

REVIEW OF E. H. CARR,
STUDIES IN REVOLUTION

Mr E. H. Carr is a justly renowned authority on both the theorists and the makers of revolution during the last century and a half, and these essays, for the most part contributed to *The Times Literary Supplement*, are written with his customary lucidity and sharpness; moreover the display that combination of accurate scholarship and exceptional capacity for organising scattered material, and presenting it vividly and coherently, which give to Mr Carr's historical work its distinction and weight. But whereas in previous years his attitude toward his subjects – Herzen, Bakunin, and indeed Marx himself – bordered on ironical detachment, and he saw them as so many gifted eccentrics, remarkable, even fascinating, but to a sane, well-balanced Englishman inevitably a trifle comical, the source of amused affection free from bitterness or contempt, he has, with the advancing years, lost this mood. It is as if the tragedy of our time makes him consider such innocent entertainment as being no longer appropriate; for we have reached a crucial parting of the ways, and we must choose our path irrevocably. Mr Carr leaves no doubt about his choice: for all his cool judgement and scrupulous scholarship, he is not merely interested in, but deeply under the spell of those who understand the nature of power and know how to fight for it and how to use it when they have won it, the *Welthistorisch* individuals who make history; and feels a corresponding lack of sympathy with those who, through failure of character and intellect, fall in the race, or, worse still, never begin, or, most ludicrous of all, gallop off in the wrong direction. Mr Carr's preferences in the gallery of revolutionaries are scarcely concealed: the hero is Lenin, even though Mr Carr very fairly points out that the Marxist canons in which he believed to the end, scarcely fitted, as they stood, either the Russian situation in the twentieth century, or that of the West. Mr Carr lends his support to the theory of Lenin's extreme consistency of purpose and outlook; yet something should surely

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be said of the astonishingly zigzag path which Lenin, so far at any rate as his published works indicate, seems to have pursued during the crucial years of 1906–17, a course exceptionally twisted even for a Russian Marxist. Similarly, in dealing with Marx, Mr Carr again very justly observes that Marx fitted his analyses neither to countries which were incapable of making their own revolutions, nor to those which, like England and France, might be capable indeed, but did not in fact make them. The roots of Bolshevism are traced with great skill: and a valuable corrective is occasionally applied to Communist historiography, as, for instance, when ‘socialism in one country’ is very properly traced to Lassalle – to whom Mr Carr devotes some excellent pages – and not to Marx or Engels (or the classical Lenin).

Mr Carr deals no less faithfully with the great forerunners of modern totalitarianism. St Simon is given his just due as the prophet of almost everything of social significance in our own time. Perhaps not quite enough stress is placed upon his original view of history, or his acute hatred of violent revolution, or his glorification not only of bankers and scientists, but of social control by industrial corporations. A melancholy picture is drawn of Herzen, who is represented as moving sadly from disillusion to disillusion, and his relative failure as a man of action is allowed to obliterate the fact that more often than any of his gifted contemporaries, whether socialist or liberal, with the possible exception of Tocqueville, he provided just assessments, unsurpassed in their acuteness, of men and situations both in Russia and in Western Europe, and did so in prose of incomparable brilliance. In his essay on Berdyaev, Mr Carr seems almost persuaded by that eloquent theologian into believing that Russia is more truly represented by the dark and troubled genius of Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy than by the great Westerners, Pushkin, Belinsky, Turgenev, Herzen, and by that movement towards political and intellectual liberalism which, until 1917, easily outweighed in numbers and influence the isolated voices prophesying doom. But Mr Carr has never concealed his dislike of liberals and is not averse to casting a protective mantle over extremists, however foolish or misguided he may think them to be. Thus he endorses altogether too cordially Mr A. Rothstein’s assessment of Lenin’s master, Plekhanov, whose unforgivable sin was to have refused to follow his former pupil in 1917; he deals amiably and informatively with Mr Gallagher and British

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Communism, and follows this with an exceedingly penetrating, and at times damaging, analysis of Mrs Ruth Fischer's book on the German Communist Party. The two essays on Stalin with which the book concludes preserve a temperate tone, but at the cost of skirting round some of the more terrible issues which tragically divide our world today. The exposition of theories is enlivened by more than one sharply drawn political portrait, and there is much shrewd and interesting comment on issues today more controversial than ever before, for the historical illumination of which Mr Carr's qualifications are at present almost unique in the English-speaking world.

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