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# FROM THE OTHER SHORE

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## Russia's Exigent Intellectuals

### *A Eulogy and a Warning*

THE CONTEMPORARY FERMENT in Russian intellectual and artistic life is so well known that the fact of its existence requires no demonstration. Once the province of the specialist, it has now come within the range of the average well-informed layman. Whereas a few years ago it was customary to search for clues to Soviet politics in personnel shifts of the Central Committee or even in the arrangement of the leaders atop Lenin's mausoleum during the May Day parades, to-day one wants to know what Khrushchev thinks of dodecaphonic music or what the censors have done to the latest instalment of Ehrenburg's memoirs. And when the poet Evtushenko, whose first visit to America in 1961 had passed quite unnoticed, makes the cover of *Time*, we can be certain that Soviet literature has arrived.

But what is the significance of this ferment? What are its sources, motives, issues, and long-term aesthetic and political implications? These questions are more difficult to answer. Of course, our instinct is to approve of the ferment and to rejoice at every victory won by the intellectuals over the bureaucrats. But we are often carried away and translate our spontaneous reaction to something we approve of into political prognostications. We like to interpret any manifestation of libertarian tendencies as an indication of the growth of liberty itself. That such procedure cannot be justified on logical grounds requires no elaboration. The reassertion of man's desire for freedom despite constant efforts to destroy freedom does not mean that freedom will win; at best it suggests that the desire for it is indestructible. We have to be extremely careful in interpreting such phenomena as the intellectual ferment in present-day Soviet Russia, lest by some mental sleight-of-hand we draw entirely unwarranted conclusions from the available evidence.

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THE RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL has been traditionally involved in the country's political life. Indeed, concern for political questions most broadly conceived, so as to include social relations and economics, has been the hallmark of the Russian intelligentsia. In this respect the writers and artists who to-day engage (to an extent unknown in the contemporary West) in Soviet political life are merely following an old and established pattern. The cause of this involvement must be sought in the peculiar relationship established in Russia long ago between state and society. Three factors—the vastness of the territory under Russian dominion; the vulnerability of the long and open Asiatic frontier; and the poverty of the human and natural resources at the country's disposal—have contributed to shape the character of Russian statehood, the main outlines of which are clearly discernible also underneath the façade of Communism. Broadly speaking, the Russian state has developed more rapidly and more solidly than Russian society, and has tended to assume an extraordinarily active role in directing national life. At certain periods, as under Peter the Great and the Communist dictatorship, the Russian State has succeeded in combining the omnipotence of an Eastern despotism with the purposefulness of a Western democracy, producing a dynamism, a singleminded drive towards a pre-set goal for which it is difficult to find an historic parallel. Society, on the other hand, tended to be passive, and to let itself be harnessed by the government in the pursuit of these state-determined ends. The system of government of the Moscow period known as *tiagloe gosudarstvo*, the rigid estate structure of the imperial period based on Peter's Table of Ranks, and the Communist system of one-party rule have this one feature in common, that in all of them the status of social groups and individual subjects is determined by the needs of the state. Or, to put it in other words, that the criterion of social status is not *rights* but *obligations*. Under this arrangement, the rights of the subjects are viewed as instruments of state power, and last only as long as the state finds them useful. Such a system of government has permitted Russia to weather many serious challenges, and eventually to emerge as the greatest power in Eastern Europe.

BUT THE TRIUMPH was bought at a heavy price. It prevented Russian society from developing that sense of civic responsibility and involvement which a healthy body politic requires, and which can derive only from active participation in political affairs. Insecure in their position, and dependent on the state for benefits and privileges, social groups in Russia always have preferred to concentrate their attention on immediate social and economic gains, conceding the conduct of national politics to the autocratic sovereign. Given their precarious position, the paucity of firmly grounded legal rights, each group feared more the competition of rival groups than the whim of absolute power. This connection between the absence of firm civic rights on the one hand, and the weakness of social initiative on the other, has

been noted by several observers, including Michael Speransky, the great statesman of the Napoleonic era, and Boris Chicherin, the leading liberal thinker of the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Now it is true that beginning with 1762, when the gentry were freed from compulsory state service and given inalienable rights (1785), the process of the enfranchisement of Russian society, the breakup of the traditional service state, got under way. Gradually, more and more groups were granted legal rights, including the right unconditionally to own private property. But this process was far from completed when the Bolshevik *coup* of 1917 disrupted it, reverting the country once more to the older system based on *service* and *duty*. The enfranchisement was too short-lived to sink deep roots in the consciousness of the people, among whom more than four centuries of state domination had moulded a different frame of mind. The imperial government remained the pivot around which public life revolved, and which held the vast empire and its heterogeneous society together. When in 1917 the abdication of the Tsar removed this pivot, Russia fell apart with a speed and thoroughness that to this day seems quite astounding.

In view of the long "statist" tradition, the struggle for political and civil liberty became the function not of social or economic interest, but of education and culture. Its leadership came from the ranks of the intelligentsia. Though at first it was composed almost exclusively of gentry, the intelligentsia gradually came to include also representatives of other classes, and in the second half of the nineteenth century acquired a thoroughly neutral class complexion. The bond uniting the

<sup>1</sup> Analysing for Alexander I the internal condition of Russia, Speransky noted that the gentry, despite its privileged status, enjoyed no firm rights independent of the crown; in effect they were as much slaves of the monarchy as the serfs were slaves of the gentry. "What finally deprives the Russian nation of all energy," Speransky wrote on the eve of the Napoleonic invasion, "is the relationship between these two classes of slaves. The interests of the gentry demand the complete subordination of the peasants; the interests of the peasants demand that the gentry be equally subordinated to the crown. . . . Thus Russia, divided into various estates, exhausts itself in the struggle among the classes, leaving the government the whole scope of unlimited power." As a remedy he proposed to grant each estate inalienable civil rights.

Chicherin constructed an impressive political theory on the basis of a strict distinction between the government and society. According to him, the weaker and more divided society, the stronger the government. Ideal conditions are achieved when government and society co-exist in a condition of balance, the government providing the sense of unity, society the sense of variety. Excessive development of state powers, especially violation of the sacred rights of individuals—the rights of contract and property—sap the energies of a nation, because society is fundamentally more stable than the state.

intelligentsia was neither social origin nor economic interest, but common assumptions and ideals.

THE OLD RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA was a diversified body with a rich intellectual tradition. The spectrum of its political opinions ranged from moderate, German-style national liberalism to a chiliastic, totalistic revolutionary creed resembling a religious enthusiasm. But for all its diversity, the intelligentsia did share certain common beliefs. (1) Those who considered themselves *intelligently* were committed to public affairs, and conceived the emancipation of the individual only in connection with the general emancipation of Russian society and democratisation of the Russian State. (2) They were historically-minded; *i.e.*, they regarded history as a meaningful and regular process, whose general course could be scientifically studied and even predicted. (3) They believed in the historic mission of the intelligentsia: they thought of themselves as the vanguard of the forces of freedom, as a group destined to point the way towards a general liberation of society. Freedom most broadly conceived as the goal, history as the force impelling mankind towards it, and the intelligentsia as the instrument—such in the most broad terms was the outlook of the typical mid-19th-century "*intelligent*."

To understand the relationship between Soviet intellectuals and the state, it is essential to take into account that, in strictly formal terms, Russian Communism has inherited the ideology of the pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia. I say "strictly formal terms" because it is quite clear that Bolshevik ideology (not to speak of Soviet reality) has betrayed the whole spirit of that ideology from which it claims descent. "Soviet democracy" is a sham, its historicism has become a rigid dogma used to justify unpopular state actions, and the intelligentsia is no longer a free agent. But for all its betrayal of the spirit of the old intelligentsia, the Soviet régime does formally adhere to the letter of its ideology. By doing so it has hopelessly compromised many of the ideals which the Russian intelligentsia had traditionally espoused, and compelled the successors of the old *intelligently* to fight on entirely new grounds.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE between the pre-Revolutionary and the Soviet intelligentsia lies in their social status. The old intelligentsia was by definition outside the prevailing service structure: a free social group, independent of the state. The Soviet intelligentsia, by contrast, is a servitor class. In re-establishing the traditional Russian service state, the Communists have not only reharnessed all the social groups that had gained partial autonomy in the 19th century, but they have also established direct supervision over the one class which had always been exempt from service. This they achieved by endowing the term "intelligentsia" with a semi-formal status and, at the same time, broadening its meaning to such an extent that it became virtually synonymous with what, among us, is known as "white collar."

Before the Revolution, "intelligentsia" was not in any sense an official term. It was a subjective con-

ception, sufficiently vague for people to dispute what it meant and whom it included. Such vagueness was intolerable to a régime which requires utmost precision from all social categories. From one point of view, the term "intelligentsia" was unacceptable because it suggests a division between mental and physical labour which Marxism denies. From another point of view, however, it had to be retained because it enjoyed great prestige and because, regardless of what theory said, it corresponded to social reality. As a result, the Soviet government has compromised by employing the concept but giving it an extremely broad definition which eliminates the possibility of the intelligentsia being considered as a class apart. The Soviet definition includes not only the intellectuals, in the proper sense of the word, but also two other groups, the professional personnel and the rest of the bureaucracy, civil as well as military. By being attached to the state service class *par excellence*, the intelligentsia, in the old sense of the word, is meant to lose its social identity.

Given this broad definition, it is not surprising that the so-called Soviet intelligentsia is very numerous. In 1956, according to official figures, it numbered no less than 15 million persons, roughly one-tenth of the country's entire adult population. The 1959 census shows under the category of "mental workers" over 20 million. We have no statistics to compare this figure with its pre-Revolutionary equivalent, because adherence to the intelligentsia was simply not measurable in quantitative terms. But we can obtain a vague idea of what such a comparison would show from an estimate recently made by the historian L. K. Erman (published in the first issue of *Voprosy Istorii* for 1963). Applying retroactively the Soviet definition, Erman computed that in 1897 there had been in Russia 726,000 *intelligenty*. In the sixty intervening years, as may be imagined, the most growth occurred not in the category of writers or artists but of professional personnel and, above all, civil servants.

Obviously, the 15 or 20 million strong Soviet intelligentsia is not really comparable to its pre-Revolutionary namesake. It is used as a general sociological term to differentiate all those citizens who are not employed in manual labour, and tells us nothing at all about their outlook or ideology. What the term has gained in precision, it has lost in meaningfulness. To make it meaningful once more, one must break it down into its components, eliminating those social groups which have no place in it. Surely it will not be objected if, to begin with, Messrs. Khrushchev, Mikoyan and Malinovsky, and the millions of bureaucrats with whose help they rule the Soviet Union, are excluded for the purpose of this discussion from the honourable company of the Russian *intelligenty* whose name and ideology they have usurped.

Having performed this dichotomy, that is, eliminated from the Soviet intelligentsia the bureaucracy, we are left with two major groups: professional people, and writers and artists.

IT IS BOTH difficult and risky to say anything conclusive about the Soviet professional man,

because we know so little about him. Much of the time he functions anonymously, like the civil servant whom in many respects he resembles. The 19th-century Russian professional enjoyed a considerable measure of independence. He sold his services, whether those of a journalist, or doctor, or lawyer, on a free market, a market with which the government could interfere proscriptively, but which it could not regulate and direct. This situation permitted him to acquire a broad background and to perform a variety of public services, such as defending political criminals, criticising the government from the pages of privately-owned newspapers and journals, or organising peasant co-operatives. The Soviet professional, by contrast, is entirely dependent on the state. The state is his only conceivable employer, and hence he is, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from the regular civil servant, at any rate from the point of view of his social position. As a salaried employee, he lacks the opportunities of serving society, and must serve the state.

To say this is not to deny that there are certain qualities that distinguish Russian professionals from the run-of-the-mill *apparatchiki*. Such qualities do exist. Soviet professional men display a sense of professional ethics and dedication to their work that one is not likely to find among mere bureaucrats. Scientists, in particular, give the impression of considerable intellectual independence and even daring. But one searches in vain among them for that undisciplined love of theorising, that receptivity to new ideas, that intellectual sweep that was so characteristic of the old Russian intelligentsia. Soviet scholars and scientists are usually very competent in their speciality; their knowledge of the facts and literature is sometimes acutely embarrassing to a Westerner. But this competence is usually of a technical nature; it is limited to the utilitarian aspects of the subject, and narrowly confined. They seem to have a positive dread of that originality of interpretation and boldness of conception that among us is considered the criterion of scholarly excellence.

Why this should be so is obvious to anyone acquainted with Soviet history. Those who were original and bold have long since perished; those who have survived either lack these qualities, or conceal them. Nevertheless, facts are facts, and as of now it is difficult to discern among Soviet professional personnel (among whom one should include professors) those spiritual and intellectual qualities which are essential if the group is to serve Russian society in its never-ending contest with the state.

IN THIS RESPECT, the situation of the writer and artist is significantly different. Let me illustrate this difference with a personal experience.

Three years ago, at an international historical congress, I ran into a leading Soviet historian, M. V. Nechkina, the author of a standard Soviet textbook and several important monographs. In the course of our conversation, Nechkina inquired about my long-term research plans. When I told her that I eventually hoped to write a history of Russian culture, she literally gasped with astonish-

ment. All she could say upon regaining her composure was: "You are a brave man!" I replied facetiously that where I came from writing books called for no particular courage (though it was quite clear the courage she had in mind was intellectual, not civil). Most of the Soviet historians whom I have had occasion to meet would very likely have responded similarly to Nechkina. A year or so after this encounter, the novelist Leonid Leonov visited Harvard. He too wished to know what books I hoped to write, and I told him what I had told Nechkina. Leonov seemed neither shocked nor surprised. For a while he said nothing, and the conversation shifted to other subjects. But later on, as we were leaving the Faculty Club, he took me under the arm, as if wishing to convey his ideas not only verbally but also physically, and said: "The subject on which you wish to write is very important and very difficult. You must give it much thought." Whereupon he told me how, in his opinion, I should proceed.

Soviet literature has always managed to preserve, even in the worst years of Stalinism, a modicum of autonomy. The reason for this must be sought not in Stalin's respect for literature, but in the nature of the literary vocation itself. Even when the régime prescribed for the novelist the subjects with which he was to deal and the manner in which he was to do it, it had to allow him a certain amount of latitude in executing the command. After all, if nothing else, the characters, settings, and dialogues had to be invented; and where there is freedom of invention there is some freedom.

To take an extreme example: the author of a novel about Peter the Great can take more liberties with his subject than the author of a history of Peter the Great. If he does not, he has to write histories, not novels. The freedom of the writer is even greater when he is a poet. Here again the theme can be laid down by the government, and so can the metre and the rhyme pattern, but the very poetic form, calling as it does for violence to normal speech habits (since we speak in prose, not in verse) pre-supposes some degree of liberty on the part of the poet. A poet who cannot tamper with words cannot write poetry. Thus, as the novelist enjoys over the historian or sociologist some freedom of thematic invention, so the poet enjoys in addition some freedom of linguistic invention. If we consider, furthermore, that most people, censors included, do not understand poetry we will not be surprised that even under the most inauspicious circumstances poets (and to a lesser extent novelists) possess a degree of discretion in the performance of their craft that is not granted to other groups of the intelligentsia.

**T**HE INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY of Soviet writers results not only from qualities inherent in their craft, but also from the peculiar attitude of the Communist régime towards the great tradition of Russian literature.

At one time some of the Soviet theoreticians had hoped to develop their own "proletarian culture". But since this hope was not realised, the government had no choice but to adopt and appropriate a large part of the literary and artistic

heritage of pre-Revolutionary Russia. No other legacy of the pre-Revolutionary period has been acknowledged so freely and openly. By the device of labelling them "progressive," the government has appropriated the works of writers whose outlook in every essential respect contradicts that espoused by Communism, and who, had they by some chance survived the Revolution, would have either gone into foreign exile, stopped writing, or perished in the terror of the 1930s: Pushkin, who exalted the freedom of the artist and the aristocratic spirit; Gogol, the defender of orthodoxy, autocracy, and serfdom; Tolstoy, the Christian anarchist, who preached civil disobedience; and many others. The impact which this literature exerts is quite incalculable. Soviet writers, who consider themselves and are considered by the authorities, as legitimate successors of classical Russian literature, enjoy because of it the right to confront major human problems—problems which scholars and scientists cannot approach without fear of being accused of "Revisionism" and apostasy.

All these factors help explain why intellectuals in general, and poets in particular have emerged in the past several years as chief proponents of the idea of freedom in Russia. Issues which in free societies concern largely literary specialists have in the Soviet Union acquired utmost political urgency, and skirmishes fought between poets and party ideologists over aesthetics possess far-reaching practical implications.

**WHAT DO THESE intellectuals want?** Having assumed the function of the old intelligentsia, do they also espouse its ideals?

These questions cannot be answered in an unequivocal manner, because Soviet intellectuals, living as they do under a totalitarian régime which monopolises all public opinion, can express their ideas only in a very indirect manner, by suggestion and innuendo. To elicit evidence from the mass of written material which they produce, it is necessary to wade through volumes of literary journals, almanacs, symposia, records of writers' conferences, which the Russians are so fond of producing, not to mention novels and collections of poetry. From this diverse source material there does emerge something of a picture of the mentality and outlook of the contemporary Russian intellectual which it may be not unprofitable to compare with the ideology of the pre-Revolutionary *intelligent*.

The greatest contrast between the contemporary Soviet intellectual and his predecessor lies in their respective attitude towards politics. The old intelligentsia had a thorough commitment to politics; the modern one seems to shun and even despise it. The whole burden of the "liberal" literature of the past several years is to assert the writer's right to an a-political existence. It takes violent exception to that thought of Lenin's, which has become a fundamental tenet of the Soviet régime, that in the struggle between Communism and capitalism there can be "no neutrality". The liberal writers seem to say that they want to be outside the great political and social conflicts of their time. They wish no political commitment, though many of



them seem perfectly prepared to acknowledge their loyalty to Communism as a fact. This rejection of politics is a natural consequence of the over-politicisation of Russian life by the Soviet leaders, of the elimination by the government of all pockets of private life.

We must not mistake the involvement of Soviet intellectuals in the country's political life for a genuine commitment to politics as such. They are involved in politics not because they want to be, but because the system under which they live interprets every human activity in political terms. Under Lenin's régime the desire not to be involved in politics was in itself the expression of a very definite political sentiment. And such, in effect, it becomes. To assert in the Soviet Union that the writer or the artist has the right to creative freedom means, by implication, to define the limits of State authority. Indeed, every time a Soviet artist paints an abstract canvas, or a Soviet poet, such as Anna Akhmatova, publishes a poem like<sup>2</sup>—

*Steel decays, to rust turns gold,  
Marble crumbles, all awaits the sword....  
Sorrow on life the surest has hold,  
And longest endures the almighty Word.*

—we witness the enunciation of a constitutional theory in the fullest sense of this word. But this occurs by virtue of the peculiar nature of the Soviet political system, not from the creator's desire. In the end it may make no difference for what reasons the system is challenged; but it is important to keep in mind the motives impelling the contemporary Soviet intellectual, and influencing his attitude to the State. If in the vast literary output of to-day we find no pronounced political sentiments, it is not only because censorship stops its expression; it is above all because the whole attitude behind it is anti-political. To put it briefly: once the intellectual had tried to change the State and society, now he tries to escape them.

A similar change may be observed in the contemporary intellectual's attitude towards history, that omnipotent divinity of the old *intelligent*. History has been used by the régime to perpetrate some of its worst crimes, and to justify the hardships and deprivations which it has imposed on an unwilling population for the sake of a nebulous future. Is it surprising that history, thus abused, has become discredited? When the young poet, Voznesensky, says: "*Time has spat on me, now I spit on time,*"<sup>3</sup> we know what he means: he wishes to be free from the tyranny of history, which, perverted and ossified into official dogma, tells him what to think and do. The dislike for history, understood as the dynamic motor force of human evolution, often expresses itself in the form of nostalgia for the past, especially the romantic past, be it the age of Pushkin and the Decembrists, or St. Petersburg during its Silver Age, on the eve of World War and Revolution.

OF THE THREE QUALITIES which I have mentioned previously as characteristic of the traditional intelligentsia, the only one which still seems to hold true to-day is belief in the intelligentsia itself.

This particular characteristic is virtually inherent in the situation of the intellectual in a so-called "backward country", which Russia, for all its technical progress, most decidedly continues to be. Surrounded by sordid reality, whose sordidness is emphasised by an exalted conception of what life "there", that is, in the West, is like, the intellectual cannot help but feel that the very cause of progress depends on him, that he is the chosen instrument of all those forces he cherishes. Even when he gives up any belief in progress, which seems to be the case with many Soviet intellectuals, he still retains a sense of being distinct from the rest of society. Indeed, among some Soviet intellectuals one can discern, at least in private conversation, a very clear note of cultural élitism, a sense of contempt for the dark masses who make up the majority of the population and from whose ranks are drawn the country's political leaders.

If we thus compare the old and the new Russian intellectual, we find that they differ in the most essential ideological qualities, while sharing certain psychological ones. Like his 19th-century predecessor, the contemporary Soviet intellectual may feel that he has a particularly important role to play; but the role which he envisages for himself is vastly different. He is no longer the social and political reformer. Rather, he appears as the near relative of the "alienated" intellectual of the West, about whom so much has been written. Like him, he rebels against a social and economic order which chokes him; only his rebellion is many times more intense because the hand that does the choking is so much more powerful. Intellectually, the roots of the contemporary intellectual rebels in Russia go back not to the *obshchestvennoe dvizhenie* (the movement of oppositional public opinion in the 19th century), but to the religious tradition and to the whole "modernist" movement, whose impressive development had been cut short by the Revolution, and which they are now attempting to resuscitate.

THE POSITIVE AIMS of the rebels may be summarised in two words: truth and "personalism".

Four years ago, when writing an essay on the Russian intelligentsia for the journal *Daedalus*, I wanted to conclude it with a brief statement to the effect that the modern Russian intellectual had a very special mission to fulfil: "to fight for truth." On the advice of friends I omitted this passage since it sounded naïve and unscientific. Now I regret having done so, because the literature that has appeared in the intervening period has demonstrated repeatedly how important the concept, and even the word "truth" is for Soviet intellectuals. The reason why the word "truth" is in disrepute among us is because we attach to it generally moral connotations; that is, we understand it as a concept which implies the existence of a single criterion of right and wrong—something we are not willing to concede. We react thus because in the environment in which we live our right to perceive is not

<sup>2</sup> Published in *Novy Mir* (No. 1, 1963), but originally written in 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Voznesensky, *Trekhugol'naya grusha* (Moscow, 1962), p. 38.

usually questioned; what can be questioned is our interpretation of the perceived reality. But in an environment where the very right to perception of reality is inhibited by claims of the State, the word "truth" acquires a very different meaning. It signifies not true value but true experience: the right to surrender to one's impressions without being compelled for some extraneous reason to interpret and distort them. As such it is a matter of the utmost concern to every intellectual and artist, and in fighting for it liberal Russians are fighting for something without which Russian culture cannot revive.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of "truth" is a veritable *leitmotiv* in the writings of the liberals. Evtushenko begins his recent autobiography<sup>5</sup> (whose original publication in France, in the Paris *L'Express*, has been the cause of his disgrace) with it:

The poet has a duty to his readers: he must show himself as he is, what he thinks, feels, and does. In return for this privilege—the privilege of expressing the truth for others—he has to pay the price: pitiless devotion to that truth.

Evtushenko's notion of truth is so uncompromising that he denies the writer even the right to be silent in order to avoid lies, demanding that he actively fight them. And when recently an apparently young and liberal Soviet critic, Benedict Sarnov, criticised the rebels Evtushenko and Voznesensky themselves for their alleged literary posing, he repeated the phrase which the great theatrical producer Stanislavsky used to fling at poor actors: "I don't believe a word!"<sup>6</sup>

By the term "personalism" I mean an outlook which claims for the individual human being a small but well-defined sphere of private life where no authority whatever can penetrate. Its precise limits are nowhere defined, but as an idea it is nonetheless very real. I suspect in most cases it means really a right to privacy in matters involving emotions. Just as the concept of "truth" in the Soviet interpretation signifies the assertion of the individual's right to unhindered perception of reality, so "personalism" signifies a right to react to this reality in complete emotional freedom. Together, the two concepts represent a natural reaction to the fantastic presumptions of totalitarianism towards the individual. They are undoubtedly a very real political force, despite their originally unpolitical inspiration.

THE RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL is once more in the vanguard of the Russian liberation movement. We admire and honour him for it. The Russian writers and artists who are to-day fighting against very heavy odds will some day surely be ranked alongside the great fighters for Russian liberty under the old régime. But to say this is not

<sup>4</sup>The distinction which I here draw resembles that which Coleridge makes between "accuracy" or "verbal truth," and "veracity" or "moral truth." (See Essay V, Introductory, in *The Friend*.)

<sup>5</sup>*A Precocious Autobiography* (Collins & Harvill, 1965.).

<sup>6</sup>*Den' poezii* (Moscow, 1962), p. 170.

to solve the question of the efficacy of the intellectual ferment as a political force.

The main contribution which the intellectuals of to-day, like their predecessors, make to the establishment of freedom in Russia is to uphold and spread liberty as an ideal. In so doing, they realise a necessary but by no means sufficient precondition of freedom as a fact. From the historical point of view, the establishment of freedom is intrinsically connected with certain definite political and legal institutions. Such institutions are viable only when they rest on concrete social support, i.e., when the ideal of freedom fuses in the consciousness of powerful social groups with the notion of their self-interest.

Regrettably, this does not seem to have happened as yet in Soviet Russia. The fundamental conditions which under Tsarism engendered the passivity of Society vis-à-vis the State continue to prevail. The absence of firm civil rights, the utter dependence of all social groups and classes on the government, and the impunity of the government itself, all militate against the emergence in society of significant liberal forces. In some respects, despotism is self-perpetuating, caught in a vicious circle that can be broken only by some violent upheaval. Where the subjects lack firm and institutionalised rights, they fear activity which can be interpreted as disloyalty to those in political authority, lest other groups in a similar situation take advantage to gain additional benefits from those in power; and where such activity is absent, civil rights are not likely to be established. The result is a kind of national paralysis.

So far, the most important measures of liberalisation put into effect since the death of Stalin have been initiated by the government in its own interest. As yet, no group of the population—except the intellectuals—has shown a willingness to jeopardise its position by challenging those in authority. I am afraid that nothing but an incurable romanticism rooted in Slavophile doctrines can explain the faith which some Westerners still place in the Russian peasant. The historical record certainly does not warrant the belief that he is an ally of freedom in the sense in which we understand it, i.e., as embodied in representative institutions and protected by law. Nor do the other social groups, notably the bureaucracy, display a strong commitment to political liberalisation. And yet, in the end, the prospects of freedom in Russia, as elsewhere, depend precisely on the support of such concrete social groups. In the Soviet Union so far, society is still gripped by fear, inert as well as self-confined, and liberty is still only an idea.

IT WOULD BE, THEREFORE, a serious mistake, both on the part of Soviet intellectuals and their foreign well-wishers, to expect literature and art to accomplish more than they are capable of by the nature of things. The dramatic intellectual ferment which we are witnessing can and probably will clear the moral atmosphere in Russia; it can make people aware of the legitimate limits to State authority; and it may pave the way for a general cultural renaissance. But political liberty will have to come from other quarters.

Richard Pipes

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## LETTERS

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### "The Intellectual Review"

READERS of ENCOUNTER must be grateful for Sir Denis Brogan's brilliant article, "The Intellectual Review," in the tenth anniversary of this invaluable magazine. Quite apart from the just tribute to ENCOUNTER, the essay reads like a classic of its kind. Where else can one learn so much about the history of the magazine of ideas? Yet I feel that Sir Denis' primary interest in politics suggests the reasons for his failure to mention some of the great literary journals, both British and American, of this century. One looks in vain, in his essay, for references to *The Criterion*, *The English Review* (first under Ford Madox Ford, and last under Douglas Jerrold), *The Adelphi* (under Middleton Murry), or *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, a short-lived but immensely important critical journal of the middle-twenties; and where is A. R. Orage's brilliant *The New Age*?

In the United States, *Partisan Review* has been indispensable, but it was never the single tree that Brigham Young found growing in the Salt Lake desert when he said, "This is the place." There are others. *Ubi sunt*: *The Dial* (1919-1928), *Hound & Horn* (1927-1934), *The Southern Review* (1935-1942), *The Sewanee Review* (1892- ), *The Kenyon Review* (1939- ), *The Hudson Review* (1948- ).

Surely there is a two-way traffic between political thought and literature; but Sir Denis seems to believe that it is one-way, from politics to literature, in a descent of increasing nebulosity, in which the journals I have mentioned are invisible. It is a little discouraging to see taken seriously the contemporary *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Magazine*. The literary and the political, in ENCOUNTER, have been well balanced; the great value of the magazine has been in its astute awareness of both.

ALLEN TATE

London

I THINK that Mr. Allen Tate has a point, one that I considered before I wrote my article. But I decided that ENCOUNTER was, above all, a polemical magazine with a strong political bias, like *The Edinburgh Review*. I did not quite stick to my principles, but I tried to. It is impossible to be completely comprehensive. Even Mr. Tate is not, for he has omitted a review with first-class claims to inclusion on his terms, *Scrutiny*. I was brought up on Orage's *New Age* by an intelligent school-master and on the Chesterton-Belloc *New Witness* (and the *London Nation*) by an intelligent father, but these weeklies are not, in my sense of the term, reviews; nor do I share Mr. Tate's contempt for *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*. It was in *The Atlantic Monthly* that I first read Hemingway's "Fifty Grand"; the November (1963) number con-

tains an admirable and lengthy review article on the Eisenhower memoirs, exactly of the type that used to be published in the *Edinburgh* or the *Quarterly*; and what I am told was the best political article I ever wrote appeared in *Harper's* December 1952 number, "The Illusion of American Omnipotence." The fact is that I don't take literary polemics or literary attitudes to politics as seriously as Mr. Tate does. Neither, I think, does ENCOUNTER.

DENIS BROGAN

Peterhouse,  
Cambridge

### Voltaire & English Scandal

IT WOULD BE GOOD, I think, for your readers (and writers) to know that the article by Lord Gladwyn has been read here in Paris with sympathy and much agreement. Nor need he worry about our being misled by the apparent Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with sex scandals and criminal coups. As Voltaire once wrote (29 March 1749) to an English friend—you will find the text in Besterman's little edition of Voltaire's letters just published (by Nelson) in London—

"... 'Tis a great pity that y<sup>r</sup> nation is so overrun with such prodigious lumbars of scandals and scurrilities. However one ought to look upon 'em as the bad fruits of a very good tree, call'd liberty..."

Well put, I think, and in Voltaire's own English.

JEAN-PIERRE GROSSER

Paris

### The Feelings of Machines

THE RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS of computers make fascinating reading in G. Rattray Taylor's article *The Age of the Androids* [ENCOUNTER, November]. Yet it seems that he agrees if only reluctantly with the "obstinate fact" (quoted from Michael Scriven) that when a suitably designed computer will be able to give the same responses as a human being, we shall have to ascribe to it feelings, love, understanding, free will, etc. He says that there are no logical grounds for refusing this, and italicises the word.

The denial that there are such grounds follows from the assumption that the meaning of words can be defined in terms of specifiable tests.

Suppose you express a doubt whether machines can have sentience. You will be challenged to state what are the responses by which you recognise the presence of sentience in man. If you cannot specify these, your doubts will be dismissed as meaningless. On the other hand, if you do give a list of these responses or accept your interlocutor's list of them, he will sketch out a suitable machine which gives these responses and claim to have demonstrated that a machine can have sentience. This is all. Detailed speculations about the design of machines having the mental and