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## Feature

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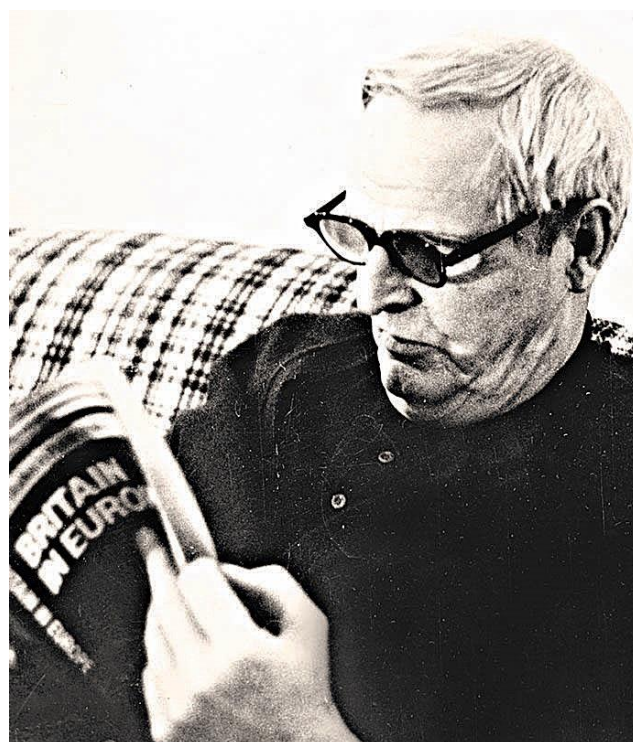
### Donald Maclean: Confessions of a Communist Spy

By Geoffrey Roberts

Donald Maclean is generally regarded as the most ideological and political of the network of Soviet spies recruited from among University of Cambridge students in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> While Maclean wrote no memoirs, he did reflect on his life as a Communist and a spy in a series of letters to Dennis Ogden in the 1970s and 1980s. A longtime member and Vice-President of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (now the SCRSS), Ogden met Maclean in the 1950s when he went to work in the Soviet Union – first as a translator and then, from 1959–62, as Moscow correspondent of the *Daily Worker*.<sup>2</sup> Ogden and Maclean became good friends, not least because both were committed to the democratic reform of the authoritarian Soviet socialist system.

Fearing imminent arrest, Maclean had fled to the USSR in 1951, together with fellow Cambridge spy Guy Burgess. In 1955 he settled in Moscow, initially working for the Soviet journal *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*

(*International Affairs*), where he met Ogden, and then as a researcher at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations. A specialist in British foreign policy, Maclean wrote and published many articles on that subject and, in 1970, a book, *British Foreign Policy since Suez*.



Donald Maclean in Moscow (Reproduced from the 'Kembridzhskaya pyaterka' / 'The Cambridge Five' website at <https://cambridge5.ru/> under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International)

Ogden was Maclean's authorised biographer – hence the 'letters to Dennis' – but the book was never written. The most important reason for its non-appearance was that Ogden did not approve of Maclean's spying activities, which he saw as damaging to the communist cause. On a trip to Moscow in 1979–80, he suggested to Maclean that communism would have been better served by him remaining an open member of the Party.

The material below features Maclean's first and last (known) letters to Ogden. Extracts from these two letters reveal Maclean's reflections and rationalisations of his life as a Soviet mole in the British Foreign Office. The ellipsis in the text is my own.

The reproduced material constitutes about a quarter of the total content of Maclean's 'letters to Dennis' – the other three-quarters being devoted to analysis of Soviet society and his hopes for future political reform. He died in 1983.

Dennis Ogden showed me the letters and, after he died in 2004, his widow Pamela allowed me to copy them.

## **Letter to Dennis Ogden, 16 March 1976**

I am beginning here some notes, which may be useful to you when the time comes for you to write the biography of which we spoke...

### **1. The main object of the biography**

Using the story of one man's life, with its good and bad sides, to win support... for the political and moral values you and I and others above all stand by...

### **2. The internal balance of the biography**

Given that the above is the main object of the book, it follows that its main emphasis must be on the third, and not the first and second periods of my life as a Communist (1932–1934 – active member of the CPGB as a student, 1934–1951 – underground, 1951–1976 and beyond – life and work in the Soviet Union)...

### **3. The place of the underground in the biography**

A biography, as distinct from a political portrait, cannot, of course, simply skate as swiftly as possible over this period without saying anything substantial about it. Seventeen years is a large slab in anyone's life... But the details of my activities during this period have no relevance to the object of the book as above defined and, in any

case, I feel no inclination whatsoever to write them down (which I alone can do).

This is, I suppose, because, although I do not at all regret having done what seemed and still seems to me my duty, I take, and took, no pride in the actual process of carrying out my task. A task which over a long period of years involved deceiving literally almost everyone you knew, including many you were fond of, about the most important thing in your own spiritual and working life, and also involved common or garden danger and tension, since a mistake might cost you several years in prison, [and which] gave me no 'job satisfaction' in the sense used in social psychology. 'Job satisfaction' in that sense I got from the intellectual, though not the social, exercises demanded from a member of the Foreign Service, and get now from trying to figure out certain foreign policy problems as a professional analyst in our Institute. I don't think there are many people who actually enjoy deceiving others or being in danger. If there are, I am not among them. Quite the reverse, in fact. Though I am proud of having managed to carry out what seemed and seems a necessary and fairly important (and difficult) task and that, when the gaff was finally blown, it was blown by somebody else's and not my own mistake, the process itself, recollected in tranquillity, still arouses in me strongish feelings of aversion. So I have an emotional block about treading over this ground. But it is a block which I have no stimulus to surmount, since the whole subject has for many years played no important role in my life and is very far from the political and moral questions which preoccupy me. I can see nothing to be gained (except money which I don't need) by writing, or contributing to, yet another 'Memoirs of a Soviet Agent'.

All this amounts to saying that I recognise that the period has its legitimate, but subordinate, place in the book and that I will, if all goes well, provide you with a dollop on the political and moral aspects of this kind of work, though not any details of the process itself as I actually experienced it. Incidentally, one of the main propositions

advanced in the dollop will be that the glorification by the Soviet authorities of the past deeds of underground workers such as myself is both a sign of massively unhealthy tendencies in Soviet society and also does severe direct damage to the world cause in which you, I and others believe...

## **Unposted Letter to Dennis Ogden, August–November 1980**

This unposted letter is an attempt to define my own attitude today to the underground work I did in the '30s and '40s. I have long been planning to make this attempt and am impelled at last to make a start by our conversation in Moscow last winter and by the airing of this subject at home by Anthony Blunt and his critics.

I agreed to take on underground work because my political beliefs appeared to require it. Since this decision meant radically changing my way of life, abandoning my post-graduate studies at Cambridge, giving up my closest friendships, I did not want to agree, but felt that it was my political duty to do so. I can see as clearly today as I did nearly fifty years ago the main reason why, given recognition on my part of the necessity of underground work as such, I could not refuse to accept it as my personal lot. With a suitable bourgeois background and a First Class degree, as well as strong political convictions, I undeniably had a better than even chance of getting somewhere on the underground front and, in particular, clearing the intellectual and political Becher's Brook presented by the Foreign Office entrance exams...

In judging today whether I was justified in undertaking in the '30s and '40s to try, if necessary in breach of the law, to provide what was then the headquarters of the world Communist movement, namely Moscow, with reliable political and military information about the behaviour and plans of the capitalist powers, the main, though certainly not the only criterion, is the degree to which subsequent history confirmed or did not confirm the political assumptions about the

course of world politics upon which I acted. When I began intelligence work in 1934, world politics in the Euroatlantic area were already dominated by the rise of Nazi Germany and the accompanying prospect of another world war, and remained dominated by Nazi aggression and its consequences for the next eleven years. During the following five or so years i.e. the remaining roughly one third of the total time-span of my underground work, the focus of world politics shifted to the antagonism between the United States (with Britain its chief ally) and the Soviet Union...

Looking back over the past decades, to me it seems that the actual course of events from the mid-thirties to the mid-forties confirmed a dozen times over in all its grimness the chief assumption upon which my decision to take on underground work was based...

My generation of Communists... foresaw, all too correctly as it turned out, that the outcome of the forthcoming battle of the British and other European peoples against Nazism would depend to a crucial degree on the Soviet Union... We did not foresee Stalin and Molotov's Soviet Munich..., but the history of the Second World War confirmed our main assumption: the decisive battles in Europe were indeed fought on the Eastern front, the outcome of the anti-fascist war as a whole did indeed prove to depend to a massive extent on the ability of the Soviet Union to break and destroy the main forces of Nazi Germany...

As I say, there seems to me to be no grounds for doubting today that the subsequent course of history confirmed the assumptions upon which I acted in... the anti-fascist period 1934–1945. While the same cannot be said without reservation about the remaining five years of my underground work, 1946–1951, I think, nevertheless, that my assumptions about world politics then, on the whole, have proved more right than wrong.

It seemed to me at the time (mostly from direct experience in the Washington Embassy) that the United States... might

well be getting ready, after a year or two's hesitation, to launch a political and military crusade against socialist states...

Since the beginning of the '50s the balance of military power between the Soviet Union and the United States has so changed that the latter long ago lost the capacity to launch nuclear war against the European socialist states without bringing about its own destruction and that of its European allies. Nevertheless, Washington has attempted (and failed) to destroy by armed force two socialist states, North Korea at the beginning of the '50s and Vietnam in the '60s and '70s...

Thus what I feared thirty years ago might be going to happen on a world scale has in fact so far happened only on a regional, East Asian, scale. At all events, I think I can fairly say that, when looked at in the light of the subsequent course of world politics, the assumption upon which I acted in the last period of my underground work (1945–1951) proved to be in large part well-founded...

[I]n recent decades a huge area of intelligence work has been revolutionised by the development of accurate space and high altitude photographic and sensor systems which must have dramatically reduced the relative value of moles, particularly military moles. [S]ecret intelligence work, though within narrow limits still an unavoidable evil, is inefficient and dangerous to society, simply because it is secret... A low or non-existent level of social accountability opens the way to crimes against society itself... Anyone familiar with the history of the Soviet security organs and the CIA and FBI in America can scarcely doubt that this is so... [T]he value of secret political information is, with rare exceptions, short-term and not long-term... It has been and is possible in the 20th century to define fairly accurately long-term tendencies from public information without the assistance of moles. And long-term tendencies are what matter in world politics. Moreover, many foreign-policy secrets... literally cease to be such in, say, six months or a year... Lastly, the efficacy of secret information depends quite

as much on the capacity of the receiving end to assess and apply it correctly as upon the ability of the mole to get hold of and transmit it...

Bearing these points in mind, what, then, do I now think about the efficacy of the information which I transmitted in 1934–1951?

...This is clearest of all in the case of the Spanish Civil War. By chance I was dealing with Spanish affairs in the Foreign Office... I was, of course, then a junior in the hierarchy but, owing to the way in which the Foreign Office operated, the greater part of papers concerning Spain of whatever security classification passed through my hands. I very soon found myself acting, without their knowing it, as intelligence officer for my own friends, who had gone to fight for the Spanish Government in the International Brigade... I had no reason to doubt then, and have none now, that the information I provided was... effective, and probably could not have been obtained by any other means.

Much the same can be said about... the policy towards Nazi Germany of the men who then ruled Britain... As in the case of Spain, there was plenty of public information showing that the Chamberlain Government, with extraordinary folly, was aiming at a long-term understanding with the Nazi leaders... The road to Munich was well-marked. My contribution to the general effort at home and abroad to prevent this suicidal crime was to provide a fairly continuous flow of detailed information not publicly available... on the manoeuvres by which the British and French Governments eventually pushed the Czechs and Slovaks into the jaws of the minotaur...

Where such doubts, and more than doubts, do arise is in the period from the conclusion of the Soviet-German Pact of August 1939 till the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, during which Soviet foreign policy was, to put it mildly, pointing in the wrong direction... [W]hatever value my or anyone else's information, secret or not, might have had, was probably largely

negated by the entirely erroneous conception of Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov and others... that they had achieved what Chamberlain had failed to achieve, namely a long-term understanding with the Nazis...

There followed four years (1941–1945) in which the relative importance to the Soviet Union of secret intelligence from British sources dropped low as compared with that of the flow of information reaching it through the mechanisms of the Anglo-Soviet (and US-Soviet) alliance... This situation began to change before the end of the war... But the major shift came in 1945 when... the antagonism between the United States (supported by Britain) and the Soviet Union became the new axis of world politics. This brought a corresponding increase in the need for, and usefulness of, secret intelligence... [T]he Soviet Union needed, and was able to assess, intelligence and I was in a comparatively favourable position to supply it.

Margaret Gowing's official history, *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945–1952*, is right in saying... that in 1947–1948 all secret papers at the Washington Embassy concerning atomic energy were dealt with by me. Lord Gladwyn is right in recording in his *Memoirs*... that I was his principal Embassy advisor during his secret visit to Washington to start the initial Anglo-American-Canadian negotiations leading eventually to the conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty... What was secret ceased to be so in a matter of months rather than years. But information about atomic matters proved to be an exception to this rule...

[W]hat general conclusion can be drawn? You and other readers will naturally have your own views or shades of view. To me it seems, looking back, that it was in the main a case of doing what had to be done, of fulfilling, well or badly, one among a multiplicity of widely differing political missions which fell to the lot of my generation of socialist-minded and liberal-minded people. Since my particular task was directly dictated by the onrush of fascism, by the peculiar dangers then hanging over Britain and Europe, I think its

imperative character, its justification in the sight of god and man, probably came to an end in 1945...

*Geoffrey Roberts is Emeritus Professor of History at University College Cork, a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, and a Vice-President of the SCRSS. His latest book is 'Stalin's Library: A Dictator and His Books' (2022, paperback edition 2025).*

#### Footnotes

1 Cecil Robert, *A Divided Life: A Biography of Donald Maclean* (1988); Philipps Roland, *A Spy Named Orphan: The Enigma of Donald Maclean* (2018)

2 Dennis Ogden's memoir of his early months in Moscow, *After Stalin: A Memoir of Moscow in 1955*, is available here: <https://geoffreyroberts.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/After-Stalin-A-Memoir-of-Moscow-in-1955.pdf>

## SCRSS News

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*Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS, except where otherwise indicated.*

## Centenary Marked

My thanks to everyone who made 2024 such a successful year for the Society. The events programme, the main July celebration, the exhibition, the book (*An Unpopular Cause* – copies still available!) and the special 36-page edition of the *SCRSS Digest* all attracted very positive responses from members and I hope that everyone who visited the centre and / or read the book came away with renewed enthusiasm to support our work!

## An Audience with Helen Sharman

Our last Centenary event for members, on 7 December 2024, was an exclusive in-person audience with Helen Sharman CMG OBE, Britain's first astronaut in 1991, UK

Outreach Ambassador for Imperial College London and President of the Institute of Science and Technology.



Helen Sharman at the SCRSS on 7 December 2024, against the background of the Space section of the Centenary exhibition (Photograph: Karl Weiss)

Helen answered questions from SCRSS Trustee Diana Turner on her selection for the UK-Soviet space mission, her 18 months of training in Star City (near Moscow) and the 8-day mission to the USSR's Mir Space Station in May 1991. She also reflected on her post-mission career, and on space research and co-operation today. There followed a lively Q&A session with the audience, and drinks – before the start of the Christmas party later the same afternoon.

We would like to express our enormous thanks to Helen Sharman for taking time out of her busy schedule to visit the SCRSS centre.

## New Beginnings

Following the tremendous support received from members during the Centenary year, we must now look to the short- and long-

term future of the Society. In the short term, as indicated in previous *SCRSS Digests*, I will be stepping down as Honorary Secretary at the Annual General Meeting in May 2025. I will remain as a Trustee and look forward to assisting the new Honorary Secretary with the array of tasks necessary to keep the administration of the Society on track. The SCRSS Council (the Charity Trustees) will have a special meeting in February 2025 to discuss longer-term questions relating to our building and its collections. Any proposals that emerge from that meeting will be discussed at the Annual General Meeting in May 2025.

## Annual General Meeting 2025

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Society will take place at the SCRSS premises on Saturday 17 May 2025, starting at 11.00. This meeting is open to SCRSS members only. The deadline for receipt of motions, and nominations of members for election to the next SCRSS Council (as Trustees), is **Saturday 1 March 2025**. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member.

## Email

Given the minimum cost of a second-class stamp is currently 85p, it makes sense for the Society to communicate with its members via email. This includes event information and the e-newsletter, but also important items like the paperwork for the Annual General Meeting. Therefore, it is vital that we have your up-to-date email address on file.

If you have not received an email from the Society's email account ([ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk](mailto:ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk)) in the last month, then please send an email to the above address and we will add you to the distribution list. Some email providers appear to block emails from our account due to spam / security concerns. We are looking at ways to resolve this, but you can help by ensuring that our email address is on your safe senders' list. If

you do not have an email address, it would be helpful if you could confirm this by letter. We will then make sure you are on our postal distribution list for important correspondence.

## Membership

Enclosed with this *SCRSS Digest* are new membership cards for renewals made since the last mailing, together with renewal notices for memberships expiring in the period up to the end of May. You can help the administration of the Society by responding promptly to any renewal notice.

If you have any questions about your membership, do please get in touch. We can send you the Society's bank details if you wish to set up a standing order so that your membership is renewed automatically.

## In Memoriam: Tatiana Piotrovskaya (1947–2024)



Tatiana Piotrovskaya at the SCRSS Advanced Russian Language Seminar, London, 2017

It is with great sadness that the SCRSS learned of the death of Tatiana Alexandrovna Piotrovskaya in April 2024. Tatiana led the Russian language and

linguistics stream on our SCRSS Advanced Russian Language Seminar in London for three consecutive years from 2016 to 2018, and would have returned a fourth time in April 2020 if not for the Covid lockdown.

Tatiana was a member of the St Petersburg Association for International Co-operation (the SCRSS's partner organisation in Russia). She taught at St Petersburg State University (formerly Leningrad State University) from 1973 to 2024 and was Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Philology and Language Culture Studies. She also previously taught Russian as a Foreign Language at the university.

Tatiana will be remembered by the SCRSS and participants of our SCRSS Advanced Russian Language Seminar as a gifted teacher, able to explain and illustrate new trends in the Russian language with intellect and wit. She was warm-hearted and enthusiastic in her interactions with participants, and many became friends with her outside of the seminar.

I was lucky to get to know Tatiana as a friend and meet her regularly on my visits to St Petersburg. She was a superb hostess, kind, generous and full of fun. She is very much missed. The Society sends its sincere condolences to Tatiana's friends and colleagues.

*Diana Turner*

## Next Events

*First-Saturday-of-the-month library openings resume from 1 February 2025. We are currently planning the rest of the events programme from April 2025 – please see the SCRSS website and our member e-newsletters for the latest details.*

**Saturday 8 February 2025, 15.30–16.30**  
**Zoom Online Lecture in Russian: Tatiana Borodina on *Художник Илья Репин (1844-1930) и Музей-усадьба «Пенаты» (The Artist Ilya Repin, 1844-1930, and the 'Penaty' Museum-Estate)***

SCRSS members only, free, book at [eventbrite.co.uk/e/1127906441529](https://eventbrite.co.uk/e/1127906441529).

**Wednesday 12 March 2025, 19.00–20.00**  
**Zoom Online Lecture: Zhanna Andrianova on Shamanism and Paganism in Russia**

Tickets: £3 (members), £5 (others), book at [eventbrite.co.uk/e/1148152949379](https://eventbrite.co.uk/e/1148152949379).

**Saturday 17 May 2025, 11.00–13.00**  
**In-person Event: SCRSS AGM**

## Feature

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### Lev Vygotsky in London, 1925

By Avril Suddaby

This year, 2025, marks one hundred years since Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, the founder of Soviet psychology, visited England. This essay gives an outline of Vygotsky's life and the background to his work, his visit to England in 1925 where he attended the 8th International Conference on the Education of the Deaf, and the legacy of Vygotsky's theories in the UK.

### Vygotsky's Life and Work

Lev Vygotsky was born in 1896. As he died in 1934, his was a short life played out against the background of momentous events. First came the Russian Revolution, followed by Civil War and the Allied intervention. After Lenin died in 1924, he was succeeded by Stalin and a quarter-century of dictatorship and repression. It sounds like the worst of times for intellectuals to develop new ideas and for them to flourish. And yet, in other ways, the post-revolutionary years can be seen as the best of times, as this was an era of progress and cultural enlightenment.

The cards appear to have been stacked against Vygotsky from the start. He was born a Jew at a time when anti-Jewish feeling was strong. He grew up in Gomel, a small provincial town in what is now Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire. Although the family were well-educated

intellectuals, he did not have the advantages that a capital city provides. Above all, he had poor health and recurrent tuberculosis that eventually killed him at the age of 36.

Despite these disadvantages, Vygotsky's achievements were remarkable. He finished school in Gomel with top marks in all subjects, enabling him to go to Moscow University where he graduated with degrees in law and literature. Then he returned to Gomel to teach literature. He also started his own research into the cognitive development of children with handicaps such as deafness, blindness and mental backwardness. In January 1924 he attended the Leningrad Conference of Soviet Psychologists where he first presented his research findings. Following this, he was invited to work at the Moscow Institute of Psychology, where he continued his research and established a department that was to become the future Institute of Defectology. During the next decade of frantic work in Moscow he produced nearly 200 scientific papers.

The time of cultural freedom ended with the death of Lenin and the rise of Stalin. Teachers and psychologists did not escape. In 1936 came the Decree on Paedological<sup>1</sup> Perversions and Vygotsky's work was banned. If Vygotsky had not died soon before this decree, it is likely he would have disappeared into the Gulag, like so many of his contemporaries.

And that could easily have been the end of Vygotskian theory if not for the efforts of his colleagues, mainly Alexander Luria and Alexei Leontyev, who continued in secret to develop his ideas. Vygotsky was 'rehabilitated' in the late 1950s and his work published, first in Russian and later in translation. In 1982 his collected works appeared, with English translations soon following.

### The 1925 London Conference

Vygotsky made only one trip overseas. This was to London to attend the 8th



International Conference on the Deaf, which took place from Monday 20 July to Friday 24 July 1925.

Until recently very little was known about the conference nor of Vygotsky's contribution to it, other than the title of his paper *Principles of Social Education for Deaf and Dumb Children in Russia*. Many years later, the discovery of Vygotsky's *Notebooks* provided some invaluable insights into his thoughts and state of mind at that time. Chapter 6 of the *Notebooks*, published in 2011, is a partial reconstruction of Vygotsky's trip to London.



Close-up of the official photograph of the foreign delegates attending the Garden Party at Penn on 23 July 1925. Lev Vygotsky is in the back row, far right. (Please note: the author has been unable to identify and, therefore, credit the source of this photograph)

Vygotsky disapproved of traditional approaches to the education of handicapped children, which he saw as condescending, philanthropic and pitying. According to Vygotsky, a special school should deal first and foremost with such tasks as bringing the abnormal child out of the state of isolation brought on him by his handicap, providing him with broad possibilities for a genuinely human life,

bringing him into contact with socially useful labour, and teaching him to be an active, conscious member of society. These were revolutionary ideas. When Vygotsky started to expound them, some practitioners in the field of defectology were impressed and came to share his opinion that they should turn away from the heritage of European special schools and establish a new pedagogy based on Marxist materialist theory.

Although Vygotsky had barely started his career in defectology, he had a commendable record of work in the reconstruction of a new socialist society. This enthusiastic contribution to social activity came to the attention of Anatoly Lunacharsky, Head of the Commissariat for Education, and of Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, and resulted in Vygotsky being invited to work in Moscow. In a questionnaire completed in July 1924, Vygotsky was asked: "In what branch do you believe your employment would be most useful?" He replied: "In the education of the blind and deaf-blind children." By the end of 1924 Vygotsky and his wife had moved from Gomel to Moscow, and in 1925 the promising newcomer was invited to present the new Russian approach to defectology at the conference in London.

If Lunacharsky had hoped that the young Vygotsky would make the same impression in London as he had in Russia, he must have been disappointed. The conference was not a highlight of Vygotsky's career, he did not present his paper or participate in discussions, and the stay in London appears to have had limited value for his own scientific development.

The conference was a formal event held mainly at the London Day Training College, with a fair number of dignitaries present. The more than 500 delegates heard only seventeen papers and there were demonstrations of what were considered useful activities for handicapped children (practical woodwork, drill and dancing). There was also a garden party at Penn<sup>2</sup> in Buckinghamshire on 23 July. It was hardly the sort of situation in which an ardent

young Communist would feel at home. The official photograph for the event shows Vygotsky among the other foreign delegates, wearing a black suit, white shirt with stiff collar and a bow tie. He does not look comfortable. The conference ended with a dinner and dance.

An entry in his *Notebooks* shows Vygotsky's state of mind: "I am tired. Indifference, almost despair. My trip yesterday revealed to me its main contradiction. I am extremely tense (the language, the responsibilities, the suit, the foreign countries) – on the other hand I am outside time and space and free of everything as never before (aloof). The former pushes aside everything that yesterday was still dear to me and excited me (the flat and other things). The latter is a huge entrance to the basic undercurrents of life. A journey is a 'trial of oneself.'"

Concern about his wife and baby daughter back in Moscow in the family's new flat, exhaustion from the journey (he had spent the week before in Berlin meeting colleagues at the Institute of Psychology) and from having to communicate in a foreign language, unease in the illustrious company, but above all the discrepancy between the prevalent philanthropic ideas about special education and Vygotsky's own ideas – all these factors contributed to his failure to make any impact at the London conference.

"In essence, Russia is the first country in the world. The Revolution is our supreme cause. In this room only 1 person knows the secret of the genuine education of the deaf mutes. And that person is me. Not because I am more educated than the others, but because I was sent by Russia and I speak on behalf of the Revolution."

Vygotsky left London on 4 or 5 August. He suffered a relapse from tuberculosis on his return – the foggy London climate could not have been beneficial – and it was feared he would not recover. However, he did recover, returned to work, and over the next nine years he produced most of the books and papers for which he is known.

## Vygotsky's Legacy in the UK

In the three decades after the 1925 London conference Vygotsky was unknown in the UK. As his work was not published even in Russia, this is not surprising. Even after his rehabilitation in the late 1950s, recognition came slowly. His most important work *Thought and Language* (*Мышление и речь*) appeared as late as 1962 when a considerably truncated translation by Cole et al, titled *Thinking and Speech*, was published.

It is mainly due to Professor Brian Simon that Vygotsky came to be known in England. In 1955, he and his wife Joan Simon visited the USSR with a small group of teachers and educationalists to study developments in Soviet psychology. This specialist tour was organised by the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR) and led by Lady Simon of Wythenshawe. It resulted in *Psychology in the Soviet Union* (1957) and, later, *Educational Psychology in the USSR* (1963) which contained an article by Vygotsky and several articles by his colleagues about his theories.

As Myra Barrs writes: "It was as if a starting pistol had been fired." The trickle of articles by and about Vygotsky was soon to become a flood. One aspect of his psychological theory, known as the 'zone of next or proximal development', became part of the educational psychology component of teacher training courses.

The Institute of Education (originally University of London, now part of University College London) has been the main centre for application and development of Vygotskian thought. Among the many illustrious names, two figures stand out: Basil Bernstein and James Britton. Basil Bernstein was to become the first Professor of Sociology at the Institute in 1965, following his work on social class and language codes. The ideas of James Britton also became part of courses in the English Department. His works include *Language, the Learner and the School* (1969, with Douglas Barnes and Harold Rosen) – an

influential study of the role of language on learning across the curriculum – and *Language and Learning* (1970). Vygotskian theory is a guiding light in these and much other work done at the Institute of Education. Interest in Vygotsky's theories continues to the present day and has impacted the way psychologists and linguists think about the language–mind relationship. To give one example of his continuing hold over the ideas of scholars today, there is the thriving *Cultural Historical International Discussion Forum* on Facebook with almost one thousand members, founded by Dr Kyrill Potapov of the Institute of Education.

*Avril Suddaby has a BA in Russian from Birmingham University and a MPhil in Comparative Education from the Institute of Education (London). Her long-lasting interest in Vygotsky and his psychological theory originated from translating articles by and about him.*

### Footnotes

1 Paedology (or US pedology) is the study of children's behaviour and development.

2 London County Council bought the Penn estate in 1920 for use as a school for deaf children, with the Homerton Residential School for Defective Deaf Children transferring there in 1921. The name was changed to Rayners Residential School in 1929, with pupils coming from all over the country.

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## Book Reviews

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**Feliks Volkhovskii: A Revolutionary Life**  
By Michael Hughes (Open Book Publishers, 2024, 336pp; ISBN: 978-1-80511-194-8, Pbk, £22.95; ISBN: 978-1-80511-196-2, pdf free to download at <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0385>)

This new book is the result of the interest in Feliks Volkhovskii pursued for many years by Professor Michael Hughes of Lancaster University, searching many archives around the world (in his own words). It is extraordinarily rich in detail and digression, supported by a forest of footnotes, which at times make the text rather indigestible.

The reader will gain insights into the nature of revolutionary activity in Russia and in late nineteenth-century London, where so many Russian revolutionaries found sanctuary in exile. The most famous are Alexander Herzen (1812–1870), who lived in London from 1852 to 1865 where he published *The Bell*, and Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin, 1870–1924), who, as I outline below, travelled to London on five occasions from 1902 to 1911.

Hughes, an Anglican lay reader, has written on Anglo-Russian relations, especially those between Anglicanism and Orthodoxy. His previous monograph was a biography of Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1903 to 1928 (Routledge, 2017).

In his preface, Hughes writes: "I am perhaps an unlikely biographer of a revolutionary like Volkhovskii. Much of my work over the past few decades has focused on individuals who were firmly ensconced in the social and political establishment of their assorted homelands. I have also spent a good deal of time exploring the lives of conservative-

minded figures who sought refuge from the chaos of modernity in an imagined world of social harmony and order.”

Volkhovskii was a lesser-known Russian revolutionary, who was born in July 1846 in Poltava in central Ukraine and died in August 1914, at the age of 68, in London. His family had a mixed heritage of Polish-speaking Catholics and Russian Orthodox. Through his close relations with household serfs, he became fluent in Ukrainian, and this helped to fuel his hatred of the Russian autocracy.

He was first arrested aged 21 in 1868, though soon released, as his activity was judged not to be revolutionary. In 1871–72 he was accused of fomenting student unrest and spent two years in prison awaiting trial, but was acquitted and moved to Odessa. He was arrested again in 1874 and taken to Moscow, and was in prison in Moscow and then St Petersburg. In 1877 he was a defendant in the ‘Trial of the 193’, was sentenced to exile in Siberia, where he spent two years, before settling in Tomsk in 1881. In 1889 he escaped first to Toronto, then in 1890 to London, where he spent the rest of his life. He initiated the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, and its newspaper *Free Russia*, which attracted the support of the liberal elite.

In 1901–2 Volkhovskii became active in the Socialist Revolutionary Party (the SRs), but was already too ill to play any part in the 1905 Revolution in Russia. He was a prolific writer for newspapers and journals, especially on literature, but “seldom touched on questions of ideology or revolutionary tactics narrowly understood”.

In 1902–3 Lenin lived in London, and edited the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra* in the building which is now the Marx Memorial Library in Clerkenwell, where his office has been preserved. He took part in the fateful 1903 second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), where it split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Lenin returned to London in April–May 1905 for the third Congress of the RSDLP, and in May–June 1907 for its fifth

Congress, at which there were 366 delegates. His fifth and final visit was in November 1911.

In 1908, working in the British Museum Library on his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin lived on the first floor of what is now 36 Tavistock Place, WC1 (formerly numbered 21), where – with the Mayor of Camden – I unveiled a blue plaque in 2012. The plaque, the initiative of the Marchmont Association, reads: “Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1870–1924, founder of the USSR, lived here in 1908.”

Volkhovskii never met Lenin, and they would have had little in common.

*Bill Bowring*

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