

RUSSIAN STUDIES

by Leonard Schapiro
 edited by Ellen Dahrendorf
 Viking, 1987
 400 pp. \$24.95

Shortly after Tsar Alexander II emancipated the serfs in 1861, a portentous debate opened up between two of Russia's leading men of letters. One was exiled political journalist Alexander Herzen; the other, novelist Ivan Turgenev. Herzen, a moderate socialist, believed that Russia possessed spiritual and moral qualities that made it different from the liberal nations of Western Europe. Following its own path, probably with the aid of a revolution, it would fulfill its destiny and become a society superior to those of the West. Turgenev disagreed. He argued that the European way of modest reform, institution-building, and confidence in law was the only sensible course for Russia. In novels such as *Smoke* (1867), he mocked radicals who embraced revolutionary ideas and hazy notions about Russia's uniqueness.

To Schapiro (1908-83), the terms of this debate had special meaning. Not only did "they underlie the eternal search for the right and true path of progress upon which successive generations of Russian intellectuals embarked," they also provided a focus for his work, which ranged from political analysis to biography. A professor of politics at the London School of Economics, Schapiro viewed the history of Russia as a tragedy stemming largely from its failure to develop a strong legal tradition. That perception, as these 24 essays show, colored his reading of events and major figures, from Lenin, the consummate "man in a hurry," to Stolypin, the reformist prime minister (1906-11) who dominated Russia's brief constitutional period. Above all, Schapiro made his readers appreciate the gap in political cultures between the Soviet Union and the West—a gap so wide that no change of Kremlin leadership is likely to be able to close it.

*Contemporary Affairs***THE JAGUAR SMILE:
A Nicaraguan Journey**

by Salman Rushdie
 Viking, 1987
 171 pp. \$12.95

Whom to believe about contemporary Nicaragua? American conservatives see a Cuban-style regime, bent on exporting Communist revolution to its Central American neighbors. Leftists regard Sandinista Nicaragua as a near-ideal state whose few imperfections result from U.S. economic and military pressures. Rushdie, an Indian-born novelist and sometime political journalist, offers a more

balanced, albeit sympathetic, perspective.

El escritor Hindu traveled in Nicaragua for three weeks in July 1986 as a guest of the Sandinistas. He describes his book as a "portrait of the moment . . . but, I believe, a crucial and revealing one." The International Court of Justice had just ruled in June against the legality of U.S. aid to the *contras*; President Daniel Ortega had recently closed the liberal newspaper *La Prensa*.

In a series of brief, tightly constructed chapters, Rushdie locates the contradictions of this "martyr country," where, he notes, "to understand the living . . . it was necessary to begin with the dead." As a writer, he found Sandinista censorship to be one of the most unpalatable contradictions. Although the president and the minister of culture are poets, and the vice president is a novelist, this "government of writers had turned into a government of censors."

The government is also notorious for its mistreatment of the Miskito Indians, who inhabit the vast Atlantic coast province of Zelaya. Rushdie found that, while the charges were largely true, Managua's scheme to grant limited autonomy to the region has already lessened local resentment. Ultimately, the Sandinistas win Rushdie's cautious endorsement for resolving the nation's most glaring contradiction: During the 46-year reign of the Somozas, most Nicaraguans lived like exiles in their own country. The revolution is thus "an act of migration," an ongoing process in which Nicaraguans are struggling to "invent their country, and, more than that, themselves."

**A CONFLICT OF VISIONS:
Ideological Origins of
Political Struggles**
by Thomas Sowell
Morrow, 1987
273 pp. \$15.95

"Conflicts of interests dominate the short run, but conflicts of visions dominate history." Hence the need, argues Sowell, a Hoover Institution economist, for every generation to rethink the age-old controversy about the nature of man.

Visions—what "we sense or feel *before* we have constructed . . . a theory"—tend toward two extremes: At one end, notes Sowell, are those who share a "constrained" vision of man as inherently limited; at the other, those who see human potential as unlimited. The former, including thinkers such as Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and Milton Friedman, believe that society must guard man against his own shortcomings. The latter—