

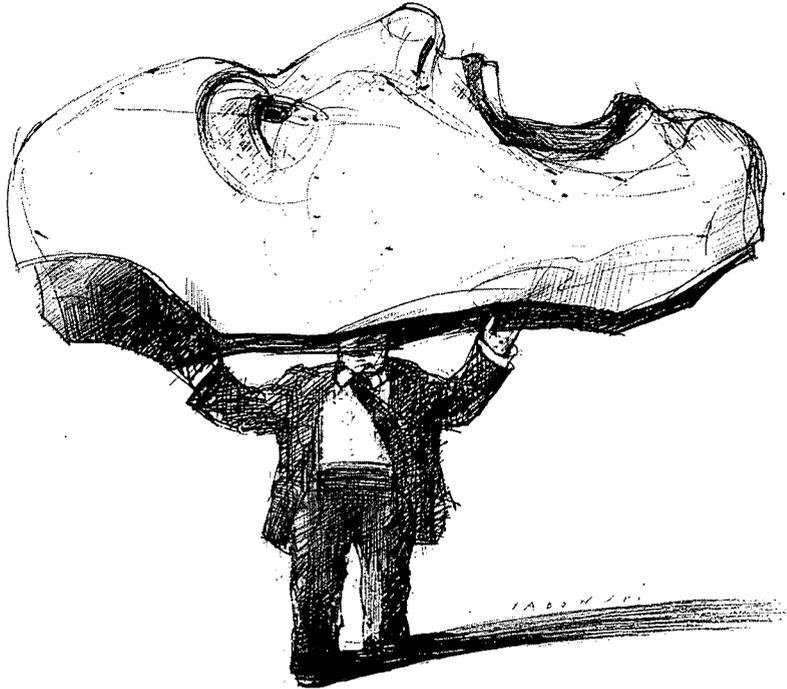
As We Go Marching

by Samuel Francis

*“... Your tragic quality
Required the huge delusion of some major purpose to
produce it.*

What, that the God of the stars needed your help?”

—Robinson Jeffers, “Woodrow Wilson”



The Democratic Imperative: Exporting the American Revolution

by Gregory A. Fossedal
New York: Basic Books;
293 pp., \$19.95

◆
“When a term has become so universally sanctified as ‘democracy’ now is,” wrote T.S. Eliot in 1939, “I begin to wonder whether it means anything, in meaning too many things: it has arrived perhaps at the position of a Merovingian Emperor, and wherever it is invoked, one begins to look for the Major of the Palace. . . . If anybody ever attacked democracy, I might discover what the word meant.”

If Eliot could read Gregory A. Fossedal’s *The Democratic Imperative*, he would remain as mystified today as he

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was 50 years ago. Mr. Fossedal certainly does not attack democracy, and his response to the classical criticism of it is cursory. He dismisses this criticism in two pages, quoting no less an authority than H.G. Wells to show that “Aristotle would have enjoyed the electoral methods of our modern democracies keenly.” But if Mr. Fossedal does not reveal the meaning of democracy by attacking it, neither does he clarify it by any precise definition. Not until the end of the second chapter does it occur to him that some clarification of what he has been and will be talking about throughout his book might be called for. Although he is content to relegate his definition to a long footnote, the passage merits quotation at length and consideration in depth.

In this book, the term [“democracy”] refers to a political system run by leaders chosen in periodic elections open to general participation

and free debate. These leaders serve a government of limited powers, with certain rights such as free speech, a fair trial to those accused of serious crimes, and so on, the denial of which is beyond the state’s reach. It is assumed that with those rights intact, voters will be able to choose the optimal arrangements for, say, economic freedom.

This crucial footnote continues for most of the page with further distinctions and elaborations, but neither there nor elsewhere does Mr. Fossedal tell us what certain key elements of his definition mean. How “general” does participation have to be before a nondemocratic system becomes democratic? What are “free debate,” “free speech,” and a “fair trial”? What is “and so on”? The content and meaning of such terms are so variously interpreted in the United States and other countries that

reliance on them for defining a word such as "democracy" is not helpful. Moreover, it is odd that Mr. Fossedal nowhere specifically includes in his understanding of democracy the element of opposition, though the right or power of opposition to an incumbent set of rulers is essential to most Western ideas of freedom.

In the second paragraph of this footnote, Mr. Fossedal tells us that "For the purposes of this book, where an advance of economic or civil freedom occurs, even without the function of a representative body, it will be equated with an advance of 'democracy.'" But in the next paragraph he says he "will not be offended if readers mentally scribble in the word 'representative' before the word 'democracy' wherever it appears throughout most of the book." Thus, we are to assume that Mr. Fossedal's democracy is representative, even when there is no representation.

To clarify further what he means, Mr. Fossedal has appended to his book three world maps for the years 1875, 1935, and 1988 to show the ebb and flow of democracy across the globe, rather like those old advertisements for Sherman's paint. The first map shows Panama and Yugoslavia as nondemocracies, though neither state existed in 1875. It also shows the whole of the continental United States in 1875 as simply "democratic," but the US territory of Alaska is only "partly democratic," though much of the Western part of the country then enjoyed precisely the same legal and political status as Alaska. Great Britain also is shown as completely democratic in 1875, though its electorate was still strictly limited according to economic class and excluded about 80 percent of the adult males and all women, and its landed aristocracy, established church, and hereditary monarchy and House of Lords were then far more powerful than they are today. In the American "democracy" of 1875, universal suffrage for white males existed in all states, though it was not mandated by the Constitution, and women, blacks, and Indians were not guaranteed the vote. States determined for themselves who voted, senators were not popularly elected, and direct primaries were virtually unknown. Few reactionaries today would be unhappy with this degree of democracy.

The map for 1988 tells us that

Taiwan and mainland China belong in the same category of "partly democratic," which is a step ahead of South Africa, communist Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique, all of which are "undemocratic." Zimbabwe also is classed as "undemocratic," though on p. 203 Mr. Fossedal refers to it as a "one-party democracy." Japan and India are democracies according to the map, while Mexico is only partly so. In all three countries, however, there are universal suffrage, more or less free debate, and regular elections, though single parties have dominated their governments for so long that formal rights of opposition are somewhat academic. The reader will be happy to learn that Alaska, still only "partly democratic" even in 1935, has by 1988 mastered whatever examinations Mr. Fossedal put to it and taken its degree as a full democracy.

Whatever democracy is and wherever it might be, Mr. Fossedal's book is devoted to the thesis that its development everywhere in the world should be the main (perhaps the only) goal of American foreign policy. The bulk of his volume expounds how this goal may be pursued—through propaganda by the broadcasting facilities of the US government and education by the National Endowment for Democracy, through support for guerrilla forces, and through international economic policies. Mr. Fossedal begins his book with a salute to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as "an active American attempt to extend democracy beyond its own shores." Unfortunately, as he acknowledges, the naïfs of the Brigade soon met the Majors of the Palace in the shape of the Comintern agents who ran the Brigade and used it to try to subvert Spain on behalf of Joseph Stalin. More fortunately, freedom in Spain was saved by the very undemocratic Gen. Franco, who knew political fraudulence when he saw it. However, the support of Communist fronts does not seem to perturb Mr. Fossedal, since he later writes that "the United States should have considered support for the African National Congress as early as 1983," despite the control of the ANC and its terrorism by the Soviet Union and the South African Communist Party. Even if all the members of the ANC were devoted readers of *Human Events*, to support an armed insurgency in another

country is an act of war. It does not occur to Mr. Fossedal that what he is contemplating is unprovoked aggression against a state that has never threatened the United States and in fact has been its loyal supporter since World War II.

Instead of spending his energies in the study of how the United States could export democracy, Mr. Fossedal might have been better advised to have concentrated on pondering three fundamental questions, affirmative answers to which appear to be largely unexamined presuppositions of his book.

First, he might have asked whether democracy is an intrinsically good form of government. If the contemporary United States is the model of democracy, the answer is not self-evident. The expansion of the franchise in the United States has occurred in tandem with the enlargement and centralization of the state, with reliance on socialist economic policies, and with the systematic use of concentrated power to uproot social institutions and classes, cultural patterns, and local and regional pluralism. Despite the vast technological and economic resources of the United States, American democracy is only marginally able to protect its citizens and interests abroad and seems utterly incompetent to enforce minimal standards of order at home. The criminal corruption of officeholders—in Congress, the executive branch, and in many urban and state governments—is commonplace, but corruption in the broader sense of the use of public power for private ends, ideological or material, is so routine that it has become an acknowledged part of our government.

These disadvantages might be bearable if democratization were accompanied by an enlarged control of governmental power at the popular level, but this does not seem to be the case. Despite universal suffrage, increased openness in government, and more active participation in some public forums, American democracy is governed largely by a permanent and only partially visible elite of bureaucrats, managers, advisers, staff aides, technicians, and clerks, whose role in decision making is seldom disclosed, whose power is never subjected to popular judgment, and whose ability to subvert, co-opt, or deflect even the most intrepid reformers

seems virtually invincible. Even in popular elections, the dependence of candidates and parties on massive amounts of money and the arts of political manipulation serves not to enhance popular control but to avoid it, leading to what liberal journalist Sidney Blumenthal has called "the engineering of consent with a vengeance."

It may be that there is no necessary connection between the forms and processes of American democracy and these obvious flaws of the current political order, though their historical conjunction suggests that there may well be a connection. In any case, Mr. Fossedal does not consider the question.

Secondly, Mr. Fossedal might have asked, assuming that it is a good or desirable form of government, whether democracy is possible in various non-Western or nonmodern states and societies. His assumption, again, is affirmative, based in large part on a wave of democratic movements of the 1980's in such societies as the Philippines, South Korea, and several Latin American states. Yet he conducts no serious analysis of this trend, its causes, its capacities for success, or its possible consequences. While Mr. Fossedal recognizes the connections between economic strength and a stable liberal democracy, he tends to neglect other preconditions such as a high degree of literacy, a stable infrastructure of governmental control, a national consensus shared by all parts of the population, and (perhaps most important) a cultural tradition that includes the many presuppositions about power and its uses characteristic of Western society. Mr. Fossedal does not sufficiently reflect upon the fact that Western democracy is less the product of "natural rights" than of several centuries of evolution within a particular civilization that recognizes and rewards individuality and opposition to a far greater degree than Oriental, African, and Islamic cultures do. Such concepts as a "loyal opposition," a public rather than a dynastic or patrimonial idea of political office, a distinction between secular and religious authority, the legitimacy of political involvement by subordinate social groups, the effectiveness of voting, a national rather than a tribal, feudal, or sectarian identity, and the willingness of those who control the instruments of force to abide by noncoercive political decisions—all are basic

to Western ideas of modern democracy but may not pertain in many non-Western or premodern societies and may not be exportable in the same way that Coca-Cola is.

Mr. Fossedal does not consider the argument that Latin America seems to undergo cycles of democracy and dictatorship at intervals of every 30 years. He never mentions the classic case of the Weimar Republic, in which a society utterly unprepared for democracy voted itself into dictatorship. He never discusses the concept of "totalitarian democracy," in which mass participation is manipulated to represent the General Will, the *Volk*, the proletariat, the People, or other abstractions useful to modern tyrants. Nor does he deal with the argument that democratic movements in many Third World societies may be the expressions of relatively new, modernized elites of intellectuals and technocrats alienated from traditional ruling classes of clergy, landowners, and military and who may seek to use democracy as a means of displacing the older elites and seizing power

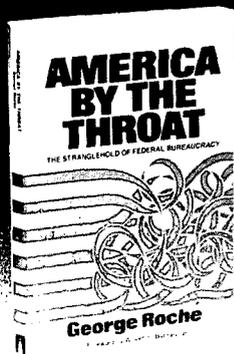
for themselves. Such new classes in Third World states, as Barry Rubin has argued, can easily form the social base of modern dictatorships rather than democracy. It may be that democracy is indeed on the march across the globe, but Mr. Fossedal does not consider the alternatives sufficiently to persuade us.

Thirdly, Mr. Fossedal does not deal at all adequately with the question of whether the export or development of democracy is compatible with American national interests. Given the way in which he defines "national interest," however, he manages to give a quick and easy affirmative answer to this question as well.

"The purpose of American foreign policy," he writes, "cannot be explained without first answering a prior question: What is the purpose of the American government? To know what we are for in the world, we must know what we are for at home. . . . The goal, as our framers put it, is to secure the rights of mankind." Mr. Fossedal goes so far as to

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suggest that anyone who doubts that the purpose of our foreign policy is to promote the "rights of man" is un-American—"To argue against a foreign policy to promote the rights of man, then, is to argue against the rights themselves, and thus against our own institutions"—and he relies on the equality clause of the Declaration of Independence to justify his interpretation of America's purpose.

We have been through all this before, but let us rehearse it briefly once again. The Declaration says nothing about the "purpose" of the US or any other government. It is not even a charter of government, but a proclamation of national independence and a catalogue of the abuses of power that justified the act of separation. The real purposes or goals of the US government are quite clearly spelled out in the Preamble of the US Constitution, and they say nothing about equality, human rights, or even foreign policy. The Constitution did not establish the political equality of individual citizens, and its toleration of slavery, the nonfranchisement of blacks in most nonslave states, the diversity of state political practices, and the indirect election of senators and the President would seem to contradict the

Straussian-Jaffa-Kesler interpretation of the American political tradition that Mr. Fossedal endorses.

From the false premise that the "rights of man" are the goal of the US government Mr. Fossedal draws the non sequitur that the same goal and purpose must animate our foreign policy. It is at this point that his book ceases to be merely frivolous and becomes dangerous. Other possible goals of foreign policy—national independence, territorial security, economic prosperity, and the physical protection of our own citizens and their property, rights, and interests at home and abroad—simply are not encompassed within Mr. Fossedal's goals. Indeed, it is possible that a good many of our legitimate national interests would be transgressed by Mr. Fossedal's foreign policy. Treaties with nondemocratic governments, private business contracts enforced by them, and geopolitically necessary alliances with them might all be jeopardized by the democratically elected regimes that replace them. The genuine democratization of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, for example, would almost certainly transform world power relationships and perhaps lead to the disintegration of the USSR and even to

protracted warfare in Europe, Western Asia, and the Far East. "Majority rule" in South Africa almost certainly would result in an anti-Western (and probably brutally racist) government oriented toward the Soviet Union and toward a control of the sea routes and vast mineral resources of southern Africa. The democratization of Saudi Arabia or other Persian Gulf states could lead to radical Islamic and anti-Western regimes that could jeopardize oil flows to the West. The democratization of Greece has already led to the most anti-American government in Europe, and the democratization of Spain has endangered our military bases there. The democratization of the Philippines has led to the doubling of the communist insurgency there, to increased political corruption and anti-Americanism, and also to endangerment of our bases.

Mr. Fossedal's division of the world into "democracies" and nondemocracies proceeds from an abstraction that bears no relationship to concrete US interests or to what the United States must do to protect those interests. It lumps pro-American governments such as those of South Africa and Chile in the same camp as enemies like Cuba and the Soviet Union. It puts close allies such as Great Britain in the same camp as uncooperative governments like India. It puts irrelevant states such as Botswana on the same level as states like Japan. The fact is that democracy/nondemocracy is simply not a useful standard by which to govern our foreign policy. It obscures or ignores too many other significant variables to offer a reliable guide to evaluating our interests or knowing how to pursue them.

One of the persistent flaws of Mr. Fossedal's book is his confusion of democracy with liberal government, though F.A. Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty* long ago clearly distinguished them: "Liberalism is a doctrine about what the law ought to be, democracy a doctrine about the manner of determining what will be the law." As Hayek (and many others) noted, there is no necessary connection between liberalism and democracy, and in fact liberal government was secured in England and the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries well before the advent of democracy. The growth of democracy, as noted above, is historically associated with the

LIBERAL ARTS

GOOD CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, REJOICE?

Some tidbits from the new Methodist hymnal: "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," those militaristic favorites, remain, only because when news leaked out three years ago that the hymnals' editors were going to drop those songs, thousands of letters poured in to protest. Nevertheless the hymnal has been bowdlerized and gone the way of the Episcopalian and Lutheran hymnals before it. "White" is out, as it's unjust to equate sinfulness with a color: in the hymn "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus" the line now reads, "make me as bright as snow." Not even Methodist founder John Wesley's brother, Charles, is exempt from these tireless editors: a line in his hymn "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" that refers to "ye deaf," "ye dumb," "ye blind," and "ye lame" gets a little asterisk and the comment below, "May be omitted." God still gets to be Our Father but "Him" is out, as are "men" and "brothers" and "sons." As the newspapers are reporting this, on women's issues the hymnal is striking a "middle ground." After all, the hymn "Strong Mother God" was rejected by the editors.

diminution of liberal government.

Yet one of the characteristic beliefs of the modern democratic left has been that democracy is essential for the protection of liberal government. Mr. Fossedal adheres to this belief and states it explicitly: "It may be possible that other forms of government would satisfy the rights of man, but practical human experience suggests that certain institutions are needed for government to respect those rights consistently." Among the institutions he suggests are elections, constitutions, and divisions of powers, though the latter two are properly liberal rather than democratic institutions. In any case, his statement is simply erroneous.

It is a fallacy of both the liberal and the democratic mind that a set of formal procedures, by itself, will protect freedom. A more realistic view has long recognized that while certain procedures can help protect freedom under some circumstances, in other circumstances they only endanger it. This is why the case of the Weimar Republic, which enjoyed the formal procedures of liberalism and democracy, is classic. The procedures and forms of liberalism, democracy, or any other constitutional type must reflect a balance of power among significant social forces—e.g., rural versus urban, business versus labor, religion versus secular authority, class versus class, region versus region—if they are to institutionalize real freedom and social diversity and enhance the level of civilization. The existence of this kind of balance may be formalized through legal and political procedures, but it can exist independently of them as well, and while clear and stable procedures are helpful in institutionalizing the balance of social forces, it is the substance and not the form that is important. Statesmen should design the forms to reflect the substance, as *The Federalist* recognized, and not try to engineer the substance to fit forms derived from "natural rights" or other abstractions. Like the man who believes that milk comes from supermarkets rather than from the careful civilization of cows, liberals and democrats believe that freedom comes from the procedures themselves; they fail to recognize, as Hayek does, that "freedom is not a state of nature but an artifact of civili-

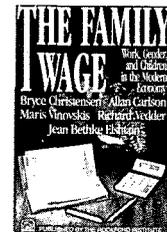
zation."

Moreover, if this kind of pluralism is not to degenerate into an anarchical factionalism, it must be limited by common acceptance of a social myth that at least implicitly defines the ends of the public order and the legitimate means by which they may be pursued. Mr. Fossedal's "natural" or "human" rights provide one such myth that has proved useful to certain groups aspiring to power throughout modern history, but the universalism of this myth tends to ignore or even undermine the particular cultural framework and social balances necessary for the preservation of concrete freedom. In any case, whether this distinctly post-Christian, Western myth exerts any enduring appeal to non-Western cultures is a question Mr. Fossedal never explores seriously.

Mr. Fossedal's prolonged ode to global democracy is characteristic of the neoconservative-social democrat-Straussian-"progressive conservative" school of political thought that now seems to prevail on the mainstream American right. Both his text and his acknowledgments are filled with quotations from the exponents of this movement and expressions of gratitude

to them. The chief goal of this movement seems not to be a serious exploration of and challenge to the presuppositions of the dominant American political culture, but rather the pursuit of its own political and cultural power. Hence, it is content to adapt prevailing liberal humanist presuppositions to its own purposes and avoids expressing any thought (or tolerating expressions by anyone else) that might offend, threaten, or frighten our own Majors of the Palace who guard the public discourse. To challenge the dominant presuppositions would mean isolation from the mainstream of political debate that these presuppositions define and would make the quest for power far more difficult. The result has been the intellectual impoverishment of the American right, the emasculation of a genuinely radical conservatism, and its replacement by bubble-talk and sophomoric cant more suitable for the Boy Scout Jamboree than for consideration by grown men and women concerned with the prospects of their civic culture. Mr. Fossedal's contribution to the body of thought and scholarship produced by this movement is no doubt destined to find a place as one of its classic expressions. ◊

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The Politics of a Death

by Donald W. Treadgold

Stalin and the Kirov Murder

by Robert Conquest

New York: Oxford University Press;
164 pp., \$16.95

It is difficult to think of a case comparable to the murder of Sergei Mironovich Kirov. Here one of the top leaders of a great country was killed—most probably by the wish of the supreme dictator, the murder being used as full or partial justification for the arrest, torture, exile, or execution of many, then thousands, and finally millions of men and women charged with some guilt relating to that deed. To be sure, there seem to have been other cases where a highly placed Soviet leader was killed, or his death hastened, by Stalin's initiative, and then posthumously praised or in effect canonized. But none of those cases involved the kind of large-scale false accusation of murder, or conspiracy to murder, that Kirov's death set off. This episode has a grisly uniqueness.

Such is a possible justification for Conquest's latest book. He has earned the title of our premier Kremlinologist, both in terms of his careful methods of handling evidence and the amazing quantity of his publications. Conquest states his opinion of this case in the preface: that "Stalin's guilt is scarcely in doubt," but that the final verification and official Soviet condemnation of Stalin for the murder of Kirov (which he expected might precede appearance of the book) would still be welcome.

Kirov, born Kostrikov in the Vyatka region of northern Russia, was studying to be a mechanic in nearby Kazan when he met some radical students from the local university and began to print leaflets for them. Next he spent time in Tomsk in western Siberia, where he joined the Social Democratic Party and was elected to the party committee.

Active during the Revolution of 1905, he was arrested and served three years in prison; after his release in 1909 he went to Vladikavkaz in the Caucasus, changed his name to Kirov, and married a girl whose sister was a Bolshevik. When the Bolsheviks organized a party separate from other Social Democrats in 1912, Kirov was among them. In October 1917 he was a delegate from the Caucasus to the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, and then took a leading role in the Bolshevik recapture of the Caucasus, including the savage conquest of independent and democratic Georgia. In 1926 he was named candidate member of the Politburo and became First Secretary of Leningrad's provincial party committee.

Despite showing occasional signs of moderation, Kirov remained a hard-line, tough-minded henchman of Stalin through the ghastly years of collectivization and all-out industrialization from 1929 to 1933. But by February 1934, at the XVII Congress of the Communist Party, the atmosphere of internal struggle and sacrifice was passing. Some highly-placed party members were horrified by what they had seen or knew had been done to the peasantry and wished to dethrone its author; others believed that Stalin had been the best person to lead the violent and merciless campaign that had now slackened, but that a less brutal person, a conciliator, was now needed in the seat of power. A number of leading Communists approached Kirov with a proposal that he replace Stalin as General Secretary—the position that Stalin had made the focal point of the dictatorship. Kirov declined, declaring—quite plausibly—that the entire policy of the party would be thrown into question if such a move was made. Nevertheless, nearly 300 (out of 1,966) delegates at the Congress voted for Kirov and against Stalin even for Central Committee membership (let alone dictator). Stalin, however, would have his revenge; as Khrushchev revealed in his secret speech of 1956, 1,108 out of the 1,966 delegates were later shot.

Stalin, who was aware of the group that opposed his leadership, then asked Kirov to come to Moscow. Kirov refused, and it was agreed that he could remain in Leningrad until 1938. There he remained, the obvious choice for any conspiratorial or democratic effort to replace Stalin. In September 1934, Stalin sent him to Kazakhstan, which had suffered grievously during collectivization, to bring in the harvest; there he had a car accident, which some have thought a first assassination attempt. Kirov attended a plenum of the Central Committee in Moscow in November, returned to Leningrad and was shot on December 1, 1934. The actual assassin was Leonid Nikolayev, an unemployed party member who suffered from both physical and psychological weaknesses. What happened next defies the imagination. Stalin and others immediately went to Leningrad to "investigate." By March from 60,000 to 100,000 people had been seized and deported from Leningrad, and one did not need to have had the remotest connection with Kirov or the Leningrad leadership to be arrested. Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had been two of the most highly placed Bolsheviks, were arrested, released, rearrested, given a trial in January 1935, sentenced to ten and five years respectively, retried publicly in August 1936, and executed. The Western reaction to the public trial was mixed, but many found it plausible that Zinoviev and Kamenev had conspired in the assassination.

The final—or perhaps the penultimate—chapter of this story lies in the gradual but mounting suspicion that the culprit was none of those who had been in the dock, but Stalin himself. It was Trotsky (safely abroad until 1940, when one of Stalin's agents sank an axe into his skull) who first hinted and in October 1936 charged that Stalin was responsible, though he thought Stalin had intended to prevent the deed at the last moment and then proceed against the oppositionists. While Khrushchev came close in his secret speech to labeling Stalin as the guilty party, he drew back,