
REVIEWS

RUSSIAN THINKERS. By *Isaiah Berlin*. Edited by *Henry Hardy* and *Aileen Kelly*. Introduction by *Aileen Kelly*. New York: Viking Press, 1978. xxiv, 312 pp. \$14.95.

One needs Sir Isaiah Berlin's stylistic brilliance to convey adequately the intellectual and aesthetic excitement induced by his lectures (and later essays) on Russian intellectual history, starting with his course at Harvard University in 1948. They stimulated in his Western listeners and readers a passionate curiosity for, and enthusiastic response to, the fathers of the Russian intelligentsia (Herzen, Belinskii) and their literary voices (Turgenev, Tolstoy). Some of this excitement may now be recaptured, thanks to the publication of Isaiah Berlin's major essays on Russian thought and literature—"Russia and 1848," "The Hedgehog and the Fox," "Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty," "A Remarkable Decade," "Russian Populism," "Tolstoy and Enlightenment," "Fathers and Children"—and his own liberal outlook and thinking as perceptively clarified in Dr. Aileen Kelly's introductory essay. Another generation's response may be different, its enthusiasm less vibrant, yet the reading, and rereading, of the essays will still give the reader intense intellectual pleasure and much food for reflection on the predicaments of the individual in contemporary society.

What is it that gives the essays such resonance and attractive power? In the first place, of course, is the author's rich and textured style. But more important, and of lasting effect, is Isaiah Berlin's talent for vivid portraiture of men and cultural milieus. Under his pen, Russia's intelligentsia and literary elite come to life; the reader can recognize men of emotion and commitment, with all their human weakness and spiritual glory. In addition, and herein lies Berlin's great achievement, he shows how these emotions, lives, friendships, and dislikes were diffracted in the ideas of these men, and in the ideas of succeeding generations. It is his ability to see ideas in their human and social existential predicament that marks the originality of Isaiah Berlin as a historian of Russian social and political thought. And it is this vision that deepens our understanding not only of the thought of those Russian writers he deals with, but of the perennial moral and political predicaments of civilized liberal men as well.

Viewed in the light of the traditional historiography of Russian *obshchestvennaia mysl'*, Sir Isaiah's essays are a refreshing departure. For him, that history is not a more or less foreordained apostolic succession from Radishchev to Lenin; nor, in his opinion, do the authors and thinkers embody or reflect some sempiternal characteristics of the Russian spirit. For Isaiah Berlin the importance and greatness of the fathers of the Russian intelligentsia—Herzen and Belinskii—and of the two writers who fascinated him most—Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy—reside in the individual quality of their search for moral truthfulness. It is this search—whether political or literary, metaphysical or "scientific"—that imparts to the ideas of these Russians their originality and appeal, as well as significance. This absolute commitment to moral truthfulness results in a unique openness to reality, an acceptance of it as the ground for man's freedom here and now, and a refusal to foreclose the manifold options of the future. History, especially for Herzen and the later Belinskii, is a process valuable in and for its own sake, it is not an instrument for some transcendent goal.

The thinkers and novelists Isaiah Berlin has chosen to write about may be termed liberal in their aspirations, if not in their existential practice. Fittingly, the collection concludes—and culminates—with Sir Isaiah's Romanes lectures, entitled "Fathers and

Children," in which he depicts Ivan Turgenev as the embodiment of the tragic, yet noble, predicament of the civilized, liberal, and humane person confronted by the extremism of a radicalized younger generation and the authoritarianism of an ossified establishment. The predicament has not been the unique fate of Ivan Turgenev; true liberals in the West are experiencing it again today; and most surely Soviet Russian *intelligenty* will face it some day again too.

Isaiah Berlin's collection of essays on Russia's intellectual past offers many a lesson for the thoughtful reader in the so-called Western world. But it is of even more urgent relevance to the Soviet intelligentsia, especially to its dissident and critical members. Isaiah Berlin's reading and interpretation of Herzen, Belinskii, Tolstoy, and Turgenev should remind them that the fathers and greatest glories of the Russian intelligentsia, committed though they were to moral truth and individual freedom, rejected a preordained or teleological view of history. They were aware of life's moral and spiritual antinomies and paradoxes and, for this reason, they refused to sacrifice the present for an unforeseeable future.

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DIE STRUKTUR DER RUSSISCHEN POSADGEMEINDEN UND DER KATALOG DER BESCHWERDEN UND FORDERUNGEN DER KAUFMANNSCHAFT (1762-1767). By *Bernd Knabe*. Forschungen der Osteuropäischen Geschichte, vol. 22. Osteuropa-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin, Historische Veröffentlichungen. Berlin and Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz in Kommission, 1975. 396 pp.

This is a highly specialized monograph, which gives a comprehensive geographical, social, and economic description of Great Russian and Siberian towns in the first years of the reign of Catherine II. The work is based upon three groups of sources. The author has read and digested the secondary literature by Soviet and prerevolutionary Russian authors (but he gives no indication of having consulted English-language sources). A useful critical analysis of this historiographical tradition introduces the book and suggests major interpretive weaknesses which require correction. Knabe also has subjected to minute analysis the materials published by the Imperial Russian Historical Society on the Commission of 1767-68, including the Instructions to the deputies, the *nakazy* or petitions from the town, as well as the 1830 edition of the Law Code of the Russian Empire. Beyond this and most important, he has examined the appropriate funds of the Town Magistrate and the Commercial Commission found in TsGADA, which has enabled him to give as complete a quantitative portrayal of mid-eighteenth-century town life as we are ever likely to have.

After identifying the salient physical characteristics of the town according to four major geographical zones, he proceeds to give for each region a detailed description of the administrative, legal, and financial structure, of population growth, and of the burden of obligations. This is followed by an occupational analysis of the *posad* community in over one hundred major towns where commerce and manufacturing prevailed, and an analysis of the relations between these towns and the surrounding countryside. The author does not neglect to investigate those social elements within the towns which stand outside the commercial and manufacturing networks, devoting a separate chapter to fourteen social groups of this type. Finally, he has compiled a complex classification of towns according to wealth and occupational profile and discusses the *nakazy* in relationship to each category. Here, as elsewhere in the book, the text is supplemented by extensive tables which, though often unnecessarily difficult to read, provide an immense amount of data which can be used in subsequent research.