

Power and Ideology

by Paul Gottfried

The Soviet Union, the Communist Movement, and the World: Prelude to the Cold War, 1917-1941

by Alan J. Levine
New York, Westport, and London: Praeger; 203 pp., \$37.95

Alan J. Levine explores the relations of the Soviet Union with both Asia and the West, from the Bolshevik Revolution through the Nazi-Soviet Pact. From the title and from the author's biographical notes, it is apparent that this volume is intended as an attempt at understanding the Cold War. In fact, Levine has already concluded the sequel to this book, which I for one look forward to seeing in print. Having been familiar with his interpretation of Soviet foreign policy from the time I was made a reader of his doctoral dissertation, I am still in awe of the factual thoroughness and rigorous argument that he brings to bear on his subject. Levine has read all available secondary works, and used whatever original documents were accessible in the United States.

Even so, what is most significant about his work on the Soviet Union is neither his thoroughness nor his painful digesting of endless monographs, including Stalinoid revisionist defenses of the Sovietization of Eastern Europe. Rather, Levine's greatest talent is in making sense of the foreign policy of Churchill's "enigma wrapped in a riddle." He has weighed all the standard interpretations of Soviet behavior toward other countries, from George Kennan's and Richard Pipes's emphases on Russian national character, through Stefan Possony's picture of demonic Communist expansion, to the desperate attempts by the American and European left to depict the Soviets as a perpetually beleaguered power. Levine believes that the Soviets have been too aggressive towards their neighbors, and too ruthlessly determined to impose their political-economic system even on friendly occupied countries, to be described as merely defensive in their actions. During the time in which the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 (which Stalin had sought since 1933) was in effect, and after helping to bring Hitler to

power through the German Communists, the Soviets slaughtered as many Poles in their occupied area as the German Nazis did in theirs.

Levine is reluctant to speak of the Soviet Union as an extension of the pre-revolutionary czarist regime; he insists on viewing that government as one with self-imposed geopolitical limits. Though affected by nationalist and imperialist currents, czarist Russia at the beginning of the century was interested not in world control but in absorbing contiguous regions and in Russianizing subject minorities. Levine also stresses the liberalizing tendencies operative in the imperial government in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. Looking at the establishment of a Russian parliament (the Duma), the legalization of political parties (including the Bolsheviks), and the land reforms begun by the Russian statesman P.A. Stolypin in 1905, Levine concludes: "Had peacetime economic development and the reforms instituted after 1905 continued undisturbed for two decades, Russia might have peacefully become an industrial constitutional monarchy."

Levine takes a relatively favorable view of Russian internal development on the eve of the First World War, and a relatively negative one of the democratic leftist provisional regime from which the Bolsheviks took over in November 1917. His attitude is certainly not that of the sentimental czarist but rather that of the clearheaded historian. Formerly a student of William Blackwell, the Russian economic historian, Levine accepts Blackwell's documented thesis that Russian economic modernization, particularly the development of heavy industry, was well underway by 1914. Yes, the czarist regime struck out sporadically against Jews and other minorities, but it was also accepting by then a new political and social order: one in which the growing middle class and a landed peasantry would hold the cards.

Russia's ill-advised entry into the First World War set into motion a chain of events that brought revolution and economic, as well as political, disaster. The provisional government, brought to power by the first upheaval in March 1917, set the stage for the second upheaval that brought the Communists to power in November.

Its moderate socialist prime minister, Alexander Kerensky, panicked, on the basis of questionable rumors, over an alleged plot led by Army commander-in-chief Lavr Kornilov. Kerensky called upon all forces of the left to save his government and allied himself with Bolshevik conspirators against right-center constitutionalists. Lenin and other Bolsheviks then dispensed with Kerensky in the mopping-up action known as the "October Revolution."

Levine, in the end, comes down on the side of those who interpret modern Soviet expansion in terms of Marxist dogma. But he does qualify what in other hands might be served up as an anticommunist *plat du jour*. Thus, Levine never denies that Lenin and Stalin were interested in "the reconquest of the Russian Empire." Having surrendered considerable territory—which the Allies did not return—to the occupying German armies in 1917 and 1918, Russian leaders were understandably concerned with retrieving lost land. They also appealed to nationalist feelings among the Russians and among divided neighboring peoples whose territory they coveted. Despite its apparent incompatibility with Marxist internationalism, nationalism was a tool that the Soviets discovered long before Hitler attacked the "Russian motherland."

But Levine also stresses the application of an expanding body of Marxist-Leninist teaching to the expansionist aims of the Soviet Union. His pointed references to Lenin's writings during the First World War are designed to show the conceptual foundation for an expanding Soviet state. Fighting capitalist imperialism, mobilizing socialists and socialist peoples against bourgeois societies, and waging wars of popular liberation provided the Leninist justification for the export of the Soviet experiment and of Soviet armies. Levine does not claim that Lenin's interpretation of Marxist revolutionary practices was the sole or perpetually overriding force behind Soviet aggression. Rather, he seems to suggest that it was a *leitmotiv* that could be and was invoked by aggressive Soviet leaders, who at least half-believed in Marxism-Leninism. This *leitmotiv* was also available to gull those who allowed themselves to be fooled: for example, Westerners who believed that the

Soviets were fighting for democratic socialist internationalism during the Spanish Civil War, when Stalin used that conflict as a smokescreen to negotiate with the Nazis while finishing off dissident socialists in Spain and Russia.

Levine's treatment of Marxism-Leninism also serves as a bridge toward understanding Stalinism. Levine takes seriously Stalin's argument about the need to "establish socialism in one country" in preparation for its armed spread. He reviews this line of thinking in *Problems of Leninism*, which was intended as Stalin's gloss on Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Though Stalin's views were "not original," Levine points out, they were in keeping with Lenin's interpretation of Marxism. Lenin had already defended Russia as the "nation of workers and peasants" and accorded a special role to intellectuals and administrators as the vanguard of the working-class movement. And though Stalin further emphasized these features of Leninism, he never abandoned the vision of world revolution. Contrary to the charges made by Leon Trotsky and other dissident Marxists-Leninists, the Stalinist scheme justified "socialism in one country" only as a precondition for socialism on a global scale. Through this explanation of Stalinist doctrine, Levine anticipates the theme of his second volume, the Soviet "liberation" of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. There he will continue his study of the interplay of power and ideology.

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Battling the Gorgon

by William H. Nolte

Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness

by William Styron

New York: Random House;
96 pp., \$15.95



In this little "Memoir of Madness," first delivered in abbreviated form at a symposium on affective disorders sponsored by the Department of Psychiatry of The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and then greatly expanded for publication in *Vanity Fair*, William Styron recounts, and attempts to account for, his descent into a mental depression that led him to the brink of suicide. What finally enabled him to escape his life-threatening despair is never, almost needless to say, made clear; he just somehow lived through the depression, aided to be sure by the solicitude of family and friends, and by a seven-week stay in the hospital. Although he confesses that the Group Therapy in the hospital did nothing more than make him seethe, "possibly because it was supervised by an odiously smug young shrink, with a spade-shaped beard," it probably did him no harm. And although the "organized infantilism" of the Art Therapy sessions seemed to him little better, they probably helped him regain his sense of comedy. It is, more than anything else, that sense of comedy or humor, as H.L. Mencken once noted, that keeps a reflective and skeptical man alive. In any case, Styron outlived his depression (or Melancholia, as he prefers to call it), and near the end of his hospitalization had his "first dream in many months, confused but to this day imperishable, with a flute in it somewhere, and a wild goose, and a dancing girl."

Styron dates the onset of his illness from the time when he discovered that the least amount of alcohol, even a mouthful of wine, caused him "nausea, a desperate and unpleasant wooziness, a sinking sensation and ultimately a distinct revulsion." But that is not to say that his deprivation from alcohol was the cause of the depression; it may just as well have been an effect, since

by that time he had begun to suffer from insomnia and, concurrently, from the tranquilizers that had been prescribed to relieve him from that malady. He notes, incidentally, that his drug-induced sleep was invariably dreamless—hence, the great sense of relief when he began to dream again.

In his effort to explain what is apparently inexplicable he posits other possible causes. Perhaps he had been flooded by his turning 60, "that hulking milestone of mortality," a temporal marker that coincided with his malaise. Or was it the vague dissatisfaction with the way his work was going, stronger during that period than ever before? He finally concludes that his morbid condition had its origin much earlier, that it was in fact genetic in nature; his father, he recalls, had "battled the gorgon for much of his lifetime." But, not quite content with that either, he believes an even more significant factor was the death of his mother when he was 13, too young to achieve the "catharsis of grief," and thus doomed to carry with him the burden of rage and guilt, "potential seeds of self-destruction."

But then all such suppositions are mere guesses, and not very convincing guesses at that. I can of course understand and sympathize with Styron's effort to comprehend his "madness," nor do I dispute his contention, stated earlier on in the essay, that in its extreme form depression is madness and that it "results from an aberrant biochemical process." But I seriously doubt that we know, or can know, any more than we have ever known before about what actually triggers the aberration. In one of several poems she wrote on the affliction, Emily Dickinson hypostatized despair as "that White Sustenance," and in "There's a certain Slant of light" she most memorably calls it "An imperial affliction / Sent us of the Air"—in effect admitting that it comes from we know not where, and then departs in equally mysterious fashion:

When it comes, the Landscape
listens—
Shadows—hold their breath—
When it goes, 'tis like
the Distance
On the look of Death—

The despair described by Dickinson is

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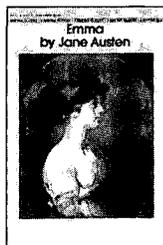
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