

New Light on Lenin

Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary, by Stephen T. Possony. *Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964. 418 pp. \$7.95.*

LENIN and the legend of Lenin have exerted a powerful attraction for research and analysis beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, but the number of critical biographies of Lenin is surprisingly small. Moreover, none of them, not even this one by Dr. Stephan T. Possony, political studies director at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, explains this strange and powerful man and the enormous power he was able to exert over the Russian revolutionary movement, especially during the years from 1917 to 1922.

Part of the difficulty in assessing Lenin lies in his personality and character, both elusive and slippery on the most central issues. Part lies in the nature of his interest and work, a combination of dull bookishness, subterranean subversive operations, and central authority in a party, a government, and an international movement dedicated to concealment and secrecy. Part lies in the difficulty reasonable, rational men inevitably have in trying to understand the "compulsive revolutionary" or destructive dictator, whether it be Lenin or Hitler.

We are already more able in 1964 to penetrate and unravel the difficulties than as recently as a decade or two ago. The intense research completed on Hitler, Mussolini and other authoritarian rulers, the understanding social scientists have acquired of the techniques of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, and the growing use made of documents captured during the Second World War have all increased our ability to understand men such as Lenin. Dr. Possony has benefited from all of these advances and from his own extensive researches in modern international politics. In particular, he has mined the rich resources of the Hoover Institution, where the archives of the Czarist police and captured Austrian, German, and Russian documents have added immense new information. He has also brought together new information concerning the

influence the Japanese government exerted upon the Russian revolutionary movements during 1904 and 1905, when some Russian revolutionaries accepted Japanese financial support against the Tsarist government. Finally, he has made some use of psychology in his effort to understand the revolutionary leaders.

In short, *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary* is a volume reflecting thorough research and intensive analysis. It concentrates on Lenin's life and activities before 1917, to which approximately two-thirds of the book is devoted. It probably provides more data on Lenin's personality, his health and his personal relations with his family and his wife than any other biography in English. In addition, no study of Lenin or of the Communist Party provides so much data and insight covering the incredible underworld in which Lenin and his fellow conspirators lived and worked. Dr. Possony has demonstrated remarkable care in pulling together the numerous and delicate details concerning this shadowy world, in which Lenin and his fellows received financial aid and critical logistic assistance from the Austrian and German governments. While no doubt the Soviet archives could provide even more data than scholars such as Dr. Possony have painstakingly collected, the essential, extraordinary picture is now clear. Certainly, no one even as recently as five years ago could have dreamed that captured Czarist archives and German documents would be as revealing.

The Soviet authorities will dislike everything about this volume, particularly its revelations concerning the Bolsheviks' financial sources during the years before and during the Revolution, Lenin's nervous illness and his personal life, and the essentially dictatorial and destructive character of his work. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a scholarly volume that would satisfy their tastes. However, Dr. Possony's book should add considerably to our own knowledge and understanding of this significant world figure. Soviet life and politics would benefit enormously if their scholars were as critical and candid in their research on this important figure.

Unfortunately, this new biography of Lenin suffers from substantial weaknesses. The style is poor; there are numerous instances of lack of clarity, poor grammar, and incorrect use of words. Moreover, the publisher and the author combined in careless proofreading: there are at least two glaring misprints.

More important, while Dr. Possony has added

immensely valuable detail to our knowledge of the underworld character of the Party's history, he has done it at the expense of incredible detail and confusion. In fact, the college student would almost certainly be repelled by the manner in which the author has presented this fascinating account. The book also suffers from serious shortcomings from the point of view of classroom use or of use by the reader seeking a full biography and analysis of Lenin and his work. For example, Dr. Possony provides very little information concerning Lenin's political thought. The 1917 seizure of power seems almost accidental, and Party and government policy during the 1917-1922 period are so casually and unsystematically described that the ordinary reader would emerge with no understanding of Communist policy or of the reasons for its triumph. Indeed, the Communist victory emerges from this study as one of the great mysteries.

Finally, this historian, like most, admires the techniques and contributions psychologists and psychiatrists have made to our understanding of earlier periods and leaders. However, Dr. Possony is an amateur psychologist, and his earnest efforts to apply new techniques to his immense data do not carry assurance. Perhaps his next effort should enroll the assistance of a competent professional psychologist.

Reviewed by ROBERT F. BYRNES

Race and Achievement

The Geography of Intellect, By Nathaniel Weyl and Stefan Possony. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1963. 299 pp. \$7.95.

WHEN THE AUTHORS of a book begin by telling you what they mean by it, the reviewer's inclination in this respect is simply to quote them. Thus:

The subject of this book is the distribution of human intellectual ability in space and in time. This is a topic of vital importance to the survival of a civilization based upon the freedom of the individual, yet it is one to which very little serious and systematic thought has been directed. Hence, there are both major gaps in our knowledge and areas which