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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition* by George Saunders

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Roger Pethybridge, and is undoubtedly one of the most important works on the Soviet Union published in recent years.

JAMES RIORDAN

Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition. Edited by George Saunders. *New York: Monad Press for the Anchor Foundation. 1974. (Distrib. by Pathfinder Press, New York.) 464 pp. Illus. Index. \$12.00. Paperback: \$3.95.*

DESPITE widespread and growing interest in political dissent in the Soviet Union, little has been published in the way of analysis or even description of opposition activity by Marxists (or Marxist-Leninists) in that country. Mr. Saunders's book, which has been prepared from a Trotskyist viewpoint, goes some way towards filling this gap. In it, Mr. Saunders attempts to document the existence of Marxist-Leninist opposition currents in the Soviet Union today and their historical ties to the 'Left Opposition' in the 1920s and 1930s. He has selected thirty-nine documents and provided each with an explanatory and interpretative note and footnotes.

The first three documents (comprising 165 pages) are essays by communists who spent many years in Stalin's labour camps. Each is informative about the fate of the 'Left Opposition'. For example, the essay 'Vorkuta (1950-53)' by 'B.M.' provides a rare account of the massive strikes in the Vorkuta labour camp complex after Stalin's death. But these three major documents are not *samizdat* at all, having been smuggled out of the country for publication abroad rather than being circulated inside Russia. They seem to have been included in order to provide a Trotskyist frame of reference for the contemporary *samizdat* documents in this collection. Very few of the latter can be described as 'Trotskyist' or 'Left Oppositionist', despite Mr. Saunders's effort to show that these historic 'deviations' command increasing respect among Soviet Marxists. The communist essays included in this volume are written by men who, having been trained to be loyal and orthodox party members, eventually refused to accept the gulf between Marxist-Leninist theory and practice. One feels that there must be many of these among the 14 million members of the CPSU. But the task of locating and describing them, let alone reproducing their written opinions, is enormously difficult not only because of the censorship but also because so few party members are self-sacrificing enough to communicate their criticisms to others. Mr. Saunders has largely failed to overcome these difficulties.

In fact many of the contemporary *samizdat* documents in this book are not by or about Marxists, and shed no light on the extent or character of the Marxist-Leninist opposition. This is disappointing, since it is in the documentation of this opposition that the book could make a pioneering contribution. However, the juxtaposition of writings by avowed communists such as Kosterin, Grigorenko and Yakhimovich with statements by non-Marxist dissenters brings home the fact that persons in these two broad categories of 'dissidents' attack the same abuses of power within the Soviet Union and are exposed to the same fates: harassment, loss of employment, and incarceration in prison or psychiatric hospital. In the contemporary *samizdat* documents by Marxist-Leninists in this book there is little evidence of the obsession with ideological purity which characterised the Bolshevik opposition movements of the 1920s and 1930s and which brought 'Left' and

'Right' oppositionists into physical conflict with one another even in Stalin's prisons (a phenomenon described in the anonymous 'Memoirs of a Bolshevik-Leninist', pp. 63-64). The anonymous Old Bolshevik's description (pp. 100-101) of the Red Army's 1945 advance into Europe as a revolutionary wave which should have been extended 'deep into Western Europe' is in striking contrast to the attitude of contemporary Marxist 'dissidents': Kosterin, Grigorenko and Yakhimovich have protested publicly in the name of communist ideals against the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops in 1968.

As Mr. Saunders acknowledges in his introduction, this collection is not intended to cover the whole range of material circulating today in the form of *samizdat*. The reader misled by the title and seeking a representative sampling of *samizdat* writings will find no examples here of non-conformist belles-lettres, nor of the more technical tracts written in *samizdat* as an alternative source of information and analysis in such fields as law and economics. A more serious omission is the absence of any writings on Marxist philosophy. Although examples of theoretical analysis in the manner of the Praxis school of thought in Yugoslavia may not be available from Russia, Mr. Saunders might well have commented on this absence and the reasons for it.

CLAYTON YEO

Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern. By Branko Lazitch in collaboration with Milorad M. Drachkovitch. *Stanford, Calif.: The Hoover Institution Press. 1973. 458 pp. \$15.00.*

THIS volume should undoubtedly find a place as a most valuable addition to all reference libraries dealing with communist affairs. It contains 716 individual biographies covering various categories of Comintern personalities, not only those better known figures forming its Executive Committee and other bodies of the Directorate, but also members of secret missions sent abroad and other less easily definable characters such as the graduates of the four principal Comintern schools. Thus, the editors are to be congratulated on their far flung efforts to scrape together any, even if often meagre, information on many typically obscure Comintern agents, and on the high level of accuracy of their material. It is curious however that they should have throughout omitted any mention of marriages or offspring in the individual biographies.

Unique though the Comintern organisation may have been, it is difficult to accept the claim, made in the blurb, that 'there has never been another organisation able to mobilise the masses in the same way . . .' Mobilisation of the masses may have been one of the main objectives of the Comintern but its success in this objective was largely confined to frothy verbal proclamations.

Among the sources listed, the outstanding work of the late Mrs. Jane Degras does not appear. There is a considerable amount of material relating to the careers of Comintern personalities in her three-volume *The Communist International 1919-1943*¹ and it should certainly have been included in sources which contain such strictly non-biographical works as Theodore Draper's volumes on communism in America and Ruth McVey's book 'The Rise of Indonesia Communism' (p. XI).

VIOLET CONOLLY

¹ London: OUP for the RIIA. 1956, 1960 and 1965.