Society for Co-operation in
SCRSS
Russian and Soviet Studies

Digest

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Contents

Feature

Valentina Tereshkova's Spaceflight: One Giant Leap for Womankind?

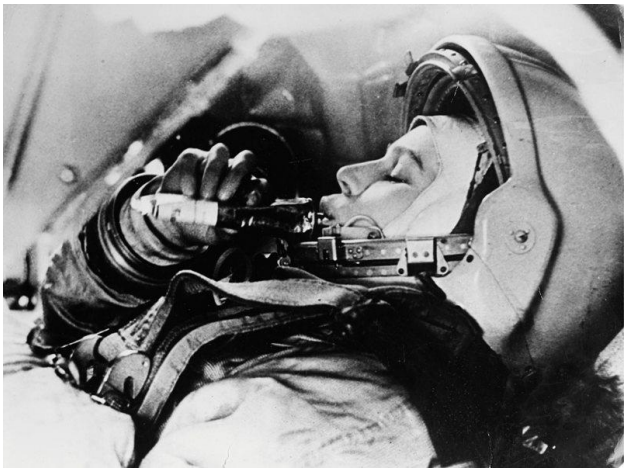
By Emily Lewis

The Soviet Union's space programme, set against the backdrop of Cold War rivalry with the United States, notched up an impressive series of achievements. Two years after Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space, the world witnessed the spaceflight of Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova, the first woman in space. On 16 June 1963, Tereshkova orbited the Earth forty-eight times on Vostok 6, symbolising one giant leap for womankind. A proletarian textile worker and a trained parachutist, Tereshkova would go on to represent the Soviet Union on the world stage, influence popular culture and have a lunar crater named after her in 1970. But what was the significance of a woman going into space in the context of the Cold War?

Valentina Tereshkova on Vostok 6, June 1963
(SCRSS Photo Library)

Ideological success on a social and cultural front was crucial, especially considering that Tereshkova's spaceflight occurred soon after the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, which highlighted the danger of escalating military tensions and ushered in a period of *détente*. At the same time, international rhetoric has long drawn upon gender roles to measure and express national progress and civilisation. During the Cold War, male leaders used the position of women to demonstrate their own nation's ideological and cultural superiority. However, beyond propaganda value, Valentina Tereshkova represents broader ideological disparities between the USSR and US with regard to the role of women. As Tereshkova herself said: "It is not necessary to dedicate two years of preparation just to achieve a propaganda flight."[1]

In celebrating Tereshkova's spaceflight, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev connected the quest for ideological supremacy with the victory for women's rights: "Bourgeois society always underlines that women are the weaker sex, but now Valentina Tereshkova has shown American men what's what. She has been up longer than all the American spacemen put together."[2] Undoubtedly, Tereshkova's spaceflight could be used to score points in the ongoing space race.



Valentina Tereshkova training in a space suit, 1963 (SCRSS Photo Library)

However, for the Soviet Union, although the liberation of women was not seen as a goal requiring an autonomous strategy aside from their contribution to the economy, putting a woman into space was a logical extension of the priority of utilising women workers. Real communism would only be achieved when women were liberated and, theoretically, a precondition for the liberation of women was that they had to participate in social labour, rather than being restricted to domesticity. Soviet newspapers did not claim this vision to have been realised at the time of Tereshkova's spaceflight, with one journalist writing: "Why hide the fact? – in our everyday life women often bear a bigger physical load in the family than men."[3]

Indeed, the USSR celebrated women in its workforce, reporting in 1963 that of every 100 industry workers, forty-five were women.[4] *Soviet Weekly* frequently published photographs spotlighting the accomplishments of women in scientific and technological professions. Another report saw it as "inevitable" that a woman had "step[ped] to the forefront of space exploration".[5] Interestingly, one American journalist did wonder whether "Valentina [would] cause a revolution in the minds of hundreds of millions of women who in many countries are downtrodden and have no rights".[6] Whether he was referring to American women or not, his comment reflects the belief that through undertaking traditionally male-dominated employment, Soviet women were liberated. Ultimately, the Soviet Union had succeeded in the mass mobilisation of women into the public sphere through their inclusion in the workforce. Launching a woman into space was only possible in a society that valued women as more than domestic labourers.

Valentina Tereshkova training in a space simulator, 1963 (SCRSS Photo Library)

Conversely, the United States maintained that civilised and advanced societies were those which relieved women of the burden of work; uncivilised and backwards societies were those which exacted hard labour from their women. The private sphere, not the very visible arena of the cosmos, was the place for women. Americans had

internalised a fear of vulnerability to communist subversion because of weak domestic structures. Tereshkova epitomised these subversive gender roles; having spent more time in space than all American men put together, she not only undermined traditional femininity but threatened American masculinity. Strongly defined gender roles (such as the American housewife) could stabilise internal social norms and the United States' position in the ideological Cold War.

Valentina Tereshkova (SCRSS Photo Library)

NASA had no intention of putting a woman into space in the early 1960s. On 17 and 18 July 1962, less than a year before Tereshkova's flight, a Special Subcommittee on the Selection of Astronauts convened to assess whether the qualifications required for a person to become an astronaut discriminated on the basis of sex. Essentially, only pilots who had tested military jets could embark on astronaut programmes, but women were not permitted to become military test pilots in the US. Jerrie Cobb, a world record-setting pilot, attempted to highlight the advantages of putting a woman into space. Utilising Cold War patriotism to make her case, she declared: "We… ask for the opportunity to bring glory to our Nation by an American woman becoming first in the world to make a space flight."[7]

Joe D Waggonner Jr, a Democratic Representative, responded: "I [don't] believe that we Americans should do something simply because the Russians do it… If something has merit, we should do it." He suggested that the Cold War alone was not enough to compel the Americans to do something. The resistance to training female astronauts suggests that the United States was reluctant to have a woman as the public face of the space race. The Subcommittee hearing concluded that, since NASA already had a large pool of qualified men, the inclusion of women would only be possible by "lowering the criteria", implying that female astronauts would undermine the seriousness of the US space programme.

American astronauts also resisted the inclusion of women in the space programme. John Glenn, the first American man to orbit the Earth, rejected Cobb's plea at the 1962 hearing: "The fact that women are not in this field is a fact of our social order." In contrast, Tereshkova remembered how women cosmonauts were encouraged by men in the Soviet space programme, stating that "[n]ot once did any of the men say they would not find time to help us", and that she "never sensed antagonism between men and women".[8] As explored earlier, the presence of women in the Soviet workforce was normalised, although true liberation had not been achieved.

Chief Designer Sergei Korolev (centre) with cosmonauts Valentina Tereshkova (left), Yuri Gagarin (second from right) and Valery Bykovsky (right), 25 June 1963 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

In the American media Tereshkova was subject to sexist narratives that served to undermine her and the Soviet Union. The press consistently characterised Tereshkova's spaceflight as a publicity stunt

and a propaganda tool. American media reports emphasise how 'unqualified' Tereshkova was. She was identified as a 'parachutist', explicitly marking her as ineligible for spaceflight under American conditions.[9] As she orbited, it was emphasised that "Valentina… is not a trained pilot and might not be able to carry out her part in a complicated manually controlled link-up manoeuvre".[10] Rumours circulated that she "did poorly and became hysterical" in orbit.[11] Historically, hysteria was a perceived medical condition that caused women to act irrationally. Describing her in this way served to dismiss her work, rather than acknowledging her as an active participant in the space programme.

Valentina Tereshkova and Yuri Gagarin on the rostrum of Lenin's Mausoleum, 22 June 1963 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Undoubtedly, the Cold War intensified the Soviet drive to prove the superiority of socialism over capitalism, but Tereshkova's orbit was also part of a utopian vision of what socialism should be. Space exploration and scientific ingenuity symbolised the future, developing alongside the construction of communism and the emancipation of women. Soviet women were to be the faces of modernity, not just working behind the scenes as they did in the United States, where gender subversion threatened American capitalism. The cosmos, made visible to the world through media communications, was the ultimate public arena; perhaps it was inevitable that a Soviet woman would go into space, supported by male cosmonauts and politicians alike. There is little to suggest that the Soviet Union would not have put a woman into space in 1963, had there been an absence of Cold War rivalry.

The gendered aspects of space exploration are still evident today. A woman, Helen Sharman, became the first British person to go into space as part of a cooperative mission with the Soviet Union in 1991. Then, in March 2019, NASA cancelled its first ever all-female spacewalk simply because it did not have enough spacesuits available in the correct size (though this spacewalk has now gone ahead). Furthermore, the popular assumption that the US 'won' the space race by landing the first men on the moon in 1969 should be questioned. NASA subordinated the inclusion of women in its astronaut programme to focus on landing men on the moon. In contrast, the USSR envisioned women as sharing in its visions of space as a symbol of the future, and Valentina Tereshkova symbolised this utopianism when she became the first woman in space.

Footnotes

1 Lothian A, *Valentina: First Woman in Space, Conversations with A Lothian*, Durham, The Pentland Press, 1993, p. 242

2 Frankland M, 'Valentina's Day in Red Square', *The Observer*, 23 June 1963, p. 2

3 Parin V, 'We are Domesticating the Universe', *Izvestia*, 18 June 1963, p. 3

4 'Facts for Thought on Soviet Women', *Soviet Weekly*, 4 July 1963, p. 8

5 Ibid. Parin

6 'Valentina Left Tire Plant for Space – Fancies High Heels and Beethoven', *The Washington Post*, 17 June 1963, p. A3

7 Qualifications for Astronauts, Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on the Selection of Astronauts of the Committee on Science and Astronautics, U.S. House of Representatives, 17–18 July 1962, URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20151211072933/http://n

asa.lu/static/qualifications_for_astronauts_hearing_1962.pdf, p. 5 (accessed 13/04/2019)

8 Ibid. Lothian, p. 241

9 Topping S, 'Soviet Orbits Woman Astronaut Near Bykovsky For Dual Flight', *The New York Times*, 17 June 1963, p. 1

10 'Russian Blonde in Space', *Chicago Tribune*, 17 June 1963, p. 1

11 Reinholdhouston R, 'Americans in Space: Women are Ready', *The New York Times*, 7 June 1983, p. C1

Emily Lewis graduated from the University of Sheffield in 2019 with a BA (Hons) in History and Politics. This article is based on her final year dissertation; as part of her research, she visited the SCRSS to explore the archives and analyse news articles about the space race. She has always been interested in Russian history, particularly the twentieth century, as well as feminism. She currently works for Sheffield Climate Alliance.

SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

SCRSS AGM 2021

The Society held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) online on 15 May 2021. The Annual Report and Accounts were discussed and approved. If you did not receive these via email, or would like a copy by post, please contact the Hon Secretary. Following the AGM, the Council met to appoint the Executive Committee (EC). The full list of the Society's Honorary Officers and Council Members is as follows: *Honorary Officers*: Professor Bill Bowring (President), Robert Chandler, Dr Kate Hudson, Dr David Lane and Dr Rachel O'Higgins (Vice Presidents); *SCRSS Council:* Philip Matthews (Chair*), Kate Clark and Charles Stewart (Vice Chairs*), Ralph Gibson (Hon Secretary*), Jean Turner (Hon Treasurer*), Christine Lindey (Exhibitions Officer*), Andrew Jameson (*), Len Weiss (*), Bethany Aylward, Mel Bach (Hon Librarian), Christine Barnard, Michael Costello, Jeremy Hicks, Jane Rosen, Diana Turner. Note: ***** indicates member of the EC.

Centre Re-opening

The SCRSS Council continues to monitor the Covid situation and will discuss the re-opening of the centre at its next meeting in June 2021. Subject to Covid, and sufficient volunteers to open up (see enclosed), the hope is that we can welcome members and researchers on one day per week from September to December 2021. If this initial trial period works well, we will extend this throughout 2022.

Library News

Thanks to a very generous financial commitment from a member to cover payments for the first two years, the Society now has a professional library management system (LMS) supplied by Soutron. Our Hon Librarian, Mel Bach, is working on setting the system up and integrating data from our current catalogue. Once this work is complete, the existing data will be available online. When cataloguing resumes, it will be on the new system. It is important to note that in year three the Society will begin paying the annual fee itself. This will be a significant sum, but essential if we are to broaden access to our collections. If you are interested in helping with cataloguing, or with the library in general, contact the Hon Secretary.

SCRSS Advanced Russian Online Seminar, April 2021

Our one-day seminars on 10 and 17 April 2021 were a great success, with thirty-one participants on Day 1 and twenty-five on Day 2. This was the first time we had run our Russian language seminar online, using Zoom. The lectures focused on aspects of contemporary Russian language and linguistics, and were given by Dr Svetlana Bukreeva, Associate Professor at the

Leningrad Regional Institute of Education Development. The Society is grateful to the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation, our partner organisation in Russia, for helping make this event happen. We hope to run a further seminar on cultural topics in autumn 2021.

Membership

A membership renewal reminder should be enclosed, if your membership has expired or will do so by the end of September – this is to save on postage. Please help on administration by responding as soon as possible. If you wish to set up an annual standing order to avoid such reminders, or to pay by bank transfer, simply request the SCRSS bank details.

Keeping in Touch

There are a number of ways to keep up to date with our events, library openings, etc: Email (make sure we have your current email address); SCRSS Website (www.scrss.org.uk); Facebook and Twitter (search "SCRSS" or "SCRSS Library"). As we often add online events at short notice, not all events can be listed in the *SCRSS Digest*. You can help the Society by forwarding information about events to friends and colleagues as appropriate.

Next Events

Tuesday 8 June 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture: Andrew Jameson on *Russian Slang: Or the Sociolinguistics of the Secret Languages of Russia*
Andrew Jameson continues his exploration of the history and special characteristics of the Russian language with a look at Russian slang, its history and the people who used it.

Tuesday 22 June 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Panel: Historical Memory and the Fight against Fascism
Joint SCRSS - Marx Memorial Library event, marking the 80th anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941. Full details are being worked on but speakers from Russia, Spain and Italy are expected.

Wednesday 30 June 2021, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture: Colin Turbett on *The Anglo-Soviet Alliance - Comrades and Allies During WW2*
Colin Turbett discusses the history of the wartime alliance and its expression at government and military co-operation level, as well as between two peoples who realised their common interests.

Tuesday 28 September 2020, 19.00
Zoom Online Lecture: Catherine McAteer on *Translating Great Russian Literature: The Penguin Russian Classics*
Catherine McAteer discusses her new book on the Penguin Russian Classic series, first launched in 1950, which became the de facto provider of classic Russian literature in English translation.

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

Victory Day 2021

SWMT Chair Philip Matthews (third from left) with the Mayor of Southwark and diplomats in front of the Soviet War Memorial, 9 May 2021 (image courtesy of Karl Weiss)

Due to Covid restrictions, this year the SWMT organised a short wreath-laying ceremony at the Soviet War Memorial on 9 May for the Mayor of Southwark and diplomats from embassies of former republics of the USSR, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Russian Ambassador made a brief address and a silence was observed. Video and photo coverage can be found on the SWMT and Russian Embassy websites. On 8 May the Ambassadors of Ukraine and Georgia laid wreaths at the Memorial.

The Mayor of Southwark and diplomats at the Soviet War Memorial, 9 May 2021 (image courtesy of Karl Weiss)

22 June

The date of the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941 is now marked as the Day of Remembrance and Sorrow in Russia. Covid regulations permitting, Russian community organisations are hoping to organise an appropriate ceremony at the Memorial to mark the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, which over the course of just 1,418 days led to the devastation of large parts of the western USSR and the deaths of 27 million civilians and military personnel.

Donations

The SWMT is raising funds to clean and maintain the Memorial in time for the Victory Day ceremony in 2022, when it is hoped a full-scale event can be organised for the first time since 2019. The easiest way to donate is via the link on the SWMT website. Contact the SWMT Hon Secretary for more details on sovietwarmemorialtrust@gmail.com.

The Soviet War Memorial is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park which surrounds the Imperial War Museum, London. It was unveiled in 1999 on the initiative of the SCRSS and the Society has been supporting the work of the SWMT since its foundation. The Trust normally organises three main ceremonies at the Memorial each year to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in January, Victory Day in May, and Remembrance Sunday in November. See the SWMT website for more information: www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com.

Feature

Sergei Pavlovich Korolev

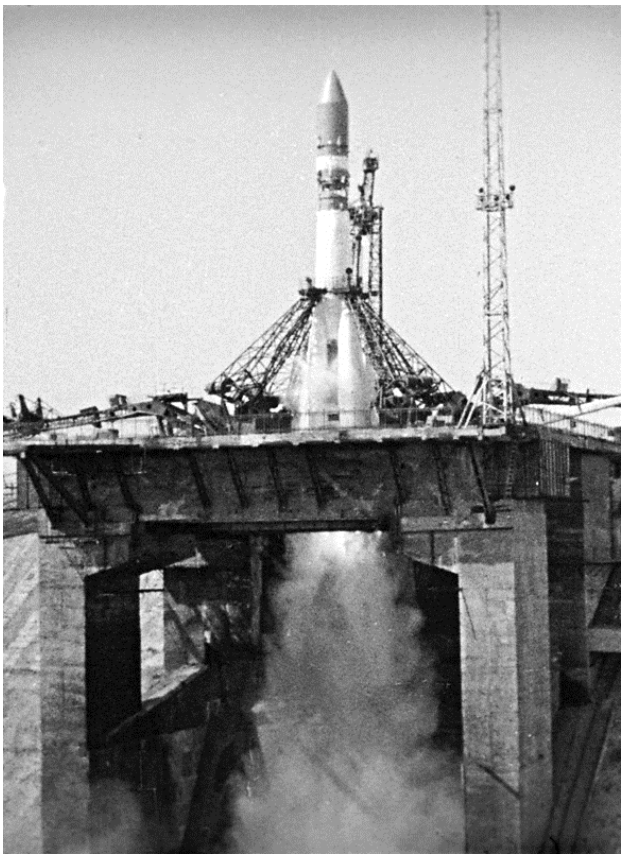
By Doug Millard

Sergei Korolev in March 1934 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

For eight long years from 1957 through to 1965 it was the Soviet Union that led the 'space race' with the United States. The USSR launched the first artificial satellite – Sputnik – in 1957 and then followed with a string of space records, including first animal in orbit (Laika, 1957), first man in space (Yuri Gagarin, 1961), first woman (Valentina Tereshkova, 1963), and first spacewalk (Alexei Leonov, 1965). But then, the Soviet space effort, which was still very active, started to be eclipsed by American efforts as President Kennedy's commitment to land a man on the Moon by the end of the decade started to bite. There was a succession of increasingly ambitious and successful American human space shots through the Mercury, Gemini and then Apollo missions.

The Soviet space model – so effective in the early years of the space age – could not compete with the huge investment of dollars and resources in NASA's programme for reaching the Moon. It is just possible that, had one individual, key to the early Soviet space successes, still been alive, things could have been a little different. That man's name was Sergei Pavlovich Korolev and he was the Chief Designer responsible for both the Soviet Union's space and ballistic missile programmes. But early in 1966, at the age of 59 and soon after he had been given overall responsibility for the Soviet Moon programme, he died during a surgical operation. If anyone could have hauled the Soviet space effort that little bit further and on to the Moon, it would have been him. Without his energy and management nous, that challenge was going to be immensely more difficult.

Korolev was an engineer of rockets, spacecraft but also of people. More than competent in the design of ballistic missiles, space rockets, artificial satellites and spacecraft, it was his ability to play the Soviet industrial, military – and above all – political systems that set him aside as someone special. He was the conductor of the Soviet Union's orchestra of space – ensuring that the scientists, engineers, fellow designers and politicians kept to the space tempo and tune. Ironically, he remained anonymous during this culminating period of his life and was only named publicly at his funeral. Even the cosmonauts who had worked closely with him had known him only as Chief Designer or by his given initials SP.



Vostok-1, with Yuri Gagarin on board, prior to launch on 12 April 1961 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Korolev was born in the Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr in 1907. He learned carpentry and put his skills to use in designing a glider – his keen interest in aviation stimulated by a visit to an air show in 1913, when a boy. He trained in aviation studies, qualified as a pilot and in 1929 graduated from the prestigious Bauman Moscow State Technical University.

In 1931 he co-created with Friedrich Tsander the Group for the Study of Reactive Motion (GIRD), one of the first Soviet state-sponsored organisations for the study and development of rocketry. For the next seven years Korolev continued to work on rocketry, GIRD having merged with the Gas Dynamics Laboratory (GDL) in Leningrad to create the Soviet Union's Jet Propulsion Research Institute (RNII). Korolev's

formative enthusiasm for aviation was now being re-moulded via the fast-developing field of military rocketry. This clearly paved the way in Korolev's and others' minds for achieving the necessary speeds and heights to reach and then move through space. But then, in 1938, Korolev was arrested.

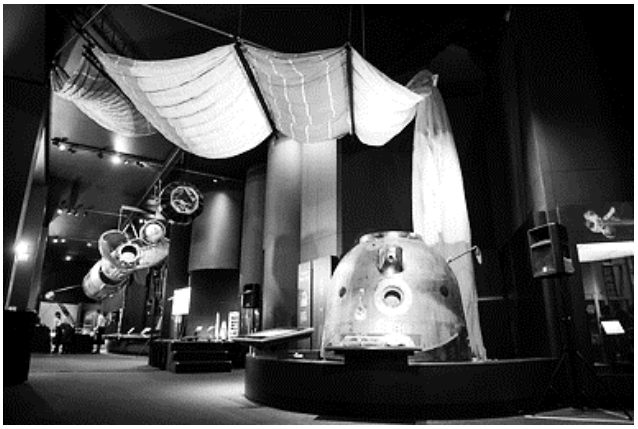
Yuri Gagarin and Chief Designer Sergei Korolev, May 1961 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Korolev was caught up in Stalin's Great Terror when the Soviet leader set out to destroy anyone he perceived as a threat to his rule. Intellectuals, professionals and the military were his targets, and Korolev was sent to the Kolyma gold mine Gulag in Siberia where he spent months in dreadful conditions. Both Korolev and his wife wrote to Stalin pleading his innocence and, surprisingly, a retrial in Moscow was granted. However, Korolev had to make his own way back – a 5,000 km ordeal that only compounded the ill effects of the Gulag itself.

Korolev was reconvicted at the retrial but was now able to spend the rest of his incarceration in the far less severe conditions of a Moscow *sharaska* prison, where fellow professionals were put to work on specific research and development assignments. Korolev was able to return to his rocketry work and it was during this period that he started to draw up his own plans for the development of a large, long-range ballistic missile.

In 1944 he was released from prison. The war had seen the development and deployment by Germany of the first long-range ballistic missile – the V2. It became clear to all the victorious Allies that such rockets would become an essential part of their armouries in the years to come and, mated with nuclear warheads, a virtually invulnerable weapon system. Korolev was put in charge of developing the Soviet Union's missile programme.

In 1957 Korolev's teams launched the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile – the R-7 – and, soon after, used a modified version to launch Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite. Soviet Premier Khrushchev had insisted that the preparation and launching of the satellite should not deflect Korolev from his missile work, but once the Sputnik headlines flashed around the world, Khrushchev wanted more space firsts.



The Soyuz TMA-19M descent module in the Science Museum, London (image courtesy of Science Museum Group)

Korolev brought his experience of working in the Soviet military-industrial complex to bear in squeezing everything he possibly could out of the teams and technologies he had worked with since the war. His work programme was exhaustive and relentless, but, although continuing to bring more successes over the Americans, was gradually reaching the most it could reasonably be expected to achieve within the Soviet system. NASA, on the other hand, was building steadily for its assault on the Moon. The American effort was underwritten with huge state funding and an

organisational effort that leveraged the full industrial and managerial might of the United States towards achieving Kennedy's goal of landing a man on the Moon by the end of the decade.

What Korolev had achieved had been astonishing but there was only so much that even as able a man as he could achieve when the old ways of doing things would no longer work. His premature death perhaps sealed the fate of the USSR's attempt on the Moon.

There is, however, one legacy of Korolev's life that stands out: Soyuz. This spacecraft, developed in the 1960s as part of the Soviet Union's intended move into deep space and onto the Moon, survived the space race years to become the most successful spacecraft (and rocket – they share a common name) to date. Had Khrushchev's insistence on ratcheting up more quick-fire firsts against the United States not been the priority (at the expense of planning for the Moon - the USSR started its manned Moon programme three years after the United States'), then Soyuz would have been developed earlier. And if that had happened, along with the new rockets that would have taken the spacecraft there, then it is just possible that the first to walk on the Moon would have been a Soviet cosmonaut.

Doug Millard is Deputy Keeper of Technologies and Engineering at the Science Museum, London. After curating the 'Cosmonauts' exhibition in 2015, in 2016 he curated the acquisition and display of the Soyuz TMA-19M descent module (used by Tim Peake, Yuri Malenchenko and Tim Kopra during their mission to and from the International Space Station in 2015–16), along with the virtual reality experience Space Descent VR. In 2019 he organised the Culture Space research programme to investigate new ways of representing space exploration in the Museum gallery. In 2020 he contributed to a BBC Radio 4 programme on Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. His current focus is a major research programme on global perspectives of space exploration to inform development of a new space gallery at the Science Museum later this decade, and assist in the planning of a major exhibition about Mars.

Feature

Yuri Gagarin: The First Cosmonaut

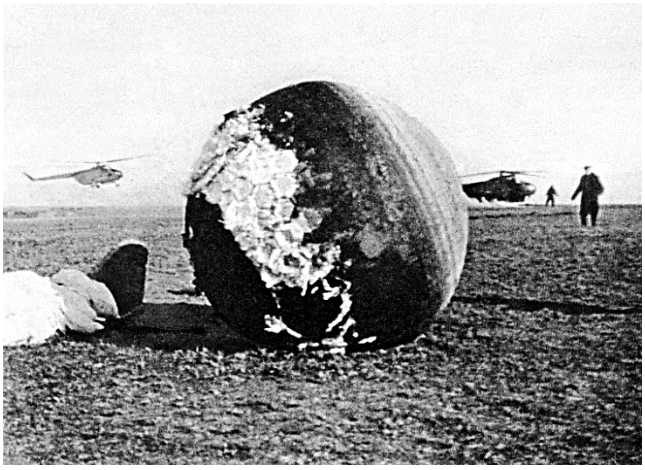
By Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

Even sixty years later, Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight on 12 April 1961 continues to be a cause of celebration around the world. His courage, his personality and his smile are remembered across the globe he orbited in less than two hours in a tiny spacecraft named Vostok ('East').

Yuri Gagarin in the cockpit of Vostok-1 before launch on 12 April 1961 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

As the latest book to explore this defining historical event makes clear[1], both Cold War rivals – the USSR and USA – wanted to be the first to put a human in space and expended vast resources to do so. That the USSR, devastated by a war that had

finished less than sixteen years before, could not only compete with but beat the economic colossus of the USA is a huge testament to the people involved, particularly ‘Chief Designer’ Sergei Korolev.



The landing of Vostok-1 after Yuri Gagarin’s spaceflight on 12 April 1961 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Each major anniversary brings fresh attention to the early days of space exploration, and so it's always worth revisiting the history. As gaps in the narrative are gradually filled, the bravery and skill of those involved is shown to be even more extraordinary than previously revealed.

Yuri Gagarin, shortly after landing his spaceflight, 12 April 1961 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Here are just three examples from Gagarin's flight.

Firstly, the failure of the main engine to switch off at the correct moment led to a higher orbit than planned. This meant that Gagarin would certainly land far from where the rescue teams would be waiting for him. And it would have grave implications should the ‘braking engine’ fail to ignite to slow the craft for re-entry.

Secondly, on re-entry from orbit, the failure of the two sections of the spacecraft to separate on time caused a near disaster.

Crowds greet Yuri Gagarin on Red Square, Moscow, on 14 April 1961 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Thirdly, Gagarin ejected from the Vostok and parachuted down to earth from a height of 23,000 feet (7 km). The ejection was planned, but Gagarin was unable to discuss it in public. The Soviet authorities wanted to register the flight for various world records that relied on the fact that the ‘pilot’ must land in the craft he took off in. This particular information was not revealed until 1971.

After the USSR had scored so many space ‘firsts’ – from Sputnik 1 in October 1957 onwards – the profound shock and anger felt in the USA, when news of Gagarin's flight emerged, can be seen to lead directly to President Kennedy's decision to launch

the Apollo moon landing programme. If the US had been first, would such an ambitious and costly enterprise have been considered?

Yuri Gagarin attending the SCR Garden Party in London on 13 July 1961 (SCRSS Archive)

The SCRSS itself has a small part in Yuri Gagarin's story. During his trip to the UK in July 1961, he visited the Society's premises in Kensington Square, London. Our archive photos show him making a brief address and receiving gifts for his children in the garden.

Cultural figures at the SCR Garden Party for Yuri Gagarin, 13 July 1961. Left to right: Bernard Kops, Anna Arbuzova, Aleksei Arbuzov, Erica Kops, Nina Froud and Arnold Wesker (SCRSS Archive)

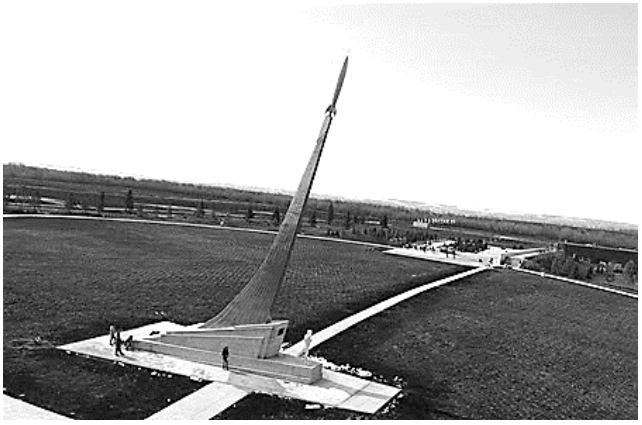
One of the SCR's members, the writer Bernard Kops, prepared a poem, which is reprinted at the end of this article. Given Gagarin's extremely heavy schedule, and the number of invitations he received, his visit must be seen as a tribute to the esteem in which the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (as the SCRSS was called at the time) was held.

Skipping forward to 1991, by then the USSR had been maintaining a permanent manned presence in orbit for a number of years. Just after the 30th anniversary of Gagarin's spaceflight, we should recall the flight of the first Briton in space – Helen Sharman. She flew on an eight-day mission to the Mir space station in May 1991 in an inspired piece of British-Soviet co-operation!

The monument to Yuri Gagarin at Greenwich Royal Observatory (image courtesy of Sputnik)

Ten years ago saw the 50th anniversary celebrations, with new books, events and exhibitions around the world. The passage of time had certainly not lessened the interest in Yuri Gagarin and his achievement. Marking the anniversary of his UK visit, a statue of him was unveiled outside the British Council offices in central London. This was later given a permanent home at the Greenwich Royal Observatory.

The Science Museum's blockbuster exhibition *Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age* in 2015–16 introduced new generations to the excitement and drama of the early years of space exploration. It also drew on the long-held Russian dreams of space travel from a period when we had barely mastered powered flight. (It's worth remembering that less than sixty years separated the Wright brothers' first controlled, sustained flight of a powered aircraft from Gagarin's orbit of the Earth!)



The museum complex at Gagarin's landing site in the Saratov region (image courtesy of Sputnik)

12 April (Cosmonautics' Day in Russia and, since 2011, the UN-recognised International Day of Human Spaceflight) always features news about the history of that first spaceflight, and 2021 was no exception. President Vladimir Putin visited the Park of Space Explorers museum complex at Gagarin's landing site in the Saratov region, Russia. The BBC interviewed the first person to meet Yuri Gagarin after he landed back on earth. A little girl at the time, she was helping her grandmother plant potatoes. She describes her extraordinary encounter with a man in an orange overall who needed to find a telephone as quickly as possible!

The SCRSS has a wide range of books, pamphlets, photographs and other materials relating to Yuri Gagarin, and Soviet space exploration in general. The arrival of an online cataloguing system (see SCRSS News) will hopefully allow information about all of the Society's relevant holdings to be brought together in one place.

Footnote

1 Walker Stephen, *Beyond: The Astonishing Story of the First Human to Leave Our Planet and Journey into Space*, William Collins, 2021

To Yuri Gagarin

Yuri Gagarin, the news depresses me,
the speeches our politicians and generals make
send my blood cold,
make me wake shivering in the night.
I look out at the sky,
and at my sleeping boy,
and wonder if he will be allowed
to die of old age,
after a full and fruitful life.

Yuri Gagarin, you are not just a Russian,
you are a smiling son of the human race,
up in the stars you must have seen
that the world is just one place,
one little vulnerable twisting ball,
in endless space.

In this hour of our peril,
wear our yearning like a medal.

Yuri Gagarin, take this message with you,
tell them we love you.
May you and I not die in war,
may you fly to the farthest star,
may your grandchildren marry mine
and honeymoon on Venus,
and bypass Mars.

Yuri Gagarin, you have a lovely face,
you are not just a Russian,
but a shooting star of the human race.
You who saw the earth as one small sphere,
help us tell the generals and politicians
and people everywhere,
you saw no curtain hanging from the stars.

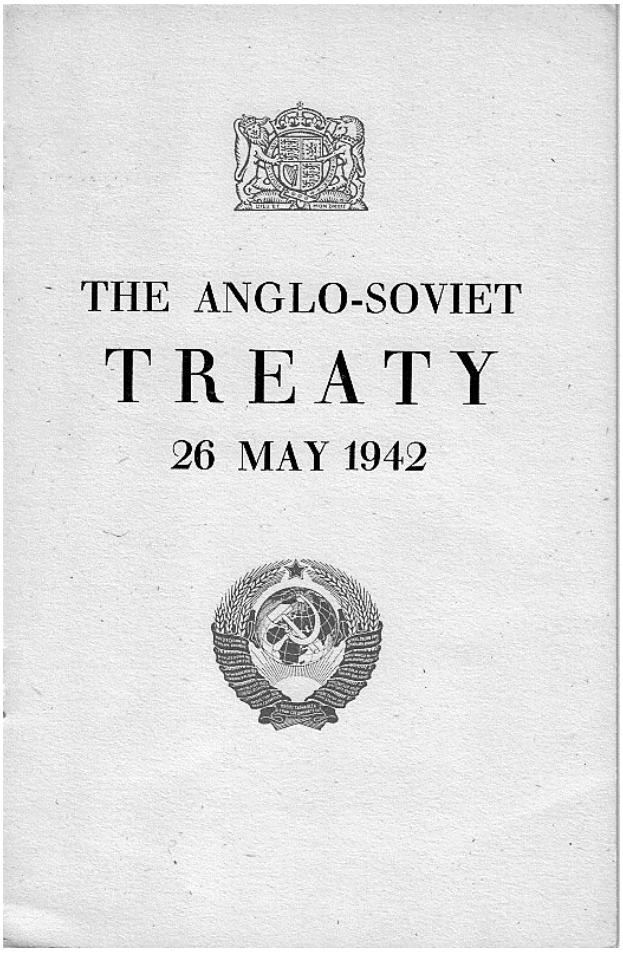
Bernard Kops (written 12 July 1961)

Bernard Kops presented his poem to Gagarin at the SCR on 13 July 1961. It was printed in the SCR's *Anglo-Soviet Journal* and later translated into Russian in the Soviet journal *Inostrannaya literatura*, No. 9, 1961. Bernard Kops was a guest at the SCRSS's *Gagarin at the SCR* exhibition launch on 14 April 2011, marking the 50th anniversary of Gagarin's flight, and read his poem again to a new audience.

Feature

Highlights from the SCRSS Archive: A Wartime Publication

By Jane Rosen



Looking at the Annual Reports of the SCR***** for the war period has been fascinating. One of the surprising elements was the number of publications issued during this period, the range of subjects and the quality of the paper and production. 1942–43 saw pamphlets on education, medicine, law, posters, theatre and literature, as well as the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*. One publication nicely reflects Colin Turbett's forthcoming lecture on 30 June 2021: *The Anglo-Soviet Treaty 26 May 1942*.

It doesn't look much, does it? However, the quality is outstanding, and its publication by the SCR (as a reprint of the original Treaty text) shows the importance of the Treaty to both nations and, of course, to our Society. Its existence governed much of the work the SCR did during the Second World War. In a wider sense, it is a reminder of how this alliance contributed to the defeat of Fascism.

***** Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR, as the SCRSS was known at the time.

Jane Rosen is a member of the SCRSS Council and former SCRSS Librarian. She is currently researching a history of the Society ahead of our centenary in 2024.

Book Reviews

The Victory Banner Over the Reichstag: Film, Document and Ritual in Russia's Contested Memory of World War II
By Jeremy Hicks (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020, ISBN: 9780822946502, Hbk, 285pp)

The Russian, or Soviet, experience of the Second World War is seldom well understood or given sympathetic treatment in Western historiography. In fact, it could be argued that Western histories of Russia tend to an exceptional degree of 'othering'. Brutal episodes in Russian history are treated as if they are somehow normal to Russia and yet exceptional to the rest of European history, while progressive processes are nearly always attributed to foreign influences, ideas or individuals. The reasons for this are many, including the politics of the day. But there is also the scale of Russia itself and the events of its history – how to compare the 26 million dead of the Soviet war with the 450,000 of the British one? How to compare the Nazi war aims in the West (occupation) with those in the East (enslavement and extermination)? The latter alone gives the Soviet war a visceral, existential nature that few Westerners are equipped to understand.

Any history of Russia, or the Soviet war, plays out in this context.

Hicks attempts an empathetic history of the symbolism of Soviet victory, one that acknowledges the scale and suffering of the Soviet (and within it, Russian) war against the Nazi invaders. The breadth of the research is impressive and the book presents a well-argued narrative of the construction of the Soviet and post-Soviet symbolism of victory. It is well illustrated with interesting and lively vignettes.

However, by presenting this symbolism as a rather uniquely Russian / Soviet phenomenon, the attempt at empathy largely fails. The sympathetic brush strokes produce a canvas of sotto voce criticism familiar to any historian of Russia. This is unfortunate because Hicks no doubt has a finer sense of Russian cinematographic and artistic culture than most, and he has produced a history that is notable in the humanity attributed to Soviet soldiery, and to the journalists, artists and documentarists his history follows.

The problem resides in the lack of historical or political context in both the introduction and the conclusion, spaces where historians can situate their work, indicating how the case study should be viewed by the reader. Here that context could have included a discussion of the universality of national myths, symbolism and official narratives as methods of political legitimation; and acknowledgement of the historical wrong being perpetuated by the West in its revision of the causes and outcomes of the war.

If Stalin airbrushed Trotsky and insisted on an ideological interpretation of '*pobeda'*, the West is today engaged in a full spectrum rewriting of history with a similar political purpose – characterising the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as twin evils, blaming the USSR for the outbreak of war, and recasting the Soviet liberation as an 'occupation' to suit the far-right (neo-Nazi) nationalists of the Slavic and Baltic 'borderlands'. It is an effort that has a political purpose in legitimating the critiques of Russia that justify Western policy.

Unfortunately, without this very necessary context we are left with the impression that there is something unique and 'dishonest' in the Soviet, and later Russian, attempt to build a narrative upon historical events, as if they are the only ones to do so. In fact, the reality is that every nation-state is, as Benedict Anderson wrote, 'an imagined community' that requires common narratives and a sense of shared historical righteousness if it is to survive. Just look at the British narrative of the war – Blitz spirit (not Dresden), Dunkirk (not the Bengal famine); or the US narrative that highlights Iwo Jima but backgrounds the war crime of the atomic bombs dropped (unnecessarily) upon the civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. With the onset of the Cold War different Victory Days eventually came to represent different wars, with the NATO countries seeking to minimise and distract from the Soviet war effort, and enable the construction of a separate 'Western' war free from ideology (to enable a seamless integration of West Germany into NATO) and free of the immense shadow cast by the Soviet war.

So, yes, the Soviet flag-raising and interpretation of victory were and remain subject to construction with political motives, but so too is the West's, and we must not forget it.

Victor Figueroa Clark

My Father's Letters: Correspondence from the Soviet Gulag
(Edited by A Kozlova, N Mikhailov, I Ostrovskaya, S Fadeeva, translated by Georgia Thomson, Granta Books, 2021, ISBN: 978-1-78378-528-5, Hbk, xxi + 280pp, £30.00, with six appendices)

This is a strange beast: a volume with lavish production values, beautifully produced, with the added 'pull' of a (mostly) child-centred approach, as daughters and sons mourn their lost fathers and treasure the few links that remain. It is a translation of a volume published by Memorial in Moscow in 2015.

The Memorial Society's aims are to ensure that Russians (and the world) do not forget the experience of unjust and often brutal arrest and imprisonment which

accompanied the early years of the world's first socialist state.

What audience is the book intended for? Russian specialists? If that were so, we would expect some of the following: a timeline, end notes, a reading list, attribution of sources, and subject and name indexes. Mostly these are not present (although in this case a different set of appendices is provided).

Is it for the general reader, to encourage support for Memorial? The foreword describes the process of going through their own archive, and why they chose to feature fathers rather than mothers (more women survived, most of these men did not). It is notable that most of the men chosen were high achievers socially and intellectually, caught perhaps because of a chance remark, or worse – a victim of the quota system imposed on the interrogators. The explanatory footnotes and some of the indexes at the end may be designed for non-specialists.

At any rate, we have a unique resource from the Memorial archives, an elegant illustrated testimony to the lives of sixteen Russian fathers and their families, who suffered in the 'Whirlwind' (see the translation of Evgeniya Ginzburg's memoir) of party purges and unfounded accusations of the 1930s and '40s. The book is also, in its way, a tribute to Memorial itself, which has been under pressure from the Putin regime for some time.

This reviewer's guess is that the real interest in this volume lies in the information on life in the Gulag as told by those who were actually in it. Good things happened as well as bad. Take Boris Shustov, for example. He was adopted by the criminals in the camp, they named him 'White Swan', showed him their craft, and he entertained them each night with tales of adventure taken from European literature. They helped him fulfil his work quota, building a railway and felling trees (he was not physically strong). When he contracted pneumonia, a free woman from the canteen nursed him and saved his life at the time. It is likely that certain aspects of camp life have been downplayed (not wanting to worry the families), but sometimes we can 'read between the lines'. As the translator notes, there are some deletions and excisions which have been left exactly as found.

The following appendices are provided: Index of places of imprisonment (with a note of who was held in each one); Index of Soviet judicial bodies; Chronology of Soviet secret police agencies; Abbreviations; Acknowledgements; and a statement 'Memorial: Retaining Our Memory of History' with a six-page list of Memorial's archives and collections.

Andrew Jameson

Accursed Poets: Dissident Poetry from Soviet Russia 1960–1980
(Edited and translated by Anatoly Kudryavitsky, Smokestack Books, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-9161392-9-9, Pbk, 211pp, £8.99, introduction, biography of each poet, bilingual text on facing pages)

This remarkable collection of poetry by a widely varying set of dissident writers reveals the underside of Russian poetry. Not that this is new. Some of the most famous and often-quoted poems by Pushkin and Lermontov only circulated in handwritten copies during those poets' lives.

The dissident movement (originally called *inakomyslyashchii* from German *andersdenkend*) stems from the period after Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes and, later, his personal order that *Ivan Denisovich* be printed in *Novy Mir* in November 1962. Before the Party could stop it, a tide of military and prison camp memoirs washed over the newspapers and literary journals. The tradition of 'writing for the desk drawer' was thought to be over, and writers began to write for the public again. And if the official publishing houses would not print it, writers would produce it for themselves on a typewriter (four copies using three carbons) and distribute it through their own networks. I personally saw a library of these in Moscow in manilla folders, to be loaned out under the most

draconian conditions of return. This was the famous *samizdat.* The joke was that a father ordered *War and Peace* to be typed out, because it was the only way he could get his son to read the work. Some of these copies inevitably leaked out to the West and were eagerly printed by émigré publishers (sometimes with all their typing mistakes), and some were knowingly offered to serious publishers. This was known as *tamizdat* (publishing 'over there'). And as the popularity of the Balladeers (Okudzhava, Vysotsky, Galich et al) grew, and tape recorders and compact cassettes appeared, yet a third genre took over: *magizdat*.

In October 1964 the monthly edition of *Krugozor* sound magazine (with flexible discs) failed to come out. It must have been full of materials for the Khrushchev era – but Nikita Sergeevich had just been replaced by Leonid Ilyich (Brezhnev). *Krugozor* was re-thought and only reappeared in January 1965. The reforms begun by Nikita Sergeevich, some of which had succeeded and some failed, were over. The hard liners were back in power. The genie was to be put back in the bottle – except that it proved impossible. Instead, we have the poems of this time, an outburst of pure poetry, unaffected by literary censorship, and free of the triteness of the usual Russian metre and rhyme. The modern style, free verse and newness of subject matter of these poems are a joy. Some comment on Soviet life: Hamlet in a labour camp, a child's drawing seen through bars, a camera that processes human brains. There is black humour: life in a housing block, a black Maria with a blind driver. And there is lyric poetry: poems about April, Adonis, several about autumn, one of which is a clever reversal of Savrasov's famous picture – this one entitled *The Rooks have Departed*.

While saluting the achievement and the PEN award mentioned on the dramatic front cover, one or two improvements could be made in the translation. 'Fat magazines' should be 'literary journals'. *Plach* is a 'Lament'. Best not to call labour camps 'concentration camps' because of the echoes of Fascism. And *dom* is not a 'house' but a 'housing block' (even though that presents more problems for the translator).

Andrew Jameson

Memories of Moscow: Memoirs of a Medical Diplomat
By Harald Lipman (Pectopah Press, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-8382855-0-0, Pbk, 346pp, £8.99)

Dr Lipman's memoirs clearly rely on a notebook of considerable thoroughness – his recollections and observations are detailed and often almost whimsically linked to parallel events far from his Moscow 'bubble'.

His first encounter with Soviet obstructive bureaucracy occurred during an unofficial 'tester' visit he made to Russia in 1983. He and his wife were waiting to board their Moscow flight from Leningrad when they were taken aside, questioned, and searched on suspicion of smuggling antique objects out of Russia. Dr Lipman emptied his pockets; his diary ("which I wrote in whenever I travelled") was taken, and the pages covering his time in Russia were torn out before its return. He reflects that, whatever the security / customs people were hoping to read, they would have been still puzzling it out years later – he admits to his characteristically indecipherable doctor's handwriting!

It is fortunate that this did not deter him from good record-keeping – the result is a fascinating insight into the daily lives of Russian people in the increasingly chaotic 1980s. We read about his – and his wife's – encounters with soldiers on guard at cemeteries; with visiting British artists; with a panoply of Soviet medical practitioners; and with diplomats of all sorts and sizes across the whole of the USSR, plus those at Embassies in Sofia and Bucharest for whose health he also had responsibility. The main lines of his thoughts were always centred on the state of Soviet-era medicine, which he sensed to be equivalent to British medicine in the 1950s. His closest attention was on provision of medicine for children: this led to the establishment of – firstly – very unofficial links with the paediatric

services at Moscow's Tushino Hospital. From those very modest beginnings came, eventually, the foundation of the Tushinskaya Trust, its patronage by Princess Diana, and the establishment of fine paediatric links between Russia and Britain, before the Trust was absorbed into the BEARR Trust (assisting with the care of deprived children in former Soviet republics) – to which Dr Lipman is diverting 50 per cent of royalties from this entertaining book.

It *is* entertaining – and here I declare an interest. In January 1993 I arrived in Moscow, as Defence Attaché, barely two years after Dr Lipman finished his third tour of duty. I share all his impressions of life in the city as the Soviet era faded away. The smells – human and mechanical – in the street air; the joys of 'proper' snow; the culture shock that strikes the expatriate on his return to London (where there is too much of everything) and on his return to Moscow (where there is no more than there was when he left); the rich variety of cultural activities – and at such a good price. The 1980s, seen by Dr Lipman, had steadiness mixed with chaos – it was exciting. It is delicately described, with little non-medical gems popping up at random: Anthony Armstrong Jones' secret package of Marmite; Boris Becker winning Wimbledon; Kim Philby's funeral; tit-for-tat expulsions in 1989. Something of interest on every page.

Phil Wilkinson

Yesterday's Tomorrow: On the Loneliness of Communist Specters and the Reconstruction of the Future
By Bini Adamczak (translated by Adrian Nathan West, MIT Press, 2021, ISBN: 9780262045131, £20.00, first published in 2007 as *Gestern Morgen: Über die Einsamkeit kommunistischer Gespenster und die Rekonstruktion der Zukunft*, Assemblage & Unrast Verlag)

Bini Adamczak, born in December 1979, "works in Berlin as a social theorist and artist who writes on political theory, queer politics, and the past future of revolutions". She is the author of *Communism for Kids* (MIT Press, 2017).

The author describes herself as a communist (p.143), and says that communists including herself have not so far been able to answer the question why a different world is possible; and will remain unable to answer it as long as they fail to confront the historical reality of communism, its actual movement.

So where is she coming from? In September 2020 she published an article entitled 'Corona Crisis Governmentality'. Her message was: "… precisely in the absence of a political – that is, collective – solution, society is called upon to individually assess and calculate risk amongst the contradictions between health and economic policies. Michel Foucault defined this situation as neoliberal biopolitics governing through individualization."

But she is far from being any kind of Marxist. On p.139 she writes: "A depilated Karl Heinrich Marx (d.1883), half his face beardless: henceforward, that is the only portrait of the founder of scientific Marxism that should ever be allowed to hang." This is preceded and followed by two more quotations – from the great pessimist Foucault.

Indeed, the structure of the book is a litany of 'communist' disasters, in reverse historical order. Chapters 2 to 6 are 'Farewell', the Hitler–Stalin Pact in 1939; 'Party', the Great Terror of 1937 to 1939; 'Class', the failure of the Left to stop the Nazis coming to power in 1932; 'Promise', Moscow in 1927 and Stalin's rise to power; and 'Revolution', the crushing of the Kronstadt uprising in 1921.

In his Foreword, Raymond Guess writes that, if he had to describe the book, he would say that "it is a lyrical and philosophical reflection on history in the service of a rekindling of utopian desire".

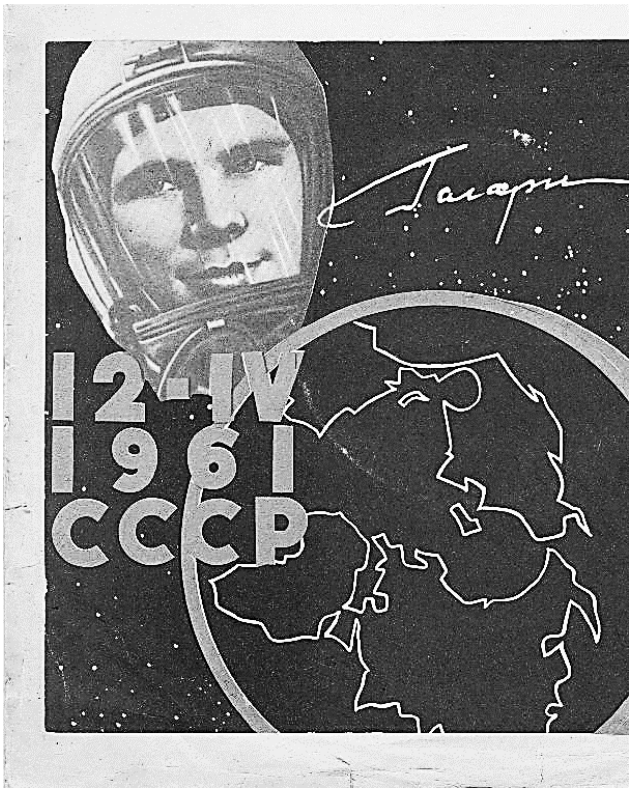
That is precisely the point. The author desires Utopia. But Marx and Engels did not prescribe or seek to design any utopia. That was not communism for them. They wrote: "Communism is for us not a state of affairs

which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things." This enemy is and was capitalism.

The enormous historical significance of the Russian Revolution, which helped to bring about the end of colonial empire, cannot be denied, any more than the English, French or Haitian revolutions.

What is nowhere to be found in Adamczak's book is any sense that we fight against capitalism because it now threatens human life on our planet. The issue is not why Utopia was not created.

Professor Bill Bowring



A Soviet record sleeve for a recording of Yuri Gagarin's transmission from space on 12 April 1961 (SCRSS Library)

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