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Feature

Post-Socialist Nostalgia and Hope

By Dr Michael (Mick) Costello

Expressions of what is labelled post-socialist 'nostalgia' have been identified by researchers among all republics and age groups of the former USSR, as well as the populations of the now capitalist states of central and eastern Europe.

The meaning of the term is disputed between two main approaches. On the one hand are those who ahistorically see this nostalgia as a universal tendency to wish for an imagined past – “the beautifying effects of memory” (*Ferretti 2015*), as reflecting melancholia and guilt (*ibid*) or as 'aphasia' – “regression to symbolic forms of the previous historical period” (*Oushakine 2000, page 994*). Boym sees in it “the disease of an afflicted imagination” (*2001, page xiii*). This view is most widespread among Western researchers although there are exceptions, such as Scanlan’s rejection of the idea that nostalgia is “the sorry cousin of

various ways of retrieving memories,” suggesting that it may be an important form of criticism of the present (*2004*).



Vera Mukhina's 1937 sculpture 'Worker and Collective Farm Woman', Moscow (SCRSS Library)

On the other hand are those who view nostalgia as an expression of dissatisfaction with new capitalist realities. Many informants in the post-socialist countries are unhappy with their current situation. “The former republics of the USSR experienced economic decline, rising levels of inequality and poverty. Russia lost the USSR’s status as a major world power and its peoples suffered an identity crisis. A process of decay and industrial de-development [is] accompanied by disenchantment with free market mechanisms [and] degeneration of their societies into chaos” (*Lane, 2014*).

Miyazaki sees a political contextualising trend as: "...social theorists [*in the West, MC*] [share... a] sense of the loss of hope in progressive politics and thought. Underlying their concern [...] is a general sense (in the academy and beyond) that the world, and more specifically, the character of capitalism, has radically changed and that social theory has lost its relevance and critical edge" (2006, page 147). That pessimism in the 'West', in my opinion, is being visited on the peoples of the former socialist 'East'.

Several scholars have tabulated the conflicting views among people of the former Soviet Union (FSU), including Abramov's examination of thought on nostalgia across the ex-socialist world (2011). The Moscow Levada Centre's survey on 'nostalgia for the USSR' found that 58 per cent of citizens of the Russian Federation regretted the dissolution of the Soviet Union (www.levada.ru/press/2011041103.html). Yet, the main current of Western literature remains overwhelmingly negative in its portrayals of all aspects of life under communist governments.

However, paying more attention to the meaning of nostalgia for those who express it allows one to see in it elements of hope for the future and not only thoughts about the past, something that Bloch had argued nearly eighty years earlier (1986 [1938–47], pages 1054–59). Gille captures something of that when she writes: "[T]he post-Socialist and the 'European' present needs no less questioning than did the Socialist past" (2012, page 280), adding: "Perhaps we can now start looking for more signs of future-orientedness in the post-Communist region and thereby stop ceding that terrain to the West" (*ibid*, page 288).

This aspect – of looking back in time and at the present – has been extensively examined for the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Witness Daphne Berdahl's essay (2012, page 181) on "the different readings and receptions" of *Goodbye, Lenin!*, a film made in 2003 by Wolfgang Becker. The film revolves around a young man and his sister hiding the demise of the

GDR from their sick mother by building a mock-up of the GDR to cocoon her. Berdahl quotes Becker, who has the son comment: "The GDR I created for my mother was increasingly becoming the GDR that I might have wished for myself" (*ibid*, page 180). For him, nostalgia contains both criticism of the present, and hopes for the future realising the potentialities of the East German past. In her monograph Boym writes: "Creative nostalgia reveals the fantasies of the age and it is in those fantasies and potentialities that the future is born. One is nostalgic for the past, not for the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past perfect that one strives to realise in the future" (*op cit*, page 351).

This reflects my own research undertaken in the years 2008 to 2012 in the Republic of Abkhazia in the Caucasus, part of the FSU. In Abkhazia it was put to me thus: "What we had then fitted us better, even though terrible things were done". While some scholars see the dismantling of statues and other symbols of the socialist period as significant by giving 'closure' to socialism, this does not explain the restoration of other statues and symbols elsewhere. In Belarus many statues remain, while the Abkhaz honour and build new statues to Nestor Lakoba, the communist founder of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921.

In her interviews with East Europeans a decade after the end of the Cold War, Ghodsee found that longing for the past was found among some who believed that they had been fooled into giving up socialism. She cites a previous fighter against socialism in Bulgaria: "What we have now is worse than we had before ... the whole thing was rotten from the start; 1989 was not about bringing liberty to the people of Eastern Europe; it was about expanding markets for Western companies" (2012, page 5). *Not the Horse We Wanted* is the title of a volume on post-socialism by Chris Hann (2006). However, some informants among the Abkhazians also blame the run-down of industry and the joblessness on "those who were in the leadership of the

Communist Party in the Soviet Union who now live to make profits and all are thieves" (from a personal communication to the author, dated 23.8.2011).

Badalov, an Uzbek who recently obtained a doctorate in Paris, has cited informants from three Central Asian republics where: "Almost all the population [...], as in other parts of the ex-USSR who knew communism, would prefer a return of the 'protector' regime [...] rather than perpetuate the current system" (2012). His field studies lead him to conclude that the current state of 'misery' people speak of "is not an imaginary construct but [...] the result of the confrontation of a precarious day and the idealised image of a previous better life of which the Soviet state was the guarantor and protector", adding: "In general, people [...] have moved from a system of collective certainty to a system of individual uncertainty" (*ibid*). He finds the misery of today obliterates or outweighs the memories of negative features in the past – hardly amnesia. To all of the mentioned criticisms of the present should be added the widespread expressions of the effects of a loss of pride and community with the fall of socialism. My own research has shown that, despite the deportation of whole nationalities and the belief that a threat of deportation hung over the Abkhaz in the 1940s, informants speak of the 'interethnic harmony' in daily life that was most characteristic of the last forty years of the USSR.

Velikonja from Slovenia discusses nostalgia's manifestations across all the previously socialist states and sees it as a possible expression of hope for the future, starting with a protest against present conditions. He poses the question: "Why is there nostalgia for real socialism? Is it but a logical response to sudden, dramatic transformation? Don't people remember those days anymore – *or do they remember them all too well?*" [*my emphasis, MC*] as he describes nostalgia as "a retrospective utopia, a wish and a hope for a safe world, a fair society, true friendships, mutual solidarity and well-being in general" (2009, page 535).

I share Velikonja's discomfort with the use of the prefix 'post' to denote today's societies, as they are characterised primarily by today's conditions, in which the 'nostalgia' element of "re-think[ing] the recent past" (*ibid*, page 537) is not central. He moves discussion of the phenomenon from the past to the future: "What lay at the core of nostalgic feelings, narratives and practices, and what many nostalgics remain oblivious to, is precisely what remains at the very bottom of Pandora's box: *hope* [...]. [I]t embodies a utopian hope that there must be a society that is better than the current one" (*ibid*, pages 547–8).

The Western academic hunt for a 'nostalgia' that only refers to the past contains an assumption that there cannot be any progress in the previous socialist states other than along current capitalist lines. Velikonja writes: "In most of the dominant discourses, socialist times are almost completely blacked out. New ideologies [...] are created and developed on the basis of a complete condemnation of everything that came before" or "impose silence about everything before 1989–91" (*ibid*, page 537). To suggest that rejection of the present 'chaos' reflects a distorted memory smacks of an outsider's imposition of an 'I know better' attitude, denying FSU residents the capacity to hold to a balanced judgement.

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Dr Michael Costello is an Honorary Research Associate in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent, where he completed his PhD in 2015. His research covers the relationships of custom, law and the state, and he has written on their topical relevance to concepts of nostalgia and hope, the participatory aspects of societal structures and attempts at state-building in former socialist societies. He has carried out extensive fieldwork in the FSU, in particular in the Republic of Abkhazia in the Caucasus.

SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

Annual General Meeting

The Society will be holding its AGM as this *SCRSS Digest* goes to press. The next issue will include a full report, but a copy of the Annual Report and Accounts will be emailed to all members in the meantime. If you're not sure whether we have an up-to-date email address for you, please email the Society (ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk). The members' email list allows us to regularly update you on forthcoming events at the centre, and also news from other organisations that may be of interest, including discount offers. If you don't have an email address and did not attend the AGM, you may request a copy of the Annual Report by post.

How Members Can Help Us

Almost half the Society's members will receive a membership renewal notice with this issue of the *SCRSS Digest*. I cannot emphasise enough that fees paid by members play a vital role in ensuring that the centre and its unique resources are maintained and developed for present and future generations. I would urge all of you who receive a notice to respond promptly. If you're a UK taxpayer, please also complete a Gift Aid form to allow us to claim on any donations you make above your basic membership fee, both now and in the future. You can also pay your annual membership by banker's order – contact the SCRSS for a form.

It's always a pleasure to meet new members at the centre. The enthusiasm shown by students, in particular, is an indication that, in spite of our limited human and financial resources, the Society offers a unique collection of materials to anyone researching the arts, humanities and social sciences of Russia and the former USSR.

However, if we are to increase membership, then it is the responsibility of all members to spread the word and encourage other individuals to visit and join. The SCRSS also offers affiliate membership, so please ask other appropriate organisations you're associated with to consider supporting our work by joining. Full membership details and forms are on our website at www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm.

What's Happening in Russia?

In February Karen Hewitt, from Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, gave a fascinating insight into current events in Russia, and particularly the opinions of ordinary Russians. This very well attended event, which attracted a number of non-members, shows a continuing thirst for more information about present-day Russia. If members have any suggestions for speakers and topics for future events, then do please contact the Honorary Secretary.

Russian Language Seminar



Participants, lecturers and SCRSS volunteers at the 8th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar, 2016

The 8th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar took place on 16–17 April 2016. This year's lecturers from St Petersburg State University were Tatiana Piotrovskaya (Senior Lecturer, Department of English Philology and Language Culture Studies), teaching our Russian language and linguistics stream, and Dr Vadim Golubev

(Head of the Department of English for the Faculty of Journalism), teaching our Russian humanities and social sciences stream.

The seminar was fully booked with thirty participants. Of this number almost half were Russian language professionals (teachers, interpreters or translators), while over two-thirds were non-SCRSS members. This confirms that there is a demand nationally for Russian-language events of this type aimed at advanced-level speakers.

The feedback from participants was excellent. Our lecturers' views on the seminar and the welcome by the SCRSS were also very positive. Vadim commented: "You were wonderful. You took such care of us! ... The audience was great. Very interested and active. A wonderful experience all round."

The SCRSS would like to thank our partner organisation the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation for its help in supporting this event. Particular thanks go to SCRSS staff member John Cunningham and SCRSS volunteers Diana Turner, Christine Barnard, Ralph Gibson and Jean Turner, without whose efforts both before and during the seminar this event would not have been possible.

Library Update

SCRSS Council member, professional librarian and volunteer Mel Bach continues her invaluable work to develop the library catalogue, and review acquisition and de-acquisition policy for the SCRSS Soviet Collections. Our regular volunteers Claire Weiss and Bethany Aylward, working with staff member John Cunningham, continue to make progress on digital cataloguing of the Art Collection. When completed, the catalogue will allow members and researchers a much better opportunity to access this unique and comprehensive collection. If any members, with Russian and a certain level of computer skills, are interested in helping to catalogue this or any other of the Society's collections, please get

in touch. More information about the Society's collections can be found on the website – or arrange an appointment to visit and see for yourself!

Russian Revolution 100

The centenary of the 'Ten Days That Shook the World' takes place in 2017. The SCRSS, together with Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School, initiated the Russian Revolution Centenary Committee (RRCC). The SCRSS Honorary Secretary is Co-Chair of the RRCC, which brings together a broad range of labour movement, heritage and cultural organisations. It aims not only to mark the anniversary but also to inform debate about its continued relevance to politics and society today. A website was launched on 1 May 2016 (www.1917.org.uk). Representatives from both the British Library and the Courtauld Institute have visited the SCRSS with a view to possible contributions the Society might make to exhibitions planned for 2017.

Next Events

Friday 3 June, 19.00

Lecture: Robert Chandler on 'Memories' by Teffi

Robert Chandler talks about his new translation (with Elizabeth Chandler, Anne Marie Jackson and Irina Steinberg) of Teffi's *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea*. This is the first English-language version of the writer and satirist Teffi's account of her journey into exile, following the Russian Revolution. *Normal entrance fees apply to this event.*

Friday 17 June, 19.00

Lecture: Margaret Fleming-Makarian on *The Nutcracker*

Margaret Fleming-Makarian talks about Tchaikovsky's hugely popular 1892 ballet *The Nutcracker*, providing thought-provoking insights into its symbolic meaning. Margaret is the author of *The Original Nutcracker Ballet: A Hidden Allegory* (2014). *Normal entrance fees apply to this event.*

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees: films and lectures £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members); other events: as indicated. Up-to-date details for all events are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm. Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF)

Holocaust Memorial Day 2016

Lord Browne of Madingley was among the speakers inside the Imperial War Museum for the 2016 Holocaust Memorial Day event, organised jointly by the SMTF and Southwark Council. The indoor element also included an account by Holocaust survivor Jan Imich, and performances by local schools. The audience of several hundred people then moved outside to the Soviet War Memorial and Southwark Council's Holocaust Memorial Tree located nearby, where a speech was delivered by the Russian Ambassador, HE Alexander Yakovenko. In a powerful address he said: "Today we are here, at the Soviet War Memorial, to remember one of the darkest, most tragic and shameful chapters in the history of mankind – the Holocaust. It is a powerful reminder of the perils of discrimination and intolerance, of just how catastrophic and barbaric the incitement to racial hatred can be. ... even today, that fire still smoulders. Anti-Semitism retains its hold in too many places. In Europe and elsewhere, minorities face rising discrimination. The world must never forget, deny or downplay the Holocaust. We must remain ever on our guard. And we must do more to raise awareness and educate our

children about such atrocities in order to promote equality and fundamental freedoms, the sense of our shared humanity and equality of human dignity.”

Victory Day 2016



Veterans from Russia, Victory Day 2016 at the Soviet War Memorial, London (photo by Karl Weiss)

The main annual event at the Soviet War Memorial attracted hundreds of guests and spectators. The Mayor of Southwark was joined by the Russian Ambassador, a military representative from the UK Ministry of Defence, diplomats from a number of CIS countries, a large group of Soviet veterans visiting London for Victory Day, British veterans and a wide range of community organisations. In his address the Russian Ambassador noted that “this year marks seventy-five years since the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet Union’s entry into World War II brought hope that the Nazi war machine would be ultimately defeated. That was the first reaction of Sir Winston Churchill to the news of Nazi Germany’s attack against the USSR. The victory came at an impossibly high cost. It took time to defeat the evil unleashed at the centre of Europe. The battlefields of the Second World War represent a roll call etched into our collective memory. The battles of Brest and Kursk, Sevastopol and Stalingrad. Decades later, the very names evoke pain. Today we honour and remember the worthy deeds of our fathers,

grandfathers, great-grandfathers, all members of the Soviet and British armed forces who fought in one of the deadliest conflicts in human history. We mourn the youth cut down in their prime as they fought in the unimaginable conditions. The lessons of history shall not be forgotten.” Coverage of this and other Victory Day events around the UK can be found on the Russian Embassy website (www.rusemb.org.uk).

As support for the events at the Memorial continues to grow, particularly among Russian community organisations and groups from other former USSR countries, SCRSS members should be aware of the key role the Society plays in the work of the SMTF. The initial idea for the creation of the Memorial emerged from an SCRSS AGM and, since its inception in 1997, the SMTF has been chaired by Philip Matthews (current SCRSS Chair), while current and former SCRSS Honorary Secretaries have held the equivalent position within the SMTF during the same period (Jean Turner from 1997–2006, Ralph Gibson for the last ten years).



Russian Ambassador HE Alexander Yakovenko and SMTF Chair Philip Matthews, Victory Day 2016 (photo by Karl Weiss)

Immortal Regiment

A significant new addition to the Victory Day events in London this year was a march along Whitehall by over one thousand people supporting the ‘Immortal Regiment’ initiative, which has now spread beyond the borders of Russia to a number of cities

worldwide. The participants, including the Russian Ambassador, carried portraits of their parents and grandparents: veterans and home front workers, members of the resistance, children of war, and those who were prisoners in concentration camps or survived the Siege of Leningrad. In Moscow, President Vladimir Putin once again joined the Immortal Regiment march through Red Square, which followed on from the annual military parade. Extensive coverage can be found on Russian news websites.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund.

Perestroika Anniversary

We continue our series, begun in the last issue of the *SCRSS Digest*, to mark the 30th anniversary of the launch of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union in 1986. We publish a new article by Kate Clark, recalling the events she reported on as a Moscow correspondent that year, and reprint a contemporary account from Bob Daglish's 'Moscow Diary' in the Society's former *Anglo-Soviet Journal*.

1986: A Historic Year in the USSR

By Kate Clark

By the time of the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February 1986, I had been the *Morning Star's* Moscow correspondent for just a year. It was Mikhail Gorbachev's first congress as Party General Secretary – and his opportunity to get much needed changes agreed. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* became keynote words, entering the lexicon of countries far and wide.

1986 had begun with Gorbachev's historic call for a nuclear-free world, with a timetable for all nuclear weapons to be decommissioned by the year 2000. It was the start of a very busy year for the country – and for me as correspondent.



Kate Clark arrives at the Soviet nuclear testing site of Semipalatinsk, September 1986 (author's photo)

'Acceleration' (*uskoreniye*) and 'restructuring' (*perestroika*) of the economy – what did it mean? To find out, I visited several important industrial plants to examine how they were introducing self-financing (*khozraschyot*). That year too I visited the cities of Arkhangelsk and the republics of Georgia and Armenia. The Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster was on 26 April and only two weeks later I was in the first group of journalists allowed near the exclusion zone. In June I was the only British journalist to cover the trial of Ukrainian Nazi collaborator Fedorenko, extradited from the USA. In September I flew to the formerly secret Soviet nuclear testing site of Semipalatinsk. In October the Reagan–Gorbachev summit took place in Reykjavik. And in December the ban on nuclear physicist and human rights campaigner Andrei Sakharov was lifted, allowing him to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky.

Gorbachev's anti-drink campaign was in full swing by the time of the 27th Congress. It was, he said, "a battle against traditions shaped and cultivated over centuries". Something certainly had to be done: hard drinking had got worse during the Brezhnev 'stagnation' years, workers could be found

drunk on the job and absenteeism was rife. But the anti-drink campaign, instead of concentrating on banning vodka from the workplace, led to the tearing up of ancient Georgian and Moldovan vineyards, causing local resentment and a drop in income for those republics. All alcoholic drinks disappeared from the shops, predictably leading to the widespread production of moonshine (*samogon*).

Even a correspondent as sympathetic to the ideas of socialism as myself could not help but see the problems in the Soviet economy. The choice of goods in the shops was poor, food supplies erratic and many of the consumer goods on offer were poor quality and old-fashioned. I needed an automatic washing machine (essential for a family with three school-age children) but could not find one anywhere, except in foreign-currency shops. Under the centralised planned economy factories kept churning out the same goods, year after year, thus achieving their plan targets but not necessarily satisfying the needs of the population.



Trial of Nazi collaborator Fyodor Fedorenko, USSR, June 1986 (author's photo)

So, like most people, I enthusiastically welcomed Gorbachev's 'new thinking' as a refreshing and much needed change. Here are some lines from a feature I wrote in February 1986 after visiting the Frunze plant in Sumy, "the first in the country to operate under a completely self-financing system".

"When President Reagan imposed his embargo on equipment supplies from Western firms for the Siberian gas pipeline,

the Frunze plant suddenly found itself obliged to make the whole gamut of equipment for the pipeline." The Frunze plant was profit making, I was told, achieved "by making the workers materially interested in the results of their work – linking wages to output and quality of output".

After a year under the experiment, the plant was a success: "Our factory was profitable even before the experiment. But in the past we used to receive from the state what it saw fit to give us, and we had to spend it on what they decided we should spend it on. Our collective lived, as it were, on state subsidies. What it meant was that the ministry used advanced plants like ours to 'patch up the holes' and help sustain the backward ones."

Now the CPSU's policy was that all enterprises should be self-financing, and those that were unprofitable would simply go to the wall. It would be a real shake-up to the system.

Covering the trial of a Nazi war criminal was harrowing, but it gave me a better understanding of what the Soviet population had been through in territory under German Nazi occupation during World War II. Fyodor Fedorenko was a Ukrainian collaborator who served the Nazis at the Treblinka death camp in occupied Poland. He had escaped to the USA after the war and obtained US citizenship, but in 1984 was extradited to the USSR.

It came as a surprise to me that so many of the witnesses who testified against Fedorenko had themselves served long prison sentences in the Soviet Union after the war for varying degrees of collaboration with the enemy. The evidence against Fedorenko was irrefutable: he was found guilty of treason and taking part in mass executions, and sentenced to death.

The *Morning Star* was firmly on the side of peace and nuclear disarmament, so gave a lot of space to any peace initiatives. "The new Soviet disarmament plan, announced by Mikhail Gorbachev last Wednesday," I wrote on 20 January 1986, "is a bold step to

rid the world of nuclear weapons over the next 15 years”.

“It provides for the stage-by-stage reduction of nuclear weapons – both delivery vehicles and munitions – right down to their total destruction under appropriate international control, on condition of a ban on space strike weapons.” These were the days of US President Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative – widely dubbed his Star Wars project.



Test tunnel, Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site, USSR, September 1986 (author's photo)

The Soviet Union had declared a moratorium on underground nuclear testing in August 1985, but the USA continued testing. In September 1986 a small group of Western journalists, including myself, had the unique chance to visit the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground in Kazakhstan. A helicopter took us to a secret military location some 90 miles from a closed military town that didn’t have a name or even figure on maps.

We were taken to a tunnel that had been prepared for a future underground nuclear test, should the moratorium be lifted. We were led inside that eerie dark passage by General Arkady Ilyenko, commander of the test zone, who told us he hoped no further tests would ever be necessary. Geiger counters at the site showed near-normal radiation, we were glad to see. But the strange shattered rocks covering the surface of the surrounding hillsides told their own story – of the massive shocks those

Gegelen Hills had experienced during all the years of underground nuclear testing. It was a sobering experience.

1986 was only the start of the *perestroika* and *glasnost* period. Much appeared in the Soviet press arguing for enterprises to become self-financing, Lenin’s work *On Cooperatives* was invoked to encourage the setting up of profit-making co-ops, and previously banned films and books started to appear gradually.

The following year would see the release of Abuladze’s anti-Stalinist film *Repentance* (*Pokayaniye*), Rybakov’s novel *Children of the Arbat* (*Deti Arbata*), and many other previously shelved works.

As for the anti-alcohol campaign, it did result in reduced mortality rates, a drop in alcohol-related road and workplace accidents, and an increase in the birth rate. But the state lost twenty billion roubles, according to *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Last year Gorbachev said: “We should not have shut down trade, provoking moonshine production. Everything should have been done gradually.” More gradualism was surely what was needed in the reform process as a whole, as ensuing years would prove. Not suddenly and unjustifiably finding fault with everything the USSR had done in the past, as much of the media started to do, but gradually turning the slogan ‘More socialism, more democracy!’ into reality.

Kate Clark was Morning Star Moscow correspondent from 1985–90. She also wrote a weekly column for The Scotsman (under the pen name of Tess Armand) from 1989–90. She translated ‘Women in Russia’ (Verso, 1994) and taught Soviet history and Russian language at the Universities of Greenwich and Westminster. She was researcher and Associate Producer on BBC Two’s 8-part series ‘Second Russian Revolution’, and Deputy Features Editor for the BBC’s Russian Service. She is also the author of two books: ‘Chile: Reality and Prospects of Popular Unity’ (Lawrence & Wishart, 1972) and ‘Chile in my Heart’ (Bannister Publications, 2013).

Moscow Diary

By Robert Daglish

Edited extract from Robert Daglish's 'Moscow Diary', Anglo-Soviet Journal, Volume 46, No 3, Autumn 1986 (pp2–5).

The Big Rethink

Not a day, or perhaps even an hour, passes without someone on television or in the press using the word *perestroika*. Various translated as 'restructuring', 'reorganisation', 'streamlining', etc, it seems to embrace all these meanings and even that of a 'new attitude', but what it actually stands for can best be judged by the effects in fields as far apart as food production and the arts.

One of the more obvious signs that the economy is getting a shake-up has been the appearance in Moscow lately of great pantechnicons loaded with fruit and vegetables from such distant places as the Caucasus and the Penza region. The other day I bought some Penza potatoes – very firm and tasty and, at 25 kopecks a kilo, rather cheap.

These huge trucks pull up outside the collective farm markets, set up makeshift stalls on the pavement and start selling their goods while the driver checks up on his vehicle after a journey of a thousand kilometres or more. Inside the market, collective farmers from not so far away go on selling potatoes grown on their private plots at 40 or 50 kopecks per kilo, while in the state greengrocers the price stays at 10 kopecks and even in winter will not rise above that price.

New regulations allowing the collective farms to dispose of thirty per cent of their produce on the free market have brought a new competitive element into the shopping situation. Competition used to only be between the state and the private grower, but now, somewhere in between, we have a much more active and better equipped cooperative element [...] At the moment it has made the market scene a lot more

lively, helped to keep prices down and benefited our diet.

The Writers' Congress

It would be a mistake to think that the problems so much in the news at present have never been reflected in literature and the press. Abdullin's plays [...] may be said to have foreshadowed much of present Party policy in agriculture. But as Daniil Granin put it at the Writers' Congress last summer: "much of our writing now seems timid, shallow, bland."

The verbatim report of the congress really should be translated and published as a book to show that this is far less likely to be the case in future. [I]t would provide an excellent summing up of the issues facing Soviet writers today and their attitudes.

Take, for instance, Yulian Semyonov's remarks about the way the size of editions is determined. Referring to the system of giving out book vouchers in return for waste paper, he said: "We all know how much pulp you have to hand in to be able to buy a copy of Akhmatova or Shukshin, but the pulp is still being published." This is yet another example of resistance to the new impulses that came after the April plenum. At present, printings are allocated by the Union of Writers and the State Publishing Committee, while Gosplan (State Planning) and the Ministry of Finance, which are interested in making real money for the exchequer, are excluded from the process – not to mention the readers.

The famous actor-director of the Art Theatre Oleg Yefremov had previously had something very similar to say about administrative incompetence in the theatre world – one and a half million roubles spent on commissioning plays, only a third of which reached the stage.

Or take Boris Mozhayev's clash with Vladimir Karpov, the former editor of *Novy Mir*, who has now been elected first secretary of the Writers' Union. Mozhayev, who is well known for his fearless exposure

of indifference and inertia in various quarters, decided to be quite specific about what he meant by that much-used phrase 'grey literature'. It was, he said, the kind of literature Karpov had filled his magazine with for three months by publishing the dramatist Eidlis's first novel, while a novel by Dudintsev (his first since *Not by Bread Alone* nearly thirty years ago) and another, by Mozhayev himself, were kept under wraps [...]

New Light on the Past

Another feature of the literary scene these days is the urging from all sides of a broader attitude to writers of the past. At the congress Yevtushenko, now a secretary of the board, led the way with a call for a Pasternak museum to be set up. But earlier in the year a rather more surprising event was the publication in the popular illustrated weekly *Ogonyok* of several poems by Nikolai Gumilyov, very little of whose work had been printed since he was shot for his part in an anti-Soviet conspiracy in 1921. So many people wrote in to the editor, asking for more information about the poet, that in September [...] the magazine responded with a six-page essay by the Vladimir Karpov I have just mentioned [...] Discussing Gumilyov's possible motives [for involvement in the anti-revolutionary plot], Karpov dismisses the notion that the poet remained a man of his class and fundamentally opposed to the revolution, on the grounds that he never wrote a single anti-Soviet poem, and his conclusion is that, although [...] the severe sentence was justified, there is such a thing as national forgiveness and this, in 1986, the centenary of his birth, is what the poet deserves.

If this essay is at all symptomatic [...] we may expect some much more interesting publishers' lists in the near future, which will probably include such names as Pilnyak, Khodasevich and Nabokov.

As for the present, Aitmatov's *Place of Execution*, Astafiev's *Sad Detective Story* and Rasputin's *Great Fire* are already being hotly debated, while in contrast to last

season a spate of new plays, topped by Shatrov's *Dictatorship of Conscience*, is rousing intense interest. Book and drama reviews should make better reading since the critics, after being thoroughly criticised, have also shaken off some bureaucratic trammels.

Feature

The Psychoanalytic Kindergarten Project in Soviet Russia 1921–1930

By Yordanka Valkanova

Imported from abroad, psychoanalytic theory found fertile soil in Russia in the post-revolutionary times, a period when enlightenment absolutism swept the country. During this era, a variety of advocacy groups promoted progressive psychological approaches to the study of early human development. The growing interest in giving scientific accounts of developmental processes to propagandise ideas about societal transformation was prompted by the need to change 'inherited' society. Ideas about the transformative power of education were nurtured by modern psychological and pedagogical theories. It is not surprising then that Sigmund Freud's psychology of unconsciousness sparked interest in Russia both prior to and after the Bolshevik 'October Revolution' of 1917. Psychologists such as Ivan Ermakov (1875–1942), Mosche Wulff (1878–1971), Tatiana Rozental (1884–1921) and Alexander Luria (1902–77) were among the founders of the psychoanalytic movement (*Belkin & Litvinov 1992*). In 1921, in an attempt to pursue the political implications of Freud's thoughts, the Soviet educational authorities initiated a psychoanalytic kindergarten project known as the Children's Home-Laboratory. The idea was backed by Commissar of War Leon Trotsky and also generously supported by Nadezhda Alliluyeva, the

second wife of Joseph Stalin and the daughter of prominent Bolsheviks.

The project remains perhaps the best known single contribution to psychoanalytic early childhood pedagogy, an object in questioning how Freud's framework could be incorporated into socialist preschool pedagogy. Whilst some previous studies, (*Etkind et al 1997; Miller 1998; Angelini 2008; Gainotti & Schiavulli 2014*), have centred mainly on explorations of how psychoanalysis is interpreted in educational projects, this survey, through a framework that derives from Dalibor Vesely's concept of the divided nature of representation (2004), views the process from both aspects. It aims to give an account of the dialectical relationship between psychoanalytic knowledge and instrumental early childhood education approaches.

Political Status

The story of the psychoanalytic kindergarten is ultimately associated with a sense of political interest and obligation. Indeed, for some members of the Russian psychoanalytical network, their interest in pursuing the eugenic implications of Freud's thoughts was not just fed by a convergence of pedagogic and political analysis, but was also built on long-standing ties to high-flying members of the Bolshevik elite (*Valkanova 2009*). The project was informally led by Vera Schmidt (1889–1937), an educator with an extraordinary career whose work remains far too little known outside the psychoanalytic world. Vera had studied the kindergarten method at the Froebel Institute in Kiev from 1913–16 and was deeply influenced by Friedrich Froebel's (1782–1852) philosophy (*Valkanova & Brehony 2006*).

The Home was an early childhood institution, run as a boarding school. In Vera Schmidt's words, a key feature was the closeness of the founders of the kindergarten project: "...in our small circle of people, who were interested in psychoanalysis, has emerged the idea of organising a children's home that could

allow us to seek new education on a basis of psychoanalysis" (*Schmidt 2011, p11*). It is striking how many of the Bolshevik leadership were in the same social and intellectual network. Amusingly, half of the enrolled children came from families of Revolutionary heroes and officials, while half were abandoned or orphaned street children. From the *nomenklatura*, these included the children of Kursky, Sverdlov, Frunze and Vera herself, as well as Stalin's birth son Vasily and his adoptive son Artyom Sergeev (Tomik). The latter noted in his memoirs that Stalin and Nadezhda Alliluyeva made only rare visits to the Children's Home during the three-year period both children stayed there (*Sergeev & Glushnik 2006*).

Alliluyeva, however, helped the newly established project to find a home in the beautiful Art Nouveau Ryabushinsky House in Moscow (built by the architect Fyodor Schechtel in 1900). The choice of the Ryabushinsky House to develop the new Soviet man and woman is significant. The sculpted staircase, stained-glass windows and painted wall tiles represented the emergence of the unconscious soul and its spiritual evolution. The kindergarten project was closely monitored by the Russian Psychoanalytic Society, the People's Commissariat for Education, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and the German mine workers' trade union organisation 'Union'.

Scientisation and its Power in Defining Pedagogy

The 'scientific' work of Vera Schmidt drew on a normative construct of a child. Scientisation was perceived as having a special form of social power in defining pedagogy. Norm had to be generated and clearly conveyed to politicians and teachers. This tendency rested on two interrelated premises: that psychoanalysts possessed and exercised power, and that education was an effective device in transforming habits and attitudes. Psychoanalytic thinking worked with a number of extensive concepts, such as unconsciousness, desire,

otherness and drives (Schmidt 2011). An apprentice-master training model was established, with a special emphasis on analysis, and psychoanalytic knowledge was seen with an 'uncritical aura' (Vesely 2004).

In order to cultivate the necessary professional attitude, the trainees had to go through analysis themselves. This training was centred on experiencing the power of sublimation. Trainees were guided towards a cathartic transformation of their professional identity. Indeed, they had to discover the similarities of their own fears and desires to those observable in children. Essentially, children were allowed to express their sexual needs freely. Vera noted in her report to Sigmund Freud (Schmidt 1924) that the aim was for the trainees to take a professional stance, without disgust, when observing infantile sexual behaviours. However, knowledge of Freud's approach was taken as a framework that devalued any other professional attributes, such as empathy or efficiency. Moreover, excessive preoccupation with psychoanalytic knowledge generation resulted in high employee turnover, and eventually, along with an inspector's report that insisted on children practising masturbation, contributed to the closure of the project in 1925.

Legacy of Vera Schmidt's Work

The evaluation of acceptable theories to support the ideological role of education marginalised positive recognition of the research work done in the Children's Home. The scientific community vigorously engaged in anti-psychoanalytic campaigns at academic forums, in scholarly journals and professional magazines. The introduction to Pavel Blonsky's book *Sexual Education* (1935) is a good example of such polemics. Blonsky cited Lenin's hostile criticism of psychoanalysis (documented in Clara Zetkin's words): "Freud's theory is a fashionable trick. I do not trust those who are scrupulously engaged with sexual issues ..." Trotsky's involvement was also unfortunate and provoked adverse actions.

Soon after Stalin launched a series of attacks on Trotsky in 1924, the project was labelled 'anti-Marxist'.

Nonetheless, Vera and her fellow psychoanalysts' claims about children's sexual emancipation greatly influenced the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich's (1897–1957) interest in Marxist psychoanalysis. Reich saw the potential implications of the project findings in the necessity of urgent reforms, not only in terms of simplifying the codification of divorces, legalising abortion and women's emancipation, but also in terms of shifting the dominant sexual ideology (Reich 1972). Since the student revolution in 1968 there has been another veritable explosion of interest in the kind of knowledge the Moscow project produced. Vera Schmidt's book, published in Germany in 1924, found a new life in the *Kinderladen* movement in Germany. Members of the movement viewed the psychoanalytical model of education depicted in Vera's book as particularly consistent with their radical left philosophy, offering a mode for escaping from centralised provisions and achieving 'collectively transformed private lives' (Baader 2015).

Ultimately, the case of the Children's Home-Laboratory provides significant insights into the relationship between practice and training, epistemic agency, political demands, leadership work and different professional groupings. Such projects, compared to similar early childhood contemporaries documented in early childhood historiography, may help us generate models of how theoretical knowledge has married practice in the kindergarten milieu. It responds in a notably complex manner to the major themes of early twentieth-century ways of thinking, while distorting them unusually in the process.

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Book Reviews

The 'Russian' Civil Wars 1916–1926: Ten Years that Shook the World
By Jonathan D Smele (Hurst, 2016, ISBN: 9781849044240, Hbk, 423pp £35.00)

It is usually recognised that the post-Russian Revolution civil wars and wars of intervention ended with victory for the Bolsheviks in 1921. But Jonathan Smele, in his painstakingly researched new history of the 'Russian' civil wars of 1916–26 argues that they continued for at least another five years – between non-Russians, particularly in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, and nationalist and ethnic forces in Armenia, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Western Ukraine – until Soviet power could be firmly established. Hence the quotation marks around the word 'Russian' in the title.

The signing of the Soviet-German Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 and the Soviet-Polish Treaty of Riga in 1921 resulted in the rendition of parts of the Ukraine, the Baltics and Poland to German

rule. This set off fighting by nationalist forces – not only against the Red Army, but also the Poles and Germans. The result of these treaties was that any Soviet help for the nascent communist revolutions in Hungary and Germany was frustrated. The hoped for export of revolution to the rest of Europe failed.

The hard-pressed Red Army had undergone a rapid development under Trotsky, Kamenev and Tukhachevsky into a successful professional army. It included experienced veterans of the Revolution and even officers from the old Tsarist military. Despite all the odds, it defeated the White armies led by Deniken, Kolchak and Kornilov, curiously described as ‘liberals’ by Smele.

The author’s research into newly available records of the White opponents of the Bolsheviks shows that foreign interventionists, especially Britain, continued to supply the Whites with military equipment and undercover agents, the latter involved in the murders of leaders of the new Soviet republics in Central Asia.

The peasants and Cossacks were ambivalent as to whom they supported, depending on the tide of war, famines in the Urals, the Volga and Ukraine, and the over-enthusiasm of some of the revolutionaries in setting up Soviet power in the villages.

The subsequent bitterness between the peasants and the hungry towns was solved by Lenin’s introduction of the New Economic Policy. This gave peasants the right to sell their goods at reasonable prices to the government, brought in expertise from the previous civil service and from abroad to build up the economy but, according to Lenin’s critics amongst his fellow Bolsheviks, allowed the rise of a new bourgeoisie.

This book is a very detailed military history of all sides of these civil wars, the reverberations of which echo to the present day.

But it underestimates the fundamental difference between the Whites and Reds. The Whites were fighting for a return to the pre-revolutionary status quo, which was moribund even before the Revolution.

The Reds had a cause that inspired both workers and peasants with a desire to create a new form of society based on common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Their success defined the history of the twentieth century and still influences the world today.

Note: This review was first published in the *Morning Star* on 26 April 2016.

By Jean Turner

Correction: In the book review of Andrew Lownie’s *Stalin’s Englishman* in the last issue of the *SCRSS Digest*, the reference to “Ernest Bevan” on page 15 should have read “Ernest Bevin”.

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