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## The American Image of Russia: 1917-1977

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Grayson, Benson L., ed. *The American Image of Russia: 1917-1977*. New York: Ungar, 1978. 388pp.

Gibert, Stephen P. *Soviet Images of America*. New York: Crane & Russak, 1977. 167pp.

Those who are looking for evidence to support a theory of convergence between Soviet and U.S. societies will find very little comfort in reading these two books. And those who naturally assume from the titles, that they will be looking at mirror images will also be surprised. The two books are not at all alike. In fact, in a rather curious way, they reflect the societies that produced them. *The American Image of Russia*, edited and with an introduction by a former scholar and foreign service officer, Benson Lee Grayson, presents no recognizable "image" but rather reflects a confusing diversity. *Soviet Images of America*, by Stephen P. Gibert, an academic consultant, describes a view that has the consistency of a theology with its customary concomitants of tediousness and irrationality.

Let it be said at the outset that we must be grateful for both books. *The American Image of Russia* brings together many important, and indeed interesting, articles and speeches assessing the Soviet Union. The range is heavily on the side of the decisionmakers, presidents, secretaries of state and ambassadors—a political "elite" as popular terminology would put it—and therefore gives us a rather unusual, nonacademic, perspective. The few statements by disappointed leftists—sounding like abandoned lovers—and now outdated Soviet supporters, sounding like the children of nature, give some sense of the extremes of informed opinion but no sense of explanation.

Reading John Reed between Herbert Hoover and Bainbridge Colby, a former Secretary of State, leads to intellectual hiccups. Nevertheless, John Reed,

famous for his *Ten Days that Shook the World*, holds his own. One must admire his extraordinary power to reduce complex issues to resounding, but childlike, statements. He calls the Russian revolution an adventure "the most marvelous mankind ever embarked upon, sweeping into history at the head of the toiling masses and staking everything on their vast and simple desires." "Vast" their desires certainly were, but if they were "simple" then they were simple as the desires of God are.

The problem with a book like this, at least for this reviewer, is that it is not really the American "image" of Russia. Instead it is simply a collection of interesting articles and statements selected without any very apparent principle except for chronological order and an eye to the significance of the authors. Nevertheless, all of the articles are revealing and three or four contain significant information that is still often overlooked. For example, there is an excerpt from the *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffans*, the great American muckraker, in which he reports an interview with Lenin in 1919. Lenin argued for the necessity of a terror in order to exterminate the middle class or to force it out of Russia. We have become so used to accepting terror as one of the normal methods of the Soviet leaders and to the idea that the leader of their cult, Lenin, had a compassionate and humane core, that it comes as a shock to be reminded that he was as cruel as the rest from his earliest days in power.

Another fascinating selection, "Slave Labor," comes from a trade union newspaper. The article is interesting on two counts: because it is written by a member of the proletariat, the class in whose name the revolution was fought; and because it is unusual to see the proletariat represented in a collection of articles on the Soviet Union, a field dominated by intellectuals, journalists, and politicians. What could more

convincingly underscore the alienation of Soviet communism from its Marxist ideals, the transformation of a workers' utopia into the nightmare of the indentured servitude, than this proletarian damnation that starkly, shockingly, argues that the laborers in the Soviet Union are nothing more than slaves?

It is certainly a defect of the selection principle that some more balanced views are not presented. Surely there are apologists for the Soviet Union from the new left who make some sense. Surely something more conciliatory could have been found than the article reflecting the sweet innocence of Hubert Humphrey or another showing the political rationalizations of Lyndon Johnson. As it is, the brunt of the apologia is borne by Corliss Lamont, a writer and left politician. But his credibility foundered when he argued in the late fifties that the purge trials of the thirties were "genuine."

Considering their extraordinary importance, reaction to the purge trials of the thirties is not properly represented in this book. Where, for instance, are the bizarre statements of Joseph E. Davies, our Ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1936? Based on his own extensive experience as a trial lawyer and statesman, he pronounced himself satisfied that the parade of old Bolsheviks, war heroes, and statesmen did indeed deserve to be shot for desiring to sell their fatherland to the Japanese, Swiss and Czechs.

Why is it so important to keep that incredible deception in the forefront of our consciousness? Because it shows us how prone we are to rationalize the irrational, to keep the surface of reality neat and orderly. Because he sent George Kennan out for sandwiches and was taken in by the trials, we dismiss Ambassador Davies now, but he was an adviser to Presidents, a distinguished man of his time and if he was taken in who would not have been? The answer cannot be neat.

In any case, that event, the purges, were an eruption from a rotten core of Soviet society, a core that remains unreconciled and uncontained. They were a culmination of events foreseen in the twenties by John Dos Passos and Emma Goldman, represented by two fascinating articles in this book, both idealists who wanted to believe in the Revolution, but who already saw the cruelty.

We must take the editor to task, however. Having compiled a volume of such fascinating but troubling reading, he cannot escape our legitimate demands for an explanation with the little inanity that concludes the introduction—"... the United States image of Russia will probably be determined primarily as it has for the past sixty years by the day-to-day and year-to-year actions of the Soviet Union and the responses of the United States government." If Grayson's selection of articles is not dishonest then that statement—if it is taken seriously at all, and obviously it should not be—is incorrect as well as vapid.

This book with all its defects of randomness and discontinuity may serve a major purpose, however, if it inspires a serious effort to analyze the love-hate relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States since the revolution. That task is a monumental one for which this book documents the need.

*Soviet Images of America*, by Stephen B. Gibert, a Georgetown professor, is a book that could not have been written in the Soviet Union. Even if speeches had been made there—and one may be fairly certain that they have not been—calling for patience, sympathy and understanding of America, they could not have been published. Thus it is up to foreign scholars to try to sort out the Soviet image of America, an image that must necessarily be doctrinaire, almost an icon of official thought.

Those who deal with primary Soviet sources must be very grateful to Gibert

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for performing the very tedious job of sorting through the endless stream of parroted formulations that takes the place of political discussion in the Soviet Union. (The uninitiated may not be aware of the fact that following a year's worth of political tracts from the newspaper *Pravda* would be less interesting than reading a collection of Vatican speeches on abortion. What one watches for are variations in emphasis, changes in footnotes, renumberings of priorities. This does not make for very exciting reading, although we must all grant that it is quite essential reading if we want civilization to survive in a Western World.)

The problem Gibert faced was how to make a readable and convincing book. That is a considerable challenge, for not only is the original material tedious, but American readers tend not to believe standard Soviet statements. They seem to take the position that Comrade Marshal, two-time winner of the Order of Lenin, Central Committee Member Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov does not really mean what he says about the need to eliminate the American threat. The process by which the American reader comes to that conclusion is never clear. Nor is it ever clear what Comrade Marshal Ivanov means if he did not mean what he said. Why, one wonders, is it more comforting to the American intellectual to deal with a world in which no one means what he says? How, one wonders, does the American think that the Soviets organize their vast country so that everyone repeats the same tedious formulations that indeed no one means?

Gibert's technique for dealing with these problems was to open with some pretty big and frightening guns. He recalled the failures of perception about the Japanese, the Sino-Soviet split, the Cuban situation, the Yom Kippur war and so on. The point is well made, therefore, that we should not trust our judgments and should be wary of our preconceptions.

The reader naturally hopes that Gibert will put the problem of perceptions in some reasonable order. However that hope is soon dashed when he writes:

With regard to Russian perceptions, however, it may be possible to affect those views which do not lie at the core of their national self image, and are not fundamental to the Marxist-Leninist belief system. And of course, as some people are more receptive to religious teachings than others, so also can it be assumed that convictions about communism and its apocalyptic view of the future vary among Soviet leaders.

How could Gibert, who, in preparing this book, must have steeped himself in little beyond war, revolution and death—60 of the cruelist years in history—propose such a bland formulation? Or is that his terrifying message? That there is nothing else to do but to try to trim around the edges?

Gibert's cullings of materials from the Soviet press is quite useful. The book is indeed "very valuable and informative," fulfilling the hope expressed for it by Richard Foster in his introduction. Methodologically, however, it does not help us to assess the degree to which the Soviets are serious about what they say. Perhaps that is an effort that Foster, the Stanford Research Institute, and Gibert will undertake next. We can hope so.

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Herz, Martin F., ed. *Decline of the West? George Kennan And His Critics*. Washington Ethics and Public Policy Center, Georgetown University, 1978. 173pp.

If you want a place in history, scribble! This rule has been upheld as valid back in time through Machiavelli to Thucydides at least—both statesmen and commanders out of power, left to