

## What About History?

IN TIME OF WAR it has often been observed that phalanxes of historians, like journalists and preachers, rush to take their places in the front of the propaganda warriors. All that is left is the stance of objectivity, the apparatus of research, the skeleton of footnotes, references to documents and occasions—the façade of scholarship. But the texts of the war-time historians like to tell of the congenital malformations of the enemy's character, of his brute and belligerent inheritance, or his paranoia, his incurable lust for aggression, his deafness to the reason that motivates the ardors of the inhabitants of the country to which the writer belongs and of those, of course, of his allies. Then after the dust of battle settles, the new books and articles appear, sometimes written by the same authors, sometimes by their revisionist successors; and it turns out that matters weren't so simple after all. War guilt is reapportioned, atrocities are reappraised and sometimes acknowledged as having also been perpetrated by the country of the writer. History is returned again to the hands of the peace-time historians—until the next crisis.

This is the pattern for what might be called historic wars—for conflicts like

those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—and which held its form, as far as the Western powers were concerned, through the first World War. But from the beginning the case of the Soviet Union has been different; not only for the historians who write in the Soviet Union but for many of those in other countries the USSR must be defended in both war and peace.

During the war, for example, David Dallin wrote a book about the Soviet Union and mentioned the defection of the Russian General Vlasov. He said that this was the same General Vlasov who had been so highly praised as a great Soviet hero by Eve Curie in her book *Journey Among Warriors*. Mlle Curie had travelled to Russia during the war and Dallin quoted her encomium of Vlasov which had appeared in the first edition of her book. By the time the second edition had appeared, however, Vlasov had gone over to the Germans and Mlle Curie had written that the defecting general was a different Vlasov from the man she had encountered and thought so highly of. That is chapter one of a curious story. Chapter two: a teacher at one of the eastern colleges, a political scientist, reviewing the Dallin book and disliking it heartily,

objected to Mr. Dallin's quotation from Mlle Curie's book, saying she had disavowed meeting the defector and that she had stated explicitly that the Vlasov she had interviewed was quite a different character. Chapter three: Mr. Dallin's careful researches had disclosed that there seemed to be but one General Vlasov and that was the man who, believing that Stalin had senselessly sacrificed the lives of thousands of Russian soldiers, had defected to the Germans after his surrender and declared his willingness to lead an army against the regime he felt was destroying Mother Russia. "Both" Vlasovs, Mr. Dallin pointed out, had the same initials, "A. A.," when they were mentioned in the press as well as in Mlle Curie's book, "both" were reported as being in command of the same sector of the Russian front. Chapter four: I wrote to the professor of political science, pointing out that when Dallin's book was published the only edition in print of Mlle Curie's book had been the one in which she had praised General Vlasov, that the quotation was accurate, and his attack on Dallin completely unfounded. The professor, waving aside this plain evidence of fact and chronology, wrote back citing the lines in Mlle Curie's second edition, which had come out some months after Dallin's book, and said that any quarrel was between Mr. Dallin and me.

This was a war-time episode, but as far as the apologists for the Soviet Union are concerned the war has never ended. As long as Stalin lived he was described within the Soviet Union as the "great Stalin," outside it any reference to the purge trials as being faked, or to the forced labor on which his economic system depended, promptly found a posse of academic defenders of his ways who denounced not the tyrant but the writers of books who dared to spread such calumnies. These acolytes of the Word, of the Truth, of history as it really happened, took the rela-

tivist view—history was not only in its nature time-bound and colored by the prejudices or class background of the writer, it must serve a pragmatic purpose whether it was called advancing the cause of peace, furthering the goal of coexistence, or merely exposing anti-Soviet machinations. All kinds of hypotheses were proposed to account for Stalin's failure to live up to the American dream. One professor of history at another eastern university thought Stalin had acted in such a belligerently anti-American fashion because of the twenty-year treaty of alliance he had signed with the British in the course of the war. Others said Stalin was a prisoner of the Politburo, still others that he could not trust Molotov who kept doing things behind Stalin's back.

Then came the reign of Khrushchev; after the memorable speech of the new leader denouncing the old, the historians inside the Soviet Union reversed their fields. Now they said they had not been free to tell the truth or even to know it, and down came the icons and the monuments and off in the opposite direction went the historical writers, with a new hero in the main role and opposite him a brand new villain whose name had to be taken down from dozens of broad avenues as well as from the city that was the very symbol of the Soviet victory in the Great War. Outside Russia, precisely the same thing happened. Now it appeared there had after all been wholesale purges of innocent people; millions of slave laborers, despite the manifestoes of American liberals, had actually been used—but that was all under the reign of the bad Stalin. Those days were dead and gone; Khrushchev was the apostle of peaceful coexistence, a man who wanted more goods—something the liberals doted on—for the common man in the Soviet Union; such forays into *Machtpolitik* as the building of the rocket pads in

Cuba were readily explained away by Khrushchev's bowing to the demand that he agree to remove them.

But now Khrushchev is gone from his seat of power, denounced in his turn by a new regime whose attack on him appears in *Pravda* and also in serious journals of opinion in the West. One such revisionist statement has just appeared in the *Nation*. In an article published in the issue of October 5, 1964, before it had been announced that Khrushchev had been deposed, Alexander Werth reported on his two-month visit last summer to the Soviet Union. Werth quoted from an article which had appeared in the London *Sunday Times* by Lord Thomson who also had visited the USSR and travelled to Kazakhstan with Khrushchev. Thomson had written: "I came away from my visit to the Soviet Union convinced that the Russians are making a more rapid industrial advance than is generally realized in the West and . . . I am disturbed by this progress . . ." Thomson had then gone on to talk about Khrushchev: "What a salesman! I think one of the world's greatest. He projects his views to his people so forcefully that it is little wonder that his leadership is so accepted. . . . They admire and respect, and yet are in no way cowed by him. Rather it is the pride and affection of a perhaps humble family towards a member who had made good in a big way." Werth commented cautiously: "All this, though correct up to a point, is rather an oversimplification." He then recorded his own impression during an earlier visit he had made in 1959-1960 "that Russia was sitting on top of the world; that prosperity was steadily growing, that everybody was highly optimistic about coexistence with the West, and that Khrushchev was immensely popular for both international and domestic reasons." Since then, Mr. Werth wrote, many Russians would

agree with what Togliatti had written in his political testament in which he said: "It is wrong to speak of the socialist countries . . . as if everything were always right in those countries. . . . Nothing is worse than to create the impression that all is well and then, suddenly, to have to start explaining new difficulties . . . and which are not necessarily isolated phenomena." And, Werth commented, although it might be argued that "the disastrous Russian harvest of 1963 was an isolated phenomenon . . . it continues to affect the Russian standard of living and the general mood of the country." He went on to tell of the many admirable aspects of everyday life, the free medical services, the low rents, the excellent transport system in Leningrad which however had a grievance—many of its best writers, artists, and singers move to Moscow. Also prices were up, food and clothing were very expensive—for example, butter at \$2.00 a pound, a simple cotton shirt cost \$4.00 or \$5.00. Thus, "It may," wrote Werth, "be a sign of greater freedom, but there is certainly a good deal of angry grumbling, not least among the working class. It is directed even at Khrushchev himself, whose optimistic forecasts of only a few years ago are now quoted against him. Some of the more irresponsible young people go as far as to claim that 'things were better under Stalin.'" Farm income was up at the expense of the city workers and "The 1964 harvest has been very uneven. If Khrushchev has effectively demonstrated that the virgin lands, far from being the 'dust bowl' they are supposed by the Western press to have become, remain one of the very largest sources . . . of grain . . . The fact remains that Northwest and Central Russia have again suffered severely from drought."

"For these reasons, perhaps," wrote Mr. Werth, "Khrushchev appears to be less popular with the industrial working class than

with some sections of the peasantry, who compare their present condition with the ruthless exploitation they knew under Stalin. On the other hand, he is well regarded by the intellectuals. Engineers and technicians of every kind consider themselves a privileged elite; . . . Scientists are also pro-Khrushchev because he allows them considerable freedom of discussion. . . . The artistic and literary world also appreciates its greater freedom (though it may not show much respect for Khrushchev as a critic). . . . The artists and film makers no doubt realize that some ex-Stalinist hatchet men are still keeping a vigilant eye on them, but the feeling prevalent among these people . . . is: 'For God's sake, let Khrushchev stay; anyone else might be *much* worse.' . . . As Olga Bergholz put it to me: 'Khrushchev may not be a great literary critic but, hell, so long as he's there I know at least that I shall never go to jail as I did in 1938 under Stalin.'

"But the new freedom is only one part of the story. If nobody is worried any more about his personal security 'so long as Nikita is there,' everybody in Russia is sharply worried about the way the world is going." They were worried, wrote Mr. Werth, about "That guy Goldwater" who would mean "not only a possible war, but a *probable* war. . . . a Goldwater victory would mean the end of the policy symbolized by the test-ban treaty, which is also looked upon as the real cornerstone of Khrushchev's foreign policy. . . ." These Russians want to live in peace with everybody. They are intensely patriotic and even nationalistic, but are singularly free . . . from any missionary spirit with world pretensions. . . . this very widespread public sentiment is largely reflected in Khrushchev's increasingly cautious foreign policy. Although, as it were, honor bound to defend Cuba in the event of an American invasion . . ."

Thus, Mr. Werth whose book on the Russian German war which has just been published, has been hailed by the *New York Times* as "one of the most important books to come out about World War II." It may be so; I have not read his history but it is possible to say something about Mr. Werth as a historian. For on November 2, after Khrushchev had been deposed, Mr. Werth had another article in the *Nation*. And lo, three weeks after his first article he was writing about a different Khrushchev and a different public response to him in Soviet Russia. Mr. Werth starts out his second piece with some self-praise. He writes: "In 'Russia in 1964,' reporting on my summer visit to the USSR, I indicated that Khrushchev's stock had fallen low in his own country. This was particularly true among the industrial workers, who blamed him for shortages, the high cost of living and the mess in agriculture." Then Mr. Werth went on to revisit his visit to Soviet Russia. He wrote: "The working class openly attacked Khrushchev as a 'windbag,' . . . An industrial executive in Moscow went so far as to tell me in August: 'You have no idea how our workers hate Khrushchev.' Another thing which rankled was his Cuba fiasco. Many people tended to agree with the Chinese that the whole stunt of setting up missile bases in Cuba and then withdrawing them was a mixture of adventurism and capitalism. . . . No doubt, as I wrote in my previous report, his determination to give first attention to improving relations with the United States and the West was popular in the country at large; yet in party circles this 'excessive' pro-Western and anti-Chinese orientation seems to have been causing more and more disquiet. I could feel it everywhere I went."

Why, if Mr. Werth ran into this sentiment of unease wherever he went, did he fail to mention it in his first article? In

that report Khrushchev merely appeared to be less popular with the working class than with some sections of the peasantry. And in that article, too, Lord Thomson was quoted on the admiration and respect, pride and affection, the Russian people had for Khrushchev who was one of the world's greatest salesmen. "Rather an oversimplification," said Werth, but still obviously worth quoting. And Werth from his own observation tells how highly the intellectuals—technicians, scientists, artists, and film makers—regarded Khrushchev. They had to deal before with the Stalinist hatchet men and one of them at least had gone to jail under Stalin; but that was 1938 and long ago—before the reign of the good Khrushchev—as of October 5, 1964. The only reference to Cuba in the first article tells of the patriotic Russians being honor bound to defend that country in the event the United States should attack. In the second piece, the Khrushchev Cuba policy is a "fiasco" and attributable to a man who "mixed adventurism and capitalism." It may be doubted that those suddenly revisionist words—should he ever read them—would be taken amiss by Khrushchev, for he was brought up in the rough and tumble view of history that the winner takes all—the offices, the appointments, and the adulation of the historians. He in fact made his own signal contribution to this

view when he made his memorable attack on Stalin and began the demolition work on that legend. For him now to be the victim of the next revision might pain but would certainly not surprise him.

"I pity," writes Mr. Werth further, "the Soviet historians who will have to rewrite the hundreds of volumes of 'Khrushchevite' history, with its absurd magnification of the part played by Khrushchev in the 'winning of World War II.'" Mr. Werth wonders if there may not be at least a partial rehabilitation of Stalin: "perhaps some of the more absurd manifestations of Khrushchev's pathological anti-Stalinism will be corrected . . ."

It is probably too early for even one as knowledgeable as Mr. Werth to do other than ask questions as to how the new party line will develop. But one thing is certain: whoever directs it and whoever propounds its theses will find its echoes not only in the Soviet press but also among the liberal historians.

Just as the great Stalin became in due course the employer of hatchet men after he was succeeded by the jovial Khrushchev, admired and respected by all save some angry grumblers and irresponsible young people, so is this same Khrushchev turned overnight into the man the workers hated. For this school of history the only crime a Russian statesman can commit is to lose or die. —E.D.