



PROGRESS QUARTERLY

Critical Introductions to the Reissued Classics

VOLUME IX · NUMBER 2

ПРОГРЕСС · МОСКВА

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PHILOSOPHY

The Main Trends in Philosophy: A theoretical analysis of the history of philosophy

One philosopher's case that the split between materialism and idealism is the real structure of the discipline - with readings of Kant, Hegel and Spinoza and a sustained quarrel with Husserl, Sartre, Carnap and Popper.

Teodor Ilich Oizerman

Introduction to the 1988 Edition

Most books in this series were written to be believed. This one was written to be argued with, and that difference is worth stating at the outset, because it changes what a critical introduction can usefully do.

T. I. Oizerman's *The Main Trends in Philosophy* is a monograph in the history of philosophy by a man who spent his professional life doing history of philosophy. Its thesis is that the division of philosophy into materialism and idealism is not a classificatory convenience imposed by commentators but the real structural fact about the discipline, and that the "basic philosophical question" — whether nature or spirit is primary — is what generates that division. Around that thesis he builds a taxonomy of doctrines, schools, currents and trends; a long treatment of scepticism from Diogenes Laertius to the logical positivists; extended readings of Kant, Hegel, Spinoza and Leibniz; and a running polemic against Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Carnap, Russell, Popper and the Yugoslav praxis philosopher Gajo Petrović. The bibliography runs to 283 numbered items in four languages. Whatever else it is, it is a book, written by one person, with a case to make.

The date

The spine says 1988, and for once in this series the spine is close to right. Progress translations routinely postdate their Russian originals by five or ten years — Kobelev's *Ho Chi Minh* carries 1989 over a 1983 Russian text — so the copyright page is never sufficient. Here the internal evidence dates the text firmly to the second half of the 1980s. Oizerman cites the Programme of the CPSU in its "New Edition" of 1986, the version adopted at the Twenty-Seventh Congress; he cites volume 28 of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, published by Progress in 1986; and he refers the reader to his own *Principles of the Theory of the Historical Process* in

Philosophy, written with A. S. Bogomolov and issued by Progress in the same year. The text cannot predate 1986.

But it reads as though it were finished before the thaw touched it. There is no Gorbachev in it, no perestroika, no glasnost, no "new thinking", not one of the words that were rewriting Soviet public language while the book was in production. Its most recent Soviet philosophical interlocutors are from 1983. A reader looking for the 1988 in this book will find it only in the Party Programme quotation, and that quotation is doing the opposite of loosening anything. So: a book of the mid-1980s, published at the end of them, which took no liberty a 1978 book could not have taken. That is a finding, and we return to it.

Oizerman himself (1914–2017) was not an apparatus functionary. He was at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences and a full Academician, and his scholarly reputation rested on genuine work: on Kant, on German classical philosophy, and above all on the formation of Marx's own thought, a subject on which he was among the better-informed people alive. He outlived the state by twenty-six years and used the time to revise, in print and in public, positions he had defended for decades — including the claim, central to this book, that the history of philosophy converges on dialectical materialism. That later revision is not a reason to discount the book. It is a reason to read it as the work of someone capable of changing his mind, which is not a description that fits most authors in this catalogue.

What is good here

A great deal, and the series' credibility depends on saying so.

The opening move is a real one. "For philosophy," he writes, "is the sole field of knowledge in which agreement among its leading spokesmen is the exception rather than the rule." From this he draws a conclusion a textbook writer would avoid: that

in philosophy, unlike in the special sciences, "one has to choose". A footnote in the introduction then quotes the physicist L. A. Artsimovich on why textbooks mislead — a textbook "may therefore sometimes weaken the reader's will for independent thinking by demonstrating the science to him as a collection of well preserved memorials of the past and not as a road to a future shrouded in fog" — and Oizerman applies the point explicitly to textbooks of philosophy. Sheptulin's Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, also in this series, is precisely such a collection of well-preserved memorials. Oizerman knew what he was distancing himself from.

The historical chapters are the work of a scholar. His Kant is read, not summarised. He credits Kant with an insight he says the eighteenth-century materialists lacked: Kant's inquiry into the origin of metaphysical ideas in reason "brought Kant close to awareness of the need to investigate the epistemological roots of religion and idealism, an awareness absent among the French materialists, who considered religion a product of ignorance and deceit, and did not ponder on what it reflected and why it was so deeply rooted in men's minds." That is a materialist docking an idealist's superiority over other materialists — a judgement no functionary would risk, and a correct one. He tracks the two editions of the Critique of Pure Reason and the "Refutation of Idealism" Kant added to the second, and understands why Kant added it. On Hegel he is better still, and generous: Hegel's dialectical treatment of philosophical disagreement "played an immense role in moulding the science of the history of philosophy", and the fault Oizerman finds is a specific one — that Hegel "harmonised the process of the history of philosophy too much".

The engagement with living Western philosophy is by name, at length, and from the primary texts. He reads Popper in the Hutchinson Logic of Scientific Discovery and quotes him accurately: "A theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific. Irrefutability is not a virtue of a theory (as people often think) but a vice." His reconstruction of Husserl's epoché and of intentionality is competent and would not embarrass a lecture. He grants Sartre a footnote in which Sartre is "correctly stressing the humanitarian sense of the atheistic outlook". He quotes Camus on suicide as the one serious philosophical problem and takes the trouble to say the question "must not be underestimated" and to trace it back through Nietzsche.

Where the engagement fails, it fails as bad philosophy rather than as non-philosophy. His reply to Popper — that falsificationism is "a subjective principle of absolute relativism

by which any description of facts ultimately proves to be a fallacy", rooted in irrationalism — is a misreading, and the sarcasm ("The poor Greek Sceptics!") is a tell that he is not comfortable. But he had read the book. That distinction matters, and the reader should hold onto it.

Partisanship, and what the argument omits

The book's last substantive section is "The Dialectical-Materialist Critique of Idealism. The Principle of the Partisanship of Philosophy" — *partiinnost'*, the doctrine that philosophy is unavoidably party philosophy.

The argument is more interesting than its reputation. Oizerman does not begin from authority; he begins from history. The eighteenth-century ideal of an above-party philosophy, he argues, was not hypocrisy but a real illusion with a real cause: "'Impartiality' meant, then, denial of feudal partiality." Against Marxism's critics he enlists Hegel, who ridiculed the demand that "the historian should proceed with impartiality" and distinguished partiality for justice from "subjective partiality" — a distinction Oizerman notes is "usually passed over in silence" so that partisanship can be presented as a Marxist invention. He is candid that partisanship can go wrong: "A contradiction between partisanship and scientific objectivity arises only when the scholar scorns the real needs of social development; in that case, however, he also betrays scientific objectivity." And he lands on Lenin's formulation, that "the non-party principle in bourgeois society is merely a hypocritical, disguised, passive expression of adherence to the party of the well-fed, of the rulers, of the exploiters" — hence, "impartiality is a bourgeois idea, partisanship a socialist one."

Note what this is. It is a sociology of philosophical knowledge, and as such it is arguable, and parts of it are simply true: the claim to stand nowhere is itself a position. What it is not, anywhere in these pages, is a claim that some institution is entitled to decide philosophical questions administratively. That claim never appears. It does not have to. Two paragraphs later the section closes with a long quotation from the 1986 Party Programme — "The Party considers it its most important duty to continue creatively developing Marxist-Leninist theory" — followed by Oizerman's own gloss that dialectical-materialist methodology is "the sole reliable instrument for cognising society and nature." An argument that partisanship is an epistemological virtue ends by producing a Party document as its warrant. The book does not notice the circle it has closed.

The silence

Now the finding, and it is a large one. This is a book about the history of philosophy, written in Moscow, that contains no history of philosophy in the Soviet Union.

There is no Lysenko in it. There is no Zhdanov, no 1947 philosophy conference, no Stalin, and no Dialectical and Historical Materialism. There is no 1931, no Central Committee resolution on Pod znamenem marksizma, and not one occurrence of the phrase "Menshevizing idealism". A four-hundred-page argument that philosophy is a battlefield declines to describe the one battlefield its author stood on.

The silence has a shape. A. M. Deborin does appear — as a source. In a footnote on Leibniz and the community of property, Oizerman quotes him ("Leibniz,' Deborin wrote in this connection, 'was convinced that community of property was the starting point of the development of humanity'") and endorses him: "This preaching of the community of property, as Deborin showed, quite obviously expressed the strength of his denial of feudal ownership." The reference is to Voprosy filosofii, 1961, no. 3. M. B. Mitin also appears — as a source, quoted approvingly on the relation of the ideal and the material, from Voprosy filosofii, 1962, no. 7.

Deborin headed the philosophical establishment and the journal Under the Banner of Marxism until January 1931, when a Party resolution condemned his school as "Menshevizing idealism". Mitin was among the young philosophers who made the denunciation and inherited the institutions. Some of those swept up in that reorganisation and the years that followed did not survive them. Deborin did, and was rehabilitated enough by 1961 to publish the Leibniz essay Oizerman cites. Here the two men sit in the same apparatus of a single book, a year apart in the same journal, each a perfectly ordinary authority, with nothing between them at all.

Compare F. V. Konstantinov's Development of Revolutionary Theory by the CPSU, published by Progress in 1971 and also in this series. Konstantinov at least raises the subject, and the way he raises it is instructive: "But towards the beginning of the 1930s (in some cases even earlier) serious errors and distortions came to light in the work of the journal and in the school of A. M. Deborin, who headed the journal." Errors that came to light: no resolution, no agent, no consequence — a purge rendered as weather. Yet Konstantinov goes further than Oizerman ever does, conceding that "The personality cult damaged the development of Marxist theory and philosophy. It fettered theoretical thinking, pushing it into dogmatism and

reducing it to commentary." That sentence, evasive as it is, has no counterpart in the 1988 book. On this one question, the 1971 volume says more. Oizerman's chosen method was not euphemism but omission, and in 1988 — when the archives were opening and Ogonyok was printing what it was printing — omission had become the more conspicuous choice of the two.

The reply, and an honest difficulty in it

The anti-Stalinist left never wrote about Oizerman. We should say this plainly rather than manufacture a confrontation: a search across the Biulleten' Opozitsii in English, the ETOL run of Fourth International (1940–1956), the collected English Trotsky, Intercontinental Press (1968–1986) and International Viewpoint (1982–2003) turns up his name nowhere. The tradition did not track Soviet academic philosophy as a scholarly field, and did not review its monographs. What it tracked, closely, was the moments when the state broke into science — and those it caught early.

In September 1948, in Fourth International, Raya Dunayevskaya (writing as "Freddie Forrest") devoted a section of "Stalinists Falsify Marxism Anew" to the June 1947 philosophy conference, observing that "no Soviet philosopher missed the significance of Zhdanov's appearance at their conference" and that Zhdanov "spoke with the authority of the Polburo when he assigned the 'philosophic workers' their new task" (the misspelling is the printed text's). The following year Ernest Germain — Ernest Mandel — reported in "Purge of Soviet Culture" that G. F. Alexandrov, the head of agitprop, had been "severely taken to task for having shown a servile adulation toward Western European thought" in his history of philosophy. That is worth pausing on. The discipline destroyed in 1947 was Oizerman's own discipline, and the charge was that a Soviet historian of Western philosophy had treated Western philosophers with too much respect. Measured against that, the fact that this book argues with Husserl, Popper and Sartre by name and from their own texts is not nothing. It is the distance the profession travelled between Alexandrov's disgrace and Oizerman's monograph, and Oizerman is owed the credit for occupying that ground even as he declines to describe how it was won. In January 1951 the same journal ran R. H. Monroe and Joseph Hansen's two-part "The Lysenko Case", dating the assault on genetics to "A Ukrainian plant breeder, T.D. Lysenko, and a professor of philosophy, I.I. Prezent" in the early 1930s, and locating the baseline in the period when Vavilov's circle "had come into prominence in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, when science was free in the Soviet

Union."

That last clause invites a challenge, and the challenge should be met rather than avoided. On 16 June 1933 — two years after the Deborin resolution — Trotsky replied from Prinkipo to three American comrades on exactly this question, and what he wrote was not a defence of philosophical liberty. "Viewed from this standpoint, philosophical activity lies between art and politics, closer to politics than to art. In philosophy, the party itself occupies a distinct militant position, which is not the case—at least not to the same extent—in the field of art." Objections that "by the 'dogmatization' and 'canonization' of dialectical materialism, the party prevents the free development of philosophical and scientific thought" he dismissed in a sentence: they "do not deserve serious attention." He wanted liberty for painters and novelists; for philosophers he wanted a party line, and he compared philosophical dilettantes to amateurs experimenting in a factory or a hospital. He appears not to have registered what had been done in Moscow two years earlier under that same principle.

So the tradition this series writes from does not come to the question with clean hands, and the introduction that pretends otherwise is not worth reading. What the 1933 letter does contain is the distinction that makes the criticism of Oizerman possible at all, and Trotsky put it in the next breath: "But least of all does this signify that in the sphere of philosophy the party can act as if all questions have already been resolved for it, and that it has nothing to expect from the further development of scientific thought." A party that takes a position in a live argument, and knows the argument is live, is one thing. A party that has resolved the questions, and whose Programme can be quoted as the terminus of an epistemological proof, is another. The whole history that Oizerman's book leaves out is the record of the first turning into the second — and Trotsky, who did not foresee it clearly enough in 1933, at least named the line that was crossed.

How to read it

As history of philosophy, this is a serious book by a serious man, and much of it can be read for profit: the Kant, the Hegel, the account of how the ideal of an above-party philosophy was itself the product of a particular class settlement, the taxonomy of trends. Its conclusion contains a sentence that ought to be quoted against most of its neighbours on this list — that the history of philosophical thought is one "in which, it is my deepest conviction, there are no trivial pages."

He was right about that, and the pages he left blank were not trivial either.

PHILOSOPHY

The Problem of the Ideal

The mind-brain problem argued at length by one party to the sharpest controversy Soviet philosophy held in public - Dubrovsky against Ilyenkov on whether the ideal is in the head or in the forms of culture.

David I Dubrovsky

Introduction to the 1988 Edition

This is a book of philosophy, and the argument inside it is a real one.

That sentence should not need writing, but in a series devoted to the export literature of Progress Publishers it does. Most of the titles reissued here are commissioned works: an institute produced them, a line governed them, and where they touch a contested question the reader can predict the answer before turning the page. The Problem of the Ideal is not that kind of book. It is a technical monograph on the mind-brain problem and on the philosophical category of the ideal, written by a man who had spent twenty years on the subject, and it is the second half of one of the few genuine controversies Soviet philosophy conducted in the open. The other party to that controversy was Evald Ilyenkov, the most original philosopher his generation in the USSR produced, who had been pushed out of his positions and who killed himself in 1979.

What Dubrovsky does with Ilyenkov is the whole interest of this volume, and it is not what a reader of this series will expect.

The date

Progress issued the English text in 1988, translated from the Russian by Vladimir Stankevich. The spine therefore says glasnost. The book does not.

Argue from the citations. Dubrovsky's references to the Soviet literature are dense through the late 1970s, thicken around 1976–81, and then stop. There is a scatter of items from 1982 — Bogomolov in Voprosy filosofii no. 7, Motorina and Semyonov in the same year — a single 1984 title, and one 1985 item, a Leningrad book on the neurodynamic mechanisms of thinking by Bekhtereva and colleagues. After that, nothing. The only 1986 references in the entire apparatus are to volume 28 of the Collected Works of Marx and Engels in the Progress English edition, which is exactly what a

translator would substitute at the point of translation and tells us nothing about when the Russian was written.

So the manuscript closed around 1982 or 1983, with at most light touching-up. This matters because everything a Western reader might hope for from a 1988 Soviet philosophy book is absent from it, and the absence is chronological rather than political. There is no perestroika here, no reassessment of the discipline's history, no reckoning. The words glasnost, perestroika and Gorbachev do not appear. Neither does Stalin, Zhdanov, Lysenko, Deborin, or the 1931 resolution that broke the Deborin school and installed Mitin. Neither, for that matter, does CPSU, or Party Congress, or revisionism. The book contains one citation to a Party organ: an unsigned 1977 Kommunist piece on strengthening the ties between the social, natural and technical sciences. One, in a bibliography of many hundreds of items. Whatever this book is, it is not an exercise in legitimization.

The dispute

David Dubrovsky was a philosopher of mind. His *Psychic Phenomena and the Brain* (Moscow, 1971) and *Information, Consciousness, Brain* (Moscow, 1980) had argued a specific and unfashionable thesis: that the ideal is subjective reality, that it is grounded in brain states, and that the relation between the two is best understood through the concept of information. Ilyenkov held something close to the opposite. For him the ideal was not in anyone's head at all: it was the universal form of social activity, objectified in culture, in value, in language, in the norms that meet an individual before he is conscious of anything. Two decades of Soviet philosophy ran between these positions.

Dubrovsky sets the two out, in his introduction, as two legitimate research programmes — his own oriented on natural science, Ilyenkov's on the humanities — and says the line between them is "largely conventional". When he comes to the substantive treatment, in the section of chapter 1 headed "Disputes over the Problem of the Ideal in Marxist Literature",

he introduces his opponent like this:

This conception of the ideal has found its most brilliant and consistent proponent in E. V. Ilyenkov, a distinguished Soviet philosopher who died in 1979. His theory has a large following and this is precisely the reason why its critical analysis is so topical.

He goes further. Ilyenkov's 1962 encyclopedia article, he writes, "gave a powerful impetus to the study of the problem of the ideal. It raised important questions that gave food to creative thought." And then, plainly: "I take this opportunity to acknowledge the great debt which I owe to Ilyenkov's works."

The argument that follows is conducted on the merits, at length, with page references to Ilyenkov's posthumous two-part article in *Voprosy filosofii* nos. 6 and 7 for 1979, and with his opponent quoted at paragraph length rather than in scraps. Dubrovsky's central charge is exegetical and quite serious: that Ilyenkov's reading of Marx on the ideality of the value-form will not survive an inspection of the passages. "Regrettably," he writes, "Ilyenkov did not cite the passages from Marx's *Capital* and *Economic Manuscripts* which he invoked in support of his opinion." He then cites them himself, and argues — one may think rightly or wrongly — that Marx's "purely ideal or mental form" is a mental reflection in the heads of the parties to an exchange, not a property residing in commodities.

There is heat in it. Catching Ilyenkov describing a brain "polished and recreated by labour" after insisting that the ideal is independent of the brain's states, Dubrovsky writes: "One might think there exists some other human brain which is not 'polished' and not 'recreated by labour'!" — and adds, drily, "Such mishaps are none too rare with Ilyenkov." His deepest objection is not technical at all but humane: an ideal conceived as an objective compulsory pattern of conscious volitional activity, he argues, "rules out any autonomy of a living creative individual assigning him the role of a puppet, a functional element within 'the objective compulsory pattern'."

And having said all that, he stops and concedes: "There is no denying the fact that Ilyenkov's works contain not a few sound and interesting propositions." He lists them — the analysis of cultural values, the suprapersonal status of social consciousness, the functional nature of social materiality — before delivering his verdict, which is that "Ilyenkov's basic propositions and conclusions appear to us contradictory and his general stand on the problem of the ideal untenable."

That is a philosopher's paragraph. It is not a denunciation.

Nothing in these pages calls Ilyenkov an idealist, a revisionist, or an enemy; nothing appeals to a resolution, a congress or an authority; nothing suggests that the question has been settled anywhere but in the argument. Dubrovsky also records, without rancour, that the traffic ran both ways and that the loaded vocabulary was not his: Ilyenkov, he notes, dismissed the attempt to link the ideal to information theory as "naturalistic" and "pseudomaterialistic", and "This was Ilyenkov's response to my proposal to treat the mind-brain problem in terms of the information theory."

What is not said

Now the finding, which is a silence.

"A distinguished Soviet philosopher who died in 1979." That is the whole of it. The book never says how Ilyenkov died, or that he had been driven from the Institute of Philosophy, or that the "large following" Dubrovsky credits him with was a following acquired against the grain of an apparatus that had no use for him. A reader who came to this book knowing nothing would take away that a well-regarded colleague died in his fifties and that his ideas outlived him.

One can be fair about why. A monograph on the category of the ideal is not the place for an obituary, and in 1982 there was no place at all where the circumstances could have been printed. But the effect is that Dubrovsky argues at length and in detail against a man whose last word on the subject was published after his death, who cannot reply, and whose inability to reply is left entirely unexplained. He notes in passing that Ilyenkov's conception "for many years has been opposed by a number of Soviet philosophers". He does not note what else was done to him. The dispute is honest; the frame around the dispute is not complete, and the incompleteness was not Dubrovsky's choice to make.

There is a second fence, and he states it himself. Introducing the whole survey, he writes that "Opinions of Soviet philosophers who have concerned themselves with the problem of the ideal in recent years are widely divergent on a number of issues" — and then immediately: "The Marxist philosophers are unanimous in the solution of basic problems related to the nature of the ideal and in the criticism of idealist and dualist conceptions of the ideal." Unanimity on fundamentals; divergence permitted on specifics. That sentence marks the exact perimeter inside which Soviet philosophy was allowed to think, and the honest thing to say is that within the perimeter the thinking was real.

The Western philosophers

The other surprise is Part Two, which is a hundred pages on Anglo-American philosophy of mind, and which is good.

Dubrovsky's subject is what he calls "scientific materialism" — the identity theory, running from Place's "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?" (1956) through Feigl's "The 'Mental' and the 'Physical'" (1958) to Smart's "Sensations and Brain Processes" (1959), and on to Armstrong, Rorty, Feyerabend, Putnam, Sellars and Nagel. He read them in the originals; the footnotes cite Minnesota, Notre Dame, Oxford and the American Philosophical Quarterly. He reconstructs Ryle before demolishing him, notes accurately that Ryle's later work abandons the monism of *The Concept of Mind*, and gets Feigl's "raw feels" right.

What he does not do is abuse them. The word *bourgeois* appears seven times in the whole book; four of those are in the titles of Russian works listed in the notes, and the three in Dubrovsky's own prose are period usage for Western philosophy as a category, never a charge levelled at a named opponent. On the contrary — twice he defends the Western materialists against his own side. Of the standard Soviet dismissal, he writes that "it appears hardly justifiable to dispose of the identity theory as 'one of the varieties of modern vulgar materialism'", because vulgar materialism never posed the logical problem of the mind–brain relation and the identity theorists make it central. And of attempts to class Feigl and Smart with the idealists: "they appear to be absolutely untenable". His summary judgement is that the school "draws on vast scientific material and represents a peculiar version of the natural scientists' theoretical reflection". He then argues against it — from Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, as one would expect, but by way of argument rather than citation-as-verdict. Indeed at one point he corrects other Soviet writers' use of Lenin: "Reference to Lenin, however, is based on a misinterpretation of his views."

The reply that was never written

Here the honest report is a negative one. The Fourth International and the wider anti-Stalinist left did not answer this book, because they did not know it existed. A search of the complete English Trotsky corpus, the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, the run of Fourth International from 1940 to 1956, *International Viewpoint*, Intercontinental Press and the collected George Novack finds no mention of Ilyenkov and no mention of Dubrovsky. (One apparent hit, in *International Viewpoint* no. 305 for November 1998, is a different

Dubrovsky altogether — a Ukrainian miner speaking at a Moscow conference on Trotsky.) The tradition tracked Lysenko closely and Zhdanov's 1947 intervention in philosophy closely; it never tracked the academic philosophers, and the argument over *ideal'noe* has no counterpart in its vocabulary at all.

What the tradition does supply is the standard against which a book like this should be measured, and it is not the standard a reader might guess. Trotsky wrote on the question in June 1933, two years after the Deborin school was broken, in "The Party in the Field of Art and Philosophy". He is not a libertarian there. He holds that "philosophical activity lies between art and politics, closer to politics than to art", that "In philosophy, the party itself occupies a distinct militant position", and that complaints about the canonisation of dialectical materialism "do not deserve serious attention". But he adds the sentence that makes the whole passage usable:

But least of all does this signify that in the sphere of philosophy the party can act as if all questions have already been resolved for it, and that it has nothing to expect from the further development of scientific thought.

Authority without closure. That is the line, and it is a line an official philosophy crosses the moment it decides an argument is over. George Novack, the American Trotskyists' philosopher, described the crossing in *Is Nature Dialectical?*: under Stalin, dialectical materialism "became scholasticised and ossified", and the Western contempt for it had been "reinforced by the arbitrary and ignorant interference of the Stalinist bureaucrats with scientific theory, along with their narrowly schematic, distorted, and dogmatic interpretation of Marxist method." Novack's image for the closed system is Henri Lefebvre's, and it is perfect: a French Communist Party official telling Lefebvre that the house of dialectical thought "is finished; there is nothing left to do but put up the tapestries."

By that test — the only test this series is entitled to apply — Dubrovsky passes. He does not think the house is finished. He thinks a major question is open, that his most distinguished colleague got it wrong, and that the way to show it is to quote him accurately and take him apart.

There is a last irony worth the reader's attention. Novack's own *Elements of Dialectical Materialism*, written in August 1940, holds both sides of the Soviet dispute at once and does not notice the strain. On one page: the mind of the individual "does not and cannot exist except as a function of his brain and

his body" — Dubrovsky's position exactly. On another: "Nature is the primary product of material evolution; society developed out of nature and consciousness out of society" — which is Ilyenkov's. What Ilyenkov and Dubrovsky spent twenty years pulling apart, the Fourth International's philosopher had left comfortably fused. That is not a point against Novack, who was writing a short popular exposition. It is a point about what the Soviet argument was actually for, and it is the best reason to read this book: the problem is hard, it was not invented by the state, and two serious people disagreed about it for a long time.

Dubrovsky closes the book on a sentence that no functionary would have written, defending the wandering, unreliable freedom of the inner life: even where it "brings forth chimeras, castles in the air, comforting illusions, false beliefs and maniacal ideas", it "represents the essence of the restless creative human spirit, eternally seeking truth, beauty, goodness, justice and excellence."

Read it as philosophy. It is the last thing on the list of what Progress Publishers was for, and here, once, it is what they printed.

SOVIET SOCIETY

Teaching: Calling and Skills

Thirty-five years in the classroom, told in the first person - how a vocation begins, what craft in teaching consists of, and what Ushinsky, Makarenko and Sukhomlinsky taught one practising teacher.

Yuri Azarov

Introduction to the 1988 Edition

The book opens in a forest. A young man of twenty-one has come to a nameless settlement in the far north, at the end of a narrow-gauge line in the Arkhangelsk region, to begin his life as a teacher; and before he has taught a single lesson the school's director, Mikhail Fedorovich Parfenov, wakes him at six in the morning to go picking mushrooms. It is in the woods, watching the older man touch the mushrooms and name their kinds, that Yuri Azarov feels his vocation being born — "not with classroom work, but with sentiments of admiration, astonishment and conflict." Much later, he tells us, he "formulated for myself the principle of care in upbringing." Teaching: Calling and Skills is the record of that principle worked out across thirty-five years, and it is one of the warmest, most personal books Progress Publishers ever sent into English. It should be read for its warmth first, and questioned second, because the questioning matters far less than the thing it is questioning.

Azarov is not an institute committee and not an apparatus functionary writing to order. He is a practising teacher and pedagogical writer reflecting, in the first person and often against himself, on what it is to be good at this work — "To be a teacher is to be a member of a special profession," the introduction begins, and the whole book turns on the conviction that "everything that pedagogics achieved is transformed through the personality of the teacher." The structure follows a life: Part One, "How a Calling Is Born," is memoir; Part Two, "The Sources of a Teacher's Mastery," sets him among his masters — Konstantin Ushinsky, Anton Makarenko, Vasily Sukhomlinsky; Parts Three and Four move to the experiments of his maturity, in the village of Prelestnoye and in a teacher-training project in Latvia. This is a book about craft and character, written by someone who plainly loved the work and loved children, and its first claim on a modern reader is simply that it is true to the classroom in a way that very little writing about education manages to be.

It is worth being exact about when we are reading. The spine

says 1988, and Inna Medow's English translation is of that year; but the text itself was finished a little earlier. The latest event it records is a visit "in early 1986" to Prelestnoye, and the book reads throughout like the mid-1980s rather than the end of the decade. That distinction turns out to matter, because 1988 was the height of glasnost, and one comes to a Soviet book on education from that year expecting the vocabulary of the hour. It is not here. The words perestroika, glasnost and Gorbachev do not occur once; neither does the Twenty-Seventh Congress, nor "acceleration," nor any of the reform slogans that saturated Soviet print in 1987–88. The word "restructuring" appears twice, both times in a purely pedagogical sense — once of Ushinsky's nineteenth-century reforms, once in a warning by Makarenko against people who wished to "reshape" and "restructure" everyone too fast. For a book about Soviet schooling published in 1988, that silence is a real finding, and it tells us what kind of object this is: not a manifesto of the reform years dressed for export, but a personal testament whose formation predates them, given an English jacket at the moment the system it describes was being argued over in the open.

And yet the reform current is present, if one looks at the pedagogy rather than the politics. The mid-1980s were the years of the Soviet "innovator teachers," a public movement for a pedagogy of cooperation against the drill-and-mark authoritarianism of the ordinary classroom, and Azarov belongs unmistakably to that ferment — one of his chapters is titled "Overcoming One's Own Authoritarianism," and among the colleagues he praises is Mikhail Shchetinin, one of the movement's best-known experimenters, whose work on training teachers he describes at length. So the book is reformist, but its reform is of the teacher's manner, not of the order the teacher serves. That gap — anti-authoritarian in method, untouched in its destination — is the whole of the small critical point this introduction will eventually have to make. It is better to earn the right to make it by first saying, plainly and at length, what is good here. There is a great deal.

The humane core, which is the reason to read the book

Azarov's finest pages are about his own failures. The first long story in the book is of his nephew Victor, a difficult fifteen-year-old handed to the twenty-one-year-old teacher to "polish, process and shape," and of how completely Azarov mishandled him — imposing regimes, losing his temper, treating the boy as an extension of his own pride. The retrospective judgement is merciless and exact: "he was my property, which fate had given me to polish, process and shape. But he was not clay." Of the whole episode he writes, "Today, of course, I see myself as a tyrant in these personal pedagogics," and names the fault precisely — "that was my principal pedagogical error, which I did not recognize at the time." A book on teaching that begins by convicting its own author of tyranny toward a child has bought itself the right to be listened to, and the honesty is not a device; it recurs. Azarov's method, for all its confidence about "skills" and "mastery," is built on the memory of getting it wrong, and on the slow discovery that the child in front of you is not material to be worked but a person to be met.

From that discovery the humane doctrine grows. The teacher's first instrument is not technique but attention — "the ability of a teacher to create the most delicate types of relations with children," expressed "through glances, smiles, barely perceptible movements, a line from a poem." One chapter is called "A Teacher's Heart Must Be Nourished by Love," another "A True Teacher Enjoys Communicating with Children," and Azarov means both literally; the book ends on a long, unhurried conversation with a village art teacher about drawing, courage and humour, in which the governing idea is that "communicating with children is always a festive occasion." He insists, against a hardening orthodoxy of his day, that every child is gifted and that the school's task is to help each one find the field in which he can feel strong — not to sort the creative few from the rest. He is scornful of the curriculum-head as dispatcher, the functionary who tells a young teacher to change a fair mark to a kinder one so the inspectors will be satisfied. The scene is worth pausing on, because it is one of the sharpest things in the book and Azarov reports it without a word of editorial framing. His head of curriculum in the northern settlement, confronted with a stack of failing dictations, simply instructs him: "Simply change it." When the young Azarov protests that the work does not merit a higher mark, the answer is candid — "As soon as you submit such marks a commission will arrive, they will criticize you," and prove that the teacher, not the pupils, has failed. That is the machinery of falsified achievement, the inflated pass-rate

demanding from above, shown at the classroom's ground level by a man who was told to take part in it in his first term and never forgot the taste. He lets it stand as reported, because a reader can see for himself what it is.

Part Two, where he places himself among his masters, is the most substantial thing in the volume and the most useful to a reader outside Russia. His portrait of Ushinsky — "the passionate voice of Konstantin Ushinsky," raised when tsarist Russia's revolutionary democrats were calling for "a struggle to free the people from serfdom and bring them enlightenment" — is a genuine piece of intellectual history, and his account of Makarenko, the great pedagogue of the orphaned and delinquent, is affectionate and clear-eyed about the tension between Makarenko's collective and Azarov's own bias toward the single child. Most of all, this book is a companion to another in this series. Azarov devotes an entire section to Vasily Sukhomlinsky, "director of the Pavlysh village school," praises his *To Children I Give My Heart*, and reaches — retelling the horror of Sukhomlinsky's young wife, tortured and hanged by the Gestapo with their newborn son murdered before her — the same formula the Sukhomlinsky volume turns on: "There is no such thing as abstract humaneness, humaneness must be irreconcilably hostile to any oppression, slavery or arbitrariness." A reader who has the companion edition, V. Sukhomlinsky on Education (Progress, 1977), will recognise the whole moral world; Azarov is a citizen of it, and his book is, among other things, a warm secondary testimony to how the Soviet pedagogy of the heart understood itself.

None of this is diminished by being Soviet, and most of it would survive the removal of every Soviet reference. The attention to the individual child, the refusal to treat the pupil as clay, the conviction that the teacher's own inner life is the real curriculum, the self-critical honesty about one's own authoritarian reflexes — these are contributions to the craft of teaching, full stop, and English-speaking teachers can take them straight. That is the rescue, and it is the larger part of the book.

The narrow edge: where the calling is asked to serve

The critical point is small, structural, and — as with Sukhomlinsky — not a charge against the man. It is that every pedagogy in the Soviet Union, however tender, was required to arrive at the same terminus: the formation of a loyal Soviet citizen equipped with a settled Marxist-Leninist world outlook. Azarov's book carries that freight more lightly than almost any

other title in this series — its ideological surface is remarkably thin. Lenin is named half a dozen times and never doctrinally (as Krupskaya's husband, as the name of an order and a university); there is no atheism in the book at all, and when an old icon hangs in the corner of a peasant's hut it passes without a word of disapproval. The load the book does carry is patriotic and collectivist rather than anti-religious or scholastic, and it sits, tellingly, at the seams — in the places where the education of the heart is handed on to the education of the citizen.

Those seams are easy to find once you look. Azarov ties the teacher's sincerity, the very quality he prizes most, to civic formation: the teacher's cases reveal "the teacher's ideological conviction, his patriotism," and the children respond when he addresses them "not only as adults but also as citizens of their country." He endorses Makarenko's demand that the teacher "possess a keen political sense," which Makarenko called "the most important attribute of our teaching competence" — a striking thing to rank first in a book whose whole argument is that love and attention come first. And where he reports the classroom in another teacher's voice, the destination is stated flatly: the Latvian experiment's aim was "developing a Marxist-Leninist world outlook on the part of students," and the essence of moral education in a Soviet school, another passage explains, is an unshakeable belief in the rightness of certain ideals — "the essence of ideological and political education in Soviet schools." When Azarov describes how a research teacher is to be trained, the two halves are set side by side without friction: "a knowledge of a society's ideology and culture, and in mastering the arsenal of professional knowledge and skills." Ideology and craft, learned together, as one competence.

There is nothing sinister in the tone of any of this; that is precisely the point. The apparatus into which the caring teacher is fitted — the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol, the "military and patriotic education," the "moral image of a Soviet school student," the University of Marxism-Leninism where teachers upgrade their qualifications — appears in the book as the natural furniture of the world, unremarked because unquestioned. And this is where the 1988 date returns to sharpen the reading. Azarov has written a whole book about overcoming authoritarianism — but the authoritarianism he overcomes is the teacher's, in his manner toward the child. The far larger question — whether the world outlook the child is being formed toward is itself open to the child's judgement, whether a pupil taught to feel deeply and think for himself might turn that faculty on the "settled ideals" and find them wanting — never arises. The individual approach awakens the

emotions and the intelligence and then points them at a destination fixed from outside. Azarov trains the heart and the mind superbly; who the heart is finally to serve, and what the mind is finally allowed to doubt, is decided elsewhere. At the very moment the whole society was learning to doubt those things aloud, this book, gentle and honest as it is, does not.

The reply, kept short

The tradition from which these introductions are written — the anti-Stalinist Marxism of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International — thought hard about exactly this problem, and, revealingly, it did not answer the Soviet pedagogy of the heart with a colder pedagogy. It answered with more honesty about the gap.

The book's last sentence is a small, beautiful circle: "I am convinced that harmoniously developed people can only be reared by other harmoniously developed individuals." It is the oldest hope of socialist education — Marx's aim of the all-round development of the individual, the human being freed to unfold every capacity — and Azarov holds it in full. But Marx always tied that hope to the transformation of the society that stunts people, never to schooling alone; and Azarov's circle, that only the harmonious can rear the harmonious, quietly assumes the harmony it is supposed to be producing. Writing on "The Tasks of Communist Education" in August 1923, Trotsky warned against precisely this move — against "any formless humanitarian interpretation of the conception 'new man'." In an unfree and unfinished society, he argued, you cannot manufacture the finished citizen by careful schooling: "we do not create the abstractly harmonious and perfect citizen of the commune, but we form the concrete human beings of our epoch, who have still to fight for the creation of the conditions out of which the harmonious citizen of the commune may emerge." To try to form that harmonious citizen "by careful laboratory work, in an extremely disharmonious transition stage of society" would be, he wrote, "a wretchedly childish Utopia." (International Press Correspondence, vol. 3 no. 56, 16 August 1923.)

The irony is worth stating plainly, because it is the reverse of what one expects. The revolutionist is less willing than the loving schoolteacher to promise a finished, harmonious soul — not out of coldness, but because he insists on measuring the promise against the actual society and telling the truth about the distance. What Azarov offers as the crown of his art, the seamless rearing of the harmonious person, is exactly the seamlessness Trotsky refused, on the ground that the seam is where the honesty lives. This is the same limit the companion

Sukhomlinsky volume reaches, and it is a limit of the situation, not of the men. Both were real teachers doing genuine good inside a frame that would not let the good turn back and judge the frame.

How to read it

Read it, then, for the calling and the skills, which are its title and its substance and are entirely real. Azarov's attention to the single child, his honesty about his own failures, his refusal to treat a pupil as clay, his insistence that a teacher's heart must be nourished by love and that communicating with children is a festive occasion — these are gifts to anyone who teaches, in any society, and they lose nothing if the Soviet frame around them dissolves. The thin ideological seams should be seen for what they are: not the book's purpose but its border, the fixed edge past which a humane and self-critical pedagogy of the mid-1980s was not permitted to inquire, even in the year everything else was being inquired into. There is even a small, unfashionable wisdom in the book's insistence that good work and good spirits belong together — "The most difficult work is performed easily and cheerfully when one is in a good mood," the village art teacher tells him near the end, and a school run on that principle would be a kinder place than most. The tenderness and the craft were Azarov's own, hard-won across thirty-five years. The destination they were made to serve was not his to choose, and it is the one thing in this generous book that he never thought to question.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The US Two-Party System: Past and Present

Two centuries of the American party system read by Moscow University's Americanists - Burns, Commager, Rossiter, Burnham and the platforms quoted in the original, down to Iran-Contra and the 1987 summit.

Dmitry Chasovennikov

Introduction to the 1988 Edition

Most of the books in this series are answered by the tradition from which this introduction is written. This one is, for the most part, agreed with — and that makes it the harder book to read honestly.

The US Two-Party System: Past and Present is a two-hundred-year history of the Democratic and Republican parties, from the Federalists and Jeffersonians to Reagan's second term, written by a collective of Moscow University Americanists and issued by Progress Publishers in English in 1988. It is not the work of an apparatus hack. Its own jacket describes the contributors as "experts on American history at Moscow University and institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences," working in a series sponsored by the Scientific Coordinating Council at Moscow University; the immediate predecessor it names is N. Sivachev and E. Yazkov's *History of the USA Since World War I* (Progress, 1976). This is the Sivachev–Yazkov school of Soviet Americanistics — the most professional wing of Soviet scholarship on the United States, whose members read the American sources in the original and cited them by page. The translation, by Sergei Sossinsky, is clean and the apparatus is dense: across the book the authors quote James MacGregor Burns, Henry Steele Commager, Clinton Rossiter, Barry Goldwater, Robert Taft, Walter Dean Burnham, the collected works of Lincoln and Jefferson, the party platforms and the Congressional Quarterly, alongside their own Soviet monographs. Whatever else is wrong here, the citation test — does the book read what it argues against, in the original? — is a clear pass. Credit that at the outset, because the argument that follows depends on it.

The date is real. Progress translations often lag their Russian originals by years, and this series has learned to date the text rather than the spine. Here the spine is honest. The concluding chapter reaches "the events of 1986 and 1987 (the 1986 midterms, the Iran-Contras affair, and the fall 1987 currency upheavals)," and mentions "the success of the Washington summit" — the December 1987 INF signing. This book was

finished in late 1987 or the first weeks of 1988 and reads like it. That matters, and we will return to why.

The shared thesis

The book's core claim is stated on its first analytic page and never abandoned. The two-party system is "a single political complex consisting of two bourgeois parties operating in close interaction and interdependence and linked together by fundamentally similar goals pursued, however, by different methods." The parties "form a system mechanism chiefly because they have a common mission in the Political process — to protect and improve capitalist social relations." Their rivalry is real but bounded: a "consensus" within a single class over the inviolability of private property, dressed for the electorate as a choice. When one governing party is discredited, the authors write, this "leads not to a loss of faith in the system as such but only to a change in the party decor in the Washington halls of power." The system is, in their fine phrase, "a kind of shock absorber protecting the American government machinery from abrupt jolts."

The trouble for a critic in the anti-Stalinist tradition is that this is, very largely, our analysis. The proposition that the Democrats and Republicans are two parties of one ruling class, that their contest is engineered to keep an independent workers' party off the field, and that the Democratic Party in particular functions as the burial ground of insurgent movements, is not a Soviet discovery. It is the classical position of American Trotskyism, argued continuously in *The Militant*, the *International Socialist Review* and the writings of the Socialist Workers Party for half a century. Set the Soviet text beside George Novack, the SWP's most prolific writer on American politics, and the sentences interleave. Reviewing Matthew Josephson's *The Politicos* in 1938, Novack wrote that "the Democratic and Republican Parties share the task of enforcing the domination of big capital over the people. From the social standpoint, the differences between them are negligible." On the Cold War consensus the Soviet authors dwell on at length, Novack in 1956 had already written that the

monopolists rule "through a coalition of the two capitalist parties, which differ on incidental domestic issues but have basic unity on foreign policy." The Moscow book's account of the parties absorbing protest to defuse it is the same mechanism Novack described in 1938: the managers of the two parties "had to head off any independent mass movement which jeopardized the two-party system and therewith the domination of the plutocracy."

So where the book is describing the machinery of exclusion — the shared corporate financing, the marginalisation of third parties, the bipartisan foreign-policy front, the manufacture of a "choice" between two servants of the same class — it is broadly right, and it is right in a way American radicals were right before it and independently of it. The authors even reach the sharpest of the conclusions. The Democratic Party, they write, has performed "immense services for the US Establishment by integrating within its structure social forces seeking to break free of the control of the two-party tandem. It is the basic tool for involving the working people in the legitimate political process controlled by the monopoly bourgeoisie." A reader who knows the SWP's lifelong polemic against liberals who herd every movement back into the Democratic column will recognise the thought exactly. On this, the book is a witness for the prosecution, and should be read as one.

The book is at its best, in fact, on the strangling of the labour party. It follows the story the American Marxist tradition considers decisive: the near-misses of independent working-class politics and the men who killed them. It records the Socialist Party's million votes for Debs in 1912, the founding of the Farmer-Labor and American Labor parties around 1919-20, and the Conference for Progressive Political Action of 1922-24. And it identifies, correctly, the fatal act — that the trade-union and reformist leadership of the CPPA refused to build the independent mass workers' party the movement's left wing demanded, and instead channelled the drive for independent political action back into support for candidates on the two old tickets. On Franklin Roosevelt it is equally clear-eyed, describing his "vigorous flirtation in 1934-1936 with the leaders of the Farmer Labor Party of Minnesota and the Progressive Party of Wisconsin" — and how, "as soon as he managed to tie them sufficiently strongly to the Democratic bandwagon, he immediately adopted a tougher line toward his allies on the left wing." That is precisely the operation Trotsky, in his 1938 Mexico discussions with Cannon, Dunne and Shachtman, warned the American section against joining: he told them to enter the union political movement only to fight for "an independent

party, not for Roosevelt or LaFollette, a machine for the workers themselves," and never to let it become "a purely opportunistic appendage to the Democrats." The book and the exile are analysing the same betrayal.

Where it goes wrong

The convergence is real, and it is also where the book's Stalinism hides — not in what it denies but in what it is structurally unable to say.

The first fault is a single, load-bearing exemption. The whole book is an indictment of parties that draw insurgent movements into the safe channels of the two-party system. Every actor is measured against that standard — except one. Where the narrative reaches the Communist Party of the USA, the analytic machinery switches off. The CPUSA appears as "a force on the political scene which challenged the bourgeois two-party system and put forward a revolutionary program for socialist transformation of society," and there the matter rests. But the Communist Party's most consequential decade in American electoral politics was the Popular Front, from 1935, when it became the most energetic advocate in the country of voting for Roosevelt and the Democratic Party — the very operation the book spends four hundred pages condemning. The tradition this introduction speaks for named that at the time. In Trotsky's 1938 discussion, Vincent Dunne reported that in Minnesota "the Stalinists, together with a wide section of the progressives, intellectuals, are at one in turning the labor party more and more into a bloc with the Democratic and liberal candidates." Novack, surveying the same history in 1968, wrote that both the Socialist and Communist parties, having once stood for independent class politics, "began to alter their attitudes and break with the tradition of independent class politics upon which the socialist and communist movements had been built" — and did so "with equally disastrous results." The book cannot write that sentence. Its own framework convicts the party it exists partly to protect, so the party is lifted out of the framework. This is not a small evasion. The strangling of American labour's political independence, which the book narrates so well for the 1920s, had a second act in the 1930s and 40s in which Moscow's own party was a principal — and the book's silence on it is the silence of an interested party.

The same tilt distorts the book's account of Debs. The Socialist Party's growth, the authors write, drew its "major replenishments" "not by the workers, but rather by petty-bourgeois elements." This is the old Comintern demotion of the Debsian party, deployed to keep the crown of "genuine

workers' party" reserved for the Communists — and it is bad history. Debs's Socialist Party had a deep working-class base in the mining towns, the needle trades and the railroads; the judgment is doctrinal, not evidential, and it is the kind of judgment the book would never accept from a bourgeois scholar about a party it favoured.

The second fault is subtler, and here the book is better than a reader of Soviet textbooks might expect, so it must be stated precisely. The authors do have a theory of mass pressure. They quote the Soviet historian V. L. Malkov to the effect that Roosevelt moved left "only under the impact of the popular forces," and they build a genuine dialectic in which protest movements force concessions that the parties then absorb. That is more than the monolithic ruling-class conspiracy the genre usually offers, and it should be acknowledged. But notice the angle of vision. The movements enter the story almost entirely as pressure to be managed, and the parties as the managers. Of the 1960s the book writes that "the most trying problem was to integrate the black movement into the system." Integrate — the verb belongs to the ruling class; the Black freedom struggle is the object of the sentence, not its subject. The labour upsurge that built the CIO, the civil-rights movement that broke Jim Crow, the anti-war movement the book itself describes as a serious potential threat to the foundations of bourgeois society — these appear mainly as forces to be neutralised, rarely as agents that wrested real and permanent gains from a system that conceded nothing willingly. The book sees the co-optation clearly, which is its strength; it sees the self-activity of the oppressed dimly, which is its Stalinism. History from above, even when the above being described is the enemy, is still history from above.

The system that could not be named

The third fault is the one that ought to have been unbearable to write, and the book does not appear to have noticed it at all.

The organising indictment of the entire volume is that the American two-party system is, in Lenin's phrase that the authors quote twice, "one of the most powerful means of preventing the rise of an independent working-class, i.e., genuinely socialist, party." The scandal, in the book's telling, is a rigged choice: two parties of capital, and no lawful road to a third. That is a serious charge, and much of it lands. But it is issued by the export house of a state that offered its own citizens not a rigged choice between two parties but no choice at all — a single party, the CPSU, with opposition of every kind proscribed and, within living memory of these authors' teachers, punished by death. A book whose whole complaint is

the artificial narrowing of political competition to two permitted options is written from within a system that permitted one. The asymmetry is not incidental to the argument; it is its shadow, and the book never once turns to look at it.

This is testable, and it tests out. The one-party system is discussed in these pages — but only ever the American kind: the "Era of Good Feelings" when the Republicans stood unopposed, or the New York Times's 1942 relief at "a swing back to a normal pattern from a very abnormal pattern of one-party domination." The Soviet Union appears constantly, on nearly every page after 1917, but always as an actor in foreign policy — the target of the "anti-Soviet course," the partner in détente, the summit at Washington — and never as a political system with a party structure of its own that might be held to the standard the book applies to the United States. The word the reader keeps waiting for never comes.

And here the date does its work. This book was completed in the winter of 1987-88. By then glasnost was two years old, the Nineteenth Party Conference that would authorise contested elections was months away, and the question of the CPSU's monopoly of power was the most openly argued question in Soviet public life. A book on democratic pluralism, appearing in the very season the USSR's own one-party settlement was cracking, contains not one occurrence of glasnost, perestroika, or Gorbachev's name. That silence is not neutrality; it is the sound of a genre outrun by events. The Americanists could dissect the manufacture of consent in Washington with real skill precisely because it was someone else's system. Turned inward, the same instruments would have been seditious. So they were not turned inward, and the book stands as an unintended monument to its own thesis: an analysis of how a political order restricts the field of the sayable, produced by an order that had just restricted this one.

The comparison the book could not make had already been made from the other side, and made plainly. Reviewing the American mythology of the two parties in 1968, George Novack wrote: "The ordinary American believes in the two-party system as devoutly and dogmatically as the Stalinist does in the one-party system." That is the whole matter in a sentence. The revolutionary-Marxist critique of the American duopoly was never a defence of the Soviet monopoly; it was a case for something both regimes denied — the working class's right to its own party, and its own state, controlled from below. Novack could name both dogmas because he served neither. The Moscow authors could name only one.

The reply, and the balance

What, then, did the tradition offer in place of the two-party system it also condemned? Not the Soviet model, and not mere abstention. From the 1930s onward the American Trotskyists argued the case the Moscow book gestures at and cannot complete: a mass labour party based on the trade unions, independent of both capitalist parties, as the indispensable next step for American workers. Trotsky's position was neither a slogan nor a dogma — in 1932 he had been sceptical of the labour-party demand, fearing it would become "a hindrance to the progressive evolution of the working class"; by 1938, with the CIO exploding across basic industry, he pressed the SWP to advocate an independent party of the unions armed with a transitional programme, "a machine for the workers themselves." The argument recurred through every election the book covers, in the journals — the International Socialist Review, The Militant, later Intercontinental Press — that answered these campaigns as they happened. A reader who wants the counter-case to this book, stated in the same decades, should go to Novack's *Third Parties in American Politics* (1968) and his 1938 review of *The Politics*, and to Trotsky's 1938 discussions *On the Labor Party in the United States*. They share the diagnosis; they differ on the cure, and on who they were willing to indict.

None of this cancels the book's real merit, and the honest verdict has to hold both halves. Where *The US Two-Party System* describes the corporate financing of both parties, the exclusion of labour and the left from the ballot, the bipartisan Cold War, and the seesaw that changes the "party decor" while leaving the class in power untouched, it is often acute and broadly correct, and it earns the respect of anyone in the tradition it partly overlaps. Its scholarship on the nineteenth century — the Federalist-Republican origins, the collapse of the Whigs, the realignments of the 1850s and of the New Deal — is serious work that reads its American sources and cites them. This is not a book to be dismissed; it is a book to be corrected on three points and credited on the rest.

The corrections are these. It exempts the one party — its own tradition's American party — from the very analysis it applies to every other; it treats the movements of American workers and Black Americans as objects of ruling-class management rather than as agents of their own history; and it prosecutes the crime of a narrowed political choice while representing a regime that had abolished choice altogether, in the very year that regime began to come apart. The first is factional; the second is a limitation of vision; the third is the one that dates the book forever. A Soviet study of how the American ruling

class keeps the workers from their own party is worth reading. That it could be written, in 1988, by scholars forbidden to ask the same question of their own state is the last and most eloquent thing it has to teach.

HISTORY The First Breath of Freedom

The Decembrists in their own words - the society programmes, the interrogations, the letters from Siberia - gathered as a documentary collection, with most of the material unavailable elsewhere in English.

Vladimir Fyodorov

Introduction to the 1988 Edition

This is not a monograph but a documentary collection, and the distinction matters, because it is the source of the book's real value and of the frame that value has to be read against. Vladimir Fyodorov, D.Sc. (History), has gathered the testimony, letters, memoirs, statutes and trial papers of the Decembrists — the noble officers who on 14 December 1825 marched insurgent Guards regiments onto Senate Square in St Petersburg against the autocracy, and who paid for it with the scaffold and the Siberian mines. Around the documents he has written a preface, a long "Historical Background" essay, and the connective headnotes that open each section and each figure. The volume appeared from Progress Publishers in Moscow in 1988, in "The Library of Russian and Soviet Literary Journalism," translated by Cynthia Carlile. Its title comes from the second of its three parts, and behind that from Herzen; its epigraph is Tolstoy's — "The Decembrists are always interesting and stir the most serious thoughts and feelings."

What the reader is holding, then, is roughly nine parts primary source to one part editorial voice. That proportion is the book's strength. It is also why the introduction that follows spends most of its length crediting Fyodorov and only its last third quarrelling with him — the quarrel is with the ramp he lays under the documents, not with the documents, and not with the scholarship that assembled them.

The book, and its date

Establish the date first, because Progress spines mislead and this one carries a charge. The documents are of the 1810s to the 1880s; the compiler's own prose fixes his moment precisely. "Even today," Fyodorov writes in the Historical Background, "when the first socialist state has celebrated its seventieth anniversary, Lenin's assessment of the Decembrist movement retains its validity." The seventieth anniversary of October is 1987. This is a text written at the very height of

glasnost, in the year the Soviet Union began, publicly and painfully, to reopen its own past — and published in 1988, when that reopening was in full flood.

That dating is worth holding onto, because the book does nothing with it. Search the text for glasnost, perestroika, Gorbachev, restructuring: nothing. (The "Gorbachev" the concordance returns is Ivan Gorbachevsky, a Decembrist of the Society of Associated Slavs.) A book about noble rebels who rose against despotism, censorship, the secret police and Siberian exile, appearing in the one year the Soviet century was being forced to look at its own version of all four, refers to its own moment not once. It keeps strictly to 1825 and to Lenin. Whether that silence is discretion, conviction or reflex, it is the first thing to notice, and we will come back to it, because the documents Fyodorov chose are a good deal less silent than he is.

What the book rescues, and it rescues a great deal

Take the scholarship on its own terms first, because it earns that. This is a real historian doing real work. Each document arrives with a biographical headnote — dates, rank, society, sentence, fate — and a source note; many are drawn straight from the archives, cited by fund and file number in the Central State Archives. The selection is intelligent and it is moving, and for a reader without Russian it is very nearly the only door of its kind into 1825 in English.

Consider what is actually in these pages. Pestel's testimony to the Committee of Enquiry, in which the leader of the Southern Society traces his own road to revolution — "The slavery of the peasants had always affected me deeply" — and diagnoses his age with a clarity that needs no gloss: "every age has its distinctive feature. The present age is marked by revolutionary ideas... The spirit of change is, so to speak, causing minds everywhere to simmer." Pyotr Kakhovsky's letters to Nicholas I from the Peter and Paul Fortress, written by a man who knew he would hang, and who used the little time he had to lecture the Tsar on political theory: "Where, show me the country,

reveal the history — where and when were nations happy under absolute rule, without the law, without rights, without property?" Alexander Bestuzhev's astonishing catalogue of a whole society's discontent — soldiers, officers, sailors, scholars, "young people complained that they were prevented from learning... Every element was in ferment." The Green Book of the Union of Welfare; Pestel's *Russkaya Pravda*; the extracts from Nikita Muravyov's draft constitution. These are the founding programmatic texts of the Russian revolutionary tradition, and Fyodorov puts them in front of the reader in sequence, with enough scaffolding to follow the argument.

Then the insurrection, and then the part that no reader forgets: the reprisal. Fyodorov reproduces the machinery of the state's revenge in its own words — the decree to the Supreme Criminal Court, the protocol, Nicholas's instructions on the "ceremonial execution" — and then the report of the Governor-General of St Petersburg to the Tsar, dated 13 July 1826, on the hanging of the five. It is one of the coldest documents in the Russian nineteenth century: "Due to the inexperience of our executioners and their inability to construct a scaffold, at the first attempt three, namely: Ryleyev, Kakhovsky and Muravyov, fell to the ground, but were quickly hanged a second time, and met their merited end. The which I humbly report to Your Majesty." To have set that beside the survivors' own accounts of the same morning — Yevgenii Obolensky watching "all five, surrounded by grenadiers with fixed bayonets" — is editorial judgement of a high order.

And then Siberia, which is where the collection becomes something more than a political anthology. Fyodorov gives space to the wives who followed their husbands to the mines — Maria Volkonskaya's notes, Pauline Annenkova's reminiscences — and to the strange, luminous afterlife of the exiles: Nikolai Bestuzhev teaching local children to read; Bobrishchev-Pushkin, the Decembrist who became a homoeopath and drove his little hunch-backed pony from one end of cholera-struck Tobolsk to the other, treating the poor without pay. Tolstoy's verdict on the returned exiles closes the theme — that after thirty years it was "clear that happiness is not in Siberia nor in St Petersburg but in the human spirit." A reader told that Progress printed only apparatus would not expect this book, and would be wrong. It is a work of recovery, and much of what it recovers is unbearable and beautiful at once. That much should be said plainly and first.

The rails under the documents

Now the frame. A documentary collection is shaped twice —

once by what is chosen, once by how it is introduced — and Fyodorov's introductions run the documents along a single track whose terminus is fixed before the first of them is read.

The track is Lenin's. The Historical Background opens not with a Decembrist but with a citation: "Russia witnessed the first revolutionary movement against tsarism in 1825" (Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution"), and Fyodorov adds, "I would like, as a historian, to begin my account of the first Russian revolutionaries with this assessment by Lenin." He then lays out the famous schema in full — three generations of the Russian revolution, the aristocratic (1825–1861), the bourgeois-democratic (1861–1895), the proletarian (from 1895), with the Decembrists and Herzen as "the most outstanding figures of the aristocratic period." And he draws from it the conclusion the whole book exists to earn: "the October Revolution is quite rightly seen as having its starting point on that day of 14 December" 1825. October was "the natural culmination of the Russian revolutionary-liberation movement, its final fruit, its consummation." Herzen's regard for the Decembrists, Fyodorov writes elsewhere, showed "the natural inevitability of the next stage in the liberation movement."

The collection is built to that shape. It opens with Mikhail Lunin's "A Look at the Secret Society in Russia," whose keynote — "Its Cause Is the Cause of the Whole of Russia" — announces the theme of continuity, and it closes, after the documents of struggle, trial and exile, on Lenin's 1912 essay "In Memory of Herzen," printed nearly whole. The book's last words are Lenin's: "The Decembrists awakened Herzen. Herzen began the work of revolutionary agitation," the work "taken up, extended, strengthened, and tempered by the revolutionary *raznochintsi*... The storm is the movement of the masses themselves," first in 1905 and then in 1917. The reader is walked from Senate Square to the Winter Palace along a graded ramp, and every document is a step on it.

The genealogy is not the objection

Here honesty requires a hard turn, because the easy criticism is the wrong one. It would be simple to convict Fyodorov of manufacturing a Bolshevik pedigree for men who were constitutional monarchists and republicans of 1825, and to leave it there. But the tradition from which this introduction is written built the same genealogy, and did so with pride.

In December 1925, speaking to the Second Congress of the Society of Political Prisoners and Deportees on the twentieth anniversary of the first revolution, Trotsky drew the identical

line of descent: "Without Radishchev there would not have been Pestel. Without Pestel, no Zhelyabov. Without Zhelyabov we would not have had Alexander Ul'yanov. And without Alexander there would not have been Vladimir" — and concluded, "In Leninism live the Decembrists, the teachers of the 1860s, the Populists and the People's Will." ("Twenty Years After 1905," delivered 26 December 1925.) Honouring the Decembrists as ancestors of October is not a Stalinist falsification; it is common ground across the whole movement that came out of 1917, this series included. Whatever is wrong with Fyodorov's book, it is not that he claims Pestel and Ryleev for the revolutionary tradition. They belong to it.

The difference is in the kind of genealogy, and it turns out to be everything. It shows in two places.

First, in what is said of 14 December itself. For Fyodorov the rising is a revolution and a smooth first step: he endorses the Decembrist Batenkov's court declaration that it was "not a mutiny, but the first experiment in political revolution in Russia," and calls the day "the first-ever armed uprising in Russia against absolutism." In the same 1925 speech, Trotsky reads the same event as tragedy: "Both had essential elements of revolution, but were still not revolution. That class that would have been able to take power was incapable of leading the peasant movements. The insurrection of the Decembrists had insufficient social support." The point that Lenin himself concedes in the passage Fyodorov quotes — that these were revolutionaries "very far removed from the people" — is for Trotsky not a footnote to a triumph but the analytic centre: 1825 as an argument about social forces, a rising by officers over the heads of a peasantry they could not reach, defeated in six hours because it had no ground under it. That is why Trotsky insists the story is one of "single-combat" and "a necessary preparatory school," a chain of heroic insufficiencies, each redeemed only by the next. Fyodorov's ramp climbs; Trotsky's is a record of defeats that had to be paid for before anything could be won.

Second, and more important, in where the genealogy ends. Fyodorov's is closed and completed. Its terminus is not an argument but a monument — "the first socialist state has celebrated its seventieth anniversary" — and the whole preceding history is graded by its arrival there. A genealogy that ends at a finished triumph spares itself the one question its own logic ought to force: what became of the thing at the top of the ramp? Trotsky's genealogy could not be closed, because for him the proletarian revolution was not a consummation to be commemorated but a conquest still to be defended — and, by the time he wrote *The Revolution Betrayed* in 1936, a

conquest already half lost to a bureaucratic caste that had raised over the workers' state a new apparatus of privilege, censorship and police. The difference between the two genealogies is the difference between a heritage honoured as an open argument and a heritage laid to rest at the foot of a statue.

1988, and the documents that will not stay in 1825

Which brings us back to the date, and to the sharpest thing in the book — sharper than anything Fyodorov intends. Test the collection by the question this series puts to every volume: can the category it celebrates be turned on the speaker's own side? The book celebrates men who resisted an autocratic police state — its censorship, its espionage, its unaccountable treasury, its scaffolds and its Siberia. It seals that resistance safely at 1917, its enemy a dead Tsar, its victory complete. It never once lets the category swing round toward the state publishing it. And yet the documents Fyodorov reprints keep swinging it round on their own.

Read Lunin's essay "The Social Movement in Russia in the Present Reign," written in 1840 from Siberian exile and placed near the end of the book. It is an indictment of Nicholas I's regime, and in 1988 it is an indictment with a double edge Fyodorov leaves entirely unremarked. On the state's finances: "We pay, but we do not know where our money goes... today we pay so much, and tomorrow we may be obliged to pay twice this amount." On the press: a government "surrounding the freedom of the press with new restrictions." On the fate of critics: a power that "extinguished with the hand of the executioner the minds which illumined and guided the development of the social movement." And, most startlingly, on the character of the regime — Lunin's exiles imagining the reproach they would fling at the rulers: "We preached the cult of law, you preach the cult of the personality... and have plunged it into the abyss of laxity, the vices of espionage and the darkness of ignorance."

The cult of the personality. That phrase — in the English of this Progress edition, and, a Soviet reader would have known, in the Russian below it — was the official euphemism under which the Soviet state had, since 1956, acknowledged and quarantined the crimes of Stalin. Here it stands in a Decembrist's 1840 arraignment of a tsar, reprinted in Moscow in 1987–88 with no gloss, no footnote, no evident awareness that the reader's ear would catch it. Whether Fyodorov placed it consciously or the resonance ambushed him, the effect is the same and it is the book's real electricity: the machinery the collection teaches its reader to despise in Nicholas I — the

secret police, the exile, the strangled press, the cult of a single person, the "hand of the executioner" — describes, sentence for sentence, the century that lay between the Decembrists and the book's own publication. The genealogy the book draws so carefully, from Senate Square to the seventieth anniversary, has a stretch it will not walk: the stretch in which the heirs of the men who fought the police state built one of their own. The silence noted at the outset is not neutral. It is the seam where the frame and the documents come apart.

The reply, and where to read further

The revolutionary-Marxist tradition answered this way of reading the Russian past as it was being written, and answered it without giving up the ancestors. The relevant texts are near to hand. Trotsky's "Twenty Years After 1905" (1925) honours the Decembrists as forebears while refusing to call their defeat a victory. "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution" (Summer 1939) reopens the whole Populist–Marxist quarrel that Fyodorov's ramp flattens, as a three-cornered argument — Plekhanov's, Lenin's, Trotsky's — in which the peasant question decided everything and no party simply won; his brief "A Note on Plekhanov" (24 April 1922) is the companion portrait of the tradition's first Marxist. And *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) is the book Fyodorov's frame is built to avoid: it reads the Soviet outcome by the standard of what the revolution had promised — precisely the standard a genealogy ending at a monument declines to apply. Read against chapters 5 and 6 of that book, "The Soviet Thermidor" and "The Growth of Inequality," Lunin's indictment of Nicholas stops being a period piece.

The reader should also set this volume beside its own twin in this series: Andrei Anikin's *Russian Thinkers* (Progress, 1988), a history of Russian socio-economic thought running the same road — Radishchev, the Decembrist economists, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, the Populists — to the same terminus in "the Young Lenin," and open to the same reflexive objection in a scholarly key. The two books are the same operation performed on the same heritage, one in documents and one in narrative, in the same year. Read together they show the method whole.

None of this is a reason to do without Fyodorov. It is the reason the book is worth republishing. He has recovered a heritage and read much of it with real feeling; the documents he assembled are the founding papers of the Russian revolutionary tradition, and the human record he preserves — the wives on the road to Chita, the botched scaffold, the homoeopath on his pony — is history of the first order and

will outlast any frame. Read the collection for Pestel and Kakhovsky and Lunin and the women who followed them east; read Herzen's line that closes the second part — "raised up on the scaffold, these people awoke the soul of a new generation." And then read past the ramp Fyodorov lays beneath them, and ask the question his own last document, Lunin's, cannot help but pose: whether the heirs of the men of 14 December kept faith, in the end, with the "cult of law" they died for, or whether they too came to be arraigned before "the court of our contemporaries and descendants." The Decembrists asked that question of their century. The honest way to honour them is to keep it open, and to let it be asked of ours.

PHILOSOPHY The Principles of Philosophy

The last systematic primer of Soviet philosophy, written in the first person by a philosopher of science who soon afterwards broke with Marxism-Leninism and went to work for Yeltsin.

Anatoly Rakitov

Introduction to the 1989 Edition

Almost everything in this catalogue was written by a committee. The great primers of Soviet philosophy — Konstantinov's Fundamentals, the ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, Afanasyev's Marxist Philosophy — carry an institute on the title page and a general editorial board behind it, and they are written in the impersonal voice of an apparatus that cannot be wrong. The Principles of Philosophy is different at the first sentence. "I shall begin my exposition of the principles of Marxist-Leninist philosophy," Anatoly Rakitov writes, opening Chapter I, and he keeps that "I" the whole way through: he stages Socratic dialogues, he says where he will return to a question later, he grants that a serious materialist "cannot simply reject idealists' arguments out of hand." This is one man teaching, and the man is worth knowing. Rakitov (born 1928) was a serious philosopher of science and logic, not a doctrinal functionary; and within a few years of finishing this book he had broken with Marxism-Leninism altogether. The biographical record is clear on where he went: into the service of Boris Yeltsin, as head of the analytical and information centre of the Russian presidency in the early 1990s. So this small textbook occupies a singular place. It is very probably the last systematic primer of Soviet philosophy written by a man who was already, perhaps, half out the door — and reading it with that in view, from its own tone rather than from anything we might project onto its author, turns out to be the most interesting thing that can be done with it.

Begin with the date, because for once the date on the spine is the date of the text. Many Progress translations lag their Russian originals by years, and several volumes in this series wear a glasnost jacket over an Andropov-era book. Not this one. The Principles of Philosophy is a glasnost book to its bones, and it announces the fact in its own vocabulary. The Introduction speaks of "the revolutionary reorganisation and restructuring taking place in the USSR, aimed at overcoming the stagnant tendencies noted during the two preceding decades"; of a "period of stagnation" in which "conservatism,

and a certain subjectivism in decision-making were often raised to the rank of ideological principles"; of the need "to carry out a radical economic reform and to democratise society." It names perestroika and glasnost directly, dates "the ideology of renewal and the new thinking that the CPSU has been developing since the mid-1980s," and reports that "Soviet reorganisation (perestroika) is meeting certain resistance from the bureaucracy, and among certain conservative figures." It even floats, in the chapter on the state, a thought that would have been unprintable a decade earlier: "the model of socialism with a one-party system is not the only one possible." A book that speaks of "socialist pluralism" and "intellectual pluralism," and that sets itself against the "ideological barracks" of the past, is unmistakably a document of 1988–89 and no earlier.

The erosion of the old orthodoxy is real, then, and it is not cosmetic. It reaches the one subject Soviet textbooks had guarded most fiercely: their own history. The Introduction states, as a task the new ideology must perform, that it must give "a clear evaluation of the causes of the stagnation, and of all the breaches of social justice and deviations from socialist democracy and unjustified repressions carried out by Stalin and his immediate entourage." Set that beside its sibling volumes. The ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism (1978) contains the name Stalin zero times and the Terror not at all; Konstantinov (1979) admits only "the cult of personality," a defect of one man's "character," sealed off from the system. Rakitov, eleven years and a change of political weather later, will use the word "repressions" and put Stalin's name beside it. He will also say something no earlier primer would: that "the administrative, bureaucratic methods of leadership of the Soviet economy and state, built up in the 1930s and 1940s, have come into acute contradiction in recent decades with the needs of social development." The stagnation is dated, the bureaucracy is named, and the machinery of the 1930s is put in the dock. This is a textbook whose factual claims about the settled perfection of Soviet society are visibly crumbling in the author's own hands.

One small omission is worth marking before we credit the

candour too fully. For all the naming, the reforms in this book have no author. Perestroika is the work of "the CPSU," of "the political leaders of Soviet society," of "the Communist Party which called on all the working people"; Mikhail Gorbachev, the living man who had proclaimed every one of these slogans, is not named once in the book. That is the old depersonalising reflex — Soviet policy as a process without a hand on it — surviving intact inside the new candour, and it is a first hint of where the loosening stops.

What does the book actually teach? It is a complete and orthodox exposition of dialectical and historical materialism, and it is worth stating its doctrine precisely, because the criticism that follows depends on taking it seriously. Philosophy, Rakitov holds after Marx, is "the intellectual quintessence of its time," a system of knowledge of the world as a whole; and it has one "basic question," the relation of consciousness to being, with two aspects. On the first — which comes first, matter or thought — "materialists affirm that matter is primary and determinant, and consciousness secondary and determined," and the whole history of philosophy divides into the two camps, materialist and idealist, that answer it. On the second — whether the world is knowable — materialism affirms that it is, and that the proof is not contemplation but "practice, i. e., of people's social and production activity." Consciousness is not a mirror-image struck off passively: it is a "reflection" of matter, a doctrine, Rakitov notes, that "subsequently came to be called the theory of reflection and was developed on a fundamentally new basis by Lenin." To all of this the book attaches the principle of partiinost — partisanship, or party-spirit — the insistence that "recognition of the irreconcilability of idealism and materialism is a prime important feature of the Marxian principle of partisanship in philosophy," and that every philosophy, whatever it pretends, serves the interests of a definite class.

Extended to society, materialism becomes historical materialism, and the load-bearing formula is stated flatly: dialectical materialism "extends materialism to society, considers that material social being determines social consciousness, and treats history as a developing, dialectical process." The relations of production "form the economic system of society, the basis of society"; the state, parties, law, morality, art and "the various forms of social consciousness" are the superstructure "built as it were on top of the relations of production, just as the storeys of a building are erected on top of its foundations." "'Social consciousness reflects social being — that is Marx's teaching', Lenin remarked," and Rakitov makes the line the hinge of his historical materialism. Over

this frame he lays the three laws of dialectics, of which the law of the unity and struggle of opposites is "the essence and kernel of dialectics," in Lenin's phrase, "since it answers a most important and complex question, that of the source of development." Development everywhere comes from within, from the growth and resolution of internal contradictions — and social contradictions are sorted into "antagonistic" (irreconcilable, resolved only by the elimination of one side) and "non-antagonistic" (soluble by peaceful adjustment). That distinction will matter enormously in a moment, because it is the pressure-point on which the whole book turns.

First, though, the credit, which is due and which is substantial. Rakitov is a real philosopher, and it shows on the page in a way it does not show in most of this catalogue. His chief pedagogical device is the staged dialogue, and the dialogues are genuinely well made. A Materialist argues an Objective Idealist to a standstill over whether the world needs a designer; then a Subjective Idealist arrives to claim that an apple is only "the name for a certain combination of visual, tactile, and other sensations," and the Materialist walks him, courteously and inexorably, into the trap of solipsism — "you are arguing with yourself and trying to convince yourself that you are right... only you exist and there are no other people in the world" — until the idealist concedes, "perhaps you are right, and there is something wrong in my argument." On the knowability of the world, a Subjective Idealist produces the oldest sceptical exhibit of all, the pencil that looks bent in a glass of water, and the Materialist answers not with an assertion but with an experiment, and then with a genuinely fine image: knowledge "is not some isolated 'slice', but a spiral consisting of endless turns," each stage correcting and deepening the last. This is Socratic teaching that respects the reader's intelligence, and it is the opposite of a catechism's question-and-certified-answer.

The same quality runs through the history of philosophy, which is unusually generous for a Soviet primer. Rakitov gives real weight to Indian and Chinese thought — the Indian "technique of meditation and self-training," he writes, "is of undoubted interest for the contemporary science of man" — and to the Arab philosophers who "preserved the philosophical heritage of antiquity and made it available to the scholars of the European Middle Ages." He credits Hegel and Kant with raising "several important propositions of the dialectical method" that "much" surpassed "the naive dialectic of antiquity," and he honours Gramsci at length. His feel for science is a working philosopher's, not a propagandist's: quarks and gluons, annihilation of electron and positron into a field, the periodic law, science "outpacing technology" — these are used as illustrations because Rakitov actually

understands them. Where this series has often had to report a rote inventory dressed as thought, here it can report the reverse. As elementary exposition of what dialectical and historical materialism claims, and of the classical arguments for and against materialism, *The Principles of Philosophy* is lucid, fair to its opponents in the set-piece dialogues, and better written than almost anything beside it on the shelf.

And yet the book fails at the exact point every book in this series fails, and it fails in the most instructive way of any of them, precisely because it comes so close to not failing. The doctrine it teaches contains a universal solvent: the theory of ideology. Ideology, Rakitov explains, is "false consciousness" — Marx and Engels's phrase — because exploiting classes have "striven to present their interests as eternal and immutable," and its thought is bent by "social being" to that end. This is a powerful acid, and Rakitov pours it freely over bourgeois thought. Multi-party democracy is unmasked: "the existence of a number of political parties, known as political pluralism, provides an appearance of choice for the working people," while in fact all of them defend the same basis. Agnosticism is "a weapon employed in the ideological struggle by opponents of the progressive classes." Bourgeois political economy, philosophy, law — each is traced back to the class interest it secretly serves. The solvent works on everything. Except one thing. "Socialism ensures the predominance of a scientific world outlook," and Marxism-Leninism alone is exempt from the acid because it is not ideology at all but science. Asked directly whether "a true ideology" is possible, one "that correctly reflects reality," the book answers: "Of course, it is possible. Initially it takes shape as the ideology of the working class... Its ideology does not aspire to justify any social set-up whatever as eternal and immutable." The category that explains all thought as the distorted echo of class interest is never once turned on the doctrine doing the explaining. That doctrine is "science," the "scientific world outlook," and stands outside the theory it applies to everyone else.

Now, the interesting part. In the earlier primers of this series that exemption sat undisturbed on a set of triumphant factual claims — the Terror airbrushed, the 1936 Constitution called "the Constitution of triumphant socialism," Soviet society described as harmonious and contradiction-free. Rakitov, in 1989, has given all of that up. His book admits contradiction under socialism as a permanent condition: "contradictions cannot be eliminated from it once and for all," and "its inherent non-antagonistic contradictions are the source of its development and perfection." He admits the bureaucracy. His dialogue on the sources of development — a Metaphysician

who thinks change comes from outside, a Dialectician who insists it comes from within — takes as its climactic worked example the degeneration of the Soviet state itself. "In certain conditions, and in socialist society as well," the Dialectician says, "situations may arise when the state machinery begins to develop interests and goals of its own that do not correspond to those of society as a whole." The machine "becomes bureaucratic and clumsy," "begins to hold it back and slow it down," and produces "stagnation in public affairs and the economy." This is the method turned, at last, partway on the USSR — a thing no volume before it in this catalogue would do.

So has Rakitov passed the test the earlier books failed? He has not, and seeing exactly why is the whole point. The discriminator this series has learned to use is narrow and it holds here perfectly: error is admissible; the category is not. A Bolshevik may be granted a mistake — Stalin his "repressions," the reforms their "resistance," the 1930s their "administrative, bureaucratic methods" — without the classification ever turning inward. And under all Rakitov's new candour the classification does not turn. The bureaucracy is a "phenomenon," a set of "methods," a "non-antagonistic contradiction" to be dissolved by "political and educational measures"; it is never a stratum with a material interest of its own, never a class-in-formation, never something the theory of ideology could be applied to. Crucially, the Party that reforms it is never the thing reformed: the contradictions "were realised and laid bare by the Communist Party which called on all the working people to set about renewing society." The Party remains the physician and never becomes the disease. And the epistemic exemption — the claim that Marxism-Leninism is science and not ideology — survives every concession. Rakitov will surrender the perfection of Soviet society, the innocence of the 1930s, even the necessity of one-party rule; the one thing glasnost cannot revise from inside the doctrine is the doctrine's claim to stand outside ideology as science. That is the load-bearing wall, and it is the only wall left standing.

There is a smaller tell that confirms the pattern. The candour has a sharp edge where it meets the countryside. Collectivisation appears once, and it is presented, with no trace of the new frankness, as a triumph of dialectical method: a "contradiction" between industry and peasant agriculture "was resolved through collectivisation," and "socialist relations of production arose in agriculture based on co-operative ownership." No kulak (a well-to-do peasant), no requisitioning, no famine of 1932–33 — the abstract word "repressions" is admissible, but the concrete catastrophe that would have to be laid at the door of the system rather than one

man's "entourage" stays outside the frame. The reflexivity fails in the particular exactly where it failed in the general.

The revolutionary-socialist tradition answered this book's move before the book was written, and from inside its own categories. In "The ABC of Materialist Dialectics" — a short polemic of December 1939, part of his defence of dialectics in *In Defense of Marxism* — Trotsky drew the distinction Rakitov's book is built to blur. The real dialectician, he wrote, is the one who has "learned finally to apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself," and who determines "that critical limit beyond which 'A' ceases to be 'A', a workers' state ceases to be a workers' state." Whoever recognises development "in only certain spheres" and treats the rest as fixed is not a dialectician but a "vulgar evolutionist." That is the precise measure of *The Principles of Philosophy*. Rakitov recognises development in one more sphere than his predecessors dared — the bureaucracy, the stagnation, the fallibility of the Party's own methods — and then stops, at the caste and at the category, exactly where continuing would cost something. A method that finds contradiction, negation and supersession in every order of nature and history, and exempts a single order, its own, has not made a small local exception; it has suspended itself at the one point where it would have had to ask what class the ruling stratum of the USSR had become.

The tradition had carried the method through to that answer half a century earlier. *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) — the standard against which every Soviet account of Soviet society in this catalogue must be read — begins from the very premise Rakitov reaches in 1989, that a transitional society "does not proceed harmoniously, but in contradictions," and then does the thing Rakitov will not. It names the bureaucracy as a caste: "exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism." It reads the growth of the state, which Rakitov's own doctrine says should be withering, as the symptom it is: "the state does not die away, but grows more and more despotic... the bureaucracy rises above the new society." And it states, in one line, the law Rakitov's book is written to deny: "Bureaucracy and social harmony are inversely proportional to each other." Fifty-three years before Rakitov let his Dialectician concede that the state machinery can "develop interests and goals of its own," Trotsky had given those interests a name and a class content. One may accept or reject his diagnosis; what cannot be denied is that it is the dialectical method carried to its own society, which is the one operation the primer forbids itself.

Behind the particular failure lies the general one this series keeps meeting: *diamat* — the codified state philosophy of

dialectical materialism — is not the living method of Marx but a doctrine frozen into a syllabus, and a frozen dialectic is a contradiction in terms. The fair counterweight is not a treatise but another popular primer, and one exists: George Novack's *An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism* (5th ed., New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971, from the lectures of 1942), delivered to worker-activists while the leaders of his party stood trial. Novack teaches the same three laws and the same categories, and opens by refusing Rakitov's central move: "We shall approach dialectics not as a closed system. On the contrary it is an open system." And the sentence the whole exemption is built to avoid: "Dialecticians recognise that all formulas must be provisional, limited, approximate, because all forms of existence are transient and limited. This must also apply to the science of dialectics and to the formulations of its laws." This must also apply to the science of dialectics — that is the clause a state philosophy cannot afford, because a method that must be turned on its own formulations will, sooner or later, be turned on the state that certifies them.

Which returns us to Rakitov himself, and to the reason his book is the most poignant object in this catalogue rather than merely the most candid. Measured against Konstantinov, Afanasyev, Boguslavsky and Oizerman, *The Principles of Philosophy* marks the far end of a visible curve: across the decade the exemption holds, but the factual claims it protects fall away one by one, until in 1989 almost nothing is left of them but the bare epistemic claim to be science. Rakitov could write the dialogues so well, and could admit so much, precisely because he was the kind of philosopher who would eventually find the last exemption untenable too — and, the record shows, he did, laying down the doctrine entirely within a few years and taking his analytical skills into the service of the state that replaced the one this book was written to legitimate. Read from its own tone, the book does not read like a catechism confidently recited. It reads like a doctrine hedging in the first person, on the edge of a country and a career about to end. That authors of such books saw the danger, named more of it than anyone before them, and still could not cross the last line, is the truest record they leave of the year in which they were written.

HISTORY History of Religion

A comparative history of religion from the Australian initiation rites to Islam, by one of the Soviet Union's most eminent ethnographers - the teaching distillation of a lifetime's primary fieldwork.

Sergei Aleksandrovich Tokarev

Introduction to the 1989 Edition

Sergei Tokarev's History of Religion is a genuine work of scholarship, and it is worth saying so at the outset, because the series it belongs to does not often let one say it. Progress Publishers issued the book in English in 1989, in the "Student's Library" — a teaching series; the companion volume advertised at the back is Yaroshevsky's History of Psychology in the same collection. It is a single-handed comparative survey of the whole field: the tribal cults of Australia, Oceania, Africa, Siberia and the Americas; the national religions of China, India, Egypt, Iran, Greece, Rome and the Jews; and the three world religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. It runs to some 137,000 words and it was written by a man who knew the material. Tokarev (1899–1985) was one of the Soviet Union's most eminent ethnographers, and his larger Religion in the History of the Peoples of the World remained for decades a standard reference. History of Religion reads as the teaching distillation of that lifework: the same architecture — tribal, national, world — carried through with a specialist's control of the detail.

Begin with the date, because the spine misleads. The copyright page reads 1989, but the text is older. Its author died in 1985, so nothing in the book can postdate that year, and nothing does: the latest datum inside it is the remark that Muslims "number around 800 million (1985)." There is no glasnost in these pages, no perestroika, no Gorbachev; no mention of the millennium of Russian Christianity celebrated with official blessing in 1988, and none of the visible return of religion to Soviet public life that was under way as the English edition went to press. This is a mid-1980s text — very possibly older in its bones — in a 1989 jacket. The distinction matters for how we read it, and it matters most at the single point where the book touches its own country and its own time.

The learning is real

The first thing to credit is the sheer comparative range,

handled without the padding and ritual that deforms so much of this catalogue. Tokarev moves from the initiation rites of the Australians to the ancestor cult of China, from the pantheon of the Yakuts to the theology of Philo of Alexandria, and he is a reliable guide throughout. He is good on the mechanics of belief — the "initial magic" of the pointing-bone, the divination bones of Shang China, the borrowing of Christian baptism from the Near Eastern Mandaean sects and, behind them, the Babylonian cult of Ea. He is good, too, on the things a lesser survey would flatten: he pauses to note that the standard claim that Australian religion "was a purely male domain" may be an artefact of male anthropologists interviewing male informants. That is a scholar's reflex, not an ideologue's.

The intellectual backbone of the book's strongest chapters is Engels — specifically the late Engels of Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity and On the History of Early Christianity. Tokarev credits him plainly: Engels "was the first to analyse so thoroughly the historical conditions in which Christianity developed and its social roots," and the account that follows — Christianity as the levelling cult of a demoralised Roman world, "a way out... not in this world" — is genuine historical materialism doing genuine work. It is not a caricature of religion but an explanation of one, and on early Christianity it remains a serious contribution. Where Tokarev quotes Lenin it is to the same purpose and with a real citation attached: Lenin "even referred to the 'democratic-revolutionary spirit' of early Christianity" (footnoted to The State and Revolution, Collected Works, vol. 25, p. 425). This is a book that argues from texts it names, not from doctrine it invokes.

A surer sign of the real thing is Tokarev's willingness to leave scholarly disputes open rather than resolve them by fiat — including disputes among Marxists, which a lesser Soviet author would have closed with a citation to authority. On the vexed question of whether Jesus existed, he lays out both the "historical" and the "mythological" schools and then concedes: "Marxist scholars also have differing opinions on this question," adding that "it is not so important to Marxist scholars whether a preacher named Jesus lived and died in the

first century in Palestine." On the origins of Islam he opens the same way — "Soviet scholars have disagreed about the social base and social roots of early Islam" — and canvasses three rival theories before offering his own, tentatively, "to my mind." This is how a scholar writes who takes his field to be a field of inquiry and not a body of settled doctrine. It is the opposite of the ritual certainty that marks the weakest volumes in this series, and it is worth registering as a positive finding, not merely the absence of a fault.

Most striking is the methodological essay Tokarev appends as his Conclusion, which is the best thing in the volume and the least Soviet. He opens by refusing the easy verdict: "the history of religion is not simply the history of the errors of the human mind." If religion were merely a bundle of mistakes it would have dissolved, as errors do, "with every step man took forward towards the cognition of the world"; its persistence proves it is something else — rite, code, institution, "the relationship between people with respect to... the notions about God or gods." He is explicit that this "is not another version of the simplistic theory of deception," and that "the difficulty in combating religion is not merely in disproving false ideas, as bourgeois atheist educators have suggested." He warns against the mechanical materialism the frame invites — "every ideology, including religious ideology, is relatively independent" — and against forcing explanations where the evidence is thin, insisting that a supposition must never be presented "as an established truth" and that sometimes the honest course is "simply leaving the question open." A textbook writer under a doctrine of certainty, telling students to tolerate an open question, is doing something admirable.

And note what the book does not do. Marx's most famous sentence about religion — the "opium of the people" — appears nowhere in it; the slogan-Marxism one expects is simply absent. Nor is there any triumphalist teleology. The Conclusion does not claim religion is withering under socialism, does not promise its extinction, does not treat the USSR as the place where the history of religion ends. It closes instead on Engels' sober formula: religion "is still basically the expression of people's powerlessness in the face of his environment." That is a diagnosis, not a boast, and a reader braced for Soviet crowing will be surprised by its restraint.

Where the mandate presses on the scholar

The frame does leave marks. When Tokarev turns from explaining a religion to judging it, the historian gives way to the editorialist, and the verdicts arrive pre-written. Early Christianity was "a step backwards in comparison with the

ethics... of the Stoics"; its triumph "corresponded to the general cultural decline... and regress into barbarism." The Christian ethic of forgiveness "was for the benefit of the exploiters," and the doctrine of sin "kept the masses from contemplating genuine struggle with social evil." Some of this is defensible social analysis; some is the reflex by which every religious idea is cashed out, in the last instance, as a device of class rule. The functionalism can be crude: religion offers "the oppressed masses... illusory consolation, hope in reward after death," and at the same time frightens them "with the threat of punishment."

It is worth pausing here, because the caricature the book mostly avoids is also one the Marxist tradition itself never quite held. Marx's "opium" line — the one Tokarev omits — is the tail of a sentence far more sympathetic than its reputation: religion is "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions." The point was not that believers are dupes but that religion answers a real distress, and that the distress, not the answer, is the thing to abolish. Tokarev's own best formulations — religion as the cry of "powerlessness," as consolation the powerless genuinely need — are closer to that fuller Marx than to the atheist slogan. When the book is flat it is because the mandate has supplied a verdict; when it is subtle it is because the scholarship has quietly outrun the mandate. The seam runs right down the middle of the Conclusion.

The silence that dates the book

There is one subject on which History of Religion is not subtle, not flat, but wholly silent — and it is the subject a Soviet history of religion is least entitled to skip. The book says nothing about the most consequential episode in the recent history of religion in its own country: the Soviet state's decades-long war against it.

The scale of the omission is easy to measure, because Tokarev handles religious persecution fluently everywhere else. Rome persecuted the Druids; Claudius "destroyed the Druid religion in Gallia." The Tokugawa shoguns persecuted Christians and in 1614 forbade the religion outright. In Korea "Buddhists were persecuted... driven from the capital and large cities." The Babi movement in Persia "was brutally suppressed" and its leaders "brutally executed in 1850." Pharaoh Ikhnaton "ordered that all their temples be closed down." Persecution, suppression, closed temples, executed clergy, cursed heretics — the whole vocabulary is present and in constant use, applied without hesitation to Egypt, Persia, Rome, Japan, Korea,

colonial Polynesia. It is applied to the Soviet Union not once.

Search the book for the machinery of the actual Soviet campaign and every term returns nothing. The League of the Militant Godless — the mass organisation that ran the anti-religious drive of the 1920s and 1930s — is absent; the word "godless" occurs a single time in the whole volume, and it describes Anaxagoras, expelled from Athens in the fifth century B.C. Yaroslavsky, who led that League, is not named. Neither is the closing and demolition of churches, mosques and synagogues; the arrest, exile and execution of Orthodox priests, Muslim clergy, Baptists, rabbis; the anti-religious museums installed in requisitioned cathedrals. "Scientific atheism," the discipline in whose name Soviet universities taught this very subject, is not mentioned. The 1917 revolution appears exactly once, as a chronological marker for the slow economic development of the Volga peoples. The tell is sharpest in the comparison the book itself invites: it can report that after the Chinese revolution of 1911 "the Church was separated from the state" and "services were discontinued in the Temple of the Sky." The far more sweeping disestablishment carried out in Russia after 1918 — separation, closure, confiscation, prosecution — is a historical event when it happens in Peking and a blank when it happens in Moscow.

What stands in its place is more revealing than mere silence would be. The book's one present-tense sentence about religion in the USSR reads: "In the USSR and other socialist countries the Church changed its political orientation in support of the state, advocates peace and social progress, stands behind the government of the Soviet Union and that of other socialist countries in their efforts for peace and friendship among nations and for the liberation of colonial countries from imperialism." A survey that has just spent four hundred pages tracing how states coerced, suppressed and remade the religions under them arrives at its own state and finds only a Church that loyally "advocates peace." The war is not merely unmentioned; it is overwritten with a picture of harmony. This is the reflexivity test in its purest form. The category of persecution, which the book wields against every other power, cannot be turned on the power that published it.

The date makes the silence heavier rather than lighter. This is a teaching text, put into the hands of students, and issued in English in 1989 — the year after the millennium of Russian Christianity had been marked with the regime's own participation, at the very moment when churches were reopening, when the atheist establishment was folding, and when the history the book omits was, quite visibly, ending.

Whatever excuse a 1955 or a 1970 edition might claim, a volume reaching students in 1989 with its present-day horizon frozen in the loyal-church sentence of about 1985 was handing them a history of religion with the most immediate chapter of their own country's religious history torn out. The best scholar in this catalogue could describe the persecution of Babis in Shiraz and not the persecution of Baptists in Kiev.

The reply: an ideology to be answered, not a faith to be crushed

The tradition from which this series is written was, on its own terms, no friendlier to religion as a system of ideas than Tokarev was. It regarded religion as false consciousness and expected the raising of humanity to dissolve it. But it drew a line that Soviet "scientific atheism" erased — the line between combating an ideology and persecuting believers — and that line is exactly where Tokarev's frame goes blind.

The Marxist case was that religion is undermined by lifting the material and cultural level of the masses, not by police measures. Trotsky put it plainly in 1926, lecturing on radio and science: "Under the socialist system science and technique as a whole will undoubtedly be directed against religious prejudices, against superstition, which reflects the weakness of man before man or before nature" (Radio, Science, Technique and Society, 1926). The weapon is the broadcast voice "from the Polytechnical Museum," not the closure order — a task of persuasion set against the church, not a campaign of coercion against the churchgoer. In *Problems of Everyday Life* the argument is the same: you displace the church by giving working people something better, not by decree. It is precisely because this tradition took religion seriously as an ideology to be answered that it refused to treat believers as enemies to be broken.

The principle had a longer pedigree than Trotsky. In *Socialism and Religion* (1905) Lenin had already drawn the two-sided distinction that Stalinism collapsed: toward the state, religion was to be a private affair, the church disestablished and the believer left unmolested; toward the party, religion was to be combated — but by materialist explanation and propaganda, not by administrative persecution, and without insult to the sentiments of believers. The revolution was to separate church from state precisely so that conscience would be free of the state, not so that the state could hunt conscience down. What the League of the Militant Godless practised in the 1930s — the dynamited cathedral, the arrested priest, the museum of atheism in the looted sanctuary — was a repudiation of that distinction, and it is exactly the distinction Tokarev's frame no

longer contains. In his Conclusion the fight against religion is a matter of exposing "false ideas" and outgrowing "powerlessness"; nowhere does it occur to him that a state might fight religion by force, because the state that employed him had done so and could not be described doing it.

And when the Soviet state did break them, it was this tradition's press that kept the record Tokarev's book suppresses. Intercontinental Press, the weekly of the Fourth International, covered Soviet religious repression continuously through the years Tokarev's manuscript was closing. Its issue of 27 March 1978 (vol. 16, no. 12) printed the statement of the exiled General Pyotr Grigorenko, stripped of his Soviet citizenship weeks earlier, who set down the names the official history would not: the imprisoned priest Dmitri Dudko; the Christian Committee headed by Father Gleb Yakunin; and "the Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostals" whose congregations were being harried, alongside the Crimean Tatars and the Helsinki monitors, into the camps and psychiatric hospitals. Here is the reflexive knowledge that History of Religion cannot hold: a revolutionary-socialist paper, hostile to religion as ideology on the same grounds Tokarev is, documenting the persecution of believers as an outrage — because freedom of conscience is not a concession to superstition but a condition of the emancipation the whole project claimed to serve. Tokarev's Church "advocates peace"; the believers in Grigorenko's list were in prison. Both statements were true in 1978. Only one is in the book.

what "scientific atheism" permitted its most learned practitioner to see — and it is why this genuinely valuable book had, in 1989, already been overtaken by the country it declined to describe. Read it for the religions of the Australians and the Mandaean, of Egypt and Rome and early Palestine. For the religion of the Soviet Union, and for what was done to it, read almost anything else.

What the volume is, and is not

None of this cancels the scholarship, and the point of an honest introduction is not to let the silence swallow the learning. Tokarev's comparative survey is the real thing — knowledgeable, wide, methodologically self-aware, and unusually free of the ritual invocation that clogs its shelf-mates. On the origins of Christianity, on the varieties of tribal cult, on the internal logic of Confucianism against Buddhism, it can still be read with profit; a student would come away from it genuinely instructed about the religions of the world. It is a better book than the frame it was made to serve, and its author was plainly a better scholar than the mandate required him to be.

But it is a history of religion with a hole in it exactly where its own authority should have been greatest, and the hole is not an accident of scope. Tokarev could name the persecutor everywhere the persecutor was safely foreign or safely dead. He could not name the one at home. That is the boundary of

HISTORY Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh's life from the village to the declaration of independence and the war - by a TASS correspondent who reported from North Vietnam under the bombing in 1965.

Yevgeny Kobelev

Introduction to the 1989 Edition

The most informative page in this book is the one nobody reads.

Turn to the copyright notice. It carries two dates. The Russian original is copyright "Молодая гвардия", 1983 — Molodaya Gvardiya, the Komsomol's publishing house, which ran the Soviet Union's long-running popular-biography line. The English translation is copyright Progress Publishers, 1989. What Progress issued in the fourth year of glasnost, months before the Berlin Wall came down, was a book written and cleared for the press under Yuri Andropov.

This matters because 1989 is otherwise the latest date in this series, and it invites an obvious question: did the loosening of Soviet censorship reach the export list? The answer here is that it reached the imprint page and stopped. Nothing in this text was revised for the reader of 1989. It is a 1983 book in a 1989 jacket, and reading it that way explains almost everything that follows — including, as we shall see, one passage that could not have been written in 1979 and one that could not have been written at any point before 1985.

What the book is

Yevgeny Kobelev was a Soviet Vietnamologist and journalist, and he tells us in his first paragraph what he was doing there: "It so happened that I was in Vietnam as TASS correspondent when the country was fending off the U.S. aggression." He describes reaching Vinh in June 1965 under bombing, waiting for nightfall at river crossings, anti-aircraft guns so loud that his party could not hear each other speak. That is not filler. It establishes at the outset that this author had been in the country, spoke to people there, and cared about them, and the reader should hold onto that when the book's failures accumulate.

It is a popular biography, not a monograph. There is no bibliography. Across roughly 105,000 words there are about

six substantive source footnotes, and every one of them is to Lenin's or Marx's Collected Works in Progress editions. The acknowledgements thank "the friends and companions of Ho Chi Minh, writers and journalists, whose remembrances, articles and stories about that great Vietnamese were utilised in writing this book" — which is an accurate description of the method. Kobelev works from Vietnamese official memoir literature, Soviet recollections, and the French colonial and left press. Where those sources are good the book is good. Where they are the Party's own version of itself, so is the book.

The four tests

Stalin. He is named once as a historical actor, and it is a piece of set-dressing: in the Canton training school of the mid-1920s, "the walls were hung with portraits of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Sun Yatsen, and Pham Hong Thai." Otherwise the name appears only as Stalingrad — five times, all of them about the battle, including a genuinely striking scene in which Ho, imprisoned by Chiang Kai-shek in 1943, is smuggled a newspaper reporting the German surrender and "jumped with joy." Ho spent more than six years in the Soviet Union. He was there through the first and second five-year plans, through the famine, through the Terror. The man who ran the state during those years does not appear in the account of them at all. This is not glasnost. It is the standard Brezhnev-era solution: not defence, not denunciation, simply erasure.

The Terror. This is the book's central and unforgivable silence, and it is unforgivable because Kobelev goes straight into the room where it happened.

Ho reached Moscow in 1934 and stayed until mid-1938, living at the Comintern's Eastern Secretariat, studying at the International Lenin School under the alias Linov, and leading the Vietnamese group at the Institute of National and Colonial Problems. Kobelev devotes a full chapter to it — "His Second Homeland" — and it is warm and detailed. Ho does his morning exercises with dumb-bells and a chest expander. He plays chess badly and inventively. He arbitrates squabbles

among the students. He goes to newsreels of the Spanish war and sees Chapayev several times over. Of his arrival, Kobelev writes that after Hong Kong prison and the news of his executed comrades, "everything Nguyen saw in the Soviet Union was like a soothing ointment, giving him new faith, new strength and vigour."

Now set that against what was happening to the Comintern's foreign cadre in exactly those rooms in exactly those years. At the Seventh Congress in July 1935, Kobelev tells us, Ho "again met his old friends Nadezhda Krupskaya, Dmitry Manuilsky, Iosif Pyatnitsky" and got acquainted with "such distinguished personalities of the world communist movement as Georgi Dimitrov, Klement Gottwald, Bela Kun." Pyatnitsky, who effectively ran the Comintern apparatus, was arrested in 1937 and shot. Béla Kun, leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, was arrested in 1937 and shot. They are named in a 1989 book, in a friendly list, with no indication that anything ever happened to them. The Asian sections of the Comintern were gutted in these years; the Vietnamese in Moscow were a small, foreign, unprotected group, and Ho's own standing was not secure. Kobelev's chapter runs from 1934 to 1938 and contains not one arrest, not one disappearance, not one funeral.

The word "terror" and its cognates occur eleven times in this book. Every single occurrence is about French colonial repression, Chinese reaction in Canton, fascism as defined by the Seventh Congress, or the Diem police. The Soviet Union does not have a 1937 in these pages. And the chapter closes with the doctrinal payoff that the whole omission exists to protect: "Socialism was winning once and for all on one-sixth of the Earth's surface... It also proved that socialism could be built in one country, and a fairly backward one."

Trotsky. Named twice, and the second is the giveaway. Explaining Ho's thinking about negotiating with France in 1946, Kobelev reaches for Brest-Litovsk as the precedent: "All counter-revolutionary forces from the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries down to the most reactionary of reactionaries were dead set against such a treaty. And they had an ally in Trotsky and the so-called Left Communists... This provocative policy was skilfully camouflaged with ultra-left rhetoric."

This is not analysis. It is the formulation of the History of the CPSU (Bolsheviks): Short Course of 1938, reproduced without adjustment fifty-one years later. It is also false in a way that requires no Trotskyist commitment to see: Trotsky headed the Soviet delegation at Brest under a policy adopted by the

Central Committee, the Left Communists were a faction of Bolsheviks led by Bukharin, and describing either as allies of "the most reactionary of reactionaries" is the language of the show trials rather than of the events. Anyone wanting the documentary record can consult the Central Committee minutes for January–February 1918, which have been published in English for decades and show a real and open disagreement among Bolsheviks about a genuinely appalling choice.

The Vietnamese Trotskyists. Here the book fails its sharpest test, and it fails it twice.

In the 1930s Saigon was the one place in the world where Trotskyism was a mass force. The Struggle group — La Lutte — around Ta Thu Thau, Phan Van Hum and Tran Van Thach, together with the League of International Communists, topped the poll in Saigon municipal elections and had a serious base among the city's workers. The Communists collaborated with them in the La Lutte front until Moscow's Popular Front line made that impossible.

Kobelev records the break, and does it by quoting Ho directly. Instructing his couriers before they left Moscow in 1936, Ho lists three points, of which the second is: "The Trotskyites have betrayed their reactionary essence everywhere, and in Vietnam as well. Our Party must dissociate itself from them most resolutely. There must be no compromises."

Then, in the account of the August Revolution in Saigon in 1945, the Struggle group reappears exactly once, in a single clause, as part of the reactionary bloc: the counter-revolutionary forces, we are told, pinned their hopes on a front that included "apart from numerous pro-Japanese parties, a strong Trotskyite group that called itself The Struggle, the Kaodai sect and the Hoahao sect."

Note the amalgam — the technique is the point. Pro-Japanese parties, the Trotskyists and two armed religious sects are placed in one list so that the middle term takes its colouring from the others. And note what is not said. Ta Thu Thau is not named anywhere in this book. Neither is Phan Van Hum, nor Tran Van Thach, nor Ngo Van. What happened to them is not mentioned either: in September 1945, in the weeks Kobelev is describing, the Viet Minh security services hunted down and killed the leaders of the Vietnamese Trotskyist movement. Ta Thu Thau was seized at Quang Ngai and shot. He had spent much of the previous decade in French prisons. Kobelev's book, which is scrupulous in recording every Communist martyred by the French — Tran Phu, Le Hong Son, the

schoolboy Ly Tu Trong going to the guillotine singing the Internationale, and it is right to record them — has nothing whatever to say about the revolutionaries killed by the revolution.

That silence is the finding, and it is not a small one. It is the difference between a biography and a hagiography.

What is not here at all

The book's narrative ends at the Fourth Party Congress of December 1976, and the chronology appended as "Milestones in Ho Chi Minh's Life" stops at Ho's death in 1969. There is therefore nothing on the Chinese invasion of February 1979, nothing on the boat people, and nothing on the decade-long Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia that was still going on as Progress printed this translation. Cambodia enters the final paragraphs only as a triumph — "the victory of the people's revolution in Kampuchea which put an end to the brutal Pol Pot regime" — followed by a sentence whose subject is left unnamed: "Enemies have tried at different times to wreck the alliance, but in vain." The enemy is China, and a reader who does not already know that will not learn it here. Companion volumes in this series, particularly *Kampuchea: From Tragedy to Rebirth* (1979), show what the argument looked like when Moscow was willing to make it openly.

One detail crystallises the book's alignment. In 105,000 words there is exactly one cult of personality, and it is not Stalin's: writing of Ho's caution about his own image, Kobelev notes that "He condemned the ugly forms of the Mao Zedong personality cult."

What holds up

A great deal, and the reader should be told so plainly.

The Paris chapters are the best in the book and remain worth having. Kobelev reconstructs Nguyen Ai Quoc's life in the 17th arrondissement — the unheated room, the brick warmed in the landlady's fire and carried upstairs wrapped in newspaper — and his political education among Marcel Cachin, Paul Vaillant-Couturier, Gaston Monmousseau and Jean Longuet. He quotes at length from Nguyen's own journalism, including a fine piece for *L'Humanité* contrasting l'Étoile, Batignolles and Épinette as rungs of the social ladder. He follows the argument at the Tours congress of December 1920 carefully enough to show what actually drew a colonial subject to the Third International: not doctrine but clause 8 of

the twenty-one conditions, quoted here in full, obliging member parties to support liberation movements in the colonies "by deed rather than word".

The Comintern chapters are similarly useful, and on one point genuinely creditable. Kobelev reports without embarrassment that at the Fifth Congress in 1924 Nguyen Ai Quoc attacked the French Communist Party from the platform for its colonial record — that *L'Humanité* had cut the words "to the colonial peoples" from a Comintern address, that an FCP section in Algeria had passed a resolution against a Comintern call to the colonial peoples to rise, that the party had never adopted a document conceding the colonies' right to secede. A Soviet popular biography that lets a Vietnamese Communist indict a fraternal European party in those terms is doing something better than propaganda.

And there is one passage that could not have appeared in 1979, though not for the reasons the 1989 date suggests. Kobelev recounts that six Vietnamese served in the International Regiment formed on Dimitrov's initiative during the defence of Moscow in 1941, that their names had been lost because Comintern Vietnamese used aliases and none appeared on the regiment's roll, and that "It was not until 1985, the year of the 40th anniversary of Victory, that Soviet and Vietnamese historians and journalists finally identified five of the six Vietnamese who had taken part in the defence of Moscow." Four died at the approaches to the city. This is real archival recovery, dated after the Russian text's own 1983 copyright, which means someone updated the manuscript at least once. That makes the untouched 1934–38 chapter a choice rather than an oversight.

Finally, on Ho himself, the book is not wrong about the essentials. He was an anti-colonial revolutionary of the first rank who spent three decades in exile, in prisons and in poverty; he built a party where none existed; he led a successful war against French and then American power. Nothing in this introduction is meant to diminish that, and a reader who wants the texture of those years — Canton, Hong Kong, Siam, the cave at Pac Bo, the Chinese prisons — will find it here in quantity.

Where the other account is

For the Vietnamese Trotskyists the essential work is by a survivor. Ngo Van, a member of the Saigon movement who lived through the events Kobelev summarises in a clause, published his history of the period in Paris in 1995 as *Việt-nam 1920–1945: révolution et contre-révolution sous la*

domination coloniale. Reviewing it in International Viewpoint no. 270 (October 1995), K. Govindan set out what the book restores: that the Struggle group and the League of International Communists "exercised a real influence, particularly in Cochin China", that they organised thousands of militants and, on the colonial authorities' own records, were more popular than the Communist Party among Saigon's urban workers, and that during August 1945 The Struggle was printing a daily paper in excess of fifteen thousand copies. The same page recommends Simon Pirani's Vietnam and Trotskyism (1987) and Revolutionary History vol. 3 no. 2 (Autumn 1990), which is the English-language documentary collection on the subject.

That the current was not finished is itself on the record. International Viewpoint no. 197 (December 1990) carries an interview with Ha Cuong Nghi of the Vietnamese Trotskyist group behind Cahiers Vietnamiennes, describing four days spent in Prague among Vietnamese contract workers and students in the winter after 1989, carrying a case of documents in Vietnamese that included Khrushchev's secret speech. Fifty-four years after Ho instructed his couriers that there must be no compromises, and a year after Progress Publishers printed those words in English, the argument was still being had.

Read Kobelev for Paris, for Canton, for the Comintern corridors and for a journalist's feel for the country. Read him against himself on Moscow between 1934 and 1938, and on Saigon in 1945. The book's own copyright page tells you why the second half of that instruction is necessary.