

## The Revolutionary

### On the Persistence of Myths and Mystiques

By Ronald Hingley

“REVOLUTION” AND “revolutionary” are enshrined among the most sacred cult words in Communist vocabulary and have been specially impregnated with enthusiasm, high-mindedness and moral uplift. If they have now begun to smell and turn up at the edges through overuse in grubby hands, there is no sign that Communist sopkesmen have noticed the fact. Soviet citizens, for example, are still urged to show the revolutionary spirit or revolutionary vigilance nearly fifty years since Russia’s most recent revolution.

To the Communist all revolutions, past and future, are sacred. The prospect of an anti-Communist revolution does not deter him, for he has ensured by a simple linguistic device that no such event can ever occur. The term “revolution” may mean any “complete overthrow of the established government . . . by those . . . previously subject to it” to the compilers of the “bourgeois” Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. But to the Soviet lexicographer a revolution does not count unless it leads to the replacement of an “obsolete social system” (*i.e.*, one not approved by Communists) by a “new

progressive social system” (*i.e.*, one which has the blessing of the current party line). (See, for example, “*revoliutsiia*” as defined in the *Soviet Academy Dictionary of Contemporary Russian*.) Not being “progressive,” non-approved uprisings—such as that in Hungary in 1956—simply are not reckoned as revolutions at all.

We cannot expect things to be quite so clear-cut in the future, for already rival Communist oracles in Moscow, Peking, Tirana, Havana and elsewhere are in disagreement about what constitutes a true revolutionary movement. But however much they may disagree about how the symbol should be applied, the symbol remains a sacred one.

Spokesmen of Communist governments may have good reason for praising revolutionaries and trying to claim all revolutionaries as their own. But what of ordinary citizens in non-Communist societies? Have these any motive for idealizing the revolutionary—their would-be destroyer—in this way? Hardly. Yet it is arguable that even in non-Communist societies the calling of revolutionary is often too much honored. There remains a tendency to regard any revolutionary as a glamorous, romantic figure, whether he is thought of as throwing bombs at Russian Tsars in the 1870’s or as crawling, bearded and festooned with hand-grenades, out of the Cuban sierras 80 years later. As these examples show, the revolution-

*A frequent contributor to these pages, Mr. Hingley is Lecturer on Russian language and literature at Oxford University. His published works include Under Soviet Skins (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1961) and The Undiscovered Dostoyevsky (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1962).*

ary may be thought of as slightly comic, but his heart, it is believed, is usually in the right place.

In the Western world, for example, one may easily hear a person who is no sort of Communist, and who may well be what Communists call a "bourgeois," blithely referring to Cuban-trained revolutionaries as "happily throwing bombs somewhere in South America." The speaker has never so much as seen a bomb, still less thrown one. He would admit if pressed that bombs are liable to litter the landscape with odd pieces of random bystanders and that he would not like himself or his children to be among them. But for him the purely scenic aspect of revolution has eclipsed all others.

IT IS NOT THE PURPOSE of this essay to denounce all revolutionaries without reference to their cause or achievements, or to deny that noble and good deeds have been done by brave men in the cause of overthrowing oppression—which is how the word revolution got its built-in plus sign in the first place. But surely it is time that revolutionaries were stripped of the picturesque gloss which has been imparted to them. Is it unreasonable to suggest that they and their revolutions should be treated neutrally, on their own merits—to be judged by their methods and practical achievements, not unthinkingly overpraised? Does the revolutionary automatically deserve the kind of prestige awarded, rightly or wrongly, to explorers, mountaineers, astronauts and international footballers? And even if he sometimes does deserve such acclaim, is it suitable that he should automatically receive it from his enemy and victim, the "bourgeois"?

The concept "bourgeois" is every bit as fraudulent as that of "revolutionary" and differs from the latter in carrying a whiff of disapproval. No one of course regards *himself* as a bourgeois, any more than anyone who visits a seaside resort regards himself as a "tripper." The word is for other people. Still, we are aware that countries such as Britain and France are called "bourgeois" in Soviet propaganda and that articles such as the present one are said to be written by bourgeois intellectuals. All these terms are stale and repulsive. But however small the residue of meaning retained by the term of abuse "bourgeois" and the term of praise "revolutionary," these two contrasted types are natural enemies by any standards. Still, the revolutionary has taught the bourgeois to admire him—a strictly one way process, for the revolutionary emphatically does not admire the bourgeois.

The idealization of the revolutionary in the Western world is certainly not confined to writers and spokesmen who can be considered bourgeois. Among the more vociferous admirers of such well-known revolutionary figures as Trotsky and Stalin was, for example, George Bernard Shaw, who incidentally much admired Fascist leaders such as Mussolini as well. (Brutality, perhaps, was the passport to his affections.) Anyway, Shaw does not illustrate the point very well, since he was merely an inverted bourgeois and thus of little permanent interest, except possibly to his contemporary bourgeois whom he was so concerned to shock. As a more serious example of an admirer of revolutionaries we may take a modern historian, the biographer of Stalin and Trotsky—Isaac Deutscher. This is perhaps a timely moment to consider Mr. Deutscher since the third and final volume of his great trilogy on Trotsky has just been published.<sup>1</sup>

WHEN THE FIRST VOLUME of this trilogy appeared, a reviewer claimed that it was written "with that sympathy and understanding for his subject without which no biography should be attempted."<sup>2</sup> Well, perhaps. But even sympathy and understanding can be overdone, as in passages such as the following from the new volume:

*The passions of his [Trotsky's] intellect and heart, always uncommonly large and intense, now swelled into a tragic energy as mighty and high as that which animates the prophets and the lawgivers of Michelangelo's vision (p. 12).*

*He [Trotsky] stood where he stood like truth itself, unkempt and unadorned, unarmored and unshielded yet magnificent and invincible (p. 382).*

*It cannot be, it would be contrary to all historical sense, that so high an intellectual energy, so prodigious an activity, and so noble a martyrdom [as Trotsky's] should not have their full impact eventually (p. 512).*

After this it comes as no surprise to find Trotsky described as "the greatest master of Russian prose of his generation" (p. 252), and as an "historian of genius" (p. 221). What remains a surprise, even with all this, is the status

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929-1940*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> From *The Listener* (London), as quoted on the dust jacket of Deutscher, *op. cit.*

given to Trotsky as a prophet who, Deutscher wrote in his second volume, "ran so far ahead of his time that more than thirty years later much of his prediction still remains unconfirmed by events."<sup>3</sup>

This claim constitutes a monument of absurdity by any standards, but in general Mr. Deutscher's cult of Trotsky's personality can be viewed with some tolerance. Trotsky was, after all, a great man. He was not merely a brilliant orator and theoretician, he was also highly successful in the practical side of conspiracy, organization and administration. But reading this biography, one becomes aware of the fact that to Mr. Deutscher revolutionaries in general—the rank and file as well as the leaders—bestride the narrow world. They may come in different sizes, but all are colossi. Indeed, of all authors on the subject he seems more prone than any to the kind of dated romanticism about revolutionaries which I am attempting to discredit. To treat Trotsky as a heroic figure may be excusable. But to treat the smaller fry as "uncommon intellects steeped in Marxism" is going altogether too far, as is the implication that a revolution—any revolution—is inevitably a grand and noble spectacle. Nor is it reasonable to suggest that the most pathetic, hysterical and ineffectual revolutionary crackpot is to an ordinary mortal as a giant to a pygmy.

AMONG THE REVOLUTIONARY small fry to whom Mr. Deutscher alludes from time to time in his Trotsky trilogy is Victor Serge. Of Russian origin, Serge was brought up in the West, but spent most of the years 1919-36 in the USSR and is an important witness of Soviet events in those years. It happens that a volume of his memoirs appeared in English at about the same time as the final volume of Mr. Deutscher's trilogy.<sup>4</sup> It also happens that Serge's account contrasts in various ways with the over-heroic picture of the revolutionary painted by Mr. Deutscher.

Not that it is Serge's intention to deflate the revolutionary. Far from it. To Serge himself revolutionary activity seems to have come as naturally as writing music came to Mozart. He was apparently driven by none of the more normal revolutionary urges, ranging from a desire to found a new and better society to mere power-seeking or a grudge against the existing

order. To Serge revolution was a self-justifying activity. Why was he a revolutionary? As well ask him why he breathed.

One might almost apply to him what Professor E. H. Carr has said of the notorious 19th-century revolutionary Nechaiev—the model for Peter Verkhovenski in Dostoyevsky's great anti-revolutionary study, *The Devils*:

*He believed in revolution as a tenet valid and sufficient in itself; and he believed in nothing else.*<sup>5</sup>

Serge's work has impressed some "bourgeois" critics as noble and eloquent. Indeed it is quite possible to see him—as so many other revolutionaries of the period—as a sort of Marxist saint, careless of his own welfare, defying death and imprisonment in "capitalist" Europe and in Stalinist Russia alike. However, I cannot myself take this view, for it seems to me that Serge has, to borrow a phrase, "unmasked himself" in his writings. They are, for example, unusually revelatory of the indifference and hostility of a certain type of revolutionary, not merely to his enemy the bourgeois, but also to the "ordinary people" and "workers." These are in theory the ultimate beneficiaries of his political activity, but one would hardly think so from the tone in which Serge writes about them.

Even as an adolescent Serge saw himself as a man apart, someone different from his young contemporaries who, as he tells us, "talked about bicycles or girls in a most loathsome way." He continues in a style which throws further light on revolutionary psychology:

*We were chaste, expecting better things both from ourselves and from fortune. Without benefit of theory, adolescence opened up for us a new aspect of the problem. In a sordid alley, at the end of a dark passage hung with gaudy washing, there lived a family we knew: the mother gross and suspicious, nursing the vestiges of her beauty; a lecherous daughter with bad teeth; and a stunning younger girl, of pure Spanish beauty, her eyes all charm, innocence, and softness, her lips like blossom. It was all she could do, when she passed us chaperoned by her dam, to manage a smiling "Hello" to us. "It's obvious," said Raymond, "they're sending her to dancing lessons and keeping her for some rich old bastard." We discussed problems like this. Bebel's Woman and Socialism was on our reading-list (p. 11).*

<sup>3</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963.

<sup>5</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles*, London, Stokes, 1933, 1949, p. 335.

This passage from the first chapter of Serge's memoirs may be taken as a text for much of what follows and as an indication of certain trends in revolutionary psychology in general. One is struck, above all, by the puritanical attitude. Serge apparently saw himself as a novice in some peculiarly censorious order of monkhood, and his contempt for money is closely intertwined with what might be considered almost a rejection of sex ("We were chaste, expecting *better* things both from ourselves and from fortune").

Indeed, after considering the careers of certain revolutionaries one might be inclined to ask whether revolutionary politics are some powerful form of anaphrodisiac, or possible sex-substitute. "Women," we are told, "had never appeared at any period of his life to interest or attract Bakunin; and all the evidence goes to show that this giant of superhuman energy was sexually impotent."<sup>6</sup> The previously-mentioned Nechaiev, too, is known to have shied away from any contacts with women, and the most famous revolutionary of them all, Lenin, was known as much for his rather puritanical views on sex as for his personal avoidance of romantic entanglements—the recent disclosure of his peculiar relationship with Inessa Armand notwithstanding.<sup>7</sup>

Yet it is possible to pursue this line of thought too far, of course, for there have certainly been revolutionaries who have not shared Serge's attitude on sex. Perhaps what Lenin's solitary *affaire du coeur* suggests is the tendency, among many revolutionaries, of one central passion—for revolution—to drive out others.

THE PASSAGE QUOTED ABOVE brings us on to another of the less glamorous features in the revolutionary's make-up—that is, his obsession with money, or rather his obsession with his idea that other people are obsessed with money. In the case of Serge this takes somewhat extreme forms—in fact it led him to a detestation, not merely of money, but even of the elementary comforts of existence.

It is characteristic of Serge that he should have resented Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1920's not (as many Communists felt) because it meant abandoning Communist principles, but because it saw the disappearance of the extreme hardships of the Civil War period. For these hardships Serge retained a

sentimental attachment that bordered on aberration.

It is to the NEP period, when "the sordid taint of money is visible on everything again," that the most extraordinary passage in Serge's memoirs is devoted. This carries the life-denying side of revolutionary psychology to a fantastic point:

*I knew fair-haired Lisa I—in the days when, emaciated and crazy-eyed, she saw her first child die of starvation. Now they have another child, who is far better fed than the children of our unemployed workers. Lisa is now a plump blonde who wears a necklace of heavy gems from the Urals. There is still a slight hint of madness in her eyes, which makes me long to come out with some sharp questions: "It was great when we were up against it, wasn't it? Do you remember Mazin's body under the fir trees? And the corpse of that little sculptor Bloch who got shot, we never knew why? And his wife's corpse, so childlike she was? Tell me, do you remember?" But I say nothing of the sort; it would not be nice, the world has changed (p. 197).*

Nowhere does Serge express the revolutionary's death wish quite so outspokenly as here, but he comes near to it in his comments on A.A. Yoffe's suicide note. Here we find the death wish combined with a mystical idea of communion with humankind:

*The man who wrote these lines, prepared to seal them with his own blood, here touched on heights of faith where neither reason nor unreason counts any longer; there has been no better expression of the revolutionary's communion with all mankind in all ages (p. 229).*

Incidentally, "communion with mankind" was seen by Serge, as by other revolutionaries, as a one-way process—the kind of communion that may be said to exist between a chess player and his row of pawns. Mankind exists to adopt certain predetermined postures chosen for it by the revolutionary.

This manipulatory attitude is richly revealed in Serge's reflections on working-class affluence which he observed in Belgium in 1936 (after spending many years in the Soviet Union) and contrasted with the miserable condition of the Russian worker:

*These riches were within reach, within reach of an unemployed man in a working-class area, without benefit of socialism or a Plan! It was disconcerting. I had known of all this before-*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>7</sup> See Bertram D. Wolfe, "Lenin and Inessa Armand," *Encounter* (London), February 1964.



hand, but the reality of it shocked me as if I had been ignorant. It was enough to make one weep in humiliation and grief for our Russia of revolutions.

On May Day we saw these provincial streets full of workers out in their Sunday best with their families; young girls with red-ribboned hair, men with red badges in their buttonholes, all of them with well-fed faces, the women fat at thirty and the men fleshy at forty or so. They were off to a Socialist demonstration, and looked just like the bourgeois as pictured by the popular imagination in Russia under the influence of the cinema. Peaceable, content with their lot. I gathered that these workers of the West had no desire whatsoever to fight for socialism or for anything else for that matter (p. 324).

It may seem unkind to dwell so long on Serge, who in many ways was a pathetic figure with his pursuit of lost causes. Perhaps he even broke with Stalinism because he could not bear to be on the winning side—and not because of the “massacres in so great number as to inspire a certain dizziness,” for, to a mind like Serge’s, those were all in the day’s work: they “were the only roads possible for us.”

Serge’s writings are mainly of value as a primary source on the history of his period. Yet as I have tried to suggest, they also have a certain usefulness in showing the revolutionary as a humdrum and curiously perverse figure—providing a needed corrective to such glossy, larger-than-life portraits of heroic figures steeped in Marxism as Mr. Deutscher paints.

LET US NOW CONSIDER a few further aspects of the revolutionary, taking evidence from some whose attitude to revolution in the Soviet sense has been ambivalent or hostile.

The first figure to be considered is the young—not so much in years as in the imagery that word projects—poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Yevtushenko leaped to fame in 1956 at the age of 23 with the publication of a controversial poem, *Zima Railway Station*. This was followed by his expulsion from the Komsomol—an important event in the career of any young Soviet poet at the time, and an important step to recognition by the younger generation. Since then Yevtushenko has been labeled a “rebel” against Soviet society and has become regarded as a sort of professional *enfant terrible*.

But Yevtushenko has not been a rebel pure and simple. In order to be published at all he naturally has had to make concessions to official viewpoints, and in recent years the element of concession in his public postures has tended to

win ground over the element of defiance. There have been times when it has seemed doubtful whether he is a rebel at all, though his personal courage has not been questioned and he remains to some extent an enigma.

One important act of defiance for which he has been censured in the Soviet Union is the publication abroad of his autobiography, known in English as *A Precocious Autobiography*, in effect another “smuggled” Soviet work like Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* and so many more.<sup>8</sup>

One is tempted to call this a retarded rather than a precocious autobiography, for here the gifted and at times brilliant young poet appears to poor advantage—especially when he tries to handle ideas, an activity in which he is clearly not very much at home.

However, the very commonplace nature of Yevtushenko’s ideas makes his book a useful quarry for the student of revolutionary romanticism, since certain characteristic aspects of the subject are here expressed in clichés of impeccable triteness. The book is above all the repository of the “things-were-better-under-Lenin” school of thought. According to this thesis there is a certain “pure” revolutionary idea, sometimes called “pristine,” embodied by Marx and Lenin. (The fact that Lenin departed from Marx’s teaching in many respects is often conveniently forgotten by promoters of the thesis.)

“I love my fellow-countrymen as a Russian,” Yevtushenko writes, “but I also love them as a revolutionary. They are the dearer to me because they never became cynics, never lost their faith in the initial purity of the revolutionary idea, by whatever filth it has been desecrated” (p. 38). To Yevtushenko “Lenin’s teaching is dearer than anything in the world” (p. 81). Stalin distorted Lenin, “the whole meaning of whose work was that communism was for man, whereas all the implications of Stalin’s practices were that man existed for communism” (p. 76).

Similarly, Mr. Deutscher repeatedly puts forward his Trotsky as the custodian of the tradition of Marx and Lenin in its “pristine purity.”

It is a sad comment on the plight of revolutionaries at the moment that their utopistic longings, once focussed exclusively on the future, have been turning increasingly towards the past. Little as either Lenin himself or the country over which he ruled might seem to justify any nostalgic glow, Russia of the 1920’s has become a romantic theme in post-Stalin Soviet literature—something exciting to com-

<sup>8</sup> Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, New York, Dutton, 1963.

pare with the gray present. Moreover, the “things-were-better-under-Lenin” school seems to have won ground among those “bourgeois” enemies of the revolutionary who were described above as being so easily inclined towards unthinking admiration of the revolutionary. Even among opponents of communism in the West not many pause to consider that Lenin has been the supreme architect—with Trotsky, Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini as active and able junior partners—of 20th-century totalitarianism, one of the greatest misfortunes ever to afflict humanity.

One understands of course that Yevtushenko, and other invokers of the name of Lenin in the Soviet Union, are not necessarily as naive as I have suggested. They can hardly be blamed in their peculiar position for using whatever weapons are at hand against the forces of entrenched Soviet illiberalism. And Lenin’s name still remains a formidable polemical weapon that has been wielded skillfully by the “liberal” side in Soviet polemics. Thus Lenin is now being used to mitigate the totalitarianism which he himself set up. One suspects that Castro has been used as a similar ambivalent symbol by Yevtushenko, some of whose “Cuban poems” have perhaps implied that in Cuba is to be found the true, “pure” revolutionary spirit which has not been seen in bureaucratic Russia for many a year.

The use of champions of totalitarianism to further a “liberal” cause is regrettable (if we are right in assuming that this is what is going on), but the contest between “liberals” and “illiberals” in the Soviet Union has its own special rules and it is not really for onlookers to be too censorious about the contestants’ choice of weapons. If we had to play that tiresome game ourselves we might not show up very well either. It is probably legitimate tactics to use Castro’s Cuba and Lenin’s Russia as a stick to beat Khrushchev’s Russia, and the Western citizen can only be grateful that he neither has to live in nor choose between any of these societies.

REVOLUTIONARY UTOPIANISM about past and future is often combined with a certain bland callousness toward the sufferings inflicted by revolution on previous generations—surely one of the least attractive items in the catalog of revolutionary attitudes. This callousness is present in Yevtushenko’s parade of clichés, and it does not gain from being combined with a characteristic complacency about the Russian national character:

*You may object that, side by side with its*

*achievements, the Revolution brought new tears and new sorrows to the Russian people.*

*But here our Russian character must be kept in mind. Suffering is a habit with us. What seems nearly unendurable to others we endure more easily.*

*Besides, we have paid for our ideal with so much blood that the cost itself has made it all the dearer and more precious to us, as a child born in torment is the dearer and more precious to its mother (pp. 39-40).*

There is something monstrous about the way in which a Yevtushenko or a Trotsky, using what Mr. Deutscher calls the “grand historical scale,” is prepared to write off the sufferings of generations. “When it is a question of the profoundest changes in economic and cultural systems, twenty-five years weigh less in history than an hour does in a man’s life”: thus Trotsky as reported by Mr. Deutscher.<sup>9</sup> And again:

*Against those who, dwelling on retrograde developments in the Soviet Union (and on his own fate), denied the raison d’être of the October Revolution, he [Trotsky] pointed out that “in criticism as in creative activity perspective is needed.” The fifteen years since October were only “a minute on the clock of history.”<sup>10</sup>*

Few indeed are the revolutionary clichés which Yevtushenko leaves unturned in his autobiography, for to those mentioned above we must also add such old favorites as “money is the root of all evil” and the praise given to the concept of “seeking truth”—a mysterious process, never further defined, in which all men of good will are by axiom deemed to be permanently engaged. But he does not pay much attention to one concept which plays a key part in revolutionary romanticism and Marxist platitude-building—that of the “worker.”

IT IS THE ROMANTIC image of the worker in Marxist revolutionary thinking that we must now consider, though this concept is so wrapped in mystery that one is hard put to do it justice. The visitor to a Communist country who asks why the workers have no right to strike is usually told it is because their factories and places of work are “their own” and they obviously cannot strike against themselves. Similarly Communist countries are “workers’ states,” but it is impossible for the non-Marxist

<sup>9</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929-1940*, p. 512.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

to see that this is so or to discover any way in which the worker's ownership of his "own" factories or of his "own" state is expressed in practice. The non-Marxist visitor begins to realize that "worker," when used in this way, is a purely mystical or metaphysical conception, having nothing whatever to do with anyone who has ever swung an axe or handled a lathe.

This may lead the non-Marxist to question the thesis whereby the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 is termed a "workers' revolution." He will certainly notice that many prominent leaders of the Bolshevik coup—Lenin and Trotsky for example—were proletarians neither by birth nor by adoption (in the sense of working with their hands for a living). Later Soviet leaders such as Khrushchev have not been backward in claiming worker's status for themselves, in many cases with more reason than Lenin and Trotsky. But however proletarian Khrushchev's origins and early life may have been, it is hard to see him or other Soviet leaders as manual workers in any meaningful sense of the term. They are in fact professional politicians of a rather special kind. The case could not be otherwise: it may be true, as Lenin is supposed to have said, that any cook can learn to run the affairs of state, but if so the first thing he must do is stop being a cook—there really isn't time for everything.

Nevertheless the romantic image of the worker—that honest, horny-handed son of toil, somehow more noble, deserving and "real" than the non-worker—has been successfully adopted by the Soviet state and to some extent, like other romantic revolutionary symbols, "sold" to the gullible bourgeois abroad. This concept has tended to replace what is surely a more objective and reasonable view of the workers (or proletariat)—as people who make their living in a certain way and who therefore have certain broad features in common distinguishing them from others, but who are not thereby made better or worse or more or less fitted to exploit (or be exploited by) their fellow men than anyone else.

IF THERE IS ONE name in Russian literature more associated with revolutionary romanticism than any other it is that of Maxim Gorky, author of the celebrated *Song of the Stormy Petrel*, of the revolutionary novel *The Mother*, and many other evocative works. It is often forgotten, however, that Gorky's attitude to the revolution was by no means so simple-minded and clear-cut as it is made to seem by Soviet literary historians. Gorky had the awkward habit of using his brain from time to time

and he did not always come up with the correct official stereotype.

It is in a little-known passage from *My Universities*, the third volume of Gorky's autobiography, published in 1923, that we find a politically unorthodox confrontation of the intellectual (Gorky himself) and the worker (an anonymous friend who had become a political "tycoon" since the revolution). The passage deserves to be put to Gorky's credit when his sins as an official hagiographer come to be reckoned up, if only because Gorky here makes no serious attempt to dissociate himself from the heretical philosophy of his worker friend.

*"I don't want any of these things, my dear Aleksei Maksimovich," the worker tells Gorky. "What do we need with academies, sciences and aeroplanes? All I need is a quiet corner and a woman to kiss when I want to, one that responds honestly, body and soul, see? You argue as an intellectual, you're not on our side any longer. You're poisoned. You put ideas above people. . . . Intellectuals like worrying, they've tagged on to rebellions from time immemorial. . . . The worker rises for the sake of revolution, he has to secure a just distribution of the means of production and the product of labor. But do you think he wants to take control of the state once he's got power? Not a bit of it. They'll all go their different ways and . . . get themselves a quiet life. . . . Why should I build a town when I only want a little cottage?"*

(A few pages earlier Gorky had recorded the great impression made on him thirty years before by a like-minded "worker" who remarked, among other things: "Factories and machines to make more and more machines—that's stupid. . . .") Gorky continues:

*After this conversation, I couldn't help wondering whether millions of Russians really only put up with the hardships of revolution because they cherished the idea of escaping from work. A minimum of work and a maximum of enjoyment—a very attractive idea.<sup>11</sup>*

HOWEVER, IT IS HARDLY to Gorky that one looks for a champion of ordinary mortals against revolutionary oppression. If there is one Russian author of our times to whom that honor belongs above all others, it is Boris Pasternak

<sup>11</sup> M. Gorky, *Izbrannyye sochineniia*, Moscow, 1946, pp. 498-500 (my translation—R.F.H.).



for his *Doctor Zhivago*.<sup>12</sup> The novel is very much more than a mere anti-Soviet or anti-revolutionary polemic, and Western readers who approached it in this spirit, after it had been dramatically smuggled out of Russia, found themselves disappointed. However, on closer examination, it did turn out to have a deep anti-revolutionary message implanted in almost every line. This is especially evident in the loving care with which Pasternak describes ordinary family life—the sort of thing which Serge, Trotsky and their like so often dismissed as beneath contempt. “What do wives matter to them at a time like this?” Pasternak’s heroine Lara asks with reference to her husband, a famous revolutionary leader. “The workers of the world, the remaking of the universe, that’s something. But what’s a wife? Just an individual biped, of no more importance than a flea or a louse!” (p. 273). This indifference to personal ties is sharply contrasted with the hero’s outlook, reflected for example in his thoughts while traveling home from the front during the war: “What is there in the whole world worth more than a peaceful family life and work? The rest isn’t in our hands” (p. 156).

Pasternak’s defense of ordinary people against revolution is part of the texture of his novel, and not the least eloquent element in his indictment of revolution is what he leaves unsaid about it. Of the specific claims of Soviet official propaganda he has very little indeed to say: it is clear both from the novel itself and from what Pasternak has said elsewhere that he did not think these sufficiently serious to be worth discussing. However, his novel does contain several eloquent passages in which he comes to grips with revolutionary psychology in general terms. The following is probably the most important of such passages:

*But . . . those who inspired the revolution aren’t at home in anything except change and turmoil: that’s their native element; they aren’t happy with anything that’s less than on a world scale. For them transitional periods, worlds in the making, are an end in themselves. They aren’t trained for anything else, they don’t know about anything except that. And do you know why there is this incessant whirl of never-ending preparations? It’s because they haven’t any real capacities, they are ungifted. Man is born to live, not to prepare for life. Life itself—the gift of life—is such a breathtakingly seri-*

*ous thing! Why substitute this childish harlequinade of adolescent fantasies, these schoolboy escapades?* (p. 269).

As this passage suggests, in the conflict between Victor Serge and his young contemporaries who “talked about bicycles and girls,” Pasternak was all for the bicycles and girls.

Pasternak seems to have seen revolutionary thinking as a sort of impertinent pomposity with no relevance to anything of real importance in man’s spiritual life. It is significant that he finds himself opposed not merely to the Lenins and Stalins of this world, but also to such a fierce anti-revolutionary as Dostoyevsky. To Pasternak these apparent opposites were more similar than they seemed. Both had a kind of shrill high-mindedness—a cumbrous phrase, but one which seems to express what he deplored. Thus the following assessment of Russian authors, put into Dr. Zhivago’s mouth, is of the greatest importance as an indication of Pasternak’s thought:

*What I have come to like best in the whole of Russian literature is the childlike Russian quality of Pushkin and Chekhov, their shy unconcern with such high-sounding matters as the ultimate purpose of mankind or their own salvation. . . . While Gogol, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky worried and looked for the meaning of life and prepared for death and drew up balance sheets, these two were distracted, right up to the end of their lives, by current, individual tasks imposed on them by their vocation as writers, and in the course of fulfilling these tasks they lived their lives, quietly, treating both their lives and their work as private, individual matters, of no concern to anyone else* (p. 259).

“Private, individual matters of no concern to anyone else”—the Marxist revolutionary recognizes no such things. Perhaps if he did his record of failure would not be so complete as it is. For so far he has been mainly successful in stimulating sudden, dramatic changes of government involving the substitution of one form of tyranny for another. He has helped acquire power which has usually been no sooner acquired than it has been seized from him by calculating, *soi-disant* revolutionaries, as callous as himself, but of most unrevolutionary temperament.

The image of this modern knight in shining armor is gradually becoming more tarnished. It may lose its glitter entirely if mankind should ever move on from political adolescence.

<sup>12</sup> Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, tr. Max Hayward and Manya Harari, London, 1958.



# The Many Faces of the Cold War

Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised, *by Marshall D. Shulman.*  
*Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963.*

The Soviet Political Mind: Studies in Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change,  
*by Robert C. Tucker. New York & London, Praeger, 1963.*

Soviet Foreign Propaganda, *by Frederick C. Barghoorn.*  
*Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964.*

The Soviet Union at the United Nations: An Inquiry into Soviet Motives and Objectives,  
*by Alexander Dallin. New York, Praeger, 1962.*

Africa and the Communist World, *edited by Zbigniew Brzezinski.*  
*Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1963.*

Diversity in International Communism: A Documentary Record, 1961-1963,  
*edited by Alexander Dallin, with Jonathan Harris and Grey Hodnett.*  
*New York & London, Columbia University Press, 1963.*

## Reviewed by Richard Davies

"WE ARE evidently at the beginning of the third major effort since 1945 to establish whether or not it is possible for the Soviet Union and the West to live together on this planet under conditions of tolerable stability and low tensions," wrote Walt W. Rostow in the October 1963 issue of *Foreign Affairs* (p. 1). The beginning of this "third round" is a good time to look back and

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*Mr. Davies is an American student of Soviet and East European affairs, with a special interest in diplomacy and international relations.*

consider the characteristics and origins of the past stages of the cold war and draw a few conclusions from such a retrospect.

In his book, *Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised*, Marshall Shulman has taken a hard, fresh look at the foreign policy pursued by the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership from 1949 until the dictator's death in 1953. In the early 1950's, Professor Shulman argues, the Soviet leadership began to realize that its aggressive policy of the immediate postwar period had evoked a vigilance and cohesion in the West that were producing a sig-

nificant remobilization of Western military forces. Under these circumstances, which were clearly illustrated by the strong American reaction to Communist aggression in Korea, Stalin began preparing a shift towards a more tolerant foreign policy and a posture calculated to be less alarming to the outside world. Shulman finds the first signs of the new policy in the relative easing of the Soviet outward thrust in 1951-52 (e.g., the Korean truce talks begun in July 1951), in developments in the "peace" movement and the tactics of the French Communist