

War publicly erupted on the issues of Eastern Europe, Americans would not have tolerated war to liberate this area from Soviet dominance.

But American leaders expected that their mere possession of the atomic bomb might constitute an implied threat and hence render the Soviets more tractable on Eastern Europe and other matters. Stimson, for example, complained that Secretary of State James F. Byrnes was using the bomb as an "implied threat" in dealing with the Soviets, thus hoping to force concessions. Byrnes's strategy, much to his distress, did not yield American victories, probably because the Soviets feared that concessions would only encourage American boldness and invite greater demands.

Compelled by citizens to "bring the boys home" and to demobilize conventional forces rapidly after V-J Day, the administration came to rely primarily upon the bomb for military power.

Shortly after Hiroshima, the Pentagon began preparing a plan for atomic attacks on the 20 "most suitable targets" in the Soviet Union, in the event of war.

Ten weeks after Hiroshima, a Pentagon committee began preparing a plan for nuclear attacks on the 20 "most suitable Soviet targets." That plan, recently declassified, chose only cities (including Moscow and Leningrad), selecting them on the basis of their importance for industrial production, government operations, or scientific research. These 20 cities, with a total population of about 15 million, produced most of the aircraft, guns, tanks, trucks, and refined oil—the sinews of war.

Most planners of 1945–1946, unlike those of 1949, did not have even a faint hope that atomic bombs would immediately end a war with the Soviet Union. They did expect that the bombings would weaken the enemy and speed victory by pulverizing the Kremlin and destroying vital parts of the

Soviet economy. Many of the residents of the Soviet cities were expected to die in the attacks, but planners did not emphasize the A-bomb as a terror weapon that would destroy morale. Nor, unlike the 1949 planners, did those in 1945 believe that the A-bomb could be employed against ground troops in Western Europe.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1945 analysis were unnerving to American military leaders: The atomic bomb was not an omnipotent, but a very limited, weapon. It might deter war, but it could not alone defeat the Soviet Union. If the Soviets attacked Western Europe or the Middle East, to cite the two key areas, American war planners acknowledged that these lands might be lost for as long as two years. Such pessimistic counsel conflicted sharply with popular beliefs that the A-bomb was the absolute weapon.

In 1945–1949, American leaders did not expect Soviet aggression against Europe in the near future, and they knew that the Soviets lacked the navy or long-range air force to threaten the United States. Perhaps for these reasons there were few who urged preventive war. During the war, Arthur H. Compton, the Nobel physicist and Manhattan Project official, had been virtually alone in suggesting that the United States drop an atomic bomb on the Soviet Union to make her roll back the barriers of secrecy. After the war, James Forrestal, the first secretary of defense, flirted with the notions of preventive war, and his successor Louis Johnson, as well as Secretary of the Navy Francis Matthews, advocated this strategy. Such counsel encountered hostility within the administration. American leaders, despite some fears, believed that the future could be on their side: Both Dropshot and National Security Council Document 68 were part of the continuing process by which they assessed Soviet and American power and then called for greater defense spending. They all agreed on Soviet malevolence, but believed that American will would triumph. The critical issues, for most, were the appropriate price of military preparedness, the likely cost of victory, the proper mode for blocking Third World revolution, and whether sufficient American power might deter all-out war long enough for the Soviet Union to crumble while the American system endured and even flourished. □

UNMAILABLE: Congress and the Post Office, by Dorothy Ganfield Fowler. University of Georgia Press, 266 pp., \$14.50.

Uncertified mail

WILLIAM C. WOOLDRIDGE

THE STORY OF THE U.S. POST Office is a feature-length cartoon of American political history. The burning issues of the day have always reached the Post Office, and have there been reduced to caricature by becoming the object of the petty bureaucratic mind. In retrospect, we must resemble the Finns, who recently banned Donald Duck from children's libraries because of his common-law marriage, nudity, and bourgeois attitudes toward work and money. With a little power over what other people read, men with deeply held convictions will usually stage a farce.

Unmailable is a straight-faced legislative history of restrictions on what may be deposited in the United States mail. The interest of the subject does not lie in the intrinsic fascination of postal code classifications but in the highly focused treatment of various views of the proper uses of a government service, and it is remarkable how often these views come down to the same consensus: Material that the majority finds disagreeable ought not to be disseminated through the government mail.

The first example of a mailability restriction, going back to 1797, already had a comic character. Letters were getting goeey. The culprits were newspaper publishers, who mailed off their papers quite literally before the ink was dry, turning the contents of the nation's mailbags into soggy masses. Congress considered a proposal allowing only dry newspapers in the mails, the forerunner, Fowler shows, of all the laws excluding undesirable material from the mails for the next 150 years. But unlike the restrictions that were to come, avowedly aimed at the content of communications, the dry paper law sought only to

WILLIAM C. WOOLDRIDGE is an attorney in Roanoke, Va. and the author of *Uncle Sam the Monopoly Man*.

protect the mechanical side of mail distribution. Yet some congressmen objected strenuously to the idea, fearing to entrust local postmasters with the power to decide which papers were wet and which were dry. The law was enacted by a narrow vote.

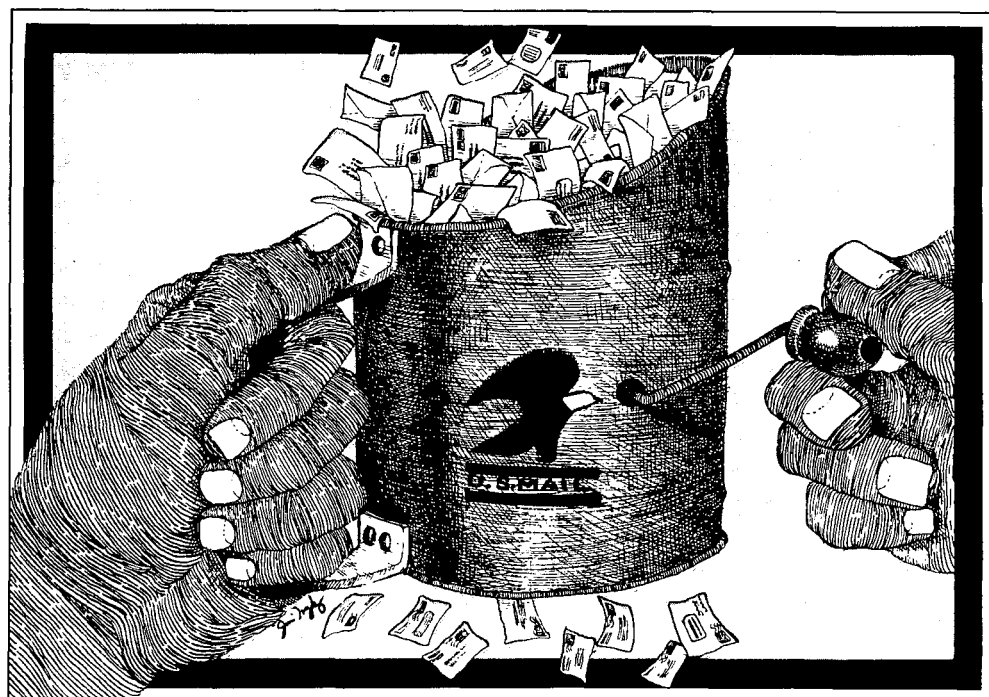
WITHIN A FEW YEARS, eighteenth century concern over the perils of the administrative exercise of discretion seemed well taken. When abolitionists began to use the Post Office to circulate their literature, demands immediately arose for the removal of this incendiary and seditious material from the mails. The Post Office piously disclaimed the right

passed. Right up until the outbreak of the Civil War, postmasters continued to act on their own judgment. In Lynchburg, Virginia, for example, Postmaster Robert H. Glass would not deliver the *New York Tribune*.

The Civil War developed a new censorship, initially grounded on nothing more than the postmaster general's decision to exclude disloyal papers from the mail. Exclusion suppressed a paper as effectively as direct censorship, for no other means of general circulation were available. With poetic justice the practice of refusing use of the Post Office to "seditious" abolitionist papers was cited as precedent for action against the more current form of sedition: opposi-

tion to the Post Office (in fact, the federal securities laws of the 1930s were based in part on Congress's power over the Post Office). While nothing came of these particular initiatives, Fowler points out that at the time when people still thought the interstate commerce power related to interstate commerce, the Post Office power became a convenient base for a whole series of forays into federal criminal law. (For example, concealable firearms were made non-mailable in 1927, and even information on the availability of foreign divorces was interdicted in 1939.) Whenever administrators and legislators felt strongly enough on a subject, they were more than willing to use the postal power as a substitute for the general federal police power they did not possess. Even before the Eighteenth Amendment, newspapers with liquor advertisements could not be mailed in dry states; the bootstrap reliance on state law recalls the attempted interdiction of abolitionist papers in states where they were illegal.

About 60 Socialist papers lost their second-class mailing privileges in World War I; Postmaster General Burleson would not brook criticism of the draft, of the sale of government bonds, or of the collection of taxes. When President Wilson intervened on behalf of *Masses*, Burleson faced him down; a more detailed look at him and some other individuals who figured prominently in executing postal policies would have been worthwhile.



Jim Murphy

to "exclude newspapers from the mail . . . on account of their character or tendency, real or supposed." However, the same end was achieved through a policy of letting individual postmasters do as they pleased with abolitionist tracts. To legitimize this policy, President Jackson in 1835 sought a statute barring abolitionist material from the mails. John C. Calhoun rejected Jackson's approach on states' rights grounds. His committee report also asserted that Congress could not use its control over the Post Office to limit freedom of the press, since to do so would violate the First Amendment. Instead, Congress should simply close the Post Office to antislavery material in states that prohibited its circulation! Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Thomas Hart Benton, and others debated these issues for a week. In the end, no bill

tion to the use of force against the South.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Post Office's attention was occupied by lotteries, fraud—and obscenity. Anthony Comstock became a special postal agent and scoured the country for offensive material. Among other activities, he successfully lobbied for a law excluding information about birth control from the mails; it stayed on the books almost a hundred years.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, A man who was sure enough of his convictions to think the government should enforce them wherever possible, wanted to exclude from the mails "anarchistic opinions" and the "disgusting details" of murders and divorces. Congressmen drew an analogy between the futures market and a lottery, and tried to block speculators' ac-

IN OUR OWN TIMES RESTRICTIONS were placed on the dissemination of Communist propaganda, then dropped as a result of a Supreme Court ruling. Better-known cases concerned obscenity in the mails: the attempts to ban the distribution of *Esquire*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and, on an appropriate note of buffoonery, 2000 reproductions of Goya's *Naked Maja*. (The prohibition on mailing obscene materials remains a law; it may surprise laymen that so much of the constitutional litigation over obscenity and the First Amendment grows out of a Post Office statute.) These disputes have been elaborately analyzed elsewhere; Fowler's contribution is to relate them to the long and enduring tradition of postal censorship.

A strand running through the whole story of use of postal powers for purposes other than facilitating communications is impatience with judicial remedies and a preference for the efficiency

and effectiveness of administrative fiat in suppressing whatever mortal danger to the republic loomed largest at the time. The courts have on the whole come out reasonably well in their periodic efforts to stop Post Office bureaucrats from acting as the arbiters of the politics and morals of American society. The story is not one of ever greater impositions on freedom of the press, but rather of regular and repeated strikes at political and social minorities, strikes which were predictable—given the status of the Post Office as a branch of the government—and which the postal authorities were often at a later date compelled to rescind.

The author's sources are primarily legislative history and court cases, with the result that the account is a straightforward monograph that some readers would find dry. Where Fowler has incorporated a larger amount of secondary material, as in the chapter on the abolitionists (perhaps the best in the book), the narrative is more fully rounded and of wider interest. She is entirely aware of, and frequently alludes to, the broader implications of the subject, but hews close to the legislative trail in presenting it. Within these intentional confines, the book lays out clearly the development of the power to exclude material from the mails, as often as not to thwart some victimless crime, like the sale of birth-control devices, Mexican divorces, or pornography. The book's design (for which no credit is given) is also engaging. For example, *Unmailable* comes jacketed in a plain brown wrapper.

THE POST OFFICE'S LOONY tunes are of more than antiquarian interest. In recent years a curious reenactment of Post Office history has taken place at the Federal Communications Commission. The airwaves, like the Post Office, are conceived to be a mode of communication that belongs to "the public." Again and again the agency in charge has succumbed to the temptation to regulate and restrict such communication for some good cause, sometimes seeking legislative authorization after the fact, if at all. This very term the FCC is trying to persuade the Supreme Court to recognize its right to prohibit unsavory language that may fall short of the legal definition of obscenity. The FCC continues to struggle with obscenity, the "fairness doctrine," prime-time programming restrictions, family viewing hours, and the insidious merchandising

of presweetened cereal by cartoon heroes. In the abstract, everyone agrees that the content of communication is not the proper concern of the government, but for many, the principle must be abandoned in the face of concrete evils like abolitionism and tooth decay.

The advent of cable television has presented the old temptation in still another guise. There is already an abundance of commentators who are demanding that this new medium be somehow harnessed to "the public interest." Advocating various FCC controls, one law professor has emphasized cable television's unique capabilities: If properly handled, "government can reach the individual and the individual can reach government"—on reflection, a truly sinister goal for a country's channels of communication. *Unmailable* should make it hard to forget that no matter how neutral we may wish a government service to be, time and circumstances will regularly turn it into a vehicle that any zealot with a passing political majority can use to promote his own vision of the good. □

**THE "CONFESSION" OF
MIKHAIL BAKUNIN, edited by
Robert C. Howes and Lawrence
D. Orton.
Cornell University Press,
200 pp., \$12.50.**

Tenacious myths

NICOLAS WALTER

BAKUNIN WAS ONE OF THE best-known revolutionaries of the nineteenth century, and the *Confession* is one of his best-known works. But most of what has been said about him in general, or about this work in particular, shows only how little what is said by men of letters has to do with what is done by men of action.

Bakunin was born in 1814 into a noble Russian family, and was destined

NICOLAS WALTER is the editor of *The New Humanist* (London). He has edited Bakunin's *The Paris Commune* and *The Idea of the State and Kropotkin's Memoirs of a Revolutionist*.

for the army. But, abandoning his family, his career, his class, and his country, he emigrated to Western Europe in 1840. First he theorized about rebellion in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and France, for which he was sentenced in his absence to loss of title and estate, and to exile in Siberia; then he practiced revolution during the upheavals of 1848–1849 in France, Germany, and Austria, for which he was imprisoned and exiled for 12 years. After being arrested in 1849, he was twice interrogated, tried, condemned to death, reprieved, and deported—first in Saxony, then in Austria—and in 1851 he was returned to Russia.

After a couple of months in the Peter and Paul fortress in St. Petersburg, he was invited by the head of the political police to write a confession of his revolutionary activity for Czar Nicholas I. He did so, but it gained him only permission to correspond with, and to be visited by, his family; he was not granted exile in Siberia until 1857, after Nicholas had been succeeded by Alexander II. Bakunin escaped from Siberia in 1861, and resumed his revolutionary activity in Western Europe, which he continued until just before his death in Switzerland in 1876.

The *Confession* seems to have been used by the Czarist government to damage Bakunin's reputation in the revolutionary movement at least once in his lifetime, but it remained inaccessible in the police archives for more than half a century, until the 1917 revolution. It remained unpublished for some time even then, appearing in part in 1919 and in full in 1921, when it was also used by the Marxists to damage Bakunin's reputation in the revolutionary movement. The authoritative Russian edition was published in 1936, and translations appeared in several languages. The present book represents the first English translation, by Robert C. Howes, with introduction and notes by Lawrence D. Orton. There is certainly no need to do the job again, and this elegant (and rather expensive) addition to the literature of the revolutionary movement is welcome; but it is not perfect.

The most obvious defect (apart from the heavy-handed style both of the translation and of the editorial apparatus) is that the *Confession* doesn't stand alone; it should really be read in conjunction with Bakunin's other prison writings—the letters and diaries written in Saxony and Austria, the letters written to his family in Russia, and the