THE BOOK THAT SHOOK THE KREMLIN

BY
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IT SEEMS FITTING that Russian author Boris Pasternak, whose writing has been called a great act of faith, should have had his towering novel, *Doctor Zhivago,* spirited out of the Soviet Union and published by a Communist who had to reach within himself to match that faith.

Doctor Zhivago is a terrifying panorama of Russia's revolutionary agonies and, more important, an impassioned denial of the Godless materialism that is the crux of Marxism. Its publication so infuriated the Soviets that when Pasternak was awarded a 1958 Nobel Prize, they at first refused to let him accept it, branding him "a pig," "a snake," and "a black sheep in a good flock." Since released in an American edition, it became our number one best seller; its U.S. publisher, Pantheon Books, estimates that as many as 1,000,000 copies may be sold.

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amine their position. That this forceful statement of faith in the human spirit came out of Communist Russia was a miracle. That it has helped readers to find themselves is another. That it raised doubts among the Communist faithful that may never be stilled is perhaps the greatest miracle of all.

Doctor Zhivago may have finally provided Western intellectuals who are still tied to the Communist party with a new belief by which they can become free.

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Today it is obvious that this ideology-shaking book would never have seen the light of day had it not been for Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. The story of how this came about is full of intrigue, political threats and earnest soul-searching. At 32, Feltrinelli is the youngest publisher in Italy, and probably the bravest. Though a Communist, he chose to place artistic freedom above party discipline, and through him *Doctor Zhivago* was won for the West. To do so, Feltrinelli—a slim, intense man who wears horn-rimmed glasses—had to stand up to the Italian Communist party, largest and strongest west of the Iron Curtain.

In 1956, when he brought about his *Doctor Zhivago* coup, Feltrinelli was only 29 and had been in the publishing business for just one year. His father, a banker, died when Feltrinelli was about 21, leaving a fortune in landholdings, building materials and other enterprises. Since then the firms have been run by administrators while Feltrinelli now devotes his time to publishing.

Feltrinelli was a natural for Communist recruiters. Mussolini was riding high, and young Giangiacomo was impressed by Communist resistance to the hated Fascists. At night he would go outside and scribble on the walls: "*Abasso Mussolini!* Down with Mussolini!"

In November, 1945, while still in school, he volunteered for the Italian Army which by then was fighting alongside the Allies. Thanks to the English he had learned as a child, he was assigned to liaison with the American Fifth Army and saw combat around Bologna. He left the Army as he entered—a private.

FELTRINELLI HAD by that time become a Communist. "I was against that class in Italy which had backed fascism, which was against the working man, against land reform, against change," he explains. (Similar views, incidentally, are expressed by Pasha, a character in *Doctor Zhivago* who turns to Marxism as a reaction against overcrowding, deprivation and the "indifference of the rich.")

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Boris Pasternak (left) won Nobel Prize for novel that Feltrinelli (right) spirited out of U.S.S.R.

For a while Feltrinelli wrote for left-wing publications, and in 1954, started financing a line of inexpensive paperback books on economics, history and sociology. This brought him into close contact with the Communist cooperative bookshop, Rinascita, which distributed the volumes. Finally, in 1955, he went into publishing on his own.

At the beginning of 1956, Communist party chieftains decided to send a representative to Moscow to forge stronger ties with Soviet literary circles. The man chosen was Sergio D'Angelo, who had been running the Rinascita Bookshop in Rome. D'Angelo speaks fluent Russian and is an expert on Soviet affairs. Feltrinelli, who knew him from the bookshop, asked D'Angelo to keep an eye out for any Russian works that might bear republication in Italy. As Feltrinelli's man in Moscow, D'Angelo became one of the main protagonists of the *Zhivago* affair. Even now he is reluctant to discuss it—obviously afraid of endangering Russian friends. But part of the story can only be told by him.

"Not long after my arrival in Moscow in 1956," D'Angelo says, "I heard a broadcast announcing that a new book by Boris Pasternak would shortly be published." Here was news. Pasternak, Russia's greatest living poet, was again preparing a major work after 25 years of silence. No foreign correspondent thought the matter worth reporting, since few people in the West had ever heard of him.

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To D'Angelo, however, the announcement was significant. In February, 1956, Khrushchev had already made his eventful speech denouncing Stalin. There was hope for a thawing of repressive Soviet policies. Pasternak again in print would be an important manifestation of this change. D'Angelo quickly wrote to Feltrinelli.

"I wanted to make sure," he says, "that he would have the chance of being the first Western editor to publish the book."

Feltrinelli immediately told D'Angelo to contact Pasternak and secure the manuscript and world rights to the book. But finding Pasternak, D'Angelo discovered, was a difficult task. People who knew him were reluctant to admit it, and when they did, they hesitated to reveal his address. Finally, D'Angelo managed to meet the Russian author in a small office which Pasternak maintained in Moscow. A few days later, Pasternak invited D'Angelo to his home at Peredelkino, about 20 miles from Moscow.

Pasternak had always liked Italy and Italians—his second wife is half-Italian. On the porch of his small wooden house, surrounded by a forest of birch and pine, Pasternak signed a contract granting Feltrinelli world rights to his book. Then he went into the house and brought back a copy of the novel, saying, "I gave another copy to Goslitizdat (the Soviet state publishing house). I haven't the slightest idea when it will be published."

If D'Angelo had sent the novel by mail—as he normally would have—the typed script would probably never have arrived in Milan. Instead, Feltrinelli had made arrangements for a rendezvous in Berlin. D'Angelo put the manuscript in the bottom of his suitcase—not, he says, to smuggle it out, but only because he didn't want to crush his shirt collars. The two men met on West Berlin's fashionable Kurfürstendamm and D'Angelo handed Feltrinelli a string-tied parcel about the size of a newspaper folded into four parts.

On his return to Moscow, D'An-

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gelo discovered that the Russian authorities knew that the manuscript of *Doctor Zhivago* had left the country. Important personalities, he was told, were upset about it.

Back in Italy, Feltrinelli, too, found that the atmosphere had changed. Letters began to arrive from Russia. One asked to have the manuscript returned to Pasternak "for revisions." Others suggested it would not be wise to publish the book. Then, in the fall of 1956, Feltrinelli was summoned to the office of Palmiro Togliatti, the extremely literate Italian Communist party boss. "I want you to hand over that novel by Pasternak," Togliatti said brusquely. "I don't think you should publish it."

"But, why?" asked Feltrinelli, taken by surprise. "In my opinion, it is a very good book."

Togliatti, apparently acting on instructions from Moscow, insisted that even Pasternak had changed his mind about having the book published. When Feltrinelli refused to return the manuscript, Togliatti angrily threatened him with expulsion from the party and withdrawal of all support from his editorial enterprise. He urged Feltrinelli to send the manuscript back to Russia. The younger man remained firm. "I must think it over," he said.

"At least," said Togliatti, "promise not to publish it without telling me first." Feltrinelli consented.

For several months, no more was heard of the matter. Then in January, 1957, Feltrinelli received a letter from Goslitizdat in Moscow, asking him not to publish the book in the West until their own publication date—tentatively set for September, 1957. Party officials in Rome called Feltrinelli several times to make sure he would honor the request.

Feltrinelli, replying through D'Angelo in Moscow, wrote that he had no intention of exploiting the book for anti-Soviet purposes. He also assured the Russians that he would wait until September 1, 1957.

It was not until much later that Feltrinelli discovered that the Russians had already refused to publish

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the book. They returned the manuscript to Pasternak on October 24, 1956. It had been accompanied by a bitter letter in which five Soviet literary lights branded the book "a squalid, malicious work full of hatred for socialism."

But the Communists still had to convince the recalcitrant Feltrinelli. As D'Angelo tells it: "September 1 was near and the party was using every possible means to prevent the book's publication. But Feltrinelli kept saying that he would wait only until the date agreed upon. At this point a surprise card was played. In the middle of August, 1957, Feltrinelli received a telegram signed by Pasternak, saying, 'Please return my manuscript as I consider it not a mature work.' "

Now Feltrinelli had to make a big decision. Should he take the cable at its face value and send back the novel? In his safe, along with the manuscript, were several letters from Pasternak which seemed to contradict this last message. For some time, particularly after the Hungarian rebellion, Feltrinelli's faith in the party had been shaken; he had been subjected to what he calls "the greatest pressures." Undoubtedly, Pasternak also had felt the turn of the screw—and even more forcefully. Today it is believed that Pasternak was told either to telegraph Feltrinelli within 24 hours or face arrest.

"To Feltrinelli, and to me," says D'Angelo, "it seemed that Pasternak had not done it of his own free will. We felt sure he would not deny his own work."

Feltrinelli had other reasons for believing that the Pasternak telegram had not been sent voluntarily. Sometime earlier he had received the Russian author's autobiography which, in its last pages, contained this sentence: "I have just finished my major work, the only one of which I am not ashamed, and for which I will answer without fear, *Doctor Zhivago* . . ."

Still Feltrinelli hesitated. If he published the book, he would be severing connections with his friends and colleagues. Besides, what would

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happen to Pasternak if he published the book? Did he have the right to gamble with another man's freedom, and possibly his life?

Feltrinelli's final decision came from the book itself. At first, he had not thought it particularly anti-Communist. But then he began to find answers to questions he had long felt like asking. Feltrinelli had already published several books on what he calls "the disconcerting reality of our times—man against machines." In *Doctor Zhivago* he found the soul's need overshadowing economic need.

"Here was a newer, sharper meaning for human values," says Feltrinelli, "something that is needed now when each of us is pitted against super-organized society. In my view, man is fighting for his soul. This book, I believe, helps one to fight." If this were so, Feltrinelli reasoned, Pasternak surely would want his voice heard. After all, he had written that it was not the function of the writer "to serve principalities and powers, communism or capitalism." This could only mean that the writer's responsibility was to himself as a man. If, thought Feltrinelli, he, too, was to be an individual, he would have to publish the book.

Not until a year later was he to know how correct his judgment had been—when photographs showed the joy with which Pasternak had greeted news that he had won the Nobel Prize.

Meanwhile, Feltrinelli sent a carefully worded reply to Pasternak's telegram. Agreements had been made with two foreign publishers—Gallimard in France and William Collins Sons & Co. in England. It was now too late to rescind these, he wired, expressing his regrets.

But the Russians made one more attempt to prevent publication. A delegation of Russian writers came to Italy, ostensibly on a holiday. It was led by poet Alexei Surkov, secretary general of the Union of Soviet Writers. In Milan, Surkov had a turbulent meeting with Feltrinelli in which he berated the publisher for not returning Pasternak's manu-

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script. When Feltrinelli stood firm, Surkov stormed out empty-handed.

Furious, the Russian called a press conference, inviting only newspapers of the extreme Left. "I have just seen an Italian publisher," he sneered, "who is about to publish a novel which has never appeared in Russia; . . . the author has tried in vain to get his manuscript back from this publisher. We Soviets are amazed that the wishes of an author can be so shamefully violated."

Then, as if by chance, he recalled another occasion, many years ago, when a book by Pilniak—which had been turned down in Russia—came out abroad. This allusion was greeted by an embarrassed silence. Even the Communist journalists remembered that in the period of the great purges, Pilniak had ended up in front of a firing squad!

In November, 1957, *Doctor Zhivago* appeared in Italian bookstores. Reviews were unanimously laudatory. Even party-line critics reviewed it in glowing terms, although when word finally reached them that the book was banned in Moscow, they flip-flopped shamelessly to pour abuse on Pasternak. Within a year, however, over 120,000 copies were sold, although few Italian best sellers reached the 30,000 mark. The success of the book made Feltrinelli Italy's third largest publisher.

There have been several attempts to isolate Feltrinelli from Italian intellectual life. But he takes comfort in a phrase of Pasternak's that "only the isolated seek truth and break with those who do not love it enough." On November 6, 1958, almost 300 Italian writers, painters, journalists and stage and screen personalities called on the West to boycott Soviet cultural activities until Pasternak was allowed to work freely. It was only after this that the Communist party started to attack Feltrinelli frontally.

There had been other, subtler attempts to discredit him. One, according to the publisher, was the mysterious publication in Holland of a clandestine Russian edition of *Doctor Zhivago*. On the frontispiece

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—without his permission—was Feltrinelli's name. Copies were handed out at the Brussels World's Fair last summer. A strange side light is that the Dutch publisher claims to have handed copies to a messenger sent by Feltrinelli. Feltrinelli denies sending any messenger and further insists he never gave the Dutch publisher the Russian text. Recently, in ads taken in *The New York Times* and six leading European newspapers, the Dutch firm admitted publishing the book without permission and reaffirmed Feltrinelli's rights to it.

Feltrinelli has not been happy about attempts to use *Doctor Zhivago* as political propaganda. He thinks this can only worsen Pasternak's position. Besides, he feels that the book's meaning transcends the cold war. As Pasternak himself says, "My novel was not intended to be a political statement. I wanted to show life as it is, in all its wealth and intensity. I am not a propagandist."

The circumstances under which *Doctor Zhivago* came to the West have evoked almost as much controversy as the book itself. One of the thorniest problems is the definition of the phrase "world rights." Some Americans insist they have the right to use the book for films or TV since no copyright agreements exist between the U.S. and Russia, and because Feltrinelli only owns book publication rights. Feltrinelli says that he owns *all* rights and the fact that no agreement exists between the other two countries means nothing, since he is Italian. In any event, royalties are being scrupulously paid into accounts set up for Pasternak. They will eventually come to about $1,000,000.

How deeply Giangiacomo Feltrinelli himself was affected by *Doctor Zhivago* was shown in November, 1958, when he publicly announced that he had left the Communist party a year earlier "for various reasons, the last of which was definitely the Pasternak affair."

Others are following his example. Oddly, their defections are being carried out quietly. There seems to be something in the book which impels Communist readers to re-ex-

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