

Now You See Him . . . Now You Don't



[LENIN, TROTSKY, ROCKEFELLER AND STALIN]

ALTHOUGH (to our embarrassment) we didn't recognize it at press time, we printed in the last (August) issue, as an illustration for Isaac Deutscher's "Lenin: The Making of a Revolutionary," a picture (figure 1) of Lenin in Teatralnaya Square speaking to the troops leaving to fight the Polish White Army—a picture which has long been famous as a doctored photograph. Another photo (figure 2), taken within seconds of the first, from a different angle, shows a figure standing on the stairs at Lenin's left. It is Leon Trotsky, leader of the 1917 Bolshevik insurrection and architect of the Red Army. After Stalin purged him a few years later and had him exorcised by the official historians, Trotsky was written out of Russian history. Our unwitting publication of this photo is an example of historical forgetfulness; we were aided by a leading local Trotskyist, who loaned us the print.

The Russians have carried the practice of political exorcism to fantastic heights. But of course they have no monopoly on it. And in keeping with the great American tradition of balanced journalism, we may recall another famous case of a removed Russian, a case that was immortalized satirically by E. B. White in the poem reprinted here.

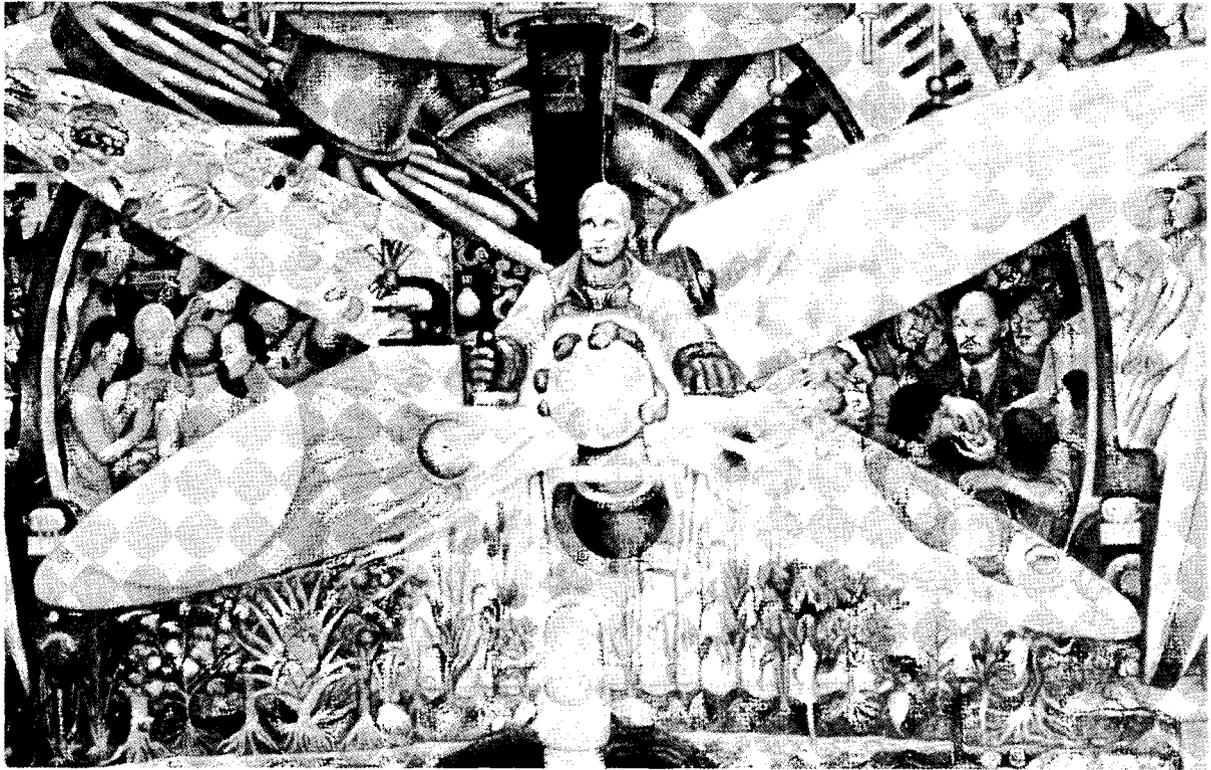
Back in 1932, Nelson Rockefeller, a young man on the way up, was given the difficult job of promoting rentals in the family's new Rockefeller Center, which in those Depression years was losing \$4 million annually. He took to his task enthusiastically; as one reporter wrote at the time, he was always on the spot "to open bunny gardens in the Sunken Plaza, dedicate wisteria exhibits and skating rinks, present

certificates and gold buttons to outstanding construction workers, and so on. On these occasions he made graceful little speeches with the manner of a particularly articulate and successful football coach."

In a fit of expansiveness, young Nelson—already a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum—hired the noted Mexican Communist painter Diego Rivera to do a 17 x 63-foot fresco in the lobby of the Center's main building. To Rockefeller's consternation, however, Rivera placed the unmistakable figure of Lenin in the middle of his work. Rockefeller fired off a note to the artist, saying, "While I was in the building at Rockefeller Center yesterday viewing the progress of your thrilling mural, I noticed that in the most recent portion of the painting you had included a portrait of Lenin. The piece is beautifully painted but it seems to me that his portrait . . . might seriously offend a great many people . . . As much as I dislike to do so, I am afraid we must ask you to substitute the face of some unknown man where Lenin's face now appears."

Rivera refused, and after much diplomatic maneuvering, Rockefeller sent an agent to pay the artist off and to fire him. Rivera left with a vulgar and contemptuous gesture directed both at the Rockefeller man and the capitalist system in general. Rockefeller had the fresco destroyed. A year later he was made treasurer of the Museum of Modern art, and in 1939, its president.

Not long ago Rockefeller proclaimed to a Newsweek reporter: "Art is probably one of the few areas left where there is absolute freedom." —THE EDITORS



I Paint What I See

A Ballad of Artistic Integrity

"What do you paint, when you paint a wall?"

Said John D.'s grandson Nelson.

"Do you paint just anything there at all?"

"Will there be any doves, or a tree in fall?"

"Or a hunting scene, like an English hall?"

"I paint what I see," said Rivera.

"What are the colors you use when you paint?"

Said John D.'s grandson Nelson.

"Do you use any red in the beard of a saint?"

"If you do, is it terribly red, or faint?"

"Do you use any blue? Is it Prussian?"

"I paint what I paint," said Rivera.

"Whose is that head that I see on my wall?"

Said John D.'s grandson Nelson.

"Is it anyone's head whom we know, at all?"

"A Rensselaer, or a Saltonstall?"

"Is it Franklin D.? Is it Mordaunt Hall?"

"Or is it the head of a Russian?"

"I paint what I think," said Rivera.

"I paint what I paint, I paint what I see,

"I paint what I think," said Rivera,

"And the thing that is dearest in life to me

"In a bourgeois hall is Integrity;

"However . . .

"I'll take out a couple of people drinkin'

"And put in a picture of Abraham Lincoln,

"I could even give you McCormick's reaper

"And still not make my art much cheaper.

"But the head of Lenin has got to stay

"Or my friends will give me the bird today

"The bird, the bird, forever."

"It's not good taste in a man like me,"

Said John D.'s grandson Nelson,

"To question an artist's integrity

"Or mention a practical thing like a fee,

"But I know what I like to a large degree

"Though art I hate to hamper;

"For twenty-one thousand conservative bucks

"You painted a radical. I say shucks,

"I never could rent the offices—

"The capitalistic offices.

"For this, as you know, is a public hall

"And people want doves, or a tree in fall,

"And though your art I dislike to hamper,

"I owe a little to God and Gramper,

"And after all,

"It's my wall . . ."

"We'll see if it is," said Rivera.

—E. B. WHITE

The Theft of a Nation: Apologies to the Cherokees

