine of "bypassing the capitalist stage" is, again, not a local invention but the export theory of "socialist orientation" that the Soviet Union applied from Aden to Angola, and that a sibling volume in this series — the Academy of Sciences' *USSR and Countries of Africa* (1980) — builds on the same "non-capitalist road." The theory presents as accomplished fact exactly what permanent revolution posed as a question: whether a state can be steered to socialism from above, by a vanguard standing in for an absent proletariat and a foreign power supplying the model.

The verdict of the event

A theory that makes a prediction can be tested against what followed, and this one now can be, in a way it could not when Progress sent the book abroad. The book's last sentence is its prophecy: "the hard but glorious march executed by a free and united Vietnam down the road to socialism will culminate in as great a success as the glorious victory of the Vietnamese patriots over the imperialist aggressors." Half of that came true, and the half that did should be granted without grudging.

The national-liberation achievement was real and heroic, and it is what raises this book above propaganda. Independence from France was genuinely won — the August Revolution named the anti-colonial tasks correctly and the movement carried them through at a colossal human cost that the book does not exaggerate. Dien Bien Phu really did break French rule. The

United States, the strongest power on earth, really was defeated. And in 1975 a country that war had split at the seventeenth parallel really was reunified under a single state. On the tasks it had already accomplished, the book records true history, and the framework it used named those immediate tasks correctly.

The other half — the "march down the road to socialism" that was to "culminate in as great a success" as the war — did not arrive as promised, and its failure took the exact shape the reply had named in advance. The attempt was made in earnest. In the South after 1975 the new state moved against private commerce and, in 1978, launched a forced socialist transformation: an agricultural collectivisation drive in the Mekong delta, and the nationalisation of the trade and finance that the book itself concedes were "concentrated largely in the hands of the Chinese bourgeoisie." Both met the answer such measures have always met — resistance, hoarding, flight. The transformation of the South helped drive the boat-people exodus of 1978–79, when hundreds of thousands left by sea. The economy foundered through the crisis of the *bao cap*, the "subsidy" years of the early 1980s, when the plan delivered shortage and inflation rather than the promised abundance. And then, at its Sixth Congress in December 1986, the very party that had proclaimed the socialist revolution adopted *Đổi Mới*, "renovation": decollectivisation, price liberalisation, the licensing of private enterprise, and, in 1987, a foreign-investment law among the most open in the region. It reintroduced, by deliberate policy, precisely the market and capitalist relations that the socialist stage was supposed to supersede. This was not a Vietnamese aberration but the regional and world pattern — the same turn Laos took as its New Economic Mechanism in November 1986 and the Soviet Union as *perestroika*.

Here, and this is where Vietnam's dossier is richer than Laos's, the Fourth International's press did not have to reason by analogy: it covered the turn directly. Writing in *International Viewpoint* in March 1991, Pierre Rousset described how "the key formulae of *doi moi* (renewal) and *tu duy moi* (new thought)" had opened a period of "economic liberalization" in which "the market in agricultural products is essentially free, and private commerce flourishes." His summary of the political settlement that resulted is the whole matter in a sentence: "the VCP leadership has sought to pursue liberalization on the economic plane while freezing everything on the political plane" — a bureaucratic party, its monopoly wholly intact, presiding over the reintroduction of capitalist relations within little more than a decade of victory. The tradition had restated the underlying argument through the

1980s, in the debate between Ernest Mandel and Alec Nove over market and plan (*Quatrième Internationale* no. 28, April–June 1988, where Mandel's "Le mythe du socialisme de marché" answered Nove's case for "feasible" market socialism) — a general theoretical reckoning, not a word of it about Vietnam, but joined at exactly the moment the bureaucratic states were reaching for the market *en masse*.

The verdict falls where permanent revolution said it would. Trotsky had put the general point in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936): "Money cannot be arbitrarily 'abolished'," and the transitional epoch "does not mean a cutting down of trade, but, on the contrary, its extraordinary extension." A backward, war-ruined, overwhelmingly peasant country, led by a party that substituted itself for a proletariat which barely existed, could not vault into socialism by the administrative will of its cadres; the plan could not simply abolish the market it was built to replace. The book was right about the stage it had finished and wrong about the stage it foretold, and its wrongness took the very form the reply had described three decades before it happened.

Correct the record: the road that ran over the Trotskyists

A book titled *The Road to Victory*, opening on the revolution of September 1945, is silent on one thing above all, and the silence is total. Search its ninety thousand words and the name Trotsky does not occur once; neither does Ta Thu Thau, nor La Lutte, nor Cochinchina, nor any acknowledgement that the Vietnamese revolutionary movement of the 1930s contained a large, indigenous current that took the socialist revolution seriously and paid for it with its life. This is not an accident of a foreign author's ignorance. It is the erasure of the fact that the Party's road to victory ran, at its very starting point, over the corpses of Vietnamese revolutionaries murdered by the movement this book celebrates.

Saigon in the 1930s had one of the strongest Trotskyist movements anywhere in the colonial world. The historical facts, recorded by the movement's own survivors — the historian Ngo Van, himself of the Saigon milieu, chief among them — and reported by the Fourth International's press across four decades, are these. Around Ta Thu Thau and the newspaper *La Lutte* (in Vietnamese, *Tranh Dau*, "The Struggle"), Trotskyists and communists in Cochinchina cooperated for several years in a united front that at moments outpolled the Stalinists in Saigon municipal elections. Intercontinental Press set out the arc in September 1985: "The Struggle" group led by Ta Thu Thau, it wrote, "which was

later recognized (in 1939) as the Vietnamese section of the Fourth International — worked closely with the Indochinese Communist Party in southern Vietnam from early 1933 through mid-1937," until the alliance broke apart on the eve of the war. In one of the ironies the official history cannot afford to record, Ta Thu Thau was jailed in 1937 "by the 'democratic' Popular Front government of French imperialism" — a French Popular Front in which the Communists sat.

Then, in the autumn of 1945, as the August Revolution unfolded and the Trotskyists pressed to arm the workers' committees and carry the revolution beyond its bourgeois-democratic limits, the Viet Minh turned on them and killed them. Ta Thu Thau was arrested in the south-central provinces as he travelled from Hanoi back to Saigon and, in the words of the same account, "tried and acquitted three times by local People's Committees in Quang Ngai province, but subsequently was murdered nonetheless." He was one of hundreds. Intercontinental Press stated it plainly in April 1979: "Dozens of Trotskyists who opposed this were massacred by the VCP, including the popular Trotskyist leader Ta Thu Thau."

This is not a retrospective charge invented by later critics. The Fourth International named the murders as they became known and mourned Ta Thu Thau as one of its own. Its International Executive Committee, in an appeal "Against the War in Indo-China!" printed in Fourth International in June 1947, wrote that the Indo-Chinese section, "on the morrow of the country's 'Liberation' and at the very beginning of the Indochinese revolution, was deprived by the criminal hands of Stalin's GPU of many of its leading elements, among them the heroic figure of comrade Ta-Thu-Thau" — and in the same breath sent its "fraternal greetings to the courageous fighters of Viet-Nam." At its Second World Congress in 1948 the International called for a minute of silence for its martyrs and read his name into the roll alongside Trotsky's own; and it listed him again in October 1978 among the movement's murdered founders, "Ta Thu Thau from Vietnam," beside Blasco (Tresso) of Italy and Pouliopoulos of Greece. The point is exact and it belongs at the front of any honest reckoning with this book: the revolutionaries who took permanent revolution seriously in Vietnam itself were not refuted by the Party whose victory *The Road to Victory* narrates. They were killed by it, and then written out of the history.

The silences and the transfigurations

Elsewhere the book's method is not silence but transfiguration — the awkward fact named and turned inside out, which, as

this series has found repeatedly, produces a falsifiable claim harder to defend than any omission. Three cases stand out.

The ethnic-Chinese question is the sharpest. The book does not hide the 1978 nationalisation of Southern commerce; it defends it, and blames its consequences on Peking. "Seizing upon the quite legitimate nationalization by the SRV government of large-scale private trade in South Vietnam which was concentrated largely in the hands of the Chinese bourgeoisie," it writes, "Peking leaders launched a campaign of crude slander," and Peking's agents then "force[d] by a combination of fraud and threats many of them to abandon their jobs... and go to China." In this telling the expropriation is legitimate, the exodus is Chinese subversion, and the tens of thousands who drowned at sea do not appear at all — the word for the sea exodus, the boat people, is nowhere in the book. Here the Fourth International's press is the corrective, and it is a fair one, because it was in no way hostile to Vietnam. Intercontinental Press covered the exodus week by week through 1979, dated the decisive act — "It was only in March 1978 that capitalism was overturned in South Vietnam, notably with the expropriation of the ethnic Chinese bourgeoisie which controlled commerce" — and spent most of its energy attacking the imperialist and Chinese hypocrisy that exploited the tragedy. But even while defending Hanoi, it would not print the book's whitewash: "There are too many indications," it conceded in July 1979, "that there was an aspect of racism in the policy followed toward the ethnic Chinese." That concession, from a sympathetic source, is precisely what the book's phrase "quite legitimate" is constructed to deny.

The re-education camps are handled by euphemism, exactly as the Laos volume rendered its camps "seminars." Former soldiers and officials of the Saigon regime, the book says, were subject to "registration," and "the former employees of the puppet administration and personnel of the puppet army following re-education were involved in work for the common good"; by the elections of 1976, it adds, "95 per cent of all those who had undergone political re-education had been given the right to vote." Behind that benign formula lay a network of camps in which many thousands were held for years without trial. A book that dwells for chapters on the crimes of the enemy has, for the treatment of the defeated by the victor, only the vocabulary of civic improvement.

By contrast, the two events on which the book might have been expected to fall silent — the invasion of Cambodia and the war with China — it does not conceal at all; it transfigures them into their opposites, and takes Hanoi's side as completely as the Laos book did. The overthrow of the Khmer Rouge

becomes a spontaneous liberation by "the revolutionary, patriotic forces of Kampuchea," the Vietnamese army offstage; China's assault is "aggression" pure and simple, its own two-year record of pressure on Vietnam the sole cause. On the merits of the quarrel the Fourth International was in many respects closer to Hanoi than to Peking or Phnom Penh; the point here is not that the book took the wrong side but that on every question dividing the communist world it took Moscow's side and Hanoi's without a trace of the independent deliberation a sovereign account would show — the same tutelage, dressed as "proletarian internationalism," that runs through the Laos volume.

The reflexive test, and what the book is for

The deepest question to put to a Marxist-Leninist text is not how loudly it denounces its enemies but whether its own categories can ever be turned on itself. *The Road to Victory* is a narrative history rather than a work of doctrine, so it does not run on the vocabulary of "opportunism" and "revisionism" that this series meets in the philosophical volumes — the words scarcely appear. But the reflexive test applies to its central category all the same. The book invokes "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as the essence of the new state, and insists throughout on "the leading role of the working class" and "the alliance between the working class and the peasantry" — in a country that was, as a matter of plain historical fact, overwhelmingly peasant, its industrial proletariat a small minority even in the North and thinner still in the newly conquered South. Where Kayson's Laos volume was at least candid that its "working class was weak" to the point of near-non-existence, Divilkovsky and Ognetov never concede the difficulty; they simply assert the proletarian character of a peasant revolution. A dictatorship exercised in the name of a class that barely exists, by a party that identifies itself with that class by fiat, is the permanent problem permanent revolution named: the substitution of party for class does not dissolve the question of who actually rules a society; it conceals it. Nowhere does the book entertain the possibility that a one-party state built in the name of an almost non-existent proletariat, with no institutions of workers' democracy, might be not the instrument of the working class but a stratum standing above it. The category faces outward only — at imperialists, puppets, hegemonists, the exploiting classes. It is never once turned inward. That refusal is not a matter of a word; it is the exact blind spot that the decade after 1979 filled in, when the party that had abolished the market restored it while keeping every lever of political power in its own hands.

Read as history, *The Road to Victory* is a genuine, partisan record of one of the great anti-colonial endurance feats of the century, and the fight it narrates deserves every ounce of the honour the authors pay it. Read as theory, it is a clear statement of the doctrine of stages in its Soviet colonial form, offered as settled Leninism at the very moment — 1979 — when the events that would refute it were already in motion. Its value to a critical reader lies in that coincidence: it lets you watch the theory this series was founded to contest applied to a real country at the peak of its confidence, and then, in the decade that followed, watch that theory's central promise fail, the announced march to socialism ending in *Đổi Mới* and the return of the market, exactly as the tradition of permanent revolution had warned it must. And it lets you measure the book against the graves it steps over: the Vietnamese revolutionaries whose own road to socialism the Party closed with a bullet in 1945, and whom the Fourth International, alone, refused to forget. Between the book's account of the road to victory and that one, the reader now has both, and can decide whose road it was.

Of Human Values

Essays on Rasputin, Shukshin and Abramov by a critic who could genuinely read - and who, as head of the Moscow Writers' Union, had spent the previous year destroying the careers of writers who published without permission.

Felix Kuznetsov

Introduction to the 1980 Edition

This is a book about conscience written by a man whose job was to punish it. *Of Human Values* is a volume of literary criticism — seven essays on the best Soviet prose of its day, on Valentin Rasputin and Vasily Shukshin and Fyodor Abramov, on the moral seriousness that ran through the "village prose" of the 1970s — and much of the criticism is genuinely good. Its author, Felix Kuznetsov, could read. He could also, in the same years, sit across a table from writers he judged to have stepped out of line and see them expelled, unpublished, and broken. To read the book without that second fact is to miss what it is. To read it with that fact in mind is to watch a professional custodian of literature explain, at length and often movingly, why literature matters — and never once let the word "freedom" touch the writer.

Progress Publishers issued the English text in Moscow in 1980, translated by Evgeni Filippov from Kuznetsov's *Horizons of Humaneness* (Gorizonty chelovechnosti). The date on the imprint is, for once, the real date of the argument. The latest work Kuznetsov cites is Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Uplifted* in a 1979 Moscow printing; his organising authority is the 25th Congress of the Communist Party (1976), which he quotes on the first pages; nothing in the book postdates the decade it appeared in. This is not one of the Progress titles that carries a fresh jacket over a text years older than its spine. It is a book of 1980, and that matters, because 1980 is the year immediately after the episode that tells us who Kuznetsov was.

What the book is, and who wrote it

Felix Kuznetsov (1931–2016) was, by the time this book appeared, First Secretary of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union of the Russian Federation — one of the most powerful literary-administrative posts in the country. The Union was not a professional association in any Western sense. It controlled who could publish, who received an apartment or a dacha, who was translated and paid, and — through its power to expel —

who ceased, officially, to be a writer at all. Kuznetsov ran its Moscow organisation. He was an apparatus man of literature, and he was very good at it.

In January 1979 a group of writers, among them Vasily Aksyonov, Viktor Yerofeyev, Andrei Bitov, Fazil Iskander and Yevgeny Popov, assembled an uncensored literary almanac called *Metropol* — not a political tract, but an anthology of work that had not passed, and would not pass, the censor. It was offered openly to the authorities; the point was to publish outside the machinery, not underground. The machinery answered. Kuznetsov summoned the younger contributors to the Secretariat, and it was Kuznetsov who supplied the public verdict. At a meeting of the Central Writers' Club on 22 January 1979 he called the almanac's contents "pornography of the spirit"; in *Moskovsky Literator* on 7 February he wrote that its authors were playing "a filthy political game that has nothing to do with literature." Popov and Yerofeyev were expelled from the Union. Aksyonov resigned and, the next year, emigrated. The affair became a small international scandal, and Kuznetsov was its Moscow face.

That is the man writing here that the highest task of literature is "the significance of genuine human values for man and our society," and that Soviet writing at its best fosters "human kindness, compassion and empathy, fine sensibilities and intolerance of evil." The book and the expulsions are not separated by a decent interval. They are the same year, the same desk, the same signature.

It helps to know what the book was for. Its governing frame is *razvitoi sotsializm*, "developed socialism" — the Brezhnev-era doctrine, formalised around the 25th Congress, that the Soviet Union had reached a settled, mature socialist stage in which the urgent business was no longer transformation but consolidation, and above all the moral and cultural cultivation of the citizen. Kuznetsov's opening pages recite it exactly: at "the mature stage of socialism" the country's "spiritual potential is ever more fully realised," and concern for the

individual's moral values has become "a duty of the State." Literature's assigned task within that doctrine is the shaping of "moral attitudes," which is why the 25th Congress's attention to "the topic of morality and moral quests" matters so much to him and why he quotes Brezhnev on it directly. The book, in other words, is not idle criticism; it is criticism performing a commissioned function within a Party programme — and its English publication by Progress adds a second audience to the first. To the Soviet reader it modelled correct literary judgement; to the Western reader it advertised a Soviet literature morally serious enough to answer the "consumer society," a respectable face for détente-era export. Both audiences were to be shown the same thing: that in the USSR the life of the spirit was in safe, cultivated hands. The hands were Kuznetsov's.

Where the criticism is real

The house rule of this series is that a book is not to be dismissed wholesale, and *Of Human Values* earns the credit honestly on one front: Kuznetsov is a real reader of the writers he most admires, and those writers were among the finest the Soviet Union produced. His subject is the generation that turned, in the 1960s and 70s, from public themes to the inner life — to conscience, memory, death, the moral weight of ordinary rural existence — and he tracks their achievement with attention and, at moments, with tact.

His pages on Rasputin are the strongest. Writing on *Live and Remember* — the story of Nastena, whose husband deserts from the front and hides near his own village — Kuznetsov catches the thing that makes the novella unbearable and great: that Nastena takes her husband's crime into herself as guilt, and that Rasputin refuses to let her off. "Rasputin is kind and truthful," he writes, and then, refusing sentimentality, notes how the writer "shows without a single false note" both the grief and the shabbiness of the children in *The Last Break* who "poison the last days and hours of the dying mother." When he concludes that this "menace of lack of spirituality that dehumanises people" is "what makes Rasputin's story valuable," he is not wrong, and he has done the reading to earn it.

He is nearly as good on Shukshin, and here something more interesting shows through. Kuznetsov quotes Shukshin's drunken village priest — "there is no God... God is Life. I believe in that god" — and grants that "the reflections of the weird drunken priest are the author's own thoughts," that here Shukshin "utters important, confessional truths in his own

voice." He notices the "soul ache" that runs through the stories, the failed lives, the men who drink because "there is at least some meaning" that way. This is close observation of a difficult, spiritually restless writer. On Trifonov, whose spare Moscow stories of shabby compromise offered the least "positive" material of any writer he treats, Kuznetsov is generous and accurate: "War against desert in human souls runs through the whole of Trifonov's prose," he writes, crediting the very understatement — "little or no social comment" — that a cruder official critic would have called a failing. And when he judges that Bondarev's *The Shore* falters because "the Great Patriotic War is something the author has lived through, while the modern West is something he has only seen," he is making a genuine critical discrimination, the kind that comes from a real eye and not from a checklist.

None of this should be waved away. A reader who wants an intelligent guided tour of Soviet village and moral prose at the end of the 1970s — who Abramov's *Pryaslins* are, why Farewell to Matyora mattered, what Belov was doing in *All in a Day's Work* — will find one here, written by someone who had read all of it closely. The problem is not that Kuznetsov cannot see literature. It is what he does with the seeing.

The tell

Watch what happens the moment Shukshin's material becomes awkward. His film *The Red Snowball Tree* had won a prize abroad, and Kuznetsov reports that "some foreign critics raised their eyebrows: they wondered how a film promoting Christianity, and the Russian Orthodox elements of the peasant soul, could not only have been released in that mysterious USSR, but even won official support." A critic free to follow the evidence might pause on that — on the plainly religious grain of Shukshin's imagination, on the "soul ache" and the "I Believe!" he has just been quoting. Kuznetsov does the opposite. He reaches past Shukshin to a letter Belinsky wrote to Gogol in 1847 and produces it as a ruling: the Russian people is "profoundly atheistic people by nature." The awkward fact is not examined; it is administered. This is the gatekeeper's reflex inside the critic's prose — the reflexive step from asking what the writer means to deciding how to keep the writer on the right side of the line.

Once you see it there, you see it everywhere, and it comes to a head on the one word the book cannot afford. *Of Human Values* is saturated in the vocabulary of conscience, honour, truth, and moral choice. Kuznetsov even insists that "the Marxist-Leninist conception of morality, which is based on the

theory of social classes, does not abolish freedom of moral choice or human conscience, as Lenin stressed." Freedom of moral choice: the phrase is right there. But it is the freedom to arrive, by an inner path, at the conclusions already held; it never becomes the freedom of the writer to publish what the Union will not pass. Every value in the book is a value that terminates in agreement. The frame is stated openly: literature is the field of "the unprecedented ideological battle for man's soul and mind which the world is witnessing," and the highest praise Kuznetsov can give any of his writers is to enrol them in socialist realism — to certify that their conscience came out where the Congress said it should. When Bondarev's fictional Soviet writer wins a televised argument against a West German critic, Kuznetsov underscores it as a verdict: "Nikitin, and with him, the Soviet writer Yuri Bondarev, win the argument." The moral drama is real to him only when it is also a scoreboard.

And then the silences, which in this series are themselves the finding. In a 1980 book about the conscience of contemporary Soviet literature, written by the First Secretary of the Moscow Writers' Organisation, the following words do not appear: Solzhenitsyn. Samizdat (the underground circulation of banned manuscripts). Metropol. Censorship. Sinyavsky, Daniel, Brodsky — the writers tried, jailed or exiled in the two decades the book surveys — are absent to a man. This is not the ordinary silence of a critic with a chosen subject. Kuznetsov is not an outsider who happened not to mention these things. He is the official who, twelve months before the book appeared, had personally pronounced the Metropol writers guilty of "a filthy political game that has nothing to do with literature." The absence is not ignorance. It is the same act as the expulsions, performed in a different room: the drawing of the line that decides what "literature" and "human values" are permitted to contain. A book that defines conscience so as to leave out every Soviet writer who paid for having one has told you exactly where its own conscience stops.

The mechanism that makes all this feel like generosity rather than control is the book's steady polarity against the West. Kuznetsov's values are almost never defined on their own terms; they are defined against a foil — the bourgeois "consumer society," the "philistine petty-bourgeois mentality," the "black holes" in man's consciousness, the West German critic in Bondarev's novel who predicts that the Soviet Union too will "grow fat" and let its spiritual life die among the refrigerators. Set against that, orthodoxy reads as humanism: to affirm conscience becomes an act of resistance to consumerism, and the reader is invited to feel that the Party

and the human spirit are on the same side of a single front. It is an effective move, and it quietly does the book's hardest work, because it locates every threat to the inner life outside — in Hamburg, in the marketplace, in the enemy — and so leaves no room to ask whether the deeper threat to a writer's conscience might sit in Moscow, in the Secretariat, in the man drawing up the expulsion list. The enemy of the soul is always the West; it is never the Union.

So the two questions this series learned to ask of any such volume answer themselves here. Does "human values" ever extend to the freedom of the writer? No. Could the book's own category — the moral courage it celebrates, the refusal to live a "stolen life," the "civic courage" it demands of its heroes — ever be turned on the author's own institution, on a Writers' Union that broke careers for a manuscript? The book is built so that it cannot. Its heroes are brave against kulaks (well-to-do peasants), against wartime cowardice, against Western consumerism, against the "philistine petty-bourgeois mentality" the Congress warned of. They are never brave against the apparatus, because the apparatus is holding the pen.

The reply

The tradition this series writes from did not have to wait for the Metropol affair to answer Kuznetsov. It answered the whole type of official he was, three times over, decades before, and — most usefully — it did so from inside Marxism, so that the objection cannot be dismissed as bourgeois complaint about "free expression."

Start with the writer the Soviet state itself canonised as the father of its aesthetics, Georgi Plekhanov, whose own *Selected Philosophical Works* this series republishes. In *Art and Social Life* (1912–13), reprinted by Progress in Volume V of that edition (1981), Plekhanov set down the sentence Kuznetsov's whole enterprise depends on not quoting. Political authority, Plekhanov wrote, "always prefers the utilitarian view of art" — the demand that art serve a purpose set for it — because "it is to its interest to harness all ideologies to the service of the cause which it serves itself"; and, he added, since such authority "is most often conservative and even reactionary," the demand for commanded art is generally a reactionary reflex, one that "can just as well cohabit with a conservative, as with a revolutionary attitude of mind." Plekhanov's aesthetics rules out precisely the thing Kuznetsov administered. On his account the artist thinks in images that arise, as he put it after Belinsky, unbidden — and images cannot be issued to order like a directive. To command the image is to abolish it. The founder Progress kept on its shelf

had already convicted the Writers' Union of the oldest habit of power.

Trotsky put the same case in the register of the revolution's own quarrels. On 9 May 1924, in a speech to the Press Department of the Party's Central Committee — printed as "Class and Art" — he faced down exactly the men who were then trying to turn literature into an arm of policy, the critics of the journal *Na Postu* ("On Guard") who policed writers by their politics and denounced the editor Voronsky for approaching literature "from the literary point of view." Trotsky's answer was blunt: "art has to be approached as art, literature as literature, that is, as a quite specific field of human endeavour." A class criterion in art was legitimate, he granted, but "this class criterion must be refracted artistically" — and the *Na Postu* method, judging a book by which émigré paper had praised or damned it, he called "not tactics but a disgrace." Kuznetsov's Belinsky-against-Shukshin manoeuvre — reaching past the work to a ruling that settles it — is the *Na Postu* method in a smoother suit. The tradition named it, and named it as a betrayal of Marxism, in 1924.

By 1938 Trotsky was writing about what that method had built. In "Art and Politics in Our Epoch," a letter to the *American Partisan Review*, he set the October revolution's early flowering of art against what the bureaucracy had made of it: "The bureaucratic reaction, on the contrary, has stifled artistic creation with a totalitarian hand." Official Soviet art, "based on lies and deceit," existed to "exalt the leader" and manufacture a myth. And against the whole idea of a Kuznetsov — the state officer of literature — Trotsky stated the principle that the Metropol expulsions violate to the letter: a genuine revolutionary party "is neither able nor willing to take upon itself the task of leading and even less of commanding art... Art, like science, not only does not seek orders, but by its very essence, cannot tolerate them." Such a pretension, he wrote, "could only enter the head of a bureaucracy — ignorant and impudent, intoxicated with its totalitarian power." Art "can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself." The First Secretaryship Kuznetsov held was, in this account, not an instrument of socialist culture but the precise thing that suffocates it.

The point of setting these texts beside *Of Human Values* is not to deny that literature has social content — Plekhanov, Trotsky and Kuznetsov all insist that it does, and the tradition answering this book has always expected art to take the side of the oppressed. The distinction, and it is the whole distinction, is between a writer who freely finds that his images and his

convictions run together, and an authority that supplies the convictions and requires the images to match. The first is the condition of all committed art, Rasputin's and Shukshin's included. The second is the Metropol Secretariat. Kuznetsov's book is an extended, cultured, sometimes beautiful argument for the first, produced by the operating hand of the second.

What to take from it

Read *Of Human Values*, then, for what it honestly contains: an able critic's account of a remarkable body of writing, by an insider who had read every page and who genuinely loved some of it. On Rasputin, on Shukshin's ache, on Trifonov's buried moral seriousness, Kuznetsov is worth having, and this series does not pretend otherwise. But read it knowing what it is doing with that love. The book's recurring word is conscience, and its governing act is the suppression of it. It was written by the man who, in the same twelve months, told the country that an anthology of uncensored fiction was "pornography of the spirit," and it is built so that the courage it praises can never be aimed where courage was actually required. The constraint is not in Kuznetsov's eye, which was good. It is in his office, which decided in advance what a Soviet writer's conscience was permitted to conclude — and expelled those who concluded otherwise. That is why a book so full of human values has no room in it for the freedom of a single human being to write.

Fundamentals of Political Economy

Marxist political economy for beginners, both halves of it - capitalism through Capital and Imperialism, then the political economy of socialism - set out in nineteen short chapters in the doctrine's last untroubled year.

Maria Nikolaevna Ryndina and others

Introduction to the 1980 Edition

Of the roughly two hundred Progress titles in this series, the fullest statement of Soviet economic doctrine is the academic course Political Economy prepared under Academician A. M. Rumyantsev, reprinted and introduced separately in these pages. Fundamentals of Political Economy is that same doctrine reduced to a primer. In nineteen short chapters and some eighty thousand words it carries a reader from the definition of a productive force to "the economic competition between the two world economic systems," and it was meant to be the first book on the subject a student or a self-taught worker ever opened. Its title page names three authors — M. N. Ryndina, G. O. Chernikov and T. N. Khudokormov — and Progress issued it in the "Marxist-Leninist Theory" series, translated from the Russian by Lenina Ilitskaya. The first two of those authors elsewhere produced a Political Economy of Capitalism that halts at the capitalist frontier. What distinguishes the present book is that here they do not halt. Chapters One to Ten expound the political economy of capitalism, and expound it competently; Chapters Eleven to Nineteen cross over into "the political economy of socialism," and it is the crossing that fails. The reason it fails is written, in the book's own words, into the half that holds.

The date of the text

The spine says 1980, and for once the spine is close to the truth, but it is worth being exact, because the exact date is part of the argument. The latest events in the book are the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the CPSU of 1976, from which Brezhnev is quoted more than once; the recession of 1974–75; the Soviet Government statement of 4 October 1976 on restructuring international economic relations. The tenth five-year plan of 1976–1980 is described as still under way — retail prices "were kept stable" through it, collective-farm pay "is to increase by another 26 per cent" before its end — and the socialist countries are said to be "now implementing

economic plans for the period up to 1990." There is no Twenty-Sixth Congress, which met in February 1981; the word constitution does not occur once, though the 1977 Constitution's signature phrase, "developed socialism," runs through the book eighteen times. So the manuscript closed around 1979 and reached English in 1980. That places it three to four years ahead of the Rumyantsev course and before the July 1979 planning decree on which the larger book leans. This is the doctrine caught in its last untroubled year: after "developed socialism" had been officially proclaimed and before anyone with a Moscow chair would call the decade that followed the era of stagnation. The book teaches the serene functioning of a completed socialist order at the last moment such serenity was still official.

What the book gets right

The first ten chapters are an exposition of Marx's Capital and Lenin's Imperialism, and they are a good one. They proceed in Marx's order and by Marx's logic. Chapter Three takes the commodity, the twofold character of labour, the money form and the law of value; it defines the law of value accurately as "an objective economic law governing commodity production," traces how the "spontaneous operation of the law of value" both develops the productive forces and ruins producers, so that "simple commodity production breeds capitalist relations," and it teaches commodity fetishism as a category rather than a slogan. Chapter Four derives surplus value and states the basic law of capitalism; Chapters Five and Six handle the distribution of surplus value, the reproduction of social capital and the theory of crises, correctly locating the roots of crisis in the contradiction between "the organisation of production in individual enterprises and the anarchy of production in society in general" and in the lag of effective demand behind the growth of the two departments of production. Chapters Seven to Ten expound Lenin's theory of imperialism — monopoly and finance capital, the export of capital, state-monopoly capitalism as "a complete material preparation for socialism" — and expound it faithfully. A reader schooled in this half would emerge genuinely able to

analyse a capitalist economy. This must be said plainly, because the tradition from which this introduction is written shares that analysis without reservation. On the anatomy of capital there is no quarrel between this textbook and its critics. The quarrel begins at the exact point where the book asks the reader to carry Marx's categories across the frontier into the Soviet economy unchanged.

The claim at the centre

The thesis the second half exists to establish is that socialism has its own political economy: a parallel system of objective economic laws, discovered rather than made, that govern the socialist economy as the laws of Capital govern the capitalist one. The book enumerates them — a main economic law of socialism, a law of the planned, proportionate development of the national economy, a law of distribution according to work — and, as the load-bearing member of the set, the continued operation of commodity production and the law of value. On this it is entirely explicit. "The law of value also operates," it states, "its existence arising from the presence of commodity-money relations under socialism"; indeed money, price, trade, credit and profit persist with it. What changes is only the manner of operation. "The law of value operates in socialist society through the mechanism of planned price formation"; it is no longer "a regulator of social production" but is consciously used, "in the acts of sale and purchase, when the prices of goods are realised."

And these laws are insisted upon as objective. In its opening chapter the book holds that under capitalism "economic laws operate spontaneously," whereas under socialism "they are realised through the conscious, organised activity of the people." But conscious realisation, it is careful to add, does not make them any less objective: "the economic laws operative under socialism are objective. They are not invented and cannot be annulled or altered at will." Under socialism, we are told, "people can not only learn the content of economic laws, but also provide the best possible conditions for their correct operation," and so "the working people under socialism become genuine makers of their own history." The book wants both halves of this at once: laws that govern from outside the will, and producers who are their masters.

The concession the book cannot see

The remarkable thing is that the book states the objection to its own doctrine and then rejects it. There are theorists, it complains in Chapter One, "who identify the spontaneous

action of economic laws with their objective character. They imply that no objective laws exist in socialist society as there are no and can be no spontaneously operating economic laws in it." That is precisely the point Marx makes, and the book treats it as an error. But it is not an error; it is the whole content of Capital, and the book itself teaches it forty pages earlier. Value, in Marx, is the category of a society in which production is not consciously controlled — in which the labour of individuals is validated as social labour only behind their backs, after the fact, through the exchange of things. That is what commodity fetishism is, and Chapter Three defines it correctly: under commodity production "these relations form spontaneously and dominate men," so that "people are dominated by their own production relations, which are manifested in things." The chapter then draws the conclusion the second half will have to unsay: "With the abolition of private ownership, commodity fetishism disappears."

Set the two halves side by side and the book refutes itself. If commodity fetishism disappears with the abolition of private ownership, and if — as Chapter Sixteen insists — the law of value nonetheless still operates under socialism, then either fetishism has not disappeared or the law of value is not what Part One said it was. Both cannot stand. The law of value governs from behind precisely because, and for exactly as long as, the associated producers do not govern their own economy in front. To say that it still operates under socialism is to concede, whatever the authors intend, that the producers do not yet consciously control their economy; that their labour is still socially validated through price rather than through transparent common decision; that they are, in Marx's sense, still ruled by their product. That is not the classless society Marx meant by socialism. It is a transitional economy in which the old forms survive because the old problem — the conscious social organisation of labour — is unsolved. A "political economy of socialism" of this length is, in its very existence, testimony that its object is not yet socialist: political economy is the science of an economy that runs itself and confronts its participants as an alien objectivity, and to the extent that an economy has genuinely become the transparent joint work of its producers it ceases to have a political economy at all. The book cannot see this because its institutional function forbids it. It must present the USSR of 1979 as socialism achieved — "developed, mature socialism," in its own phrase — and so it must convert what Marx read as the symptoms of an unfinished transition into permanent laws of a finished order.

This is the same fault the introduction to the Rumyantsev course anatomises at greater length, and a reader who wants the argument developed against the full academic version will

find it there. The primer is if anything the sharper specimen, because it does the incriminating work in fewer words and states the objection to itself out loud.

The answer from within the tradition

None of this is hindsight. It was set down, from inside the Marxist movement and against exactly this bureaucratic tendency, four decades before Ryndina's collective codified the orthodoxy. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), in the chapter "The Struggle for Productivity," Trotsky treated the survival of money and value under Soviet conditions not as a law to be enshrined but as the measure of a distance still to be travelled. State and money, he wrote, are alike "an inheritance from the class society, which is incapable of defining the relations of man by man except in the form of fetishes"; in a communist society both "will disappear," and "their gradual dying away ought consequently to begin under socialism." The persistence of money was therefore an index of incompleteness: "We shall be able to speak of the actual triumph of socialism only at that historical moment when the state turns into a semi-state, and money begins to lose its magic power." Note what this does to the textbook's own vocabulary. Ryndina's book announces in Chapter Three that fetishism has already been abolished; Trotsky says the "deathblow to money fetishism will be struck only upon that stage" — a stage explicitly located in the far future, "entirely to posterity" — when social wealth has grown enough to make the value calculus fall away of itself. The forms cannot simply be commanded out of existence: "Money cannot be arbitrarily 'abolished'," he wrote against the ultra-lefts. But the reason cuts equally against the textbook, because the value forms cannot be dispensed with by decree for the same reason they cannot yet be dispensed with at all, and that inability is the standing evidence that the transition is unfinished. What Trotsky read as a symptom, the primer teaches as a law.

He had made the constructive half of the case earlier still, in *The Soviet Economy in Danger* (22 October 1932), against the first bureaucratic triumphalism about the plan. A transitional economy cannot verify its own plan in advance; it must test its blueprints against the very market forms the bureaucracy imagines it has transcended. "The plan is checked and, to a considerable degree, realized through the market." And he named, exactly, the illusion this textbook institutionalises: only a "universal mind" of the kind imagined by Laplace, registering every process of nature and society at once, "could a priori draw up a faultless and exhaustive economic plan." "The bureaucracy often imagines that just such a mind is at its

disposal; that is why it so easily frees itself from the control of the market and of Soviet democracy." Fundamentals of Political Economy is that imagination compressed into a curriculum: the law of value not confronted as a check on the plan but "used" through "planned price formation," the recalcitrance of an unmastered economy dissolved into the confident administration of objective laws by a state that has, on paper, already understood them.

The graves under the serenity

There is a last silence, and it is the most telling, because it concerns the discipline's own past. The book presents "the political economy of socialism" as the natural continuation of Marx and Lenin. It was nothing of the kind. As a distinct discipline with its own codified laws it was a Stalin-era construction, given authoritative form by Stalin himself in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1952) — the text that ruled that commodity production and the law of value would persist under socialism, and that laid down the "basic economic law of socialism" as the securing of society's growing requirements through the continuous expansion of production. Ryndina's collective reproduces that framework entire. Its main economic law — the "well-being and all-round development of all members of society" through the growth of production — is Stalin's 1952 formula, here rephrased and hung instead on a sentence lifted from Lenin. The 1952 template is unmistakable, and the name of its author appears in this book exactly zero times.

The erasure runs deeper than Stalin. The real founding debates of Soviet economics — fought in the 1920s over industrialisation, accumulation and the peasantry — have been removed from the record altogether. Evgeny Preobrazhensky, whose *The New Economics* (1926) made the law of value under Soviet conditions its central problem and coined the debate's most powerful category, "primitive socialist accumulation," is absent: not one occurrence of his name, nor of that concept, in the whole text. Bukharin, his great antagonist, is absent. Trotsky is absent — this primer does not even trouble to condemn him, as the fuller courses do; it simply proceeds as though the argument had never happened. The agrarian economists Kondratiev and Chayanov, whose work on peasant economy was of the first international standing, are absent. This is not oversight. Those economists were, most of them, physically destroyed in the Terror — Preobrazhensky and Chayanov shot in 1937, Bukharin and Kondratiev in 1938 — and the book chooses the one sentence that turns the knife without knowing it does. "In the Soviet

Union," it declares, "the main work on building socialism was completed in the latter half of the 1930s. Today the Soviet Union is a country of developed, mature socialism." The latter half of the 1930s is the years of the shooting. The discipline this primer teaches was built on the graves of the discipline that preceded it, and dates its own completion to the season of the executions. Its serenity depends on the reader not knowing they are there.

Where to read the other side

And then history ran the control experiment. The book closes, as such books had to, on "the economic competition between the two world economic systems," and it is confident of the result: Soviet growth rates "decisive," living standards rising, "no inflation," while in the capitalist world "crime is on the increase. People are turning to drugs. Capitalist culture is deluged with pornography." Within a decade the economy whose objective laws these were had abandoned the plan for the market and then ceased to exist. A political economy claims to have found the objective laws of its object; when the object collapses within ten years, the claim is answerable, and the honest verdict is that the laws were not laws. That is not a cheap point scored after the fact — it is the balance sheet the book's own method demands.

Fundamentals of Political Economy should be reprinted and read for what it is: the most economical statement of Soviet economic orthodoxy in the language of international circulation, and, in its first half, a genuinely usable exposition of Marx and Lenin. The reader who wants the counter-argument on the second half has it close to hand, and much of it stands in the tradition the book claims and cannot name. Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* remains the standard against which every Soviet account of Soviet society in this series should be read; its treatment of money, value and the state supplies the reflexive analysis this primer forbids itself. The companion introduction to the Romyantsev Political Economy carries the same critique against the full academic course, and the sibling volumes from the same stable — Rymalov's *The World Capitalist Economy* (1982), Osadchaya's *Keynesianism Today* (1983), the earlier Sdobnikov-edited *Socialism and Capitalism* (1971) — show the identical structure of insight and blindness, first-rate on the crisis of the capitalist order and silent on the sickening of their own. The reflexive test that the anti-Stalinist tradition applies to this whole library is simply whether the categories a book builds can be turned on the speaker's own side. Ryndina's collective builds the finest analytical instrument in the

catalogue and, in its second half, points it in only one permitted direction — which is the record of what a serious economics costs when the state that commissions it requires it to face away from itself.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

The Crisis of Capitalism and the Condition of the Working People

The capitalist slump of the 1970s measured from Western official sources - unemployment, wages, inflation, output - and addressed to the mass Communist parties of France and Italy in the Eurocommunist years.

Gennady Pavlovich Chernikov

Introduction to the 1980 Edition

The title of G. Chernikov's book makes a promise in two halves, and it is worth pausing on the join between them. The Crisis of Capitalism and the Condition of the Working People proposes to move from a diagnosis of the Western economy to an account of what that economy does to the people who live inside it. The first half is the stronger. Chernikov is an economist of the Soviet academic establishment, writing out of the world that the Institute of World Economics and International Relations and the Institute of the International Working-Class Movement had built, and when he stays close to the statistical record of the capitalist slump of the mid-1970s he is often precise, sometimes genuinely useful, and easy to check. The second half is where the book turns into what it was commissioned to be: a demonstration, by contrast, of the superiority of the system he served. The contrast is the argument, and the contrast is where the book fails, because to make it work Chernikov has to describe one half of the world in the vocabulary of crisis and leave the other half in permanent daylight.

Begin with the date, because the catalogue can mislead. The spine reads 1980, and both the Russian original and the English translation carry a Progress copyright of that year. Here, unusually for this series, the spine is close to honest. The book's evidence runs hard through 1977, reaches into 1978 — steel output, OECD growth forecasts, the "order books of capitalist shipyards ... the thinnest for the past ten years" — and ventures a forecast that the growth curve of the major powers "will creep slowly upward in 1979 and possibly in 1980." This is a book written at the very end of the 1970s and published as the decade closed: a late-Brezhnev text in a late-Brezhnev jacket, with none of the dating problems that afflict other titles in this catalogue. What it says, it says about the world of 1979, and it should be read as a document of that exact moment.

What was it for? Not, in the first instance, for a London bookshop browser curious about Marxism. The book is addressed, throughout, over the heads of that reader to the Communist parties of the West. Its worked examples are drawn from the 22nd Congress of the French Communist Party, from the Bonn congress of the German Communist Party, from the Italian and Belgian party press; its authorities are the 25th Congress of the CPSU and the pages of World Marxist Review. Its closing chapters are a détente-era brief — "Peace, Detente, and Co-operation of All Countries," "Co-operation with Socialist Countries — a Dictate of the Times" — arguing that the Western parties should press for trade with the East and an easing of Cold War tension. This is export literature for the Eurocommunist years: ammunition for the mass Communist parties of France and Italy to make the case that the crisis of the 1970s vindicated them, and that a "democratic way out of the crisis" led, by stages, toward socialism. Chernikov is writing not to convert the West but to arm its Communists, and the book carries the assumptions of that commission on every page.

The doctrine it exists to serve should be stated exactly, because Chernikov states it exactly himself. The organising category is the "general crisis of capitalism" — not this or that recession, but a single terminal process. "The general crisis of capitalism," he writes, "which began during World War I (1914–1918) and the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917, consists in the dying of capitalism and its replacement by a new, socialist mode of production." That process is said to unfold in stages: a first stage from 1917, a second after the Second World War with the emergence of a bloc of socialist states, a third from the mid-1950s. The slump of the 1970s is fitted into this frame as evidence of the third stage deepening — "a further undermining of the capitalist system's foundations." The frame is doctrine, not finding. It is asserted as a law of history, and everything the book then documents is arranged as an instance of it. Capitalism has been dying, on this account, for sixty-three years, and the fact that it has spent

those decades visibly transforming itself — a difficulty a more curious analyst might dwell on — is folded in as merely another symptom of the death.

Alongside the general-crisis schema runs its human counterpart, the thesis of the deteriorating condition of the working people. Chernikov is careful, and to his credit more careful than many, not to claim that Western workers are simply starving; he concedes that the gains won by Western workers have "to some extent retarded the tendency toward an absolute deterioration of the working people's material position." But the tendency is held to be real and to be reasserting itself, and by the end of his wage analysis he concludes that the crisis meant "an absolute worsening of the position of the greater part of the working class of capitalist countries." Immiseration, absolute and relative, is the mechanism by which the general crisis is supposed to be felt in the household.

Now the part that must be said plainly, because a reader told that the whole book is worthless learns nothing from it. When Chernikov documents the distress of Western workers in the mid-1970s slump, much of what he assembles is real and can be cited. His unemployment chapter is the strongest section of the book. The figure he gives — registered unemployment in the developed capitalist countries rising from 6.6 million in 1965 to 17.1 million by December 1975, drawn from national statistics and the International Labour Organisation — is in the right order and honestly sourced. His anatomy of Western unemployment insurance is better than most Soviet accounts of the West and repays reading: he is right that coverage was full of holes (more than a fifth of the United States labour force outside the system; larger shares in Italy and France), that benefit typically replaced only a fraction of prior earnings, and that it ran out after a fixed period "whether or not the unemployed person has managed to find a new job." His pages on migrant labour — the eleven-to-thirteen million foreign workers of Western Europe, hired in the boom and expelled in the slump, a reserve the employers used for "letting 'steam' out of the labour market" — describe a real and ugly mechanism. And he is honest, in a way that strengthens rather than weakens his case, about the limits of official statistics: retail-price baskets "so selected as to hide the true picture," wage indices that leave out miners, migrants, women and the unemployed. A reader who wants a contemporary Marxist account of the 1974–75 recession as it looked from Moscow, with its citations to the ILO, the OECD and the UN Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, will find one here, and the sourcing is generally good enough to follow up. The scholarship, where it is scholarship, deserves that acknowledgement.

The trouble is not the documentation. It is the frame, and above all the asymmetry the frame requires. This is a book about the condition of the working people, and it has only one working people. Run the vocabulary of the book against itself and the pattern is unmistakable. "Crisis" tolls through the contents page like a bell — the overproduction crisis, the monetary crisis, the energy crisis, the ecological crisis, the crisis of state monopoly control, the ideological and political crisis — and every one of them is Western. "Shortage" appears only as an energy shortage in the capitalist market; "deficit" only as the budget and trade deficits of the United States and France; "stagnation" only as the fate of Western real wages. Not once is any of these words allowed to touch the country Chernikov is writing from. The Soviet Union of 1979 — a country then entering the era its own later economists would call the *zastoi*, the stagnation; a country of chronic consumer shortage, of queues, of the second economy — appears in this book solely as the daylight against which the Western night is measured. Poland, where the decisive events of the book's own publication year were about to unfold, is not mentioned at all.

The conclusion states the counter-image without embarrassment. "A planned socialist economy, by its very nature, excludes economic crises and other upsets." "Unemployment has been completely banished from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries." "The incomes of workers, peasants, and all working people are rising and prices kept stable." The "exploitation of man by man has been abolished as a result of historic transformations, and an end has been put to social inequality." The move is not incidental; it is the book's engine. Every deprivation catalogued in the West is convertible, by a turn of the page, into a Soviet achievement. When Chernikov reaches the plight of the Western unemployed, he does not merely describe it — he answers it, quoting the Soviet Constitution's guarantee that citizens have "the right to work (that is, to guaranteed employment and pay in accordance with the quantity and quality of their work)," and holding up "the countries of the socialist community, where the right to work is guaranteed by their constitutions" as the standard the West fails to meet.

This is where the book must be measured against the tradition it exists to refute, and where its silences become findings. The classic answer to exactly this operation was written more than forty years before Chernikov's book, by a man who knew the Soviet worker's condition from the inside and had every ideological reason to flatter it and refused. Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) is the standing counter-text, and it speaks directly to each of Chernikov's claims. Against the boast that exploitation of man by man had been abolished and

inequality ended, Trotsky's chapter on "The Growth of Inequality" found that "Soviet society is already divided into a secure and privileged minority, and a majority getting along in want" — the privileged half-million and the pyramid of officials beneath them, set over a working class from whom they were, in his word, deeply alienated. Against the picture of a working class that "works for itself," Trotsky described a factory regime in which "the workers lost all influence whatever upon the management of the factory," in which the worker "in the bureaucracy ... sees the manager, in the state, the employer."

And against the very contrast Chernikov builds his book upon — the humane socialist workplace set beside the exploitative capitalist one — Trotsky supplied the sentence that ought to be printed opposite Chernikov's conclusion. Describing the piecework and speed-up regime of the Stakhanov years, he observed that in the Soviet Union "the classic methods of exploitation, such as piecework payment, are applied in such naked and crude forms as would not be permitted even by reformist trade unions in bourgeois countries." That is not a Cold War slander imported from the West; it is the judgement of a founder of the Soviet state, made in 1936, and it inverts Chernikov's entire scheme. The book's decisive absence is the Soviet worker's own organisation. Chernikov's chapter on the class struggle is full of Western trade unions striking, marching, defending their members — the French CGT, the West German unions, the eight million who answered the call for a general strike in Italy in November 1977. In the socialist half of his world there are no strikes and no independent unions, and the reason is not that the workers were content; it is that the right Chernikov most conspicuously omits from his catalogue of socialist guarantees is the right of a worker to combine against the state that employs him. He quotes the Constitution's right to work. He is silent on the right to withhold it.

That silence had a history the book does not tell. The Soviet workplace Chernikov offers as the humane alternative to Western wage-labour had itself been the site of a struggle between workers and their own official unions — a struggle Trotsky watched at first hand during the Stakhanov drive of the mid-1930s, when the speed-up campaign set the productivity of the exceptional worker against the wage of the average one. Reporting the resistance it provoked, Trotsky noted the astonishing alignment it exposed: in this conflict "the workers are on one side, the trade unions on the other." That is the precise inversion of Chernikov's picture. In his West, the unions defend the workers against the employer; in the actual Soviet Union of the record, the union stood with the state

against the worker, which is why the Polish workers of 1980 had to build a union outside the official structure rather than reform the one they had. And Chernikov's own method — reading a constitution aloud as proof of a social reality — is the one Trotsky had already turned against the Stalin Constitution of 1936, warning that a fundamental law drafted by the ruling stratum is a self-portrait, not a guarantee: "the lie with which, as a mirror of the ruling stratum, the new constitution is imbued." Chernikov quotes the 1977 Constitution's right to work exactly as the 1936 text had been quoted in its day, as a fact accomplished. Trotsky's caution — that the article guaranteeing the citizen's property would in practice protect "the bureaucrat's automobile ... more effectively than the peasant's wagon" — was a warning about the distance between the paper right and the administered life. Chernikov reprints the paper right and calls the distance closed.

The event supplied the commentary the text could not. The *Crisis of Capitalism and the Condition of the Working People* carries a 1980 copyright. In August 1980 — the book's own year of publication — the workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk struck, an Inter-Factory Strike Committee spread the stoppage across the Baltic coast, and on 31 August the Polish government signed the Gdańsk Agreement conceding the right to form independent, self-governing trade unions. *Solidarność*, the first free trade union in the Soviet bloc, was born of precisely the grievances Chernikov's book declared abolished: rising prices in a system where prices were supposedly "kept stable," a shortage economy in a bloc where shortage was a Western disease, and a working class demanding an organisation of its own against the state that claimed to embody it. No introduction needs to strain the point. A book that asks after the condition of the working people, and can find that question worth posing only west of the Elbe, was answered within months of its appearance by ten million working people inside the system it defends, who had concluded that their condition was a question too.

There is one sentence in Chernikov's conclusion that reads, in retrospect, like an unwitting confession. "Anti-communists," he writes, "try, in their attacks on socialism, to prove that economic and social progress are allegedly achieved under socialism without development of democracy, and even at the price of a limitation of political freedoms." He raises the charge in order to dismiss it as slander — and then Gdańsk demonstrated that the "anti-communists" and the Polish workers were describing the same thing. "Genuine democracy," Chernikov insists a few lines later, "is unthinkable without socialism." The workers of the Baltic

coast, building the freest institution their country had seen since the war precisely against the state that called itself socialist, were not persuaded.

The wider claim — the "general crisis," capitalism in its terminal stage — belongs to a prophecy that the anti-Stalinist left had been examining critically for decades before Chernikov restated it. The Fourth International never doubted that capitalism was crisis-ridden; its founders had lived through 1929. What it doubted was the official schema's central move: the conversion of a real analysis of capitalist contradiction into a calendar of inevitable, stage-by-stage collapse, timed to the achievements of the Soviet state and immune to disproof. Chernikov's own book contains the material for the objection. He records, honestly, that the scientific-technical revolution had "even limited the scale of the recession during the steepest fall in production," that Western capitalism kept renewing its fixed capital and restructuring its industries — and then files this dynamism, without apparent unease, under the heading of death. A system that has been dying since 1914 while transforming the productive forces of half the planet is a system whose obituary needs rewriting, or at least dating. The "general crisis" was not a finding about capitalism; it was a fixed point of Soviet doctrine, and its function was less to explain the West than to certify the East. That is why Chernikov can end a book about economic crisis with the announcement that socialism, "by its very nature, excludes economic crises and other upsets" — a sentence that the following decade in Poland, and then across the bloc, would treat as an experiment and refute.

What, then, is this book for a reader today? It is a well-sourced Soviet account of a real slump, and its first half can be mined — with the ordinary caution owed to any partisan source — for the ILO and OECD data, the anatomy of unemployment insurance, the mechanics of the migrant-labour reserve, that Chernikov assembled with real diligence. It is also a near-perfect specimen of the operation this series exists to document: the reservation of the entire vocabulary of crisis, shortage, stagnation and exploitation for one half of the world, in a book whose own subject was the condition of the working people, written in the last full year before the working people of Poland made that reservation impossible to sustain. Read the unemployment chapter for its figures. Read the conclusion beside *The Revolution Betrayed*, and beside the date on the spine, for everything the figures were arranged to prove.

PHILOSOPHY

The Development of the Monist View of History

The book that taught Russian Marxism to argue - Plekhanov in 1895, under a pseudonym and a deliberately dull title to fool the censor, tracing historical materialism back through French materialism, Guizot, the utopians and Hegel.

Georgi Plekhanov

Introduction to the 1980 Edition

In 1895 a book appeared legally in St Petersburg under the name N. Bel'tov, with a title clumsy enough to bore a censor into passing it. The clumsiness was deliberate. Progress Publishers' own foreword to this printing says so: because propaganda for materialism was prohibited in tsarist Russia, the author gave the book, "as he put it, an 'intentionally clumsy' title", and the word monist was chosen to stand against a "dualist" view of history rather than to advertise the materialism underneath. Bel'tov was Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov, writing from exile, and the book he smuggled past the censorship is the one that taught Russian Marxism to argue.

Start with the date of the text, because the spine misleads in the ordinary way. The Russian original is 1895. This English volume's copyright page records four printings — 1956, 1972, 1974 and 1980 — so what you hold is a fourth impression of a translation first issued in 1956, in the year the Foreign Languages Publishing House was becoming Progress. Nothing in it was rewritten for 1980. The Publishers' Foreword could have been composed at any point in the preceding quarter-century, and reads as though it was.

The book as philosophy

It deserves to be read as an argument and not only as an artefact, so take the argument first.

Plekhanov was answering N. K. Mikhailovsky, an editor of *Russkoye Bogatstvo* and the ablest theorist of Liberal Narodism, along with the sociologist N. I. Kareyev. In 117,639 words Mikhailovsky is named 292 times and Kareyev 44. That is the shape of the thing: a sustained demolition of named opponents, quoted at length from their own pages.

The method is what makes it durable. Rather than assert historical materialism and defend it, Plekhanov reconstructs

the road to it — French materialism of the eighteenth century, the French historians of the Restoration, the utopian socialists, German idealist philosophy — and shows each school breaking on a problem the next inherits. Chapter I sets the trap that the whole book springs: if human nature is fixed and opinions govern the world, then opinions must themselves be explained, and the explanation cannot be opinion. Chapter IV opens on the reversal with a flourish that is characteristic of him — "The materialists of the eighteenth century were firmly convinced that they had succeeded in dealing the deathblow to idealism" — and then spends forty pages showing that the corpse wrote the next century's philosophy. He is generous to his adversaries in a way the tradition that later canonised him mostly was not: Hegel is named 227 times, Saint-Simon 50, Guizot 26, and none of them is a straw man.

He also, in a footnote to Chapter V, does something with consequences. Explaining why he will not accept "economic materialism" as a label — Marx, he notes, never called himself an economic materialist — he writes that he uses the term "dialectical materialism" "because it alone can give an accurate description of the philosophy of Marx". That is the phrase entering the language. Hold on to it; it returns below.

And the book is not the mechanical determinism its later reputation suggests. Its Conclusion states the aim of the whole materialist enterprise as an ideal, and says the word: what Marx and Engels wanted was "the subordination of necessity to freedom, of blind economic forces to the power of human reason". A reader arriving expecting economic fatalism will find the opposite argument being made against the Narodniks (the Populists), who were the ones accusing Marxists of quietism. Plekhanov's Preface notes drily that this charge "is not likely to be reiterated by anyone nowadays".

The Preface also contains the best single sentence about what a polemic is. Asked why he corrected only slips and misprints between editions, he answered that altering the substance of a polemical work "is like appearing before your adversary with a new weapon, while compelling him to fight with his old

weapon" — the more scrupulous, he adds, because Mikhailovsky was by then dead. Progress's own foreword calls the book polemical, lively and readable, and says that although small it "gives a sufficiently full account of the main features of Marxist philosophy". On that, the publisher and this introduction agree without reservation.

What the apparatus does, and what it will not name

The Publishers' Foreword is a compact piece of editorial engineering, and worth reading closely because the same operation runs through the whole Soviet Plekhanov industry.

It gives him everything up to 1903 — the Emancipation of Labour Group, the fight against Narodism, the first attack on Bernstein's revisionism — and then executes a turn in a single sentence: "After 1903 Plekhanov went over to Menshevism—the opportunist trend in Russian Social-Democracy—and made a considerable number of mistakes in appraising contemporary developments". The sentence is immediately followed by a rescue, and the rescue is Lenin's, from 1921: you cannot become a real, intelligent Communist without studying all of Plekhanov's philosophical writings, "because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world."

That is the formula the series has come to call credit-and-containment: the philosophy is canonical, the politics is quarantined, and Lenin supplies the warrant for both halves. It is worth saying plainly that this is not censorship of the text. The book is printed whole, its arguments un mutilated, its author named. The containment happens in the framing.

Progress executed the same operation at scale. Between 1976 and 1981 it issued Plekhanov's Selected Philosophical Works in five volumes — I (1977, itself a third edition following printings of 1960 and 1974), II (1976), III (1976), IV (1980), V (1981) — some 1.66 million words prepared by the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences. It is a serious scholarly edition. Volume I's Publishers' Note records that the texts were re-checked against manuscripts held in Plekhanov House and the Saltykov-Shchedrin library in Leningrad, and names the translators: the *Monist View* is Andrew Rothstein's, first published by Lawrence & Wishart in London in 1947, with Plekhanov's preface and "A Few Words to Our Opponents" translated by A. Fineberg.

Volume I also carries three signed Editor's Notes that argue with Plekhanov in the open rather than cutting him. One tells the reader flatly that a statement of his is "radically at variance

with the basic principles of Marxist-Leninist dialectics", and rebuts it with Engels. Another warns that his treatment of geographical environment "cannot be regarded as absolutely correct". This is a real editorial virtue and the series should say so: an editor who prints the offending passage, marks it, and gives his reasons has left the reader able to disagree with him. Note the limit, though — I counted the notes across all five volumes, and all three are in Volume I. Volumes II to V carry none.

The introductory essays do the heavier work, and they are franker than the standalone foreword. Volume IV's essay speaks of "the political sin which Plekhanov committed after the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. (1903), when he went over to the Menshevik position", traces the damage into the 1909 Chernyshevsky book and the articles on Belinsky and Herzen, and states its exclusion criterion out loud: Plekhanov's legacy is to be assessed not through his late *History of Russian Social Thought* but through the work of the 1880s and 1890s. Whatever else that is, it is not concealment. It tells you what has been left out and why.

But here is what the whole edition will not do, and it is the finding of this introduction.

I was briefed that the five-volume set stops dead in 1913. It does not, and the correction matters. Volume V closes with a cumulative alphabetical index of every work across all five volumes, and that index dates three items later: "Utopian Socialism in the Nineteenth Century" (1914), the preface to Deborin's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Dialectical Materialism* (1916), and "From Idealism to Materialism" (1917). All three are printed, not merely listed, in Volume III. The edition's own notes date the Deborin preface to the end of 1915 and place "From Idealism to Materialism" as completed by Plekhanov at the beginning of 1915 and published in Moscow in 1917.

So Progress printed Plekhanov's philosophical writing from the very years of his defencism — from the war he supported and the revolution he opposed.

And across all 1,662,177 words of those five volumes, the words that name what he did in those years do not occur. Defencism: zero. Defencist: zero. Social-patriotism: zero. Social-chauvinism: zero. Zimmerwald: zero. Yedinstvo, the group and paper through which he conducted his 1917 politics: zero. This is not a search artefact — the underlying stems are everywhere in the ordinary senses (defence and patriot run to dozens of uses per volume in Plekhanov's own prose), so the

nil is on the terms, not on my spelling of them.

The containment, then, is not chronological and not even topical. It is lexical and generic. Menshevism can be named, repeatedly, and called opportunism and a sin. The defencism of 1914–17 cannot be named at all, while the philosophy written during it is set in type. The apparatus argues with Plekhanov about geographical environment and about mechanism; about August 1914 it has no vocabulary.

The volumes on the shelf and the textbooks that ignore them

There is a second, stranger fact, and I have been careful with it because an earlier version of the claim was too strong.

Some of Progress's own philosophy textbooks do not mention Plekhanov at all. V. G. Afanasyev's *Marxist Philosophy* (1980) uses his name zero times in 130,932 words, in a book that finds room for Belinsky, Herzen and Chernyshevsky. Krapivin's *What Is Dialectical Materialism?* (1985, reprinted 1987) has zero, including in a section on the revolutionary democrats. *Philosophy and Sociology* (1975) has zero, against 58 mentions of Herzen and 49 of Chernyshevsky.

The tempting conclusion is a systematic erasure. It is wrong. A. F. Sheptulin's *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (1978) quotes Plekhanov approvingly on the role of the great personality and footnotes him to the edition, by volume and page — *Selected Philosophical Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1974, p. 497, and Vol. II, Moscow, 1976, p. 314. Oizerman's *Main Trends in Philosophy* has eleven mentions; Zis's *Foundations of Marxist Aesthetics* has ten.

That makes the corrected claim the stronger one. Sheptulin proves the volumes were on the shelf, in print, and citable by page, in the same years and from the same publisher. The silence in Afanasyev, Krapivin and Frantsov is therefore a choice made by particular authors, not a prohibition and not an availability problem. It is a divided practice — which is much harder to explain away than a blanket ban would have been, because it means someone decided each time.

One detail sharpens it to a point. Krapivin's book is called *What Is Dialectical Materialism?* The phrase is Plekhanov's, defended in the footnote to Chapter V quoted above, in the volume you are holding. Krapivin does not cite him once.

The reply

The anti-Stalinist left did not need to rescue Plekhanov from Moscow, because it never gave him up — and it did the thing the Soviet apparatus could not, which was to name the collapse and go on admiring the man.

The central text is Trotsky's, written on 24 April 1922 as part of the introduction to the first two volumes of his collected works, published that year in *Under the Banner of Marxism*, and printed in English by the American Socialist Workers Party in *Fourth International*, vol. 4 no. 3 (whole no. 31), March 1943. (The composition date is four years after Plekhanov's death and twenty-one years before the issue that carries it; the archive's issue date is the printing, not the writing, and the distinction matters here.) It opens by conceding the ruin — that a generation knew Plekhanov only in his "patriotic" decline — and then insists twice over: "This was a truly great man."

Trotsky's assessment of what Plekhanov did is more exact than the Progress foreword's, and more limited. He did not create historical materialism and added nothing new to it, Trotsky writes; what he did was introduce it into Russian life, which was "a merit of enormous significance". He locates both the achievement and the failure in the same fact — that Plekhanov was a forerunner, "the first crusader of Marxism on Russian soil", a theoretician without a party to apply the theory in, and that the imbalance between theory and practice proved fatal when 1905 and then 1914 arrived.

And where the five Progress volumes have no word for the defencism, Trotsky quotes it. He reproduces Plekhanov's late formula that a defensive war is a just war, cites the introduction to the *History of Russian Social Thought* in which class struggle governs a society's internal affairs while national solidarity governs its external ones, and observes that this is a doctrine from Sombart and not from Marx — Sombart being a man Plekhanov had spent decades demolishing. That is an act-attached charge: a named text, a quoted sentence, a specified reversal, all of it refutable by anyone who opens the book. It is precisely what the Soviet apparatus's unfalsifiable "political sin" is not.

The essay's last move is the one worth putting beside the Publishers' Foreword. Trotsky notes that Plekhanov's admirers in his decline had gathered his worst writings into a separate edition, and says that by doing so they only helped separate the false Plekhanov from the real one, who "belongs entirely and wholly to us."

Both traditions, in other words, front this author with a claim

of inheritance, and both cite Lenin's 1921 sentence to do it — the Fourth International editors quoting it in 1943 in one translation, Progress quoting it in this volume in another. The difference is not whether Plekhanov is claimed. It is whether the claim requires an unnameable remainder.

That claim stayed live. Fourth International went on to print Plekhanov himself: his essay on Hegel in April 1949, and "Belinsky and Rational Reality" serialised across four issues from spring 1955 to spring 1956. Nearly thirty years later George Novack, in "In Defense of Engels" (Intercontinental Press, 16 February 1976), answered the fashionable claim that Plekhanov's philosophy was the seed of his politics, wrote that "Plekhanov, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky are our teachers", and named, without flinching, "Plekhanov's bad conduct in 1905, 1914, and 1917" — the three dates the five Progress volumes cannot print. Novack's *Understanding History* builds its own account of Marxist sociology directly on Plekhanov's division of Marxism into dialectical materialism, historical materialism and scientific socialism, crediting him by name. That tripartition is also, as it happens, the architecture of Progress's own ABC of Social and Political Knowledge series, whose volumes 5, 6 and 7 are Scientific Communism, Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism — one of which is Krapivin's.

ideal as "the subordination of necessity to freedom, of blind economic forces to the power of human reason".

A note on this text

Readers comparing editions should know the following. This edition is set from the Progress Publishers printing whose imprint page reads "First printing 1956 / Second printing 1972 / Third printing 1974" — the printing immediately before the 1980 fourth printing this series catalogues, and the same setting of type: the same pagination, the same contents, the same 334 pages.

The text is complete: the Publishers' Foreword, the Preface to the Second and Third Editions, Chapters I to V, the Conclusion, both appendices, the notes and the indexes. An earlier digitisation used for this series broke off after Chapter IV, and an earlier state of this introduction accordingly took its quotations from Chapter V and the Conclusion from the composite text held by the Marxists Internet Archive, flagging them as external. That is no longer necessary and no longer true of this book. Every quotation above is taken from the printing and verified against it — including the footnote in Chapter V that defends the term "dialectical materialism" "because it alone can give an accurate description of the philosophy of Marx", and the Conclusion's statement of the