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Feature

The Soviet Five-Year Plans and Preparation for the Nazi Invasion

By Dr Michael (Mick) Costello

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the launch of the First Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union. In 1928 the Soviet Union embarked on the road of national planning with all resources socialised, mobilised and directed by the government. The First Five-Year Plan aimed to transform the country from an agricultural economy to an overwhelmingly industrial one, with a mighty defence capacity. Pre-revolutionary imperial Russia had fewer than twenty per cent of its workforce engaged in industry; famines struck every two years.¹

In this article, I briefly consider the first three Five-Year Plans (1928–41) and the build-up to World War II (WWII), before touching on two disputed elements: collectivisation, and electrification and irrigation in Central Asia.



We Will Fulfill the Plan of Great Works, poster by
Gustav Klutsis, 1930 (SCRSS Library)

The Russian Revolution was followed first by five years of foreign military intervention and home-grown revolts, which ravaged the economy, and then by five years of peace, during which a start was made on economic restoration under state-regulated capitalism. The latter registered a growth in agriculture but had industry lagging, as the free-market prices for peasant produce were too expensive for the growing cities.

In 1926 the Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) discussed a change in course – for total socialisation of industry and farming. The following year's CPSU Congress outlined the objectives of the First Five-Year Plan for 1928–33.

Joseph Stalin's report to that Congress summed up its aims: "to ensure the acceleration of the rate of development of industry and ensure for industry the leading role in the whole of the national economy ... that in the course of development of the national economy, the socialist sector of the national economy, the socialist forms of economy, should be ensured ever-increasing relative importance at the expense of the private-commodity and capitalist sectors."²

He warned of "the revival of interventionist tendencies among the imperialist countries ... preparing ... conditions for war against the U.S.S.R."³ The same year Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for War, had argued for heavy industries to be built far behind the frontiers and that the whole economy should be placed on a war basis.⁴

By the end of the first two years of the plan's progress, Stalin was encouraged to state: "We are becoming a metal country, a motorised country, a tractorised country."⁵ To force the pace, he told a conference of industrial managers that, if the USSR was to survive, it must industrialise within ten years to a level that had taken capitalist Europe and the USA up to a century to reach; the country had to overcome "her backwardness, military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness".⁶

An all-out drive was made to collectivise the peasants into large farms, with the output state planned and sold to the state at fixed prices to feed the growing industrial workforce, as well as to build up reserve stocks for the military. Coercion was used and the richer peasants slaughtered cattle which, combined with poor harvests and grain requisitions, led to famine in grain-growing areas.

After the first, there followed two further plans (1933–37 and 1938–41), the second of these being interrupted by the Nazi-led invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. These built on the achievements of the First Five-Year Plan but also overcame problems

that had occurred in plan fulfilment: they aligned, fine-tuned and co-ordinated the work of the many new enterprises; mechanised the collectivised peasants; built up communication systems, and scientific and military research. Famine was ended from the Second Five-Year Plan onwards and the Soviet Union's economy was boosted, taking second place only to the USA.

Meanwhile the international situation was worsening. In 1931 the Japanese invasion of Manchuria brought them to the eastern frontiers of the Soviet Union, whose strength they probed by provoking military clashes. In the West, growing Fascism in Germany and across Eastern Europe made no secret of its common objective to destroy the 'Bolshevist Judaism' coming from 'the East'.

Plans for the invasion of the USSR continued: in 1934 Poland signed a pact with Germany, and in 1938 in Munich Britain and France gave the Nazis carte blanche to invade Czechoslovakia, opening up the way to march eastwards. Britain and France, together with Poland, refused Soviet offers of an alliance to halt the Nazis, and Poland and Hungary both gained territory from the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. During the truncated Third Five-Year Plan of 1938–41 even greater emphasis was placed on building the arms and arms-related industries, with a growing proportion of new factories that could be switched quickly to produce armaments.

In August 1939 the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression agreement with Germany in an attempt to delay the Nazi invasion that Munich made inevitable. The Nazis and their allies invaded in June 1941, only six weeks after Stalin's last warning that war was imminent, given to a closed gathering in the Kremlin of graduates of all military academies.⁷ It took only until 1942 for the Soviet Union to match Germany's level of arms manufacture and to begin rolling back the invaders. Harrison has noted: "the Soviet mobilisation of industry appears to have been more successful than the German."⁸ It took the Nazis only eight months to occupy Greece, France six

weeks, Norway one month, Belgium eighteen days, Holland five and Denmark six hours. Austria had capitulated without a fight.

According to the respected and not uncritical historian Riasanovsky, “[t]he plans did succeed – and succeed strikingly – in developing industry, particularly heavy industry, and in collectivising agriculture. Scepticism turned to astonishment ... entire new industries appeared, while huge virgin territories, including the distant and difficult far north, began to enter the economic life of the country”.⁹ Significantly, and most relevant to this article, he added: “Red armed forces, by contrast with the tsarist army, obtained a highly developed industrial and armaments base, a fact which alone justifies the five-year plans, in the opinion of some critics.”¹⁰

Collectivisation provided the grain to feed the industrial workers in rapidly expanding cities, as well as reserves for the army for the forthcoming war, from a reduced rural population. The urban population increased from 26 million to 38.7 million between 1926 and 1932, while the number of employed jumped from 11.5 million in 1928 to 24 million in 1932.¹¹ Even a critic of the severe costs of collectivisation wrote: “it is doubtful anything short of this kind of mass mobilization would have given Russia the means to withstand the Nazi onslaught a few years later.”¹²

There has been much writing to denigrate everything that the USSR achieved: exaggerating the cost, even spreading Nazi-initiated propaganda that the Soviet Government intentionally caused the famines of the early 1930s, writing about WWII as a tale of Russian brutality against the German civil population, criticising the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Rarely are there reports such as Keefe's: “In the first five year plan, which ended in 1934, there was a fifty percent increase in industrial output with an average annual growth rate of eighteen percent, while the population of industrial workers doubled. Much of this success can be attributed to

the zeal with which the workers approached their work.”¹³ There is little about ending famines, illiteracy, homelessness, unemployment and epidemics.

Throughout the Cold War and continuing today, many scholars and propagandists such as Conquest¹⁴ and Appelbaum¹⁵ writing on collectivisation have concentrated on and exaggerated the costs in lives, also claiming that famines were state policy. However, since the Russian archives opened up in 1993, other detailed scholarship has drawn on statistics held in them to reach different conclusions. In particular, Davies and Wheatcroft demonstrate how groundless is the charge of intended famine and illustrate the lengths to which the Soviet leadership went to correct problems that arose during the first plan.¹⁶

Works by authors such as Westerman¹⁷ still pour scorn on the projects of Central Asia, dwelling on difficulties encountered in their construction, ignoring the success of industrialisation and the part played by it in the war. They contrast with the view of Wheeler that the Soviet irrigation project “in spite of the gloomy prognostications of Western students of Central Asian affairs was on a remarkable scale and linked it to electrification in the same area”¹⁸, while industrial output in Central Asia increased “more than 12-fold between 1926 and 1940”¹⁹ to six times as great as the best attained during the tsarist Empire. The grandiose canal building system in arid Central Asia included industrial superstructure, power stations, cement and engineering works, according to Tartur²⁰. He spells out their immense military contribution to the home front in WWII, sustaining industrial plants that were evacuated before the invading Nazi armies.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 removed the barriers to state control and made possible planning in all spheres, managing “spectacular advances in the sphere of public provision”²¹ and leading to the victory over Fascism.

Footnotes

1 NK Krupskaya, *The Woman Worker*, translated by M Costello, London, Manifesto Press Co-operative, 2017, p 1. *Originally published 1905, reprinted 1925.*

2 JV Stalin, 'The 15th Congress of the CPSU(B), December 2–19, 1927: Political Report of the Central Committee, December 3', Marxists Internet Archive website, 2009, URL: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1927/12/02.htm>

3 Ibid

4 EH Carr, RW Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy: 1926–1929*, New York, Macmillan, 1969, p 430

5 Ibid, p 451

6 JV Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953, pp 454–458.

7 'Sekretnoe vystuplenie Stalina', Okno v Rossiyu website, 30 April 2013, URL: http://windowrussia.ru/rv/2013_04_30/Sekretnoe-vistuplenie-Stalina/

8 M Harrison, 'Industrial Mobilisation for World War II: A German Comparison' in J Barber & M Harrison (Eds), *The Soviet Defence Industry Complex from Stalin to Khrushchev*, London, Macmillan Press, 2000, pp 99–117

9 N Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000

10 Ibid, p 501

11 P Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929*, New York, University of Cambridge Press, 1985, p 94

12 JR Keefe, 'Stalin and the Drive to Industrialize the Soviet Union' in *Inquiries Journal*, Vol 1, No 10, 2009, URL: <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1684/stalin-and-the-drive-to-industrialize-the-soviet-union>

13 Ibid

14 R Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986

15 A Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, Allen Lane, 2017

16 RW Davies & SG Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933*, Volume 5 of *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia*, London, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2004

17 F Westerman, *Engineers of the Soul: In the Footsteps of Stalin's Writers*, London, Harvill Secker, 2010

18 G Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964, p 173

19 Ibid, p 159

20 S Tartur, *The Hungry Steppe Becomes a Land of Plenty*, Moscow, Novosti, 1974

21 D Lane, 'The Significance of the October Revolution' in *Theory and Struggle*, Vol 118, pp 3–11, 2017

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

SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the SCRSS AGM will take place at 11.00 on Saturday 19 May 2018 at the Society's premises. The meeting is open to SCRSS members only. The deadline for motions and nominations of SCRSS members for election to the next Council is Friday 20 April. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member. The agenda will be available from early May.

SCRSS–Marx Memorial Library Working Group

At the November 2017 meeting of the SCRSS Council, Marx Memorial Library (MML) archivist and librarian Meirian Jump gave an update on the work undertaken

towards its proposed bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for substantial funding to expand its premises (Marx House) in Clerkenwell Green, London. Following on from the proposal that the SCRSS joins with MML in developing the bid, a joint working group has been created with senior members from both organisations. The group will look at the feasibility of the SCRSS moving to the enlarged building, and how the Society might function there if it did so. The intention is that the proposed bid to the HLF would include the costs of cataloguing the SCRSS collections, a project manager, and all costs associated with a move to new premises. The first meeting of the working group is scheduled to take place in January 2018. Members of the SCRSS will be kept informed of any specific plans via the *SCRSS Digest* and the SCRSS e-newsletters; there will also be an update at the SCRSS AGM in May. It has already been agreed that, should the SCRSS Council eventually be in a position to recommend a move to Marx House, an Extraordinary General Meeting of the SCRSS membership would be called to vote on such a motion.

Membership Renewal

A substantial number of members will receive a membership renewal notice with this edition of the *SCRSS Digest*. As always, an early response is of great assistance to the Society – both financially and in terms of avoiding further reminders. Please double-check that you are paying the correct membership fee (see www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm), in particular if you pay by standing order. We accept payment by bank transfer, standing order, cheque or cash only. Please contact the Honorary Secretary for the Society's bank details if you wish to pay by one-off bank transfer, or to set up a standing order to pay your membership fee automatically in future or commence a regular monthly donation. The SCRSS is extremely grateful to all those members who 'top up' their membership fee with a donation. Donations are also eligible for Gift Aid, which provides further benefit for the Society.

Library News

Work continues on moving the Society's fantastic collection of Soviet children's literature from the basement to the top floor. Over 20 metres of additional shelving is planned for the basement which should make it a little easier to access the books that remain there. Volunteers also continue to work on cataloguing the Education section and sorting books in the History section. In addition, the de-acquisition of duplicates in the Literature section is helping to create some more space – and provide visitors with an opportunity to buy some bargains from the display in the ground floor hallway.

Lenin Comes to Oxford



Street poster for the *Lenin: Leader of the Russian Revolution* exhibition in Oxford

In November 2017 the SCRSS exhibition *Lenin: Leader of the Russian Revolution* had a highly successful run at the North Wall Gallery in Oxford. Over 100 guests attended the opening and more than 1,000 people visited during the ten days it was on display. Pupils from St Edward's School, to which the Gallery is attached, and other local schools took the opportunity to view the 80+ exhibits (photos, posters and objects), all drawn from the SCRSS archives. The local publicity for the exhibition included large-format outdoor adverts on local streets, several half-page adverts in the *Morning Star*, and news coverage in *The Guardian*, the *Morning Star*

and local media. The Society earned a substantial fee, and the bonus of excellent sales of its Russian Revolution centenary mugs and the special autumn 2017 issue of the *SCRSS Digest*. The exhibition will be on display at the SCRSS in time for the Saturday opening on 3 March, and we will inform members of additional dates on the SCRSS website and our SCRSS e-newsletters.

RRCC Update

Marking the centenary of an event that 'shook the world' was always going to be a challenge. With a vast range of major institutions and organisations across the UK looking to present their own interpretations of the events of 1917, both the SCRSS and Marx Memorial Library (MML) felt that there was room for a more informed and positive perspective. Initial discussions led to the creation of the Russian Revolution Centenary Committee (RRCC) (www.1917.org.uk), which attracted a broad membership of labour movement, heritage and cultural organisations with the aim of informing debate about the Revolution's continuing relevance to politics and society today.



Participants arriving at the Russian Revolution Centenary Conference on 4 November 2017
(photo by Karl Weiss)

Although the initial purpose was to exchange ideas, information and resources,

discussion turned to the RRCC itself doing something to signify the importance of the anniversary. Four key elements emerged. The first was the MML exhibition *The Russian Revolution 1917–1922 and its Impact on World War One and the British and European Labour Movement*. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and created by Professor Mary Davis using archive materials from MML, the SCRSS and other sources, it went on display at various locations, including the SCRSS, from May 2017 onwards.



Final session of the Russian Revolution Centenary Conference on 4 November 2017
(photo by Karl Weiss)

The other three elements of the RRCC's work relied heavily on financial support from the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust and the Ken Gill Memorial Fund, together with donations from trade unions, other organisations and individuals. With funds largely secured, work began on an ambitious day-long international conference at the TUC Congress House in November, a film festival running from September to November, and the creation of a documentary film that would become a key legacy of the project.

The MML Education Committee took on the task of preparing the programme for the international conference, and soon the list of speakers was broadening out from Europe to India, South Africa, Cuba, and the USA. The Rio and Phoenix independent cinemas in London agreed to host the *Spark* film festival, screening eight classics related to the Russian Revolution. And Chris Reeves of Platform Films began work on a

documentary film, narrated by the actress Maxine Peake, to incorporate historic footage from the archives of the SCRSS and interviews with the conference speakers.

The SCRSS had a substantial presence at the *Russian Revolution Centenary: Marking 100 Years Since the October Revolution Conference* on Saturday 4 November, which attracted a capacity audience of 500 people, including many SCRSS members. As Co-Chair of the RRCC, I had the honour of being Master of Ceremonies in the main hall throughout the day; SCRSS Vice-President David Lane and Executive Committee member Christine Lindey were both keynote speakers; and a band of SCRSS volunteers staffed our stall, helping to generate ten new members and substantial sales of our centenary mugs and the *SCRSS Digest*.



Claire Weiss, one of the SCRSS members helping out on the SCRSS bookstall at the conference on 4 November 2017 (photo by Karl Weiss)

Judging by the social media flowing live from the conference, and subsequent feedback, both attendees and speakers felt that the event fulfilled its purpose of looking closely at the Russian Revolution, its aftermath and its continued impact around the globe. The documentary film *Red October: Revolution in Russia*, shown in part at the conference, is due to be completed by Chris Reeves in early 2018 and will be screened at the SCRSS. All the keynote speakers at the conference were interviewed for the film and it will form a lasting legacy for the work of the RRCC. In exchange for the loan of 16mm films from

the SCRSS collection, Platform Films has undertaken to begin work on digitising them, which should secure them for future use and enable the Society to screen these classics of Soviet cinema once again.

Other Russian Revolution Events

The SCRSS hosted several events in October–November to mark the centenary. Mike Pentelow delivered an excellent account of London links with revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin and Nadezhda Krupskaya; our guests Margarita Mudrak and Tatiana Emelianova from the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation gave members an overview of events marking the centenary in their home city; and later the same month SCRSS Council member Andrew Jameson attracted a number of non-members to his lecture on the October Revolution in Russian literature. The Society also hosted the TUC Library exhibition *The Russian Revolution and its Impact on the Left in Britain 1917–1926*.

Next Events

Saturday 10 February 2018, 11.00–14.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members Only

Saturday 10 February 2018, 14.00
Lecture: Kevin Bridge on *Stalingrad and Battles Further West – The Great Patriotic War in 1943*
Normal admission fees apply.

Saturday 3 March 2018, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members Only with Exhibition *Lenin: Leader of the Russian Revolution*

Saturday 21 – Sunday 22 April 2018, 10.00–16.20 daily
Event: 10th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar 2018

Our two-day seminar offers a stimulating lecture programme in Russian, aimed at teachers, translators and interpreters of

Russian, and all with an advanced-level comprehension of spoken Russian. Maximum 30 participants. Two parallel streams, led by speakers from St Petersburg State University, Russia. *Russian Language and Linguistics*: Tatiana Piotrovskaya, Senior Lecturer, Department of English Philology and Language Culture Studies. *Contemporary Russian Culture*: Dr Natalia Bogoliubova, Associate Professor, Department of International Cultural and Humanitarian Co-operation. *'Early bird' rate (pay by Friday 9 March 2018)*: £125 SCRSS members, £145 non-members. *Standard rate (pay by Friday 6 April 2018)*: £140 SCRSS members, £165 non-members. For full details, visit www.scrss.org.uk/russianseminar.htm.

Saturday 19 May 2018, 11.00
Event: SCRSS Annual General Meeting
SCRSS members only.

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

Events Update

In November 2017 Remembrance Sunday was marked at the Soviet War Memorial by an Act of Remembrance. Wreaths were laid by the Mayor of Southwark, local MP Neil Coyle, diplomats from CIS countries, Second World War veterans and a range of organisations, including the SCRSS. As this *SCRSS Digest* goes to press in January 2018, the annual Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony, organised jointly with Southwark

Council, is taking place, with wreaths laid at the Soviet War Memorial and the nearby Holocaust Memorial Tree.

SMTF to Become a Charity

The Trustees of the SMTF (Soviet Memorial Trust Fund) have agreed to apply to the UK Charity Commission to create a charitable trust. This will formalise the work of the Trustees and broaden fund-raising opportunities. Details, including the new name, will be outlined in the next issue of the *SCRSS Digest*.

Next Events

Wednesday 9 May 2018, 11.00
Event: Victory Day Act of Remembrance at the Soviet War Memorial, London
For more information, please email the Honorary Secretary of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) on smtf@hotmail.co.uk.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, London (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund. For more information about the Memorial, see the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/sovietmemorial.htm.

Feature

European Schoolbooks Ltd and the Russian Book Trade in the UK

By Masha Kulikova, Marketing Assistant,
European Schoolbooks Ltd

Founded in 1964, European Schoolbooks Ltd, together with our European Bookshop in London, is a specialist provider of books, teaching resources and periodicals in

European languages. At our headquarters in Cheltenham we offer wholesale services to booksellers, educational establishments and commercial organisations in the UK and worldwide. In addition to Russian, we specialise in French, Spanish, German, Italian and Portuguese. I have worked in Marketing in European Schoolbooks' Cheltenham office for one and a half years and, in my opinion, the Russian book trade in the UK is a fascinating and promising business.



The European Bookshop, London
(photo courtesy of European Schoolbooks Ltd)

Our customers interested in Russian come from all parts of the world, including Australia, Canada, the United States and Europe. We have a loyal base of private customers overseas who order from us on a regular basis. In the UK our main customers are UK-based booksellers, Russian schools and private customers.

Our most popular products are language-learning resources from publishing houses in Russia such as Zlatoust and "Russian Language". Courses, which specialise in books for teachers and learners of Russian as a foreign language. These publishers also cover Russian as a second language, which is especially popular with our customers in the vast Russian-speaking community in the UK. The range of language-learning products we offer includes self-study and classroom courses, grammars, reference books, dictionaries, accessible literature, games, DVDs, CD-ROMs and downloadable software.

Literature is popular, especially Russian translations of the world-famous *Game of Thrones* series, *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Our young readers love translated versions of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and books by children's authors such as Julia Donaldson, Roald Dahl and Eric Carle. And, of course, Russian classics are always bestsellers, including such golden names as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Gogol, Nabokov, Bulgakov and Tsvetaeva.

Our bestselling fiction tends to be by recent nominees for the various literary prizes, such as the Russian National Bestseller, Big Book, Russian Booker and the Nobel Prize in Literature. We keep track of the latest award results and import the winning titles, so that our customers can easily follow general trends in Russian literature. The most popular Russian literature publishers remain Eksmo, AST and Azbuka, as well as mainly children's publishers such as Rosmen, Makhaon and Samokat.

We work closely with our Russian partners. Delivery times are better now than they were several years ago: it can take only a week to ten days to deliver books from Russia to our headquarters in Cheltenham. However, finance is still a problem. Apart from the cost of money transfers, the language-learning materials themselves are not cheap. The publishers admit this, explaining that their prices are high because of their specialised materials and the small circulation (5,000 copies in comparison to 30,000 copies of an average popular novel). Language-learning resources are also printed on high-quality paper. Last but not least, these publishers depend on imported, currency-based printing materials; each year the cost of printing house services increases by 15–20 per cent due to the exchange rate and the economic situation in the country, which all contribute to general price growth.

We understand that our customers want low prices, so we offer a partnership programme to schools and universities that enables their staff and students to buy books from us at an agreed discount. For private customers,

we provide discounts at events that we attend throughout the year. One of these is the Language Show in London, the biggest languages event in Britain. We have been taking part in the Language Show for the last twenty years and in 2018 we will have a bigger stand than ever. Visitors will be able to see and compare all the latest books and materials from our publishers in all of our languages, including Russian. We are always delighted to see a big interest in Russian language materials and, having attended the show myself twice now, it is especially gratifying to welcome the same Russian customers who come every year to browse the latest products on display and place orders with us.



The Online Russian Bookshop website
(photo courtesy of European Schoolbooks Ltd)

Apart from the Language Show, there are many other events where Russian has proved to be popular, including Language World, ALL conferences and, of course, fully dedicated Russian events such as the Russian Teachers' Group conferences and the Russian Children's Education Fairs. We are delighted to support any events that are run in the UK by Russian organisations. In addition to participating in events, we advertise in various magazines and newspapers. We advertise in the SCRSS Digest on a regular basis, as well as supporting the SCRSS Russian Language

Seminars. We also write reviews of Russian publications for *The School Librarian* magazine, promoting new Russian authors to UK schools and libraries.

Of course, there are still some Russian speakers who don't know about us. At the last Russian Children's Education Fair, some customers admitted that they did not know about our European Bookshop in London, or that they had passed the shop many times, but not gone in, assuming that 'European' languages did not include Russian. Therefore, visitors at Russian events are very pleased to find out, firstly, that we sell Russian books and, secondly, that we have a bookshop with a physical address in central London where they can come and browse real books.

We receive interesting enquiries from customers on a daily basis. Requests have ranged from "2 metres of Russian books" for a film production, to the 5-volume *Philokalia (Добротолюбие)*, a key text for all the Eastern Orthodox Churches written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries, to Boris Sopol'nyak's *The Cheka-OGPU Secret Archives (Секретные Архивы ВЧК-ОГПУ)*.

As a native Russian speaker, I really enjoy being able to help other people learn about my culture. Also, living overseas and having the chance to speak my own language as part of my job is like a gift. In general, I can't help but admire the interest in the UK and other countries in Russian publishing. I feel proud when our customers praise the 'elegance' of Russian literature and share their opinions with me. Such positive feedback always inspires me and makes me feel useful. European Schoolbooks will continue to do our best to help promote Russian culture and Russian language in the UK.

The European Bookshop is located at 123 Gloucester Road, London SW7 4TE, Tel: +44 (0)20-7734-5259, Web: www.russianbookshop.co.uk, www.europeanbookshop.com. See also a short video about our bookshop at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rOf-DMOd0w>.

Feature

Improving Business Relations with Russia: The Alfa Fellowship Programme

By Seraphina Davey, Director – Russia & CIS, Taboola

I am sure that the readers of the *SCRSS Digest* know only too well the extent to which Russia is misunderstood and misjudged by those who haven't had the opportunity to live, work or travel there. If young professionals from the West had more exposure to Russian business, perhaps their interactions would be more positive. It is with this very goal in mind that Mikhail Fridman, business magnate and philanthropist, set up the Alfa Fellowship Programme over ten years ago. I was lucky enough to secure a place on the programme in 2012.

Fridman's idea is to bring young professionals from the UK, US and Germany to Moscow for ten months, to provide a stipend, accommodation, seminars and language training, and to enable each Fellow to complete work placements at leading institutions appropriate to their field. In doing so, he hopes to foster intercultural understanding, and ultimately improve business relationships and outcomes for those engaged in global business.

Founded in 2004, the Alfa Fellowship Programme is funded by Alfa Bank and run by Cultural Vistas, an organisation based in New York. Modelled on the Bosch Fellowship, candidates must demonstrate a strong academic record, interest in Russian and European / Eurasian affairs, and have a clear vision for what their professional skills might bring to the workplace in Moscow and what they will take away from it. Russian language skills vary (I was a complete beginner) but the majority are intermediate or advanced level, and many speak a third language.

I first heard about Alfa from a friend in 2009 and immediately wanted to apply. However, at that time I didn't have enough experience under my belt to get the most out of the programme, having lived in Spain for a year and been working in media and publishing in the UK for just two. Life in London meandered on and in December 2011 I found myself again yearning for a new experience, and then remembered the Alfa Fellowship. With five years of experience in sales and advertising by now, I was much better placed to think strategically about what I might get out of the programme, and what professional skills I might be able to offer to an organisation in Moscow. The application process requires candidates to outline these motivations and plans in writing, propose how they might spend their year, and produce a piece in Russian (where appropriate) or another foreign language. Approximately thirty applicants are invited to face-to-face interviews with a panel from Alfa Bank itself, Cultural Vistas and former Fellows.

Intensive language lessons started in London three months before departure and our group – five Brits and seven Americans – relocated to Moscow in June 2012. The summer was spent at language school and at lectures at the Higher School of Economics, as well as attending various meetings with institutions from the Carnegie Moscow Centre and World Bank to Ekho Moskvyy. The idea was to complement linguistic knowledge with insights into Russian businesses in a range of spheres, getting an insider's look into what makes business in Russia tick and the local mind-sets.

During this time we explored options for work placements, which were to start in October. For me, the Alfa Fellowship Programme was not only an opportunity to live and work in Moscow and to learn Russian, but was also a way of taking my career in a new direction, without the risk of leaving a job or taking a large downwards or sideways step. I therefore sought to reposition my career more online, and found a placement to do so at CTC Media, Russia's largest independent television

channel. The level of English among employees was low, apart from in the senior team, so I mainly worked on research and global projects, and tried to improve my Russian with conversations around the office. The work was isolating at times, and navigating the social norms and cultural nuances of an all-Russian office was certainly challenging, but I was able to gain a lot of the knowledge of digital advertising that I had lacked, and also devote a lot of time to Russian outside the office.

I ended up staying in Russia for four years, and moved back to London to manage the Russia and CIS business for an advertising technology company. I had wanted to be able to achieve a level of Russian that would enable me to be an asset to an organisation in the UK or elsewhere. While my linguistic knowledge is what got me the job, in fact I think what is more valuable is my experience of being inside Russian organisations, working with Russians on a daily basis and understanding the circumstances in which they operate. I had initially been concerned that Russian-language newspaper editors and corporate teams might not necessarily respond well to a Brit selling them advertising technology in their own language. In fact, I have been delighted to find that my familiarity not just with the language of Russia, but with its culture, cities, countryside, professional and leisure pursuits, has proved a great advantage and invaluable in establishing lasting relationships.

For more information on the programme, visit [Alfa Fellowship Programme www.alfafellowship.org/](http://alfafellowship.org/) and [Cultural Vistas https://culturalvistas.org/programs/abroad/alfa-fellowship-program/](http://culturalvistas.org/programs/abroad/alfa-fellowship-program/).

Book Reviews

The Russian Revolution

By Alan Moorehead (Amberley Publishing, 2017, ISBN: 978-1-4456-6732-4, Pbk, 304pp, £14.99)

SCRSS Catalogue No: 2989

The origin of this book lies in secret German Foreign Office records, concealed during the Second World War in various hiding places all over Germany until their discovery in 1945. Their subject was the close connection of German agents with the Russian revolutionary movement from 1915 until the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917. Their object was to finance the movement for peace in the Russian revolutionary ranks to achieve Russia's withdrawal from the First World War.

The original research into these records was carried out by Dr Passony of Georgetown University. In 1956, provided with a grant by the University of Pennsylvania and funded by *Life* magazine, military historian Alan Moorehead was given the task of turning that research into a full-length book. Thus, the main theme of Moorehead's *The Russian Revolution* is to prove that Germany played a part in bringing Lenin and the Bolsheviks to power. The author expresses support for bourgeois democracy over revolutionary change, and is critical of Lenin and Marxism.

The book was first published in 1957. This edition is a reprint in 2017 for what is stated in the press release as the "90th anniversary" (sic) of the Russian Revolution.

The author goes beyond the original research by giving a detailed account of the build-up to the 1905 Revolution which forced the autocratic Tsar Nicholas II into allowing elections to a State Duma. However, its powers were strictly limited and it could be dissolved at the will of the tsar.

The disastrous Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 resulted in a Russian defeat, but this did not deter Nicholas II from joining the Allied attack on Germany in 1914. 15,000,000 peasants formed the backbone of his ill-equipped, ill-supplied and largely illiterate army. By 1915 the Russians had lost 4,000,000 troops.

By 1916 the peasants were failing to feed the towns. In the towns themselves, workers' wages rose by 100 per cent but food prices increased by 400 per cent. All

were cold, hungry and rebellious, particularly against the autocratic Tsarina Alexandra and her vile favourite Rasputin. After his assassination in December 1916 the Romanovs' rule was ended and a Provisional Government was set up under Alexander Kerensky.

Kerensky's intention was to proceed with the war against Germany, a very unpopular proposal to both troops and civilians. This was the time when German undercover financial help was reputedly paid to Lenin and his fellow Marxist exiles – to assist their propaganda work and newspaper demands for Russia to make peace with Germany.

Moorehead offers no confirmation of its acceptance by the Bolsheviks, nor any proof that Germany funded the sealed trains that brought back these exiles from Switzerland to Petrograd, although Germany was desperate for peace on the Eastern Front.

On arrival in Petrograd on 16 April 1917, Lenin was received with acclaim and an internal Marxist debate followed about the necessity for an armed insurrection. An attempt at this took place in July but failed. The Bolshevik leaders were arrested, and Lenin went into hiding.

However, the subsequent chaos and brutality of the Provisional Government again aroused support for the Bolsheviks. Lenin issued new directions for an armed insurrection. This time they were successful and supported all over Russia. Soviet power was established on 7 November 1917, leading to the Bolsheviks' first decree – the *Decree on Peace*. Under the terms of the subsequent Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, the Germans exacted a heavy price from Russia for this peace.

Jean Turner

**Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe
By Dimitar Bechev (Yale University
Press, 2017, ISBN: 9780300219135, Hbk,
xviii + 300pp, 6 maps + 11 figs, £20.00)**

The Russian flag flying over Priština Airport: this caught my attention when, on 12 June

2001, I landed for the first time in Kosovo. What was the flag doing there? Or the Russian troops securing the airport? This is one of many examples Bechev gives in his well-researched and unusually balanced analysis of Russia's activities in Southeast Europe.

The book has two messages. First, that Russia, starting with Yevgeny Primakov and for some time now with Sergey Lavrov, has made a fine art of "playing a weak hand well". Second, that Russia's motivation is not imperialist, but thoroughly pragmatic. As Bechev puts it: "Russia's overarching goal has been tactical – improving its relative position in European politics – not the creation of a political and ideological order underwritten by its power and resources."

In thoroughly readable chapters, Bechev examines the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s; the Western Balkans, in particular Kosovo, as "Europe's backyard"; Bulgaria and Romania; Greece and Cyprus; and the "Russian-Turkish marriage of convenience". These are followed by thematic chapters, "From a military standoff to hybrid warfare", "Playing the energy card", and "The allure of Russia's might." He concludes: "So what one is left with is a rivalry between an opportunist, which has a clear set of goals though lacks the means to achieve them, and a thoroughly disoriented West that possesses the power assets but is not of one mind about how to respond to the challenge."

But to return to Priština Airport, Kosovo was in many ways a bruising experience for Russia. Although Milošević came very close to persuading the Russian Duma to admit Serbia to the State Union of Russia and Belarus, the Russian Government gave little or no support to Serbia, which surrendered to NATO on 9 June 1999. Russia voted in favour of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, which placed Kosovo under the international administration of the UN Mission in Kosovo, with a NATO peacekeeping operation, KFOR (Kosovo Force). What Russia got was recognition that Kosovo remained legally part of Serbia – which it does to this day. Several EU

members, and many UN members, still do not recognise an independent Kosovo.

After a meeting between Yeltsin and Clinton, Russia joined the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe, a German initiative. At the same time, Russia wanted to create facts on the ground.

On 11–12 June 1999 a Russian paratrooper detachment from SFOR (Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina) marched overnight from Bosnia to Priština Airport. This ‘dash to Priština’ (бросок на Приштину) was intended to secure a territorial sector for Russian peacekeepers. It was not possible to reinforce them, as Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria all denied access to their airspace. The US wanted to stop them. But the British Lieutenant General Michael Jackson, commander of the NATO troops, told General Wesley Clark, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe: “Sir, I’m not going to start the Third World War for you!” Some 4,000 Russian soldiers served in Kosovo, under Canadian command, until early 2003. Their presence was a vital factor in safeguarding the Serb population in Kosovo.

Professor Bill Bowring

The Woman Worker

By NK Krupskaya (translated by Mick Costello, Manifesto Press Co-operative, November 2017, ISBN: 978-1-907464-26-3, Pbk, vi + 20pp, £3.50 + £1.50 P&P from <http://manifestopress.org.uk/index.php/publications2/65-the-woman-worker>)

More than just a long-awaited English translation of a Russian political tract, Mick Costello and Manifesto Press Co-operative have placed into our hands a new slice of history. Written under a pseudonym in 1899, *The Woman Worker* was thirty-year-old Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya’s first political pamphlet. She and her lifelong partner Lenin had been arrested and were exiled in Siberia: there was time for thinking, discussing and writing. By the time that her short publication appeared legally in 1905, Krupskaya had already aspired to political

leadership. This was to take her to revolutionary pre-eminence in education, youth work and public literacy, eventually becoming the USSR Deputy Minister of Education.

In this launch Krupskaya gives a piercing analysis of the double burden suffered by nineteenth-century working-class and peasant women under Russian tsarism, explaining the political and economic background, and pointing to the ways that women’s lives can and should be transformed. She identifies the horror of peasant women’s status as the property of menfolk, and describes the hardship and degradation suffered. She explains the different exploitation of the woman industrial worker, where the earning of wages offered a measure of independence. The political thrust of Krupskaya’s work is that women and men workers share “common interests and common feelings” that will evolve into the class consciousness required in revolutionary struggle.

A key historical benefit of this booklet lies in the inclusion of Krupskaya’s own 1925 retrospective of her original pamphlet, written for its reprint that year in Russia. She outlines how her writing had been authorised within the Party and how tsarist censorship restrictions had delayed publication. Explaining why she had agreed to the re-issuing, Krupskaya keenly cites that, although much has been achieved, “how doggedly one must work further to achieve the full emancipation of the woman worker”.

Claire Weiss

Magnetic North: Conversations with Tomas Venclova

By Ellen Hinsey and Tomas Venclova (University of Rochester Press / Boydell & Brewer, 2017, ISBN: 978-1-58046-586-1, Hbk, xvi + 405pp, £19.99)

SCRSS Cat No: 2988

These conversations form, in fact, an informal history, in very readable form, of the Soviet intelligentsia from the 1960s,

through the period of dissidence, followed by forced migration, to life as an émigré. It is made all the more readable because Venclova is a poet with a sense of irony, but more importantly, he is Lithuanian and therefore views events with the objectivity of a semi-outsider.

At the time I met him, the Moscow intelligentsia had resolved that, since the Soviet Constitution guaranteed свобода слова (freedom of speech), they would act as if it were actually in force. I took Venclova a present of the long-awaited collected edition of Mandelshtam's poetry. This movement for freedom was ground down by the security services who called in and threatened dissidents one by one. A peculiar feature, which I learnt at that time, was that the dissidents and security services knew each other and were sometimes members of the same families.

Tomas Venclova knew the poets of the older generation, Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak, and also the young poet Joseph Brodsky. He also knew Soviet dissidents. One glance at the name index at the back of the book is enough to convince us of this. As a child Tomas Venclova witnessed the occupation of his native Lithuania – first by the Soviets, then by the Nazis, then by the Soviets again. His hunger for experience was never satisfied: at Vilnius University he learnt languages, became an expert on contemporary poetry and soon, as translator and poet, came to the notice of the KGB. In 1961, he moved to Moscow and became intensively involved with the Moscow dissidents, including Alexander Ginzburg, Natalia Gorbanevskaya and others.

In 1976 he was one of the co-founders of the (Lithuanian) Helsinki Group for Human Rights and, as a consequence, the following year, during a visit to the USA, his Soviet citizenship was withdrawn. He was offered a professorship at Yale University and worked there until 2012. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union he has lived simultaneously on two continents – he was an émigré who found too many things wrong with his newly independent native land to want to return

and, in contrast to many who mourned the loss of their homeland, believed his enforced exile was a stroke of good luck.

In this book of conversations with his fellow poet and translator Ellen Hinsey, he reviews his career and brings to life again that fascinating period of the twentieth century. Whether speaking of his friendships, the art of poetry, the policies of the great powers or the tangled history of Eastern Europe – Venclova's wisdom and irony bring some calm and serenity to the great European story of uprootedness and homelessness in the mid-twentieth century.

Andrew Jameson

City Folk and Country Folk

By Sofia Khvoshchinskaya (translated by Nora Seligman Favorov, Columbia University Press, 2017, ISBN: 978-0-231-18303-1, Pbk, 272pp, £12.95)

SCRSS Cat No: 2957

Columbia University Press and translator Nora Seligman Favorov are to be congratulated on making this witty novel now available in English. A lengthy introduction explains the background of the author, Sofia Khvoshchinskaya, in terms of the changing social reforms in mid-nineteenth-century Russia brought about by Alexander II's 1861 *Emancipation of the Serfs Act*.

In this period in Russia there was a rise of feminism and many well-educated women turned their hands to writing and publishing, as did many other women in Europe. Like the Brontë sisters, Sofia and her two sisters, Nadezhda and Praskovia, were forced to write under male pseudonyms to overcome the prejudice against an activity regarded in polite circles as unfeminine and improper.

Their family was a poor but noble one, with a rundown estate in Ryazan. The sisters were educated in Moscow but, on their father's death, returned to manage the estate. However, they maintained their literary and publishing contacts in Moscow and St Petersburg, earning a living by writing and translation. Nadezhda became a

famous writer and encouraged her beloved sister Sofia to hone her writing and painting skills, which gained them acceptance in high society.

City Folk and Country Folk, written in 1863, is based on Sofia's own experience of a small provincial town, and satirises local landowners, and their pretensions and hypocrisy. The author even casts a sardonic eye on her own family, personified in the novel as the Malinnikovs.

The central characters are Nastasya Chulkova, a kindly widowed traditional landowner, whose well-kept estate contains fifty 'souls'; Olga, her feisty seventeen-year-old daughter; and Erast Ovcharov, a local landowner, whose estate has run to rack and ruin due to his bohemian literary life in St Petersburg and Europe, and to which he returns in broken health in his forties. He has pretensions of being a 'progressive writer', commenting on the situation in Russia of the peasantry, women, politics and society.

Nastasya's servants, loyal but slightly resentful former serfs, bring her all the local gossip from Snetki, the provincial capital, as well as from the local estates. So Erast's arrival is well heralded.

What is not expected is that he should ask Nastasya to let him occupy her newly built bathhouse for a while, as his own estate and huts are uninhabitable. Nastasya accepts reluctantly, since she already has an uninvited house-guest – her cousin Anna Bobova, a notorious hanger-on of the nobility and clergy in St Petersburg, who is staying until her noble sponsor returns from Europe. Nastasya's daughter Olga is outspoken in her dislike of the 'holy' cousin and regards Erast as a wimp living on a regime of slops on the advice of his Swiss physician.

But local gossip is looking for a husband for Olga, so tongues are wagging.

The result of all these complexities is a Gogol-like farce involving the honest and simple Nastasya, the healthy and

independent Olga, the self-opinionated Erast and interfering local dignitaries, such as Katerina Petrovna who seeks to marry off her unpleasant, impoverished lover to Olga to gain the dowry.

The novel offers an enjoyable insight into a provincial society in turmoil between the old and the new in the early 1860s in Russia.

Jean Turner

SCRSS Image Catalogue Numbers, This Issue

Front cover: We Will Fulfil the Plan of Great Works (SCRSS001923).

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Printed and published by:
SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB
Tel: 020 7274 2282
Email: ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk
Website: www.scrss.org.uk
Registered Charity No 1104012
Editor: Diana Turner
Publication date: January 2018