

**SOVIET DISSIDENTS:  
THEIR STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS**

by Joshua Rubenstein  
(Beacon Press; xv + 304 pp.; \$12.95)

**RELIGION IN THE SOVIET UNION  
(THE WASHINGTON PAPERS,  
VOL. VIII)**

by Albert Boiter  
(Sage Publications for The Center for  
Strategic and International Studies,  
Georgetown University; 88 pp.; n.p.  
[paper])

**ON SOVIET DISSENT: INTERVIEWS  
WITH PIERO OSTELLINO  
BY ROY MEDVEDEV**

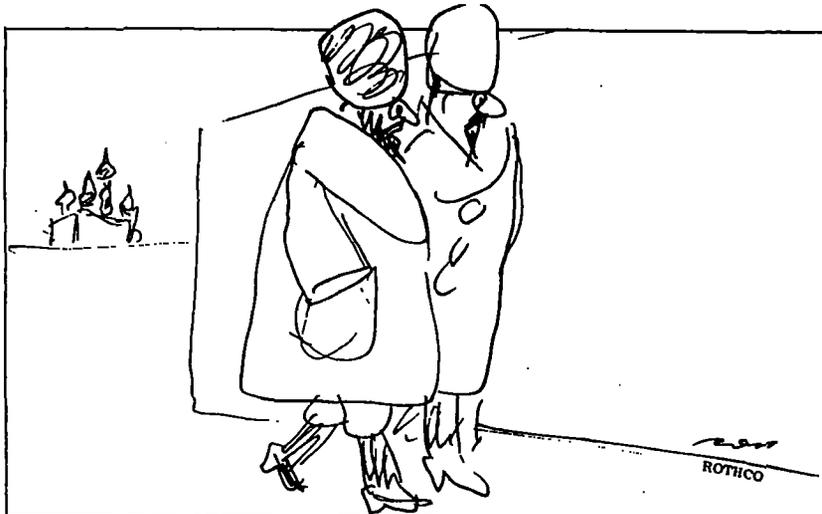
edited by George Saunders  
(Columbia University Press; 158 pp.;  
\$10.95)

Sy Syna

"The political system of Russia could not withstand twenty years of free communication with Western Europe." That trenchant observation was made by the Marquis de Custino during his travels in Russia in 1839 and recorded in his *Journey for Our Times*. According to Joshua Rubenstein, De Custino's comments "reflect a dispiriting amount of truth" even today.

Mr. Rubenstein, a staff member of Amnesty International, explains that his approach in *Soviet Dissidents* "has been to explore the origins and development of dissent through the lives of important activists," which allows him to touch only briefly on certain groups—Lithuanian Catholics, Baptists and Pentecostals, and ethnic groups such as Ukrainian nationalists, Crimean Tatars, Georgians, and Armenians. The Jewish emigration movement and its relationship with Soviet democrats is rather fully explored because of both Mr. Rubenstein's personal interest in the subject and the wealth of materials and individuals available for interviews.

Fortunately the areas slighted in Mr. Rubenstein's chronicle are filled in by two other recently published works. *Religion in the Soviet Union* is a succinct and dispassionate examination of Soviet laws, policies, and practices with regard to each major religious group in the USSR by Dr. Albert Boiter, a Sovietologist. *On Soviet Dissent*, a series of interviews by the Italian journalist Piero Ostellino with Roy Medvedev, the



"You can't please everybody in your memoirs, and I mean the Futurists, the Menshevists, the Imaginists, the Keremskyists, the Trotskyists, the...."

Soviet historian and dissenter (originally published in 1977), has been translated from Italian by William A. Packer and now appears with some additional material. It explores the definitions and the philosophical and political dimensions of dissent, and it includes a valuable section on dissent within the framework of Soviet law. Together the three books provide an in-depth picture of the Soviet dissident movement.

The starting point of Mr. Rubenstein's history is the thaw initiated by Stalin's death on March 5, 1953. "Under Nikita Khrushchev the regime took an enormously significant and irreversible step; it began to release political prisoners. From 1954 to 1959 between seven and eight million people returned from labor camps, prisons and Siberian exile with stories of torture and slave labor. Many were now angry, determined opponents of the regime." One of these was Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Another was Victor Krasin, a former Moscow University student arrested for founding a discussion group. But Khrushchev's regime was also characterized by waffling. In 1956, during a five-hour speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's personality cult. In the same year the editor of *Novy Mir* lost his job owing to the sensation caused by Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*, which the magazine had published. The furor caused in official circles by the publication abroad of *Doctor Zhivago* did not end with Pasternak's death in 1960. Khrushchev denounced Stalin again in 1961 and in the following year personally approved the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of*

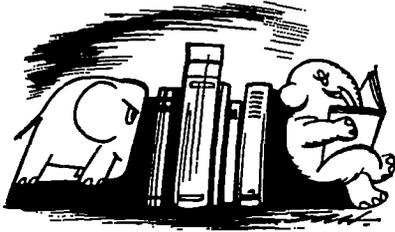
*Ivan Denisovich*, a far more damning indictment of the Soviet regime than Pasternak's book. There were reforms in Soviet criminal law and judicial procedures in 1958 and 1960. Alexander Esenin-Volpin, a mathematician who had been arrested, exiled, confined to mental hospitals, and is generally considered "father of the human rights movement," adopted the tactic of forcing Soviet authorities to conform to the law. After the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Accords, Volpin's ploy led to formation of Helsinki Watch groups throughout the country, though in 1970 few of the original human rights dissidents remained.

In the twenty-eight years since Stalin's death a pattern of dissident activity has emerged. Some relatively small and often innocuous event leads to an arrest. The arrest provokes a wave of protest in the form of petitions, letters, and demonstrations within the USSR, often coupled with external pressures brought by international groups. These protests are usually met with resistance—often more arrests. But each cycle involves people even more highly placed in Soviet life. Sometimes the furor results in the freeing of dissenters or the mitigation of a sentence; more often it results in exile.

Samizdat, or self-publishing, has been the most successful instrument of the human rights movement. From its beginnings—a few clandestine typescripts of poems, essays, and stories, including all of Solzhenitsyn's early works—it has grown to include transcripts of dissenters' trial proceedings, religious tracts, and translations of forbidden foreign works smuggled into

the USSR. Samizdat has surfaced everywhere, including labor camps in Siberia, and at every level of Soviet society.

The *Chronicle of Current Events*, though at one time halted for two years, is still issued regularly. It notes dissident activity in all parts of the USSR and includes details of arrests, interrogations, trials, and protests. Several other journals have sprung up in imitation of it, notably in the Ukraine and in Lithuania, where it speaks for the struggle of Catholics for religious freedom.



Protest letters signed by prominent citizens and addressed to Soviet leaders are continually leaked to the Western press and prove an ongoing embarrassment to the regime. They are often the first step on the road to human rights dissent for those who sign them, Andrei Sakharov being a notable example. The struggle has touched laborers as well as the intelligentsia, the religious as well as the atheistic.

Boiter points out that dissidents have finally realized what John Stuart Mill said over a hundred years ago: "that religious liberty is the mother of all human liberties." Yet repressions against the Jews and Protestant evangelical groups, such as the Hutterites, stem from czarist times. What the Soviet Government has done is extend religious repression to all groups by a series of measures built into law. The Soviet constitution guarantees separation of church and state, yet Soviet law forbids the giving of religious instruction to both children and adults. And any believer may be prosecuted for failure to fulfill any state obligation, even when it conflicts with his faith.

Dr. Boiter sets forth evidence of a religious upsurge in the Soviet Union. The evangelicals reacted strongly to a state amalgamation plan and to Khrushchev's subsequent effort to reduce the number of churches. Among the Russian Orthodox—whose church numbers over 70 million adherents, by official estimate, and where there is a tradition of government regulation—

dissent centers on the irrationality of the regulations of the Council for Religious Affairs. Jewish dissent has focused on the right to emigrate as the government continues its fierce anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaign. Half of the Soviet Union's 5 million Catholics live in Lithuania, where they constitute some 80 per cent of the population. Because Catholicism is a "Western" religion and Lithuania was incorporated into the USSR only after World War II, there is a link between the nationalistic, ideological, and spiritual aspirations of the Lithuanians, strengthened by the election of a Polish pope. As a result, samizdat is widespread and 71 per cent of young Lithuanians are Roman Catholic communicants. In Central Asia the Soviet Government has stressed modernization. It has also largely ignored Muslim religious activity and may still command the loyalty of the population.

If the religious revival in the Soviet Union is of "noteworthy proportions," Boiter nonetheless perceives the regime as even more repressive and better organized to implement its repressions than was Stalin or Khrushchev. The government still wishes to eliminate religion and correctly perceives religious practice as a form of dissent.

Roy Medvedev defines a dissident as "someone who disagrees in some measure with the ideological, political, economic, or moral foundation that every society rests on, including the Soviet Union. But he does more than simply disagree and think differently; he openly proclaims his dissent and demonstrates it in one way or another to his compatriots and the state."

This definition and Medvedev's analysis of the contradictions in the Soviet constitution regarding civil rights are the assets of a generally unsatisfactory book. The book is presented in question-and-answer format so that Medvedev's responses are along the parameters defined for him by his questioner. A subsequent interview, by Vittorio Zucconi, another journalist, is included as a postscript but adds nothing new.

Medvedev believes in communism; his dissent, therefore, is limited to those elements in Soviet life and government that block the road to true communism. Though he is vehement in condemning Stalin and Stalinism, he does not suggest that there is something fundamentally amiss in a system that allows a leader the unchecked power to

liquidate literally millions of people.

It is significant that, though his twin brother, Zhores, was stripped of his citizenship, Roy Medvedev has remained in Moscow. There he writes and publishes, relatively undisturbed by Soviet authorities—a tame tiger, saying relatively little that is not already sanctioned or tolerated by the regime.

## **APOCALYPSE: NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE IN WORLD POLITICS**

**by Louis René Beres**

(University of Chicago Press; xvi + 315 pp.; \$20.00)

*James T. Johnson*

The responsibilities of power and the exigencies of the nuclear age continue to fuel the production of books on the possibility of war. Some have been thoughtful and worthwhile, others not. There have been books on the law of war and on limited warfare; on just war tradition and on defining moral restraints to war; on deterrence strategy and on the arms race generally or the nuclear race in particular; on personal reactions to war and on military history. It is easy to think of a number of major books in the last twenty years in all these categories, and easy to recall one or more in the last five or six years—which suggests the extent of the continuing concern to explore and debate the problem of warfare.

Louis René Beres's *Apocalypse* is a book on the possibility—or, rather, the possibilities—of nuclear war in the near future and how to avoid it. Beres argues for three such possibilities: (1) nuclear war between the superpowers, (2) nuclear war as a result of proliferation, and (3) nuclear terrorism. He follows a mode of investigation common among political scientists, that of "alternative scenarios"; each path to possible nuclear war defines one such scenario. The very familiarity of the terrain he leads us through raises the question: Is yet another book on the imminence of a nuclear doomsday really needed? The answer is different for each of the three scenarios Beres considers.

The discussion of nuclear war between the superpowers raises the greatest doubt about whether *Apocalypse* makes a genuine contribution to understanding and debate. Given an argu-