

clear violations of international law, and the aggressor should be punished. To this end the United Nations, often led by the United States, has imposed sanctions on Serbia, maintained an arms embargo, a no-fly zone, and brought other forms of psychological pressure to bear. In some ways the situation is analogous to that of Iraq or Libya.

The second popular view is that the conflict in Yugoslavia is really a civil war, based on hatreds that have been kept in a deep freeze by a totalitarian state. With the fall of communism, these ethnic conflicts have sprung up like repressed coil springs. This view is held in Europe and Canada, precisely those countries that have committed troops to U.N. peacekeeping efforts. In 1992, the Europeans tried to negotiate an ethnic partition of Bosnia into cantons; although they subsequently recognized Bosnia as an independent republic, they continued to maintain that only a political compromise could bring peace. Hence their forces in Yugoslavia are there for humanitarian reasons: to maintain some sort of cease-fire so that essential supplies can be brought to civilian populations and to set an atmosphere conducive to talks among the contending forces.

There are obvious contradictions in both of these theories. First, one may ask that if it is permissible for Croatia and Bosnia to secede from Yugoslavia, a

member in good standing of the United Nations and one with internationally recognized borders, why is it not permissible for Serbian Bosnia to secede from a republic which had never existed before and whose borders had been drawn initially by a communist dictator? As for the theory of age-old enmities, some of it is simply not true. The Yugoslavia that arose after World War I was a result of the Pan-Slavism popular at that time. The Slovenes and Croats, anxious to divorce themselves from the Austrians and Hungarians, felt they had much in common with their Serbian cousins. True, there had been considerable animus between Turk and Serb for over 500 years, but in modern Yugoslavia both Muslims and Serbs coexisted reasonably well, with a significant rate of intermarriage. The Muslims did not call themselves Turks, and the term Yugoslav was popular in both groups. (Of greater import, of course, was the carnage of World War II, in which the Serbs suffered huge losses of population.)

Dr. Woodward states that the Yugoslav conflict is the result of transforming a planned economy to a market economy, and of a one-party authoritarian state to a multiparty democracy. Further, in a country where there is no majority and everyone is a member of a minority, the preservation of human rights becomes paramount. As difficult as the problem was, it became even more so with the changing international scene. Yugoslavia as one of the leaders of the Third World had been able to profit from the Cold War by receiving assistance from both sides. Despite this prolonged economic aid, however, it could never keep its economy consistently healthy, and found itself in a foreign debt crisis just as the Cold War was ending and the deep pockets of the United States and the Soviet Union were closing.

All through its post-World War II existence, Yugoslavia juggled with political reforms, at one time centralizing its economy, at other times decentralizing, but regardless of which way the pendulum swung, further reform seemed always necessary. In time the decentralization momentum became enormous, to the detriment of the federal government, where both its resources and its problem-solving ability were concerned, so that finally that government, bereft of authority, became a hollow symbol. Thus, concludes Woodward, it was a fail-

ure of political mechanisms that brought about the collapse of Yugoslavia and the breakup of the republics into ethnic entities. The West exacerbated the situation by failing to recognize that only through the federal government could Yugoslavia's problems be contained, and, by assuming ethnic animosity to be the central problem, the West virtually assured that it would become so.

Woodward feels that supranational institutions requiring sustained interaction among people and sovereign states is the best system for resolving disputes. Thus a plan for the confederation of Croatian Bosnia with Croatia, and Serbian Bosnia with Serbia (vetoed by Germany and the United States because it "rewarded aggression"), seems to her a promising first step toward a greater Balkan confederation.

She is, of course, right, but while we can refrain from damaging a country's capacity to govern, one may wonder how the West can improve that capacity. Economic aid has been the traditional method, and sometimes it has worked. Whether we have sufficient resources now to try to do that in the Balkans is questionable, and whether Humpty Dumpty can ever be put back together is equally doubtful. Nevertheless, some form of cooperation or confederation may eventually arise, and if so, the kind of knowledge Woodward provides us would be immensely helpful in nurturing it.

*Sol Schindler is a retired Foreign Service Officer.*

## LIBERAL ARTS

### CULTURAL ENRICHMENT

According to the November 1995 issue of *Border Watch*, citizens living in the southernmost areas of Arizona are suffering repeated attacks from Mexican bandits who take advantage of the porous border to slip into the United States in search of prey. Although families have had their homes invaded and have been robbed at gunpoint, a local rancher who tried to get the government to take action found that "the U.S. government will not act for fear of disturbing relations with Mexico."

## Freedom of Access

*by John Lukacs*

### Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936

*Translated by Katherine A. Fitzpatrick,*

*Edited by Lars T. Lih and*

*Oleg V. Naumov*

*New Haven: Yale University Press;*

*304 pp., \$25.00*



Though the "opening" of the Russian archives is supposed to be a blessing for historians, there are plenty of reasons for skepticism. To begin with, "open" is an inaccurate term. What is available is selective, for so much remains closed,

many papers are suppressed, others are inaccurate, and some are even doctored or otherwise falsified. What is worse, their contents are seldom properly evaluated or interpreted by historians. This volume is an example.

It comprises 79 letters written by Stalin to Molotov from 1925 to 1935 (including only three brief notes from 1936) and presented by the recipient to the Central Party Archive in 1969. In recent years, some of these letters were published in Russian periodicals. We cannot know why Molotov chose to donate these and not others, but it is plausible to conclude that he believed them to be "safe." He was right: they are safe because they are unimportant, even insignificant. What about the years of the Stalin purges; of the crucial years 1939-1941 when Stalin chose to be a partner of Hitler's Germany; or indeed of the entire period of the war and thereafter—the ten years when Molotov was the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union? Letters from these times would be interesting, even though Molotov was only Stalin's toady, an unimpressive bureaucrat, a wooden dolt (whom John Foster Dulles once called the most formidable of diplomats). It is the habit of strong men to rely on subservient people to administer their foreign policy. There are many examples of this, including Hitler's Ribbentrop, and also that of some American Presidents, but I know of no one less independent and more subservient than Molotov.

The epistolary language is vulgar and marked, here and there, by communist terminology: a terminology that, in Stalin's case, sometimes conceals rather than reveals. The very tone suggests what so few people have recognized and still do not: that the victory of the Bolsheviks *reduced*, rather than strengthened, the importance of Russia in the world; a giant muddy state isolating itself from the rest of the world, administered by people of cramped characters and cramped minds. Of course Stalin was an exception—sort of: a cunning peasant boss, instinctively good at intrigues, among a crowd of fourth-rate men.

There is one, perhaps telling, matter: that concerning Lenin's so-called "Testament." It is now obvious that the text of this was doctored, if not altogether falsified, by Trotsky, who gave it to the American communist Max Eastman. Consequently Eastman, who of course sympathized with Trotsky, published a

version more complimentary to Trotsky than to Stalin. And when Stalin raised hell about this, Trotsky reacted in a cowardly and weak fashion. How many people in the West have loudly regretted for 60 years that the unspeakable Stalin, rather than Trotsky, should have been fated to bear the legacy of the great Lenin! Yet, if Trotsky or Zinoviev or Bukharin had governed Russia in the 1930's, Hitler would have had little or no trouble in upsetting any of them, and finally in conquering the Soviet Union. Such is the irony of history.



The importance attributed to these letters by their American editors is vastly overstated. Stalin's occasional remarks about "imperialists" were essentially the emanations of a suspicious isolationist who, while he did pay some attention to matters of world revolution and to the activities of communists abroad, treated them as definitely secondary elements in his considerations. Alas, commendable scholars such as Robert Conquest keep insisting that Stalin was a consummate Marxist. But this is utter nonsense, believed and stated by people who, from decades devoted to the study of the Soviet Union, have every reason to know better. It is not their factual knowledge but their understanding of human nature that is regrettably deficient. Yet Conquest's praise for this volume seems modest when compared to that poured out in endorsements by Alan Bullock, Alexander Dallin, and others. Robert C. Tucker, in his otherwise reasonable foreword, asks: "Did Stalin dismiss world revolution in favor of building up the Soviet state (as Trotsky, for one, alleged at the time), or did he remain dedicated to world revolution?" Lih's answer, based on the letters, is that in Stalin's mind "the Soviet state and international revolution coalesced." *Coalesced?* Perhaps. But which of the two *really* mattered to him? Stalin was crude, callous, cunning, and ignorant of much of the world; but he was no fool, and he eventually proved to be a great statesman, though no revolutionary. There is nothing in these letters to suggest the contrary.

John Lukacs's latest book is *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age*.

## Brief Mentions

**Annotations.** By John Keene. New York: New Directions; 85 pp., \$8.95

*Annotations* is broad in scope, dealing with the experience of a few generations of poor blacks, though Keene focuses on his own family. A native of St. Louis, Keene draws on his past to depict the travails of ghetto life: the brutality of white police, the violence of young criminals, the temptation to adopt a "gangsta" way of life. This might sound like an exercise in complaining, but to Keene, St. Louis is "a minefield of myth and memory," a place rich in urban folklore and blessed with a soiled charm. Even here, life is not without dignity. Faced with severe poverty, the family survives through a native resourcefulness and élan: Keene's grandfather draws on his experience as a farmboy in Mississippi, where he learned "how to keep bugs from devouring potatoes without pesticide, [and] how to sow okra seed." In the end, Keene's family leaves St. Louis for a rustic suburb populated by working-class Irish. The years of hardship leave their psychological mark, but this memoir is surprisingly free from bitterness. Despite the racial enmity that crops up in the 1965 Watts riots and in his own day-to-day experiences, Keene rarely indulges in racial polemics. Instead, he focuses on his story, allowing the reader to appreciate the sheer alienness of people and place. Keene's St. Louis is the site of strange junction of French and Negro culture. Conversing in a mixture of street slang and Creole, the characters impart many new terms to the reader, such as "rudiproots," "Aleikam Salaam," and "La Ba-Kair" (Keene furnishes a glossary). Even more memorable is Keene's flashing, fragmented prose, which combines evocative slang with an eloquence worthy of Thoreau. Keene points to Faulkner and Joyce as mentors, and the book is filled with strange projections from his past experience. ("Several liquor stores sat in walking distance of that narrow, Negro crossroads, having raised and reared the men who owned them.") The author's cleverness and sheer narrative energy lend his style a dazzling quality, like a fireworks display. The result is a short book that lingers indefinitely in the reader's mind.

—Michael Washburn