

Pursuit in Zurich

Thomas Molnar

The title of Solzhenitsyn's new book, *Lenin in Zurich* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; 309 pp.; \$8.95), brings to mind two other towering works of pre-gulag literature: Dostoevski's *The Possessed* and Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. If he is up to date, he adds perhaps the recently published correspondence between Herzen's daughter, Natalya, and various Russian liberal and socialist exiles, among them Nechaev. The topic, the tone, and the style of these works is present in Solzhenitsyn's book. What is new here is the masterly use of interior monologue.

Lenin in Zurich contains the century's central enigma under a sober, one might say scholarly, title. It is a skillful collation of several chapters whose natural place is in the three volumes (the author calls them "knots") of the trilogy: *August 1914*, *October 1916*, and *March 1917*. Thus assembled, these chapters give the impression of continuity: from the moment Lenin settles in Zurich with wife and mother-in-law until his departure for St. Petersburg in the famous sealed wagon. The first train, facilitating his passage from Austria into neutral Switzerland, was agreed upon by the government in Vienna on the intervention of Lenin's socialist comrades; the second train by the government in Berlin. These beginnings were auspicious; since then, the various Western governments have assumed the lion's share in helping other Communist leaders into power—Castro, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, as well as legions of lesser candidates.

Between the two trips, to the Zürcher Bahnhof and to the Finland Station, Solzhenitsyn's tour de force reveals once again the gigantic figure of the author. He overwhelms in the sense that he turns inside out our thinking about Lenin. Indeed, what opinions does even the most anti-Communist Western citizen entertain about Lenin—whose name is now included in at least one catechism officially circulating in France? That he was a "great man," an organizational Titan, a brain able to conceive the course of history in advance, a peerless strategist. When he takes the train to cross Germany, he merely gathers the fruit of his stupendous and well-directed efforts, the mathematically calculated result of his supreme tactics by which he had patiently cornered the German government as well as his own reluctant comrades. He then installed himself in the Kremlin, whence his genius would have radiated for the greater glory of the world revolution—if he had not died

prematurely, leaving his finally secure regime to a monster whom he, a sick man, had vainly tried to keep away from the succession.

So far the familiar hagiography. Solzhenitsyn's conclusion is vastly different. First of all, he has carefully studied everything pertinent; then, more important, he has succeeded in putting himself into Lenin's skin, an enterprise he had planned for many years, preoccupied as he was from youth with the causes and the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution. Thus fate seems to be at work when Solzhenitsyn lands now also in Zurich, he too as an exile in this island familiar to more than a century's political refugees. All this makes it possible for him to write from *inside Lenin*, psychologically repeating the latter's trajectory. More than that: There is between Lenin and Solzhenitsyn a mysterious relationship uniting author and character, a relationship cemented by detestation, but a relationship nonetheless. Two men grown from the same soil, reflecting about their people's destiny on the same ground of exile—this in itself would be sufficient to lend the book an intriguing tone. But there is yet more: Solzhenitsyn's Lenin is one of the richest creations of historical and fictional literature. From beginning to end we read an interior monologue, so that not only the author but the reader as well hears the authentic voice, the voice not of some Leopold Bloom of Dublin, but of a hero of history.

Thomas Mann was perhaps the only writer (we may mention Marguerite Yourcenar as well) before Solzhenitsyn who dared a similar tour de force. In *Lotte in Weimar* no less a personage than Goethe, waking to a new day, lets fantasy and memory come to him in half-conscious tumult. But Mann's Goethe is not yet quite aware of reality in the Weimar dawn—whereas all of Lenin's nervous race-horse fibers are tense with action and anticipated action, a purebred revolutionary fully in control of his own consciousness and of what others do and might think. Following Solzhenitsyn, we gradually learn to see Lenin and *in* Lenin and are grateful to the writer for attempting neither to psychoanalyze his hero nor to "explain" his inner mechanism in some other technical way.

In spite of his great talents the secret nucleus of the revolutionary Lenin was an obsession that never for a minute seems to have given him peace. Everything must be subordinated to the revolution, nothing must be left to chance, nothing should be undertaken without the will of promoting the cause. And yet, Solzhenitsyn does not reduce Lenin to a machine; he studies with an almost painful attention the vibrations of this man, at once so simple and so complex. He shows the depth of his hatred, his dissimulations, the tension of his nerves, the abyss of his despair, the recapture of his élans, the mercilessness of his self-criticism. But there hides in this bookworm (Marx in the British Museum

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comes to mind as Solzhenitsyn paints Lenin devouring newspapers in the Zurich municipal library) an incredible energy that dislocates his black moods and crises of pessimism and allows him to reconquer himself, to spit his immense, his cosmic hatred in the face of his enemies. But, and here lies the secret of Lenin as Solzhenitsyn sees him, *everybody is an enemy*. Lenin manufactures opposition the way others seek friendship, the way a spider secretes its web. He does it also by calculating the advantages: The enemy is one who is scared, whom one blackmails, corners, locks into untenable situations—whereas a simple opponent still maintains his dignity. This psychology contains the whole Leninist, later Soviet, strategy, but its first high point was the period from July to October, 1917: making enemies while making allies also who are aware that they too may become enemies, the better to crush them. Everything is in this formula, from the relationship of Lenin and the social revolutionaries to the *programme commun* of Marchais and Mitterrand.

Hegelian dialectics found in the two men, Marx and Lenin, seems less a philosophical echo than a natural response of temperament. To divide both opponents and allies, this is the Leninist-Communist formula before and after Zurich. Nobody felt sure around Lenin even in exile, all were exposed to his violence and his contempt, all had a bad conscience before this man who wanted to make the revolution the way God created the world. With his deep-seated eyes, his sparse beard and high forehead, the little man is as determined to destroy as others are to build. The war must be carried everywhere, above all where there is peace—because peace is nothing but a hypocritical method of self-perpetuation in power for the bourgeoisie. Swiss neutrality? Lenin works day and night to kindle the civil war, the worker insurrection; the revolution must issue forth from these peaceful homes and engulf Europe before an armistice removes all hope of violent renewal. What about the other revolutionists—Austrian, Dutch, German, Russian—who offer to collaborate? Precisely, they are all traitors, imbeciles, sold-out double agents, phonies, lackeys who must be crushed, betrayed, reduced to impotence! His own intimate assistants? But precisely, they must be scorned, threatened, forced to wallow in their own moral excrement, finally gripped inside with an icy hand. The later methods of GPU, KGB, and GULAG are, like a bundle of bloody flowers, a part of Lenin's ordinary stance: contempt, hatred, distrust, cold logic, the pursuit always and everywhere of the one single objective.

There is one single exception! It is "Parvus," *nom de guerre* of Alexandre Helphand, itself a Frenchified pseudonym of Israel Lazarevich Gelfand. Through this middle-aged bon vivant adventurer-conspirator another of Solzhenitsyn's creative secrets emerges, or, rather, is confirmed. In the admirable autobiography *Le Chêne et le Veau* (reviewed in *Worldview* in May) the poet-editor Tvardovsky was so fashioned as to appear Solzhenitsyn's *pendant*, the contrapuntal figure over against the major theme, Solzhenitsyn himself. The two themes, willpower and hesitancy, resistance and collaboration, strength and weakness, Solzhenitsyn and Tvardovsky. The reader finds the former's contours more easily

because he sees the latter in the background; the painter's and architect's technique. In *Lenin in Zurich* Lenin's vis-à-vis is Parvus, the man whom first he must vanquish. Solzhenitsyn's art consists in showing, yet without stressing in a way that could be interpreted as vindictiveness, that at bottom Lenin was a revolutionary impotent, a man of moods and of miscarried projects because full of hatred, a political animal turning in his self-made cage and spewing forth stillborn ideas—and that it was Parvus who grasped correctly the revolutionary idea and action. Parvus is described in rich colors similar to those of Tvardovsky in the other work: big drinker, eater, and fornicator, devouring all pleasures; a mélange of high-class spy, *condottiere*, Maecenas of the revolution, and international financier with an equally easy entrée in salons and chancelleries.

Facing Parvus-Tvardovsky, there is the ascetic Lenin-Solzhenitsyn, a figure cut from granite, a man of one idea. But it is Parvus-Helphand-Gelfand who negotiates the business of revolution—the revolution needs the business—in Denmark, Stockholm, Berlin; it is he who concretizes the project. While Lenin is still involved in kindling the ever-slow revolutionary flame in the hearts of his petit-bourgeois Swiss companions and preaching to them the why and how of general insurrection, Parvus works out with the General Staff in Berlin the transport plans to Russia of the little band of Bolsheviks. He also knows what Lenin is too petty to understand: that much money is needed, not just small contributions, but a fortune. Parvus amasses it, in part to enhance his own reputation of invincibility, in part to enjoy membership in the world of intrigues among ultrarich liberal capitalists ever ready to finance a revolution. He had arranged, organized, set into motion everything, prompted by a different although parallel hatred to Lenin's: As a young man he had sworn to help destroy the Czar's Russia. In order to achieve this he had to remain in the background. In other words, he needed a savage beast, a total fanatic, an executioner—a Lenin.

Perhaps the most brilliant parts of this splendid work are the two chapters where Lenin receives in his poorly lit kitchen around a linoleum-covered table first Parvus's emissary, the businessman Sklarz, then, a few weeks later, Parvus himself. Sklarz arrived in Zurich when Lenin had reached the end of the rope. He was exhausted, almost ready to resign. Yet it was imperative to impress Parvus and before him, his messenger. Lenin treated the man like a servant, an enemy, exactly as he was later to treat Parvus. Sarcasm, contempt, reproaches, the ironic list of the other man's failures—these were Lenin's negotiating weapons. He had to show the other his ineptitude, his stupidities, his blunders, his unreliability, the seeds of treason already planted in him. He had to prove to the other that he was a coward, a social traitor, an imbecile, a turncoat. Only one man is pure: Lenin; the revolution is where *he* is, now, for example, in this near-proletarian kitchen. He knew that his force resided in his implacability (like Robespierre's), all the others had to serve him; and first of all the elegant, mundane Parvus had to serve him. At the moment he had to convince the other that he, Lenin,

had the better plan and that this business of the sealed train was, after all, amateurish! If he accepted it in the end, it was not without dozens of objections, pedantic conditions, considerations of all the factors involved, and mainly his own prestige.

The reader puts down the book, exhausted; Solzhenitsyn conducts the plot like Lenin the revolution: accelerating here, slowing down there, but always in a style of a hundred faces—irony, humor, melancholy tableaux, bonhomie, picturesque details. With a few brushstrokes

there stands the incomparable pamphletist, Radek, the Swiss comrades somberly contemplating their mug of beer and listening, open-mouthed, to the Tartar from Siberia; and there Krupskaya, the self-effacing wife, a veritable viper after her husband-hero's death.

One question remains. Has Solzhenitsyn gotten rid of his incubus through this book, through the trilogy whose Central Person is always Lenin? Or will he continue pursuing his character down the narrow streets of Zurich?

The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism by Daniel Bell

(Basic Books; xxvi + 301 pp.; \$12.95)

John P. Sisk

Let us suppose that the reader confronted with this title knows nothing about the author except that he is a professor of sociology at Harvard University (where, God knows, there is a variety of sociological opinion). Let us further suppose that this reader is a reasonably intelligent and well-informed person familiar with the polemical promise of the titles of books engaged with contemporary problems. Such a reader might well assume that this is one more attempt to measure capitalist society against a possible harmonious sociopolitical order that all men of good will have a right to expect, even demand. He might, influenced by the conventional metaphor of music, assume that any serious criticism of contemporary life must have as its end the elimination of contradictions in the interest of achieving something like a social symphony.

Such a reader would, of course, be misled. I cannot imagine anyone more aware than Professor Bell that in our time social symphony is an honorific synonym for totalitarianism—that such harmony as we achieve is a by-product of what we get in some measure if our efforts are well-directed and if we are lucky. Such an awareness guarantees an analysis of society quite different from that of a critic convinced that a society is good in proportion to the absence of conflict, tensions, and contradiction. For Bell society is “not integral, but disjunctive.” Against the holistic view (no less dear to what is already the *old* New Left than to Dostoevski's Grand

Inquisitor), he finds it “useful to think of *contemporary* society...as three distinct realms, each of which is obedient to a different axial principle.” He therefore divides society analytically into the technoeconomic structure, the polity, and the culture. It is “the discordances between these realms that are responsible for the various contradictions within society.” This methodological premise, as Bell points out in an important footnote, differs from that of Marxism and functionalism, both of which share the premise “that society is a structurally interrelated system and that one can understand any social action only in relation to that unified system.”

For the Marxists and functionalists, one might say, the proper social model is the work of art, that supremely compelling ecological unit. For Bell, on the other hand, the proper model is the household, which he prefers because of “its sociological connotations of family problems and common living.” The metaphor of the household has particular structural importance in the last long chapter. Since, however, it is a humane metaphor (the work of art as model-metaphor can be notoriously and paradoxically inhumane with its insistence on the subordination of parts to whole), it proves to be an excellent facilitator for issues crucial to the book as a whole: the conflict between avant-garde and bourgeois; the conflict between individual and community and the related question of authority; the ascendancy of the secular over the sacred; the replacement of history by

psychology; the question of the historic origin and value of privacy; the revolution of “rising entitlements” as wants replace needs; the problem of the separation of realms.

It is within the context of the household metaphor that the cultural contradictions of capitalism are clarified. Thus the Protestant work ethic, with its emphasis on the inhibition of sensual satisfaction and its tendency to delay sumptuary but not capital accumulation, in time produces the abundance that makes it difficult to reconcile escalating private and group wants with public needs—that, indeed, makes the satisfaction of private and group needs a priority of virtue. Hence the dilemmas we confront when we try to combine bourgeois appetites, a democratic polity, and an individualist ethos “which at best defends the idea of personal liberty.” Hence the New Left's moralistic attraction to the totalistic (and harmonious) solutions of Castro and Mao on the one hand, and the modernist-inspired rejection of delayed gratification on the other.

The latter contradiction gets attention throughout the book, but especially in Part One, “The Double Bind of Modernity,” where Bell concentrates on the capacity of the Protestant ethic “to stimulate a demand for pleasure and play in the area of consumption.” So stimulated, capitalism in time produces Hefner's *Playboy* much as Hegel produces Marx. More specifically, the ethos of the sumptuary life with its moralistic commitment to consumption and experience produces a rampant individualism that expresses itself best in the profanation of traditional values and in the spoliation of national resources. So we are confronted with the political contradictions that result when a liberal society set up to promote individual ends becomes so hedonistic that the very idea of a public household appears to be an American heresy.