

STALIN: THE HISTORY OF A DICTATOR. By *H. Montgomery Hyde*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971. xv, 679 pp. \$12.95.

According to the front matter of this large volume, this is the twenty-sixth book written (in two cases, edited) by Mr. Hyde. While two of these earlier works relate to Russia, the others deal with a variety of quite different topics, including *A History of Pornography*. It may be that he knows Russian, for a few works in that language are used, albeit somewhat fleetingly. However, the book is almost wholly based on materials in English, particularly memoirs of foreigners, defectors, and Soviet generals. This permits Hyde to write a sound, smooth unpretentious narrative of Stalin's personal role in foreign and military policy between 1939 and 1945, the best part of the book by far. This section contains no important novelties and a minimum of interpretation, but is readable and reliable.

The rest of the work is a different matter. Hyde has chosen to rely heavily on the more sensational accounts of Stalin's rise and rule, such as Bazhanov, Delbars, Lermolo, and Orlov. These books pose a serious critical problem for any writer, since there is no way to confirm much of their reportage by comparing it with alternative sources. Surely much of what they say has some foundation. For example, it is possible to confirm from Svetlana Alliluyeva's *Twenty Letters to a Friend* that she had a teacher named Natalia, who disappeared just after Nadezhda Alliluyeva's death. This does credit to Lermolo's memoir, because she wrote of just such a person at a time when it was really impossible to learn of such things from the outside. On the other hand, Lermolo's report of Natalia's (Trushina's) version of Nadezhda's death is at variance with the more persuasive evidence of Svetlana's more intimate nanny, Alexandra Bychkova. One can hardly reproach Hyde for having failed to unravel these problems, but it does not appear that he has applied much critical effort to them, preferring to tell a dramatic story rather than to sift the evidence skeptically.

One area in which Hyde *has* contributed some critical comment is the question of Stalin's alleged service to the Okhrana. In an appendix he convincingly expounds the reasons for concluding that the Eremin letter, published in good faith by Isaac Don Levine, is a forgery. Beyond this, his handling of the problem is not very satisfactory. Relying mainly on the work of Edward Ellis Smith, he presents Stalin as an agent of the Okhrana but shows little concern for the implications of this thesis. Does it reveal Stalin as a completely cynical non-Marxist, a weakling who would do anything to save his skin, a cunning revolutionary who duped the police, or a schizophrenic? In general Hyde shows little interest in the mind of Stalin, with respect to formal ideology or psychohistory. Even so obvious a theme as the cult of Stalin is barely mentioned.

An even more serious weakness is Hyde's nearly complete disinterest in the central role of Stalin in the great domestic policy issues associated with the modernization of Russia. The collectivization of agriculture is passed off with a few pages that have little direct connection with Stalin. Industrialization fares no better. Educational and cultural policy is ignored.

An up-to-date biography of Stalin, using all of the materials that have accumulated since his death, is badly needed, but this book does not meet that need.

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