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Feature

Lev Vygotsky and his Theory in a Nutshell

By James Ma

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was one of the most significant figures in the linguistic turn of modern thought. His innovative, revolutionary ideas have impacted on the way psychologists and linguists think about the language-mind relationship. This in turn has had a major contemporary influence, for example in educational practice where there is an increasing recognition of the importance of children engaging in communicative practices as a central plank of learning and development.

Vygotsky was born into a cultured Russian Jewish family in Orsha (present-day Belarus) in 1896. After studying law, aesthetics, linguistics, psychology and philosophy, he graduated from Moscow University in 1917. The October Revolution in 1917 brought about a widespread hope for the transformation of human society through the eradication of the nobility in order to “guarantee the appearance of a

new kind of person: the liberated proletarian [worker] with new morals, culture and rules of conduct” (McLeish 1975, page 15). Together with other members of Jewish and non-Jewish ethnic minorities, this made Vygotsky feel entitled to freedom, dignity and respect. More importantly, it led him to believe that the new Soviet society would create this ‘new man’.



Lev Vygotsky (SCRSS Library)

While teaching literature, philosophy, psychology and aesthetics in Gomel from 1919, he devoted much of his time to culture and education, and this had a significant impact on the cultural-historical school of thought, to which an affinity of the social and the historical was prime. He exhibited a passion for the Marxist principle that human

concepts are rooted in social activity, and society shares its knowledge and experience with less advantaged members. In applying this to the formulation of a Marxist psychology, he insisted that humans are social beings and to understand their development is to study them in social context. For him, the human mind is inseparable from “practical intelligence” and “sign use” – “the dialectical unity of these systems in the human adult is the very essence of complex human behaviour” (Vygotsky 1978, page 24). In his late twenties he plunged into this new direction for psychology, believing that “in the future society, psychology will indeed be the science of the new man” (Vygotsky 1997, page 343).

Vygotsky held a lifelong admiration for Benedict de Spinoza (1632–77) which informed his deductive approach to knowledge. For Spinoza (2001), the warrant for truth was rational rather than empirical and any phenomenon should be explained by means of logical deduction from premises previously established. This inspired Vygotsky’s perception of intellectual development as taking place through the mediational and transformative functions of symbols and signs (symbols and signs being psychological tools, such as language and literacy). For him, psychological processes initiate not simply from acts of will but through the use of signs and the practices involved in such use. His theory emphasises the value of deduction in establishing a logical basis for conceptual knowledge, resonating with Spinoza’s idea that knowledge is the conclusion of deductive reasoning in which one’s intelligence is attained through a culmination of wisdom. This gave rise to Vygotsky’s predilection for the dialectics of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), in particular the power of thesis, antithesis and synthesis for his analysis of the human mind and activity.

In the last decade of his life Vygotsky (1986) became deeply involved in the interdependency of thought and speech. It was an advance in his conception that both language and thought develop, and so does

their relationship. He described a fundamental change in this relationship commencing at about two years of age – language and thought, which have been developing relatively independently, now start to interact with each other. He viewed language as a social phenomenon even at this very early stage, although the child’s speech is egocentric (speech for him / herself). Thought is socially developed; but language and thought have different origins. For example, pre-linguistic children think independently of language, i.e. without language. When the child acquires the mother tongue, thought and language start to merge. This is in contrast with the claim made by Jean Piaget (1896–1980) that egocentric speech gives way to social speech only when the child recognises speech as a means of communication. For Vygotsky, this is a change in the nature of language and thought, signifying the human consciousness, in which language becomes intellectual and thinking becomes verbal. He also argued that the structure of speech is not a mirror image of the structure of thought. When thought is converted into speech, it undergoes a process of reconstruction during which thought is reconfigured and hence completed in words, rather than simply expressed with words. The relationship between higher psychological processes (for example, problem-solving) and lower psychological processes (for example, seeing and hearing) lies in the mediational functions of tools and signs in transforming lower into higher processes, in which language plays a crucial role.

Sadly, Vygotsky died of tuberculosis in 1934 at the age of 37. His legacy on how the human mind shapes and is shaped by social, cultural and historical contexts, albeit suppressed under the Stalin regime and little known in the West until the early 1960s, has exerted a vast influence on the development of psychological theory in the twenty-first century. However, it continues to present a challenge for Western psychology and philosophy to pin down what is meant by Vygotskian thought in order to more fully understand the ingenuity and inspiration of his theory. With regard to translation, some

of Vygotsky's concepts lack equivalent terms in English. For example, when *perezhivanie* is translated as *emotional experience*, this does not fully convey the meaning as it is "a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this" (Vygotsky 1994, page 342). This is reflected in current debates on the word's English translation, concerning issues of comparability and multifaceted meaning.

Vygotsky's theory is commonly known as 'sociocultural psychology' and has been consistently developed by his followers and advocates. Sociocultural psychology has sought to unfold the interconnection between mind, activity and culture by examining the social mechanism of human development and the use of language and other cultural tools. It has extended Vygotsky's idea of social interaction to include broader cultural, technological and socio-economical environments within which human development occurs (Daniels et al 2007). The term 'sociocultural' does not mean simply a combination of two separate entities known as 'social' and 'cultural'. Rather, it manifests these two entities as an intertwining complex whole that is simultaneously *social* and *cultural*. The word 'social' overlaps in meaning with the words 'communicative' and 'cultural'. Central to the development of interpersonal relationships and engagement is *communication*, endowed with a plethora of *culture* as a way of meaning.

Three main themes permeate Vygotsky's work: "(1) a reliance on genetic (i.e. developmental) analysis; (2) the claim that higher mental functions in the individual have their origins in social life; and (3) the claim that an essential key to understanding human social and psychological processes is the tools and signs used to mediate them" (Wertsch 1990, page 113). With regard to the first two themes, sociocultural psychology considers the human mind to be inherently social. Learning is by nature a developmental process, involving the internalisation of beliefs and values

embedded in social context. Hence the methodological approach to such processes is that of 'developmental construction', a pivotal world view of Vygotsky by which one's understanding of the world is inextricably rooted in social relations (Vygotsky 1986). Through internalisation, what is practised as social experience is reconstructed within the individual who is then able to act based upon his / her understanding of social experience. This differs from individual to individual due to different transition processes from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal and different intrapersonal formations determined by their identities. The construction of meaning by an individual stems from his / her social interaction, through which understanding the minds of others is essential. Viewed from this perspective, participation in cultural activity provides a means of knowledge construction, together with the transformation of meaning constructed with others, thus resulting in further development and learning.

Given that human beings engage with the world through the use of psychological tools, as well as technical tools (for example, computers), the third theme highlights that the human mind is culturally mediated. Social processes between individuals are transformed into higher psychological functioning within the individual – this transformation necessarily involves mediation – a concept vital to sociocultural psychology. Human mental functions are social in nature and cultural-historical in origin, involving the integration of meaning-making tools into thinking. Through social interaction, individuals act on shared activities in terms of changing them qualitatively, thus enabling each other's mind to develop. By implication, human cognition is mediated through participation in such activities with other members of the culture, rather than simply as a result of social interaction.

It is noteworthy that 1896 was a vintage year as it saw the birth of two towering figures in modern psychology: Vygotsky and Piaget. Vygotsky's theory is classed as non-

deterministic and non-reductionist, in contrast with, for example, Freudian psychoanalytical theory. It will continue to shed new light on our understanding and observation of human development in the years to come.

James Ma is a linguist. He received his PhD from the University of Bristol and undertook subsequent postdoctoral training at the University of Oxford. His academic interests are in sociolinguistics, semiotics and cultural-historical activity theory. His recent publications include 'The Synergy of Peirce and Vygotsky as an Analytical Approach to the Multimodality of Semiotic Mediation', published in Mind, Culture, and Activity, Volume 21, Issue 4, 2014, Taylor & Francis.

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SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

AGM Notice

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Society for Co-operation in Russian & Soviet Studies will take place at 11.00 on Saturday 21 May 2016 at the Society's premises at 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB. The AGM is open to SCRSS members only. The deadline for motions for discussion at the AGM and nominations of members for election to the next Council of the Society is Friday 22 April. The SCRSS Council and its Executive Committee are responsible for the running of the Society between AGMs. At 14.00, following a lunch-break, Tom Sibley will talk about Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War, to mark this year's 80th anniversary of the beginning of the bitter struggle between the Republican government and the Fascist opposition led by General Franco. The talk is free to members attending the AGM, otherwise normal entrance fees apply.

New SCRSS Chair

Philip Matthews was elected as the new Chair of the SCRSS and Kate Clark as a new Vice-Chair at the November 2015 meeting of the SCRSS Council. Both Philip and Kate are very long-standing members of the Society. Philip has been Vice-Chair for many years. He is currently into his third consecutive term as Mayor of Wilton and has served as Chair of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund since its foundation. The Council recorded its thanks to John Riley, who

previously held the position, for all the time and effort he devoted to the Society over a number of years.

SCRSS Winter Party

Our December 2015 winter party attracted a large number of members and raised over £300 for the Society. Our thanks to all those who helped to make the day a success, including those who contributed to the souvenir stall and raffle, helpers on the day, and, of course, the caterers! This was our third such event, and the aim is to build on it as an excellent way to end each year, while raising much needed funds for the SCRSS.

Cultural Co-operation

Also in December 2015, the Society was delighted to host a seminar, sponsored by Rossotrudnichestvo, on UK–Russian cultural co-operation. This event followed on from the highly successful 2014 conference organised jointly by the SCRSS and the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation. Attendees exchanged a wide variety of ideas and possible initiatives, and during the course of this year it is hoped that at least some of them will come to fruition. It was agreed that organisations involved in cultural co-operation with Russia should meet regularly, and the SCRSS will certainly continue to play its part in ensuring such gatherings take place.

Membership Renewal

The SCRSS receives no government or other regular funding, and relies on its members and own fund-raising efforts for its continued existence. Membership fees and member donations are absolutely crucial to our financial strength, and I urge everyone to respond promptly to their membership renewal form, if one is enclosed with this *SCRSS Digest*. As a membership organisation, we encourage you to participate in events, volunteer your time, share your ideas and suggestions to improve our work, and help spread the word

about the SCRSS Soviet Collections (our library and archive). Feel free to contact me via email or at events at the centre.

Russian Language

I am delighted to report the start of Term II of our weekly *Russian Language for Post-Beginners* course, led by Chris Barnard. Together with the positive response to our forthcoming *SCRSS Russian Language Seminar* on 16–17 April, it demonstrates our commitment to members interested in learning or teaching Russian. Let us know if you are interested in studying Russian at other levels, we may be able to explore options.

8th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar 2016

16–17 April, 10.15–16.45 daily

Places are going fast so book now to avoid disappointment and – if you pay in full by **Friday 12 February** – take advantage of the ‘early bird’ booking rate (full rate applies after that date).

Церковь и государство

Современный диалог на радио и телевидении

Россия после 1991

Новый русский лексикон

Школьная реформа в России

События последних лет и их отражение в языке

Англоязычные публикации в русском переводе

And many more topics...

For further details see page 6 or visit the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/russianseminar.htm.

Recent Library Acquisitions

The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James's, 1932–1943, Ivan Maisky, Gabriel Gorodetsky; translated by Tatiana Sorokina, Oliver Ready, Yale UP, 2015, xlvii + 584pp, ISBN: 978-0-300-18067-1, Hbk, 72 b/w illus, index.

St Petersburg: Shadows of the Past, Catriona Kelly, Yale UP, 2014, xvi + 464pp, ISBN: 978-0-300-16918-8, Hbk, notes, glossary, sources, bibliography, index.

The Soviet Theater: A Documentary History, Laurence Senelick, Sergei Ostrovsky (Eds), Yale UP, 2014, xxiii + 753pp, ISBN: 978-0-300-19476-0, Hbk, acronym list, bibliography, index.

Russian Artists and the Children's Book 1890–1992, Albert Lemmens, Serge Stommels, LS, Nijmegen, 2009, 511pp, ISBN: 978-90-79393-05-3, Hbk, notes, summaries, bibliography, bibliography of children's books, index (CD loose in endpapers).

The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, Richard Overy, Allen Lane, 2004, xl + 848pp, ISBN: 0-713-99309-x, Hbk, illus, maps, bibliography, notes, index.

Next Events

Thursday 14 January – Thursday 10 March, 18.00–20.00

Course: Russian Language for Post-Beginners (Term II)

Term II of our weekly Russian language course for post-beginners / lower intermediate level assumes approximately 60 hours of previous study and lasts 9 weeks. The course focuses on oral practice, based around topics, with grammar revision. It is led by Christine Barnard, a highly experienced teacher of Russian who previously taught at the University of Westminster. Numbers are limited to a maximum of 12 students. Fee: £25.00 (no concessions). *Please note: This course is open to SCRSS members only.*

Friday 12 February, 19.00

Lecture: Karen Hewitt on *What's Happening in Russia? The Views and Values of Ordinary Russians*

Karen Hewitt talks about developments and changes in Russian policies, as seen and evaluated by Russians from more than twenty different cities. Karen has spent the last twenty-five years teaching in Russian universities and travelling the country for up to two months a year. She has been a publisher in Russia, runs a project on English literature involving seventy Russian universities, and was awarded an MBE in 2014 for building academic and cultural understanding between the UK and Russia. She tries to focus on ordinary Russians and their (often very articulate) views of the world and their country. Her other work is as a tutor in literature at Oxford University Department for Continuing Education. *Normal entrance fees apply to this event.*

Saturday 16 April–Sunday 17 April, 10.15–16.45 daily

Course: 8th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar

Organised by the SCRSS in association with the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation, our popular intensive two-day seminar offers a stimulating lecture programme in Russian. Two streams are led by senior lecturers direct from St Petersburg State University, Russia. *Russian language and linguistics*: Tatiana Piotrovskaya, Senior Lecturer, Department of English Philology and Language Culture Studies, Faculty of Philology. *Russian humanities and social sciences*: Dr Vadim Golubev, Head of the Department of English for the Faculty of Journalism. There are four lectures per day: choose one of two options per session, moving from one stream to another throughout the day as you wish. The 45-minute lectures are followed by 30 minutes of discussion. The seminar is aimed at teachers of Russian, translators, final-year under-graduates and graduates of Russian, and all with an advanced-level comprehension of spoken Russian and an interest in Russia. Morning and afternoon tea / coffee and biscuits included. Bring your own lunch or use local cafes.

'Early bird' booking fee

Pay in full by Friday 12 February 2016
£99 SCRSS members; £110 non-members.

Standard booking fee

Pay in full by Friday 1 April 2016
£108 SCRSS members; £120 non-members.

Deposit

A non-refundable deposit of £20 is required to make a booking, unless you pay the full fee upfront (or an organisation is paying for you).

The full lecture programme, application form and terms & conditions are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/russianseminar.htm.

Places are limited to 30 participants, so book early to avoid disappointment!

Saturday 21 May, 11.00

Event: SCRSS AGM and Talk

11.00–13.00: AGM (open to SCRSS members only).

14.00: Talk by Tom Sibley on *Soviet Involvement in the Spanish Civil War*. See AGM Notice on page 4. Further information will follow shortly on the SCRSS website. *Please note: The talk is free to SCRSS members attending the AGM, otherwise normal entrance fees apply.*

Friday 3 June, 19.00

Lecture: Robert Chandler on 'Memories' by Teffi

Robert Chandler, translator and SCRSS Vice-President, talks about his translation (with Anne Marie Jackson, Irina Steinberg and Ed Kluz) of Teffi's *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea*, due for publication by Pushkin Press in May 2016. This is the first English-language version of the writer and satirist Teffi's account of her journey into exile following the Russian Revolution. In addition to translations of Andrei Platonov, Vasily Grossman, Pushkin and many other Russian writers and poets, Robert is also editor of the *Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*, *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida* and *Russian Magic Tales from Pushkin to Platonov*. *Normal entrance fees apply to this event.*

Friday 17 June, 19.00

Lecture: Margaret Fleming-Makarian on *The Nutcracker*

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

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

Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

Next Events

Monday 9 May, 11.00

Event: Victory Day 2016

This year's ceremony at the Soviet War Memorial marks the 71st anniversary of the Allied Victory over fascism in World War II. The Act of Remembrance commences at 11.00. Individuals and organisations are welcome to register their interest by emailing the SMTF Honorary Secretary on smtf@hotmail.co.uk. Further details to follow on the SCRSS website.

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

Perestroika Anniversary

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the launch of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union. Elected as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev had already begun a programme of change that year, admitting that economic development was slowing down and living standards inadequate. However, this programme was given impetus at the 27th Congress of the CPSU (25 February–6 March 1986). In his report to the congress, Gorbachev talked about *perestroika* (re-structuring), *uskoreniye* (acceleration), *glasnost* (openness) and the expansion of *khozraschyot* (cost accounting).



Mikhail Gorbachev (SCRSS Photo Library)

In this issue of the *SCRSS Digest* we publish a new article by Leonid Seleznev putting the changes initiated under Gorbachev into their historical perspective (the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union). We also reprint two contemporary accounts of the 27th Congress published in the Society's *Anglo-Soviet Journal* in 1986, focusing on cultural aspects of the changes and reflecting the optimism of the time.

Gorbachev and *Perestroika*

By Leonid Seleznev

In the USSR by 1970 the period of stagnation under Brezhnev had resulted in an obvious collapse of the existing system. It was evident that sources of growth were exhausted. Gross National Product (GNP) continued to fall. Industry was skewed on the one hand towards the production of armaments, on the other hand away from making consumer goods. Agriculture was at a stalemate. Living standards had stopped rising by the early 1980s. Technological progress, especially in the field of electronics, seemed beyond the comprehension of the elderly members of the Politburo.

New blood was badly needed in the Party leadership. In March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became the Politburo's choice as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). He was relatively young (just above 50 years), had been born into a peasant family, was well educated (a graduate of Moscow State University), and – above all – understood the necessity for change. In 1985 Gorbachev was not widely known in the Party or society. This was perhaps due to his having worked predominantly at the local Party level in the North Caucasus until this point – first as Komsomol leader, then as Party leader. However, by the time of his election as General Secretary, he was already a member of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

Gorbachev's plan for *perestroika*, initiated at the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February–March 1986, included:

1. Fundamental changes to the whole of the Soviet system, in particular the revitalisation of public life by increasing the role of elected government institutions
2. Changes in the economic system, including ownership and planning
3. Widespread introduction of democracy

4. *Glasnost* (or openness) i.e. freedom of the press and free speech
5. An end to the Cold War and confrontation with the West, reflecting the USSR's aspiration to join the world economy

In everyday life *perestroika* manifested itself primarily in the establishment of *glasnost* i.e. the removal of all media censorship; the introduction of market economic principles (cost recovery of enterprises, support for and encouragement of the creation of co-operatives, competition); the abolition of the monopoly of the CPSU; and revival of the work of local government organs.

The reasons why Gorbachev's plan for *perestroika* ultimately failed are numerous. Firstly, by the time Gorbachev proposed substantial reforms it was already too late to save the system. Secondly, the captains of *perestroika* wanted to achieve everything at once, whereas fundamental reforms required time to roll out. Thirdly, Gorbachev and his colleagues believed – in the best of Soviet traditions – that they themselves could change the state 'from above', without the need to involve the masses i.e. their rank and file supporters. Fourthly, it is clear that the West did not welcome the course of *perestroika*, with Western governments choosing Boris Yeltsin – an anti-communist, pro-liberal and bitter opponent of Gorbachev – as their favourite.

Yeltsin proved much stronger than Gorbachev, both as a person and a political figure. And who else came into the limelight of political life at this time? Yegor Gaidar, Anatoly Chubais, Gavriil Popov, Anatoly Sobchak, Yuri Afanasiev and other prominent 'liberals'. In spite of his fierce anti-communism, Alexander Yakovlev, a former Soviet ambassador to Canada, was appointed to the highest position within the Party leadership. The question remains: did Gorbachev want to improve socialism in the Soviet Union or convert its social system to capitalism? Whatever the case, it was the latter which succeeded.

In August 1991 Yeltsin used the political instability in the country to carry out a coup

d'état, ousted Gorbachev and put an end to the USSR. Gorbachev offered no resistance. *Perestroika* was over but there were many long-term consequences. Gorbachev's attempts to introduce market mechanisms into the economy nourished the embryo of the post-Soviet Russian capitalist class – bankers, traders and bureaucrats who went on to make their first millions – but simply made matters worse for most people. It was only natural that demands for secession from Ukraine and the other republics followed, as the majority of representatives of the national elite sought to enrich themselves. Yeltsin made no attempt to conceal the interests he served. The Soviet Union was dissolved on 31 December 1991.

Between 1990 and 1997 Russia's GNP shrank by about a half. It was a profound human tragedy: millions were impoverished, while life expectancy plummeted as the last generation of Soviet working men, who suddenly faced unemployment, uncertainty and poverty, began to die in their 50s, or even 40s.

On the eve of 2000 Yeltsin 'passed over' the presidency to Vladimir Putin. Although Putin presided over a widening of the gap between Russia's richest and poorest citizens, average living standards somehow improved, mainly due to record world prices for oil and gas. There is no doubt whose interests Putin serve. During his reign Russia has been one of the few states with a flat system of taxation and Putin has stated outright that this will continue as long as he is in office "because it's easier to collect taxes". In modern Russia the poorest pay the same rate of tax as the richest.

Leonid Ivanovich Seleznev was born in Leningrad in 1931. He survived the Leningrad Blockade during World War II. After graduating from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), he served in the Soviet Diplomatic Service (in India and at the United Nations). He is Emeritus Professor (Sociology) at St Petersburg State University, Russia.

A Dynamic Programme for Culture

Edited extract from 'A Dynamic Programme for Culture: A Discussion of Some Aspects of the Decisions of the 27th Congress of the CPSU', Anglo-Soviet Journal, Volume 46, No 2, Summer 1986 (pp14–16).



Mikhail Gorbachev at the VI Lenin steel plant in Kuybyshev (Samara), 1986 (SCRSS Photo Library)

The British mass media have tended to concentrate, in their reporting of the 27th Congress of the CPSU, upon the socio-economic policies adopted and very little has been said about the implications of the decisions taken with regard to the sphere of culture. However, both the congress programme and Mikhail Gorbachev's report emphasise that any changes in economic practice should be seen within a social and political framework that has as its major aim the improvement of the quality of life and the development of a rich, diverse, dynamic and humanist culture [...]

The congress saw this as demanding a spirit of dynamism that must become "a way and rule of life" and that should engender, as the programme puts it, "bold innovation" and "free creative endeavour" [...] This requires flexibility and a capacity to accept diversity in art, expressed through differing styles and genres, and based upon a flexible and non-dogmatic Marxism, open and innovative [...]

The report of Gorbachev calls for an approach to philosophy, politics and culture that shows "a capacity for innovation and the ability to transcend accustomed but already outdated notions" [...] Instead, what is demanded is the kind of analysis that is prepared to examine "the objective contradictions in socialist society, work out recommendations on how to overcome them" and is committed to the principles of "social justice". This calls for "bold exploration, competition of ideas and trends in science, fruitful discussion and debate" and the willingness to come to "daring conclusions" [...]

Many congress discussions emphasised that the desired changes in Soviet society would only be brought about by extending and strengthening existing democratic participation of the people. The congress itself was the culmination of months of intensive, serious, frank and lively debate by the whole Soviet people [...]

The same truth applied to sustaining and extending cultural activity throughout society. That means, according to the congress, "carrying out intensive cultural development in the countryside and the newly developed regions" so that cultural life is not seen as the prerogative of the great urban centres. And just as "government should not be seen as the privilege of a narrow circle of professionals", culture should be available to all through the encouragement of amateur artistic activity and a clear policy that gives "the widest scope for identifying people's abilities and making their lives intellectually rich and many-sided". This means that cultural activities and programmes must be more and more related to the real problems, interests and aspirations of working people [...]

Congress agreed to increase funding for cultural programmes [...] A commitment was made to increase the salaries of cultural workers [...] However, it makes clear in the adopted programme that artistic standards must be high; it condemns what it calls "hack work" and Gorbachev's report is scathing about cases of time-serving, careerism and servility to rank found among

writers and artists. He takes pains to point out that their work should be judged “not by resolutions and meetings, but by talented and imaginative books, films, plays, paintings and music” [...]

Those working in the press, TV and radio were congratulated on a number of improvements [...] but were asked to see that news reporting “is politically clear and purposeful, profound, prompt, informative, vivid and comprehensible”. It was agreed that there should be a radical improvement in film distribution and in the publication of books and journals. The programme sees the mass media as essential to the development of an ever greater participation by citizens in administration and management, helping the strengthening of democracy. Gorbachev insists that this means full and frank discussions: “Communists want the truth, always and under all circumstances.” He contrasts this attitude with the way in which “stupefying misinformation” is given to people in the capitalist countries [...]

Nevertheless, the USSR does acknowledge that work of real cultural value takes place in countries such as Britain and the congress reaffirmed its commitment to cultural exchange [...] It is a great pity that the policy of the British government has shown, during the last ten years or so, an ever increasing reluctance to facilitate a genuine programme of cultural relations with the USSR [...]

However, Gorbachev is surely right when he argues that, in spite of existing divisions between socialist and capitalist countries, “an interdependent and in many ways integral world is taking shape” and that the Soviet initiatives in peace have “touched the hearts of millions of people”. We are now in a political situation where numbers of British have moved away from a crude anti-Sovietism towards a position in which they desire to understand and learn more about the life and culture of the peoples of the USSR [...] We should use the recent decisions of the CPSU congress to press again for a more enlightened policy of cultural exchange and dialogue to be

adopted by our own government. This can only help to strengthen the peace process, as well as benefiting the artistic and creative life of both countries. In openness, dialogue, joint work and the development of relationships, we have nothing to lose and a very great deal to gain!

Creative Criticism

Edited extract from Robert Darglish's 'Moscow Diary', Anglo-Soviet Journal, Volume 46, No 2, Summer 1986 (pp8–13).

During the build-up to the congress all kinds of criticisms were published in the form of readers' letters or articles in the newspapers. To take only one example, the necessity for privileges, such as special shops for high-level administrators, was questioned. Under headings like the *Literaturnaya Gazeta's* 'Is it Shameful to Earn Big Money?' the whole problem of incentives and rewards was discussed, and this formed one of the central themes in Mr Gorbachev's report to the congress. There are obviously measures in the pipeline to gear rewards more efficiently to the quality of the end product and its sale to the public. In his speech to the congress Mr Yeltsin, the new Moscow Party Secretary (one of the newcomers who have replaced nearly a third of the former regional Party secretaries) answered the complaint about special shops without saying that they would be abolished altogether, but the word is that he has recently been standing incognito in some queues himself – with painful results for those who keep delicacies under the counter.

In a TV programme in which audiences question well-known writers and scholars about their lives and work, Academician Likhachev, the 80-year-old doyen of Russian literary studies, stressed the need for specialists in the humanities to be consulted before the launching of giant schemes for remaking nature. He himself is one of the initiators of a movement for the preservation of small peoples. His view is that the process of absorption into larger

peoples is probably irreversible but every effort should be made to record, and find a continuation for, their cultures before they are submerged. He was particularly concerned about the plan to turn the northern rivers southward. If applied to the Pechora, he said, this would mean the rapid disappearance of the invaluable Komi culture. Since that programme was made, thanks largely to protests from scholars and writers (Rasputin, Bondarev, Granin and others), a previous Academy of Sciences decision to go ahead with the 'first stage' of the scheme has been reversed, and it is noteworthy that in his congress report Mr Gorbachev specifically encouraged writers to go on taking such action.

In general, television has become much more lively and informative lately. At regular phone-ins on social topics (transport, public services, natural resources, food programme, educational reform, etc) the forceful and erudite commentator Lev Voznesensky conducts a round-table discussion among ministers and top experts in the related spheres while the studio's phone numbers are flashed on the screen and you see the telephone operators at their typewriters tapping out the questions. This is an excellent way of airing complaints and also informing the public about the real issues at stake.

Since the congress the Nine O'Clock News programme *Vremya* has been running a series called *Congress Decisions in Action*, which ranges across the country, spotting successes and failures in industry and agriculture. Its live visual presentation of personalities and situations should be pretty effective, particularly in such paradoxical cases as that of the Odessa port, where new electronic weighing equipment had been installed but – because of obsolete instructions still in force – every trainload had to be reweighed on the old railway scales at a cost in time-loss of millions of roubles.

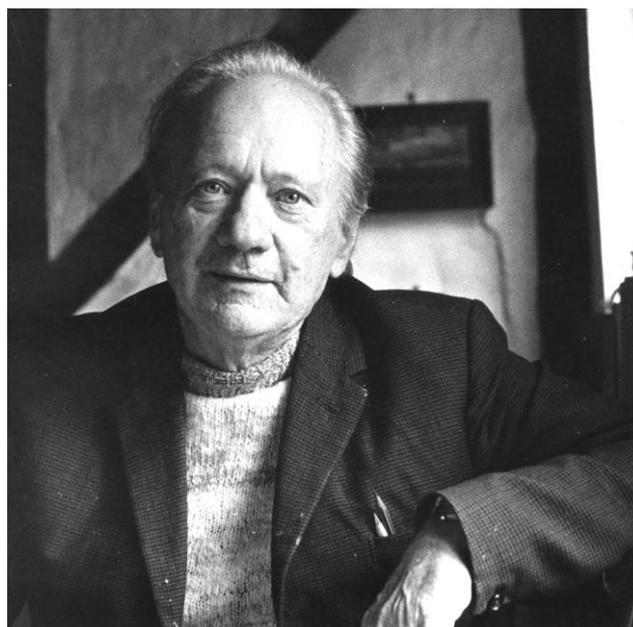
It would be a great mistake to conclude from all this (as some people are only too willing to do) that the Soviet economy is in a mess. The USSR has really splendid

achievements to show in housing, health, public transport, the abolition of unemployment, space exploration and the peaceful use of atomic energy. But, as Mr Gorbachev said at the congress, if existing capacities in heavy industry alone were used to the full, output growth rates would be doubled. Similar intensification throughout the economy should have astonishing results. The congress has inspired people with visions not of pie in the sky but of opportunities right on their doorsteps.

Feature

Jack Lindsay and the SCR

By Helen Lindsay



Jack Lindsay (reproduced by courtesy of Helen Lindsay and Phil Lindsay)

Jack Lindsay (1900–90) was an Australian-born writer who spent the majority of his working life in Britain. He is frequently described as prolific, and this is not surprising given that by the end of his working life Jack had written, translated and edited over 170 books, as well as producing poetry, plays, letters and innumerable articles. Jack joined the Communist Party in 1941 and by the 1950s was a senior figure

in the cultural life of the Party, forming an important link between the mainstream literary groups and distinguished communist writers in Europe and Russia.

Jack was an active and enthusiastic member of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR). As well as regularly contributing to the *Anglo-Soviet Journal* (ASJ), he held the following positions: Vice-President (1969–90), Council Member (1959–63), ASJ Editorial Board Member (1960–63).

His work took Jack to the USSR and the Eastern Bloc many times. His first visit was in 1949 to attend the International Peace Congress in Wroclaw, Poland, followed by visits in 1950, 1954 and 1959 to the Soviet Writers' Union congresses, and, finally, what was for me, as his daughter, a momentous family holiday in 1969 to Moscow and the Black Sea. But Jack's interest and admiration for Russian literature stems from a much earlier period: while a student at Queensland University in 1918 he started learning Russian in order to read Pushkin in the original and spoke up in defence of the young Soviet revolution.

As his work progressed, Jack wrote historical novels, biographies, non-fiction and poetry. In each genre he was interested in exploring periods of great change, eras of social struggle and development because he felt they brought out "the problem of what constitutes human nature under great stress, changing and yet remaining the same, developing the elements of continuity and change" (from an interview with Hazel de Berg, see References below).

In his historical novels he put ordinary people at the heart of the action and sought to build narrative through their individual feelings and values, while at the same time maintaining the sense of a mass cultural, social and economic movement. His use of language to embody meaning brings poetic expression close to the everyday lived experience and this correlated to his belief that politics is a lived experience, not just an intellectual construct separate from the rest of life.

Jack's novels were extremely popular in the USSR and his books were also widely published in Romania, Poland, East Germany and Bulgaria, with some series said to have sold over one million copies. *Private Eye* jokingly branded him the most popular English-speaking author in Outer Mongolia – a comment he took with characteristic good grace. His travels and extensive correspondence brought him into contact with Soviet writers – Fadeyev, Tikhonov, Marshak, Leonov, Ehrenburg – whose work he championed and helped to introduce to a Western audience. Yet his relationship with the Writer's Union was not untroubled and his defence of Russian writers such as Akhmatova, Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn was censured. Jack felt strongly that the USSR should be confident enough to take criticism and urged his Soviet friends to accept the publication of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Overall, Jack's political and cultural approach was inclusive in a period when there was considerable discord, and division was a prevailing force.

The British secret service kept extensive files on Jack (recently made available at The National Archives, Kew). Like many other communists in the 1950s he was under constant clandestine surveillance. However, due probably to his widespread activism and international profile, MI5 collected an unusually large amount of information on him, including work he carried out for friendship societies and the BBC, foreign travel and contact with colleagues.

In 2014 Smokestack Books published the first selection of Jack Lindsay's poems to appear in the UK: *Who are the English? Selected Poems: 1935–1981* (available from <http://smokestack-books.co.uk>). It is a unique poetic record of British intellectual and political life over fifty years, from the high hopes of the Popular Front in the 1930s through the long retreat of the Cold War to the nuclear arms race of the 1980s. It includes Jack's Mass Declamations *On Guard for Spain*, *Who Are the English?* and *Cry of Greece*, as well as a series of remarkable letters in verse to Bertolt Brecht, Tristan Tzara and the Soviet poet Nikolai

Tikhonov. The following extract from the collection is the first part of Jack's poem *Pablo Neruda at Stalingrad, 1949*:

Pablo Neruda at Stalingrad, 1949

1. We Were on our Way to the Tractor Factory

We were on our way to the Tractor Factory.
We stopped the car and walked by the
zigzag cracks,
the oddments of war washt clean of their
blood by the rain
and the harsh wind licking the straggled
bushes.

We crossed a railway bridge. And I watched
him bend
and take some shrapnel out of the ribs of
the earth.
Later we chugged across the Volga
and swam in the great waters, and in my
head
the moment remained. That and the sense
of cleansing,
the sky that was sky upon sky, the hurdling
sweep of the river
and the broad steppe-wind sliding into Asia.

Neruda looked out on Stalingrad,
recognising
his own images uprising
all around him from the burnt and buckled
tracks
and battered scarps, the cracks
of parched and living clay,
the rubble of steel and rusted stone.
His face was sad
with acid tangs of wormwood blown
across the ravaged day,
the stark eternal earth of Stalingrad.

Neruda looked on Stalingrad,
realising
his own images uprising,
and weighed a scrap of shrapnel in his
hand,
the split transfigured land
with stubborn steel-lights spilt
on children of the unbroken dance,
his face was glad,
his song was gathered in his glance,
where spread serenely built

the green eternal city of Stalingrad.

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Helen Lindsay is Jack Lindsay's daughter. She is contactable by email on helenlindsayconservation@gmail.com.

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Book Reviews

Stalin's Englishman

By Andrew Lownie (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015, ISBN: 978-1-473-62736-9, Hbk, 448pp, £17.00

Andrew Lownie gives a vivid insight into the world of Guy Burgess, the famous Soviet spy who defected to Moscow in 1951, in this well written, detailed and engaging biography.

Lownie foreshadows Burgess's escape to the Soviet Union in an early reference to his minor-nobility Huguenot ancestry and their flight to England in the seventeenth century for matters of conscience.

Lownie sets out the privileged upbringing that Burgess enjoyed. This included education at preparatory school, Eton, Dartmouth Naval College and Cambridge University. All of this ideally qualified Burgess for a place in the British establishment elite. Lownie suggests it may

also have been this background that secured his entrance to the world of British intelligence.

However, it was at Cambridge that Burgess first became interested in communism. He became politicised by the world situation, mass unemployment and his participation in the activities of the Cambridge University Socialist Society. With fellow Cambridge communists, he first visited the Soviet Union in June 1934. Subsequently, he was recruited by Kim Philby to work for the Soviet Union, together with Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross.

In London Burgess joined the BBC. In the run-up to war with Nazi Germany he produced anti-Hitler propaganda. From that position and from information gathered from his contacts in Whitehall, including John Cairncross, he was able to advise Moscow that Britain had no intention of concluding a military pact with the Soviet Union. The consequence was the Non-Aggression Pact signed between the Soviet Union and Germany on 23 August 1939.

During the war Burgess simultaneously ran agents for both British and Soviet intelligence. With all of the Cambridge Five well placed within British intelligence, the Soviet handlers were impressed by the extent of their access and the vast volume of information they received. In fact, the intelligence was so good that at one point they were suspected of being *agents provocateurs* planted by British intelligence.

After the war Burgess became assistant to Hector McNeil, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, giving him access to Cabinet papers and minutes, as well as those for Defence Committee and Chiefs of Staff. From there he was seconded briefly to the Information Research Department, a new organisation established in 1948 with the agreement of Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevan and aimed at counteracting the Soviet 'ideological offensive'. This new organisation distributed propaganda for British embassies and the media. Interestingly, it also supplied the Labour

Party's International Department, when Denis Healey was Secretary, and the trade unions. Burgess stayed long enough to be able to brief Moscow on the new organisation. Returning to McNeil, he was able to take out thousands of documents, including those on the Berlin crisis.

After a posting to Washington as second secretary, he returned to England in disgrace, following bouts of outrageous drinking. He fled with Donald Maclean to Moscow after an investigation into Maclean, who was identified in coded telegrams by US intelligence.

Charles Stewart

The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James's, 1932–1943

By Ivan Maisky, Gabriel Gorodetsky (translated by Tatiana Sorokina and Oliver Ready, Yale University Press, 2015, ISBN: 978-0-300-18067-1, Hbk, xlvii + 584pp, 72 b/w illus, index, £25.00)

Maisky's memoir of his life as a diplomat was first published in Russian in 1964 and quickly translated into English in three volumes: *Who Helped Hitler?*, *Spanish Notebooks* and *Memoirs of a Soviet Ambassador: The War 1939–43*. It was thought that this account was all we had from the life of this unique and talented man, who bestrode the Tsarist, Revolutionary and Soviet periods, and was successful in each. Until, that is, in 1993 when the archivist at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs brought out a volume of Maisky's personal diary for 1941 and handed it to the Israeli historian Gabriel Gorodetsky. This was the beginning of a huge project to translate and publish the whole series.

This excellently produced one-volume edition, with an editorial introduction and commentary interspersed between the diary extracts, is said to contain about a quarter of the diaries, and is the forerunner of a

complete three-volume English edition to follow. The diaries cover exactly the years that Maisky served as Soviet Ambassador in London. The value of this publication is simply that this is one of the very few diaries kept by Soviet dignitaries in the 1930s and 40s, for reasons that we are all aware of.

The British reader will be fascinated by the insights into *British* society on the left and the right, the British political scene and the British upper classes of the time. Gorodetsky compares Maisky's diaries to Pepys's in their "astute observation, spiced with anecdotes and gossip". Pepys may even have been a model for the amusing description of the little princesses giggling at a reception given by their father, George VI, or the anecdotes about George Bernard Shaw's marriage.

Maisky's remarkable network of British friends and acquaintances ran the gamut of statesmen (Churchill, Eden, Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald), Foreign Office types (Vansittart), newspaper magnates (Beaverbrook), politicians on both sides of the House, writers and intellectuals (Shaw, HG Wells, Sidney and Beatrice Webb), trade unionists, bankers and that uncategorisable original, Lady Astor.

Maisky was introduced to Churchill in the mid-1930s by Vansittart, a strong supporter of the British-Soviet alliance, although no sympathiser with communism. The detailed and lively reports in Maisky's diaries of his many meetings with Churchill are particularly valuable, because they aren't minuted in British archives. Churchill was frank with Maisky, telling him in March 1938 of his conviction that Hitler's Germany, not the Soviet Union, represented "the greatest menace to the British Empire", but adding that "if, one fine day, the German fascist threat to the Empire disappears and the communist menace raises its head again, then ... I would raise the banner of struggle against you once more".

Maisky wasn't exaggerating when, on his departure, he wrote to Churchill that "from a personal and political point of view my

associations with you ... have been the highlight of my Ambassadorship here".

Andrew Jameson

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