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## Feature

### Soviet Teacher-Innovators

By Claire Weiss

The bold purview of legendary teacher-innovator Shalva Amonashvili is characterised by the captivating title and novel informality of the cover illustration of his book *Zdravstvuyte, deti!* (*Hello, Children!* – see opposite).<sup>1</sup> His guidance for teachers of six-year-olds, published during the rumblings of the pre-perestroika years, makes a massively innovatory statement of its own. Inside this serious educational volume are the basics of a “humane pedagogy” in which “[t]he pedagogical process must be transformed on the principles of humanity and the personality-based approach... The teacher needs to shift positions – he needs to believe in his pupils”.<sup>2</sup>

Of Georgian origin, and long experience as a primary schoolteacher and teacher-educator in Ukraine and Russia, Amonashvili’s leading-edge pedagogic thought and innovatory practices challenged the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in the 1960s and 70s. But alongside the commensurate ideas of other innovators, his methods are now held as

good practice. The 92-year-old Amonashvili’s watchword is: “Only the one who constantly educates himself has the right to educate a child.”<sup>3</sup>



Cover of Shalva Amonashvili's *Zdravstvuyte, deti!* (*Hello, Children!*), 1983 (SCRSS Library)

The massive societal changes across the Soviet Union from the 1980s were the backdrop against which his methods and those of others unfolded into a creative movement. This article looks briefly at three overlapping generations of teacher-innovators (*uchitelya novatory*). To learn how their ideas originated, it benefits from insights and analyses across the Soviet period from Beatrice King (1893–1971), Dr



Avril Suddaby, and also Professor GA Bordovsky, whose cited work has a twenty-first-century perspective.

## 1920s Whirlwind of Educational Experiment

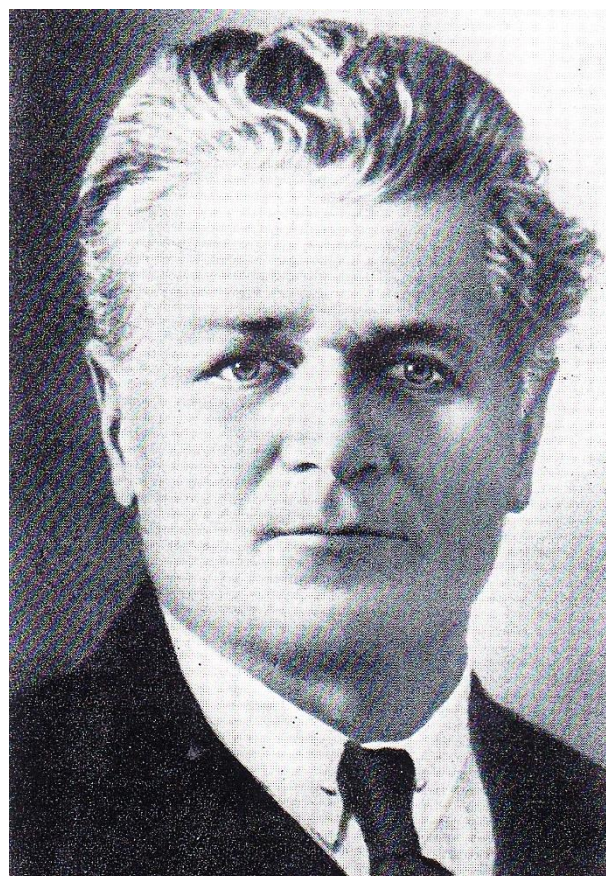


Beatrice King, 1948 (SCRSS Library)

In the 1930s Beatrice King was Chair of the Education Section of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR). In her 1938 overview of Soviet education<sup>4</sup> she described the whirlwind of exploration of revolutionary new teaching methods and structures in the 1920s. At this time Anatoly Lunacharsky was head of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (Narkompros) and King also reported teachers' opposition to his Factory Schools and United Labour Schools, in which practical work designed for "the creation of a communist citizen" had displaced traditional learning. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick, teachers had been left to their own devices to run schools.<sup>5</sup> Nadezhda Krupskaya, Deputy People's Commissar for Enlightenment, believed in the two-fold task of offering "mind and heart" education, as well as the teaching of skills for "building factories and grain mills"<sup>6</sup>, and this was the subject of King's reported discussion with

Krupskaya in the early 1930s.<sup>7</sup> By that time the revolutionary innovations of the 1920s had been curtailed; in 1931 the Central Committee of the Communist Party had called for a return to traditional classroom disciplines.

Preceding and straddling this period is a remarkable experimentalist teacher, Stanislav Shatsky (1878–1934). From the early 1900s he had set up kindergartens and children's summer camps, and later established what William Partlett describes as the largest experiment with radical, early twentieth-century new educational ideas ever implemented.<sup>8</sup> Shatsky's experimental schools in Kaluga Province and Moscow from 1919 adapted American educational theories<sup>9</sup>, including those of John Dewey (1859–1952) to encourage learning through creative work.<sup>10</sup>

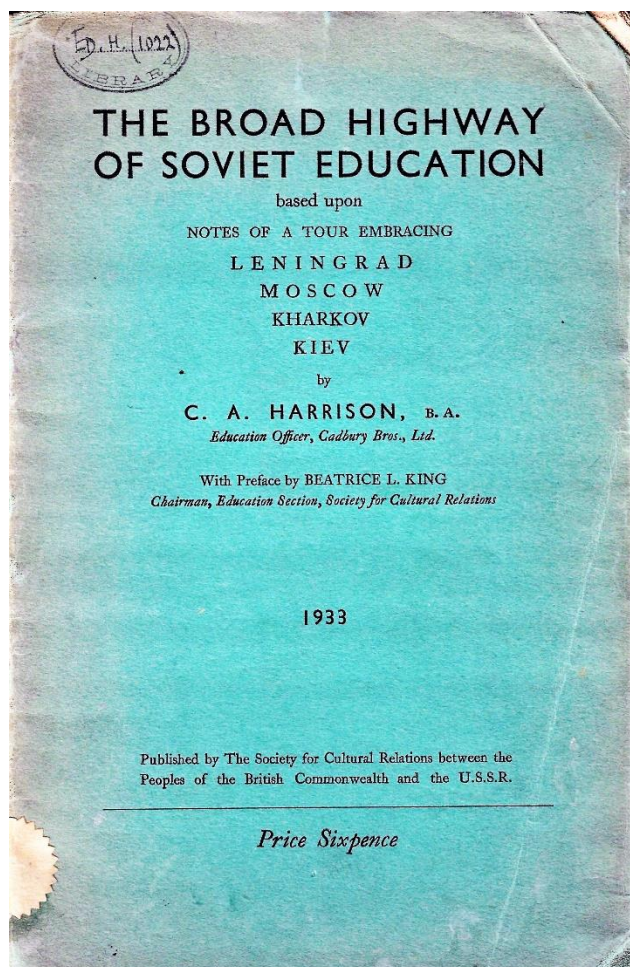


Stanislav Shatsky (SCRSS Library)

Having undertaken teacher training in London prior to World War I, it is possible that King may have become familiar with educational theories from abroad that were later tried out in the Soviet Union of the 1920s. She surmised: "[T]here is no country



in the world where there is so much educational research being carried on as in the USSR.”<sup>11</sup>



The SCR's 1933 report on an education tour to the USSR led by Beatrice King (SCRSS Library)

The SCR organised an education tour to the USSR in 1933, guided by King, who wrote the preface to the report on its findings, *The Broad Highway of Soviet Education*.<sup>12</sup> This tour came after Lunacharsky's dismissal from Narkompros and the return to traditional disciplines in school. King's explanation was that Soviet education was leaving behind some of its "crude features" and optimistically added: "The insistence of the Party decree that no one method in education can be universally applicable should encourage teachers to experiment in methods within the limits set by Narkompros."<sup>13</sup>

While the conditions for encouraging educational innovation were to become quiescent from the late 1930s until the 1970s<sup>14</sup>, the intervening period saw a

groundswell of innovative practice by individual teachers emerging across the Soviet Union. It would accrue into the 'humane pedagogy' eventually known as the 'Pedagogy of Co-operation'.

## Pedagogy of Co-operation

A 1989 paper by Dr Avril Suddaby (a former member of the SCR Council) reviews the emergence of the Pedagogy of Co-operation. Tracing the innovatory teaching methods not only of Amonashvili but also of VF Shatalov, SN Lysenkova, V Karakovsky, IP Volkov, EP Ilyin and MP Shchetinin, Suddaby observes: "At first the innovators worked in comparative isolation in their particular schools in different parts of the country, developing their individual teaching methods."<sup>15</sup>



Sofia Lysenkova (right) with colleagues on the stand of *Nachal'naya shkola* newspaper, 2002 (photo credit: *Nachal'naya shkola*, No. 13 (422), 1–15.04.2002, URL: <https://nsc.1sept.ru/article.php?ID=200201307>)

Identifying the criticality of the 1986 watershed meeting of the innovators, convened by Simon Soloveichik<sup>16</sup> of the teachers' newspaper *Uchitel'skaya gazeta*, Suddaby notes the four manifestos expounding the Pedagogy of Co-operation that later emerged from the combined creative energy of these innovators. The principles sought to establish co-operative relationships and trust between all participants in the context of education – teachers, pupils and parents – and to diminish the fear of failure so prevalent in

Soviet classrooms. Specific teaching and learning methods were advocated, all based on the tried and tested experiences of the innovators. They included such techniques as ‘supportive signals’ (Shatalov’s innovation), ‘no fail marks’ (Amonashvili’s method) and ‘free choice of tasks’ (practised by Lysenkova).

Sofia Lysenkova, a Moscow schoolteacher, had devised a methodology of “commented management” in which she refrained from being the sole voice in the classroom and instead taught children to constantly think and explain out loud.<sup>17</sup> Lysenkova was later to retort to a questioner who suggested it had been easy for the innovators to make changes: “Nobody gave me a paper that allowed creativity.”

Amonashvili later summarised the innovators’ movement: “It was an internal rebellion. The pedagogy of co-operation was innovative, it opposed the authoritarianism that prevailed then in the country.”<sup>18</sup>

## The View from the Twenty-First Century

Commenting in 2021 on teacher-innovator IP Volkov’s report to a late-1980s USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences seminar, GA Bordovsky concluded that “the new turns out to be well forgotten by the old... innovations and traditions can change places”. Volkov, who had been invited to speak on his own innovatory approaches, had stated that, on reading up on the pedagogical literature, he had found that “all the techniques and approaches that he used were already known to teachers of the past and [were] not any discovery”.<sup>19</sup>

Bordovsky’s analysis of educational innovation and its trajectories within Soviet and post-Soviet society maintains that neither traditions nor innovations should be regarded as absolute because the dynamics of their interaction depend on surrounding historical conditions. He asserts that the “innovation–tradition” dilemma in education is determined by its inertia. If the task of

education is to develop human potential, then the education system should “be ahead of the changes taking place in the country”. But he then notes that major changes in education “will give their result almost only in 10–15 years”.

A contemporary of the teacher-innovators, Bordovsky regrets that their developments were “made absolute” in the following decade, giving rise to “inconsistencies and challenges relating to the ethnic and religious diversity of Russia”.

## Footnotes

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2 Soloveichik S, ‘The Amonashvili Principle’ in *Soviet Education*, Vol. 30, Issue 3, 1988, pp. 46–53, URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2753/RES1060-9393300346>

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4 King B, ‘Soviet Education: Its Phases and Purpose’ in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 17, No. 49, July 1938, pp. 135–150, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i391952>

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8 Partlett W, *Building Soviet Citizens with American Tools: Russian Revolutions and S. T. Shatskii’s Rural Schools, 1905–1932*, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011

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14 For all the wider historical reasons.

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16 Online obituary 'Simon L'vovich Soloveichik' on University of Washington website, URL: <http://faculty.washington.edu/stkerr/solobit.html>

17 Lysenkova SN, *Kogda legko uchit'sya: Iz opyta raboty uchitel'ya nachal'nykh klassov*, Moscow, Pedagogika, 1985

18 Amonashvili Sh, 'Vnytrennyi bunt uchiteley' in *Vesti obrazovaniya*, 17.10.2011, URL: <http://eurekanext.livejournal.com/45201.html>

19 Bordovsky GA, 'Innovations and Traditions in the Contemporary Russian Education' in *Bulletin of VSU, Pedagogy*, No. 1 (110), 2021, Russian State A. I. Herzen Pedagogical University

*Claire Weiss has a particular interest in Soviet education. Having graduated in Russian Language and Soviet Studies in 1970, her 1991 MA dissertation covered 'The extent to which the values of vocationalism have affected the structure, control, funding and organisation of post-compulsory education in England and the Soviet Union with special reference to the period 1973–1990'. Since retirement, she has been a constant volunteer in the SCRSS Library, where she completed cataloguing its Soviet Education Collection earlier this year.*

## SCRSS News

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*Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS*

### Events Programme

I want to begin by highlighting our extensive autumn events programme. Information is carried in this *SCRSS Digest* and on enclosures. As part of our plans to build momentum towards our Centenary in 2024, it is vital that all members do their best to attend if possible, and to encourage friends

and colleagues to do the same. The three in-person events are a great opportunity for members to come together and perhaps look around the centre for the first time in many years. As always, do please consult the SCRSS website for the very latest information.

### Saturday Openings

Redecoration of the ground floor will continue in the autumn, but the first Saturday-of-the-month openings will be going ahead as usual. If you have been thinking about viewing the second-hand and de-acquired books we have, then do come on Saturday 7 October or Saturday 4 November. We shall be 'clearing the decks' before the Saturday 2 December library opening, Christmas party and Centenary launch!

### Centenary Club

The Club gained another member this summer, bringing the total closer to thirty. The income from the Club members has enabled the Society to prepare for its Centenary in a much more stable financial position. This mailing contains the final appeal for the Centenary Club and I hope that some of you will be able to respond. The next twelve months will be an incredibly important period as the Society seeks to secure its position as an important educational resource for this and future generations.

### Membership

The SCRSS exists today solely because of the dedicated support of its members. I am encouraged by the words of support that are often added to membership renewals. The Society has faced many challenges since its foundation and I am convinced it will overcome the present ones. But to do so, it must retain its existing membership whenever possible, while also acquiring new members. To this end, I hope everyone responds promptly if they receive a renewal notice with this mailing. New membership cards are enclosed for anyone who has renewed since the previous mailing in June.

## Centenary Projects

A reminder that the Society is working on three key projects for its Centenary next year: an exhibition, a book and a party. These are in addition to our events programme and a special issue of the *SCRSS Digest*. A small team began work in early September on the exhibition exploring our rich collections that will be launched in June / July 2024. Jane Rosen, our Honorary Archivist, is working at pace on the history of the Society: on the evidence thus far it will be a fascinating and worthy account of our first hundred years. We hope members will support this project by purchasing copies in advance of publication. Finally, on Saturday 6 July 2024, the centre will host a party for members to celebrate the Centenary in an appropriate way – and there will certainly be a cake!

## Next Events

**From Thursday 7 September 2023, 18.00–20.00**  
**Zoom Online Evening Class: Russian Language for Good Intermediate Level**  
£40 per 10-week term, SCRSS members only.

**Wednesday 27 September 2023, 18.00–19.00**  
**Zoom Online Talk: Illustrated Talk No 1 in Russian (either *Сибирь* or *Цифровые города России*)**  
Free, SCRSS members only.

**Wednesday 4 October 2023, 18.00–19.00**  
**Zoom Online Talk: Charlie Buxton on *Civil Society in Central Asia at a Time of Conflict***  
Normal fees apply.

**Wednesday 11 October, 2023, 19.00–20.00**  
**Zoom Online Talk: Dr James C Pearce on *Soviet Memories of Rus': Why The Soviet State Needed the Golden Ring Cities***  
Normal fees apply.

**Wednesday 18 October 2023, 18.00–19.00**  
**Zoom Online Talk: Illustrated Talk No 2 in Russian (either *Сибирь* or *Цифровые города России*)**  
Free, SCRSS members only.

**Wednesday 8 November 2023, 19.00–20.00**  
**Zoom Online Talk: Colin Turbett on *A People's History of the Cold War: Stories from East and West***  
Normal fees apply.

**Saturday 11 November 2023, 14.00–16.00**  
**In-Person Event: Jean Turner (1929–2023) Memorial Event**  
Free event, SCRSS members only – RSVP.

**Saturday 18 November 2023, 14.00–16.00**  
**In-Person Talk and Book Launch: Kate Clark on *Twilight of the Soviet Union: Memoirs of a Moscow Correspondent***  
Joint SCRSS-MML event. Normal fees apply.

**Wednesday 29 November 2023, 19.00–20.00**  
**Zoom Online Talk: Helen Mercer on *James Aldridge: The Most Popular Modern Western Novelist in the USSR? An Introduction to Aldridge's Life and Works***  
Normal fees apply.

**Saturday 2 December 2023, 14.30–17.00**  
**In-Person Event: SCRSS Centenary Launch and Christmas Party for SCRSS**  
Free event, SCRSS members only – RSVP.

*Our first-Saturday-of-the-month library openings resume from 2 September 2023, but are not listed above. For full details of all events, visit the SCRSS website at [www.scrss.org.uk](http://www.scrss.org.uk). Normal ticket prices apply for events (£3.00 SCRSS members, £5.00 non-members), unless otherwise indicated.*

## Feature

### Civil Society in Central Asia in a Time of Conflict

By Charlie Buxton

Accounts of civil society development in Central Asia have often identified three phases seen in different degrees across the five ex-Soviet republics. The first was a period from independence in 1991 to about



2000, when non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were being set up rapidly, taking advantage of the more open political environment and availability of external funding. In the second phase NGOs began to establish relations with their own governments; this happened intensively in the years to 2005, although the process is ongoing and is affected by the changing political situation. And in the third phase we can see NGOs operating with more confidence, based on their accumulated experience with government, business and donors.

In recent years, some of the most significant gains have been made in Uzbekistan, the country with the largest population in the region (almost 35 million). The liberalisation drive initiated by President Shavcat Mirziyoyev, after the death of his predecessor Islam Karimov in 2016, prioritises economic liberalisation and marketisation, but also provides opportunities for independent media outlets and civil society groups. Kazakhstan is the largest country in Central Asia in terms of land size, with a population of 19 million. Its political scene was dominated by President Nursultan Nazarbayev from independence to late 2019 when he formally retired (in a similar way to Karimov in Uzbekistan). Nazarbayev had played a hugely important regional role promoting the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a successor to the USSR, and (unlike Karimov) he had recognised that civil society could play a useful role in the social, educational and cultural sectors. During the twenty-five years of his regime, he and his family had accumulated massive economic resources and the handover of power turned out to be as risky as observers had predicted.

In Kyrgyzstan, following parliamentary elections in October 2020 that were condemned by civil society activists as corrupt, street protests brought about the country's third revolution in twenty years. A new president, Sadyr Japarov, came to power. Dashing the hopes of many NGOs and the main international development agencies, the constitution was rewritten to transfer power from parliament to the

president. Within a year, the country's largest single economic enterprise, the Kumtor Gold Mine, had been wrested from its Canadian owners Centerra and put under government control. The new regime, often described as 'populist', has tried to supplant NGOs as the main vehicle for public activism, allying itself with nationalist, traditional and religious elements at different times.



Youth centre activists participating in a 'world café' brainstorming session in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, as part of a conflict prevention programme (Charlie Buxton, 2012)

Much has been written in the international media about the USA's and its allies' hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan in summer 2021. This has major implications for ex-Soviet Central Asia. On the positive side, if the security situation stays stable, economic links to the south could open up (for example, new railway and power lines towards Iran, Pakistan and India, and new trading links). This is especially important for a country like Tajikistan that was almost cut off from the world for twenty-five years by the Afghan conflict. But there are less positive effects too, such as the potential spread of religious intolerance and conflict.

China is now by far the biggest investor in Central Asia, offering grants and credits within its global Belt and Road Initiative, opening up road and rail corridors to the Middle East and Europe, building factories, opening mines and logistics centres. This is done mainly within inter-governmental agreements – and sometimes in the face of popular resistance (for example, in

Kyrgyzstan militant farmers and herding communities have blocked the development of mines). China's economic power is often contrasted with the Russian Federation's continuing political and security role. Regional co-ordination is gradually developing within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), although the advent of Western sanctions against Russia means less money is available for development in Central Asia.

The main discourse in Western political and academic circles is about 'authoritarian regimes' and 'shrinking civil society space' in Central Asia. While both can be observed, a longer view shows significant efforts to build multi-party systems and government capacity, a growing range of civic and political actors, and contested transfers of power in countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Local NGOs are now more critical of international agencies, especially when they seem to be acting in their own economic / political interests, rather than a locally determined agenda. However, in the poorer countries of the region – Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – new development programmes are still heavily dependent on Western funding. By contrast, the more oil-, gas- and mineral-rich countries – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – have greater sovereign power, although they operate in the globalised capitalist framework and not always with hoped for benefits to their populations.

As in Russia, the worsening international tensions of the last fifteen years have negatively affected civil society development in Central Asia. Foreign funding for NGOs helped to create, develop and institutionalise this sector across Central Asia. However, this phase of development has slackened, just as the era of free trade promotion led by the World Trade Organization has been upended by economic sanctions and protectionist policies across the world. NGOs' international funding was one of their main competitive advantages vis-à-vis government, but in a situation of conflict this

can be used against them. They become so-called 'foreign agents', although in reality the government and business sectors in Central Asia get far more international assistance than NGOs.



Self-help group meeting in Issyk-Kul region, Kyrgyzstan. Self-help groups were set up and supported by local NGOs as part of a rural development programme (Charlie Buxton, 2005)

A careful analysis of the civil society sector in Kyrgyzstan – the most open country in Central Asia in this respect – shows that, while many human rights groups are under pressure, it is difficult to say that the sector as a whole is shrinking. In the 2010–20 period a wide range of local political and religious actors opened up non-governmental (public) organisations as a way of broadening their constituency and attracting funds (for example, from the Middle East). The influence of Islam – whether moderate or radical, official or unofficial – is now very significant within civil society, especially for traditional charitable actions in support of vulnerable groups. However, a combination of conservative religious forces and free-market economic policies makes 'pro-poor development' difficult to achieve. In particular, hard-won women's rights and influence in society are under attack. As many have noted, the post-1991 NGO sector in the former Soviet Union was often women-led, based on educational and professional opportunities opened up for women in the Soviet period.



With increasing attacks on registered NGOs, many civic activists in Central Asia now prefer to work as individuals – as bloggers, ‘influencers’, etc. Since February 2022, another group of potential activists has appeared: mostly young people who have ‘relocated’ from Russia for a variety of reasons, including opposition to the war, the closure of Western companies and new regional opportunities for online working. While some of them have already moved on to the USA or European countries, others are playing an active role in the ecological and cultural spheres.



Government and NGO partners from South Kyrgyzstan and Sogdh region, North Tajikistan, presenting results of a cross-border research skills development programme. Charlie Buxton is standing on the left (Charlie Buxton, 2015)

These interchanges take place in a delicate situation where Central Asian regimes are keen to keep as much political independence as they can, as well as whatever aid is available after development budget cuts (such as we have seen in the UK). Civil society groups, like the population in general, are split between support for Ukraine and Russia. Many people hark back to the USSR as a time when more friendly and positive relations between national groups were achieved. This memory, unfortunately, has not stopped nationalist sentiments growing. In 2021–22 this was seen in a series of border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in which many civilians, as well as border guards, were killed. It has been difficult for NGOs to maintain impartiality in relation to conflicts of this kind and many regional civil society contacts have been curtailed.

The situation in Central Asia remains volatile. Without the safety mechanism of mass work migration to Russia, it is likely that there would have been serious social unrest in the region in the last fifteen years. A telling statistic: migrants’ remittances now account for more than development aid budgets in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In January 2022, a miners’ strike in the Caspian region, together with wider economic problems and clan conflict related to Nazarbayev’s retirement, led to widespread violence and the burning down of government buildings in Almaty and other cities across the country. In July 2022, there was a short but violent clash between protestors and the police in the Karakalpakstan region in Uzbekistan, apparently linked to a fear that its autonomous status would be downgraded. Informal groups, NGOs, political, religious and social movement activists are involved in all these events. As in Europe, issues relating to colonialism, independence struggles, decolonisation, and modern-day economic and political imperialism, are highly relevant and discussed in civil society circles in the region. But without a conscious effort and mechanisms for mutual support, participants and groups involved in this are highly vulnerable to nationalist and pro-war forces.

*Charlie Buxton has lived in Kyrgyzstan since 2002 and is the Director of Books for Development, a locally registered public foundation ([www.books4develop.org](http://www.books4develop.org)) set up in 2019. He has worked for almost forty years in the voluntary sector, of which twenty in the former Soviet Union. From 2002–18 he was the representative for Central Asia at the International NGO Training & Research Centre (INTRAC), working as programme manager, consultant and trainer with a host of different international and local NGOs. He is the author of three books on the role of civil society in development processes in the region, including ‘Ragged Trousered NGOs: Development Work under Neoliberalism’ (Routledge, 2019) and ‘Russia and Development’ (Zed Books, 2014).*

# Reviews

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## **In the Eye of the Storm: Modernism in Ukraine, 1900–1930s**

**Edited by Konstantin Akinsha, Katia Denysova, Olena Kashuba-Volvach (Thames & Hudson, 2022, ISBN: 978-0-500-29715-5, Hbk, 248pp, £40)**

This book originally accompanied the exhibition of the same title at Madrid's Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum in 2022. Lavishly illustrated with 221 illustrations, most being full page and in colour, it is likely to remain a comprehensive account of Ukrainian early modernist art for years to come.

Several of the artists covered – such as Kaszimir Malevych (spelling as per the book), Alexandra Exter, David Burliuk and Sonia Delaunay – are well represented in Western art history. But there are many discoveries to be made among artists hitherto little known in the West, including Oleksandr Bohomazov and Mykhailo Boichuk. Bohomazov's vividly coloured Futurist paintings and bold charcoal drawings of city life whiz and whirl with a dynamic verve that equals those of the Italian Futurists, while his purity of colour exceeds theirs. And his late 1920s depictions of carpenters erecting wooden-framed buildings – painted in bright yellows, reds, blues and greens within strong, geometric compositions – are superb examples of socialist realist art.

In contrast, Boichuk delved into the formal simplifications of Ukraine's ancient Orthodox Byzantine art, as well as its folk art, from whose influence he created serene, idealised paintings of contemporary peasant life. In *Women Under the Apple Tree*, 1920, two well-fed peasants fill their apron and basket with perfect worm-free apples, while those in the tree still remain magically abundant. He was so influential on other Ukrainian artists, not least as a teacher at the Ukrainian Academy of Art, founded in 1917, that a movement 'Boichukism' was named after him.

Although Oksana Pavlenko is included within this movement, her painting *Women's Meeting*, 1932, has more in common with Soviet Socialist Realism. This is partly due to its use of tone, as opposed to flat areas of colour, to depict solidly three-dimensional figures, but also because of the work's overtly socialist content in which peasant women assert their right to engage in political discussion.

Anatol Petrytskyi's *The Invalids*, 1924, which rightly has long held a place in surveys of Soviet painting, is also tonally painted and is a sombre but brutally honest indictment of the effects of war. Yet the inclusion of these two works are token gestures towards overtly political content.

While paintings dominate the book, an interesting section on Ivan Kavaleridze's heroic monumental sculptures, which exemplify Soviet Constructivist sculpture, leaves one wanting to learn more. Sections on Ukrainian film, theatre and graphic design add to the book's comprehensive content.

Just as political and social history reflect the dominant narrative, so does cultural history, including art history. A strong, rather unpleasant nationalism, coupled with the current Western anti-Russian (and therefore also anti-Soviet) interpretations, underlie much of the text. For example, it states that Khrushchev's "abortive" de-Stalinisation renewed Western interest in the Soviet avant-garde, but this appropriated Ukrainian art as Russian, thereby following the "old Russian Imperialist agenda". Yet the two countries were culturally intertwined for centuries, including between 1900–1930.

*Christine Lindey*

## **A People's History of the Cold War: Stories from East and West**

**By Colin Turbett (Pen & Sword History, 2023, ISBN: 9781399087520, Hbk, 272pp, £25)**

This volume traces conflicts across the world that were between, on the one hand, the Soviet Union, the socialist camp and national liberation movements and, on the



other, the world of capitalism and its colonial possessions.

Colin Turbett dates this 'Cold War' from the communist-led Russian Revolution of October 1917. It is a tale of Soviet defences of its borders and that of its allies, and of Soviet support for national liberation struggles against the colonial powers.

The book provides enormous historical, political and economic background to the conflicts while including, as nuggets, commentaries from ordinary individuals of the 'East' and 'West' (used as political terms for the areas commanded by the major state and state-aspiring peoples of the Cold War battlefields). These include letters and other reflections on ordinary people's lives, as well as judgements on the effects and effectiveness of their rulers' propaganda machines – from people with no political axes to grind.

This rich background takes the reader well beyond the common dating of the start of the Cold War from the end of the Second World War and, especially, adds valuable details of national liberation movements and the socialist countries' support for them.

The bibliography is enormous but heavily weighted to Western sources. This buttresses Turbett's repeated denigrations of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin as a murderous autocrat, although he acknowledges Stalin's concern with defending the borders of the Soviet Union and the countries within its camp, and providing help in all forms to peoples fighting to free themselves from colonial empires. Turbett also ascribes the military success of the Red Army during the Second World War to some sort of leaderless reaction to Nazi brutalities, missing the mass mobilisation of the people at the front line and on the home front by the Soviet Communist Party, and at all levels of the country and every part of the armed forces, including in the partisan movement.

Turbett places the full weight of blame for the Cold War on the Western imperialist states. This is particularly well done when

describing their division of Germany with the help of Nazi war criminals, of Korea, Vietnam and other countries, as well as the USA's, Britain's and France's post-war attempts to destroy anti-Fascist and anti-colonial forces.

There is an interesting chapter on the Military Industrial Complex that has (and still is) driving states to ever greater spending on the military and on weapons of mass destruction. Turbett convincingly argues that in the Soviet Union – for other motives – military scientists have promoted similar demands for ever greater expenditure and delivery of the same potentially all-destroying weaponry.

He concludes that the Soviet Union under Stalin had no aggressive intentions towards the West and that Western propaganda to the contrary was a fiction. My own comment on this is that today we witness the same propaganda machine at work to describe China as a threat in a 'New Cold War'.

*Mick Costello*

**I Saw Democracy Murdered: The Memoir of Sam Russell, Journalist**  
**By Colin Chambers & Sam Russell**  
**(Routledge, 2022, ISBN: 9781032128566, 267pp, £35.99)**

Sam Russell's career as a communist journalist and foreign correspondent began in Civil War Spain. It was the first – but, unfortunately, not the last – country in which he saw 'democracy murdered'.

Sam (born 1915) died in 2010. These memoirs are based on interview notes and recordings made by two of his colleagues at the *Morning Star* in the 1970s and 1980s – Colin Chambers and Chris Myant. As those who knew him will testify, Sam's personal voice was as strong and distinctive as the one he used in his writings. This book captures both voices to a tee.

Born in London to Jewish-Polish immigrants, 'Manassah Lesser' joined the Communist Party in 1934, enlisted in the International Brigades and fought to save

Madrid from Franco's Fascist forces in November 1936. Wounded and repatriated, he returned to Spain in 1937 where he served as an English-language radio broadcaster and then as the *Daily Worker's* Spanish correspondent. He also acquired his professional name: 'Sam Russell'.

Sam remained in Spain until almost the end of the Spanish Republic. Four decades later he returned to the Iberian Peninsula to report on the fall not just of Franco's dictatorship but of the Salazar regime in Portugal, too.

Sam's journalistic career was interrupted by a spell of wartime factory work and shop-stewarding but when the ban on publication of the *Daily Worker* was lifted in 1942 he became a home affairs reporter and after the war was appointed the paper's diplomatic correspondent.

Among his many memorable encounters as a foreign correspondent, the one that stood out for Sam was meeting Che Guevara just after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Che gave him a lecture on the pusillanimity of West European communists and about how armed revolution was the only road to socialism. Sam dutifully recorded and reported what Che said but the published interview was heavily edited and censored by *Daily Worker* editor George Matthews.

A running theme of the book is Sam's often prickly relations with Party leaders and the political appointee editors of the *Daily Worker* and its successor the *Morning Star*. His efforts at reporting the whole truth often rubbed against the requirements of the current Party line.

This was particularly true in relation to coverage of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Sam was *Daily Worker* correspondent in Moscow from 1955–59 and arrived on the eve of Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Sam was told about the speech by British comrades working in Moscow who had heard its text read out and tried in vain to report it as fully as possible.

Among Sam's good friends in Moscow was the former spy, Donald Maclean, and the book sheds interesting light on Maclean's character, politics and life in the USSR after his defection from the UK.

To an extent this is a memoir of regret in which Sam repudiates many of his communist beliefs. The disillusioning turning point was the Soviet crushing of Dubček's Prague Spring in 1968 – another event whose tragic aftermath he witnessed at first hand. He says the British Communist Party should have broken with the Soviets there and then, and that the only reason to stay in the Party was to oppose and criticise the Soviet Union from within the communist movement. But, as Sam himself admits, he was never active in the Party except as a journalist, and it was other like-minded comrades who mostly fought that battle.

Sam's own disappointments do not detract from this wonderful account of the idealism and commitment of his generation of communists. It is a book that from beginning to end is packed with amusing anecdotes, personal insight and acute political analysis.

*Geoffrey Roberts*

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