

Books

THE SOCIALIST PHENOMENON

by Igor Shafarevich

(Harper & Row; 319 pp.; \$16.95)

RUSSIA'S FAILED REVOLUTIONS: FROM THE DECEMBRISTS TO THE DISSIDENTS

by Adam Ulam

(Basic Books; 441 pp.; \$18.95)

A. James McAdams

Both of these recent volumes have in common the broad subject of authoritarian government. Igor Shafarevich's book purports to be a theoretical and historical treatment of one form of authoritarian rule, socialism—which, for Shafarevich, is not new but, rather, a recurrent historical phenomenon that has left its mark on mankind's oldest intellectual and political records. By surveying this human record, we can "scientifically" uncover socialism's essential characteristics; and on this faith the author devotes most of his effort to the enumeration of a diverse array of intellectual trends: Platonic philosophy, medieval millenarianism, English utopianism, and the Enlightenment. These examples of intellectual socialism are then juxtaposed with supposedly representative instances of "actual" socialism—the Incan empire, Mesopotamia, feudal China. On these very broad foundations Shafarevich builds a definition of socialism as a "unified historical phenomenon" governed by four distinguishing principles: the abolition of private property, of the family, and of religion, and the forcible creation of absolute equality among men. Socialism, we are told, may seem to have positive aspects but, in fact, is a negative phenomenon. Because of its hostility to such core institutions as family and private property, socialism is antithetical to all those forces that sustain civilized society, especially individuality. Ultimately, it is antithetical to life itself because it postulates a nihilistic faith that can only lead to the final "death of mankind."

Shafarevich is an interesting phenomenon himself, an internationally recognized Soviet mathematician who has been ejected from his post at Moscow University due to his political leanings. Like all Soviet dissidents, Sha-

farevich is interesting because of the light his work sheds on popular discontent in the USSR. He never explicitly criticizes the present Soviet regime in this book, but his sweeping condemnation of socialism itself should be read to include the modern Soviet state. In the foreword Alexandr Solzhenitsyn stresses the enormities of socialism in practice.

As a dissenting note in a closed society, Shafarevich's work may have some merit; but I doubt that the book adds much to our understanding of socialism. The treatment of socialism's "roots" is not different from the historical generalizing already done by Eric Voegelin, Karl Popper, and Raymond Aron, and it lacks much of the latter works' subtlety and sensitivity to historical context. In part the argument is circular: The supposed features of socialist thought identify intellectual currents as socialist, which can in turn be broken down to reveal the socialist phenomenon's defining characteristics. But Shafarevich's concept of socialism is too broad (from Plato to Shang Yang to Paraguayan Jesuits) to be meaningful. He might better have confined himself to the last century: Stalinist socialism, national socialism, Fabian socialism, democratic socialism. He might then have discovered that the meaning of the phenomenon is at least partly expressed in its diversity.

Shafarevich's argument is more polemical than scientific. We can easily sympathize with his defense of individuality, religion, and the family. But a number of sincere *socialists*—Sidney Webb, Michael Harrington, or Dorothy Day—would sympathize with us.

In contrast to Shafarevich, Adam Ulam is one scholar who has never failed to recognize the diversity or complexity of his subject matter. His book

is concerned with another form of authoritarian rule, Russian autocracy, and especially with its "libertarian" challengers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By his own admission Ulam has not attempted to present a systematic history of the Russian revolutionary tradition, but his work is still a provocative and engagingly written introduction to it. Ulam is interested primarily in why "libertarian" thought and practice failed to catch on during the tumultuous final years of czarist rule. To this end he begins his study with the Decembrists' abortive coup against the monarchy and follows with an appraisal of the reactions of Slavophiles and early populists (Chernyshevsky, Herzen) to the ambiguous reforms of Alexander II. He moves on to the rough experiments in limited parliamentarianism after the 1905 revolution and concludes with the turmoil of Russian society during World War I, the raised hopes and then dismal failures of the Provisional Government, and the ultimate ascendancy of the Bolsheviks.

On the whole this is a good story, though its central argument is sometimes difficult to follow. One is never quite sure what Ulam means by the notion of a "libertarian" challenge to Russian autocracy. Had he defined the term more precisely, we would appreciate more easily why he chose to single out figures like Chernyshevsky or Herzen rather than Nechaev, Kropotkin, or Bakunin. At times also readers may find themselves so bogged down in historical details that the underlying theme is obscured. At various points Ulam gives us reasons for the failures of "libertarian" thought in Russia, ranging from a servility before traditional authority to a misplaced faith in authoritarian institutions; but it is never very clear how he wishes to tie these factors together. It might have been useful had he approached this question from a comparative historical perspective, balancing the shortcomings of the Russian record against a case (for example, France) in which the "libertarian" appeal did have some success.

Ulam devotes much of his book to Lenin and the advent of Russian communism, presumably because Lenin's victory signified the libertarians' decisive defeat. Some readers may find questionable Ulam's apparent conviction that the success of Lenin's Bolsheviks was due primarily to unprincipled

opportunism and convenient appeals to popularly held sentiments such as nationalism and "soviet" power. "Communism," Ulam boldly declares, "is just an ideological veneer over Russian nationalism." As every movement, the Bolsheviks certainly had their opportunistic element, and even today Communists are eager to exploit nationalistic appeals. But one could argue as well that Leninism was a reasonably coherent and sincerely held belief system, a synthesis of old and new perspectives, which had some novel relevance to Russian society.

Finally, one expectation suggested by the book's subtitle is in fact never fully met. Ulam devotes less than a tenth of his argument to contemporary dissent. It is true, of course, that the modern dissidents' position is much weaker than that of even their predecessors, the Decembrists. Nonetheless, critics of the present regime are by no means less fervent or less articulate advocates of the libertarian spirit, however it may be understood. Especially intriguing for Ulam's purposes is the fact that these dissidents speak in radically different voices about what freedom might mean in the Soviet setting—just compare a Solzhenitsyn with a Sakharov. These contradictory impulses have yet to be explored fully, a fact that should invite Ulam to prepare a new study on the evolution of modern Soviet dissidence.

**THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE:
THE AIMS AND METHODS
OF AMERICA'S POLITICAL
INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM**

by Frank J. Donner

(Alfred A. Knopf; 554 pp., \$17.95)

John B. Keeley

On occasion one reviews a book that is disappointing because of what it might have been with better editing. *The Age of Surveillance* is just such a "might have been" book—might have been receiving better reviews, might have conveyed an important story to the public in a far more convincing manner, and, consequently, might have accomplished what the author so passionately desired. Instead we have a book that is poorly structured, badly balanced, redundant, pedantic, occasionally tendentious, and a mighty chore to read. Having said all this, I hasten to

add that I am glad to have read Mr. Donner's book, and, bad as it is, I thank him for writing it.

In a deliberate, exhaustive, almost tortuous fashion the author lays bare the political surveillance activities of private and public organizations. People, places, and events are documented with such detail as to be overwhelming at times. Over a hundred pages alone are devoted to J. Edgar Hoover who, as the book reveals, destroyed himself and betrayed not only the public's trust but that of his own organization as well. Still, for all his paranoia about communism and his manipulation of Congress and presidents alike, Hoover did create an agency that combatted interstate crime, frustrated corporate fraud, and was more effective in its counterintelligence role than is generally known. Even devils must have their due. To have given Mr. Hoover his would have added credibility to Donner's more important judgments. And do we really need to know that the director had such a phobia about germs that he ordered the installation of violet-ray toilet lamps or that he was so concerned about his safety that he forbade left turns of his limousine and propped a decoy hat in his car to confuse would-be assassins?

Hoover and the FBI are truly the devil incarnate to Donner, and he devotes the first six chapters of his volume almost exclusively to them. The reader who endures this will be rewarded in the remaining six chapters with a relatively more thoughtful and balanced consideration of the domestic surveillance activities (especially during the 1960s and '70s) of the military, the presidential office, CIA, Congress, the Internal Revenue Service, and of numerous private organizations.

The book documents wire-tapping, "dirty tricks," extensive file-keeping, break-ins, provocations, and disinformation involving thousands of United States citizens and hundreds of organizations. According to Donner, there is scarcely a scintilla of evidence to justify undertaking these activities but apparently much to show that, in fact, these activities failed to protect us from the bombings, riots, or lesser civil disturbances that actually threatened the public interest. Donner provides no analysis and little reasoned argument to support these premises. He wins his case—almost—by his massive documentation (639 citations) and by his

extraordinary devotion to a subject that has been his passion for twenty years.

I cannot imagine anyone knowing more about the history of political surveillance in the U.S. than Frank Donner. I couldn't be more impressed if he knew the batting averages of every player in the World Series since 1945. Unhappily, Mr. Donner's passion, which he states clearly in the introduction, clouds his understanding and weakens his case. Speaking of his accumulation of material on the abuse of civil liberties, he states:

"[It] served a deep personal need. The files and each item in them became for me a form of remonstrance, a private protest against betrayal by the government of its democratic premises. Beyond this lay the vague hope that someday I might wrest time from my law practice to present my final accounting in a book. My work as a civil liberties lawyer not only provided fresh material for my files but sharpened my desire to put it all down in a grand reckoning."

All of this from the man who abhors the files kept by others—granting that there are files and then there are files....

As the "tringe elements" of Right and Left again marshal their forces to destroy each other, my concern grows about the sins that Donner describes. His book has sharpened my unease considerably but deepened my understanding only slightly. Perhaps there is an inherent tendency in governments to stifle dissent, to confuse sedition with political radicalism. Beyond documenting the sins of the past, Mr. Donner could have helped us deal better with the future. **WV**

**CONQUEST OF WORLD HUNGER
AND POVERTY**

by Douglas Ensminger
and Paul Boman

(Iowa State University Press, 107 pp., \$7.50)

William J. Byron

This is a solid and sensible book, helpfully analytic and sufficiently prescriptive to merit the attention of agricultural policy-makers here and in the less developed countries.

Douglas Ensminger, former Ford Foundation representative for India and