

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

The December issue contained a wild distortion of my views by Steven Rosefielde ("The First 'Great Leap Forward' Reconsidered: Lessons of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*," *Slavic Review*, 39, no. 4 [December 1980]: 559–87). I am astonished that neither he nor the then editor, James Millar, thought fit to send me a copy in advance. I met both at Garmisch and Philadelphia, and not a word was said.

Rosefielde argues that Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag* shows that Soviet physical output data are wrong. He therefore criticizes all those whose computations were based on physical output series, which means virtually everyone who made computations. I did not, in fact, make any myself, but it would indeed be right to include me in the list of those who tend to accept published data on physical output. It is, of course, perfectly proper to challenge this view, provided the argument is conducted within the normal limits of academic discourse.

Instead the opportunity was taken to print a total travesty of my views, often on matters quite irrelevant to the theme. Thus I may or may not be wrong in assessing the role of agriculture in the process of capital accumulation in the early thirties. No one doubts that Stalin and his henchmen intended, through collectivization, to extract what they saw as the agricultural surplus nor the fact that the sharp fall in agricultural production had an adverse effect on what they were able to extract. My debate with James Millar, conducted on both sides with tolerance and good humor, centered on how to value what was extracted and what was supplied in return. What this has to do with GULag I do not know. To say "Nove's explanation hinges predominantly on an agrarian surplus" seems very odd. Explanation of what? It plays an important part in my analysis of the motives for collectivization. I also hold that in the years of agricultural disasters that followed collectivization, the elimination of the private peasants made possible the forcible collection of enough produce to feed the towns, even though peasants starved. This is obviously true and equally obviously does not justify the collectivization which caused the disasters.

But far worse is to come. On pages 562–65 there is a distortion of my views so complete that I can only express astonishment that it was not queried by the editor. Any normal reader of those pages would suppose that:

- (a) I accept the official claims for growth for the period 1928–33;
- (b) that the figures in table 1 ("which reflects Nove's viewpoint") are based on something that I wrote some place;
- (c) that I believe that "per capita consumption was maintained at the 1928 level";
- (d) that the diagram on page 565 "summarizes Nove's characterization" and that I believe that "the net outcome of the Great Leaps Forward was not especially grim";
- (e) that I hold that "the First Five-Year Plan was a success."

Balderdash!

I rejected the official growth statistics in an article on the so-called 1926/7 prices when Rosefielde was probably still learning to read a quarter of a century ago. I warned readers concerning the likely inflation of any figures in value terms in successive editions of the *Soviet Economy* and again in the *Soviet Economic System* (pages 360–65), stressing that it is not just a question of using obsolete prices as weights. I issued warnings on the subject in *An Economic History of the USSR* on pages 192, 226, and 383. In view of the data on pages 201–207 of that book, how could anyone conclude that "per capita consumption was maintained at the 1928 level"? I tried to demonstrate precisely that the situation in the years 1932–33 was "especially grim." If I may quote myself: "1933 was the culmination of the most precipitous peacetime decline in living standards known in

recorded history." It follows that Rosefelde's diagram on page 565 does not "summarize Nove's characterization."

Having devoted a number of pages to chronicling brutalities, deportations, hardships, famine, wildly unrealistic and unbalanced plans, was I likely to conclude that the First Five-Year Plan was "a success"? I did so only in Rosefelde's imagination. If Rosefelde had argued that I was insufficiently negative, that, for example, prison labor played a bigger role in the economy of the early thirties than I had assumed, this would be perfectly legitimate criticism, well worthy of serious discussion. But instead he chose to put into my mouth statements I did not make, to attribute to me a table and a diagram bearing no relation to anything I have ever written, to assert that I had opinions (for example, about consumption during 1932–33) which are directly contrary to those clearly expressed in the book from which he claims to have taken them. These are impermissible methods of controversy.

In the middle of his travesty of what purports to be my views, Rosefelde quotes the words "the Great Leap Forward" and later in a footnote attributes them to Solzhenitsyn. He seems to have forgotten that both my chapters from which he so selectively quoted bear the title "The Soviet Great Leap Forward." The choice of words was, of course, deliberate.

It may be that some readers, even Rosefelde, imagine that acceptance of the official physical output data implies the acceptance of Soviet claims to have fulfilled their plans. But this is not so. Using Soviet statistics, Eugene Zaleski demonstrates in his extremely thorough compilation (*Stalinist Planning for Economic Growth*) that every physical output plan target, whether quinquennial or annual, was missed by a very wide margin. This can also be seen from the figures cited in my *Economic History*, pages 188 and 191. The claim to have fulfilled plans rests wholly on figures in value terms, that is, in "1926/7 prices."

In his reply to other critics, Rosefelde again alleges that my estimates of Soviet production in 1932 "correspond closely to official Soviet estimates" and then, more offensively still, asserts that "this Nove-Davies-Wheatcroft rendition of 'All's Well That Ends Well' grossly distorts Stalinist reality." This really does leave one speechless.

For the first time, and I hope the last, in my academic career I feel I am entitled to demand an apology. I am totally puzzled as to Rosefelde's motives. To the best of my knowledge I have never done him any harm.

A few words on the issue which Rosefelde was in fact discussing, that is, on the credibility and use of physical output series on this period. The fact that most plans were substantially underfulfilled in physical units suggests that most managers reported underfulfillment in such units, does it not? It does not prove (what can prove?) that there was no false reporting. No doubt there was, and there certainly has been since, though in some instances it takes the form of concealing output as well as exaggerating it, as Rosefelde himself noted. The effect of terror in this regard is by no means clear. Suppose you are a manager in 1933 with a target of a thousand tons, and, despite your best endeavors, you have produced only five hundred tons. Which is more likely to send you on the road to GULag: to pretend that you reached your target (knowing that the customers whom you will not supply will report the fact to explain why they did not fulfill *their* plans), or to admit your failure to do the impossible? I do not know the answer. Does Rosefelde? Evidence of what people do to save their lives when they are already in GULag does not really help us. For all Rosefelde or I know, managers inflate their results more today than in 1933, because they are less scared. It was, and is, safer to inflate figures in rubles, and there is plenty of evidence that this happened in the thirties (with "1926/7" rubles) and is happening still today.

That materials are wasted, that the final output is smaller than it should be in relation to intermediate products is not in dispute. Thus steel is used to produce unnecessarily heavy goods to fulfill a plan in tons. This, and not the claim that the tonnage is exaggerated, is surely the most effective and solidly based line of criticism of the output statistics — plus of course the fact that use-value is so largely ignored.

Just one other remark. I have my disagreement with Davis, but he was quite right to remind Rosefelde of the time factor. Massive investment projects begun during 1929–32 would not have been completed in the first plan period even if there had been no bottlenecks or any shortage of skilled manpower. How long does it take to build a big factory? Until a factory is built and becomes operational, it cannot provide a flow of industrial output. Plainly this must be taken into account in assessing the efficacy or inefficacy of the chosen strategy. This is not apologetics; this is simple common sense. Rosefelde quite failed to reply to this point, and it is his duty to do so.

ALEC NOVE
University of Glasgow

[Professor Rosefelde has expressed his intention to reply.]

TO THE EDITOR:

Forthright and vigorous criticism of published work is essential to the wellbeing of scholarship, to my way of thinking, but so is civility. On the latter score I deplore Richard Hellie's savage attack on Paul Bushkovitch and his book *The Merchants of Moscow* (*Slavic Review*, 40, no. 2 [Summer 1981]: 280–82). At issue is not only the intemperate and abusive tone of the review, but the wholesale condemnation, the failure to notice the merits of the book and to provide a balanced appraisal. Though Bushkovitch may have been slipshod in his handling of some details — Hellie's review focuses mainly on this type of thing — he deserves credit for venturing to question the received wisdom on his subject, seeking to employ quantification where it has heretofore been notably absent, bringing into play some new archival material and several significant but little-known articles, and attempting to examine the commerce and merchants of Muscovy in a wider, East European perspective. As opposed to Hellie's implication that *The Merchants of Moscow* is worthless and ought not to have been published, I would characterize it as a study that promises more than it delivers, that raises provocative questions but does not often provide fully satisfying answers. This is a work every would-be student of Muscovite commerce and the merchants should read but, as with any work, read critically. The inquisitive student will find gathered here not only a fair amount of data not readily accessible elsewhere but also a good deal of food for thought.

As limitations of space rule out a comprehensive discussion, my further remarks will be confined to what I take to be the serious flaws in Bushkovitch's book. Although Bushkovitch deals informatively with a variety of matters (for a good summary, see Raymond H. Fisher's treatment in the *Russian Review*, 40, no. 2 (April 1981): 181–82), he is primarily concerned with revising what he considers the inadequate prevailing perceptions of the Muscovite merchantry. The first task of a revisionist work, it would seem, is to present a reasonably full, fair, and accurate account of the construction to be revised. But Bushkovitch fulfills this task unsatisfactorily. He speaks of a historiographical tradition that stemmed from N. I. Kostomarov (1817–85), was carried forward by M. V. Dovnar-Zapol'skii (1867–1934), survived the Revolution and reappeared in the interwar publications of S. V. Bakhrushin and K. V. Bazilevich, and has most recently been continued by N. I. Pavlenko and myself. Bushkovitch disposes of the work of each with a summary sentence or two, in which qualifications, nuances, and perceived ambiguities are disregarded, and indiscriminately imputes to the lot such views as the following: The Muscovite merchants were poor, backward, and, by implication, economically and politically ineffectual. They were completely at the mercy of an arbitrary state, whose posture with respect to them was “purely negative” and whose policies constituted the main obstacle to economic development (pp. viii–xi). How can the different conclusions that Bushkovitch draws from his study be truly judged when the historiography against which they are pitted has been faultily represented? For, as I will argue, Bushkovitch illegitimately implies that the “tradition” was flawed at its birth by ideological bias, and he tends to caricature rather than do justice to the work of his predecessors.