

IBO Catalogue, OA.45

A note on El'sberg's criticism of IB's writings on Herzen, and IB's response

El'sberg, Ya. E., 'Ideinaya bor'ba vokrug naslediya Gertsena b nashe vremya' [The ideological battle over Herzen's legacy to our age], in Yu. G. Oksman (ed.), *Problemy izucheniya Gertsena* (Moscow, 1963: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR)

El'sberg attacks (437–45) IB's treatment of Herzen in his 1956 introduction to Herzen's *From the Other Shore*, defending the orthodox Soviet view of Herzen, which takes its cue from Lenin's pronouncements on the subject. This defence is bound up with the Cold War polemics about the opposing political systems under which El'sberg and Berlin were writing. El'sberg welcomes the appearance of an English translation of *From the Other Shore* but is critical both of Berlin's interpretation of the work and of Berlin's relative lack of attention to other things that Herzen wrote. El'sberg believes that Martin Malia has made much the more important contribution to scholarship on Herzen. IB wrote to HH about El'sberg's attack on 25 October 1993:

[El'sberg] was a secretary to Kamenev, an original Bolshevik revolutionary who was duly executed by Stalin. Naturally this made the secretary's position difficult. He was sent to Siberia and had to work his passage back. He had been a member of the Academy, was undoubtedly a well-read and clever man, but as he had betrayed so many people to the secret police during the 1930s they didn't want to re-admit him; in fact they expelled him. Under pressure from Khrushchev they did readmit him. He made a violent attack on me, for obvious reasons, if only to show his utter loyalty to the official views on Herzen, Belinsky etc. – Dr Lampert [...] was very sovietisant, and I think possibly in with him, and he used to come back to England from the Soviet Union and tell me with bated breath that the scholars thought I was a very sinister influence because of my misinterpretation of the nineteenth-century revolutionaries. However, I did meet a Soviet scholar in the Bodleian – a very nice Shakespeare expert, in the company of a philosopher called [Valentin Ferdinandovich] Asmus: two perfectly decent men. I complained to them about these attacks on me, and one of them said 'This does you nothing but the greatest honour', implying, though he didn't quite say, that my opponent was a scoundrel – which indeed he was.