

Birth of Our Power

Victor Serge

Introduction and Translation by Richard Greeman

Birth of Our Power is an epic novel set in Spain, France, and Russia during the heady revolutionary years 1917–1919. Serge's tale begins in the spring of 1917, the third year of mass slaughter in the blood-and-rain-soaked trenches of World War I. When the flames of revolution suddenly erupt in Russia and Spain, Europe is "burning at both ends." Although the Spanish uprising eventually fizzles, in Russia the workers, peasants, and common soldiers are able to take power and hold it.

Serge's "tale of two cities" is constructed from the opposition between Barcelona, the city "we" could not take, and Petrograd, the starving, beleaguered capital of the Russian Revolution besieged by counter-revolutionary Whites. Between the romanticism of radicalized workers awakening to their own power in a sun-drenched Spanish metropolis to the grim reality of workers clinging to power in Russia's dark, frozen revolutionary outpost. From "victory in defeat" to "defeat in victory."

The novel was composed a decade after the revolution in Leningrad, where Serge was living in semicaptivity because of his declared opposition to Stalin's dictatorship over the revolution.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Victor Serge (1890–1947) was born to Russian anti-Tsarist exiles living in Brussels. As a young anarchist firebrand, Victor was sentenced to five years in a French penitentiary in 1912. In 1919, Serge joined the Bolsheviks. An outspoken critic of Stalin, Serge was expelled from the Party and arrested in 1929. Nonetheless, he managed to complete three novels (*Men in Prison*, *Birth of Our Power*, and *Conquered City*) and a history (*Year One of the Russian Revolution*), published in Paris. Arrested again in Russia and deported to Central Asia in 1933, he was allowed to leave the USSR in 1936 after international protests by militants and prominent writers like André Gide and Romain Rolland. Hounded by Stalinist agents, Serge lived in precarious exile in Brussels, Paris, Vichy France, and Mexico City, where he died in 1947.

Richard Greeman is best known as the translator and prefacer of five of Victor Serge's seven novels, most recently *Men in Prison* (PM Press). He is a founding member of the libertarian socialist Praxis Center in Moscow and is secretary of the Victor Serge Foundation, which supports the Victor Serge Libraries in Moscow and Kiev and underwrites translations and publication of Serge's books in Russian and Arabic. Greeman has published literary, political, and biographical studies of Serge in English, French, Russian, and Spanish as well as prefaces to French editions of Serge's books.

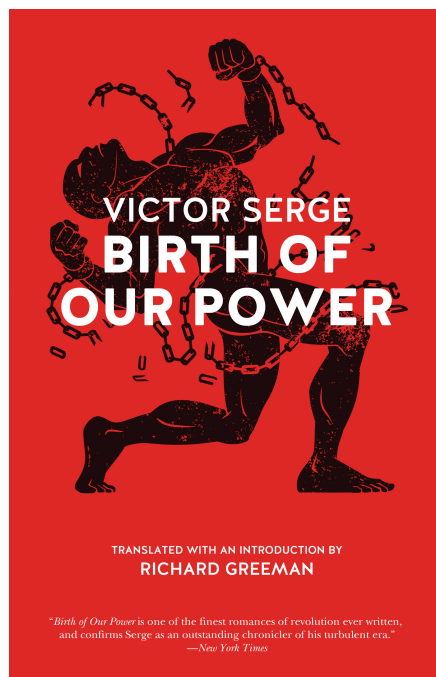
ACCOLADES

"Nothing in it has dated. . . . It is less an autobiography than a sustained, incandescent lyric (half-pantheist, half-surrealist) of rebellion and battle."

—*Times Literary Supplement*

"Surely one of the most moving accounts of revolutionary experience ever written."

—Neal Ascherson, *New York Review of Books*



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