

The Muslim East

MAXIME RODINSON: *Islam et Capitalisme*. Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1966.

AS MIGHT BE expected from Professor Rodinson, this is a work of great erudition. It deals with problems related to economic practice in the Muslim world, in particular examining to what extent, if at all, the capitalist system as practiced in Muslim countries has been induced or impeded by the ideology of Islam.

The author is described by his publisher as a "militant progressivist and anticolonialist" and as a "specialist with the views of a Marxist sociologist." His declared purpose is to help "the intellectuals of those countries coming within the orbit of the Muslim religion and civilization . . . to understand their destiny." Whether or not his Muslim readers will accept this help in the spirit in which it is offered, there can be no doubt that the book contains a great deal of original and stimulating thought on a subject about which there has been much misunderstanding.

Outlining the economic doctrine set forth in the Qur'an and the Sunna, the author concludes that it neither condemns in principle nor interferes with the practice of what is now known as the capitalist sector of a country's economy. He next compares Islamic economic prescriptions with those of Christianity and expresses the opinion that Islam has no more inhibited the development of capitalism on modern lines than Christianity has promoted it.

The longest and perhaps the most important chapter deals with present-day capitalism in Muslim countries. Here the author's conclusion is that the Muslim East has modeled its capitalism on the West. If it has failed to reach Western standards, this is not attributable in any way to Islam. Reluctance to invest money in industry, for example, is not due to Islamic injunctions on the subject but to the unsettled conditions prevailing in Muslim countries—a product, in Rodinson's view, of the pressure of European colonialism.

Having rejected the notion that Islamic doctrine precludes capitalism, he naturally proceeds to consider whether it is conducive to socialism. He maintains that in spite of Islamic precepts

enjoining compassion towards suffering, "these precepts have so far served more often to justify societies based on privilege." He therefore sees no reason to suppose that they will play any part in leading the way either to socialism or to étatism.

Somewhat surprisingly Professor Rodinson makes no mention of the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union where, it is claimed, Marxist socialism has been preferred to capitalism. If it is true that the Western capitalist system was imposed on the Muslim countries of the Middle East and South Asia by colonialist Europe, it is surely also true that socialism was imposed on the Muslim colonies of the Tsarist empire by the Soviet regime. Professor Rodinson's cautious references to "the Soviet experiment" and his conclusion that Lutskiy, the well-known Soviet writer on Middle East economics, is no true Marxist suggest that he might agree with this proposition.

Whether or not one accepts the arguments advanced and the conclusions reached, this is a remarkable book and a notable contribution to the study of economic practice and possibilities in the Muslim East.

Geoffrey Wheeler

Soviet Nationalities

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE SERVICE, US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: *The Soviet Empire. A Study in Discrimination and Abuse of Power*. Washington, D. C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965.

THIS STUDY LEAVES the reader with highly mixed feelings. On the one hand, its 200 tightly packed pages are obviously the product of an assiduous effort of compilation and documentation, providing a large variety of source materials bearing on the nationalities problem in the USSR, supplemented by statistical tables and maps. On the other hand, except in the short chapter on "Economic Retardation," the material is presented in a most indiscriminating fashion. No attempt is made to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources, and a variety of genuine and less genuine experts are quoted in and out of context. The end result

is a smorgasbord of extremely uneven quality.

The study also suffers at times from a regrettable lack of objectivity. There are certainly more than enough valid criticisms to be made of Soviet nationality policy, but there are some crimes which were *not* committed by Moscow, and not every single Soviet move has a hidden nefarious meaning. Is there anything unusual, for example, about the fact that "Russians hold a commanding position within the RSFSR" (p. 13)? Or, whatever the bad features of kolkhoz life, can one say without exaggeration that "the Soviet peasant remains a collectivized serf" (p. 66)? Again, granted that there are elements of colonialism in Moscow's relationship with the nationalities of Central Asia, can it simply be assumed that "politically the Soviets have created a strictly colonial relationship with clearly racial overtones" (p. 144)? Or can one properly define the economic relations between Russia and the non-Russian republics as "imperial-colonial . . . reminiscent of the European experience during the age of exploitation and empire building" (p. 163)?

We are told that students from the provinces are admitted to Moscow institutions of higher learning on the basis of some regional or Union Republican quotas (p. 137). Doesn't much the same thing apply to the Ivy League schools in the United States? What is wrong in the fact that most Soviet universities are located in Russia (p. 139)? Where else would one expect them to be located? What is so unusual if Russians, who account for 54.9% of the total population of the USSR, constitute 58% of the professionals? Is it really surprising that almost four times as many books per capita are published in Russian as in Kazakh (p. 125)? Since when are the Kazakhs such voracious readers? It sounds impressive to say that "in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, the Russian influx has reduced native Lithuanians to a minority" (p. 158), but how many centuries ago was it that Lithuanians last constituted a majority in Vilnius? Are Uzbeks really suffering "total discrimination in art" (p. 135)?

Prerevolutionary conditions are treated with scarcely any greater sophistication. The Ukraine is said to have been "an ordinary colony of the Russian Empire" (p. 130), which is at least controversial; and Russian expansion from the Volga to the Pacific Ocean

is equated with the overseas expansion of the European colonialist powers rather than with the expansion of the United States from the Appalachians westward (pp. 5-6).

Some situations are not so much factually misrepresented as they are simply misunderstood. The retrogression of the Karelo-Finnish SSR to the status of an autonomous republic within the RSFSR (p. 166) is mistakenly attributed to something other than foreign policy considerations; the creation of the Central Asian Bureau is explained in terms of an "unceremonious lumping together of the historic national communities" (p. 103), ignoring not only the common cultural, religious and linguistic heritage of the peoples of Turkestan, but even the fact of Turkestan's prerevolutionary as well as postrevolutionary existence as an administrative unit.

It is unfortunate that the authors of this study, having compiled a considerable amount of valid, useful and interesting material, did not see fit to weed out sources that were either obviously biased or emotionally motivated—or at least accompany such questionable information with some evaluative comment.

Michael Rywkin

Soviet Literature

HELEN VON SSACHNO: *Der Aufstand der Person, Sowjetliteratur der Gegenwart* (The Rebellion of the Individual, Contemporary Soviet Literature). Berlin, Argon Verlag, 1965.

HELEN VON SSACHNO'S book is an attempt to interpret the overall trend of post-Stalin Soviet literature in order to show the connections between "literature, cultural policy, and the spiritual history of the [Russian] nation." While this theme has a sweeping sound to it, the book is a scholarly, documented

volume which carefully avoids meaningless generalizations.

Miss Ssachno achieves her aim by using a selective approach based on her Dostoevskian view of the essence of literature. She maintains that the "vision of Russian literature" has always been a search for the absolute, for the eternal human ideas of truth and justice. She looks for signs of this fundamental outlook since the end of the 19th century, though her book concentrates mainly upon the 1954-64 period of Soviet literature.

In tracing the trend, she finds that in prerevolutionary Russian literature it manifested itself in the expectation of the coming storm. The literature of the early 1920's retained the apocalyptic vision but added to it a sense of metaphysical tragedy and doubts. If anything from the 1920's is still readable, it is the literature of this bent. Without it, she says, we would have "no short stories on the Civil War, no Soviet novel nor Soviet satire, since the naive edifices of the so-called proletarian school of an Ostrovsky, Panforyov, Serafimovich, Furmanov or Artyom Vesyoly have today, as they did in their own times, only a documentary value" (p. 38). The Stalinist period, which she dates from 1929, gradually killed off not only the vision, but also the writers of that vision. Literature was degraded to political propaganda. The trend, interrupted briefly by the war, continued until Stalin's death.

The essence of the thaw period, as Miss Ssachno sees it, consists of a return to the original vision, even though with modification. If the prerevolutionary vision consisted of an expectation of the "rebellion of the masses," then the present trend puts the emphasis upon the "rebellion of the individual." (Her book's title, by the way, is taken from a quote from Boris Pilniak's *The Naked Year*, p. 22.) The Pomerantsev and Ehrenburg articles of 1954 on "sincerity in literature" focused attention on exactly this question—the responsibility and freedom of the individual.

Miss Ssachno divides the "thaw" literature into two basically different

categories: sociological, anti-Stalin protest-literature (prototype, Ehrenburg's *Thaw*) and non-polemical humanistic literature (prototype, Vera Panova's *Seasons of the Year*). Though both trends work in the same direction, aiming at the erosion of the ersatz values of Socialist Realism, it is only the second trend which, in Miss Ssachno's opinion, will in future decades be remembered as literature. Both trends have a twofold aim: to achieve the spiritual emancipation of the intelligentsia, as the conscience of the nation, and to give a fair account of the Stalinist past and post-Stalin present of the nation.

The party—which only partially approves of the "thaw" literature—wishes to retain control over it by using pressure, compromise, and whatever other means it has left. However, with Stalinist terror gone and at least under present conditions unlikely to return, Miss Ssachno envisages a losing battle for the party: the new values created by contemporary Soviet literature will increasingly influence and change the moral outlook of the nation.

Miss Ssachno's book is written in stylistically excellent and highly sophisticated German. Her style should also be mentioned for another reason. To designate milestones or phases of Soviet literary policy, she frequently uses a vocabulary which was coined in Germany during or after the Nazi era (for example, the term "*Gleichschaltung*"—most closely translated as "bringing into line"—with reference to the Stalinist policy of the late 1920's). It is interesting that the similarity in the political approach to literature in totalitarian states produced a vocabulary which can be used interchangeably to describe comparable phenomena; yet to translate such terms into the language of countries which have not gone through the totalitarian experience is often extremely difficult.

For those students of Russian literature who can read the German language, Miss Ssachno's book should be considered essential reading.

Thomas Weiss