

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

Professor Riasanovsky is correct about some regrettable errors which crept into my book, *The First Bolshevik: A Political Biography of Peter Tkachev*, reviewed in the June 1969 issue. The publisher's editor, in rewriting my "Note on Transliteration," introduced a silly mistake which I, of course, should have caught: a reference to Tkachev's birth date rather than to his death date. Corrected, the line should read: "Tkachev's death year is given as 1886 instead of the date he knew, 1885." In the bibliography Florinsky became "Flerovsky," although Florinsky and his book were correctly cited on page 32. Beyond these failings, I am unaware of any other serious mistakes, including transliteration. Perhaps understandably bothered by these errors, Professor Riasanovsky wrote, I feel, a somewhat disappointing review of my book. He ignored some of the valuable elements in my work: Tkachev's projected "workers' dictatorship"; his "KOB" (*Komissiiia obshchestvennoi bezopasnosti*), anticipating today's KGB; Tkachev's concept of a future nationality policy for a Socialist Russia, which he described as "national in form, Socialist in content"; his theory of "permanent revolution"; his belief that the "kulaks" (his term) were ruining the Peasant Commune and the chances of this institution's being the starting point for Socialist reconstruction of the village. And so on. May I be so immodest as to suggest to readers of the *Slavic Review* that for an ably written exposition and review of my book they examine the October 1969 number of the *Bulletin* of the Institute for the Study of the USSR (pp. 45-49).

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Professor Riasanovsky does not wish to reply.

TO THE EDITOR:

Professor Robert H. McNeal, in his article "Lenin and 'Lise de K . . .'" (September 1969, pp. 471-74), has seen fit to characterize as a fabrication a purported memoir of a wealthy Russian lady, published in 1936, that says that Lenin had a secret love affair with her between 1906 and 1914. Authenticity and veracity will be more than ordinarily difficult to check in the case of a secretive, underground politician who was to have kept such an affair secret even from his own confidants.

Professor McNeal fails to shed any light on the problem because of his unusually careless handling of both sources and facts. His principal error is a case of mistaken identity among sources. As his main source he uses a book by A. Beucler and G. Alexinsky, *Les Amours secrètes de Lénine: D'après les mémoires de Lise de K . . .* (Paris, 1937). He believes that a Russian version published in *Illiustrirovannaia Rossiia* in 1936 is the same text as the Beucler-Alexinsky book, and that the lady's original memoir, on which Beucler and Alexinsky based their version, either is lost or never existed. Careful reading of the relevant passage in David Shub's *Lenin: A Biography* (New York, 1966, pp. 459-60) shows otherwise. The version in *Illiustrirovannaia Rossiia*, entitled "Lenin v deistvitel'nosti: Ego roman k Elizavetoi K\*\*\*" and copyrighted by G. Alexinsky (a French translation in *L'Intransigeant*, also in the fall of 1936, is mentioned by Shub—I have not been able to locate a copy in the United States), purports to be a memoir by Elizabeth K\*\*\*;

it is consistently in the first person and contains facsimiles of letters by Lenin. The Beucler-Alexinsky book is considerably longer and presents the material in a somewhat different sequence. It also makes a distinction between passages quoted in the first person and a narrator's text in the third person. The narrator apparently is Beucler, who alone signed the preface of the book.

Now, it is elementary that a primary source should be used in preference to a derived one. Use of the version in *Illüstrirovannaia Rossiia* would have spared McNeal most of what he wrote on the matter. The famous episode of a mass rally at St. Petersburg, which Alexinsky later used in his own memoirs without mentioning the lady, occurs also in *Illüstrirovannaia Rossiia*; but instead of Beucler's erroneous reference to June (it should be in the spring), the Russian source merely says that "it was already summer," which could just as well be a reference to unseasonably warm weather. The tale of the lady's encounter with Fürstenberg-Hanecki in Paris also appears in *Illüstrirovannaia Rossiia*. McNeal's objection that Hanecki could not be in Paris at a time when Lenin lived in Zurich is careless: Hanecki only refers to a mailing address in Zurich, not Lenin's physical whereabouts.

In trying to adduce a couple of facts, McNeal is equally unfortunate. Both *Illüstrirovannaia Rossiia* and Beucler-Alexinsky tell how the lady traveled to Stockholm to meet Lenin there at the time of the party congress (April 23–May 8, 1906), and both mention a boat ride in the fjords of the environs. McNeal finds this "highly implausible." He assures us that there are no fjords near Stockholm. As everyone knows, Stockholm is called "The Venice of the North." Any map of the area will show the numerous winding waterways, many of them with names ending in *-fjärd* (the eastern Swedish variant of the same word as *fjord* in western Swedish and Norwegian). McNeal also says that "In the early days of May around Stockholm spring is not that far advanced." To begin with, he misjudges the season and its weather and, even more, the North Europeans' attitude toward it. But even so, the weather on a given date is not a matter of conjecture based on averages. It is a matter of record, and the weather records from Stockholm are detailed and accurate for the past century. Those from 1906 show a mild winter followed by a warm spring, with some days in early May as warm as in high summer (*Observations météorologiques suédoises*, Stockholm, 1906, esp. p. 69; cf. also *Annuaire statistique de la ville de Stockholm*, various years with retrospective summary data).

McNeal's verdict of "fabrication" thus lacks any basis in facts. Do we have other grounds on which to accept or reject the memoir of "Elizabeth K\*\*\*\*"? David Shub accepted Elizabeth K\*\*\*\*'s memoir as genuine—possibly with some embroidering by the editors—because it also includes facsimiles of letters from Lenin. There are three letters, or parts of them, so reproduced in *Illüstrirovannaia Rossiia*: one in no. 45 (Oct. 31) and two in no. 46 (Nov. 7). All three facsimiles are cut, ostensibly to remove the name of the addressee, but other content may have been excluded too. The first letter is transliterated on the same page but not used in the text of the memoir; the other two are used in the text (in no. 48, Nov. 21, p. 4, col. 3 near the top; and in no. 49, Nov. 28, p. 5, first and second cols.). Only the last mentioned is also used in the Beucler-Alexinsky book (p. 177). Thus the facsimiles belong to the correspondence used in the memoir. The handwriting is undoubtedly that of Lenin as shown in his published correspondence from the same years. The facsimile reproduced letters are written in a personal tone, as if to a close friend, but they do not have the characteristics of the few love letters reproduced in the memoir; like most of the letters shown in the memoir, those in facsimile might have come from a correspondence without romance.

In all fairness—to both parties, Lenin and Alexinsky—the matter must be left there until other evidence is uncovered. If the memoir is a fabrication, it is skillfully done, and its author would be Alexinsky. He was indeed in a position to know most of the facts referred to in the memoir, including the geography of Stockholm and its weather during the congress weeks, since he was there himself. A detail will show the nature of our problem. In Stockholm, the memoir says, Elizabeth K\*\*\* was in touch with a Swedish socialist, a friend of Lenin's—the flamboyant “Comrade G.” Since *g* in Russian often stands for *h* in Western languages, anyone slightly familiar with the scene will immediately recognize the famous “Hinke” (Henrik Bergegren), mastermind of the congress's practical arrangements and guardian angel of its participants who were not really supposed to be in Stockholm at all (on his role at the congress, see Michael Futrell, *Northern Underground*, London, 1963, pp. 43 ff.). Hinke was well known among Russian Bolsheviks both then and later, and Alexinsky certainly knew him much better than the lady did. So why would Alexinsky still guard the “cover” of an initial letter “G” as late as in 1936—the same year Hinke died, seventy-five years old? The wealthy Russian lady, by contrast, may only have had this fleeting acquaintance with Hinke under conditions of secrecy and would therefore be more likely to use the cover identification when writing her memoirs. On the face of it, this might increase our credence in the memoir. On the other hand, if Alexinsky was a really skillful forger, he might have arranged details like that, just to bring about more credence among those in the know.

Another case of seeming accuracy is the memoir's statement that Lenin was extremely busy at the congress, and only once could Elizabeth K\*\*\* lure him away for a few hours' boat ride (*Illustrirovannaia Rossiia*, no. 46, Nov. 7, p. 6, col. 3, and Beucler-Alexinsky, p. 82). The protocols of the congress show indeed that Lenin was present at nearly all sessions; only in one session is it evident that he was absent, because repeated roll-call votes do not show him as either voting or abstaining. This was session 23 (of twenty-seven sessions in sixteen days) (see *Protokoly i stenograficheskie otchety s'ezdov i konferentsii Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza: Chetvertyi [ob'edinitel'nyi] s'ezd RSDRP, Aprel' [Aprel'-Mai] 1906 goda: Protokoly*, Moscow, 1959, pp. 388–402). The exact timing of the sessions is not known (*ibid.*, p. 5, note), but the number places this one close to the end of the congress, so that it could well be on one of the warm days of early May. Only a skillful forger could have so well matched the text to the facts.

Alexinsky might, for instance, have used letters which Lenin wrote to someone other than the lady, and he may also have added some of his own invention (which would then be among those not shown in facsimile), to build a story about Lenin which he wanted told. In other words, the memoir of “Elizabeth K\*\*\*” might be a parallel to the “Penkovsky Papers.” But even if this hypothesis were one day confirmed, this would not end our interest in the matter. It would still be true that we have here at least three, possibly many more, letters of Lenin's hand and not known from other sources, which of course means an addition to our basis of knowing the man.

There is also still the possibility that the memoir might be what it says it is. There are in any event two more reasons not to discuss a story of this kind as summarily as Professor McNeal has done. One is that if we accept “evidence” that proves nothing, the contours of our knowledge become blurred. The other lies in the national and international position of Lenin and his image. In his own country as well as in world communism, Lenin is idealized beyond reason—one of the

greatest myths of all time. Conscientious historians should not whitewash him without sufficient proof.

FOLKE DOVRING  
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TO THE EDITOR:

1. It is at least gratifying to learn that the affair of "Lise" is not a dead issue, as I had feared it might be. It is also gratifying to think that I am considered partial to Lenin rather than the reverse, which seems to be a more likely pitfall for American scholars. On the other hand, not everyone will assume as quickly as Professor Dovring that the alleged affair blackens Lenin's character. If true, would it not be a sign of the *prostor* that he so painfully lacks in most of his life?

2. *Fjords and rowboats*: While several reference works confirm my belief that the word "fjord" is not used to describe the low-relief inlets around Stockholm, I concede that Alexinsky's usage was derived from the similar Swedish term. Although I have done some rowing near Stockholm in late June and checked my impressions of the seasonal practices of boat hiring there with a person who has lived in the area, I now repent raising this matter because it is inconclusive, not that this in itself strengthens the case for "Lise."

3. *Letters*: There are striking dissimilarities between Lenin's authenticated hand and the published excerpts from his alleged letters to "Lise." One of the most obvious is the formation of the Russian *v* as a preposition. Judging by Bertram Wolfe's comment, to which I alluded, the Columbia University library, which presumably had a better look at the evidence than Professor Dovring did, was unconvinced that the letters were Lenin's. I do not, however, find this question crucial to my case. The published excerpts of letters could have been forged and "Lise" still could have existed, or they might have been by Lenin and written to someone else.

4. *Alexinsky*: What is crucial is Alexinsky's reliability, for one must depend wholly on him as the link to "Lise" and her story. Professor Dovring has not disposed of the contradictions that I noted in Alexinsky, undermining his credibility. While there is no need to repeat these contradictions, I do wish to point out that in one connection Professor Dovring might have spared himself some trouble if he had checked the Russian version of the story. In it Hanecki supposedly tells "Lise" in Paris during the World War, "On [Lenin] *v* Tsiurikhe." There is no basis for stating that this is merely a "mailing address."

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TO THE EDITOR:

Alvin Rubinstein's review of my book *Soviet-East European Dialogue: International Relations of a New Type?* (December 1969) has little relevance to its major ideas. His use of descriptive terms such as "turgid," "opaque," and "jaded" is unsupported by any telling example; and what is more, quoted passages are divorced from the very adjacent ideas he cites as shortcomings of the book, to wit: