

shake up our own ranks, to show them that there was no turning back, that ahead lay either complete victory or complete ruin. . . . The severity of this summary justice . . . showed the world that we would continue to fight on mercilessly, stopping at nothing.

*Stopping at nothing*—is not this but a paraphrase of the nihilist slogan, “*Everything is permitted*”? But where, one pauses to wonder, is the idealism of the dedicated terrorists of 1905?—Kalyaev, telling his comrades, “I could not throw the bomb when I saw the Grand Duke’s children riding with him in the carriage”—Voinarsky saying to approving co-conspirators, “If Dubassov is accompanied by his wife, I will not throw the bomb”—Savinkov holding back his bomb when he saw that ‘innocent strangers’ might be killed on Admiral Dubassov’s train—the same Savinkov escaping from prison revolver in hand, resolved to shoot any officer that bars his path, but to turn it on himself rather than shoot an ordinary soldier? How many words of Trotsky’s “explanation” would Stalin have to change in applying them to the extermination of Leon Trotsky, all his family, and his “faithful servitors”?

THOUGH TRAGEDY PERSONAL AND POLITICAL are in the pages of the diary, not a line of it suggests that Trotsky has re-thought anything, learned anything from his own fall and exile by a régime to which everything is permitted and which “stops at nothing.” Nowhere is there any new-found wisdom, any trace of humility or even a momentary doubt. Every line scornful, omniscient, cocksure, full of self-importance and certitude—and all the dogmatic pronouncements and judgments so wide of the mark!

Blum is a “has-been,” his whole concern being to prevent the working class from struggling against fascism. Blum and Cachin in their “united” opposition to Trotskyism are ineptly compared to Kerensky and Tseretelli opposing Lenin in 1917. Engels’ relation to Marx is absurdly and humourlessly compared to Christ’s relation to Jehovah. Trotsky feels a closer kinship with Roehm than he does with Leon Blum. Macdonald is “more contemptible than Mussolini”; the Webbs are closer to Stanley Baldwin, and Baldwin “closer to the Celtic Druids as intellectual types” than to Lenin and the author of the Diary. Spaak is “a shoddy little man . . . an honest ‘friend of the people’ . . . no more than that.” (One is reminded of Trotsky’s last word on Stalin: “a plebeian democrat of the provincial type . . . such in essence he remained to the end.”) Trotsky believed such epithets were the most devastating at his command, for he hated “plebeian democracy” more than the Barbarism with which he believed he would con-

tend when “parliamentary democracy collapsed now with a stench.”

THERE IS YET another sad note, subdued but persistent, running through the pages of the Diary. The Diarist feels that his powers are beginning to decline. “Old age is the most unexpected of the things that happen to a man.” “The worst vice is to be more than fifty-five years old” (before the Diary opened, Trotsky turned 55). “Contemporary history is running in high gear. . . . The only pity is that the organism-destroying microbes work even faster.”

Deep down within him Trotsky senses that he will not return in triumph to Russia in five years, or ever, nor preside over the re-making of the world and of man in the image of his blueprint. Indeed, five years later there is his *Testament*, bearing witness once more that neither the years of unending purge, nor the Stalin-Hitler Pact, nor the Second World War, has brought a shadow of a doubt. The *Testament* stipulates no errors, revises no positions, only reaffirms “my Marxist, dialectical materialist, irreconcilable atheist . . . faith in the Communist future.”

“Life is beautiful,” it assures those whom he expects to gather to hear the reading of the will. To “future generations” he leaves the task so ill begun “to cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence, and enjoy it to the full. . . .”

Bertram D. Wolfe

## Russian Painting in London

THIS year’s Winter Exhibition at the Royal Academy is a sad disappointment. Its aim is praiseworthy—to present the West for the first time with a more or less complete picture of the development of painting in Russia from the 13th century to the 20th. But the picture that has emerged is a dull one, and it is only too easy to sympathise with those critics who have been eagerly contrasting what the Russians have produced in the fields of music and letters with their lack of aptitude for the plastic arts. In fact, the failure of the exhibition is due not so much to the force of circumstances as to a bad choice of exhibits. The selection is at once tendentious and incompetent: not only is it dictated by the official ideology current in the Soviet Union, but even within this frame of reference reveals a curious deficiency in qualitative judgment.

Certainly, Russian painting, while richer than that of the other Slav or the Scandinavian countries put together, could never produce an

exhibition with an impact comparable to that of any Italian, Dutch, Flemish, French, or Spanish exhibition. Its 'great period' (1350 to about 1500) was followed by one of transition and decline that lasted two centuries in the course of which not a single work to rank with what was being done elsewhere at the time was produced. About the beginning of the 18th century the old tradition was entirely abandoned, icon-painting ceased to be an art, and the new kind of painting, responding to new and primarily secular needs, started its Western apprenticeship from scratch. It grew quickly; by the middle of the century could be taken seriously, and by the beginning of the next had come to occupy a modest but honourable place among the European schools.

Now, it was at this very moment that all European painting moved into a long period of crisis, from which the French alone emerged triumphant. Russian painting of the second half of the century, so far from creating an "important and entirely independent" school (as the Deputy Director of the Tretyakov Gallery puts it in his catalogue introduction), singularly resembles all the other schools at the time, including the French—not, to be sure, as we see it now, but as it was seen till quite recently at the Luxembourg and the provincial museums. The impressionists only became known in Russia at the very end of the century. A revival began which the Revolution did nothing to arrest but which was stifled from the mid-'twenties on by the doctrines, soon to become dogma, of Socialist Realism.

A reasonably organised exhibition should and could have reflected this entire past in all its diversity: all that this one reflects is the ruling prejudice. Of 122 works, 16 are icons (this for five centuries of painting), 8 date from the 18th century, 16 from the first half of the 19th, 8 from the early years of the 20th, but 36 from the second half of the 19th, and 38 from the post-Revolution period. In this way the best periods of Russian art are utterly sacrificed to the worst, and what dominates is precisely academic painting, in the derogatory sense of the term, meaning the use of a language accessible to all as a means of telling stories, whether anecdotal or tendentious. The Soviet artists shown here (excepting Petrov-Vodkin and Saryan) are, of course, using an idiom which is simply a cheap rehash of the "democratic realism" of the 1860s and '70s, a language which was then the current language of European painters—other than the only ones who count.

What is interesting about the galleries devoted to Soviet painting is that they show us not only what the powers-that-be in Russia demand of painting, but also the way in which they see it,

and the degree in which they are capable of appreciating it. We return to the other galleries able to understand the reasons for the generally mediocre effect they give.

It is not the *furor ideologicus* alone that has decided the choice of exhibits, it is also the atrophy of taste which is the inevitable consequence of this evil. And this atrophy can be blamed for the disproportions of the respective amount of space given to the various periods of the past—the conjuring away of the renaissance that preceded the Revolution, the lack of emphasis given to Alexander Ivanov (five sketches, two of which are not characteristic, and none of the water-colours on New Testament themes which are his finest works) and Vrubel (two good pictures, but not his best, and nothing painted in the last ten years of his life). But then these two distinguished, troubled, unhappy painters, who all their lives unsuccessfully sought a pictorial language which would suit them, cannot easily be classed as "democratic realists." But why not have chosen what is finest in the work of Kramskoy, Repin, Surikov? Why, among the three Serov portraits, is that of Leskov the only one which shows his great talent as a portraitist? Why, instead of showing a score of pictures of this quality (which would have been perfectly possible), triumphantly exhibit in the centre of Gallery V two huge, insipid, trivial paintings by Aivasovski and Shishkin? Among pictures dating from between 1770 and 1850, only three or four could not have been replaced by more successful and more characteristic works by the same artists. There is no painting or icon (by Simon Ushakov, for example) to mark the passage from ancient to modern Russia, but a complete gap between the early 16th century and the 1770s. Finally, the icons are second-rate examples, with four or five exceptions.

Thus, of the 122 works shown at Burlington House, only about a dozen can be classed among the best painting that Russia has produced in the course of the last eight hundred years.

Wladimir Weidlé

## Nick Magazines

THE other day, I went to Wakefield nick to have a butchers at some magazines. These rags are edited and published by the geezers in the nick, for the geezers in the nick; and the only place where you can clock them is at the Imperial Training School, which, of course, is nothing but a "School for Screws," and is situated in the precincts of this nick.