

ical Islam to the morgue of history like an opiated cancer patient, Ruthven is not so bold. He ends his book on this sober but sanguine note: "[Islam] is a message phrased in the language of a pastoral people who understood that survival depended upon submission to the natural laws governing their environment, and upon rules of hospitality demanding an even sharing of limited resources. In a world riven by the gap between rich and poor nations, and in constant danger of nuclear catastrophe, this message has an urgent relevance, and it is one that we ignore at our peril." WV

### HOW DEMOCRACIES PERISH

by Jean-François Revel

translated by William Byron

(Doubleday and Co.: 312 pp.: \$17.95)

Thomas Magstadt

If Jean-François Revel is right, nothing succeeds like failure or fails like success in world politics these days. Moscow is winning the cold war despite two startling facts: (1) The Soviet "model" has been an eco-

nomie failure wherever tried, and (2) the Western free enterprise system, for all its imperfections and vicissitudes, remains the most successful economic formula in human history.

The explanation for this paradox, Revel argues, lies in the elusive laws of political relativity, which have made economics largely irrelevant to the superpower balance. Constitutional democracies are neither militarily defenseless nor morally indefensible. Far from it. But by some cruel twist of fate, the peculiar anatomy of Soviet power is such as to readily adapt to attacking the soft underbelly of the West.

Tocqueville was on the mark when he observed that democracies are at a distinct disadvantage in dealing with dictatorships. But Revel, like Tocqueville, is not a crude determinist. Disadvantage is one thing, doom quite another. Even the appearance of the modern totalitarian state—the apothecosis of dictatorship—would not, by itself, justify the death sentence Revel pronounces. Nazi Germany, he notes, posed a mortal threat, but in the end the democracies prevailed.

So what is different about the Soviet totalitarian challenge? Not its contempt for the rule of law, for our materialistic values,

our moral standards, our religious beliefs; not its militarism, fanaticism, xenophobia, hypocrisy, megalomania, or cold-blooded Machiavellianism. The Nazis were certainly no less guilty of these perversions. The difference is a subtle one. In fact, the difference is subtlety.

The Soviets, Revel tells us, have discovered the Achilles' heel of Western democracy: its fundamental decency. This, in turn, explains the propensity of democratic nations to soul-searching and self-deprecation. Among the resultant anomalies are these:

Democratic civilization is the first in history to blame itself for the fact that another power is working to destroy it.

The democracies today accuse themselves of sins they have not committed and typically presume themselves guilty until proven innocent.

The Western powers adopt policies harmful to themselves and helpful to their common adversary.

America's NATO allies consistently apply a double standard in their relations with the U.S. and the USSR, excusing Moscow's felonies while condemning Washington's misdemeanors.

The aim of those who organize antinu-

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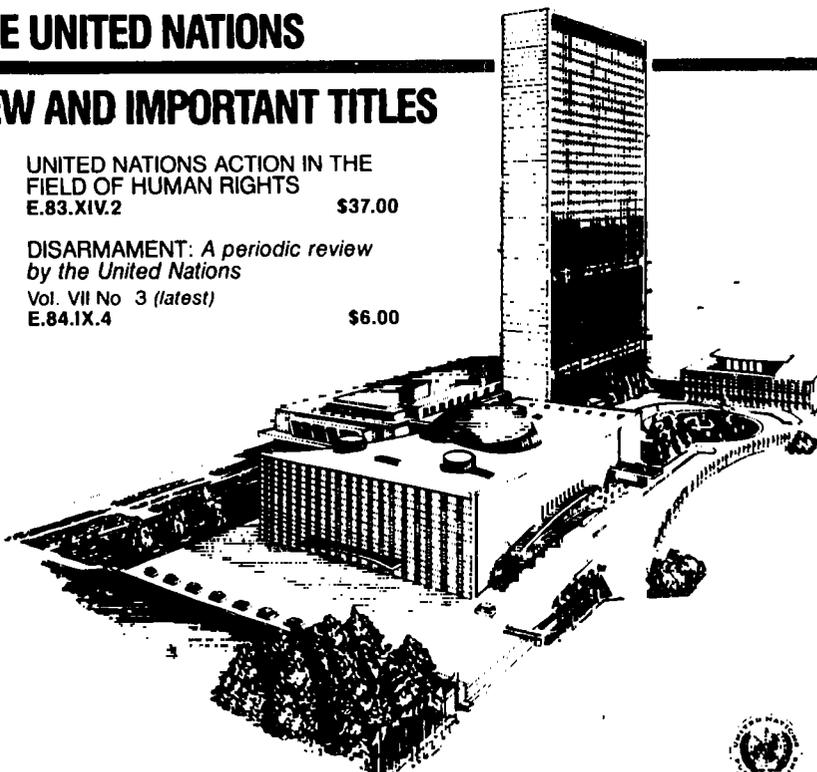
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clear demonstrations has always been to destroy democracy, not to prevent war.

Western leaders have become so accustomed to surrender that they can no longer distinguish between achieving victory and postponing defeat (e.g., the Cuban missile crisis).

The effect in international politics is to spawn a reverse Darwinism: survival of the least fit. About the Kremlin's plans the West has a pathological "fear of knowing." Revel knows, and writes that "conspiracy is too mild a term for what the Communists do. They have an overall plan that they follow methodically, patiently, relentlessly." On the other hand, there is no fear of knowing what the United States is up to. The "truth" about America can be (and constantly is) exposed to microscopic scrutiny. To buttress this point, Revel quotes Alain de Benoist, a theoretician of France's New Right: "Some people are not resigned to the idea of having to wear a Red Army cap some day. True, it is not a pleasant prospect. But we cannot stand the idea that we will eventually have to spend the rest of our lives eating hamburgers in Brooklyn." America-bashing has now become the rage of both the political Left and the political Right. And that, Revel claims, leaves few who have the passionate conviction and will to defend democracy.

Most of Revel's book is devoted to amassing evidence to prove the reality of Communist expansion and to delineate the strategy and tactics for Moscow's relentless drive to eradicate democracy. Nonetheless, Revel vigorously denies that it is his intention to damn the Soviets or save the democracies. His purpose, he insists, is to explore the arcane reasons why moral and economic superiority, in defiance of logic and history, no longer confer military, political, or psychological benefits on the West. Revel's approach is methodical rather than polemical. For every sweeping generalization, he cites numerous (and sometimes tedious) examples, frequently offering new insights into old incidents and reinterpreting landmarks of postwar history (e.g., the Berlin Wall) with startling plausibility.

However scrupulous Revel may try to be in mustering facts to support his theory, there is one fact he is unsuccessful in concealing: This book is no mere academic exercise, and its author does not seek truth for truth's sake. Revel is indeed a crusader against communism. In pretending otherwise, he protests too much.

Yet *How Democracies Perish* is as much a reproach to the West as it is an indictment of the East. Revel writes in the concluding chapter:

"I agree that we should make a point of communism's failures. Their list is so impressive that it frightens me; a system that has grown so strong despite so many failings, that increasingly dominates the world even when no one wants anything to do with it, at least not the majority of the people in the countries it seeks to penetrate, and that, where it is in power, everyone except the Nomenklature longs to be rid of—this system must nevertheless embody a principle of action and monopolization of power more effective than any mankind has ever known before. Communism and the Soviet empire are unprecedented in history. None of the classic concepts that make the past intelligible explains Communist imperialism. It does not follow the bell-shaped expansionist curve of previous empires. Yet the democracies persist in believing it will decline of itself and inevitably grow more moderate."

Conservatives will find Revel's essay highly thought-provoking; more liberal spirits will find it just plain provoking. This reviewer has a mixed reaction. Unlike so many purveyors of Far Right boilerplate, Revel is not simplistic, nor does he resort to subterfuge or sensationalism to build his case. Nonetheless, what he sees as the fatal flaw of Western institutions—their tolerance of collective self-doubt—others prefer to see as the source of that moral sensibility which has made our democratic politics worth defending. WV

### HEROES ARE GRAZING IN MY GARDEN

by Heberto Padilla

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux; 250 pp.; \$16.95)

Lorin Philipson

The embattled life of Cuban intellectuals under the Castro regime has long been a major subject of the poetry of Padilla. It is now the subject of his first novel, a roman à clef. In 1968, while serving as a foreign correspondent for the Cuban government, Padilla won Cuba's highest literary award for a volume of his poetry, *Outside the Game*. However, since the volume was critical of various aspects of the revolution, it was published with an introduction by the executive committee of the Union of Cuban Artists and Writers that condemned its contents. In 1971, the government, angered by Padilla's continued dissidence, arrested and jailed him. He was released a month later, after making a statement of self-criticism

and denouncing other writers. This confession became a cause célèbre among leftist intellectuals around the world. Among the more than sixty signatories to a letter criticizing Padilla's treatment were Jean-Paul Sartre, Heinrich Böll, and Susan Sontag. For the next ten years Padilla was unable to publish in Cuba. He survived by doing translations and, in March of 1981, was finally allowed to leave. One copy of the manuscript of this novel survived a police search of his home and accompanied him on the plane to the United States.

The title of the novel comes from a poem by Roque Dalton, whose own life is a gloss on the contradictions of heroic action. A member of a prominent family in El Salvador and self-styled revolutionary, Dalton came to Cuba in 1961. In the '70s he was killed by Communists under mysterious circumstances, allegedly because his sympathies were with national rather than Moscow-oriented revolutions.

Although the novel moves inexorably toward its catastrophe, it is not tragedy on a grand scale but, rather, a piling up of the minutiae of oppression—the petty, daily assault. This is not a story of passion but of frustration, the slow erosion of feeling and will to the point of atrophy. Padilla sets up a dialectic between members of the old guard who are still true-believers and those who reject what the revolution has become. Rodriguez, one of the believers, takes the position that one must accept the dark side of revolution—its "repression, overzealous police vigilance, suspicion, summary verdicts, firing squads"—as part of the "totality." Similarly, Humberto thinks that "the only thing that's real is the danger of a restoration."

On the other side are Julio, a former militant who is now a translator, under suspicion for voicing negative opinions about the regime, and Gregorio, a writer, an alcoholic, and a drop-out from the revolution. Gregorio is desperately trying to write a novel in secret. Julio, in strident arguments with Humberto, insists that a revolution must make room for a "critical intelligence," while Humberto defends the revolution's implacable laws and morality. For Humberto, Castro is "the only political genius in the Americas. A hero." But for Julio, "It's a sad country that needs heroes."

Indeed, the novel is devoid of heroes, except for Eduardo, killed in battle, whose photo appears ten years later on billboards all over Havana. Julio finds in this image "a subtle stroke of publicity...as effective as that of the old capitalist public relations agencies."

One of the themes of Padilla's poems—