Manchester Guardian from March onward were very optimistic, and by the summer, Price adopted the language of class politics and warfare, an ideological slant evident in his later memoirs. Even the Red Terror was justified as a legitimate defensive measure against the threat of counter-revolution, as Price asserted that “no one is in danger of political arrest unless he is under suspicion of being connected with counter-revolutionary work” (p. 151).

The sense of chaos and uncertainty so evident in this collection gives way to an ideologically heavy-handed, Bolshevik interpretation of events in My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution. This latter work has much in common with other, better known accounts by radical foreign journalists, such as Albert Rhys Williams’ Through the Russian Revolution and John Reed’s Ten Days that Shook the World. All of these works are characterized by a combative and unapologetic tone, and they provide dramatic and exculpatory tales of the Bolsheviks’ coming to power. All three authors recount suspiciously detailed accounts of overheard conversations; this is especially true of Williams and Reed, who, unlike Price, knew little Russian. All disparage the Provisional Government and the moderate socialists, praise the Bolsheviks, and condemn the Allied intervention. It should be noted that Price’s later work on the Soviet Union was much less favorable. After visiting the Soviet Union at the end of 1945 as a special correspondent for the Manchester Guardian, Price wrote Russia, Red or White (1948). While he notes in this brief account that the populace generally accepts and trusts the Communist regime, he also remarks on the inefficient bureaucracy, the emergence of privilege, and the persistence of a poor work ethic. Russians are described as a people innately submissive to authority, who live in a country where individual life has always been cheap; these are certainly not the heroic masses lauded in his earlier works.

The supporting materials provided by the editor do little to help situate the reader. The introductory comments are very brief and at times inaccurate. The biographical notes are also quite short, and the choice of individuals and facts for inclusion often seems eccentric. The bibliography and index are similarly cursory and idiosyncratic. While the book does not offer any new information about events in 1917 and 1918, its value lies in providing an example of the radicalization of Western leftists under the impact of events in Russia. As such, the work would have greatly benefited from more careful and thorough editing to help guide the nonspecialist reader.

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Folke Dovring sets himself an easy task — and fails. He wants to show that Lenin was an intensely partisan man whose polemics were rarely models of academic objectivity and who often spoke on subjects about which he had less than expert knowledge. Dovring fails not because his main thesis is false,
but because he himself is guilty of much the same sin: he has written a book on a subject about which he lacks the necessary objectivity and background knowledge.

A note at the end of the book informs us that Dovring is Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. When he discusses Lenin's misuse of agricultural statistics, I am inclined to bow to his expertise. But a useful book on Lenin requires something more than diligently reading through Lenin's Polnoe sobranie sochinenii; it requires background knowledge about at least socialist doctrine and early twentieth-century Russian history. Dovring is at best an amateur on these subjects, as shown by frequent errors of large magnitude. These faults undermine Dovring's discussion even on the peasants, a topic where we might expect a real contribution. For example, Lenin's early writings on Russian agriculture were part of a polemic against populism; Dovring seems unaware of this and in fact interprets the early writings in terms of a mythical debate between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks about the possibility of an immediate socialist revolution (p. 36). Dovring ignores the existence of the major Western monograph on this topic, Esther Kingston-Mann's Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution; this does not speak well for his grounding in the relevant scholarly literature. A final example of Dovring's weakness on this topic: how seriously can we take an account of Lenin's writings on the peasants that does not mention "On Cooperation" (1923), an article considered at the time and later to be one of his most important pronouncements on the subject.

Dovring's book is not a sustained argument but rather a ramble through Lenin's writings. I admit I sometimes found my attention called to interesting remarks by Lenin of which I was unaware. But Dovring's almost explicit intention to catch Lenin out in absurdities (p. x) makes him highly unreliable. Take a statement by Lenin in 1907 in which he defends his use of uncomradely language in criticizing a group of Mensheviks who, Lenin believed, had broken party discipline during the recent Duma elections (PSS, 15: 291-304). The argument was over the proper way to phrase one's criticism, and Lenin provides examples of making the same point in a comrade-ly or within-party manner vs. an uncomradely or partisan manner. Lenin's discussion brings up issues of continuing relevance (who among us does not shift our language register depending on whether we're criticizing friend or foe?).

Dovring comments as follows: "A piece of special interest is Lenin's response before a party tribunal where he stood accused of slander against the Mensheviks. He freely admitted this and claimed it as a legitimate political technique. Mainly, when you wanted to annihilate an adversary, you used whatever could serve this end — and at the time in question the party was split, so the Mensheviks were not party comrades" (p. 24). We turn to the text in question and find, first, that Lenin is not talking about "the Mensheviks" but about a small group of particular Mensheviks; even more striking, Lenin explicitly denied that he was either charged with or guilty of slander (kleveta) (PSS, 15: 296). Unreliable reading is the inevitable result of a determination to