

From World 1/22/73

From Russia with Misgivings

THROUGH RUSSIAN EYES: President Kennedy's 1036 Days. By Anatolii Andreievich Gromyko. International Library. 239 pp. \$9.95

By ARTHUR SCHLESINGER Jr.

THROUGH RUSSIAN EYES (the original title when it was published in Moscow in 1971 was *President Kennedy's 1036 Days*) is a book of singular interest. The author's father served seven years in Washington during and after the Second World War and has been Soviet foreign minister for the last 16 years. The author himself took a doctorate in history at the Moscow Institute of International Affairs and, as chief of the Foreign Policy Section in the Soviet Academy of Science's U.S.A. Institute, became one of the Soviet Union's top American experts. He is now attached to the Soviet embassy in Washington. Young Gromyko, in short, emerged from the heart of the Soviet establishment and was trained to be an oracle on American affairs. His book, unless one dismisses it as an act of propaganda or cynicism, must be taken to express the Soviet leadership's considered view of American society.

The ostensible subject is the Kennedy presidency; but the real and abiding theme, as in all Soviet "historical" works about the United States, is the domination of American society by monopoly capital. "The President of the United States, the venerable senators, the smartest members of the House of Representatives, and the entire bureaucratic apparatus are, in fact, in the service of the monopolists. Monopoly capital . . . controls American foreign policy, and the monopolists also rule American domestic policy." As for the political parties, "both the Democrats and Republicans are the closely cooperating parties of American monopoly capital, the interests of which they zealously serve."

The beauty of this thesis is that, for those who believe it, no fact can disprove it. If there is occasionally an appearance of disagreement in American politics,

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER Jr., the Pulitzer prizewinning historian, is the Albert Schweitzer professor of the humanities at the City University of New York.

this is simply because, as Dr. Gromyko rather oddly puts it, "monopolists cannot help but compete among themselves." If American policy seems on the surface to move in a progressive direction, this is only evidence of the unprincipled cunning of the monopolists in dissembling their purposes. It is all heads I win, tails you lose. But, if no fact can disprove the thesis, it is not an historical generalization at all but a metaphysical theorem. Wherever he took his doctorate, Gromyko is not in any serious sense an historian. He is not even a very serious Marxist. His brand, as Hans Morgenthau points out in his devastating epilogue, is typical of what used to be called "vulgar Marxism."

The metaphysical theorem provides the framework within which he examines the Kennedy presidency, or at least the Kennedy foreign policy; domestic affairs are almost completely ignored. Kennedy, Gromyko explains, "belonged to an influ-



From "The Cosmic Bicycle," by Satty (Straigh. Arrow Books)

ential family of the Boston monopolistic group . . . fundamentally controlled to an increasing extent by the Rockefellers." If his personal wealth "was by American standards comparatively small . . . he strengthened his financial position by marrying the daughter of a wealthy banker who had influence on the New York stock exchange"—an item of intelligence that would have delighted the late Black Jack Bouvier. Though himself a "more or less flexible bourgeois politician," Kennedy "acted in accordance with a previous written script. Though formally its author, he essentially played only the role assigned to him—with major or minor deviations from the 'text.'" Gromyko's Kennedy is a man of occasionally decent impulses pulled back sharply into line from time to time by the monopolies. This is at least, it must be said, a somewhat more complex conception than the fanatical cold warrior portrayed by the American revisionists or by English Marxists like Eric Hobsbawm with his

reference to "that most dangerous and megalomaniac of Administrations—the late John Kennedy's."

As Hans Morgenthau has pointed out, "If the leaders of the Soviet Union believe the fictions Gromyko presents as facts—and there is no reason to assume they do not, since the U.S.A. Institute is their main source of information about the United States—detente can be no more than a breathing spell in an ongoing struggle for total stakes." On the other hand, if neither Gromyko nor the Soviet leaders believe these fictions, if the portrayal of the United States as predestined by its economic structure to irremediable hostility toward the Soviet Union was a function of a passing moment, this hardly strengthens Gromyko's credentials as an historian. Indeed, in an introduction to the American edition Gromyko himself seems to take back the more implacable implications of his argument; and his former boss at the U.S.A. Institute, Georgi Arbatov, explained to Robert Kaiser of *The Washington Post* that Gromyko's book was written in "a period of very difficult relations between our countries" and presumably designed to serve the purpose of the time.

Whatever *Through Russian Eyes* is, it is not history. The name of N.S. Khrushchev, for example, does not sully the text, nor is it ever supposed for a single second that the Soviet Union is not the embodiment of all that is wise, true and disinterested. The book is therefore discouraging evidence of the condition of Soviet historiography, at least in the American field. Yet while men like Gromyko rise to the top of the Soviet historical profession by writing such propaganda tracts, other and better historians, like Andrei Amalrik, are subjected to unrelenting persecution by the Soviet state. "For a long time," Solzhenitsyn recently said, "the true history of our country has been neither recorded, written, nor openly discussed; and then out of the entire army of historians . . . there emerges a man like Amalrik who refuses to regurgitate the same fodder, or to pile up citations from authorities and from progressive doctrine, and has the courage to make an independent analysis of the existing social structure . . . Instead of analyzing his work and finding what is true and useful in it, they simply throw him into prison."

The persecution of Amalrik, it would seem to me, calls for protest by the American Historical Association. Other learned societies—the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Sociological Association, the American Psychiatric Association—have condemned the mistreatment of their professional colleagues in the Soviet Union. But the American Historical Association remains curiously and, I believe, shamefully unmoved. The view of (Continued on page 2)

Russia

(Continued from page 1).

the AHA council, as conveyed to me by the president of the AHA, is "that Amalrik and (Piotr) Yakir are not being persecuted by the Soviet regime because of their historical activities but because they have been distributing clandestinely current information embarrassing to the regime." Unless Soviet historians are persecuted "in their capacities as historians" the council declines to protest. This seems to me a singularly callous statement (by which I do not imply that the president of the AHA, who is an admirable scholar and a kindly gentleman, is himself a callous man). It is not at all clear that Amalrik is not in trouble in part because of his writings in contemporary history. In any case, one can only thank heaven that the National Academy of Sciences did not wash its hands of Sakharov on the ground that he was not acting in his capacity as a physicist and that, after all, he had embarrassed the regime by clandestinely distributing current information.

The silence of the historical establishment is matched only by the silence of the historians of the left. In a way this is odd, since few of them retain any strong faith in the Soviet Union. Perhaps, they fear that condemnation of Brezhnev's Russia might suggest that there could have been

good reason to oppose the Stalinization of Europe in the 1940s. Whatever the case, William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, Christopher Lasch and the rest have shown no great inclination to ask the AHA to protest the treatment of Amalrik. One cannot avoid noting the contrast between their silence and the forthrightness of historians of the left abroad. Thus E. P. Thompson, whose book *The Making of the English Working Class* has had, and deservedly, such an impact on American radical historians, wrote the *London Times* last September: "What is obscene is a state which, after 55 years of 'socialist power,' defends itself against the opinions and initiatives of its own citizens by administrative decrees, censorship, and police control . . . Mr. Solzhenitsyn has asked us to shout once more. And we must, urgently, meet his request." Some on the left, Thompson continued "have been so busy making faces at liberal-capitalist hypocrisy . . . that they have grown insensitive before the daily crime of Soviet repression and have become lacking in elementary duties of solidarity. We must make it clear again, without equivocation, that we uphold the right of Soviet citizens to think, communicate, and act as free, self-activating people; and that we utterly despise the clumsy police patrols of Soviet intellectual and social life."

Thompson has said it all. One hopes that American historians will recognize the "elementary duties of solidarity" before it is too late. □