

# On the Stage of Russian History

Donald W. Treadgold

**Russian Studies**, by Leonard Schapiro, *New York: Viking, 1987. 400 pp. \$24.95.*

**Alexander Kerensky: First Love of the Revolution**, by Richard Abraham, *New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. xiii + 503 pp. \$29.95.*

**Stalin and the Shaping of the Soviet Union**, by Alex de Jonge, *New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986. 542 pp. \$19.95.*

**The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine**, by Robert Conquest, *New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. 411 pp. \$19.95 (paper \$9.95).*

**Soviet Defectors: The KGB Wanted List**, by Vladislav Krasnov, *Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986. xvi + 264 pp. \$16.95.*

**Hammer**, by Armand Hammer, *New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1987. 544 pp. \$22.95.*

THE CURRENT EUPHORIA in our nation's capital, and elsewhere, regarding the prospects for Soviet-American relations may or may not have firm grounding in the facts—that is not my subject here. What may be confidently asserted is that the current scene must, for any sensible judgments to be made, be surveyed from the standpoint of solid historical understanding.

Of the selection of recent publications here examined, the one that goes furthest

back is the compendium of the short writings of the late Leonard Schapiro entitled simply *Russian Studies*. As a wise man trained in law, Schapiro always stressed “the historically conditioned weakness of the sense of legality” (Harry Willetts's introduction) in Russia's past. He did not limit his concerns in this respect to Russia. Nuremberg produced an “appalling travesty of international law”; the United Nations is a “fraudulent mess”; “if internationalism is ever to be attained, it will come about through the regeneration of individual societies and not through the attempt to simulate union among a congress of barbarous and nationalist entities”—that is, countries where the rule of law was tenuous or absent.

Such lines may lead one to relegate Schapiro to the cantankerous far Right; it would be quite unjust to do so. Willetts rightly speaks of “his restrained and objective examination of phenomena which he knew to be detestable.” One instance might be his surprisingly sympathetic pages on the young Lenin. He ranges through a multitude of subjects in articles and reviews, not least some of the greats in Russian literature, too seldom figuring in the writings of American historians: above all Turgenev, but also Dostoevsky, Blok, and Solzhenitsyn. It is all good reading, and never falls below a high level of perception and knowledge; the book is almost free from minor errors and is beautifully edited and printed.

I would fault Schapiro on one issue alone: He finds in the Russian past things that were not there. To be sure, there were great and real horror and oppression. But revolutionary *ideas* (as distin-

guished from the scarcely articulated aspirations of the peasant revolts) came from the West. The Decembrists did not advocate "distinctively Russian socialist ideas" for the simple reason that there were none in that period (that is, before 1825)—and moreover, none in the West either under that name. Populism was not an "essentially indigenous Russian movement" at all; the leading narodniks such as Lavrov were uncompromisingly Westernizing socialists. Bolshevism was not "a nationalist Russian movement . . . first and foremost." To say that the Bolsheviks in power were peculiarly brutal and savage in a way reminiscent of old Muscovy is one thing; to declare them "Russian nationalists" is quite another—it is both to ignore the West European thought-world to which the persons and ideas found in the text and footnotes of Lenin's writings belong and to denigrate quite gratuitously the humane and spiritual sides of the genuine Russian national tradition that the Communists have combatted so furiously. Schapiro rightly singles out such writers and activists as Boris Chicherin and Dmitry Shipov as working for the Russia governed by law that he wished for. The flaw I have tried to point out is a small one in this splendid book.

Most of the Schapiro volume is devoted to the pre-revolutionary part of Russian history; Richard Abraham's *Kerensky* begins with his protagonist's early years, but the bulk of the narrative deals with 1917—the few months when Kerensky had any historical importance—and afterward. He was born in 1881 and thus turned thirty-six two months after the February Revolution began; by widely-remarked coincidence, he and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin both came from Simbirsk; the fathers of both were educational administrators and probably knew each other. It is surprising that this is the first biography of the most important person in the Provisional Government; perhaps part of the reason is that the brief episode of democracy in Russia is so little known in this country (American school children repeatedly oblige the critics of public education

by stating that the Bolsheviks overthrew the tsar). It is a labor of love. There are seventy-two pages of footnotes, drawing on sources in Czech, Finnish, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish, as well as the usual Russian, French, German, and English. No one will ever want any more detail about Kerensky's life, and few will cavil at the author's sympathetic, often admiring, still cautious and critical approach to the man.

However, the book has its shortcomings. It does not read easily, transitions are often awkward, and frequently persons and events are referred to without being introduced. There are some curious slips. A few examples: on the frontispiece "Sebastapol" is an error—the name may be spelled a couple of ways but not that way; the great amount of transliteration from the Russian in the footnotes is almost flawless, except that the author has inexplicably placed diacritics over the "e's" in a whole series of words that should not have them; he puts one not two accents *aigus* on *émigré*; *Trudovik* (a group then party to which Kerensky belonged) should be translated "Toiler" or "Toiling" not "Labor" (a narrower term); Nicholas II did not create but merely revamped the State Council.

More troublesome is his treatment of the pre-revolutionary government. Nicholas II "persistently preferred proto-fascist policies to democratic ones"—a silly statement on several counts; Stolypin, termed "a notorious hard-liner," authored land "reforms" which Abraham puts in disparaging quotation marks; the field court-martials of 1906 were said to have been established as a response to only two assassinations and (it is true) sentenced several hundred to death, but there is no mention of the fact that terrorists killed more than 4,000 officials in the revolution of 1905. He gives short shrift to "smutty conservatives" who, whenever a radical came along daring to "speculate about sexual relations based on love rather than convention," tried to undermine his influence by accusing him of advocating "free love."

As for Kerensky's brief interlude on the

stage of Russian history, the author appreciates his position between the Kadets, the Octobrists, and the generals on his right and the Socialist Revolutionary leaders (Was he to be considered one or not?), the Mensheviks, and the Bolsheviks on the left. Abraham does not, however, undertake to evaluate what he did at any stage. Did he do as well as anyone could have done? Was he right or wrong to permit the disintegration of the army, to attempt a last offensive, to seem to cooperate with and then to repudiate Kornilov, to let the Bolsheviks out of jail, and then wait for them to strike him down—as they proceeded to do? The author is silent. The narrative is here, the interpretation is lacking.

Lenin and Stalin both are fortunate enough to have biographies devoted to them by Adam Ulam. Alex de Jonge has sought to improve on Ulam's *Stalin*. Altogether he has not succeeded. Again we are reminded that Stalin could have been the bastard of the explorer Przhevalsky; Stalin the seminarian and bank robber (for the sake of the party, of course) are described, and so forth. De Jonge does not mention that the Tiflis seminary was Stalin's only option for higher education, since there was no university there. We do not to this day have any clear idea of why or how he became a Marxist; we are not certain whether he was or was not a double agent who worked partly for the Tsarist secret police. The combination of Stalin's obscurity as a young man and the exclusively hagiographical approach to him required when he was approaching middle age makes it extremely difficult to write his biography, and de Jonge is not at fault.

It is, of course, a story lurid enough to fit the picture of the dust jacket—lurid, but also curiously mixed. On the one hand, Stalin was a monster who sent millions to their deaths for no good reason, in peacetime, an inveterate and vulgar drinker and carouser, a murderer of all but toadies, whom he promoted in incredible fashion—the great physiologist Pavlov declared that the only precedent for certain elec-

tions to the Academy of Sciences was when Caligula made his horse a senator (actually, consul); de Jonge is wrong that Stalin's anti-Semitism was "quite as rabid as Hitler's" either in theory or in practice, but it was bad enough. On the other hand, Stalin succeeded in charming Roosevelt and a host of foreign visitors, diplomats, journalists; he managed to persuade the Western allies to swallow his betrayal of the Poles killed at Katyn and in the battle of Warsaw (1944); he displayed, and apparently felt, a genuine regard for literary greatness—he phoned Pasternak after Mandelstam's poetic attack on Stalin was discovered and asked, "But he's a great writer, is he not, a great writer?"; he evacuated Zoshchenko and Akhmatova in a special plane from Leningrad to escape Nazi siege—even though he caused more than one writer's death. I do not mean to imply that the uncertain merits I have listed somehow balance the unspeakable crimes Stalin committed.

Probably de Jonge's simpler and less sophisticated biography will attract more readers than Ulam's, and the story certainly needs to be better known by the general public. For the most part he traverses well-trodden ground, but in one respect the author has made a new contribution—by using British Foreign Office documents. He shows us an Anthony Eden consistently determined to suppress the truth about Soviet conduct during and after the war, abetted by two especially nauseating underlings named G. M. Wilson and Thomas Brimelow. Edward Crankshaw called Wilson "a Quaker of the cold-blooded kind." When famine struck the Ukraine after World War II, and cannibalism occurred in the USSR for the third time (previously during the Civil War and collectivization), Brimelow dismissed reports of misery and oppression as "pop-pycock." De Jonge is also good on the moral disintegration that overtook the whole country during the height of the Stalin terror.

Altogether the book reminds us once again, as Alexander Zinoviev has been insisting, that the horrors of the Stalin

period were not neatly distributed between the dictator and the secret police on the one hand and the rest of the population on the other. This was a society whose army had a standing order for any soldier to shoot his fellow soldier if he seemed to be holding back during an advance, where at the height of the purges "everyone felt guilty," in which such an intelligent man as Bukharin, instead of thinking about how to end the madness, when he was about to return from Paris to his death in Moscow, told the two Dons that it was not just Stalin but Russia that was all wrong, and that he was going to read through the Marx archive just brought by German socialists to Russia to find out from some overlooked bit of Marx's writings why Russia was the way it was.

The Great Terror (as Robert Conquest named it)—the purges in which Bukharin and many others perished—was horrible enough, but the worst single episode of Stalin's domestic policy was collectivization together with the "terror-famine," the former climaxing in 1930 and the latter in 1932-33. This was the time when, in a territory inhabited by some 40,000,000, "a quarter of the rural population, men, women and children, lay dead or dying, the rest in various stages of debilitation with no strength to bury their families or neighbors . . . [while] well-fed squads of police or party officials supervised the victims." The result, if not the purpose, was to crush "two elements seen as irremediably hostile to the regime: the peasantry of the USSR as a whole, and the Ukrainian nation"—which two overlapped a great deal.

Conquest's book, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (the title is taken from the medieval epic *The Tale of the Host of Igor*), unbelievably, is a first. No one has previously attempted a full-scale study of this episode, exceeding the Holocaust's 6,000,000 in number of deaths. The author's careful computation is that 14,500,000 died as the result of "dekulakization" and the famine of 1932-33. Part of the reason for such amazing neglect is to be found in Stalin's dis-

covery of a marvelously effective technique for influencing world opinion in the course of this very episode. He learned that "even though the truth may be readily available, the deceiver need not give up. He saw that flat denial on the one hand, and the injection into the pool of information of a corpus of positive falsehood on the other, were sufficient to confuse the issue for the passively uninstructed foreign audience, and to induce acceptance of the Stalinist version by those actively seeking to be deceived." The technique has been used successfully many times since then. In 1932-33 it was sure-fire on a Western population lacking any comprehension of a government which could drive rural people to a point where a starving mother could tell her children, "If I die, eat me," while such correspondents as Walter Duranty toured the afflicted areas and denied there was any famine, though he told the British embassy privately that ten million might have died—the same Duranty, by the way, who received a Pulitzer Prize to the cheers of an American dinner audience only politely responsive to all other prize-winners.

The Russian Orthodox Church came under heavy attack in the 1929-30 period especially. Before the Revolution, Moscow had 460 Orthodox churches; today, with several times as many inhabitants, it has about 30. When Hitler's troops came to the western part of the USSR, they sometimes permitted at first the reversal of the hated actions of 1929-33 by dissolving the collective farms and reopening the churches. It was Stalin's good fortune that the army's Nazi superiors refused to make such reversal their policy.

Conquest is a master of the facts of the period, and his judgment is equally impressive. He does not hesitate to present the Soviet arguments in favor of collectivization or to point out that cultural "Ukrainization" was real at first, and only later became a sham. One strength of the book is to show how each major actor—Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Bukharin—changed policies or practices, sometimes several times, as events proceeded. There are no

stereotypes or *a priori* arguments. He manages to get through the truly hair-raising, nauseating story of the actual events in the villages of the Ukraine and elsewhere without giving way to emotional rhetoric.

Under the tsars, the peasants were helped in times of famine; under the Soviets, no one helped, and the people from the cities often made things worse, deliberately and on orders. As late as the end of the 1930s, Soviet citizens were worse off than under the tsars. One might ponder for a moment the very large numbers of Americans who at one time or other have not realized that these things are so.

From the horrors of the period of the First Five-Year Plan a number of Soviet citizens recoiled. It is surprising that more did not try to flee. Over the whole period of Soviet history several different sorts of persons did leave: the émigrés of the Revolution and Civil War; the displaced persons (DP's), often outside Soviet borders as a result of Nazi or official Soviet action, or both, at the end of World War II, who tried to remain abroad and succeeded (often despite U.S. and British use of force to send them back to Stalin); the contemporary emigration of Jews and a few others; exiles against their will. Defectors, however, are here defined as those who have left in violation of Soviet law and against the wishes of the Soviet government. Krasnov, who did so himself in 1962, has in *Soviet Defectors* sought to study the phenomenon by way of what he calls the KGB Wanted List—a secret volume, regularly updated, a copy of which was somehow obtained by the émigré monthly *Possev* (Frankfurt), and which he was allowed to use.

The author has subjected the information regarding 470 defectors from 1945 to 1969 to painstaking statistical analysis. The statistics are neither very surprising nor very illuminating, but the book still contains much of interest. One man reports that he had to repackaging "Made in USA" butter with Soviet wrappings; another, privy to such information, reports

that he never in twenty-one years encountered a single case of foreign espionage in the USSR in peacetime, though thousands were shot on the false charge. The Western press does not come off well. Krasnov recalls that most early revelations of defectors were met with disbelief (compare the enthusiastic belief accorded Duranty's lies, as pointed out above) until at least partly confirmed by the Soviets themselves, in Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956 and elsewhere.

Krasnov attempts to sum up the message of the defectors: The Soviet regime, lacking a popular mandate and opposing the national aspirations of all Soviet peoples, must rule by lies and violence; the defectors feel duty-bound to tell the West that only strength and firmness will work in dealing with Soviet leaders. Many of them have been puzzled and bitterly disillusioned at the treatment given them by the U.S. government; time and again, under four different administrations, "negligence; ineptitude; incompetence; and lack of sensitivity, compassion, and political will" were shown in handling them. A recent example is the 1980 case of the Soviet soldier who tried to defect to the American embassy in Kabul, which boasted not a single Russian speaker, and was sent an interpreter only after four days' delay; the soldier "was reported to have freely chosen" to return and "has not been heard of since."

A quite different book is *Hammer*, remarkable in its way. It has a well-meaning, naive, even childlike tone from beginning to end, even when Armand Hammer is finding euphemisms for his unpleasant marital problems. Neither the author nor his amanuensis (Neil Lyndon) has any notion of the Russian past or the motivation to look anything up. For example: Nicholas II in 1901 signed a decree in Moscow permitting the hanging of Lenin's brother; in fact, it was Alexander III who was tsar when Alexander Ulianov was hanged in 1887, and his capital was St. Petersburg, not Moscow; a book was presented to Alexander I "about 1860"—but he reigned 1801-25; Stroganov was not "one of the

greatest of all icon painters” but the name of a rich family which *patronized* a great school of icon painters—this from the owner of Hammer Galleries! His geography is shaky: We hear of eastern Libya “up by the Algerian border,” from which one goes west towards Egypt (*sic*). And so forth. It is not hard to debunk this saga of the man who knew everybody in the world worth knowing and passes through life doing good in all directions—read the passages on Hammer in Joseph Finder’s *Red Carpet* (1983) to learn on how feeble a basis rest the stories of Hammer’s profitable business ventures in the USSR, his fabled friendship with Lenin (they had a single one-hour meeting), and his friendship with John F. Kennedy (there was none at the time claimed). The Communist connections of the Hammer family are obscured in *Hammer* but spelled out in some detail in *Red Carpet*.

The testimonials the publisher has collected for this partly fictional volume are gathered into a slick-cover pamphlet with

nine pages of text and included with the book. They come from the vice president, two ex-presidents, four present or past heads of foreign governments, Bob Hope, Jonas Salk—the pamphlet is itself a piece of Americana, of a peculiarly ludicrous and repulsive kind. Why do these celebrities not direct people who want to learn about Soviet-American relations to the books on the above list that precede *Hammer*? Because, Ann Landers writes (I am not making this up), it “reads like a novel,” while no one is likely to read himself to sleep on accounts of cannibalism in the Ukraine. There is a place for the Armand Hammers of this world, and they may even have their minor uses in furthering international peace. But I confess some discouragement at the fact that world leaders heap fulsome praise upon books such as this one, while serious, truthful books about the second superpower must make do with sober and sensible dust jackets that will attract far fewer readers.