Revelations from the Russian Archives: Documents in English Translation. by Diane P. Koenker; Ronald D. Bachman
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hope that those who question the interpretations of this skilled and thoughtful young historian will do so in a serious and scholarly manner.

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This weighty volume contains declassified Soviet documents that were exhibited at the Library of Congress from June to July 1992, an event that James Billington, Librarian of Congress, calls “one of the most important exhibits in the [Library’s] history” (ix). Billington and other Americans who assisted in the selection of materials were approached by representatives of the Russian republic, officials whom the volume’s editors call “a group of democrats led by Rudolf Pikhoia,” then head of Russian State Archives (xv). The editors neglect to mention that the exhibit, also facilitated by Dmitrii Volkogonov, was connected with Boris Yeltsin’s first state visit to the United States. Some documents were hand-carried to Washington in the original.

Part 1 focuses on Soviet domestic issues. The opening section, entitled “The Apparatus of Repression and Terror,” contains almost one-third of the 343 documents published. Among the items are inconclusive depositions relating to the assassination of Sergei Kirov, the prostrations of the various party “oppositions,” the early establishment of forced labor camps, the Katyn massacre, censorship, and the deportation of nationalities. The editors note that there are no “smoking guns” on Kirov or the onset of the Great Terror. The second section, “Intellectuals and the State,” continues many of these same themes, from which the text moves on to more of the same under the rubrics “The Communist Party Apparatus” and “Economic Development” (meaning, instead, the horrors of dekulakization and collectivization, plus the questionable character of industrial successes). Brief sections on “Religion,” “Chernobyl,” “Pereestroika and Glasnost” round out an unremittingly grim, not to say familiar, story.

Part 2 is devoted to American and Soviet relations, beginning with the vast famine relief of the American Relief Administration (the U.S. military intervention is passed over) and culminating with the debacle of Afghanistan. “The documents released here,” write the editors, “shed little light on the inner workings of the Soviet foreign policy process” (781). By contrast, Soviet internal acknowledgments of the magnitude of Lend-Lease are revealed, as we are also served the menu of an apparently sumptuous Kremlin dinner in 1943 hosted by Josef Stalin for Joseph Davies, President Roosevelt’s personal representative, as well as the full text of a fawning letter Davies wrote to Stalin (with the preamble, calling Stalin a “Great of the Earth,” that was left out of the version published in the already universally condemned Mission to Moscow [1941]).

To introduce the documents, Diane Koenker has supplied abundant and even-handed explanatory notes, but her diligence is overshadowed by the structure of the exhibition, which parrots a certain notorious interpretation of the USSR and corresponding American mission that events after 1989 ostensibly ratified (particularly the obsequious behavior in 1990–92 of Russian republic officials). Occasionally the exhibit and resulting book happen upon a world of incomparable suffering made poignant by unshakable hopes for social justice and advancement. But these moments are lost in the book’s grind toward America’s extraction of unconditional surrender. So much for Lev Trotsky’s 1922 lament that “we still do not know what the Great Republic across the ocean wants from us” (555).

Handsomely assembled in coffee-table format with rare Gulag and other photographs, this collection speaks to American identity and the oversized place therein of Soviet communism. In that sense Billington’s assessment of the exhibit’s importance cannot be dismissed as self-promotion. “Revelations” from the Soviet archives con-
tinue to divulge at least as much about American preoccupations as supposed Soviet secrets.

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This volume contains 122 documents from the former Soviet archives, the overwhelming majority of which were authored by Vladimir Lenin. Because they were considered sensitive, these documents were not included in the voluminous collections of Lenin's works published in the Soviet era. In general their "sensitivity" consisted in the fact that the documents might threaten Lenin's reputation (or that of the regime), but in some cases concern over diplomatic secrets or even, for example, references to the use of codes seem to have resulted in documents finding themselves in the secret Lenin file.

Though some of these documents are very interesting, many others are mere snippets of information that will baffle anyone uninitiated in the details of their specific context. In many cases too, it is difficult to see what is so very sensitive or frightful about Lenin's comments. It is, of course, necessary to remember that the audience from which these documents were being hidden was not so much western historians as the Soviet public to whom the regime considered it essential that Lenin be portrayed in saint-like terms. This made some sense given Russian traditional political culture, the relative newness of the Soviet regime, the huge suffering inflicted on its subjects in the regime's first decades, and the fact that de-Stalinization had ruined many of Soviet communism's potential legitimizing myths.

Thus, for instance, a document establishing Lenin's noble origins finds itself in the archive, as do his comments on the Roman Malinovskii case (Doc. 17). In my opinion Lenin was quite right to argue that police agent or not, Malinovskii did great harm to the tsarist regime, especially from the Duma podium. Lenin was also right to insist that in 1917–18 Bolshevik and German interests temporarily coincided and "we would be idiots not to take advantage of this" (Doc. 27), however much hysteria this might cause among certain of the party faithful. No doubt the authorities felt that such Realpolitik might be too much for the narod to swallow, particularly in an era when the old internationalist class-consciousness had long since been buried by Soviet patriotism and memories of the second anti-German war.

In 1987 I spent a number of days driving around London alone with Dmitrii Volkogonov. Of the many documents he had mined from the archives, it was the ones revealing Lenin's ruthless severity toward the peasantry (such as Doc. 24 in Pipes's collection) which most appalled him. On closer acquaintance, the friend, father, and protector of the people seemed to embody opinions and methods very reminiscent of Iosif Stalin. Given Volkogonov's own origins and biography (a typical one for the postwar Soviet elite), and given the sentimentally populist nationalism at the core of the Soviet patriotic worldview, it is not difficult to see why he was so shaken or, therefore, why the Kremlin took care to keep records such as document 24 out of the public eye. Western historians should not be surprised by such materials. Ample evidence has long existed in the west about Bolshevik perspectives and policies vis-à-vis the peasantry in 1918–21.

Among the longest and most interesting documents in this collection are a September 1920 speech by Lenin on the war with Poland and the prospects of world revolution (Doc. 59) and a March 1922 (Doc. 94) demand that the famine be exploited as an opportunity to smash the Orthodox Church. The latter is accomplished by a typically Leninist call to shoot as many priests and bourgeois as possible in order to