

Confronting Stalin's Ghost: The Soviet Left Today

IN A BURST OF PROPHETIC VERSE published a month before American pilots mined North Vietnamese waters, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, one-time iconoclast and now somewhere between harmless house radical and occasional if muted voice of protest within the establishment, wrote for the Soviet youth magazine *Yunost*:

*Russia and America, your way
to each other is complicated,
but I believe that through all
the filth or mines, we will
float to each other,
we will float,
and we will embrace as in May
of '45, but this time—
I believe—
forever.*

Yevtushenko's mines were the "moss-covered mines of mistrust," not the assorted acoustical, magnetic, and pressure types of more recent American vintage bobbing around in the Gulf of Tonkin. Still, Yevtushenko's lines suggest a poetic scenario for the June summit conference in Moscow: *Brezhnev and Nixon floating on the mined waters and then up, up, up over the shelled and bombed coastline, over the high-flying B-52s, over the fire-swept skies of all Indochina, westward over the massed armies at the Sino-Soviet frontier, over the Mordovian labor camps in central Russia, to meet in beefy yet weightless embrace high over the Great Kremlin Palace. FOREVER.*

Here is another prophetic image, this one from a source written but not published in the USSR in 1968 by the brave academician Andrei D. Sakharov, brilliant physicist and tireless civil libertarian. Sakharov, too, has the main protagonists soaring high over earthly battles to converge, by the year 2000, in a collaborative effort to eliminate oppres-

sion, hunger, the threat of nuclear annihilation, national divisions, disease, and racism. Sakharov's "socialist convergence" proceeds through four partly overlapping stages, each with a projected timetable. In stage three the Soviet Union and the United States, "having overcome their alienation," engage in a gigantic economic and scientific program to save the world's poor. Simultaneously, disarmament is arranged. The start of stage three: 1972.

As if determined to meet the timetable sketched out in Sakharov's scenario, Nixon and Brezhnev concluded a week of amicable diplomacy with agreements on the joint exploration of space, cooperation on health and environment, and, above all, with a treaty limiting strategic arms. The major deviations from the script are that these mutual programs were devised not by the "leftist reformist wing of the bourgeoisie" in the U.S., nor by the "realistic forces of leftist Leninist communists" in the USSR, as Sakharov projected. Even as he was preparing to go to Moscow, Nixon was ferociously assaulting Hanoi. Even as he was preparing to collaborate with Nixon, Brezhnev was cracking down on dissidents, including some of Sakharov's comrades in the struggle for "socialist legality." Such ironies of our epoch are not new. Nixon exchanging toasts with Podgorny is perhaps not quite as lurid a spectacle as Ribbentrop and Stalin in Moscow in 1939, if only because we have by now come to expect the Soviets to behave with a sense of unadorned national self-interest calculated ahead of the morale or well-being of communist movements abroad. ("One Soviet tractor is worth more than ten foreign communists" was a quip heard around the Moscow-dominated Communist International back in the 1930s.)

No one can deny the Soviets their right to choose very carefully, in this age when technological machismo and bellicose notions of national honor rule in Washington, between the risks and costs to their own people and their anti-

by Louis Menashe

imperialist obligations. The policy dilemmas flowing from the need to weigh national advantage against international revolutionary considerations are inherent to a socialist state in an unevenly balanced world. They were present at the very birth of the Soviet republic when Lenin's government rejected the idea of carrying a revolutionary war into Central Europe, and decided to accept German peace terms in order to preserve Bolshevik power. Fifty-four years later, though the Soviet state is immeasurably stronger and no longer isolated, the same dilemmas exist. What *can* be called into question, and in the first instance by the Soviet people themselves, is what constitutes the Soviet national interest and who defines it. Such a challenge lies at the heart of the resurgence of dissent in Russia during the past decade and a half. The history of this period illuminates both the nature of the protest movement and the state of the Soviet Union.

[THE FLOODGATES ARE OPENED]

OPEN POLITICAL OPPOSITION in the USSR ended in 1929 when the "Right Opposition" recanted its "mistakes" in the pages of *Pravda*. Some three decades later, it began a slow and cautious revival. Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20th Party Congress — which, incidentally, remains unpublished in the Soviet Union — is in fact the charter document for revised attitudes toward the Soviet past. Khrushchev's motives, then as later, were complex but probably political in the main. In the words of one analyst, he "undertook to destroy [his opponents'] political power by discrediting their historical images." Here he revealed himself as a bold and imaginative master of Soviet political life, which, since Stalin's time, has seen history used as an important adjunct to the ruling process. The problem, especially with respect to accounts of developments within the Party, was that, to quote Voltaire, history became the lie commonly agreed to. Whatever his motives, Khrushchev began to turn that lie around, if only partially.

A history-publishing flood followed Khrushchev's decision to lift the lid on the past. Many archives were thrown open, the list of forbidden books was shortened, new journals appeared, and the limits of controversy, in print and at symposia, were notably expanded. Non-persons (even Trotsky) began appearing in neutral narrative; others were fully rehabilitated. Debates raged, the likes of which had not been seen in the USSR since the '20s, over such issues as the role of violence in the Revolution, the place of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in revolutionary history, the character and behavior of the Bolsheviks, in addition to disputes over the historical Stalin.

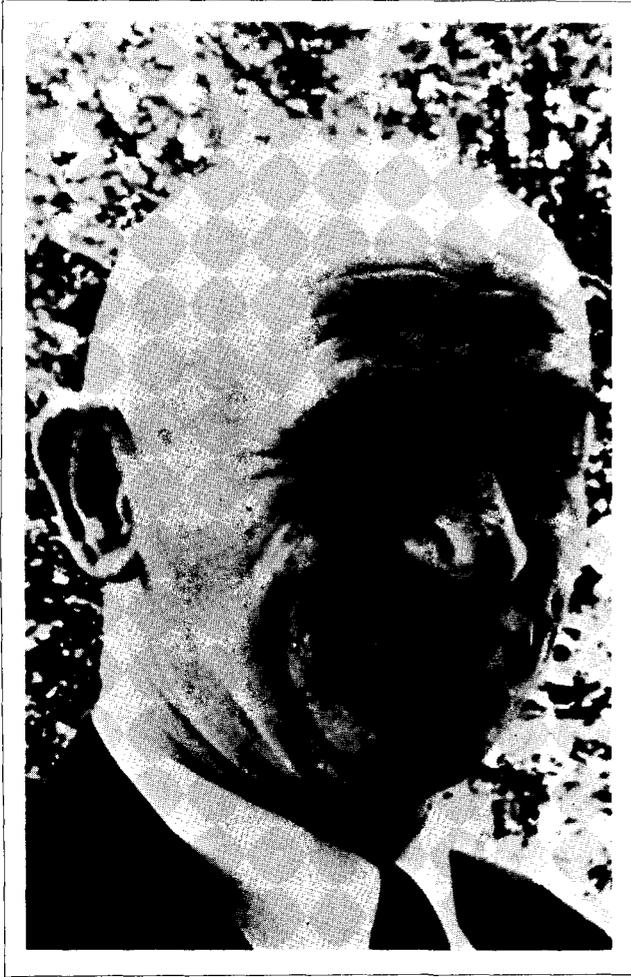
However, the flood was never able to breach the dikes of Party constraint. The fear, even under Khrushchev, of "going too far" with revisionist history was too great to allow the flood to perform its full irrigating and fertilizing potential. (The Soviet cultural intelligentsia still speaks of the feeling of "five minutes to freedom" which characterized the Khrushchev period. It was rumored at one point that the Party was about to abolish censorship in all the arts, but held back, reportedly because the bosses still couldn't bring themselves to stomach modernism.)



Yevgeny Yevtushenko

EVEN SO, THE '50S WAS A PERIOD of cultural and intellectual ferment in the USSR. Out of it has come a weak, fragmented, and ideologically diffuse but nonetheless palpable movement of political opposition. In 1968 Major General Pyotr Grigorenko delivered what was probably the most radical public thrust at the regime since the '20s. Speaking at the funeral of his friend, the writer Alexei Kosterin, Grigorenko denounced the "totalitarianism that hides behind the mask of so-called Soviet democracy." He reminded the 300 mourners present that Kosterin "tirelessly repeated Lenin's words, 'There is nothing harsher and more soulless than a bureaucratic machine.' Therefore he believed that a communist had no higher task than to destroy this machine."

Earlier that year seven men and women unfurled banners in Red Square denouncing the invasion of Czechoslovakia. When a bust of Stalin was set up at the Kremlin wall in 1970, a protest leaflet was circulated signed "Committee of the Struggle for Socialist Democracy." (That same year, a portrait of Stalin was repeatedly torn down at a Lenin Jubilee exhibit in Moscow.) At Moscow and Leningrad Universities groups calling themselves Marxists and Leninists have turned up; one at Leningrad University published an underground journal called *Kolokol (The Bell)*, the name of the newspaper published in London exile by the first great Russian socialist and populist, Alexander Herzen, a century



Major-General Pyotr Grigorenko

ago. In 1969 the historian Pyotr Yakir helped organize the "Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights." The following year Sakharov was instrumental in forming the "Committee on Human Rights."

But against this movement is arrayed a powerful counterforce. For all his eloquence, Grigorenko was confined to a psychiatric clinic. The seven Red Square protestors were all imprisoned, exiled or confined, as were at least eight of the fifteen founders of the "Initiative Group." The university groups have been broken up and *Kolokol* suppressed. Sakharov and members of his group are constantly harassed and under surveillance.

Besides official repression, the opposition faces other, equally enervating conditions—its painful isolation from the great silent majority of Middle Russia, the amount of time and effort expended not on political work but on self defense in connection with trials, detentions, and confinements, and the meager number of openly dissenting supporters. However fraudulent the diagnosis may be in a clinical sense, there is indeed political truth in the pronouncements of Soviet psychiatrists that some dissenters are suffering from "reformist delusions."

Their work is unimaginably difficult, but it goes on. Already the movement has produced its share of battle-hardened veterans who have been through prisons, work camps, and psychiatric hospitals, and who still won't give up.

Vladimir Bukovsky, at 30, is typical of this cadre. Said to be the son of a government functionary, Bukovsky first came to public attention in 1962 along with young poets who read their dissident verses to crowds in Moscow squares. Bukovsky, then 19, had written an essay ridiculing the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) as a paper organization with no claim to real existence. He was arrested the following year and put in a mental institution. Released a year later, he was confined again for eight months in 1965. In 1967 he organized a public demonstration in Moscow's Pushkin Square demanding freedom for a group of arrested dissidents. For that he got three years at hard labor. Arrested again in 1971 for his contacts and interviews with foreign correspondents, and for circulating unauthorized publications, Bukovsky this time got a stiff seven years at hard labor plus five years, in Soviet camp parlance, "on the horns" (exile). Article 70 of the Russian Republic's criminal code makes it a crime to disseminate "slandorous inventions discrediting the Soviet political system." Underground transcripts of Bukovsky's trials and interrogations reveal a sharp and articulate fighter, tilting on legal and ideological grounds with his adversaries. Additionally, he shows a moving courage and commitment:

Moscow Assistant Prosecutor: I am officially warning you that at any time we can arrest you for the libels in your interview [published in the *Washington Post*].

Bukovsky: What's that, a threat? There's no point in threatening me. I'm not afraid of that . . .

MAP: So you won't stop your activity?

Bukovsky: Certainly not. It's my moral duty to my comrades from the camp. And to those of my friends who are still there.

Much as western radicals would be heartened to learn that the Soviet opposition has a communist or New Left orientation, there are no grounds for such hope. Although Bukovsky may be described as an anarchist, among his co-defendants at the Pushkin Square demonstration trial was a Kantian liberal and a Christian. The older dissidents range from Marxist-Leninists with a militant temperament (Grigorenko), to Fabian socialist (Sakharov) with a "beyond Marxism" and technocratic-reformist outlook. Among the younger dissidents I think we are witnessing an overall anti-establishment rebellion which at this stage will take many exotic forms, as in the West, of cultural, life-style protest as well as theoretical and political groping. The bedrock of their unity is the common struggle for the civil freedoms guaranteed by the Soviet constitution and an end to Stalinist modes of administrative—and now psychiatric—justice. Their strategy, in whatever actions they engage in, is to obey the law and, by mobilizing public opinion in the USSR and abroad, to pressure the *authorities* to obey the law. Measured against the political tasks that lay ahead, this is a small and limited objective; measured against the inflexibility and toughness of the present regime, that objective is a huge and essential stride toward political reform.

The absence of a solid, clear-cut communist opposition in the USSR results in part from the Stalinist Party's violence against all internal heterodoxy. The continuation of that practice today, in lower key, has made open dissent within the Party unthinkable. Another reason is the "my

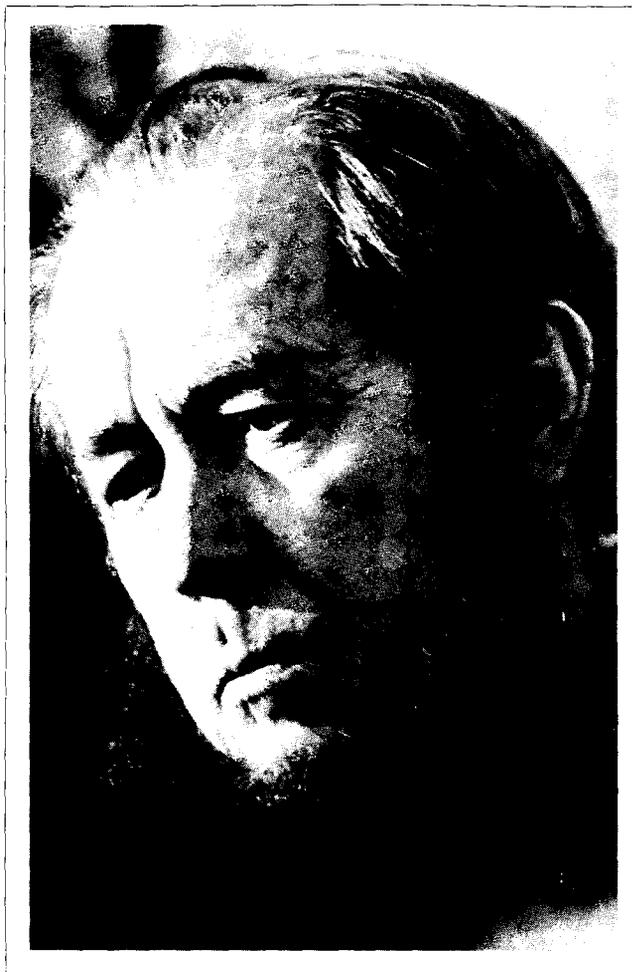
Party right or wrong" psychology first articulated by Leon Trotsky, in the true tradition of tragedy as blind disregard of fate. Outside the Party, the same spirit of fear and obedience helps to silence those we might call the gut radicals in the USSR. But other elements enter as well—namely non-chalance and indifference. Insofar as the political establishment represents nothing but staid conformity and knuckle-headed malice, its official ideology, which purports to be Marxism-Leninism, continues to alienate people. Occasionally (as in the case of the worker-dissident Anatoly Marchenko) someone actually reads Lenin and draws his own conclusions about Lenin's teachings and the practice of his successors. But usually, Marxism-Leninism is about as worthless as any required reading in a Civics course.

Although it is impossible to gauge the subterranean ferment taking place within the Party, it is all but certain that on many issues profound differences exist among the leaders. But they are not the kind of differences which might inspire communist invigoration below. The configurations are peculiar. Take the case of Pyotr Shelest, recently removed as Party boss of the Ukraine, reportedly for disagreeing with the Politburo's decision to wave aside the American mining of Vietnamese waters and to go ahead with the summit. Radicals in the West might applaud Shelest for wanting to respond to U.S. aggression, but in domestic affairs Shelest is none other than a Soviet equivalent of Spiro Agnew. For the Soviet radical, then, the quest for liberalization may tend to go hand in hand with attitudes which radicals in the West would consider "soft on U.S. imperialism."

By the same token, the Chinese position has failed to inspire the dissident movement. For reasons which remain perplexing, given Stalin's relationship to the Chinese revolution, the leadership in Peking has elected to uphold Stalin's reputation against the accusations of his successors. In doing so, the Chinese lost an opportunity to energize young Russians with their own militant and egalitarian spirit, as they have done in the West. Had they denounced both revisionism and Stalinism, then possibly some very interesting political momentum might have developed among Soviet youth. As it is, the Soviet radicals' references to Maoism are embarrassingly venomous, but typical of the attitude of most Russians, among whom a Maoist is as hard to find as a whistling shrimp.

[NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND]

IT IS, ABOVE ALL, THE legitimacy and democratic responsiveness of the present Soviet regime that concerns the dissidents. That some, like Sakharov, seem to tie Soviet democratization to American cooperation is not so much a testimonial to their naiveté, as a commentary on the complicated Stalinist past and on the character of Soviet society generated by that past. Any profile of the dissenting movement, and of the qualities and institutions challenged by the movement, has to be grounded and clarified by historical perception. For the movement itself, in the USSR as anywhere else, historical self-consciousness is absolutely essential to a sense of identity. The Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes have robbed the Soviet people of a full and authentic view of their own past, and



Alexander Solzhenitsyn

in so doing have profoundly disoriented them. Public disorientation is a condition of elite rule. By seeking to educate themselves and the Soviet people in their own history, the dissenters help restore the moral equilibrium and political vitality of Soviet Society.

Literary considerations apart, this has been the glory of Solzhenitsyn's work. What Soviet officials and the hacks of the literary establishment denounce as rattling old bones, or defaming the Soviet past, or wallowing in memories of personal misery, is actually an indispensable historical documentation. Despite his primary and almost exclusive concern for advancing Russian literature, that documentation has thrust Solzhenitsyn into a political stance, and has had explosive political consequences—which is perhaps the overriding reason for the regime's efforts to silence him. Crucial to Solzhenitsyn's educational process has been the rise of the "samizdat."

Trotsky notes in his conclusion to *The History of the Russian Revolution* how the Tsarist and Soviet stages of Russian history could be marked off by the respective linguistic contributions each had offered the world. The one had provided "such barbarisms" as *Tsar*, *knout*, and *pogrom*; the other—*bolshevik*, *soviet*, and *pyatiletka* (five-year plan). Since Trotsky wrote that in the early '30's the stages of Soviet history might be traced further—through such expressions as Stalinist, *sputnik*, and now *samizdat*.



Joseph Stalin

The term *samizdat* combines the Russian word for “self” and “to publish.” It first appeared in 1966 but the practice itself—of circulating hand or typewritten, mimeographed, or otherwise duplicated materials which cannot be published in the USSR—is actually quite old. What seems novel is the scale, diversity, and political scope of present-day *samizdat*.

Although only a fraction of *samizdat* has reached the West, the phenomenon has received considerable attention here, owing to the work of such anti-communist outposts with CIA credentials as Radio Liberty, the People’s Labor Alliance, *Survey* magazine, and the Center for International Studies at MIT. Doubtless, many of the dissidents would feel politically uncomfortable with their Western patrons, whose motivations are anti-Soviet, whose selection may distort the real nature of the movement, and whose efforts lend plausibility to charges by Soviet courts that the *samizdat* writings are used to harm the USSR abroad. Indeed, many a Soviet protester has asked his signature to be removed from a letter or petition to authorities on learning that the document was published in the West. And the KGB has not been above turning this situation to its own advantage, for it sometimes serves as a conduit to CIA outlets for materials written by people it is interested in embarrassing back home—Solzhenitsyn, for example.

Nonetheless, in the last analysis, the shame of it is not

what the West does with the materials, but the intolerably backward state of political affairs in the USSR which makes censorship a keystone of national policy. One might be charitable to the Soviets and allow that, in conditions of continuing ideological combat and a relative scarcity of resources which requires strict allocation of public funds, they are justified in extending publication facilities to some and denying it to others. But even then the questions would remain: What is allowed to be published and who decides? The stance of the bureaucracy is appalling here. Nothing could be more *anti-Soviet* in Western eyes than the tons of sterile and banal pap that does get by the censors; nothing could be more *pro-Soviet* than an honest and well-told historical novel or a frank and imaginative discussion of current problems in Russian society.

Samizdat is kaleidoscopic in form and content. Broadly, the materials may be classified into literary and political categories. This distinction is always artificial—especially so in the Russian context. As in nineteenth century Russia, if literary work is realistic and honest in describing existing, or even past, conditions, then it is political by definition. A seemingly innocent series of rustic sketches by Turgenev had an impact in Tsarist Russia comparable to that of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the United States. A century later, Dudintsev’s novel about bureaucrats and inventors, *Not By Bread Alone*, caused a political storm.

There are poems, songs, drawings, short stories, memoirs, and whole novels circulating in *samizdat*, including the work of non-Soviet authors. *Samizdat* tapes record Western music off short-wave radio, common in all Russian, as in European homes. Some evidence indicates that an internal “*samizdat* of the air” has existed in the USSR for at least a dozen years. At least a part of it is political, even though it is produced by radio hams mainly for entertainment.

On the political side, seven distinct categories of *samizdat* appear:

1) *Protest letters and petitions addressed to judicial authorities, the Soviet and foreign communist press (who never publish them), to professional colleagues, to “world public opinion,” to Party and state organs, and to Soviet political figures personally.* Usually their signers belong to the scientific, professional, and cultural intelligentsia but here and there a protest or appeal from a worker turns up. The issues vary from protests over the arrests, trials, jailings or psychiatric detention of specific figures to concern over penal conditions and policies on religion and Soviet nationalities. In recent years there has been a great deal of protest activity around the last two categories, with a focus on the Crimean Tatars, still struggling to regain their homeland long after Stalin banished them *en masse* for Nazi collaboration; on Jewish affairs, especially the desire to emigrate to Israel; on persecution of the Baptists; and on cultural suppression and Russification in the Ukrainian and Baltic republics.

2) *Transcripts of trials, and of statements by the defendants; of conversations with the KGB; of proceedings at various meetings where controversial themes and issues are voiced.*

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“Mr. President . . .”

“What is it, Pat?”

“Mr. President, there’s a terrible demonstration going on outside.”

“Oh, there’s always a demonstration going on outside, Pat.”

“Yeah, but Richard, this one is completely out of control.”

“Well, we have people to take care of that, they’ll do their job, you do your job, and I’ll do my job.”

“But Richard, you don’t understand, they’re storming the White House.”

“Oh, in that case I’d better call out the Third Marines.”

“You can’t, Richard.”

“Why not?”

“It is the Third Marines!”

“Ohhh . . .”

The Show the Pentagon Couldn't Stop



A FEW YEARS AGO, the United Serviceman’s Organization—better known as the USO—sponsored a series of television commercials in which GIs walked along rice paddies or picked their way through the desolate battlegrounds of yesterday. Over these stark visuals came the plaintive voice of a soldier: “Doesn’t anybody care?” The scene then changed to a joyous USO dance with smiling soldiers and pretty girls. The message was clear: if you give generously, the boys overseas will get euphoric enough on popular music and short skirts to forget their dirty job.

In 1972, this sort of thing seems hopelessly out of date. The GIs’ nightmare cannot now be so easily calmed; the circumstances which make for their loneliness cannot be so easily wished away. Most Americans simply want to forget that soldiers exist, for they call

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