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Feature

Russia and The New Cold War

By Kate Hudson

For those who watch Russia's relations with the West, the last few months have been a cause for considerable concern. Indeed, the term 'new Cold War' has been widely used from all parts of the political spectrum. Although there have been a number of blips in relations, by far the most significant has been the tension around the USA's long-planned missile defence system. Despite international protest, the USA persists in its goal to put facilities for the provocative system in the Czech Republic and Poland, and the Russian Government has expressed its concerns in no uncertain terms. Recently, at the EU-Russia Summit in Portugal, President Putin likened the situation in some respects to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, when, in response to NATO missiles being sited in Turkey, the former Soviet Union placed nuclear

weapons in Cuba. In response to US plans to site a radar in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland, Russia has stated that it will re-target its missiles on western Europe.

Popularly termed Star Wars, Missile Defence is part of the US military strategy to achieve 'full spectrum dominance' – full military control of all land, sea, air, space and information. While the USA describes it as a defensive system, because it allows the USA to shoot down incoming missiles, in reality it will enable the USA to attack other countries without fear of retaliation. It has already sparked international controversy and provoked a new global arms race, with the danger of nuclear weapons use. President Bush insists that the USA needs missile defence in case terrorists or 'rogue' states ever develop inter-continental ballistic missiles able to reach them. In fact, this is extremely unlikely, as terrorists or states without long-range missile technology could deliver nuclear weapons more easily, cheaply and with less likelihood of detection in other ways – in a truck, on board ship, or even as part of an aeroplane. Thus, Missile Defence is widely understood to be a system deployed against major state actors such as Russia or China. It is no doubt understood as such within those two countries.

The Russian Government has expressed strong concern about the development of the system. Earlier this year, US Defense Secretary Robert M Gates went to Moscow to persuade Russian leaders that the system was nothing to worry about. "The Russian position with respect to this issue remains unchanged," replied Defence Minister Serdyukov. "We do believe that

deploying all the strategic elements of the ballistic missile defences is a destabilising factor that may have a great impact upon global and regional security.” And who can be surprised at this response? This is added to a situation where not only has NATO moved up to the Russian border, it also includes former Soviet Republics.

There was also an attempt to win President Putin round at the so-called Lobster Summit at Bush’s holiday home in Kennebunkport. But it is clear that Putin and Bush came no closer to resolving the crisis over US missile defence plans. Indeed, after the summit concluded, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov raised the possibility that Russia would put missiles in Kaliningrad if the USA went ahead with building facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic. Kaliningrad is a Russian enclave on the Baltic coast, between Poland and Lithuania, separated physically from the rest of Russia. Ivanov’s suggestion is an alarming one and it is certainly an indication that Russia is seriously worried about the USA’s missile defence system. There is also considerable opposition to the system from within the Czech Republic and Poland. A majority in both countries opposes the plans.

Of course, one could conclude that Russia is just engaging in belligerent rhetoric, posturing about something that presents no threat at all. But a closer look at the issue suggests that is not the case and that Russia really does have genuine concerns. It also appears to be the case that Russia is attempting to put forward alternatives that it feels to be constructive. During the G8 summit, Putin proposed that the USA could use Russian facilities in Gabala in northern Azerbaijan. And in order to prove that it was a viable option western journalists were invited to take a tour of the site. Gabala is a huge radar station with a 6,000 km range – sufficient to cover the Middle East. Although critics say the base is out of date, it detected the launch of the Iranian Shahab-3 missile in January of this year, and presumably upgrading it would be no more expensive than building facilities from scratch in central Europe.

Russia has subsequently also offered the use of facilities in southern Russia, and has offered to work with the US administration over missile defence in the framework of the NATO–Russia Council. Yet Bush continues with the view that facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic are a necessary part of the system.

So why should Russia be so concerned? The USA has repeatedly insisted that the system is designed to knock out missiles from rogue states. And the relatively small number of interceptor missiles would surely be absolutely useless against the full might of the Russian arsenal.

That is true – the system could not deal with a massive Russian first strike. But consider the possibility of a US first strike, which knocked out the major part of the Russian arsenal. The interceptors of the Missile Defence system would be sufficient to knock out most of the retaliatory strike from Russia. So the common vulnerability would be at an end; there would be no ‘mutually assured destruction’ – thus the end, presumably, of even any gesture towards the notion of ‘deterrence’. Then you have a situation where Russia has to rely on the USA’s choosing not to attack, and that is not something that can necessarily be guaranteed.

Last year an article in the US journal *Foreign Affairs*¹ put forward the view that the age of US nuclear primacy had begun. It argued that the US arsenal was growing rapidly, while Russia’s decayed and China’s stayed small: “For the first time in almost 50 years, the United States stands on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy. It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike.” While US officials were quick to disagree, this shifting balance, together with US insistence that missile defence must be in Europe under their control, is bound to stoke Russian anxieties.

So Russia is likely not only to put missiles in Kaliningrad, but also to upgrade its nuclear missile arsenal and introduce a range of

other improvements and innovations. This is not the road we want to go down: we do not want a new Cold War. Better by far that the USA ditches its Missile Defence plans now.

¹ Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, 'The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy', in *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 2006

Kate Hudson is Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Head of Social & Policy Studies at London South Bank University, and Vice-President of the SCRSS.

SCRSS News

Seeking the Twelve!

The Society has welcomed an offer from its Council member Andrew Jameson to donate £1,000 towards the further development and improvement of the work of the SCRSS and its premises – if 12 others will do the same. We are therefore putting this offer to our members in the hope that we can find the necessary 12 donors willing to match Andrew's £1,000 contribution. This money would provide a great boost to the SCRSS' educational work and facilities. If you can help, please contact Jean Turner, Honorary Secretary, at the SCRSS.

Head Office List of Teachers, Translators and Interpreters

SCRSS members who are accredited teachers, translators and / or interpreters of Russian and other languages of the former Soviet Union may apply for inclusion on the list at a cost of £10.00 per annum. The list is sent out regularly in response to business and private enquiries.

SCRSS Email Bulletins

The Society's email bulletins keep members up to date with news and details of

forthcoming Russian-related events. If you are not already on the email bulletin list and would like to be, please send your email address to John Cunningham at the Society. If you have previously asked to be included on the email bulletin list, but your email address has changed, please reconfirm the up-to-date details to John Cunningham.

Events

Friday 30 November 7pm

Lecture: 90th Anniversary of the Russian October Revolution – The Path to Democracy or Tyranny?

By Jean Turner, Honorary Secretary of the SCRSS. Jean Turner will speak on her contention that the Russian October Revolution was the world's first successful democratic revolution and that the Soviet Union embodied democratic socialist principles throughout its existence. Its dissolution in 1991 resulted from the inherent rights embodied in its various constitutions and Congresses, taken advantage of by a corrupt power elite.



From the SCRSS Library

The Society's 2008 programme of films and lectures will be available on request and via email in December.

All lectures and film shows take place at the SCRSS premises in Brixton, Admission: £3.00 (members), £5.00 (non-members). Tea and coffee are available before events.

SCRSS Russian Seminar, April 2008

We are pleased to announce that, following the success of last year's Russian language seminar, the SCRSS will be organising a further two-day seminar in early April 2008. The seminar is aimed at teachers of Russian, graduates and final year undergraduates of Russian with a good aural understanding of Russian and wishing to keep abreast of the latest linguistic, social and cultural developments in Russia. Further information will be available from the Society in January 2008.

Britain Introduces Biometric Visa Applications in Russia

The British Government is introducing biometric data collection (fingerscans and digital photographs) as part of a worldwide biometric identification process that is designed to protect an individual's identity, facilitate future entry to the UK, combat visa fraud and abuse of the UK's immigration and asylum systems.

From 8 November 2007 all visa applicants, irrespective of nationality, will have to present themselves in person to the British Embassy to have their fingerscans and digital photograph taken. There is no charge for this service in addition to the visa fee.

Feature

The Campbell Creighton Collection in the SCRSS Archive

By Charlotte Kasner

Campbell Creighton was one of those who could be said to have weathered the curse of living through difficult times. Born just before the First World War in 1913 in Winnipeg, Canada, he was of an age to see active service in the Second World War. He fought as a gunner in the Royal Artillery, having come to England as a Rhodes

Scholar to read PPE and graduating with an MA in 1937.

By 1938 he had married an Englishwoman and, already a committed Marxist, was editing the British Young Communist League magazine. Having selected to practise journalism, he went on to edit *Russia Today*, the journal of the British-Soviet Friendship Society. By the 1950s he had become the British Editor for the World Peace Council in Vienna, but even then he was not to settle.

In 1957 he became the General Secretary of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR), a post that he was to hold for eight years. Two years after leaving the SCR in 1965, he went to Moscow. Ostensibly employed on a two-year contract, his two years turned into 23, during which time he was the Moscow correspondent for the Society's *Anglo Soviet Journal*.

His years in Moscow saw his passion and expertise in Soviet ballet, music and theatre increase and, following his death in 1990, he left behind a sizeable amount of material in several specialist collections, including many translations. Amongst the papers that he donated to the SCRSS is a collection of theatre and concert programmes, punctuated by the occasional programme for a sports event or cultural festival.

At first sight they would appear to offer just a list of productions and casts – useful perhaps to confirm information for the specialist, but yielding little else to the casual observer. In fact, they hide gems of social history and confound anyone who may have imagined that the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev years was a stagnant, closed society.

Far from being cocooned in a form of cultural isolation, the Bolshoi Opera, for instance, was host to visiting companies, including regular visits by German companies.

The ballet and concert graduation programmes hide the agony of those who waited to find out the role allocated to them

in the all-important finals, or the nerves of the examinees. They also reveal details of the early careers of those who were head of their final year only to fade into obscurity, or those who failed to land the plum roles only to build solid and sometimes international careers later.

Even the productions are surprising: in amongst the annual ripped and bleeding chunks of Tchaikovsky and Mozart are fascinating glimpses of one-act works or pieces by Soviet composers that have never been heard abroad, even regular samples of *Chu Chin Chow!* The same old section of *Swan Lake* (Big Swans) appears every year with a new cast of hopefuls. Thumbing through the programmes, one can almost feel the nerves and the anticipation of the opportunities that might follow if the performance went well. Year after year world-class soloists trained in a 400 year-old tradition come to grips with the 19th-century classics, perhaps for the first time in public. Small and great orchestral works are placed on the stands of this year's graduating musicians with who knows what promise.

The fact that Creighton went back year after year suggests that the atmosphere must have been electric, in spite of the comparative lack of variation in the programme.

In addition to the ballet and opera seasons and graduation programmes, there are occasional festivals that provide a veritable paper orgy of Russian and Soviet culture: the Bolshoi Ballet and Opera, the Maly Theatre, the Moscow Arts Theatre. Small groups come in from far off republics and flit from venue to venue: one night in a purpose-built venue, another in a makeshift hall – a stream of one night stands that is exhausting to trace. There is folk song and dance, acrobatics, circus. Even more occasionally a sports programme pops up, perhaps the souvenir of an official visit or a break from the arts taken on a whim. Official invitations are sometimes tucked inside programmes and sometimes programmes are duplicated, hinting at the unseen other who was privileged to share in the cultural delights of the Silver Age.

If requirements dictate a thorough, chronological review of a particular company or season, then this collection will frustrate. However, as a glimpse into Soviet Moscow's cultural life in the 1960s and 1970s it is a treasure, an eclectic, even eccentric clue to the tastes of a remarkable man.

The Campbell Creighton Collection is still in the process of being catalogued but it will provide another link in the chain of the unique archive at the SCRSS.

Charlotte Kasner trained as an actor, musician and dancer (Cecchetti method) and was a professional performer for 25 years. She gained an MA in Ballet Studies from the University of Roehampton in 2003 and is currently preparing to read for a PhD on Yuri Grigorovich, director of the Bolshoi Ballet from the 1960s-80s.

Book Reviews

Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective
By Archie Brown (Oxford University Press, 2007, ISBN 13: 978-0-19-928215-9, Hbk, 384pp, £25.00)

Though the title may lack the immediacy of John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*, the author, well known as Mikhail Gorbachev's biographer, presents a finely argued analysis of the last years of the revolutionary process begun in 1917. Archie Brown sets out to demolish some of the myths that have grown up regarding this era (1985–91), among them "the idea that the Soviet system was on its last legs and doomed to imminent collapse by the 1980s" or that "Boris Yeltsin was primarily responsible for dismantling a Communist system in Russia".

The author has had access to newly released archive material, first-hand accounts from those involved, as well as the manuscript of a book written by Gorbachev

in 1989 but never published. These all add interest to his detailed narrative. There are reprints of four articles written by Brown in 1985–89 which convey some of the excitement and expectation raised by the twin-track policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* – words that managed to enter the international lexicon. In an article written within weeks of his appointment as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Brown states that although Gorbachev was "a true believer in the Soviet system ... he may yet have a greater opportunity than any individual since the death of Stalin to make an impact on it". To these older articles are added chapters dealing with the intellectual origins of *perestroika*, its development and effect on other countries and, of course, the ending of the Cold War.

Brown clearly believes that Gorbachev's role has been misunderstood and that his achievements were considerable. In fact, the book concludes with a top ten list that would provide plenty of scope for discussion amongst students of this period. Although not a light read by any means, it certainly adds immensely to an understanding of the people and events that helped to shape our current world.

Note: The introductory chapter of the book is available on the OUP website at www.oup.co.uk.

By Ralph Gibson

Piggy Foxy and the Sword of Revolution: Bolshevik Self-Portraits Edited by Alexander Vatlin & Larisa Malashenko (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, ISBN 13: 978-0-300-10849-1, £25.00)

Over the course of an eventful life Marshal Voroshilov hoarded away relics from his past, including hundreds of drawings gifted to him by other members of the Soviet Government. It is this remarkable collection of portraits, sketched hurriedly in pencil, ink, and watercolours during the course of governmental meetings, which is

showcased for the first time in this latest volume of Yale University's *Annals of Communism* series. Although the aim of the project is to bring down the curtain upon the Soviet era, and much of the editorial language used to discuss the functioning of that society is loaded and, at times, even pejorative, there is enormous value and interest to be found in the publication of the formerly closed archives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Items of immediacy, and even intimacy, which were once assumed private, are now firmly placed within the public domain. As a result, whole new areas of research and interpretation have, quite literally, been opened up following the collapse of the USSR, enabling long forgotten Bolshevik voices to begin to speak once again for themselves.

The cartoons presented here firmly link the personal to the political, and present a series of snapshots of the rivalries, friendships and pressing concerns of the Soviet leadership from the time of Lenin's death and the Collective leadership up until Stalin's personal consolidation of power with the Show Trials. Few come from the hands of trained artists, but all were made by professional revolutionaries who whiled away their time during seemingly interminable Gosplan meetings by poking fun at each other, their petitioners and superiors.

These sketches reveal a tight-knit group of men and women whose identity and sense of solidarity were forged through the experience of revolution and civil war. Far from being drab, they are revealed through their in-jokes and asides as being intensely human, passionate and even self-deprecating.

The most accomplished of these part-time cartoonists was Nikolai Bukharin, the veteran revolutionary and Marxist theorist, whom Lenin once called the 'darling' of the Bolshevik Party. His caricatures display an intense curiosity, a sense of the absurd and a gentle humour that is often absent from the sketches of some of his comrades.

He did not hesitate to mock himself as 'Piggy Foxy' – a misshapen, puckish little figure, perhaps more vulpine than porcine, with pointed ears, spiky beard and bushy tail. In another sketch he stands as a tubby little figure lecturing a gaunt Felix Dzerzhinsky from the hilt of 'the sword of the revolution'.

By way of contrast, Stalin saw everything in terms of the political. Across the top of Bukharin's sketch of a querulous Smilga, staring myopically out of a fog, he wrote in bold red pencil the direction that the image should be circulated: "To all members of the Plenum." Laughter, as any school child knows, can hearten or it can destroy. With the stroke of red crayon Smilga's days as Vice Chair of Gosplan were numbered. It is little wonder therefore that, with the onset of the terror, the cartoons presented here become grimmer, far more scatological and less technically adept. The talent had dried up, and so to had the humour.

By John Callow, Librarian, Marx Memorial Library

Note: This is an edited version of the review that appeared in the 4 September 2007 issue of the Morning Star.

Lively and Other Stories

By Boris Mozhaev (translated by David Holohan, Hodgson Press, www.hodgsonpress.co.uk, 2007, ISBN 978-1-06164-00-3, Hbk, 495pp, £25.00)

This is the first English translation of the work of Boris Mozhaev (1923–96), a literary chronicler of rural life in Soviet Russia. He grew up in a village in the Riazan area, worked as a naval engineer, and later returned to his native region where he increased, by research, his extensive knowledge of country life.

He openly criticised the collective farm and state farm systems with his biting satire of bureaucracy. Some of his novels and short stories were published in the Soviet period, sometimes with cuts by censors, while the

publication of others was delayed until the beginning of *perestroika*.

The stories in this collection range in length from long novellas (*Lively* and *The History of the Village of Brëkhovo*) to brief character studies (*The Saddler* and *Shishigi*). The narrative is vivid, humorous and entertaining, the satire sharp but tinged with compassion. The translator points out that it recalls the styles of Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin.

In spite of Mozhaev's attitude to state regulation of agriculture, most of his characters are not portrayed as villains or heroes, corruption and spite being embodied in both peasants and party officials, likewise honesty and fairness. The eponymous heroine of *Sania*, a young novice stationmaster in a remote village outpost, tries to restore order from chaos, but is betrayed by a corrupt colleague and time-serving officials, and eventually exonerated by the Comrade's Court on the honest evidence of another colleague.

Kuzhin, nicknamed Lively, tries to make an honest living as an independent practitioner of many skills and is reported by spiteful local officials, but survives by using his intelligence and verbal wit to win over more open-minded authority figures.

In all the stories even the minor characters are vividly portrayed. Much of the characterisation is achieved by dialogue. Here Mozhaev's deep knowledge of traditions, superstitions, dialect, slang and obscenities enlivens the narrative. This is particularly evident in *Old Mother Proshkina* whose central character has held Party responsibility but is also a rich source of traditional wisdom and colourful language. Mozhaev also has a sharp ear for political jargon – at its funniest in the mouth of Bulkin, the narrator of *A History of the Village of Brëkhovo*.

Minute details of agricultural or craft processes, such as mowing or basket weaving in *Lively*, are included without pedantry. Landscape is beautifully and sensitively evoked. We are also made

aware of the harshness of the weather, the vast distances and the peasants' ability to endure hardship, even in the post-war and post-'Thaw' years.

David Holohan includes a general introduction to the collection, an introduction to each story, as well as two appendices, a glossary and detailed footnotes. There is also a memoir of Boris Mozhaev by Solzhenytsin, who accompanied him on some of his tours of research.

By Sheila Clarke

Film & Ballet Reviews

Bolshoi Ballet London Season: London Coliseum, July & August 2007

The Bolshoi Ballet's first visit to London in 1956 occurred when memories of Russia's role in the war were fresh and the Cold War undeveloped. The excitement that the Bolshoi Ballet engendered then is difficult to imagine now and we are certainly a world away from queuing overnight for precious tickets.

In the 1970s a visit was still a rarity but tickets were easier to obtain and not as expensive as they have become. One ran the gauntlet of political protests and magazine sellers outside (and sometimes inside), which rather added to the sense of occasion. As a schoolgirl I saw a great generation of dancers at their peak, including Vassiliev, Maximova, Liepa and Timofeyeva, from the best seats in the house. By the 1980s Irek Mukhamedov led the Company, which was still at the top of its form.

By the 1990s much of the glamour had faded. Economic, political and social changes engulfed the former Soviet Union and the Company needed to survive in a global, commercial environment. Grigorovich, who had taken the Bolshoi out

to the world as never before, had gone and the youngest dancers struggled to interpret his Silver Age classics, created in very different times.

Even the choice of repertoire was not as easy as it had been. The standard diet of 19th-century classics and Grigorovich works would not take the Company forward, but international audiences did not want yet more Balanchine and Forsythe, however new these may have been for the Bolshoi dancers. After a couple of disappointing seasons Ratmansky arrived. An insider who had spent a large amount of time outside the Company, and a young man to boot, he had a tall order to revive and extend the Bolshoi in a much harder and more unforgiving world where the advantage of novelty had long worn off.

This season he has certainly managed that in spades, co-ordinating an ideal combination of works to create jewels for the Bolshoi crown. He has managed to negotiate the labyrinth of internal Company politics to enable guest artistes to inspire: neither before nor since has Carlos Acosta displayed the qualities that he found for the greatest Spartacus since Irek Mukhamedev.

The dancers displayed virtuosity, bravado and humour and gave their all, night after night. The stamina required for the marathon version of *Corsaire* was a marvel, the version charming. The old warhorse *Don Quixote* was again a signature work and *Bright Stream*, last year's triumph, well worth a second viewing. *Spartacus* lived and breathed again, the roaring and standing ovation on the first night was quite like old times, even if the days of the hour-long curtain calls are over.

The world-beating season that the Bolshoi gave London is no mean feat in the current climate: we'll miss them next year. Let us hope that it is an appetite-whetting pause and that they will return soon with treasures old and new.

By Charlotte Kasner

Academica Rossica's First Russian Film Festival: Opening Night, 27 September 2007

This was a really splendid occasion. The cultural powerhouse of Academica Rossica was showcasing its entire festival on one night – a dozen contemporary Russian films at the Apollo multi-screen cinema in Lower Regent Street, London.

Arriving at the cinema, it was full of the buzz associated with film festivals and their opening nights, as well as a complimentary Baltica. Having looked at the programme beforehand, I was interested in *Goddess*, about a policewoman investigating the case of a missing girl for a year and the growing blur between dream and reality in her life, or *Peter FM*, a lively and heartwarming romantic comedy set in St Petersburg. On arrival the choice was between *Euphoria* and *The Mermaid*. Balancing a tragic-comedy about a girl who could make her wishes come true (*The Mermaid*) and a tragic love story about the powerful and destructive forces that draw people together (*Euphoria*), I opted for the powerful and destructive forces.

Euphoria was an excellent film. Obviously low budget, it was primitive in style, shot against the dramatic backdrop of the rural central Volga region in the height of summer. Inexplicably, the two central characters, Pakha and Vera, meet in the scorched rural landscape and are drawn together. The following day Vera's daughter is bitten by her husband's dog and taken to hospital. Without transport to follow on, her husband, Valery, takes to vodka. Vera seeks Pakha's help and he takes her to the hospital in his boat, in a journey that binds them inextricably together and culminates in the inevitable tragic ending, which I hope the readers will see for themselves.

I was delighted with the film, which was made a work of art by the photography and composition, and I am sure readers will find it as therapeutic as I did. It's the ideal antidote to the depressing offerings of the London Film Festival, on which – after

Import Export – I have now given up. Academica Rossica is to be congratulated on their Russian Film Festival. The Apollo is the ideal venue, as is the nearby new Ukrainian restaurant, Divo, for the après-film. We are all looking forward to next year.

By Charles Stewart

From the Russian Press

State Duma Elections

In the run-up to the State Duma elections in December *Itogi* published a series of interviews with the Head of the Central Electoral Commission in Russia, Vladimir Churov (No's 43 [593]–45 [595], October–November 2007, www.itogi.ru).

The Commission had been compiling the register of electors since July. At 29 October more than 108 million voters had been registered, including Russians living abroad. The next official figure would be announced on 2 December. Between 11 November and 1 December, on presentation of their passport, voters would be able to check the register at their local electoral commission to confirm that their details were correct.

Bribing voters in the form of gifts, souvenirs, humanitarian aid, etc, would be cause for removal of a political party from the electoral list. There had been some complaints of infringements but in general these had occurred prior to registration with the Commission and therefore technically could not be considered criminal. Personally, Churov believed that certain promotional merchandise, such as pens, bags and T-shirts, ought to be allowed, but his colleagues at the Commission had not yet made a final decision.

Churov rejected claims by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) that the proposed conditions under which international observers would work were unprecedented in their restrictiveness. Only 12 ODIHR observers had taken part in

the Polish elections. In contrast, some 330 observers from different international organisations had been invited, including 70 from the ODIHR and the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Head of ODIHR had been invited to visit Moscow for the first time in November.

In a recent opinion poll only 11% of those asked had expressed absolute faith in the vote counting process. However, Churov pointed out that less than 1% of voters had actually encountered infringements of the rules or vote rigging and court cases were rare. The Commission was doing all that it could to reduce public scepticism through greater transparency in the vote counting process. Churov himself was confident that Russia's electorate, legislation and Central Electoral Commission were "the best in the world".

Dacha Life in the 19th Century

Moskovskiy Novosti carried a nostalgic evocation of life in the dachas around Moscow in the 19th century ('Proch' iz stolitsy!', No 43, 2–8 November 2007, www.mn.ru).

Moscow's dacha boom had been at its peak in the mid-19th century. Every self-respecting official, merchant, teacher or self-taught intellectual aspired to spend the summer in the country. The first dachas were mainly rented and located not far from the capital on the banks of the Moskva and Yauza rivers. By the end of the 19th century demand and the expansion of the railways led to the construction of new settlements further from Moscow, in places such as Ostankino.

Detached dachas were a rarity up to the 1905 Revolution, with most Muscovites huddled in hastily assembled shacks in the backyards of peasant cottages. Renting a peasant cottage was a better option, even if it was divided into separate compartments for six–eight families. These communal cottages had a single entrance and an outside stove for cooking, but each compartment had its own window and,

occasionally, access to a veranda. Renting out cottages was a profitable source of income for many peasants.

Later, land was divided into small square plots on which identical small houses were built cheaply. In the 1930s the Soviet authorities resumed the mass construction of cheap, one-storey dachas: two-room, 15.4m² apartments for four people with a 5m² kitchen and an enclosed balcony.

By 1888 more than 6,000 dachas had sprung up in 180 villages around Moscow. Each spring 40,000 people – almost a quarter of the middle class – left the capital for the country. Families lived at their dachas from April to November; only the head of the family returned daily to the capital to work. Commuters could travel from one of the many local railway stations, but most preferred a horse-drawn cab for one–two roubles an hour. The journey took no more than 40 minutes.

Families often transported much of their furniture and belongings to their dachas at the start of the season: living in the country was cheaper than renting an apartment in town.

Conditions were relatively primitive. Residents drank water from the local river, with artesian wells only reaching the countryside after 1930. Electricity and running water came much later.

But dacha life in the 19th century had its pluses: summer theatre, concerts, football and tennis. Fyodor Chaliapin toured the dacha settlements near Moscow, while dacha balls became so popular that they attracted not only locals but also celebrities from the capital, the latter often pursued by 'paparazzi'.

Is Socialist Realist Art Collectible?

Argumenty i Fakty Online considered the appetite for Soviet art on the domestic and foreign markets ('Modnye russkiye kartiny. Chto pokupayut na Zapade?', 3 November 2007, www.aif.ru).

Anatoly Borovikov, a member of the International Confederation of Antiquarians and Art Dealers, felt that the much heralded but long awaited interest in Socialist Realism abroad was unlikely to materialise. Foreign buyers only valued the Russian Avant-Garde and little of this was currently available: there were many fakes in circulation, originals were expensive and owners rarely keen to part with their collections. As for Shishkin, Repin or Aivazovsky, not a single European museum held works by these artists as they had no artistic value on the world market. What hope, then, for Socialist Realism?



Illustration by Yuri Annenkov to Alexander Blok's
The Twelve, 1918 (SCRSS Library)

Gallery owner Leonid Shishkin, on the other hand, focused on the domestic market. This was far larger than the Western market and was growing fast. Russian buyers now had money, better taste and were nostalgic for the past. As such, interest in Socialist Realism was developing; it had passed the 50-year threshold and was automatically gaining in value on the Russian market. Key artists of the 1920s–30s, such as Pimenov, were worth around 1 million dollars. Leading lights of the 1940s–50s, such as Gerasimov, were now valued at around 500–600,000 dollars. And these prices were doubling year on year.

It was too early to say whether Socialist Realism would catch on in the West. However, experts believed that currently there was a niche market for large-scale canvases – one that the Socialist Realist tradition might fit.

Articles selected, summarised and translated by Diana Turner

Listings

Art

The Mercer Art Gallery

Swan Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, Tel: 01423 556188, www.harrogate.gov.uk/museums
Until 20 January 2008: *Beyond the Caspian Sea – Art and Treasures from Turkmenistan*. Paintings, photographs, textiles, ceramics and jewellery illuminating this distant land. Includes exhibits from the SCRSS. Tuesday–Saturday 10am–5pm, Sunday 2–5pm. Admission free.

Dance

Volga Russian Dancers

Bookings and enquiries: Ann Pavett, Tel: 020 8579 4925, Email: annpav2@hotmail.com
Amateur and professional dancers. Repertoire contains Russian, Ukrainian, Gypsy and Moldovan dances – in full costume. Classes and rehearsals take place at Marylebone Dance Studio, 12 Lisson Grove, London NW1, Fridays 8.30–10.30pm, £6.00 per class (concessions £5.00). Professionals rehearse daytime in London W3. Dancers are both English and Russian. Classes are run in both languages.

Events

4th Annual Russian Winter Festival

Trafalgar Square, London, Contact: Elena Moiseeva, Tel: 020 7183 2560, Email: em@eventica.co.uk

Sunday 13 January 2008: The Russian Winter Festival has now become an important annual fixture for the London public. Each year it has attracted record crowds who are treated to an extremely diverse look at Russian culture, from modern pop stars and indie rock, to folk

groups, street theatre and military marching bands.

Russian Arts in London 2007–08

www.russianact.co.uk

22–24 November: Shikloper and Friends, Sax Maria, London Jazz Festival, The Purcell Room and Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank Centre and Vortex, London
5 December: *Absurd* (films and lecture), British Library, London

7 December: Last Riot by AES + F from the Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art; Visual Art at Tate Britain, London
31 January 2008; Zventa Sventana, New Folk/Cargo

4 February 2008: *Everything Must be Dared* (lecture), British Library, London

7 March–27 April 2008: Alexander Rodchenko Photography, Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London

Russian Charity Gala

5A Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2TA
Friday 23 November 2007 6–9pm: Charity Gala in aid of the Russian charitable foundation Humanitarian Programmes Support (HPSCF, Patron: Dame Helen Mirren).

This celebration of Russian art and music will begin with a short presentation of HPSCF's work and end with an auction of Russian paintings by both highly collectible and lesser-known artists. In between there will be refreshments and music. More than 60 paintings for sale can be previewed on Thursday 22 November from 10am–6pm at Pushkin House and on Friday until 2pm. No paintings will be sold before the doors open at 6pm on the night, but reserve bids may be placed. Tickets cost £25. Please email naomi.shannon@hft.org.uk for a booking form.

Lectures

SCRSS

320 Brixton Road, London SW9, Tel: 020 7274 2282, www.scrss.org.uk
30 November 7pm: *90th Anniversary of the Russian October Revolution: The Path to*

Democracy or Tyranny? by Jean Turner, Honorary Secretary of the SCRSS [see page 3 for details].

Russian Circle, Sutton College of Learning for Adults

St Nicholas Way, Sutton, Contact: Bob Dommett, Tel: 01403 256593, Fees: non-members £7.00 per evening.
30 November 7pm: *Yuri Norstein's Contribution to Russian Animated Filmmaking* by Clare Kitson (illustrated). Followed by Russian Winter Party.
18 January 2008 7pm: *Vasily Andreevich Tropinin (1776-1857) – Russian Portrait Painter* – short illustrated talk by Natasha Dissanayake. Followed by: *The Life and Works of Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938)* by David Brummel (lecture and poetry reading).
15 February 2008 7pm: *The Battle of Stalingrad* by Dr Michael Jones.
28 March 7pm: *The Making of Marshal Kutuzov (1745 -1813)* by Bob Dommett (illustrated). Followed by a recital of Russian classic romantic pieces performed by John Cheshire.

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