

why this dissatisfaction led her finally to embrace views or findings that sharply reduced the number of victims as well as the responsibility of Iosif Stalin, the party, and any aspect of the official ideology. The new understanding of the purges has been exemplified by the volume edited by J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning entitled *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (1993). Its contributors made strenuous efforts to find nonsystemic explanations for the terror. Thus they considered it a mistake to seek its origins in the person of the dictator, in the administrative system, or in the official ideology, opting instead for diffuse, apolitical explanations that included personal hatreds, lack of coordination, crop failure, local confusion, personal conflicts, and even ancient rural traditions and superstitions.

Contrary to the much repeated claim, the critiques of the revisionists, did not, for the most part, stem from a desire to support or heat up the Cold War. These critiques originated mainly in the feeling that the revisionists were unwilling or incapable of mustering any moral indignation about the misdeeds of the Soviet system and that their work—wittingly or unwittingly—diminished its moral responsibility for the huge amount of suffering it had inflicted on its people and those of several neighboring countries. I also question the existence of a suffocating “Cold War consensus” (712)—another alleged source of the critiques directed against the revisionists. I recall a great deal of dispute and disagreement about these matters and, especially, the rise and the popularity in the 1960s of the moral equivalence school. The latter was certainly incompatible with any notion of a “Cold War consensus,” and it postulated that the two superpowers were equally responsible for it (often the United States more so) and that both systems were deeply flawed morally (on closer inspection the United States more so).

The critiques of the revisionists were also inspired, I believe, by their cavalier and often contemptuous dismissal of the information provided by refugees and defectors—people who grew up, lived in, and suffered under the Soviet system (all the more remarkable since the revisionists professed interest in information “from below”). Getty referred to these sources as “second-hand personal memoirs, gossip . . . and lurid accounts by defecting spies eager to earn a living in the West” (Getty and Manning, eds., *Stalinist Terror*, 40–41). Such denigration of defectors can be explained by an aversion to the revelations they provided, which conflicted with the more favorable views of the Soviet Union entertained by many revisionists.

These observations suggest that the ideals of nonpartisanship embraced by Fitzpatrick (683) have remained as elusive for the revisionists as for those who believe that there are occasions when scholars and intellectuals should bear witness against evil.

PAUL HOLLANDER

*University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University*

To the Editor:

The discussion on revisionism (*Slavic Review*, vol. 67, no. 3) depicts the evolution of Soviet studies over the last thirty-five years as a Hollywood-type story about how the good guys valiantly confronted and heroically defeated the bad guys. Some readers must feel reassured that the revisionists, idealistic knights of facts-based scholarship, ultimately prevailed over the totalitarianists, the reactionary champions of retrograde obscurantism. And even readers inclined to perceive the “discussion” as a display of sectarian triumphalism will surely find it helpful. After all, it is always good to know who is calling the shots in a particular professional arena and which faction has amassed enough power to impose its understanding of what should count as “a scientific statement based on facts” and what should be dismissed as “biased interpretation tainted by ideology”—and to these important questions the essays offer an unambiguous answer.

Other questions the “discussion” leaves unanswered. The gist of Sheila Fitzpatrick’s and J. Arch Getty’s lamentations is that until recently scholarship on the Soviet Union was not exclusionary enough and tolerated intolerable views. They passionately argue that the field should be purged of “Cold War attacks,” “antirevisionist argument[s] (or smear[s]),” arguments “value-laden in a Cold War way” (Fitzpatrick, 691, 693, 683); “mud slinging against revisionists,” “a Cold War consensus,” and “the totalitarian taint” (Getty,

711, 712, 714). That much is clear. What is less clear are the criteria that should guide the cleansing process. What is an “antirevisionist smear”—and what is an allowable critique of revisionism? What is a “Cold War attack”—and what is an acceptable negative assessment of Soviet realities? Needless to say, such criteria are bound to be murky and controversial, and the field of Soviet studies is not the only field where judgments about how to draw the line separating “science” from its “others” should be made. But if such demarcations are necessary, they may also be dangerous. A field may be delineated in such a way as to legitimate the coexistence of different opinions, multiple theoretical and methodological approaches, and vigorous contestations from which few topics are exempt. Or it may be cordoned off in accordance with the preferences of dominant cliques who have defeated their opponents in the battle for jobs and prestigious appointments, banished alternative points of view, and restricted debates to issues related to a limited vision of what is worth knowing about a set of observable phenomena (for example, a vision of the Soviet Union as a genuine civilization that coalesced around inspiring ideals and legitimate practices, was embraced by responsive rulers and supportive social constituencies, and consistently managed to sustain more than just a modicum of likable normalcy for its loyal citizens—but which, tragically, could not survive in a world still dominated by the cruel realities of capitalism and the hollow myths of liberal democracy).

Readers aware of the problem of exclusionary demarcations will probably inquire why it is that the “discussion” does not feature a single dissenting opinion. Perhaps the omission marks a victory for true scholarship. The revisionists, who are “big on sources” (Fitzpatrick, 701) and adept at using “the usual tools of analysis” (Getty, 713), obviously interpret their own ascent as proof that scholarly progress had taken place. As superior professionals, they should be entitled to treat “totalitarianists” in the same manner in which the American Chemical Society treats alchemists. Alternatively, the ban on dissenting points of view might be taken to mean that a reigning faction can smother criticism.

Of course, *Slavic Review*'s readers will have to decide which interpretation is more appropriate. Certainly, those who read the “discussion” as an uplifting tale about “scientific progress” will produce solid justifications for their choice. But the same might be said about those who lean toward the “censorious tribalism” explanation. And to understand why, a juxtaposition of the essays by Hellbeck and Osokina might be illuminating. The one truly original idea in the “discussion” is Hellbeck’s suggestion that the field of Soviet Studies stands to benefit from a “vital debate” between those who “study the Soviet past from afar” and those who “personally experienced Soviet power or live on formerly Soviet soil” (722). Given the hegemony of revisionism in western academia, the makeup of the first group is easy to predict. What about the second group? One participant in the “discussion” fits the description: Osokina. From her contribution we learn that she grew up as a “happy Soviet Young Octobrist” who did not know anything about Iosif Stalin, that “the totalitarian model” contradicts her “personal life experience,” and that “the Cold War view of Soviet society . . . hurt [her] feelings” (716–17). It is easy to understand, then, why she was considered a legitimate participant in the debate Hellbeck calls for. Why she was considered the *sole* legitimate participant, however, is harder to fathom. Is it realistic to assume that the organizers of the “discussion” could not find a single individual whose “personal life experience” differed from that of Osokina? And if not, should we then conclude that a “happy Soviet childhood” and “having one’s feelings hurt by the Cold War model” are de facto litmus tests that nonwestern participants in the “vital debate” should pass?

Finally, Fitzpatrick asserts that “the field” is no longer as “nasty” as it used to be “during the Cold War” (682). Should we trust her cheerful judgment on this particular issue? Would it not be more appropriate to hear the stories of those who have experienced the downside of revisionist triumphs—for example, scholars who opted to build upon and develop, rather than ritualistically reject, certain aspects of the totalitarian paradigm and who have a reason to believe that this circumstance accounts for the fact that they could not secure academic employment or see their work appear in print? More generally, a propos of revisionism: are losers not a better authority than winners on the “nastiness” of an academic status quo—or a political system?

VENELIN I. GANEV  
Miami University of Ohio