

A Lesson to Learn

The Secret Betrayal, by Nicolas Tolstoy, *New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979. 503 pp.*

MORE THAN three decades have passed since the Western Allies turned over millions of Russians to Stalin. Many of them were civilians deported from Russia by the Germans and kept in slave labor camps during the war. Others were ordinary prisoners of war, captured at the Eastern Front. But there were Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Kalmucks, Georgians, and Azerbaidjanis who defected to the German side to fight Communism in German uniform. The majority of these were enrolled in German-officered regiments, called the Eastern Legions; others were members of the more or less paper "Vlasov Army of Liberation." There were also the Russian forced labor battalions, which were incorporated in the Tods organization and used in military construction works. The fate accorded to almost all of the repatriated men and women was monstrous. Members, or suspected

members, of the Eastern Legions and Vlasov units were shot as soon as the British or American military authorities handed them over to the N.K.V.D. and S.M.E.R.S.H. The others—civilian D.P.'s and P.O.W.'s—were sent to the Vorkuta labor camp in the Arctic Circle. The victims knew what to expect; many committed suicide to escape a horrible destiny. Leaders in the West were fully aware of the consequences of the forced repatriation. Yet they deliberately sacrificed a number of helpless men as a political sop to appease the Soviet government.

Based on a meticulous accumulation of facts and key-witness testimonials, Nicolas Tolstoy's book goes far beyond anything written about this controversial issue. Using recently-released British government documents, the author reveals the details of the secret Russo-Anglo-American diplomatic negotiations which led to the forced repatriation. He uncovers irrefutable evidence that as early as October, 1944, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, without argument or objection, hastened to promise Stalin the return of all his subjects. Subsequently he and Foreign Commissar Vyacheslav M. Molotov laid the foundation for the terms of repatriation completed in the Yalta Agreement. As Tolstoy notes, this agreement contained no provisions regarding the repatriation of unwilling Soviet citizens. Yet, both British and American military authorities used force to send them back to Russia. This enormous operation, involving forced repatriation, kidnappings, suicides, and widespread infractions of the Geneva conventions concerning prisoners of war, was known to only a very few in the West. Of these, the majority strongly opposed it as unjustifiable and inhuman. Tolstoy points out that military leaders such as Generals Montgomery, Bedell Smith, and Eisenhower often refused to hand over Russian prisoners of war un-

willing to repatriate. Diplomats like Averell Harriman and Robert Murphy warned about the tragic consequences of indiscriminately carrying out the Yalta Agreement. But, according to Tolstoy, the British Foreign Office unswervingly supported the policy of forced repatriation in the hope of facilitating the return of British prisoners liberated by the Red Army.

Interestingly, United States policy differed greatly from that of Great Britain. As Tolstoy demonstrates in great detail, the State Department first rejected the principle of forced repatriation. Subjected to strong British pressure, it succumbed. A few score Russians who had served in the ranks of the German army were sent back. In the light of all the evidence, however, Tolstoy's claim that Eden and his advisers believed in Stalin's good will and that Eden himself felt strong affection and admiration for Stalin is an overstatement. Nevertheless, the vital question remains: Was the forced repatriation necessary? The answer is, of course, "No." The Western tradition of granting political asylum was abrogated in the case of Russian prisoners of war during and throughout the years immediately following World War II. What made the sinister episode even worse was the fact that thousands of Tsarist fugitives, who had fled their country in 1919 as allies of the British and American interventionist forces and were, thus, not covered by the Yalta Agreement, were also handed over to S.M.E.R.S.H.

Tolstoy's work is heavy reading, yet it is one of the most illuminating books in recent literature on contemporary Russia. It is helpful not only in increasing our knowledge of what really happened during wartime collaboration between Russia, Great Britain, and America but also as a lesson we all have to learn.

Reviewed by JANOS RADVANYI