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Feature

Russia and the New Cold War

By Kate Hudson

The Soviet Union's role in the Second World War meant that, although it had suffered enormously, it emerged with vast prestige and moral authority, and was a truly global player. The West, which had been hostile since 1917, was forced to accept and acknowledge this fact, for example in the USSR's role on the UN Security Council, the division of Europe, and the post-war treaties. But the West only temporarily accepted this new status quo, it worked and waited for a change to come about, as it eventually did in 1989. The 'old' Cold War was a standoff between the two systems where for much of the time the West sought to prevent the expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence, which provided both a popular state socialist economic development model and an attractive

political alternative (in particular for national liberation movements). However, the term 'Cold War' was a misnomer. Although the US and Soviet Union avoided direct confrontation and nuclear war, there were huge numbers of wars and armed struggles where the forces of the people, generally backed by the Soviet Union and its allies, confronted the US and its allies, determined to prevent them from achieving genuine liberation. Vietnam was one such example.



President Trump and President Putin meet in Helsinki, 16 July 2018 (image courtesy of Sputnik)

The years after 1989 were disastrous for the former Soviet Union, as Yeltsin accepted International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy prescriptions that brought about the greatest ever collapse in a peacetime economy. But what became absolutely clear was that any hopes of a new world order of peace and democracy were just absurd. The West had no interest in improving genuine democracy and living conditions in the former state socialist countries. Their primary interest was in opening up the markets of those countries and incorporating them into the

economic and military frameworks of the West.

This can be seen most clearly in the case of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), which is the primary Western military alliance. Originating in the Cold War, it adapted to the era of US global domination and is now used by the US in its attempts to retain that global domination. Indeed, this is what the New Cold War dynamic is all about.

When the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991, NATO did not follow suit. Rather than scaling back its global military presence, the US moved rapidly to integrate the former Warsaw Pact countries into its sphere of influence via NATO. In March 1999, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were all admitted as full members. Ten days later they found themselves at war with their neighbour Yugoslavia, as part of NATO's illegal bombing campaign. But developments at that time were not limited to expanding its membership. At NATO's 50th anniversary conference in Washington in April 1999, a new 'Strategic Concept' was adopted. This moved beyond NATO's previous defensive role to include 'out of area' – in other words offensive – operations, anywhere on the Eurasian landmass. Subsequently, NATO has even seen a global role for itself, often falsely posturing as a force for humanitarian relief. In March 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania were admitted to NATO. In 2009, Albania and Croatia also became members. Montenegro was confirmed as the twenty-ninth member in June 2017, despite huge public opposition. Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are also in negotiations to join the alliance.

This scale of expansion has contributed to international tension as Russia sees itself increasingly surrounded by US and NATO bases. The increasing NATO presence in the region was a major contributory factor to the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and in the continuing crisis in Ukraine. In addition to opening new bases in Eastern Europe, NATO has also opened a training

centre in Georgia and will support the reform of Ukraine's military. NATO exercises, for example in the Baltic region in 2017, are also destabilising.

The Trump presidency has ushered in a new era of militarism. Trump's new defence strategy states that the US will compete for dominance against its long-term strategic competitors Russia and China: this is what the New Cold War is all about. Russia and China are now designated as 'revisionist powers' that wish to reshape the world consistent with their 'authoritarian model'. While Russia was vastly weakened under the Yeltsin presidency and compliant with Western demands, subsequent leaders have rebuilt Russia as a confident and independent actor with its own alliances – the BRICS economic bloc, for example – and a determination to draw the line at NATO expansion into Ukraine and Georgia. Hence the change in rhetoric towards Russia and the marked increase in hostility and tensions. Trump's new approach also shifts the focus away from the Middle East and the 'war on terror'. With the emphasis away from asymmetrical warfare with non-state actors to war with major powers, the risk of nuclear confrontation and war is increased. The recently published new US nuclear posture review develops this framework and makes nuclear war more likely with its commitment to a whole new generation of nuclear weapons (in particular, low-yield nuclear weapons, often described as 'usable'). This goes hand in hand with the US's recently announced \$1 trillion programme for nuclear weapons 'modernisation'.

Of course, the US is not the only one to 'modernise' its nukes. Russia is also undertaking such a programme, although it is worth noting that its goal is to phase out and replace all Soviet-era strategic nuclear weapons systems. This process, which has been under way since the late 1990s, is around 70 per cent complete and due to be finished in the mid-2020s. Compare that to the UK – currently in the Trident replacement modernisation process, the second new nuclear weapons system since the end of the Cold War. China too is

modernising and expanding, albeit from a very small start.

Trump's commitment to NATO appears to hinge upon fellow members being willing to fund US military ambitions. When he attended his first NATO summit in Brussels in May 2017, he took fellow member states to task for failing to meet the agreed two per cent of GDP spending on defence every year, a target that the UK government now meets. He repeated this theme again at the 2018 summit, raising the spectre of four per cent spending, as well as making blustering threats about US withdrawal if NATO countries fail to pay up. His growing demands on member states to spend more on the military, rather than their health, education and housing needs, threaten their sovereign decision-making powers.

One of the key factors in the tensions between Russia and the West is the US / NATO missile defence system. Although described as a 'defence' system, it actually allows for the capability to make first-strike attacks without fear of retaliation. Missile defence installations in Europe are a particularly contentious issue between the US and Russia, with the latter concerned that the system surrounds and threatens its territory. President Bush insisted that the US needed missile defence in case terrorists or 'rogue' states ever obtained missiles able to target the country, but the system was clearly aimed at Russia and China. These plans looked vulnerable at the end of Bush's second term of office: there were enormous concerns that missile defence was leading to a new arms race. Indeed, the term 'New Cold War' was also coined at that time.

Under President Obama, an apparent shift in strategy took place. Obama cancelled the projects proposed for Poland and the Czech Republic and, encouraged by this development, Russia signed up to a new bilateral nuclear reductions agreement ('New START' – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with the US in April 2010. This was a significant move by Russia, following years of tension. In 2002, when the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), Russia had reacted by

refusing to implement START II and suspending the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), while in 2007 President Putin had threatened to withdraw Russia from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) and the CFE.

In reality, the Obama Administration had new plans in place for US missile defence – to modify and expand ship and land-based systems for installation in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The full details were presented in 2010 in a Ballistic Missile Review Report that showed a shift from 'defending the homeland' against long-range missiles to 'defending against regional threats'. Obama wanted land-based Patriot missiles and sea-based Aegis SM-3 interceptors to be installed in Europe for 'protection' against short, medium and intermediate-range missiles. Poland and Romania have agreed to host interceptor missiles, radar systems have already been established in Turkey and Israel, and Spain is hosting US / NATO missile defence ships.

In November 2011, when the US failed to agree to make the missile defence shield a joint project with Russia, President Medvedev announced sweeping plans to address what Moscow considered to be a threat to national security. In December 2013 Russia confirmed that Iskander missiles had been stationed in its westernmost territory of Kaliningrad for over eighteen months. In 2015 Russia finally left the Treaty on CFE, citing the development of the US missile defence system in Europe.

President Trump has reiterated his commitment to missile defence. Following months of tension with North Korea over its continued nuclear testing, the US administration announced in May 2017 that its THAAD missile defence system in South Korea was operational, though not currently at full capability. As well as incurring protests from local residents, who fear the weapon could make them a target, China and Russia are also concerned that the system could impact their nuclear capabilities. This move looks set to antagonise relations further in the region.

This is a dangerous situation by any measure and further developments are unpredictable. It is to be hoped that all those in positions of power and responsibility, particularly in nuclear-armed states, are fully aware of the catastrophe that they could inflict, and that they abandon the rhetoric and escalatory language that has, in recent times, given rise to so much international concern.

Kate Hudson has been General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) since 2010 and is a leading anti-nuclear and anti-war campaigner, both nationally and internationally. She is the author of a number of books, most recently 'CND at 60: Britain's Most Enduring Mass Movement' (2018). By profession a historian, she was Head of Social and Policy Studies at London South Bank University from 2001 to 2010. She is also a Vice-President of the SCRSS.

SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

Library Acquisitions

The Society was delighted to accept a generous donation, from Ruth and Jonathan Steele, of framed Soviet cartoons, posters and other artefacts from the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the Soviet Union. These were acquired when Jonathan was *The Guardian's* bureau chief in Moscow from 1988–94. The Library has also received an almost complete set of the Library of International Literature, a series published in the USSR in the 1970s. These volumes, which include both Russian works and Russian translations of the best of world literature, are currently being accessioned and will be available for members to borrow.

Please note that we are unable to accept bulk donations of books or other items, due to limited space. The Library may consider

individual titles to fill gaps in our collections, but we ask potential donors to supply a listing in advance to the Honorary Secretary.

Library Withdrawals

Over the past eighteen months, SCRSS volunteers have made a huge effort to identify titles for removal from our basement collections in order to relieve over-crowded shelves. These are predominantly exact duplicates, but also books not relating to the Soviet period. Russian literature and history make up the bulk. We are keen to find good homes for these books, but lack of time means that we cannot offer them one by one. Would any SCRSS member be interested in taking several hundred withdrawn titles, or know of a charity or similar organisation that might be interested? The books would be boxed up at the SCRSS and would need to be taken from the premises in one go. Please contact the Honorary Secretary for details.

Merchandise

We have stocked up on the latest five designs of our SCRSS mugs, so do please take a look when you next visit the centre. Mugs cost £6.50 each. They feature images from the SCRSS collections relating to May Day, Victory Day, the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Valentina Tereshkova – the first woman in space. See the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/publications.htm for a promotional leaflet. They are a great way to support the Society – and they make excellent gifts (not least for Christmas)!

Exhibition Viewing and Sale

The SCRSS hosts a social evening on Friday 2 November to mark the Russian Revolution anniversary. It is a final chance to view the exhibition *Lenin: Leader of the Russian Revolution* before it closes. We plan to sell most of the exhibits to raise funds for the SCRSS, so this is a perfect opportunity to make a purchase. Further details will be available in due course.



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SCRSS–MML

As members should already be aware, the SCRSS is currently discussing the long-term possibility of moving its offices and collections to a redeveloped and expanded Marx House on Clerkenwell Green, the current premises of the Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School (MML). A joint working group has been formed, drawn from the SCRSS, SCR House Ltd, MML and Marx House Ltd. It has met several times this year to discuss the project and formulate proposals to be decided upon by the respective organisations.

Following advice from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), on which the whole undertaking relies, a project enquiry form was submitted earlier this year as a first step towards seeking a Resilient Heritage grant for preparatory work. This work would involve a professional audit of the SCRSS collections, governance and skills reviews, audience surveys, development plans, and funding of feasibility studies. HLF's feedback is currently being considered before any bid for funds is actually made. In addition, the working group is discussing a basic Memorandum of Understanding which would underpin the ongoing discussions.

The project has been discussed at the last two AGMs and developments will continue to be regularly reported upon in the *SCRSS Digest*. Meanwhile, if you have any comments or suggestions relating to this, please do not hesitate to contact the Honorary Secretary.

Email Address?

SCRSS membership includes our regular e-newsletter, sent by email up to four times each month. It covers SCRSS news and events; information from related organisations; and occasional discounts or tickets for events offered to our Society's members. If you have an email address and are not receiving the e-newsletter, simply email ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk with 'Subscribe'

in the subject line and we will add you to our list.

Membership and Gift Aid

As usual, many members will receive a green membership renewal notice with this issue of the *SCRSS Digest*. Please help the Society by responding promptly. To make renewal easier in future, please consider setting up a standing order to pay your membership fee annually. The process is simple and we can send you the relevant form by post or email.

If you are a UK taxpayer, we can also claim an extra 25 per cent on any *donations* you make to the Society. The Gift Aid form is available on the website at www.scrss.org.uk/membership.htm or we can post a copy to you. The Society is immensely grateful to those members who 'top up' their membership fee with a donation, as well as to those who have committed to regular monthly donations.

Next Events

Thursday 20 September–Thursday 6 December 2018, 18.00–20.00

Evening Class: Russian Language for Intermediate Level (Term 1, Autumn)

Fees: £40 per term (SCRSS members), £60 per term (non-members).

Saturday 6 October 2018, 11.00–14.00

Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members

Saturday 6 October 2018, 14.00

Talk: Andrew Jameson on *The Horrible History of Russian (What Russian Language Tells Us About Russian History and the Russian Character)*

Normal admission fees apply.

Friday 19 October 2018, 19.00

Talk: Professor Bill Bowring on *Russia's Criminal Justice System – From Tsar Alexander II to President Putin*

Normal admission fees apply.

Friday 2 November 2018, 18.00–21.00
Event: Social Evening / Exhibition
Viewing and Fundraiser
Details to be confirmed.

Saturday 3 November 2018, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening
for Members

Saturday 1 December 2018, 11.00–16.00
Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening
for Members

Please note: Full details for all the above events are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm.

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. Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

Soviet Memorial Trust

Fund News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SMTF / SWMT

SMTF Becomes SWMT

Charity

The Trustees of the SMTF have undertaken to transform the SMTF into a UK charity called the Soviet War Memorial Trust. Charity status will allow the SWMT to apply for UK Government Gift Aid on donations from UK taxpayers and will significantly broaden the range of institutions that can be approached to financially support its work. At the time of writing, a bank account is being opened, which will be followed by an application to the HMRC for recognition as a UK charity for Gift Aid purposes. A launch event and a dedicated website are planned

for the autumn. If you wish to be kept informed of SWMT events and developments and / or would like to support its work by volunteering or donating, then please contact the Honorary Secretary (see below).

Upcoming Anniversaries

In May 2019 the SWMT will mark the 20th anniversary of the unveiling of the Soviet War Memorial in London and, in 2020, the 75th anniversary of the Allied Victory over Fascism. The Trust is hoping to raise sufficient funds to mark both anniversaries with appropriate events, in addition to the Act of Remembrance on the 9 May itself.

Next Events

Sunday 11 November, 12.30
Event: Remembrance Sunday at the Soviet War Memorial

An Act of Remembrance, marking the UK's Remembrance Sunday, will take place at the Soviet War Memorial. The Mayor of Southwark, local politicians, diplomats from Russia and other former USSR states will join veterans and others to lay wreaths at the Memorial and observe a two-minute silence. Members of the public are welcome to attend. If you intend to lay a wreath on behalf of an organisation, contact the Honorary Secretary in advance (see below).

Contact: Honorary Secretary, SMTF / SWMT, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, Email: smtf@hotmail.co.uk

The Soviet War Memorial is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park which surrounds the Imperial War Museum in London. The Memorial was unveiled in 1999 on the initiative of the SCRSS and the Society has been supporting the work of the SMTF / SWMT since its foundation. The Trust organises three main ceremonies at the Memorial each year to mark Holocaust Memorial Day (January); Victory Day (9 May); and Remembrance Sunday (November).

Feature

Social Enterprise in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia

By Charles Buxton

One of the growth areas for civil society organisations in the post-Soviet region is social enterprise. Social enterprise aims to bring together social and economic aims and activities under one roof. In the UK and Europe, it was suggested that this form of activity might help solve the problems brought into focus by the financial crisis of 2007–8 (in the UK it was promoted under the Conservative Government's slogan of the 'Big Society'). In Russia and its neighbours, governments committed to the market economy are trying to use private-sector methods for the solution of the massive social problems inherited from the transition period. Meanwhile, the big international donors talk increasingly about 'social impact investment'.

Kyrgyzstan

Several years ago, the British Council launched its Global Social Enterprise project, in partnership with Social Enterprise UK, to study the spread and impact of this new sector.¹ Almost thirty studies have been completed in large countries like India and Pakistan, and in smaller ones like Ghana, Morocco, Philippines – and this year, Kyrgyzstan. Working closely with the British Council's office in Almaty, Kazakhstan, a team of Bishkek-based researchers at INTRAC used four criteria, worked out with local experts, to identify NGOs and companies that could be described as social enterprises:

1. A social enterprise must have a clearly defined community, social or environmental purpose;
2. It must be involved in trading, that is, selling goods and services for money;
3. It must have rules on limits to profit distribution to private shareholders;

4. It must be independent of the state.

The team discovered that civil society organisations are leading the way in social enterprise development in Kyrgyzstan. The Association of Social Entrepreneurs (ASE) has played a key role in this, led by a group of disabled people's organisations and a high-profile leader Mirbek Asangariev (himself a person with a disability). ASE runs a training programme for social enterprise start-ups and brings in mentors for individual entrepreneurs from the business sector. Other agencies that offer training in business planning include the Aga Khan Foundation's University of Central Asia (UCA) in partnership with Coca-Cola, and the UK-based development agency Enactus which works with student groups.



Social enterprise *Min Jumush* was set up in 2015 in Osh city, Kyrgyzstan. It provides home and office cleaning, as well as public event services, to help young people earn an income while studying in higher education (image courtesy of author)

The INTRAC report showed what a wide spectrum of individuals and organisations are interested in social enterprise in Kyrgyzstan. Women make up 56 per cent of leaders of social enterprises (more than either NGOs or small businesses), while young people aged up to 36 years are

leading the way in start-ups. Social enterprises are working in almost all areas of the economy, with education, social care and retail being the most cited sectors. The objectives of social enterprises are just as diverse. Those mentioned most often were: improving a particular community (63 per cent), creating employment and enterprise opportunities (57 per cent), and supporting vulnerable people (55 per cent). Other responses included supporting women and girls (39 per cent) and promoting education (33 per cent).

In this fledgling sector, some 50 per cent of social enterprises have an annual turnover of less than 10,000 US dollars (USD); 25 per cent have an annual turnover of less than 1,000 USD. A significant number of enterprises have no paid staff. But their organisations are growing and they are often optimistic about the future. While NGO-based social enterprises, in particular, are able to access grants, for three-quarters of them grants make up less than 10 per cent of their annual income.

Our study attracted keen interest from the Kyrgyz Government, in particular from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, on the one hand, and the Ministry of Economy, on the other. Government officials attended a consultation meeting at the start of the study and the presentation of final results, discussing findings and making public statements in support of the work of social enterprises. While there is no special law yet on social enterprise in Kyrgyzstan, our report showed that the term has been used in a number of other recent laws. This will be useful when further initiatives are undertaken to promote the sector.

Kazakhstan and Russia

Social enterprise and innovation are increasingly a priority for government policy in the post-Soviet countries. A recent report on innovation in social policy by Gulnara Dzhunushalieva of the University of Central Asia focused on four countries in the Eurasia region: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.² She found

that social entrepreneurship was a new phenomenon but growing fast. The rapid increase in the number of social enterprises in Russia was supported by major funding from the Russian Government and from a foundation Nashe Budushchee (Our Future), set up in 2007 by the oligarch Vagit Alekperov. Thus, the Ministry of Economic Development reported that in 2015 the federal budget for “socially oriented non-profit organisations” (SONGOs) had increased to 7.2 billion roubles (108 million USD) and the number of organisations in this category had reached 140,000.

Dzhunushalieva noted a variety of roles and actors in the social enterprise field, among them social activists, social innovators, social business, corporative social responsibility, socially responsible business and social reformers. Her own definition owes much to Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, according to whom “what defines social entrepreneurs is that their core personality is committed to the pursuit of the good of all”, together with a comprehensive approach to the problem being tackled and innovative methods of tackling it. Dzhunushalieva found that 83 per cent of the respondents in her study had these characteristics.

The activities of the Nashe Budushchee Foundation are quite impressive. Every year they run a social enterprise competition in which the prizes are in the form of interest-free loans. By 2018 they had given out almost 200 loans to enterprises from fifty-two regions in Russia for a total of 499 million roubles. An *Impulse for Good* prize is awarded annually with several different categories. A social enterprise laboratory develops new kinds of training and support to social business, and a form of certification has been worked out with the British company Social Enterprise Market.

A new law on social enterprise is currently being developed by the Ministry of Economic Development. However, the Foundation’s experts believe that it needs amendment, since it appears not to include ‘socially oriented NGOs’ in the definition of social entrepreneur. At present NGOs make

up about one third of social entrepreneurs in Russia. Just as in Kyrgyzstan, pre-school and supplementary education are popular themes, also leisure and medical services, and a number of production lines (including recycling).

In Kazakhstan the Ata Meken movement is also in favour of a law on social enterprise. A recent article by one of its leaders, Talat Doskenov, noted that a number of institutions surviving from the Soviet period fall into this category: workshops run by the Association of the Blind and other disability groups, cooperatives, rest homes run by trade unions and public libraries. Some of these are public funded in part, raising the question of whether municipal self-financing bodies should fall under the category of social enterprise. Dokenov sums up: "Social entrepreneurship is a means of carrying out social activity, uniting a social mission with economic efficiency and entrepreneurial innovation."

Footnotes

1 See www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise

2 Gulnara Dzhunushalieva, 'The Establishment of Social Entrepreneurship Movements as a Response to the Transformation of Governments' Social Policies', 2016, in GATR Journals jber113, Global Academy of Training and Research Enterprise, URL: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/gtr/gatrjs/jber113.html>

Charles Buxton works for the International NGO Training & Research Centre (INTRAC), Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Feature

Russian Language Teaching in UK Schools

By Katarzyna Piotrowska-Fletcher

When people find out that I am a teacher of Russian, they usually give me a surprised look and ask in disbelief whether any students actually study Russian in UK schools. It is a sad fact that the uptake of

foreign languages among UK students is lower than in other countries. Fewer and fewer make them their exam choice because they are widely considered to be a more challenging subject and one in which it is harder to secure top grades – an important consideration in the grade-driven student community.

So how many students are currently studying Russian in the UK and how successful are they in their studies? Based on official statistics from Pearson Edexcel and CIE, the two examination boards that offer this language at present, approximately 2,100 students sit the Russian GCSE and about 1,250 in total opt to sit the A-level / Cambridge Pre-U in the subject. Among them are both heritage learners (students with some connection with the language, such as having been born in Russia or having Russian parents) and learner candidates, but it is impossible to determine precisely the proportion. The vast majority of Russian learners who start studying the language at the *ab initio* level come from the independent sector, and, more precisely, from a few major private schools such as Harrow School. There are a few exceptions, in most cases grammar schools, but they are few and far between.

This is very regrettable, not only because of the natural beauty of the language and the wealth of culture that comes with it, but also, for those more practically minded, for its usefulness in business as the eighth most spoken language in the world. Russian also inspires a particular passion and loyalty in those students who do choose it. Although significantly fewer start Russian in comparison with students of French or Spanish, they tend to continue with the language not just until their GCSE exams but beyond it, making it one of their A-level choices and, very often, one of their degree subjects. At university, it is typically combined either with another modern language or with classical languages, history, politics, economics, business or even such subjects as engineering.

Interestingly, those who choose to study Russian generally do not find it as hard as

they had feared and do very well in their exams. Most Russian departments pride themselves on an excellent exam grade record, probably as a result of a combination of factors. Firstly, Russian is generally a subject choice of the more academically able students (some schools only allow the top of their new cohort to choose it). Secondly, it is often taught in smaller groups than other languages, which makes it a completely different learning experience for the students. And finally, unlike those teaching more popular languages, teachers of Russian have to try much harder to get 'customers' through their door, extending their teaching to various language-related activities outside the classroom, such as societies, cultural outings, subject competitions, and invaluable language trips and exchanges.

At Harrow School, an independent boarding boys' school in which every student has to study at least one modern foreign language for GCSE, Russian is just one of seven languages that students can choose as their GCSE language option. Spoilt for choice, our boys often study two or more foreign languages, since languages are taught not only on the timetable, but also off the timetable as an extra subject. There are also off-the-timetable lessons for heritage learners who follow a custom-made curriculum cut to their individual needs.

In addition to attending language lessons, boys studying Russian belong to the Slavonic Society which runs a rich programme of lectures, delivered both by world-famous speakers as well as by the members themselves; theatre, ballet and cinema outings; poetry recital and essay competitions; and cultural evenings to celebrate *Maslenitsa* and other similar events (for these events we often pair with one of the other schools that offers Russian).

There are regular cultural and language trips to Russia, but we also organise Russian language study trips to some of the ex-Soviet republics. Despite what we see on TV and read in the press about tensions between the governments of Russia and the

republics of the former Soviet Union, in fact there are lots of extremely warm and hospitable people in these countries for whom speaking Russian is not an issue. My students and I experienced this very special hospitality during a one-week stay in Kazakhstan, where the boys spent a week working with children in an orphanage in Almaty. More recently, during a language trip to Estonia, the boys participated in an intensive Russian language course without the hassle of obtaining Russian visas and for a fraction of what they would have been paying for a similar course in Russia.

The passion with which my students at Harrow School learn Russian and, above all, their loyalty have always been a true source of inspiration for me. Similarly, for other British schools, despite many obstacles – such as the constant shortage of resources and the uncertainty accompanying the recently reformed exams – with enough drive and determination on the part of students and their teachers, Russian will, hopefully, not only survive but continue to flourish in the future.

Katarzyna Piotrowska-Fletcher is Head of Russian at Harrow School. She has an MA in Languages (Russian & English) and Linguistics from Warsaw University, and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists.

Feature

The Impact of Soviet Art on British Art from the 1930s to the Early Cold War

By Christine Lindey

The socio-political effects of the Bolshevik Revolution cannot be overestimated. As capitalist governments feared its spread to their own working classes, it energised and radicalised the latter. Yet art historians have somewhat underestimated its impact on Western art in the interwar years and beyond. Only a minority of British artists

were inspired by Soviet art, whereas many disparaged it, but the issues it raised about the form and the social function of art provoked debates within both factions.

Initially, Bolshevik experiments such as El Lissitzky's and Lyubov Popova's abstractions made little impact on the rather insular 1920s British art world. But in the early 1930s Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson, members of the tiny British avant-garde, were obliquely influenced by Soviet abstraction through their membership of the Paris-based, international Abstraction-Creation Group, which included Soviet artists.

Meanwhile, some British artists were troubled by the international avant-garde's focus on formal innovations, which they saw as individualist elitism that ignored artists' social responsibility. They were also appalled by the mass unemployment, poverty and social inequalities exacerbated by the Great Depression, which contrasted with the socio-political achievements of the new worker state. In the early 1930s a few artists, including the communists Cliff Rowe and Betty Rea and the socialists Misha Black and Pearl Binder, set off for the USSR to see for themselves.

They discovered a dynamic, pluralist art world, some of whose Marxist artists energetically opposed their own avant-garde's obscure 'abstract concoctions' and argued for an accessible, forward-looking realist art. Their influential Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR), founded in 1922, celebrated working-class achievements through depictions of contemporary Soviet life in its revolutionary development. In style they ranged from Isaak Brodsky's precise realism to Alexander Deineka's and Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's moderate absorption of elements of modernism, but all of their styles were legible. They were to become the precursors of the method of Socialist Realism in art, adopted in 1934.

Some British visitors had reservations about the styles of Soviet art, but all were impressed by Soviet cultural policies. Unlike

capitalist societies, which cast artists as individualist outsiders competing for inadequate patronage, the USSR integrated art and artists into society. It democratised access to art and art education, promoted state patronage of public arts (murals, sculptures and illustration) and encouraged artists' organisations. In contrast to the situation in depression-hit Britain, illustration and design work was plentiful in aid of public information and literacy campaigns, and international artists were welcomed. Rowe and Binder were among those who stayed on to work there.



Comradeship in Industry, 1934, by Serafima Riangina (reproduced in the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, 1942, SCRSS Library)

Rowe later said that he only returned to Britain in 1933 because the political struggle was more urgent there.¹ Inspired by Soviet artists' organisations, that year he initiated the formation of a British artists' collective known as the Artists International (AI). Its stated purpose was to spread Marxism and

to assert “the international unity of artists against imperialist war on the Soviet Union, fascism and colonial oppression”. The AI combatted fascism, exposed capitalist exploitation and fostered working-class politicisation through the public arts of banners, posters, leaflets and cartoons, and illustrations in publications such as *Left Review*. It democratised access to art through meetings and exhibitions such as *The Social Scene* in 1934, pointedly held in London’s Whitechapel Gallery where the middle class feared to tread.

By 1935 the growing international fascist threat spurred the AI to widen its membership by tempering its Marxist outlook and renaming itself the Artists International Association (AIA), yet its policies remained left-wing. It grew rapidly during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) as progressive artists were galvanised into supporting the anti-fascist struggle, which they understood to be the front line against a second world war.

The AIA blossomed during World War II when government policies to popularise the arts as a means of creating social cohesion echoed the AIA’s commitment to democratising access to the arts. Indeed, the British State’s attitudes were partially coloured by Soviet-inspired AI and AIA ideals. Thus, the influential War Artists’ Advisory Committee (WAAC), a government organisation, was a major patron and promoter of various forms of accessible and patriotic realist art. Works such as Laura Knight’s *Ruby Loftus Screwing a Breech-Ring* (1943), which it commissioned, could well be mistaken for a Soviet painting.

The wartime Anglo-Soviet alliance prompted much British interest in the USSR. There were publications about Soviet art and exhibitions were held, some curated by the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR – the SCRSS’s original name). Even normally snooty critics reviewed these relatively sympathetically; yet British artists, including socially committed ones, were often baffled by Soviet art’s aesthetic conservatism. This was due partly to the rather narrow interpretation of Socialist

Realism favoured by the Soviet wartime art establishment, for example Serafima Riangina’s painting *Comradeship in Industry*, 1934. Prints of the latter were sold in Britain and reproduced in an article by Edward Carter in the summer 1942 issue of the SCR’s *Anglo-Soviet Journal*. He explained that art’s different social role in the Soviet Union made it difficult for a British audience to appreciate “that the Soviet artist in his [sic] task of interpreting such strong, simple, and direct sentiments can speak in equally direct and simple language”.² Yet the rather patronising tone of his earnest defence implied that he too may have been a little baffled.

The Cold War killed hopes of the continuation of a socially inclusive British art. The dominant aesthetic now demonised Soviet Socialist Realism as old-fashioned, retrogressive and lacking in artistic freedom. It was contrasted with Western abstraction’s freedom of expression which triumphed as the pinnacle of a stylistic hierarchy, at whose base languished all forms of realism, tainted through association with Soviet art. Ironically, the art establishment adopted Bolshevik abstraction as a pioneer in its narrative of the development of ‘international’ abstraction, but stripped it of its original social intentions. Artistic freedom now eclipsed artists’ social responsibility. Yet a small minority of courageous British socially committed realists, such as Rowe, carried on regardless.

Footnotes

1 L Morris & A Brighton, *Interview with Cliff Rowe*, Tate Archive, 1978

2 E Carter, ‘Modern Soviet Art’, *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, London, Vol III, No 3, July–September 1942, pp 172–176

Christine Lindey is an art historian with a special interest in Soviet and Socialist art. She has taught art history at Birkbeck College, University of London, and at the University of the Arts, London. Her new book ‘Art for All: British Socially Committed Art from the 1930s to the Cold War’ will be published by Artery Publications in late September 2018.

Reviews

Short Stories from Azerbaijan in One Volume

Edited by Anne Thompson-Ahmadova (translated by Nazakat Agayeva, Hertfordshire Press in partnership with the Translation Centre under the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan, 2018, ISBN: 978-1-9100886-72-4, 383pp)

Azerbaijan is a small country that packs a powerful cultural punch. I was first drawn to its transcendental mugham music, which is recognised as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. But as a translator I have become increasingly impressed by its literature. The two are interlinked, as the Azeri literary tradition has its roots in lyrics sung to traditional music forms. The authors in this collection are successors to the great twelfth-century poet Nizami Ganjevi, the poets and bards of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, and the Russian-influenced writers of the nineteenth century. The first author in this anthology was born in 1870; the last in 1968. The opening story is a satire on the tsarist secret police (*The Bomb* by Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev); the last a mystical tale of love and death (*Maryam's Son* by Fakhri Ughurlu). Spanning a century, these stories offer glimpses into the trajectory of Azerbaijan as it went from being part of the Russian Tsarist Empire to an independent republic in 1918, to being absorbed by the Soviet Union and finally gaining independence in 1991. A prominent theme in many stories is the tension between village and city, between the traditional way of life and the modern, between older and younger generations (such as *He Didn't Come* by Ali Valiyev, in which a city man returns to the village of his birth but fails to visit his parents). The stories include *Martyrs' Avenue*, a heart-rending account of the aftermath of Black January 1990 when hundreds of independence demonstrators were massacred by Soviet forces. There is

also a wonderfully reflective musing on literature, materialism and social change, triggered by Pope John Paul's visit to Baku in 2002 (*John Paul II* by Afag Masud). There is humour too. *Dried Up in Meetings* by Mir Jalal Pashayev creates an absurd bureaucratic figure who is all too recognisable today.

I wondered why there were only two women writers included in the selection. Most of the stories have a male protagonist. The Azerbaijani editors said this was due to few women of the period writing short stories for adults, but more books by contemporary women authors are in the Azerbaijan Translation Centre's pipeline.

Most of these stories have been translated from Azeri and a few from Russian. This collection is in the process of being translated into nine languages besides English, including Arabic and Norwegian. Culture in Azerbaijan receives strong state support. For the Western reader this collection, skilfully translated and edited, provides a welcome insight into a society that is relatively little known in the West. Highly recommended to anyone seeking to broaden their knowledge of this fascinating country.

Caroline Walton

The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past
By Shaun Walker (Oxford University Press, February 2018, ISBN: 978-0-19-065924-0, Hbk, 278pp, £20.00, index, maps)

Written by a *Guardian* journalist, who has worked in Russia for more than a decade, this book seeks to chart Vladimir Putin's mission to fill the void left by the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is written in a journalistic style: part anecdote, part interview and part historical interpretation. It attempts to show how the political leadership under Putin has consolidated Russia and attempted to turn a formerly traumatised country into a major world player. This theme is continued in

parts of the book where the author illustrates how Putin uses the sense of injustice caused by the dismantling of the Soviet Union to promote a particular brand of nation building. At the centre of nation building is the Soviet victory in the Second World War – “an anchor of national legitimacy in an ocean of uncertainty” (page 20). The new regime also relies on the Russian Orthodox Church to provide a new moral code and sense of purpose.

This theme, however, is not developed; in most of the book the author turns to ‘curating’ the past and the present. In an attempt to evaluate the reality of the war, he turns to the darker side of Soviet history: the deportation of the Kalmyks and other nationalities, notably the Tatar population from Ukraine. Two other chapters, not related to the nation building theme, deal with the bloody war in Chechnya and a discussion of Kolyma, an outpost of the Gulag system. The objective here is to balance the glorification of the Soviet past with the repressive elements of the regime. The result gives a catalogue of Soviet misdeeds and the thread of nation building is lost. The book, however, has many interesting interviews with witnesses to past and current events. These recall their often horrific personal history during the chaotic and violent periods of Soviet history. Here the author adds his own rhetorical twist to events. On a visit to Kolyma, he recalls: “I could hear the whooshing of the fast-flowing river, into which it is believed that the NKVD agents tossed the corpses of their victims after executing them” (page 93).

There are chapters on the politics of Ukraine, the Crimea and Donbass. These focus on the post-Soviet period. The prose is often vivid and written in an accessible journalistic style with reflections on Soviet, Russian and Ukrainian history and society. As appropriate for a journalist, the author uses his interviews to great advantage and their scope brings to light many diverse views. However, this leads to personalised forms of explanation. The transition from communism is described as a “scramble for something to steal” (page 190) and oligarchs like Akhmetov are described as

“hoover[ing] up many of the biggest factories and enterprises in the region” (page 191). We might have had something on the policies of Western interests, such as the European Union, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and their advisers who framed the policy of transformation in terms of privatisation and marketisation. The frequent references in the book to corruption preceded President Putin and could have been traced back to the post-communist leadership, especially President Yeltsin.

The author has some excellent reporting of the events in Donbass and interesting discussions with leaders of the rebel forces. Many of these exposed the author to considerable danger. He emphasises the role of Russia in the events; and he rails at John Pilger’s reports which he considers “bought the Kremlin’s talking points uncritically” (page 221). The author’s account would have been more balanced had he considered the Orange Revolution and the ousting of a legitimately elected president in the context of Western involvement in democracy promotion and the enlargement of the European Union.

Dr David Lane

Russian-Turkmen Encounters: The Caspian Frontier before the Great Game

By S Peter Poullada with translations by Claora E Styron (IB Tauris, 2018, ISBN: 978-1-78453-701-2, Hbk, xxx + 181pp, £69.00, preface, endnotes, biblio, index, col illus, maps, also available in Kindle edition)

The defining difference between Russia and other European states lies in its frontier with Asia, Asian politics and the Asian way of life. The Russian-Viking state was torn away from its European connections after the Mongols’ siege and sack of Kiev in 1240. For the next two hundred years all Russian princes had to travel to Sarai (near Astrakhan) to receive the Great Khan’s letters patent (*yarlek*). The Mongols did not interfere with local life or religion, but they

set up post roads, held censuses and levied taxes. The Russian words for treasury, money, customs and prison are all Turkic.

As the Mongol–Tatar grip lessened, one might have thought that Russia could have turned again to Europe, but no: the way was blocked by the Polish–Lithuanian empire that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In the East, Ivan IV ('The Terrible') added two Khanates to Russian lands, Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1556. Sweden and Poland exploited Russian weaknesses in the West at the same time as Russia made advances in the East down to the Caspian and into Siberia. Ivan, by murdering his own son and heir, brought the 'Rurik' dynasty to an end in 1598. The Time of Troubles followed until Mikhail Romanov, in 1613, founded the Romanov dynasty, and slowly Russia, a more than half-oriental state, began to broaden its horizons. Peter the Great (1682–1725) was the first to speak of the Russian Empire and himself as 'Imperator'. We sometimes forget how many wars, in East and West, Peter fought at the same time as he pushed through his forceful Europeanisation of Russia.

This is the often chaotic historical context for the book reviewed here. The first half of the book tells the story of the peoples living on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, told from their point of view. In the mid-eighteenth century the Russian Tsar sent two expeditions across the Caspian Sea in response to an extraordinary plea for assistance from the recently subjugated Kalmyk Khan. The official journals of these expeditions form the second half of this unusual study, translated into English here for the first time, and record the encounters of Captains Tebelev and Kopitovskii (in 1741 and 1745, respectively) with the Turkmen tribes of the Caspian frontier zone. The author shows that before the better-known nineteenth-century rivalry between the Russian and British Empires, famously known as the Great Game, Russian merchants, envoys and explorers were engaged in a complex relationship with the various tribal and political groups of Central Asia: Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kalmyks and even forces from the Safavid and

Afshar shahs who ruled Iran. The study draws on Russian archival sources, as well as Persian and Uzbek chronicles.

Andrew Jameson



One of our 2018 SCRSS mug designs: 1983: 20th Anniversary of the World's First Woman in Space, Cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, £6.50. See [www.scrss.org.uk/ Documents/SCRSS-mugs-leaflet-2018.pdf](http://www.scrss.org.uk/Documents/SCRSS-mugs-leaflet-2018.pdf) for colour photos of all five designs.

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