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## Feature

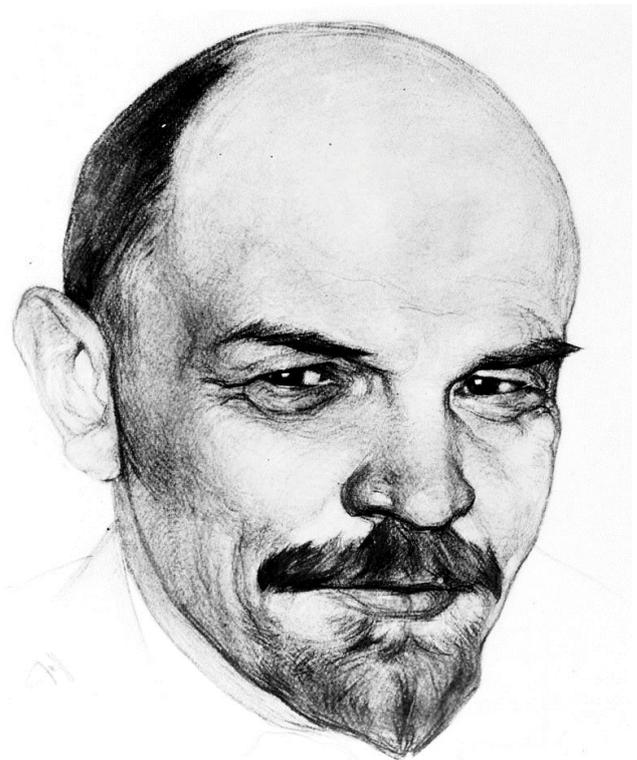
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### The Heritage of Vladimir Lenin

By David Lane

One hundred and fifty years ago, on 22 April 1870 in Simbirsk, Russia, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (universally known as Lenin) was born. He came from a wealthy middle-class family in the estate of the nobility (the *dvoryanstvo*). His father, an inspector of schools, was able to finance his two sons' university education. A formative event in Lenin's life was his brother's execution by hanging for plotting the assassination of the Tsar in 1887. Lenin himself followed in the tradition of opposition to the autocracy: he was expelled from Kazan University for dissident activity and later, in 1897, exiled for three years to Siberia. He became an active social democrat in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, and a founder and leader of its Bolshevik wing. Lenin was a leading Marxist theorist of monopoly capitalism and is best known for the tactics and the leadership of the successful Bolshevik insurrection against the Provisional Government in October 1917. He consequently became the head of

the Government of Soviet Russia and later the Soviet Union (Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars) until he died in 1924.



Pencil portrait of Lenin (SCRSS Library)

### The Image of Lenin

Lenin is a controversial political leader who has aroused deep feelings of loyalty among his followers and distrust, even aversion, from his opponents. Leszek Kolakowski (1978, *Vol. 2*) has set the tone for contemporary Western interpretations. "To Lenin... all theoretical questions were merely instruments of a single aim, the revolution." Once achieved, it led to a "one-man tyranny" (pages 383, 489). Richard Pipes described him as "a ruthless and manipulative leader" (1996, *publisher's blurb*). This approach is also shared by

some Marxists, notably by Rosa Luxemburg (1961 [1904]). Tom Rockmore (2018, pages 208–9) is one of the latest commentators to condemn Lenin for his endorsement of the dictatorship of the Party over the working class.

Others are more positive. Maurice Dobb, at a meeting convened by the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (now the SCRSS) on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenin's birth, remarked that "his simplicity and the straightforwardness of everything he said was an essential part of his nature"; the "secret of his influence was... that he could be part of the mass and lead at the same time" (1970, page 5). Georg Lukacs, as early as 1924, described Lenin as the "greatest thinker to have been produced by the revolutionary working-class movement since Marx" (1970 [1924], page 9). A view shared by Stalin and Mao Zedong. Even after the dismantling of the European communist states in the twenty-first century, writers such as Lars T Lih (2011, 2005) and Alan Shandro (2014), provide positive appraisals. Slavoj Zizek calls for a "return to Lenin", to "*repeating*, in the present worldwide conditions, ...the revolutionary project in the conditions of imperialism and colonialism" (2017, page 11).

The ambiguity of these conflicting interpretations lies in the lumping together of quite distinctive phases and dimensions of Lenin's political philosophy and action. We need to distinguish between Lenin's thought (his conception of the conditions and tactics for socialist revolution); the legitimating doctrine of Leninism devised in the USSR after the Bolshevik seizure of power; and the continuation of the revolution after Lenin's death under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, and in China under Mao Zedong.

## **Lenin's Theory of Socialist Revolution**

Whereas Marx and Engels used Western Europe as their chief empirical referent, Lenin's approach was based on his study of Russian society in the late nineteenth

century, which he embedded in the evolution of capitalism as a world economic system. Such contradictions could only be resolved, he contended, by a movement to socialism. By extending Marx's method and linking it in this way explicitly to Russian problems, Marxism as it developed in Russia became differentiated from the Marxism of Western Europe.

Lenin followed conventional nineteenth-century Marxist reasoning but he developed an understanding of capitalism as applied to Russia in three substantive ways. First, the idea of the uneven development of capitalism; second, a theory of leadership and political mobilisation embodied in a political party promoting revolution; and third, a theory of imperialism that describes the stage of monopoly capitalism (imperialism) in the early twentieth century. Lenin went beyond Marx and Engels by combining political economy, a sociology of the class structure, and a strategy for political action.

His ideas on the uneven development of capitalism in its imperialist form links the socialist revolution in the East to the consequences of capitalism in the West. Europe in 1917 gave rise to a situation that "offered us the opportunity to create the fundamental requisites of civilisation in a different way from that of the Western European countries". For Lenin, capitalism was international: the socialist revolution would take place at the weakest link in the capitalist chain and this was to be found in countries undergoing the transition to capitalism, in the semi-peripheries. Lenin also anticipated a revolution in Russia spreading to oriental countries such as China; the focus of socialist revolution would move to the East. But that was not all. A crucial assumption was that a socialist revolution in Russia, led by the Bolsheviks, would be paralleled in Western Europe.

But a new social formation would not spontaneously grow out of capitalism. Human action in the form of a revolutionary social-democratic political party was necessary to move society on from capitalism to socialism. Lenin called for a

centralised Party of committed socialist revolutionaries to bring about revolution. He shifted the balance of political action from spontaneity to organisation.

Lenin's analysis of the social structure of development in Russia, as an exemplar of developing colonial countries, was correct. He detected the weakness of the domestic bourgeoisie as a revolutionary force. He fittingly widened the definition of the working class from the proletariat to include all the working population (*trudiyashchiysya*) in the democratic revolution. While he correctly considered the rich and middle peasantry to be class groups that would support the overthrow of the autocracy and the institution of a property-owning bourgeoisie, he misjudged the middle and poor peasants' adverse disposition towards a collectivist economic structure. The October Revolution led not only to the consolidation of peasant lands but to a considerable growth in the number of middle and poor peasants. Their attachment to land ownership was much greater than their support for a new form of collective ownership. Consequently, the Bolsheviks faced entrenched opposition from the villages that led to violence and repression of the peasantry in order to keep the Bolsheviks in power.

Lenin was again correct in his analysis of the need for political organisation, in the form of the leadership of the Communist Party. Under conditions of police surveillance, a "party of a new type", with a democratic form of policy making and centralised organisation and control, was a practical necessity for any social-democratic party to survive in tsarist Russia. But the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', instituted to keep the Bolsheviks in power, is more controversial. While Marx regarded it as legitimate to secure a socialist government against counter-revolution, it continued as a form of oppression in post-tsarist Russia. Where Lenin was incomplete was in his failure fully to understand the adverse effects of bureaucratic control that became apparent in the period after the seizure of power in Russia. Democratic centralism became a process of centralised economic development and modernisation that had

positive effects with respect to social welfare and equality, while, concurrently, the political forms of tsarist Russia were reconstituted as a political bureaucracy.

## Geopolitical Aspects

Lenin's geopolitical analysis of capitalism as imperial monopoly capitalism drew attention to the inherent conflict between hegemonic capitalist and dependent states. Lenin's political focus on capitalism's 'weakest links' and the successful seizure of power in 1917 shifted the national and socialist revolutions to the colonial world. Lenin noted the dislocating effects of the First World War on the capitalist powers. It was a decisive factor in disrupting the Russian economy and society, and created a wide range of political strata predisposed to ending the tsarist regime. Lenin showed immense courage and political leadership in carrying out a successful national revolution. This was his greatest achievement.

However, Lenin misjudged the national political and social relationships between classes in the developed capitalist states. On 20 October 1920, he reiterated his belief that "in Germany and England we have created a new zone of the proletarian revolution against worldwide imperialism". The idea that a working-class rebellion would take place then was mistaken. He was mistaken to believe that a revolution in Russia would be the spark that would break world capitalism. Imperial capitalism could be likened not to a continuous chain with weak links, but to a large tree: cutting off branches does not kill it, on the contrary, it stimulates new growth. Capitalism continued to expand and grow. Lenin erred in his understanding of the working classes in the advanced capitalist states. Despite systemic economic crises, capitalist societies have maintained high levels of social and political integration. The Western working classes remained integrated into capitalist society and this attachment was neither broken by the suffering endured during the First World War, nor by the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Eventually, in the late twentieth century,

capitalism overpowered the Soviet Union, as well as the East European socialist states.

Lenin creatively fused Marx's economic analysis of capitalism to a sociology of Russia, to a geoeconomics of capitalism, and to a politics of leadership and action. He regarded the October Revolution in Russia as a success for the socialist cause. However, his approach was incomplete and he provided an erroneous analysis of the disintegration of advanced imperial capitalism. Capitalism in the West was threatened by the October Revolution but not defeated by it. Ironically, a hundred years after the October revolution, post-Soviet Russia has re-joined the capitalist chain. Slavoj Žižek's appeal to "reinvent" Lenin's call to revolution remains even more challenging now than it did in October 1917.

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*David Lane is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and currently Emeritus Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge University; he was previously Professor of Sociology at the University of Birmingham.*

*He has written extensively on the USSR and state socialism, Marxism and socialism. Recent publications include: 'Changing Regional Alliances for China and the West' (with G Zhu, 2018); 'Elites and Identity in the Transformation of State Socialism' (2014); 'The Capitalist Transformation of State Socialism' (2014).*

## SCRSS News

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*Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS*

### Annual General Meeting 2020

This year's SCRSS AGM will take place on Saturday 24 October at 11.00. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, it will be online only, using the Zoom application. Members must register in advance before 17.00 on Wednesday 21 October in order to receive the link to join the meeting. To register, email [ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk](mailto:ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk) with 'AGM registration' in the subject line and your name in the body of the message. The AGM will discuss the Annual Report and Accounts for 2019, as well as elect members of the SCRSS Council. The meeting provides an opportunity for members to question the Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and other members of the SCRSS Council on the contents of the Report and Accounts, and discuss the future development of the Society. The Annual Report and Accounts will be sent out by email ahead of the AGM to give members an opportunity to review them beforehand.

### Activity

Despite the absence of live events and library activity at the SCRSS centre in Brixton, the Society is continuing to operate, with a switch to online events. These begin with a talk by the Society's President, Professor Bill Bowring, on 30 September. The SCRSS Council continues to

monitor the situation and assess when volunteers can return, and library openings, events and room hire resume. Given the tightening of Covid-19 restrictions towards the end of September, realistically it may be some time before it is judged safe to do so.

## SCRSS Digest

This edition of the *SCRSS Digest* is accompanied by a copy of the special summer edition dedicated to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Allied Victory in the Second World War. This was previously available on the SCRSS website only, but now everyone can have a physical copy! We are grateful to Diana Turner for her role as volunteer editor of the *SCRSS Digest*.

## Email Updates

The Covid-19 restrictions mean that it is more important than ever that we are able to communicate with members regularly by email. If you are not receiving the Society's email updates, please contact the Honorary Secretary as soon as possible to be added to the mailing list. And if you change your address, please send us the new details. The email updates contain information, between editions of the *SCRSS Digest*, about our own events, as well as links to events of interest elsewhere. Members can also use the updates to alert other members to projects they are involved with (for example, books, talks, exhibitions), as well as to seek help for research or to find a particular book. The updates will keep you informed about planned openings of the library and events when these eventually resume. The SCRSS website is also updated regularly with event information and has a very extensive Useful Links page.

## Online Panel

The online panel on *Historical Memory and the Fight Against Fascism*, jointly organised with the Marx Memorial Library (MML), was a tremendous success with an audience of almost 120 people. Speakers Michael

Jones, Phil Katz and Jonathan White covered a huge amount of ground, both historic and contemporary. If you missed it, you can still view the entire meeting via the Events section of MML's website. A 'Part 2' of this online panel will follow in November, with participation from the SCRSS, MML, the Soviet War Memorial Trust and the International Brigade Memorial Trust. Details will be available on the SCRSS website and via email updates to members in due course.

## Membership Renewal

As Covid-19 continues to affect everything we do, I am extremely grateful to everyone who responded so positively to the membership renewal appeal in July. I am still processing these and hope to have all the new cards dispatched over the next few weeks. If you are due for renewal any time up to the end of the year, you should find a membership renewal reminder enclosed in this mailing. The Society relies on membership income for much of its regular expenditure, so do please respond promptly. If you wish to pay online, email the Honorary Secretary to request the relevant details. Many members already have standing orders set up to pay their membership fee automatically each year. If you prefer to use this method, then simply confirm details in an email or by post. This should prevent any further renewal notices being received and will ensure your membership never lapses.

## Next Events

**Saturday 24 October 2020, 11.00–12.30**  
**Zoom Online Event: SCRSS Annual General Meeting**

**Tuesday 3 November 2020, 19.00–20.30**  
**Zoom Online Lecture: Dr David Lane on *Lenin's Ideas on Revolution: Are they Relevant Today?***

*Up-to-date details for all events are available on the SCRSS website at [www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm).*

# Soviet War Memorial Trust News

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Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

## Manchester Memorial



Unveiling ceremony of the Manchester Memorial, (photo courtesy of the Russian Embassy)

The SWMT welcomes news of the unveiling of a plaque in Manchester in early September 2020 dedicated to the 'Soviet soldiers who gave their lives liberating Europe'. It also pays tribute to the citizens of besieged Leningrad (now St Petersburg), Manchester's twin city. The unveiling was attended by the Lord Mayor and the Russian Ambassador. Photographs and more details can be found on the websites of the Russian Embassy (search for "Manchester memorial") and Sputnik News (search for "Manchester plaque").

## Next Events

**Sunday 8 November 2020 (TBC)**

**Event: Remembrance Sunday, Soviet War Memorial, London**

The SWMT hopes to conduct a ceremony at the Soviet War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday. However, much will depend on UK Government Covid-19 guidance and regulations. Further information will be available on the SCRSS and SWMT

websites in due course. You can also contact the SWMT by email at [sovietwarmemorialtrust@gmail.com](mailto:sovietwarmemorialtrust@gmail.com).

*The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against Fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet War Memorial Trust (SWMT). Events take place at the Memorial on Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army), Victory Day (9 May) and Remembrance Sunday. More information about the Soviet War Memorial and the SWMT can be found at: [www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com](http://www.sovietwarmemorialtrust.com).*

## Feature

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### Highlights from the SCRSS Archive

By Jane Rosen

This is the first in what we hope will be a series highlighting discoveries from the SCRSS Archive as work is done on sorting it in preparation for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our organisation. So, let's begin with an introduction to the Archive itself.

The Archive is situated on the top floor of 320 Brixton Road. As you enter it, you are greeted with the smell of old paper and a vision of crowded shelves and filing cabinets. Here is the history of the Society from when it began in 1924 as the Society for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (SCR) to the present day. Much of the earlier period is sorted and is in archive boxes labelled with their contents. Much is not. The idea is that this material should be organised and used to produce a centenary history for the anniversary in 2024.

Obviously, the project has been delayed by the current pandemic. However, there has been some progress and, although this has been concentrated on the later part of the Society's history, it has given some enlightening information of use not just for the centennial publication but for future research in the field of cultural relations with the Soviet Union during the Gorbachev years, and the transition to the post-Soviet period.



Soviet teachers on the SCR Russian Language Easter Seminar, April 1985, enjoy a guided tour of Salisbury by Christine Matthews (right) of the SCR Wessex Branch (SCRSS Archive)

Many of the discoveries have been in the area of Russian language teaching in the UK and the SCR's sterling work in promoting its study here. I have delved into the records of the Easter Seminar – from its earliest appearance in the 1970s to its heyday in the 1980s and the final course in the early 1990s. There are also references to the courses we organised in the Soviet Union and masses of information on the changes that occurred to the arrangements and structure of these during the 1990s. These provide a rich source for those studying this transitional period.

Discoveries have also been made regarding one of the transformative periods of the Society when it moved to Brixton. We have found papers that relate to the buying of the building, its preparation, material relating to the basement and its suitability for housing the Library, and information regarding the inherited, long-term tenant, Lena Evans.

You will be pleased to know that, although unable to physically attend the Archive during these difficult months of the pandemic, work has not stopped. The National Archives has allowed visitors to its website to download digitised items free of charge. We have, therefore, been able to find material on the Society and many of its members, including personalities such as Jack Gaster, Dora Cox and Ivor Montagu. It provides a snapshot of what these people were involved in and how they were perceived by the authorities. It also provides us with an idea of how inefficient the intelligence services were, how prevalent the observation was, how threatened they were by the Soviet Union, and how dangerous they felt some of our members were. I think we should take pride in that! The information that we find will be added to the Archive when appropriate.



320 Brixton Rd, London SW9 – the SCRSS's home since 1969, photographed in 1947 (SCRSS Archive)

Another great addition to the Archive is an interview conducted with Jean Turner, former long-term General Secretary and current Honorary Treasurer. The interview was carried out at the end of last year and finally transcribed during the lockdown. Much of the interview covers the last decade of the Soviet Union and refers to the refurbishment of the building, the development of the idea of the Soviet War Memorial and the subsequent work to ensure that it happened. It also deals with the renaming of the Society, which is supported by the written scrawl discovered before lockdown (it cannot really be described as a note) emanating from a

discussion between Jean and Bill Bowring, then Chair of the Society, with naming suggestions.

We are thinking of extending our interviews to other long-time members and officers of the SCRSS, although this is only likely to happen after restrictions to movements and meetings end. So be prepared!



John Platts-Mills, former SCR President – left,  
Andrew Rothstein, former SCR Vice-President – right  
(SCRSS Archive)

The Archive is a treasure trove. Much of it is undiscovered treasures and we want to share these with you as we find them, or indeed as they are rediscovered. Some of the highlights include the scrapbooks of the earliest period of our existence and, again, these newspaper cuttings show not just the excitement of the developments and achievements of this new country; but also the fear in which it was held. Some of the material is unexpected – the sharpness of Andrew Rothstein in his comments to the then Librarian that he would not be interviewed by the BBC, a lesson to her that this bastion of objective news reporting could not be trusted (well, actually, I already knew that, I had been brought up properly), but the incisive Rothstein terminology was a joy to read. And, indeed, the letters penned by John Platts-Mills, former SCR President, all of which show his sense of humour and his joy in life.

Some of the treasures are (or will be, when we are able to re-open) available to researchers already. These include the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, Annual Reports, and

publications of the Society's sections such as the Education and Science bulletins. Others will gradually become available as the listing and sorting continue. In the meantime, when the SCRSS is open again on the first Saturday of the month, you are likely to find me on the top floor poring over letters, reports and ephemera. Say hello but don't stay long. I have a lot to get through!

*Jane Rosen is a member of the SCRSS Council and former SCRSS Librarian, and is currently researching a history of the Society ahead of our centenary in 2024. Her specialist interests include radical children's literature and partisan movements, and she is co-editor (with Kimberley Reynolds and Michael Rosen) of 'Reading and Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900–1960' (Oxford University Press, 2018).*

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## Book Reviews

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**Revolution! Writing from Russia 1917**  
**By Pete Ayrton (Editor, Harbour Books, 2017, ISBN: 978-1-905128-31-0, Pbk, 364pp, £15.00)**

Pete Ayrton has put together a most intriguing and engrossing selection of writing about the Russian Revolution and the following period of the 1920s, a selection that one can read for entertainment as much as for serious history. A distinctive feature of the selection is that the extracts are written not only by Russians (and well translated) but also by foreign writers who witnessed everything that happened and took it at face value. There is an atmosphere of innocence about this book: Russia could still be discussed and described as if it were a 'normal' country.

The foreign writers selected (Ransome, Wells, Reed, Bryant, Hughes, Serge, Benjamin and others) were sympathetic to the Revolution, and their extracts show how they felt at the time. If we are to understand the 1920s, which formed one of the most exciting periods in Russian history, we must

banish from our minds what was to happen in the 1930s and 1940s, and understand that in the 1920s there was still a lot to play for.

The selected Russian writers include Babel, Zoshchenko, Kollontai, Ilf and Petrov, and Lunts. They were writing freely and stayed in the USSR, although some were treated badly in a later period. (Alexandra Kollontai was one of the few women in the Bolshevik Government, later she was more or less sidelined as a diplomat, but at least she survived the purges.) Ilf and Petrov produced the most loved classics of the 1920s, *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Little Golden Calf*. The first of these achieved the honour of being made into a film by Mel Brooks. Zoshchenko is also one of Russia's greatest humorists, describing in a simple deadpan style the most typical Soviet mishaps.

The third group of writers include some who were not in sympathy with the Revolution. They emigrated before 1925, while it was still possible. They include Teffi, an extraordinary woman who has experienced a well-deserved revival in the last few years. Her account of leaving Russia, recently published, is the first detailed description I have seen of the unbelievable chaos Russia fell into during the so-called Civil War. Edith Sollohub and Nina Berberova were two others – both women – their common sense tells us something, does it not? (Edith was a Countess, of course...)

The extracts follow a roughly chronological sequence, and there are yet more surprises in the collection. Bruce Lockhart's 'Memoirs of a British Agent' and Paustovsky's account of the blockade of Odessa. Somerset Maugham appears with more agent's memoirs, and Bertrand Russell sends a 'Letter from Russia'. Berberova writes of the 'Destruction of the Intelligentsia' and Victor Serge of the 'Deadlock of the Revolution'. The final extract is 'How Robinson was Created' by Ilf and Petrov, two writers who wrote together. In a story prophetic of the future, they describe how a writer's honest portrayal of Robinson Crusoe is turned into

garbage by a Soviet editor. Comic writing at its best.

*Andrew Jameson*

### **Russia is Burning: Poems of the Great Patriotic War**

**By Maria Bloshteyn (Editor, Smokestack Books, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-9160121-1-0, Pbk, 476pp, £13.99, bilingual text + article 'Muse under Fire' pp 450–475)**

This remarkable compilation owes its existence to the dedication of two people, Andy Croft of Smokestack Books and Maria Bloshteyn. More than this, Maria has dedicated it to her father and her two grandfathers on the Kalinin, Leningrad and Baltic Fronts respectively. Those translations that already existed have been traced in numerous sources and brought together. In addition, poems that needed translating were translated by Maria, Robert Chandler, Boris Dralyuk and Irina Mashinski. A subscription was raised to aid publication, and this reviewer is pleased to see his own name in the list (page 476).

Difficulties in compilation were compounded as it became clear that the editors were not dealing with a single body of work. Depending on the circumstances of the war, texts could be written by a) Soviet poets who were published and / or wrote some of their poems 'for the desk drawer', b) poets interned in the Gulag, c) poets who switched sides and either supported the German invaders or ended up aligned with them, or d) émigré poets. There are more details of the collection process in the Introduction.

The collection is arranged in four sections (which, by the way, do not correspond with the description in the paragraph above). *Seven Poets Killed* consists of seven poems, each written by a poet who died in one of the years 1939 to 1945, as a tribute to those who perished. Next follows *Voices Heard*, poems by well-known writers which were published at the time. The third group is *Muted Voices*, and these are poems written by émigrés or kept in desk drawers. Finally, *The War Remembered* contains

poems written some time after the end of the war, as the name suggests. Some poets have poems in more than one section, according to when and how the poems were written.

In each section, every poem has a short description of the background to the work and any necessary explanation. The translations are of high quality as one would expect with these capable translators.

Of course, having bilingual texts invites comparisons between originals and their translations. This type of presentation does show up how difficult the translation of poetry is. Put simply, how is it possible to retain both faithful meaning *together with* an identical form in the target text (forgive the jargon)? Sometimes we make use of semi-rhymes, sometimes visual rhymes which have different pronunciations. A lot can be achieved by using the right tone or register skillfully applied. But there will always be times when the two texts diverge, but still remain true to the overall theme. This is the test of a good translation, and this is a test that *Russia is Burning* passes with distinction.

Andrew Jameson

**Vladimir Lenin: How to Become a Leader**  
**By Vladlen Loginov (translated by Lewis**  
**White, edited and with an introduction by**  
**Professor Geoffrey Swain, Glagoslav**  
**Publications, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-78267-**  
**061-2, Pbk, 328pp, £19.00)**

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this new book, in its excellent and highly readable translation by Lewis White.

But I have to start by arguing with the translation of its title. The book was published in 2005 in Russia with the title *Vybor puti: Biografiya*, which may be literally translated as *Choosing a Path: Biography*, giving a much better idea of the content of the book. This is not at all an instruction manual for would-be leaders, nor does it explain how Lenin became a leader. Instead, it is a detailed and well-researched chronological account of Lenin's early life –

from his birth as Vladimir Ulyanov in 1870, to 1900, when he was 30 years old. In 1901 he began to sign his works with a new pseudonym – Lenin. There were twenty-four momentous years before his death aged 54.

Vladlen Loginov was born in 1929, and is now 91 years old. In the course of his long life he has published over 400 books and articles, many on Lenin. His latest work, published in 2018, is *Lenin: Sim pobedishi (Lenin: By This Sign Thou Shalt Conquer)*, covering the last years of Lenin's life from the end of the Civil War, to his conflicts with Stalin and his Testament. It is available as a free-access electronic book at <https://leninism.su/images/PDF/loginov.pdf>.

Loginov certainly knows his subject matter, and every page is thoroughly referenced to many sources. The reader will find much fascinating detail as to Lenin's immediate ancestors and his early life. I thought I knew a lot about Lenin, who is one of my own special subjects, but I learned a great deal, and with pleasure. For example, details of Lenin's practice as a criminal defence advocate in Samara, from 1892 to 1893 (pages 126–128); and of his life with Nadezhda Krupskaya in Shushenskoye (pages 228–237).

What was the task Loginov actually set himself? His own Introduction is entitled 'What Colour Were Lenin's eyes?', that is, the various descriptions of Lenin's short stature and his "agreeable, swarthy face with a touch of the Asiatic to it", but in particular his force of personality. But Lenin, still lying in the Mausoleum (contrary to his own wishes), has become the subject of myth upon myth, especially in the Soviet period, when he became "a kind of symbol of the 'new faith'... For millions, an object of near religious veneration". In Loginov's view, "... searching for the roots of modern problems in Lenin's past deeds is at the very least unfair, since it has now become a wholly separate narrative: it is akin to blaming Christ for the Crusades and the bonfires of the Inquisition".

Loginov's aim is very modest: "... not to offer an explanation, but to present some

material for consideration, a few details of his biography hitherto unknown.”

*Bill Bowring*

### **Red Star at War: Victory at All Costs**

**By Colin Turbett (Pen & Sword Books, July 2020, ISBN: 9781526763280, Hbk, 232pp, RRP £19.99)**

Colin Turbett presents a picture of how the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany and its allies affected individual soldiers and civilians – fighters in the front lines, the home front, under occupation in the partisan movement and in the immediate aftermath of victory. Three of the ten chapters cover the author’s case studies of individuals on all fronts, discussions with survivors, the stories of heroes. It is in the wealth of photographs collected, and quotes from letters to and from the front, that the book is at its strongest. Attention is drawn to the tremendous part played by women in all services – as snipers, air force and tank crews, in partisan units, as well as in the huge medical corps, many as nurses saving the wounded under fire.

Three chapters cover successive stages of the war, ending with the offensives that brought victory. Turbett states: “the Soviet Union, who until 1944 faced 90 per cent of Axis forces, won the war, albeit with the welcome help from their Western allies” (p. x).

In the first chapter Turbett speaks of terrible conditions in the Soviet Union even before the Nazi attack. Indeed, his picture of life in the Soviet Union is a grim one throughout – from the 1917 socialist revolution to industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation. In the war itself tens of millions were killed and maimed as the Nazis wilfully destroyed towns and industries, and carried out mass murder in the occupied areas. The publisher’s blurb is a summation of Turbett’s take: “Russia’s losses during the Second World War were beyond imagination and touched the lives of an entire population caught between a brutal and murderous invader and a ruthless leadership at home”. While at times

qualified, a curious theme runs through the book suggesting that popular reaction to the invasion was responsible for the Nazi defeat – a view that understates the Soviet leadership’s mobilisation of Communists, in the first instance, and its rallying of the people, while ignoring how the Soviet high command outmanoeuvred Nazi generalship time and time again.

Turbett’s view of the role of the political officers and the state security forces is wrongly negative, ignoring their military prowess. For instance, every one of the 160 frontier posts were manned by these special military formations, together with their families. They were the first to meet the vastly superior Nazi onslaught and fought to the last, not one surrendering.

Overall, Turbett has collected information that is useful for other researchers to dip into. However, it is a pity that the quality of the many printed photographs does not match the top quality of those on the dust cover, being dark and grainy. Some poor editing needs revision, including wrongly applied captions and the names of characters varying without explanation in the narrative.

*Mick Costello*

### **We are Building Capitalism! Moscow in Transition 1992–1997**

**By Robert Stephenson (foreword by Vladimir Gel’man, Glagoslav Publications, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-912894-02-4, Pbk, 210pp, £25.00)**

Robert Stephenson lived and worked in Moscow from 1992–97. A civil servant, he had been head of the IT Strategy team for the UK’s Employment Service, and was invited in 1992 to become a consultant to the new Federal Employment Service, and then a capacity builder for trainers in business and commercial skills. In 1995, in Moscow, he married the brilliant sociologist Svetlana Stephenson (née Sidorenko, now at London Metropolitan University, essential reading – *Gangs of Russia: From the Streets to the Corridors of Power*, 2015). So, Robert experienced Moscow as the

capital of the new Russia, not that of the former USSR.

Robert is also an accomplished photographer with an eye for the telling detail, and there are over 100 fascinating photographs in this book, most of them taken in 1992–93. The final photograph, however, taken in 2012 (page 208), shows the ‘Moscow City’ skyscraper complex looming over the Garden Ring and Krymsky Most (bridge). The photograph on the opposite page taken in the same place, in 1992, twenty years previously, shows an utterly different view, with no advertising, very little traffic – and no skyscrapers. Should we feel nostalgia?

As Vladimir Gel'man comments in his Introduction on Robert's photographs: “his focus [is] not only on major political events... but also on the manifestations of the societal change in many details of Moscow life, from the rapidly changing patterns of consumption to the outward appearance of Moscow and its inhabitants.” Indeed, as Gelman says, the book has its own protagonist, Moscow.

The book has eleven chapters, each with an insightful introduction and commentary by Robert. The chapters' titles give a good indication of their contents: ‘The Shadow of the Past’; ‘Inflation, Speculation and Accumulation’; ‘Reform and Resistance’; ‘Religious Resurgence’; ‘Out with the Old and in with the New’; ‘Reaching for the Stars’; ‘Attractions and Distractions’; ‘On the Road’; ‘The View from the Street’; ‘Strange Sights’; and ‘The Shape of Things to Come’.

The book is beautifully produced in landscape A4 format, and the photographs are vividly reproduced. I found myself reliving my own experiences during those turbulent years. One of the first photographs (page 28) is of a rock concert held at the White House on 19 August 1992 on the first anniversary of the failed coup of April 1991 (which Robert missed – I was in Moscow). But there are no photographs of Yeltsin's use of tanks in 1993 to storm the White House, where the Supreme Soviet was

sitting, though Robert has a brief account of events on pages 69–70.

This chapter, ‘Reform and Resistance’ (pages 69–79), has photographs of demonstrations in 1992–93. Robert comments that “...the streets of the city became a forum for protest against, and promotion of, social change”. But he is a detached, apolitical observer.

This gorgeous book is recommended to anyone who wants to view, if not experience, how life carried on.

*Bill Bowring*

**Note:** Some sample chapters and photographs from the book are available to view on the publisher's website at <https://glagoslav.com/shop/we-are-building-capitalism-moscow-in-transition-1992-1997/>.

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