

transactions of the heart that Forster throve. In the really formative years of his experience, it wasn't B.B.C. and N.C.C.L. that kept appearing in Forster's diaries and letters. The memorable initials, going back to his India years, were the letters H.H. (standing for His Highness the Maharaja of Dewas). Here was a man, not an organization, served and revered by Forster; a man like those dead Englishmen Keats and Arnold who could reveal stunning insights sufficient to nourish the spirit. It may on reflection seem queerly relevant that the honorific abbreviation which meant so much, H.H., can do double duty where it counts most for Forster, for those little initials also represent the "human heart."

Reviewed by JOHN RUSSELL

A Soviet Citizen Dissents

To Build a Castle—My Life as a Dissenter, by Vladimir Bukovsky, translated by Michael Scammell, *New York: The Viking Press, 1979. 438 pp. \$17.50.*

THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL recollection of Vladimir Bukovsky's descents into the inferno of Soviet prisons, labor camps, and psychiatric hospitals is a bittersweet work: it tells (sometimes interminably) of the unsuccessful attempts of a Soviet citizen to reform the Soviet system through his conscientious objections, and it ends with his expulsion from the Soviet Union. Mr. Bukovsky, now thirty-six and a student at Cambridge University, was born, raised, and imprisoned in the Soviet Union. He was expelled from that country (without losing his citizenship) in December, 1976, when he and his family were flown to Switzerland and exchanged for the Chilean communist leader, Luis Corvalan Lepe. Because expulsion was not what Bukovsky wanted, the story is one of failure—but it is a brilliant, heart-rending

failure whose images of the indomitable human spirit resisting the forces of official oppression are themselves inspiring.

I

HAVING GROWN UP in modest Moscow circumstances, Bukovsky underwent the usual compulsory education and became a member of the standard Communist youth group, the Young Pioneers. He found these predetermined roles desperately constricting, plunging him "into irreversible gloom." His school subjects "were so saturated with ideology that nothing else was left" of them; without disputing the ideology itself, such saturation "simply made every subject deadly dull." The same held true of his youth group activities. As this characterization suggests, the Soviet educational process is one in which "the natural attributes of a normal child . . . are rooted out at all costs." Not only the subjects but also the children are made dull: individual investigation and excitement in one's studies are not valued in Soviet education. "This refusal to recognize their individuality evokes a desperate resistance from young people." From some of them, perhaps; most, however, yield to the demands of the regime. "Everyone raises his hand at meetings, votes at elections, and, most important of all, does not protest."

Bukovsky nevertheless protested. For example, when his humiliating criticism of a classmate for failure to live up to the classmate's namesake, Lenin, reduced the classmate to tears, Bukovsky promptly resolved that he "couldn't and wouldn't play [the] idiotic role" assigned him by Soviet society. Rather than be a part of it, he resigned at the age of ten from the Young Pioneers. At fourteen, while the elite among his peers were rushing to join the League of Communist Youth ("Komsomol"), he again proved to be a nay-sayer, refusing membership in the organization. And his disillusionment turned to despair as later events reinforced his doubts about the benevolent Soviet state: Stalin's death let surface the revelation of his megalomaniacal imprisonments, tortures, and executions; Lenin's

works furnished Bukovsky with no more than "a living history of the crimes of the Bolsheviks"; and the youthful instigators of the Hungarian uprising, with whom Bukovsky identified, were savagely crushed by the overtly repressive Russian bear.

For Bukovsky, the impersonal catastrophes of an evil era soon became very personal indeed. In high school, having assisted with the production of a literary magazine ("a devastating parody of life at school and in the Soviet Union"), he was reprimanded by the Moscow City Committee of the Party and instructed to "temper" his mind "in the furnace of labor." In 1960-1961, his association with unauthorized avant-garde poetry readings in Mayakovsky Square in Moscow earned him K.G.B. surveillance and expulsion from Moscow University. Eventually, perhaps inevitably, he was arrested and imprisoned in 1963 for helping to organize the poetry readings and for "processing and preparing anti-Soviet literature with the intention of distributing it."

II

THE REMAINDER of the book catalogues horror stories about Bukovsky's years in prisons, labor camps, and psychiatric hospitals; these stories are "sufficient unto the day" to exhaust one's power of comment, or condemnation. A catalogue of the civilized crimes committed against a people—even a nation's own people—is not, sadly, news in this century. Still, Bukovsky's list of the criminal acts of the Soviet state against dissidents, "inferiors," and common criminals, deserves to stand and be counted with other distinguished lists: Stanley Elkins' *Slavery*, Richard Rubenstein's *The Cunning of History*, and, of course, Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Yet, beyond the predictable revulsion evoked by this book's vivid characterizations of prison life and the perverted legal system in the Soviet Union, the Western reader may feel a certain ambivalence toward this story and its hero. For, one wonders, what result other than expulsion could have come from Bukovsky's actions, given the nature of the Soviet state and society?

The Soviet state, Bukovsky says, is "a regime founded on coercion." Accordingly, Bukovsky followed a course of vigorous yet lawful and nonviolent resistance; he insisted upon his rights (such as they were) under Soviet law, as a way of opposing the state's lawless use of force. He refused to assent or submit to official coercion; he would not be coerced by official lawlessness or threats. And he urged others likewise to refuse to submit to officially-wielded but unlawful power—to do otherwise, to go along in order to get along, would be explicitly to concede the state its claim to be exercising legitimately its authority. "Power rests on nothing other than people's consent to submit, and each person who refuses to submit to tyranny reduces it . . . , whereas each who compromises only increases it." But this exhortation to noncooperation, based upon the persuasive power of principled action by the individual citizen, assumes an inclination on the part of the Soviet state to recognize the validity of such action. Why should it? Rather, how can it, without destroying itself?

Western political theory, at least insofar as it is embodied in the liberal tradition, recognizes the normality of individual dissent and disagreement. But the communist theory underpinning the Soviet Union accommodates no such recognition; instead, communism presupposes some degree of communal or collective agreement as the ground upon which all citizens act. Comparatively speaking, the problematic object for political theory in the Western liberal tradition is *consensus* (i.e., how to reach and preserve it); for communism, the problematic object is *dissent* (i.e., how to explain and deal with it). Thus, Western political theory at least recognizes the possibility of a conflict arising between societal demands and the dictates of the individual conscience (even though the conscience, as a purportedly subjective element, provides little leverage against the reputedly objective element of the law). Communism, on the other hand, must treat the conscientious actions of a dissenter as a wilful refusal to conform to the common good.

By endorsing a nonviolent and lawful form

of moral opposition to the Soviet system, Bukovsky seems to be advocating some form of conscientious objection (as compared to civil disobedience: expressing dissent through the active breaking of the law). Certainly, it is true that he does not advocate any form of violence or revolution. In this regard, he follows the example of Gandhi; indeed, Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* must be one measure of this book. Yet, on occasion, Bukovsky also seems to deny the very authority or legitimacy of the Soviet state altogether; in this regard, he reminds one of Thoreau. On still other occasions, as when he emphasizes the need to respect the law and its forms and procedures, at times suggesting that it is the law that may best serve the vulnerable claims of conscience, the precedent of Sir Thomas More comes to mind. Whether these affinities lead to some transcendent coherence in this book or whether, instead, they suggest a fundamental incoherence, I do not know.

I can say, however, that regardless of whether or not these responses to the conflict between the individual citizen and the system are complementary or contradictory, Bukovsky's courageous example may well prove to be indispensable. After all, he does manage to elevate the "war," as he terms it, between the Soviet citizen and system beyond the level of power politics—this contest is over no less than the self-respect and soul of Soviet man. And the outcome is in doubt.

I despised Soviet man . . . who had neither honor nor pride, nor a sense of personal responsibility. . . . The tragedy was that he existed inside every one of us, and until we could overcome this Soviet man within, nothing in our life would change. It was he who kept me in jail.

Soviet society is as culpable as the regime for the dissident's imprisonment, and that society ultimately imprisons all men, unless they can free themselves from the twisted psychology of slave and tyrant upon which the Soviet system relies. "One thing was clear to me: man's liberation couldn't come from outside. It had to come from within, and until the

majority of us had freed ourselves of the psychology of the underground, . . . our descendants were doomed to go on arguing in their kitchen: When did it all begin?"

It began with the Czars and the violent reaction they provoked from the Bolsheviks and others dissatisfied with the state of Russian society: that much and more Bukovsky's book helps us to understand. But his account of the horrors of the Soviet inferno cannot answer the next question: when will it all end?

Reviewed by THOMAS D. EISELE

Bureaucrat of Culture

The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People, 1933-1970, by Stephen Spender, *New York: Random House, 1978.*
xiv + 236 pp. \$10.00.

IN HIS LATEST OFFERING Stephen Spender tries to do for five decades what Muggeridge, Levin, and others hardly succeeded in doing for one, so it is not surprising that where they flunked, he fails. He canters, with commentary, memoirs, and reviews, over the last fifty years, familiar territory for the most part, in the case of the 'thirties tediously so, and his superficial and sketchy approach does nothing to improve matters. The book claims to be a "case-history," and it is as a portrait of the author rather than of the age that the book has interest; particularly when the "image," sedulously created, which the author propagates of himself, is not the picture which actually gets through to the reader.

On the Stephen Spender of yesteryear, that political animal who was adopted by anti-fascism, dabbled in Bolshevism, and for a brief spell joined the Communist party, an irony of a kind is directed; but whatever critical eye—it is genial enough—is thrown on that figure from the past, nothing of the