

Rewriting History in Soviet Russia

Also by Roger D. Markwick

RUSSIA'S STILLBORN DEMOCRACY? From Gorbachev to Yeltsin
(with *Graeme Gill*)

Rewriting History in Soviet Russia

**The Politics of Revisionist Historiography,
1956–1974**

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palgrave



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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2001 978-0-333-79209-4

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First published 2001 by
PALGRAVE
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE is the new global academic imprint of
St. Martin's Press LLC Scholarly and Reference Division and
Palgrave Publishers Ltd (formerly Macmillan Press Ltd).

ISBN 978-1-349-41923-4 ISBN 978-0-230-59773-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230597730

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Markwick, Roger D.

Rewriting Soviet history : the politics of revisionist historiography, 1956–1974 / Roger D. Markwick ; foreword by Donald J. Raleigh.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-349-41923-4

1. Soviet Union—Historiography. I. Title.

DK38 .M2725 2000
947'.0072—dc21

00–048337

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01

*To **Therese** and our children, **Caitlin** and **Eleanor** –
for all those days and nights far away*

'The history of the Soviet Union is in one sense no more than the history of the attempt to teach the intellectuals their new place in a cosmos of socialist modernity.'

J. P. Nettl, 'Ideas, Intellectuals, and Structures of Dissent', in Philip Rieff (ed.), *On Intellectuals: Theoretical Studies, Case Studies* (Garden City, New York, 1970), p. 103

'In olden times maps lacked a consistent scale; together with the more or less correct reproduction of a locality they contained fantastic pictures and simply blank spots. Nowadays, some historical narrative is similar to such maps: fabrication coexists with truth, perspective is distorted, while much that is important is reduced to patter or simply passed over in silence.'

A. V. Gulyga, in *Istoriya i sotsiologiya* (Moscow, 1964), p. 85

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Foreword

In the early years of *perestroika* associated with the M. S. Gorbachev era, millions of Soviet citizens participated in a national dialogue on the past and future of their society. This passionate debate, which involved writers, publicists, politicians and historians, not only forced a rethinking of the principles of Soviet-style socialism, but also brought about what R. W. Davies has so appropriately called a 'mental revolution'. The reaction of professional historians to the challenges posed by the public discussion eventually swept away decades of Stalinist dogma, creating conditions that enabled Russian historians to rejoin the world community of historical scholarship. Roger Markwick's articulate and penetrating study of the politics of revisionist historiography in the Soviet Union offers a prehistory of the crisis that befell Soviet historical scholarship in the Gorbachev era, and then some.

Drawing on Kuhn's concept of a paradigm shift, Markwick zooms in on the relationship between the appearance of revisionist currents within Soviet historical writing in the shadow of N. S. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, and the rise of a new generation of so-called *intelligenty* during the 1960s. In revealing the socio-political implications of the emergence of a revisionist historical scholarship, Markwick shows that the maverick historians carried on not only the Russian historiographical tradition but also that of the *intelligent*. The self-proclaimed conscience of society, the **intelligentsia** had arisen in the nineteenth century. Dedicated to the Russian people or *narod*, the **intelligentsia** espoused a critical world outlook and sought to close the gulf that separated the elite from the Russian masses.

In locating the emergence of revisionist historians within the specific tradition of the Russian *intelligent*, Markwick explains how revisionism represented a form of legal dissent that ultimately threatened the very legitimacy of the party elite. He likewise places his renegade historians within the larger context of the *shestidesyatniki*, the key generation of men and women of the Soviet Sixties Generation, persuasively arguing that they represented a manifestation of an embryonic civil society. The bureaucratic political elite's stifling of the ferment caused by this unique cohort contributed to the onset of stagnation in the Brezhnev

years, paving the way for the upheaval in historical writing associated with the Gorbachev revolution.

Building on an earlier generation of writing on the emergence of a dissident historical trend in the Soviet Union, Markwick taps newly-opened archival material and revealing disclosures that saw the light of day under Gorbachev. Markwick also enriches his study with oral testimonies of many of the most prominent players in the events of the 1960s and 1970s. This unique source provides a trenchant commentary on, as well as an element of authenticity to, the more traditional sources. His treatment of the so-called Burdzhilov affair in the aftermath of the Twentieth Party Congress presents the most complete assessment yet of this opening salvo fired by the revisionists. The author then interrogates the major discussions and debates triggered by the 'New Direction Historians' that rocked the historical profession at the time. Particularly revealing is his fascinating case study of the writing and rewriting of the history of collectivization, carried out by Viktor Danilov and his associates. Markwick breaks new ground in chronicling the rise and fall of the Institute of History's Sector of Methodology, which he depicts as 'the institutionalized expression of the self-conscious transition of the post-Stalinist intellectual elite towards a new generation of *intelligenty*, reminiscent of the traditional Russian *intelligentsia*'.

Markwick throws light on the revisionist historians' collision course with the Brezhnev leadership and the imposition of bureaucratic controls over the activities of the nonconformist historians, taking the story to 1974 with P. V. Volobuev's dismissal as Director of the prestigious Institute of the History of the USSR. In his concluding chapter, the author presents his convincing thoughts on the significance of the *zastoi* or stagnation associated with the Brezhnev years. During the period the party could stifle, but not stop, the evolution of critical views on the Russian and Soviet past that first got a hearing during the turbulent time between 1956 and 1974. In peering beyond the veneer of conformity, one sees that the canonical interpretations embodied in the *Short Course*, the catechism of Stalinism, remained nothing more than a 'hollow shell'.

Might the defeat of the *shestidesyatniki*, Markwick queries, have doomed *perestroika*? After all, the 'best and the brightest of those who really believed in the ideals of the October Revolution' lost confidence and faith in the party-state as a result of the political, intellectual, and emotional retrenchment of the period of stagnation. This is a provocative way to end Roger Markwick's thoughtful and original book. It is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the evolution of

historical writing in the Soviet Union, the emergence of civil society in Russia, the role intellectuals play in one-party states, and how subterranean currents during the much-maligned period of stagnation both enabled and constrained the future course of *perestroika*.

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DONALD J. RALEIGH

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Preface

Intellectual production is shaped as much by the present as by the past. This study of the construction and reconstruction of the past by Soviet revisionist historians in the 1960s is a conscious response to the tumultuous developments that preceded the demise of the Soviet Union. It is no accident that this book begins and ends with the upheaval around Soviet history fomented by *perestroika*. Underlying this entire book is the question of where did this ferment originate? – given the stultifying weight of 18 years of the Brezhnev incumbency – not to mention the iron-heel of Stalinism. Despite the totalitarian aspirations of the Soviet state it never quite succeeded in capturing the minds of all the historians, although they were among the most persecuted members of the intelligentsia.

The development of Soviet historical writing in the 1950s and 1960s had a life and logic of its own that made it more than a mere creature of communist party policy. The basic structure of the book reflects that fact. In the first place it pursues the development of the discussions among the historians themselves rather than moving from party political resolution to political resolution, so to speak. The broader political developments are present, of course, but mainly as essential background to the discussions themselves. This endeavour to bring the movement of Soviet historiography into high relief against the political background explains the attention given early in the book to the culture of the production of Soviet history. Hence, too, the endeavour to situate the emergence of historical revisionism in the mid-1950s in the broader sweep of Russian historiographical and intellectual traditions.

Formally, the chronological limits of the book are 1956, the year Stalin was denounced by Khrushchev, and 1974, the year the revisionist historian P. V. Volobuev was dismissed as Director of the Institute of the History of the USSR. However, it was impossible to constrain the book strictly within these limits. In the first place, because this project was precipitated by the *perestroika* upheaval in Soviet historiography; in the second, because it is impossible to understand either the recent upheaval or its precursor during the ‘thaw’ without at least going back to the 1930s, the period of extreme Stalinism. Further, although the book is organized chronologically, at times it has been necessary either to anticipate later developments or backtrack somewhat.

Some terminological clarification is appropriate. Firstly, throughout I refer to 'history', 'historical writing', 'historical science' and 'historiography'. Historiography is an ambiguous word. It may mean scientific analysis of the process of the writing of history (strictly speaking this is 'historiology'), but it literally means describing historical writing. I have used historiography both as a synonym for the methodology of historical writing and for the writing of history itself. I am taking a cue here from Peter Novick; I rely on the context to clarify in which sense I am using the word 'historiography' and its derivatives (see Novick, 1988, p. 8, n. 6).

The second point relates to 'revisionism' and its derivatives. In Marxist parlance, especially in the former Soviet Union, 'revisionism' has been a term of abuse, meaning an unprincipled abandonment of the fundamentals of Marxism. In Western political science and history, however, this term has fairly positive connotations, meaning a challenge to intellectual orthodoxy. When I refer to 'revisionism' and so forth, I mean it in the second sense.

The research methodology of the book directly reflects the time in which it was researched and written. From the outset it seemed necessary, if I was to make sense of the plethora of discussions among Soviet historians during the 1950s and 1960s, to get 'behind the scenes' of the published record of the discussions, in order to draw out the self-perceptions of the historians who were in the vanguard of historical revisionism. When I first began my fieldwork in Moscow, in February 1992, *perestroika*, *glasnost*' and the subsequent demise of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had opened up unprecedented opportunities for access to hitherto inaccessible sources. Not just access to academic and party archives, but more importantly to the personal papers and, above all, the opinions of some of the major players. What began then as an inquiry based primarily on published, written sources – long the staple fare of sovietology – rapidly turned into an exercise in oral history. This unique source base is one of the distinguishing features of this book.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I establishes the context both of the book and of the writing of history in the USSR, exploring in particular the Russian tradition of the intelligentsia in relation to the renaissance in intellectual life after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. This undertaking reflects a major objective of the book: to go beyond a mere history of historical revisionism in order to utilize these developments as indices of shifts in the socio-philosophical outlook

and self-perception of the historians themselves as intellectuals. This book is therefore an investigation of the politics of knowledge.

Part II is the most historiographical. It details some of the paths by which historical revisionism moved forward, despite the attempts to contain it by the academic administrators and party *apparatchiki*. These quests increasingly encroached on the fundamental postulates of the officially endorsed historiographical paradigm, and, *ipso facto*, put historical revisionism on a collision course with an increasingly conservative academic and political elite.

Part III deals directly with the political repercussions of a sustained challenge to historical orthodoxy by a group of elite historians, homing in on the confrontation between the revisionists and their overseers that developed in the mid-1960s. The final chapter is as much an epilogue as a conclusion. It not only draws out the nexus between the defeat of the revisionists and the onset of the so-called period of stagnation; it also establishes the nexus between the revisionism of the 1960s and the furore around history that erupted soon after the advent of *perestroika*. The book has thus come full-circle, but it leaves open the question of the ramifications of Soviet historical revisionism for the post-Soviet future.

ROGER D. MARKWICK

Acknowledgements

This book has had a long gestation. It began as a PhD thesis in the Department of Government and Public Administration, University of Sydney, research for which commenced in early 1990, including a major research trip to Russia in 1992. The degree was awarded in March 1995. Since that time I have returned twice to Russia, in late 1995 and again in early 1998, to secure additional materials that have enabled me to augment and substantially revise the original thesis.

No scholarship is produced in isolation. My principal debt is to my former supervisor Graeme Gill, Professor of Government and Public Administration, University of Sydney, who guided the original thesis to a successful conclusion. In the years since, Graeme's unstinting encouragement and support have enabled me not only to produce this book but also our own joint study of contemporary Russian politics.

I am pleased that Donald Raleigh, Pardue Professor of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has written a foreword to my book. From the very start he has been a passionate supporter of this project. As an examiner of the original thesis it was he who encouraged me to seek additional materials that would enable me to publish a major study of Soviet historical revisionism in the 1960s. R. W. Davies, Emeritus Professor, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, who also examined the thesis, recommended publication of the revised work. I am particularly grateful for his critical comments on the historiography of collectivization.

Of course, particular thanks must be given to those scholars in the former Soviet Union, unfortunately many now deceased, who, in straitened times, have generously allowed me extensive interviews and/or access to their papers: A. M. Anfimov, V. S. Bibler, V. I. Bovykin, A. Kh. Burganov, V. P. Danilov, L. V. Danilova, Ya. S. Drabkin, M. Ya. Gefter, Ye. N. Gorodetsky, A. Ya. Gurevich, N. A. Ivnitky, Boris Kagarlitsky, Yu. A. Moshkov, S. S. Neretina, N. I. Pavlenko, K. N. Shatsillo, P. V. Volobuev, M. A. Vyltsan and I. E. Zelenin. At Moscow State University in 1992 I had the good fortune to have as my supervisor Professor Moshkov, who himself had made a significant contribution to Soviet historical revisionism. An invitation from the late Academician Volobuev to present the findings of my research to the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, in October 1995

gave me the opportunity to express my gratitude to these scholars. Gul'nara Davletshchina and, more recently, Aleksei Popyrin laboriously transcribed my interviews.

Renfrey Clarke has been a generous host on several occasions in Moscow. Elena Osokina, of the Institute of Russian History, was especially helpful when I first went to Moscow in 1992 and in the years since. Joachim Höslér, formerly of Phillips-Universität Marburg, who generously sent me several documents on the Burdzhaliov affair, has since become a friend and colleague. Ron Hoskinson was an indefatigable proof-reader.

A Post-doctoral Fellowship at the University of Sydney provided the opportunity to write the book. Visiting fellowships at the St Petersburg University of the Means of Communication and the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences enabled me to pursue the follow-up research for the book. In this regard, an Australian Academy of the Humanities Travel Fellowship provided particular assistance in 1998. I am grateful to Taylor & Francis Ltd, 11 New Fetter Lane, London, for permission to reproduce material from an article of mine originally published in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 46, no. 4, 1994. I am also grateful to Professor Victoria Bonnell for permission to reproduce on the cover a poster from her book *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (California: University of California Press, 1997), Fig. 6.4, from an original image courtesy of the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

Finally, this book could never have been written had it not been for the encouragement, endurance and unselfish moral and material support of my partner and wife, Therese Doyle, to whom this book is dedicated, together with our children. Therese not only helped me to comprehend Thomas Kuhn but, when the going got tough, offered the most sensible advice: 'write your way out of it'.

ROGER D. MARKWICK

List of Abbreviations and Russian Terms

AIRI	Arkhiv Instituta Rossiiskoi Istorii (Archive of the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences)
<i>aktual'nost'</i>	having relevance to the contemporary world
AN SSSR	Akademiya Nauk SSSR (Academy of Sciences of the USSR)
<i>apparatchik(i)</i>	party-state bureaucrat(s)
ARAN	Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk (Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences)
<i>artel'</i>	type of collective farm
<i>aspirant(y)</i>	graduate student(s)
cc	columns
CC	Central Committee
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
d.	delo (file)
f.	fond (record group)
<i>frontoviki</i>	front-line soldiers
Glavlit	Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i pechati (Main administration for literature and the press [the censor])
<i>gorkom</i>	gorodsky komitet (city party committee)
IMEMO	Institut Mezhdunarodnoi Ekonomiki i Mezhdunarodnikh Otnoshenii (Institute of World Economy and International Relations)
<i>intellektual(y)</i>	professionally-trained [politically loyal] specialist(s)
<i>intelligent(y)</i>	member(s) of the intelligentsia
<i>intelligentsnost'</i>	characteristics of a member of the intelligentsia
<i>I SSSR</i>	<i>Istoriya SSSR (USSR History)</i>
<i>IZ</i>	<i>Istoricheskie zapiski (Historical Transactions)</i>
<i>Kandidat nauk</i>	Candidate of Science [first post-graduate degree]
KGB	Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti (Committee of State Security [political police])
<i>KK</i>	<i>Istoriya vsesoyuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov): kratky kurs, pod redaktsiei komissii TsK VKP (b), odobren TsK VKP (b) 1938 god (Moscow,</i>

	1952) (<i>History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course</i>)
kolkhoz	kollektivnoe khozyaistvo (collective farm)
Kolkhozsentr	Vsesoyuznyi Soyuz Sel'skokhozyaistvennykh Kollektivov (All-Union Union of Agricultural Collectives)
<i>kombedy</i>	Komitety bednoty (Committees of the Poor Peasantry)
<i>kommuna</i>	type of collective farm
<i>Komsomol</i>	Kommunistichesky Soyuz Molodezhi (Communist Youth League)
<i>Kst</i>	<i>Kommunist (The Communist)</i>
kulak	rich peasant
l.	list (page)
MGU	Moskovsky Gosudarstvennyi Universitet (Moscow State University)
<i>mnogoukladnost'</i>	multistructuredness
MTS	Mashinno-traktornaya stantsiya (Machine Tractor Station)
MVD	Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
Narkomzem	Narodnyi Komissariat Zemledeliya (People's Commissariat of Agriculture)
NEP	<i>Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika</i> (New Economic Policy)
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)
<i>nomenklatura</i>	list of key posts approved by the party [= elite]
<i>obkom</i>	oblastnyi komitet (regional party committee)
<i>obshchina</i>	traditional village commune [also <i>mir</i>]
OGPU	Ob"edinennoe Gosudarsvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (Unified State Political Administration [political police])
<i>OI</i>	<i>Otechestvennaya istoriya (National History)</i>
op.	opis' (inventory)
<i>partiinost'</i>	commitment to the party line
PD	papers of V. P. Danilov
PN	papers held by S. S. Neretina
RSFSR	Rossiiskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)

<i>raikom</i>	raionnyi komitet (district party committee)
<i>shestidesyatniki</i>	the people of the 1960s
<i>stroï</i>	[social] system
TOZ	Tovarishchestvo po sovместnoi obrabotke zemli (Association for the joint cultivation of land)
TsGANKh	Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv narodnogo khozyaistvo (Central State Archive of the National Economy)
TsK KPSS	Tsentral'nyi Komitet Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union)
TsKhSD	Tsentr khraneniya sovremennoi dokumentatsii (Centre for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation)
TsPA	Tsentral'nyi partiinyi arkhiv (Central Party Archive)
<i>uklad(y)</i>	[socio-economic] structure(s)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAK	<i>Vysokaya atestatsionnaya kommissiya</i> (Higher Qualifications Commission)
VF	<i>Voprosy filosofii (Problems of Philosophy)</i>
VI	<i>Voprosy istorii (Problems of History)</i>
VI KPSS	<i>Voprosy istorii KPSS (Problems of the History of the CPSU)</i>
VKP (b)	Vsesoyuznaya Kommunisticheskay partiya (bol'she- vikov) (Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks))
Vuzy	Vysshie uchebnye zavedeniya (Higher Educational Establishments)
<i>vydvizhentsy</i>	workers promoted to administrative posts
<i>zakonomernosti</i>	lawful regularities
<i>zakony</i>	laws