

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR:

Replying to a review is a sterile task. The reviewer has read the book (so one hopes), formed his opinion, and put it on the record. How can he be made to change his mind? In our case, however, we should like to express gratitude to Alexander Dallin. True, he is dissatisfied with *Utopia in Power* (*Slavic Review*, Summer 1988), if only because it is not the "great" book which he has been awaiting, the book that "will put it all between two covers, sensibly, subtly, judiciously." Ah, how we too would like to read such a book! It is actually difficult to visualize it. Can one say, for instance, that Michelet was judicious and sensible in his *History of the French Revolution*? Even Gibbon can easily be charged with bias. Whatever the case, the very fact that our work has been mentioned in the same review with the ideal book about the Soviet Union, a work that may appear in time, does us much honor. "Thank you," we say to the reviewer. We thank him also for having found practically no errors in a volume of 877 pages. The few sentences with which he disagrees can hardly be placed in the category of "errors."

We shall permit ourselves, nonetheless, to make two marginal notations on the review. The first has to do with the main reason which, in the opinion of the reviewer, prevented *Utopia in Power* (why he considers this an "oxymoron" is not entirely clear) from being "that great new book." The reviewer found that *Utopia in Power* is "a conventional anti-Bolshevik version of history," that "the dominant motif is the totalitarian theme." It seems to us that Dallin would hardly have found fault with the book in this way if he were familiar with what the more daring Soviet historians are writing and saying today. The totalitarian nature of the Soviet system (still in its Stalinist form) is not in doubt today. The conventional Bolshevik version of history has so discredited itself that this year (1988) history examinations have been completely abandoned for secondary school graduates in the USSR. Iurii Afanas'iev, speaking at a meeting of historians and writers, has declared that Soviet history is the most falsified in the world (*Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 5 May 1988). It seems that soon supporters of the "Bolshevik version" will be left only within the walls of the Moscow Institute of Marxism-Leninism and in certain American universities.

Our other notation relates to the second cause of the reviewer's displeasure. This cause is reflected in his very first sentence, in which he writes that the book is "probably the most ambitious émigré attempt to provide the western reader with a systematic history of the Soviet Union." Not the work of two historians addressed to readers, but an attempt by émigrés to present an émigré viewpoint to a western reader. The second sentence removes any lingering doubt: the book has been written by "two émigré historians." The sense of the reviewer's insistence here is obvious: émigrés, consequently biased, unable to write "sensibly, subtly, judiciously." This accusation has been heard before: Jews should not write about the Holocaust, Armenians about the 1915 genocide.

We are not surprised by the accusation itself, which is a conventional one. What is surprising is that it comes from an American historian. Doubly surprising is that the author of the review was himself not born on the banks of the Mississippi. This brings up the question once asked by David E. Powell ("'History' and Recent Histories of the USSR," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 20 [Autumn-Winter 1987]: 353): at what moment does an émigré cease to be an émigré? Perhaps that moment should be considered to be not when citizenship in another country is acquired, but when the individual acquires a "progressive" view of Soviet history, when he accepts the "Bolshevik version." It might be possible to analyze the makeup of American Sovietology from that point of view.

Our marginal notations to Alexander Dallin's review should be ended "judiciously," it would seem: *Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.*

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