

Stalin's Slogan

Socialism in One Country, 1924-26. By E. H. CARR. *Macmillan*. 45s.

IN HIS slow but stately progress through the history of the Russian Revolution, Professor Carr has now reached the crucial period of the mid-twenties, when the personal struggle for power among Lenin's successors broadened into a fateful conflict over long-term policies. It was in these years that the Bolshevik leaders slowly and hesitantly came to grips with the problem of industrialisation: how slowly and how hesitantly, Mr. Carr's account makes plain. It was then, too, that Stalin gradually tightened his grip over the party apparatus—the same apparatus which eventually became the organisational focus of his "revolution from above." When these two processes came to a head simultaneously, at the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925, the Soviet leaders—somewhat to their own surprise—found themselves committed to the policy they had rejected when Trotsky proposed it some years earlier. Two more years had to pass before the Fifteenth Congress, in December 1927, took the final step of sanctioning the draft Five-Year-Plan, but by the end of 1925 the crucial choice had been made.

In this complex of crises and decisions, a pivotal place came to be occupied by the slogan "*Socialism in One Country*," with which Stalin's name was henceforth associated. That it was at first no more than a slogan becomes clear from Mr. Carr's laboriously documented account of the confused inter-party debates and polemics of the period. Stalin, it is plain, hardly knew what he was letting himself in for when—with some encouragement from Bukharin—he asserted that the Soviet régime could solve its internal problems even if there was no world revolution. The further step from national self-sufficiency to breakneck industrialisation belongs to a later period, after Trotsky had been driven out and his programme adopted by men who refused to look at it when he advocated its merits. In 1925 few people dreamed of such things. If Stalin did, he kept quiet about it. The "industrialisers" were to be found on the left wing of the party, although it is noteworthy that in the person of Sokolnikov—then Finance Commissar—Trotsky's following also included an extreme *laissez-fairist* to whom the solidity of the currency meant a great deal more than industrialisation: further proof that the political battle-lines had been drawn in disregard of economic logic.

As yet Professor Carr has given us only the first of three projected volumes on the great

controversy of the mid-twenties; most of it is taken up by an extremely detailed and thorough analysis of the economic background. The factional struggle is to be discussed at greater length in a second volume, external relations in a third. Fortunately Mr. Carr has departed from this rather rigid framework to the extent of introducing short sketches of the principal *dramatis personæ*: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and Stalin. There is also a tantalisingly brief account of the inter-party debates on the eve of the December 1925 congress, when Zinoviev and Kamenev publicly broke with their erstwhile ally, Stalin. It is typical of the confusion attending the major turning-points in this extraordinary story that the break came over Stalin's support for the then official policy of making greater concessions to the wealthier peasants—shortly to be denounced as *kulaks*. In 1925 it was still possible for Communist leaders to assert that "socialism" could and would be "built at a snail's pace," though Bukharin even then got into trouble by declaring that the peasants should be encouraged to "enrich themselves." This was heresy, and has remained so, though Gomulka has come close to saying something similar.

Amidst these complexities—every fluctuation

in the harvest yield meant a political crisis in the Central Committee—the great fact that stands out from Professor Carr's account is the constant strengthening of the Communist party's hold over the country, and the machine's hold over the party. These were the years when the Bolshevik leadership consciously substituted itself for the proletariat in whose name it had made the revolution—so much so that when in 1927 Trotsky appealed to non-party elements he was in all seriousness denounced as a counter-revolutionary. The party bureaucracy had not yet given birth to a new ruling class—it *was* the new ruling class, or rather it filled the void left by the collapse of the old order and the absence of anything organic that could take its place. For a brief period in Russian history, the shape of society came to depend upon the decisions taken by a handful of leaders. Even an academic theorist like Bukharin could change the course of events by shifting from one theoretical position to another. Such situations never last long, but the intoxication born of them leaves its mark upon the decision-makers. Autocracy was in the Russian tradition; when Communism became the vehicle of a planned "revolution from above," the autocratic spirit reasserted itself with a vengeance. This was one of the many

ways in which the "principle of continuity," in Mr. Carr's language, triumphed over the "principle of change."

Why this momentous change came to be associated with the figure of Stalin, requires some further explanation. Mr. Carr's analysis establishes clearly enough the reasons for Trotsky's failure; he is less convincing in trying to account for Stalin's success. He seems indeed somewhat baffled by the personality of the protagonist, though a clue to his success is suggested by the observation that, as the most nationalist and "isolationist" of the Soviet leaders, he was instinctively driven into courses which fitted both Russia's anti-Western tradition and the technical requirements of ultra-industrialism. Here it may be thought that Mr. Carr solves his problem by looking at the situation through the eyes of the victors. The theoretical justification for this procedure was suggested years ago by the late Professor R. G. Collingwood who, as a good Hegelian, held that we can understand a problem only by arguing back from the solution that was eventually adopted: Nelson won the battle of Trafalgar, hence he had solved his tactical dilemmas, and we can discover what these were, and what his general strategy was, by arguing back from the tactics he employed in the battle. Villeneuve, having lost the battle which Nelson won, must be presumed to have failed to solve *his* problems, and we thus cannot discover what his plans were by studying his manœuvres. The argument is ingenious, but it ignores the possibility that victories may be won despite faulty planning, or even in the absence of any plans.

Again, it may be true that we can understand the nature of a problem only by arguing back from the solution, but how do we know that there was no alternative? In the case of post-revolutionary Russia, there was at any rate the alternative of building industry upon a prosperous peasantry, instead of squeezing the maximum surplus out of the countryside for the benefit of the planners. That, of course, would have involved a slower tempo, and it is arguable that the U.S.S.R. would then not have become the world's second industrial power; but it cannot seriously be maintained that "Socialism in One Country" by definition meant starving the population for decades, in the interest of erecting a giant heavy industry. The fact is that in 1925 Stalin himself did not think so—on the contrary, he was all for going slow. So were most of the Bolshevik leaders. That in the end they outdid Peter the Great—not to mention Ivan the Terrible—in the sacrifices they imposed upon the Russian people, is a historical circumstance with which we have to reckon.

The Novels of George Eliot

BARBARA HARDY

A new study of George Eliot's novels which devotes particular attention to her power of form, interpreting this not only as the product of conscious artifice but also as the direct expression of her profound analysis of the human condition.

25s net

Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*

HERBERT J. HUNT

Professor Hunt relates the development of the various categories into which Balzac divided the stories of the *Comédie*, and the genesis and development of the characters who reappear in them, to the stages of the author's progress as a creative artist. He provides, in effect, a fully informative guide to Balzac's grand conception.

April 23 50s net

THE ATHLONE PRESS

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Perhaps it requires no rational explanation; certainly it has never found one.

George Lichteim

The Monotony of Love

The Chains of Love. By ZOÉ OLDENBOURG. *Gollancz*. 18s.

The Captive and the Free. By JOYCE CARY. *Michael Joseph*. 18s.

The Ruined Boys. By ROY FULLER. *Deutsch*. 15s.

Love in 4 Flats. By RALPH RICKETTS. *Chapman and Hall*. 15s.

Let Us Find Heroes. By GREGORY SOLON. *Constable*. 16s.

ZOÉ OLDENBOURG's splendid and sprawling new novel, excellently and feelingly translated by Michael Bullock, *The Chains of Love*, is about a group of artists in Paris: and for a harder set of people to bring alive you would have to comb the five continents. It ought to be as easy to write a love story about one place, or one set of people, as another. But Paris, and Parisian left-wing intellectuals (subsection painters and sculptors particularly), have been overworked till the very names of streets and districts, the very smell of paint and clay, seem more fictional, more "romantic" in the wrong sense, than actual. Then, too, though it may sound paradoxical, it is harder, I think, to write a passionately intended and passionate sounding love story about people to whom sex (if not love) is something almost as commonplace as paint or clay, and as uninhibitedly regarded, than it is to write about one in which there is an element of conflict, not so much between the lovers as between one way of life and another, one relationship and another, where the physical consummation of a love affair is less casual, less a foregone conclusion. This is not to advocate eight and a half volumes of snails' pace seduction, such as you find in *Clarissa*, with consummation in the ninth, but simply to state the (pretty obvious) fact that the "glass of water" attitude to sex does not noticeably diminish the excitement. (In fact, Madame Oldenbourg's main character Stéphanie is anything but promiscuous: but the atmosphere of pervasive promiscuity—a basically unexciting one—exists, of course.) Here the love affairs, though mainly triangular or even quadrangular, are made so terrifyingly passionate that one almost really

believes in a man's suicide for love; and, so closely is one involved with them that one follows with a personal sense of fullness or loss the fluctuations of Elie's feeling for Stéphanie, Stéphanie's for Aron, Aron's for Stéphanie, Stéphanie's for Francis, and so on, since they are never mechanical or arbitrary. The characters live at an intense, but credible, level of feeling; and this intensity extends far beyond the scope of a particular love affair, to their attitude to their work, to their surroundings, to their families: particularly one feels it in the relationship between Stéphanie and her illegitimate child Lisbeth—their complete interdependence, the fun and physical playfulness, the mother's half-exhausted, adoring sense of responsibility, the sort of sense that makes it impossible for the mother of a small child ever to sleep really soundly, for the consciousness of the child's needs is there, even in sleep. It is in making us feel the humanity of her characters, her meaning of the word love and the way it conditions their behaviour, that Madame Oldenbourg excels: "Oh, the everlasting backslidings and fresh beginnings," she writes, "the monotony of love!"

Joyce Cary's last novel, posthumously "put together" (for he wrote his novels in a curious horizontal way across the years, spending as