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## Feature

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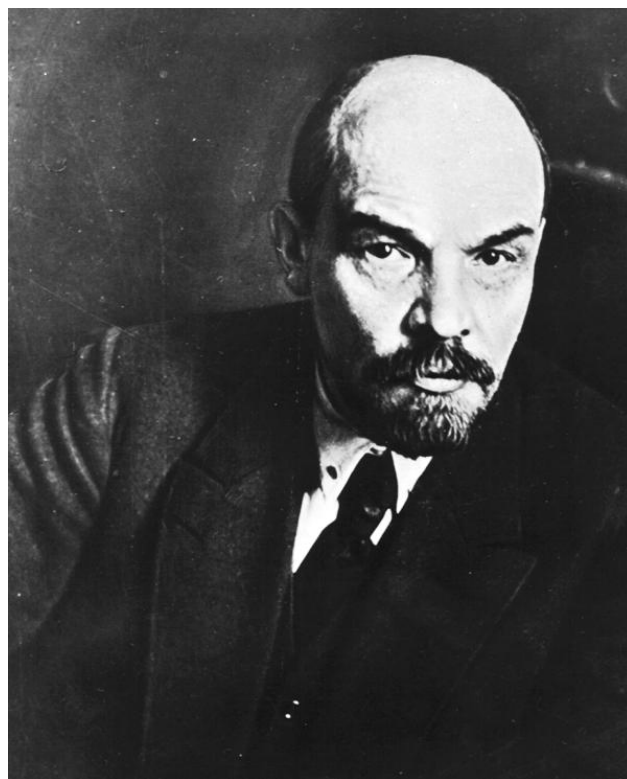
### **“We value and love life too much”: Lenin, the Russian Revolution and the Violence of the First World War**

By Dr James Ryan

In September 1918, during a short-lived period of official and very deadly Red Terror implemented by the Soviet political police, the Cheka, an article in the official Cheka journal justified the violence of the Soviet state in striking terms. Instead of the “many millions of class murders in the war”, instead of the “slow systematic sucking dry of the blood of the working people by the web of capitalism in the interest of the ruling minority [...] we have set about merciless struggle” against the enemies of the people. This would be a truly humanist terror, because “we value and love life too much – it is a sacred gift of nature”.<sup>1</sup>

The war in question was the world war that had not yet ended, and that for the Bolsheviks would not end until victory in the

Civil War in 1920. This article stated, very directly, the essence of the Leninist approach to the First World War. It hints at how central the war was to the evolution of Leninism as a revolutionary ideology and to its continued relevance in Bolshevik discussions after the October Revolution in 1917. In fact, the war was not just the context but, to a large extent, the justification for the October Revolution.



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (SCRSS Library)

It is worth stressing this in 2014 as we commemorate the anniversary of the war. For too long Russia’s involvement in the war has been marginalised or forgotten, both in the West and in Russia itself. Historians of Russia have in recent years endeavoured to redress this balance, and a major multi-volume history of Russia’s Great War and Revolution will soon be published in English by an international team of scholars.<sup>2</sup>

Over eighteen million men of the Russian Empire fought in the war. The historian Karen Petrone has demonstrated that, though the Soviet Union “may not have officially recognized World War I as part of its own founding myth”, it did take part in the “pan-European intellectual movements that interpreted the war and coped with its aftermath”.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Europe’s socialist parties supported the war efforts of their respective countries. Of the Russian socialists, Lenin’s Bolsheviks and the left wing of the Menshevik party were firmly opposed to the war. The war, according to Lenin and many other socialists, was imperialist in nature. It was the inevitable product of the latest imperialist stage of capitalism, characterised by international rivalries for markets and colonies for the export of finance capital.<sup>4</sup>



Nicholas II blesses the troops, 1915 (SCRSS Library)

Upon its outbreak, Lenin immediately called for “a revolutionary war by the proletarians of all countries” against the “bourgeoisie of all countries”. He believed that the war had “placed on the order of the day the slogan of socialist revolution” for the more advanced Western European states, for it reflected capitalism’s inherent contradictions and concentrated immense economic power in the hands of the state. Convinced that the war was “no chance happening” but rather “just as legitimate a form of the *capitalist* way of life as peace is”, Lenin predicted somewhat prophetically: “This war will soon be followed by others, unless there are a series of successful revolutions.”

Lenin’s position was not anti-war as such in 1914, rather anti-imperialist. His socialism

was fundamentally opposed to war and envisaged a peaceful future, yet he believed in waging a “war against war”, recognising the immense potential that the war had created for radical social upheaval. He made this particularly clear in a letter to his close friend Inessa Armand in January 1917. There were, he pointed out, three main types of international wars: those between exploiting, imperialist nations for conquest; those between exploited and exploiting nations; and the most “complicated”, those between “equal” nations. He opposed national defence in the war of 1914 only because socialist revolutions were ripe in both warring camps, and because the war was one of plunder.<sup>5</sup> Violence, as he put it, was “alien to our ideals”. However, he was convinced that the “salvation” (*spasenie*) of humanity “from the horrors of the present and the future wars” would only come about through “the fierce class struggle and class wars” needed to achieve “that beautiful future” of a peaceful socialism.

Initially during the war, Lenin thought that Russia’s revolution would simply be a democratic one, not socialist. By 1915 his thinking had evolved, and he reasoned that a proletarian-led revolution in Russia would “at once [...] bring about the socialist revolution in alliance with the proletarians of Europe”. The Russian revolution would no longer be simply a “spark” that might ignite a revolutionary conflagration across Europe, but rather “an indivisible and integral part of the socialist revolution in the West”. Following the overthrow of the autocracy and the creation of a Provisional Government in Russia in February–March 1917, Lenin reasoned that, in a limited political sense, the democratic revolution had already been achieved. He maintained that Russia was in transition to socialism and, having processed the theoretical significance of the war, he had arrived at the fateful conviction that a socialist political revolution was necessary there also. In his famous *April Theses* of 1917 he declared that Russia was passing from the first to the second stage of the revolution, “which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants”.

Lenin's rationale was based partly on his observation of the wartime state-controlled economy ("state-monopoly capitalism"), which he thought had expedited history and placed Russia on the "threshold" of socialism; partly on the moral imperative of continuing the "civil war" he had advocated since 1914, for "[t]o achieve peace [...] it is necessary that political power be in the hands of *the workers and poorest peasants*, not the landlords and capitalists".

Following the revolution, and as the Civil War took hold of the country, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were in no doubt that the revolution was of immense global significance in the context of the world war. The brutality of the war certainly coloured their understanding of how to make sense of, legitimise and justify the violence to which they increasingly resorted. They understood that they were living through times of unprecedented violence and upheaval. Despite the horrors on the battlefields of Europe, they were also convinced that the war – the civil war of the working masses against their oppressors – needed to be fought with (as Lenin wrote) "the utmost ardour and determination at a time when history demands that the greatest problems of humanity be solved by struggle and war".

The concepts of 'holy war,' martyrdom and self-sacrifice, in the Christian tradition, were important components of propaganda aimed at soldiers and civilians during the First World War.<sup>6</sup> Many religious figures during the war sacralised the conflict against national enemies as a form of redemptive purification for the nations involved.<sup>7</sup> In Soviet Russia during the Civil War, and despite the overt atheism of Bolsheviks, the violence of revolution was also clearly connected with concepts of the sacred and sacrifice. Violence occupied an ambiguous position in Bolshevik thought, as something terrible and something to be opposed, but also as something necessary in order to be overcome. The philosopher René Girard has explained that sacrificial customs are concerned with "a radically new type of violence, truly decisive and self-contained, a

form of violence that will put an end once and for all to violence itself".<sup>8</sup>



Lenin in Red Square, 1919 (SCRSS Library)

That is what the Bolsheviks sought to achieve. They thought of themselves as warriors for a just cause, and they sought to purify their acts of violence by emphasising the purity, selflessness and humanity of their motives, as well as the justness of their cause. To quote from one newspaper article of January 1919: "Violence, which is set in motion by the proletariat, is sanctified (*osviashchaetsia*) in the eyes of the wide masses by that great goal which it serves!" That goal would be to rid the world of the social order that had, according to their convictions, plunged the world into war in 1914. In this period of centenary anniversaries, it is important to be mindful of the violent legacies of the First World War and, as historians have been doing, to re-insert the Russian Revolution firmly into the wider narrative of that conflict.

*James Ryan has recently been appointed Lecturer in Modern European History at Cardiff University. He completed a PhD in Modern History at University College Cork. He is the author of 'Lenin's Terror: The Ideological Origins of Early Soviet State Violence' (London and New York, 2012), which was released in paperback in July 2014.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 'Ezhenedel'nik VChK', No 1 (22 September 1918), in VK Vinogradov (Ed), *VChK upolnomochena soobshchit'...*, Moscow, Kuchkovo pole, 2004, pp 55–6

<sup>2</sup> See *Russia's Great War & Revolution* website: <http://russiasgreatwar.org>

<sup>3</sup> Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2011, p 13

<sup>4</sup> To avoid an excessive number of references to Lenin's works in this article, readers are referred to my book on Lenin's thinking on violence, *Lenin's Terror: The Ideological Origins of Early Soviet State Violence*, London and New York, Routledge, 2012

<sup>5</sup> See Document No 100 in IuN Amiantovym (Ed), VI Lenin: *Neizvestnyie dokymentyi*, 1891–1922, Moscow, Rosspen, 1999, pp 201–2

<sup>6</sup> See Allen J Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2004, and Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: The Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Holt / Metropolitan Books, 1997, especially p 18

<sup>7</sup> See James McMillan, 'War', in D Bloxham & R Gerwarth (Eds), *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp 52–5

<sup>8</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory, London and New York, Continuum, 2005 [1972], p 28

## SCRSS News

### 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SCRSS was marked by a full house at the Society's centre on 5 July. Guests included Chargé d'Affaires at the Russian Embassy, Alexander Kramarenko, the Mayor of Southwark, Cllr Sunil Chopra, Chair of the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation (SPAIC), Margarita Mudrak, and Vice-President of the Russian-British

Association based in Moscow, Tatiana Skalkina.



Left to right: Mayor of Southwark Cllr Sunil Chopra, Russian Chargé d'Affaires Alexander Kramarenko, SCRSS President Bill Bowring. Far right: SCRSS Vice-Chair Charles Stewart

Over eighty members and invited guests enjoyed drinks and an excellent buffet (food provided by Russian Revels). A small exhibition explored some of the Society's past activities, with highlights from the archive and collections. One particular exhibit attracted a great deal of attention: a page from the visitor book for the Society's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1954, signed by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, actors Laurence Olivier (a member) and Sophia Loren. There were library tours during the afternoon and guests were impressed by the range and depth of our collections. The new flooring and recently installed hanging system in our ground floor space were given their first proper test. And visitors enjoyed the use of the rear garden to relax in the sunshine.

SCRSS President, Professor Bill Bowring, opened the formal part of the event with a welcome to members and guests. There were speeches of congratulation from Mr Kramarenko, who made reference to one of the Society's famous founding supporters, Virginia Woolf; and from Cllr Chopra who spoke of the Society's important role in the creation of the Soviet War Memorial in Southwark and in the ongoing organisation of ceremonies and events through the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund.

Anton Chesnokov delivered an address on behalf of Konstantin Kosachev, head of the

Russian federal agency Rossotrudnichestvo. It noted: "The Society was one of the first which realised the full potential and saw the perspectives for co-operation between Russia and the UK, learned the importance of the engagement of civil society and actively promoted these friendly initiatives." Mr Chesnokov, based at the agency's London office, went on to present the organisation's medal *For strengthening peace, friendship and cooperation* to Jean Turner, Hon Treasurer (and former Secretary and Hon Secretary for some thirty years); Ralph Gibson, current Hon Secretary; and John Cunningham, SCRSS Library & Administrative Assistant for the last twenty years.

Margarita Mudrak brought greetings both from SPAIC and the Committee for External Relations of St Petersburg and its new Chairman, Mr Evgeny Grigoriev. On his behalf, she presented the Society with a beautiful timepiece – set to St Petersburg time and incorporating a Palekh design and the city's coat of arms. On behalf of SPAIC, she presented a lavishly illustrated album of Russian costume from the city's ethnographic museum. Tatyana Skalkina passed on congratulations from the Russian-British Association and presented gifts to Jean Turner and John Cunningham in recognition of their longstanding work.



Left to right: Kate Clark (EC), SCRSS staff John Cunningham, Hon Secretary Ralph Gibson, SPAIC Chair Margarita Mudrak, Hon Treasurer Jean Turner, Anton Chesnokov of Rossotrudnichestvo

On behalf of the SCRSS, Ralph Gibson thanked all those present and expressed the

hope that the success of the event would be measured in more return visits, more support for the Society's activities, new members and a greater appreciation of the unique and important library collections held by the Society.

## Anniversary Greetings

Below we reproduce formal letters of greeting to the SCRSS, on the occasion of our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, from our three long-term partner organisations in St Petersburg and Moscow, Russia.

### From the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation

St Petersburg, July 2014  
Dear Friends

All members of the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation and the Association for Cooperation with Great Britain send their sincere and heartfelt congratulations to the members of the Society for Cooperation in Russian and Soviet Studies on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

We are proud of being partners and friends of such a unique organization which helps to ensure cultural and people-to-people contacts between Great Britain and Russia. We feel we are members of one international family sharing our history and cultures, ideas and concerns.

Thanks to your collective efforts, your unique organization has gained strong positions in the sphere of British-Russian cooperation.

Your cultural activities, humanitarian support and expressions of solidarity with the Soviet people in the struggle against German Nazism during the Second World War are highly evaluated by our country and people. We know that owing to your initiative a Memorial to the Soviet people who lost their lives in the War was unveiled in London in 1999.

Today your reputation is demonstrated by various cultural and educational programmes and longstanding partnerships with British and Russian organizations. We are grateful for your hard work and good will in promoting Russian Culture and Russian Language in Britain.

The SCRSS and its members have always been supporters and true friends of our organization.

We have great admiration for your activities and are confident that you will continue to build bridges of mutual understanding. We wish the SCRSS prosperity and continuing success.

Yours sincerely

Professor Leonid Seleznev, President,  
Association for Co-operation with Great Britain  
Natalia Eliseeva, President  
Margarita Mudrak, Chairperson  
Tatiana Emelyanova, Director for International Programmes  
Julia Volkova, Executive Secretary

**From the External Relations Committee  
of the Government of St Petersburg**

St Petersburg, July 2014  
Dear Mr Gibson

We would like to extend our sincere congratulations on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies.

For many years the Society has been a centre for educational, scientific and cultural contacts, helping to strengthen the friendship between our countries.

In the difficult years of the Second World War the Society gave immeasurable moral support to our state. On the Society's initiative a Memorial was unveiled in London in 1999 in memory of the Soviet people who perished during the Second World War.

Today you continue actively to popularise Russian language and culture in Great Britain.

We are delighted that your contacts with the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation continue to be ever more fruitful.

We wish you and your colleagues success in your noble activity, good health, well-being and prosperity.

Yours sincerely

Evgeny Grigoriev, Chair of the Committee

**From the Russian-British Association**

Moscow, 5 July 2014  
Dear Friends and Colleagues

Please accept our heartfelt greetings on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SCRSS.

Over these years hundreds of UK citizens have been dedicating their selfless efforts towards one noble goal – finding common ground and promoting shared values to ensure stable relations between the civil societies of the UK and Russia.

The people of the former Soviet Union and Russia appreciate and will always remember the support that your organization has been continuously extending to us during the most trying periods of modern history, especially during the years of World War II.

Celebrating the anniversary with you and wishing you and your families every blessing, we hope that the experience and prestige that the SCRSS has gained over the nine decades will ensure every success in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Yuri Fokin, President, Ambassador  
Tatiana Skalkina, Vice-President



Dulat Issabekov

# The Transit Passenger



*English - Russian - Kazakh  
performances*

26-29 September 2014

Dvorets Shkolnikov

Baurzhan Momushuly 5, Astana

Tel: 55 67 67

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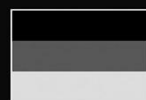
*English*



*Қазақ*



*Русский*



*Deutsch*



*Français*

Supported by:



## Library Project

The SCRSS library project was paused in July to bring the first stage of the project brief to conclusion (assessment of the library collections and quick wins). The second stage, which focuses on library strategy, is expected to re-commence later in the autumn with a re-defined set of objectives and schedule.

## Discussion Group Starts

Our discussion group for non-native Russian-speaking members of the Society held a successful first session in September. The group will meet again from 2–4pm on 2 October (with topics *Cities – Moscow and St Petersburg*, and *Food / Restaurants*), 6 November and 4 December. The Society will then review arrangements for 2015. The group is open to SCRSS members only; a contribution of £2.00 per session includes tea / coffee. We have also received requests for an evening version, which will be considered by the SCRSS Council. If you are interested, please telephone the Hon Secretary on 020 7274 2282 or email [ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk](mailto:ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk).

## Volunteering

The regular work of the Society, and its future development, rely heavily on volunteers to support our only (part-time) paid member of staff, John Cunningham. We're looking for assistance on a regular or ad hoc basis – from working with the books in the loan library and helping out at events to gardening and the general upkeep of the premises. If you have time to spare, please contact the Hon Secretary. Please note: you must be an SCRSS member before you can volunteer!

## Next Events

For up-to-date details of all events listed below, visit the SCRSS website at [www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm).

**Saturday 4 October 2.30–4.30pm**

**Lecture: Dr Timothy Bowers on *Alan Bush and Nationalism in Music***

Alan Bush (1900–95) was a leading British twentieth-century composer who taught at the Royal Academy of Music for over fifty years. He was also a vice-president of the SCR (now the SCRSS). This special event is in co-operation with the Alan Bush Trust, which seeks to increase awareness of and performance of his music. Alan Bush's daughter, Dr Rachel O'Higgins, will attend and a CD of his works, including *Africa*, *Symphony No 2 'Nottingham'* and *Fantasia on Soviet Themes*, will be on sale. Dr Timothy Bowers is Alan Bush Lecturer and Undergraduate Tutor at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He will discuss Bush's view of 'nationalism' in music, his music in relation to it and comparisons with the work of his contemporaries. *Normal admission fees apply.*

**Monday 27 October 6.30pm**

**Exhibition: London–St Petersburg: City and People Photo Exhibition**

Launch of the SCRSS's joint photographic project with SPAIC. The exhibition includes photographic portraits, with short biographies, of a range of residents of our two cities. Following the launch, the exhibition will be on display from 30 October until end 2014 on weekdays and during SCRSS events. For weekday visits, we recommend that you contact the SCRSS beforehand to make an appointment.

**Tuesday 28 October 9.30am–6pm**

**Event: The Role of Public Diplomacy in Fostering Russian-British Relations**

A one-day conference, organised jointly by the SCRSS and the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation, which aims to highlight the importance of public diplomacy in the development of relations between Russia and the UK, and the role of British and Russian NGOs, cultural and educational institutions, and the media in this process. Places are limited and must be booked in advance. Fee: £20 per person. Venue: Rossotrudnichestvo, 37 Kensington High Street, London W8 5ED. For full details and to book, please email the SCRSS on [ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk](mailto:ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk).

**Saturday 8 November 10am–5pm**

**Event: 3<sup>rd</sup> SCRSS Russian History Seminar**

This year's seminar focuses on Khrushchev's Thaw, the period of de-Stalinisation, relaxation of censorship and peaceful coexistence in the USSR from the mid-1950s to early 1960s. Full details of our speakers and topics will be confirmed shortly, but we expect to cover aspects of the period in relation to art, architecture, literature and politics. The seminar is aimed at everyone interested in Russian and Soviet history. Fee: £50 (£40 for SCRSS members), including lunch and tea / coffee. *Register your interest now by email.*

**Saturday 6 December 4–6pm**

**Event: SCRSS Party**

A fun and fundraising event to mark the end of the SCRSS's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

*Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees for films and lectures: £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members). Admission fees for other special events: as indicated above.*

**Please note:** dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

## **Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News**

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### **Ushakov Medal Presentations**

The Russian Embassy in London has embarked on a major exercise to present Ushakov Medals to over 3,000 British convoy veterans. A number of ceremonies have taken place at the Embassy, in regional venues such as Wiltshire County Hall, and attachés have been dispatched around the country to present medals to individuals. More information can be found on the Embassy's website at <http://rusemb.org.uk/ushakov/>.

## **Next Events**

**Sunday 9 November 12.30pm**

**Event: Remembrance Sunday**

The ceremony marks the UK's day of remembrance for its war dead from all conflicts, and reflects on the joint sacrifices made by British and Soviet allies in the defeat of fascism in World War II. Those on the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) mailing list will receive a formal invitation in October, or see details on the SCRSS website. If you would like to receive regular information about the SMTF, please contact the Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or email [smtf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:smtf@hotmail.co.uk).

*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).*

## **Feature**

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### **UK–Russian Relations: Through the British Library Looking Glass**

By Katya Rogatchevskaia

“Englishmen do not easily understand foreigners; still less do foreigners understand Englishmen. This is especially true of Englishmen and Russians.” With this statement Sir JAR Marriott started his survey of Anglo-Russian relations, published in 1944.<sup>1</sup>

Relations between our two countries can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when Ivan the Terrible opened up the White Sea and the port of Arkhangelsk to the Muscovy Company. Thus began a high-level correspondence between the Russian and English monarchs, initially focused on

commerce, but also containing an interesting exchange on military alliance and personal issues: Ivan the Terrible proposed to Elizabeth I and asked whether she could guarantee him political asylum. This correspondence is held by the National Archives at Kew, the British Library (Cotton MS Nero B VIII and B XI, and Royal MS 13 B) and at Oxford in the Ashmolean.<sup>2</sup>

The next big momentum in Anglo-Russian relations came in the early modern era with the Grand Embassy of Peter the Great, a Russian diplomatic mission sent to Western Europe in 1697–98. The Russian tsar met with William III and, on his invitation, also visited England in January 1698. The visit is discussed in letters belonging to William Blathwayt, a politician and statesman who was Secretary at War from 1683–92 (Add MS 37979-37992). The British Library also holds *A Congratulatory Poem to the Czar of Muscovy on his Arrival in England*, printed in London for this occasion (shelfmark C.20.f.2.[208.]). The Grand Embassy failed to accomplish its main diplomatic goals, but the young tsar definitely enjoyed himself, as we can learn from *The Diary of John Evelyn*, Peter's landlord.<sup>3</sup>

The British Library holds several unique and large collections on economic, cultural, political and diplomatic relations between the two countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These include the papers of Prince Khristofor Andreevich Lieven, the Russian ambassador to Britain from 1812–34, and his family (Add MS 47236-47435). There are also various reports from the War Office, for example *Russian Advances in Asia*, 1873–85, prepared by the Topographical and Statistical Department (shelfmark W 671).

The end of the nineteenth century saw a significant growth of interest in Russian culture and language among British intellectuals. The British Museum Library played quite an important role in this, both as a depository and as a centre for social interaction.<sup>4</sup> This was the time when publications on various aspects of Anglo-Russian relations started to emerge.



Edouard Luboff's *Soviet Dumping*, published by the Anglo-Russian Press Association, 1931 (reproduced by courtesy of the British Library)

The Anglo-Russian Literary Society, which existed in London in 1893–1936, was one of the earliest British organisations to promote cultural relations with Russia. Membership was open to both Britons and Russians. Although the main activities of the Society took the form of monthly meetings, events and the formation of a library of Russian books and periodicals, they also produced some publications, such as *Early Russian Intercourse with China* by J Dyer Ball (London, 1912), held at the British Library (shelfmark W2/5921). The newspaper collections at the British Library hold the first two periodicals solely devoted to creating awareness of Russia. *Free Russia* (1890–1915) was the organ of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, which included Arthur H Dyke Acland MP, JG Shaw Lefevre MP, Joshua Rowntree MP, Edward R Pease and Dr Robert Spence Watson among its members. *The Anglo-Russian* (1897–1914) was a monthly

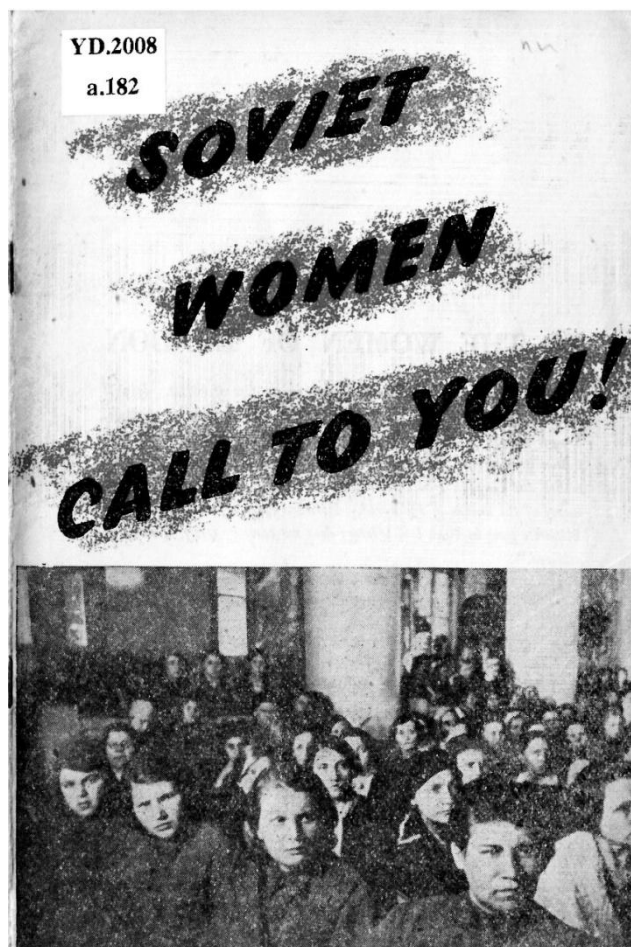
newspaper that sought to promote more friendly relations with Russia. It advocated civil and religious liberties in Russia, promoted English culture and literature in Russia, and vice versa, but also had a commercial focus.<sup>5</sup>

Some other commercially focused periodicals were short-lived, for example *Anglo-russkii torgovyi zhurnal* (London, 1884–85) published in Russian; *Anglo-Ruskaia Gazeta = The Anglo Russian Gazette* (London, the British Library holds issues 1 [1909] – 97 [1913]); and *Anglo-russkii torgovyi biulleten = The Anglo-Russian Trade Bulletin* (London, 1902),<sup>6</sup> issued in both languages. In 1919 the Anglo-Russian Trust, formed in 1909, undertook publication of *The Russian Almanac* (two copies are held at shelfmarks P.P.2456.gh and P.881/51), which replaced *The Russian Year-Book* (held at shelfmark P.P.2456.g for the year 1911).

Of course, it was impossible to stay above the fight, even in Britain. The publications issued by Hands Off Russia and the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, on the one hand, and the Russian Liberation Committee, on the other, are quite revealing. Less well-known organisations also contributed to the debate, for example the Anglo-Russian Press Association, founded by a journalist Dr Edouard Luboff.<sup>7</sup> Only two of the organisation's books are held at the British Library,<sup>8</sup> but we know that Luboff was one of the first authors to write about Bolshevism in Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Ephemera are the most difficult type of material to trace in the British Library collections. Some of our items were received as legal deposit copies, others within larger bulks of material, which causes difficulties. For example, the individual brochures bound together within a series of volumes titled *Miscellaneous Pamphlets and Leaflets* have only recently been properly referenced in the catalogue record. They include a brochure *Anglo-Russian Relations* written by Ruth Fry, peace activist and first chairman of the Russian Famine Relief Fund, and published by the National Council for Prevention of War in 1927 (shelfmark

WP.1411). Other similar items were acquired much later, for example *What I Saw in Russia* by the Dean of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson (shelfmark YD.2010.b.3610); materials relating to British support for the Soviet Union in the Second World War, such as *Soviet Women Call to You!* (London, Women's Anglo-Soviet Committee, 1942, shelfmark YD.2008.a.182); and *Souvenir Programme of the Barrow-in-Furness Anglo-Russian Friendship Week* (1942, shelfmark YD.2005.a.1341).



Brochure *Soviet Women Call to You* published by the Women's Anglo-Soviet Committee, 1942 (reproduced by courtesy of the British Library)

This short survey covers only a tiny proportion of the material collected by the British Library on UK-Russian relations. However, I hope it gives a flavour of the wealth of resources that remain to be discovered and analysed by scholars interested in this subject.

*Katya Rogatchevskaia is Lead Curator of East European Studies at the British Library. Her research interests include medieval*

*Russian literature and language, Russian Literature of the twentieth century (especially émigré literature), the history of the Slavonic collections of the British Library, and digitisation of Slavonic material.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> JAR Marriott, *Anglo-Russian Relations, 1689–1943*, London, 1944, p (v)

<sup>2</sup> See Tracey A Sowerby, 'A Letter from Elizabeth I to Tsar Ivan "the Terrible"' in *The Textual Ambassadors Research Network* blog at [http://www.textualambassadors.org/?p=610#\\_ftnref4](http://www.textualambassadors.org/?p=610#_ftnref4) (accessed on 6/9/2014); Inna Lubimenko, 'The Correspondence of Queen Elizabeth with the Russian Czars' in *The American Historical Review*, Vol 19, No 3 (April, 1914), pp 525–554.

<sup>3</sup> First published in 1818 and has gone through numerous editions since that date.

<sup>4</sup> See R Henderson, 'Russian Political Émigrés and the British Museum Library' in *Library History*, Vol 9 (December) 1991, pp 59–68; Anat Vernitski, 'Russian Revolutionaries and English Sympathizers in 1890s London: The Case of Olive Garnett and Sergei Stepniak' in *Journal of European Studies*, 35(3), pp 299–314; Barry C Johnson (Ed), *Tea and Anarchy! The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1890–1893*, London, Bartletts, 1989; E Rogatchevskaia, 'The Most Important Books Which I Would Strongly Recommend to Acquire: Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev in Correspondence with the British Museum Library' in *Electronic British Library Journal*, article 9, 2013, (<http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2013articles/article9.html>).

<sup>5</sup> See John Slatter, 'Jaakoff Prelooker and *The Anglo-Russian*' in *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, Vol 2, Issue 3, 1983, pp 48–56.

<sup>6</sup> The British Library only holds two issues.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.edouardluboff.com/>

<sup>8</sup> E Luboff, *Soviet Dumping*, London, 1931 (shelfmark X.519/517) and E Luboff, *A Red Year: A Record of Soviet Life, Activities and Intrigues ... during 1926*, London, 1927 (shelfmark 8095.df.8)

<sup>9</sup> GE Raine, E Luboff, *Bolshevik Russia*, London, Nisbet & Co, 1920 (shelfmarks 9456.a.10 and W20/8179)

# Conference Report

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## **'British–Soviet Friendship and Cultural Exchange: Promotion, Partnership and Propaganda', SCRSS, 24 May 2014**

By Emily Lygo

The idea of the conference was to bring together people researching forms of exchange between Britain and the USSR in various fields. During the twentieth century the SCR served as a conduit for many of the exchanges between the USSR and Britain; when it was not involved directly, its members often were. Thus, the SCRSS was the ideal place to hold this conference. I'm very grateful to the SCRSS for making it such a successful day.

Papers at the conference examined the history of exchange between Britain and the USSR, and the representation of Soviet culture in Britain. They concerned, in particular, specific areas of exchange and contact, the practicalities of organising exchange with the USSR, and the problematic search for neutral ground in a field where politics always loomed. It was very satisfying to see overlaps between papers emerge and common questions recur.

In Panel One, attempts to achieve exchange between musicians and writers were shown to have been fraught with problems. Pauline Fairclough gave an account of the difficulties in the 1940s that resulted in no real exchange between Britain and the Soviet Union, and the frustrations that British individuals encountered when trying to surmount the obstacle of early Cold War politics; Louise Wiggins offered a fascinating insight into the role of the personal relationships Alan Bush developed in facilitating exchange, but also the frustration that politics was so obstructive, both to cultural exchange between the countries and to the career of Bush in Britain. My paper on the SCR Writers' Group showed

that there were similar problems in the literary field: Soviet censorship and various restrictions on citizens were a serious obstacle to genuine lines of communication being established.

Panel Two dealt with British engagement with ideas from the USSR, and the question of whether a middle or neutral ground could be maintained in such exchange. Matthew Taunton compared the ways that Harold Laski, DN Pritt and Stephen Spender reported and responded to the Show Trials of the 1930s, identifying illuminating differences between them, while Steve Ward demonstrated that the exchange of ideas on architecture between Britain and the USSR was an important area of genuine cultural exchange in spite of encountering the usual problems with politics. Sonja Grossmann's paper on British–Soviet friendship and cultural exchange societies gave a history of the difficulties that they had in establishing and maintaining their own particular position with regard to politics and the project of exchange with the USSR, and of avoiding, in some cases, the interference of communist parties in their affairs.

Panel Three was concerned with how Soviet culture and Soviet-influenced culture was presented in Britain. John Riley gave a history of the Film Society and its pioneering screening of Soviet film, which was interesting to British audiences for both artistic and political reasons. Pat Simpson described a fascinating chapter in the history of Down House in Kent, when it had a 'Russian Room' full of art and artifacts from the USSR relating to the history of science. Alison McClean traced a history of connections between pro-Soviet artists and the SCR, which resulted in a little-known, yet significant, mural produced in the house of long-time SCR president DN Pritt. The papers underlined the real importance that art played in British–Soviet exchange and the way that art, exchange, diplomacy and politics became interwoven.

Panel Four, the last panel of the day, concerned mainly printed material relating to the history of British–Soviet exchange.

Andrew Jameson reviewed the early development of the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, while Elena Ostrovskaia and Elena Zemskova described their work on the journal *International Literature*, produced in the USSR for foreign consumption, but with the involvement of a variety of émigrés, as well as Soviet specialists. Katya Rogatchevskaia gave an account of the large and varied holdings of the British Library relating to the subject (see also her article on page 9 of this issue of the *SCRSS Digest*). The papers pointed to the ways in which Soviet culture was presented to the British public, and discussed the problems of neutrality and objectivity in a highly politicised context, as well as the question of what value such publications had then and have now.

The conference was enjoyable and genuinely productive. It showed that exchange between Britain and the USSR happened in a variety of contexts, and that similar questions and problems occurred in each case: questions of political position, of personal commitment, of personal connections and relationships. It also highlighted the different levels at which exchange could be meaningful: between countries, between organisations, between professions, and between individuals.

*Dr Emily Lygo is Senior Lecturer in Russian at the University of Exeter. Her research interests include Anglo-Soviet cultural relations, the history of literary translation in Russia and twentieth-century Russian poetry.*

## Reviews

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**Malevich (Tate Modern, London, Web: [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk), Adult £14.50, Concession £12.50, until 26 October 2014)**

In early twentieth-century Russia modernity was welcomed by both the artistic and the political vanguards. Believing that these

were interdependent, Kasimir Malevich (1879–1935) embraced both with clear-minded passion.

Malevich was born into a large Polish family in Kiev, where his father managed sugar refineries. His fragmentary art education lacked the lengthy academic discipline that formed most other pioneers of modernism, yet – like theirs – his early work looks like a crash course in recent innovatory styles.

The Tate's *Malevich* exhibition duly begins with a succession of his Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, folksy Symbolist and carelessly brushed Expressionist paintings; many being stronger in daring than accomplishment.

He found his forte in 1912 once he reached the visual rigours of Cubism with its focus on form, line and space, rather than colour and touch. Combining Cubism with Russian Futurism's socially subversive subjects led to his first mature works.

He soon faced the fundamental question: why should painting retain any contact with the visible world now that this was represented so accurately by the modern technologies of photography, film and photomontage?

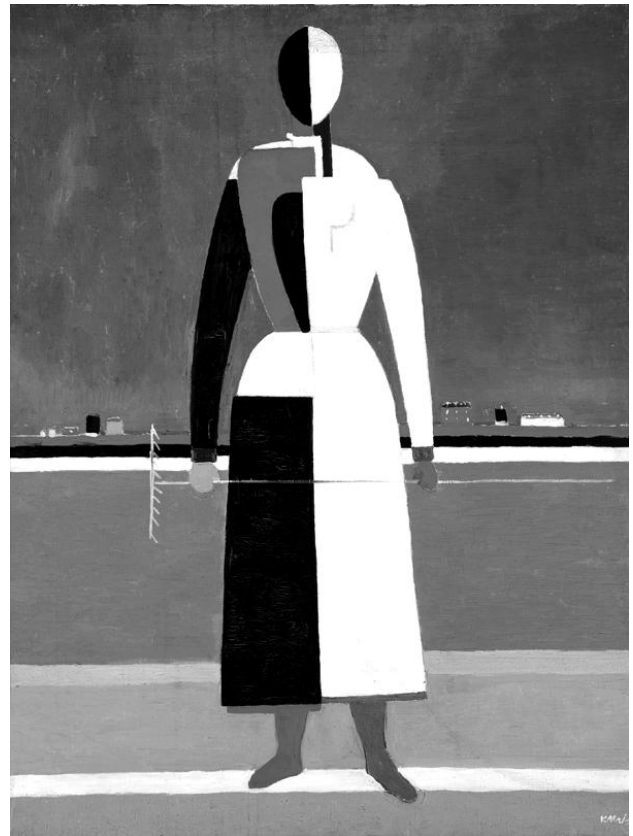
In 1913 Malevich designed outlandishly 'abstract' costumes and sets for the avant-garde opera *Victory Over the Sun* (a film of its recreation is screened in the exhibition).

Two years later he painted his first *Black Square* and backdated it to 1913. So radical was this provocative statement about the absolute essence of painting that it has influenced generations of artists, and remains contentious. He explained: "To reproduce beloved objects and little corners of nature is like a thief being enraptured by his leg irons."

Malevich called his new aesthetic Suprematism, wrote a manifesto and created arguably his best paintings in the following three years. Flatly-painted simple geometric forms in black or bold colours are juxtaposed against an even white ground.

Often composed diagonally, rectangles, triangles and circles speed across the surface with a dynamism echoing that of flying machines. Uncompromisingly stark, these paintings defy and deny any connection with tradition.

Having arrived in Moscow in 1905, Malevich fought in the Battle of the Barricades in that year's aborted revolution. He remained a lifelong socialist, joining the Federation of Leftist Artists in the February 1917 revolution.



Malevich: *Woman with Rake*, 1930–32, (reproduced by courtesy of Tate Modern)

It was no coincidence that, by the period of war communism (1917–22), Malevich's paintings became ever simpler, paling into white forms on white backgrounds. By 1919 they had completely faded out. "Painting died like the old regime, because it was a part of it," he said.

From the October 1917 revolution onwards Malevich's career exemplifies the promotion of the avant-garde to high art status by the young worker state – the first government in the world to do so.

Appointed Commissioner for the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Art in 1917, and head of the experimental Petrograd Free State Workshops (SVOMAS) by 1918, Malevich became an influential art establishment figure.

From 1919 he continued to develop new forms of art education, based on Suprematism, in his own department at Vitebsk Art School. He organised his students and himself into a collective under the acronym UNOVIS (Champions of the New Art); together they set out to improve daily life by exploring the essence of form, colour and volume as prototypes for practical application by engineers, architects and designers. Having inspired many contemporaries, these principles, published by Malevich in 1927, still underpin much modernist design today.

Malevich's return to figurative painting in the late 1920s may come as a shock, since these works were long marginalised. This exhibition devotes two rooms to them, presenting them as surprising, ambiguous and complex reinventions of figuration. Yet it interprets his themes of peasant life as conveying the "dislocation, alienation and despair" of collectivisation policies.

By privileging the individual avant-garde artist, the curatorial stance undervalues the urgency of the international left's 1930s debates about artists' social responsibility. Malevich's late experiments in blending modernism with various forms of realism were part of a wide quest by Soviet artists to create an accessible, yet modern, art.

After his premature death from cancer in 1935, the city of Leningrad honoured Malevich by paying for the grand Suprematist funeral that he had designed himself.

Malevich was a true radical and original thinker. His major contribution to art theory and education more than compensates for a certain lack of intuitive flair and sensuous engagement with the act of painting.

The exhibition is too big, so that it is difficult to absorb the numerous drawings and UNOVIS projects displayed towards its end. Yet, apart from its predictable anti-Soviet bias, it provides a meticulously researched and comprehensive survey of Malevich's work. Its unpretentious chronological organisation is welcome and its reconstruction of his 1915 Suprematist exhibition is impressive. The exhibition is a must for all those interested in Soviet and modernist art.

*Christine Lindey*

Note: This is a revised version of a review published in the *Morning Star* on 3–4 August 2014.

Christine Lindey is an art historian and lecturer. Her areas of expertise are nineteenth and twentieth century art, with a special interest in Soviet and Socialist art. Her publications include *Art in the Cold War: from Vladivostok to Kalamazoo* (Herbert Press, London, 1990) and *Keywords of Nineteenth Century Art* (Art Dictionaries, Bristol, 2006).

## **The Years of Progress: The Soviet Economy 1934–1936**

**By RW Davies, with Oleg V Khlevnyuk & Stephen G Wheatcroft (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)**

In the sixth volume of his monumental history of Soviet industrialisation, RW Davies (known to his many friends and colleagues as Bob) reaches what Naum Jasny called (and Davies concurs) the 'good years' of the Second Five Year Plan.

In what sense were they good? They were certainly in sharp contrast to those that preceded and followed them: the violent upheavals and often near-chaos of the First Five Year Plan and the collectivisation of agriculture, and the terror of 1937–38. The economy grew at between 19 and 29 per cent per annum and industry roughly doubled, with many of the factories and plants commissioned in the first *pyatiletka* coming into operation. While agricultural production fell short of its targets, it still grew at a substantial rate, enabling grain to be accumulated and famine to be averted after the very poor harvest of 1936. Economic

performance varied between sectors. While the machine tool and defence sector saw spectacular growth, iron and steel were the poor relations of heavy industry. But the continuing high rate of investment and the impressive growth of labour productivity opened, in Davies's words, "a qualitatively new period in Soviet industrialisation... an important and perhaps decisive stage in Soviet development". And as the sub-title of his book suggests, Davies sees this as progress not only in terms of economic growth, but in the fundamental and irrevocable transformation of Soviet society, giving it the capacity to defend itself against deadly enemies and the potential to provide its population with a quality of life previously unimaginable. With a wealth of new data from the Russian archives cited in the text and the many appended tables, much of it provided by Oleg Khlevniuk (on the Gulag) and Stephen Wheatcroft (on agriculture), and analysed with exceptional insight and clarity, this volume will be the definitive account of the Soviet economy in this period for many years to come.

One of the many strengths of this volume is that economic developments are set in the context of political, social and international change. The period was, Davies argues, one of "relative political moderation". The atmosphere at the Party congress in December 1934 was one of reconciliation: former opponents and critics of Stalin like Bukharin and Pyatakov were given important posts, exiled kulaks and their families were treated more leniently, conditions in the Gulag and 'special settlements' improved, and a new Constitution was proclaimed in 1936. But the qualification is apposite. While Stalin conferred incessantly with his closest colleagues – his correspondence with Kaganovich and Molotov is exceptionally revealing – his absolute power over decision-making could be and was exercised with drastic effect, as for instance his sudden decision in October 1934 to end bread rationing and, the following year, rationing of all foods. By 1936 storm clouds were gathering. As Davies notes, with the trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev in August (and their execution on Stalin's orders

immediately following the guilty verdict), and Yezhov's appointment as head of the NKVD in September, "Soviet politics entered a new and much darker stage".

This will be the subject of the final volume of Bob Davies's magnum opus. It will be eagerly awaited by anyone who wishes to read / see the latest and finest research on the formative years of the USSR.

*John Barber*

Note: Dr John Barber is a Life Fellow of King's College Cambridge and an Honorary Fellow of CREES (Centre for Russian and East European Studies), University of Birmingham. He worked with Bob Davies at CREES in the late 1970s on the Soviet industrialisation project. He has researched Soviet history in World War II and co-edited (with Andrei Dzeniskevich) *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad 1941–44*, Macmillan, 2005. He is currently working on a project on sustainable urban development with EU and Ukrainian colleagues.

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