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SOVIET WRITINGS ON THE "FIRST"
AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE BICENTENNIAL

ABSTRACT

This paper describes and assesses treatment of the American Revolution in Soviet historical works, encyclopedias and textbooks. The author traces the evolution of Soviet ideological appraisals from past rigid hostility to present restrained criticism of this "bourgeois revolution."

R-20-75

December 30, 1975

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SOVIET WRITINGS ON THE "FIRST" AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE BICENTENNIAL

Prepared for the
Office of Research,
U.S. Information Agency

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Note

Soviet Writings on the "First" American Revolution and the Bicentennial was prepared under contract between the United States Information Agency (USIA) and Sergius Yakobson. The author has reviewed specialized Soviet media.

The report is issued as an aid to Agency programming dealing with the U.S. Bicentennial, especially for Soviet and East European audiences. However, its distribution does not indicate endorsement by the USIA, nor should its contents be construed as necessarily reflecting the official opinion of the Agency.

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PREFACE

(Prepared by the Office of Research, USIA)

The U.S. Bicentennial has already focused major Soviet attention on the American Revolutionary period. Highlighted in the present study is the dilemma posed for Soviet ideologists by the Bicentennial observance. Although Lenin praised the American War of Independence as "a model of a revolutionary war," this paper finds evidence that the subject is a source of embarrassment to today's Soviet Establishment in that it seems to imply a threat "to the Soviet claim of being a superior **society** representing a perfect **type** of revolution." Soviet historians have reacted by attempting to downgrade the political consequences of the American Revolution, maintaining--in the words of one writer--that this "class conflict" actually led to political control by "the aristocracy and the well-to-do bourgeoisie."

While belittling American preparations for the Bicentennial observance, Soviet historians have sought to step up their own output on its historical background. The first section of this paper delineates twelve themes of Soviet commentary on the American revolution and on the views of American historians. The second section traces the evolution of Soviet official attitudes as demonstrated in successive editions of encyclopedias, university texts and schoolbooks, from the intransigent hostility of the late Stalin period to the more balanced and restrained, but still sharply critical, treatment of recent times. The author concludes that "what stands out is the Soviet effort to honor the popular masses--artisans, farmers, workers--as heroes and at the same time victims of this bourgeois revolution."

SOVIET WRITINGS ON
THE "FIRST" AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE BICENTENNIAL

PART I--THE HISTORICAL APPROACH

Soviet officialdom has long paid attention to the period of Lincoln and the abolition of slavery in the South--called in Moscow the "Second American Revolution." As for 1776 and the "First American Revolution," Soviet historians admit that it has so far been one of the most neglected areas of their current preoccupation with the American past, a preoccupation dating only from World War II.

Soviet Historians and 1776

The American Revolution is the subject of only 36 entries in a comprehensive bibliographic listing of Soviet Russian-language publications issued between 1945 and 1970 on the history of the United States.¹ It accounts for less than 1 per cent of the 3,657 monographs, dissertations, articles in serials and periodicals, and book reviews recorded in the bibliography. Behind the paucity of the output--on the average only one to two items a year--were apparent difficulties experienced by Soviet historians in treating a complex series of events which refused, from their standpoint, to move in a straight and logical line.

In the candid words of a serious Soviet student of American history, Dr. N. N. Bolkhovitinov, who is senior scientific researcher at the Institute of History of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences in Moscow and author of two substantial works on the Monroe Doctrine and the establishment of early diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia, the case of Soviet studies of the First American Revolution has been a "rather paradoxical situation."² Practically all that was worth recording by the beginning of 1969 could be counted on one's fingers--a general study by A. A. Fursenko, The American Bourgeois Revolution of the 18th Century, two dissertations on the Class Struggle Surrounding the Preparation and Ratification of the U.S.A. Constitution of 1787 (1948) and the Political Struggle in the U.S.A. for the Bill of Rights (1963), plus a few scattered articles on George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine.

¹Prepared recently by a former member of the Library of Congress, Mr. Leo Okinshevich, and scheduled to be published shortly by the Clio Press at Santa Barbara, California.

²Bolkhovitinov, N. N. "Some Results and Tasks of the Study of Modern History of the United States of America in the Soviet Union." In: Novaia i Noveishaia Istoriia, 1969, no. 2, p. 48.

Fursenko's 151-page work, "an important event in the national history of America and in world history," appeared in 1960 in an edition of 10,000 copies as one of a series of popular works sponsored by the Academy of Sciences Institute of History, and was meant for both historians and the general public interested in the historical development of the United States. The slim volume had all the earmarks of a Marxist historical work--an opening reference to Karl Marx and a closing quotation from Das Kapital and Lenin, a last chapter fittingly called "The Class Struggle in the United States of America in the Years 1783-1787," and a number of affirmative textual references to Outline Political History of the Americas by William Z. Foster of the U.S. Communist Party. Fursenko stressed the role of the popular masses in achieving victory over England, the impact of the conflict on the economy of the former colonies, and important changes which occurred in rural colonial life to lay the foundation for the development first of agrarian and, at a later date, of industrial capitalism in America.¹

The Bicentennial As Stimulus

Confronting the scarcity of serious Soviet works on the American Revolution, Bolkhovitinov expressed a hope that the approaching Bicentennial would serve as a stimulus to "a beginning of systematic exploration of the American Revolution on the part of Soviet historians." He recognized a few steps in this direction made recently in Kazan on the Volga (by P. B. Uman'skii) and in Leningrad (again by A. A. Fursenko), but urged Moscow historians to join the others in realization of the program. This, he observed, was "the more urgent as in American historiography during the last two decades tendencies have increased to question the revolutionary significance of the American War of Independence and to interpret the situation as if the War were not a revolution at all, or were a conservative revolution." Bolkhovitinov had in mind well-known works of adherents of the so-called "neo-conservative" school in the United States, historians such as Daniel J. Boorstin, Robert E. Brown, Clinton Rossiter, and Louis Hartz. Somewhat strangely, he saw it a duty of his colleagues, Soviet historians, to rescue the image of the American Revolution from being profaned by misguided and unfaithful American colleagues. Bolkhovitinov obviously felt himself on safe ground in this endeavor, for none other than Lenin had praised the American Revolution as a model of a revolutionary war.²

¹Fursenko, A. A. Amerikanskaia burzhuznaia revoliutsiia XVIII veka (The American Eighteenth Century Bourgeois Revolution), Moscow, 1960, p. 3.

²Bolkhovitinov, op. cit., p. 48.

The hope expressed by Bolkhovitinov has so far failed to materialize. There were no new titles of Soviet works devoted to the American Revolution when at the end of 1971, more than two years later, a detailed appraisal of the progress of Soviet historical research was submitted by G. N. Sevostianov to the First Moscow Symposium of Soviet Historians Specializing in America.¹ The four-day symposium, organized by the Institute of World History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and attended by about 130 leading Soviet specialists from the academic centers of Moscow and Leningrad, and from provincial towns like Kazan, Kiev, Kuibyshev, Saratov, and Tomsk, appears to have been a command performance; the forthcoming American Bicentennial seems to have been an important factor in the decision to hold this long delayed review of the available forces in the Soviet Union.²

The Bicentennial As Threat

Not all the references to the Bicentennial made during the above symposium appeared in its printed proceedings, released in 1973 in a limited edition of 500 copies. For example, pertinent observations by Sevostianov, director of the Sector for the History of the United States and Canada at the Institute of World History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and leading spirit in the organization of the symposium, were omitted for an unexplained reason.³ On the other hand, rather sharp remarks by Dr. A. A. Fursenko, representing the Leningrad branch of the Institute of History of the Academy, were included. These seem to have reflected the sentiment of at least those of Fursenko's colleagues who did not feel at ease about preparations for the Bicentennial--or about their own interpretation of them in any case:

Following President Nixon's decision, a special commission was created to prepare for the jubilee on a nation-wide scale. In addition to this, local commissions were created in each state. At the beginning, in July 1969, Nixon named as head of the national commission Wallace Sterling, a scholar, president of Stanford University and specialist in the field of higher education. However, a year later Sterling was replaced by David Mahoney, a businessman and one of the major figures in advertising, who in 1969 had been awarded the honorary title of "Man of the Year" for his services in the field of advertising. The fact that a specialist in advertising was placed at the head of the commission, which included a whole group of prominent people and among them several members of the government, was no accident. The activity of the commission, its report to the Congress

¹ Materialy pervogo simpoziuma sovetskikh istorikov-amerikanistov (Materials of the First Symposium of Soviet Historians Specializing in American History), Moscow, 1973, Volume I. p. 17.

² Golovina, M. A. "The Symposium of Soviet Historians Specializing in American History." In: Amerikanskii Ezhegodnik, 1972, Moscow, 1972, p. 303.

³ Materialy, op. cit., Volume I. A reference to Sevostianov's observations appears on pp. 184f.

of the U.S. in July of 1970 with proposals on the preparations for the jubilee, as well as its subsequent activities, all bear an openly propagandistic character. Furthermore, the remarks of President Nixon are imbued with the same spirit, expressing a broad political program which is **intended** both for the United States and for other countries.

One of the aims of this campaign is to prove the superiority of the American way of life, of the American path of development, and especially of the American type of revolution. The representatives of bourgeois historiography of the U.S. have spoken out in step with the advertising men and politicians. They have taken up the task of **giving** scholarly backing to this thesis.¹

The last paragraph of Fursenko's observations shows clearly that what was troubling American specialists among Soviet historians was not so much the elaborate U.S. preparations for a celebration as the historical antecedents of the Bicentennial and the threat they seemed to imply to the Soviet claim of being a superior society representing a perfect type of revolution. Regardless of the blunt accusation made recently by Professor Richard B. Morris of Columbia that "the word that is really missing from the Bicentennial is 'revolution'" and that the United States government "seems to be terrified by the thought that the United States is a revolutionary country,"² Soviet historians appeared to sense a continuing appeal of the "First" American Revolution that was peculiarly American and yet universal.

Fursenko was followed at the symposium by another Soviet historian, P. B. Umanskii from the State University of Kazan, who addressed himself to a different aspect of the Bicentennial. He spoke of the millions of Americans, and primarily American youth, who were said to have lost faith in the ideals of America and for whom now, he suspected, the Establishment was trying, with the aid of historians, to rekindle the "spirit of 1776."³

Among participants in the symposium deliberations Dr. Robert Ivanov, head of a Special Sector on World History in the Institute of World History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, proved in this instance to be less concerned with ideology. In fact, he used part of his allotted time to advocate obtaining microfilms of the mass of publications already in preparation in the individual states in connection with the Bicentennial celebration.

¹Fursenko, A. A. "The American and French Revolutions (A Comparative Analysis)." In: Materialy Pervogo Simpoziuma Sovetskikh Istorikov-Amerikanistov, Moscow, 1973, Vol. I, pp. 185f.

²Hornblower, Margot. "Revolution, Myths and Realities." In: The Washington Post, July 6, 1975, p. C1.

³Umanskii, P. B. "The First American Revolution in Contemporary USA Historiography (The 'New Left'; The 'New Economic History')." In: Materialy Pervogo Simpoziuma Sovetskikh Istorikov-Amerikanistov, Moscow, 1973, Vol. I, p. 210.

He suggested that Soviet historians participating in the celebration should, after having satisfied their own curiosity, deposit reproductions of such historical materials in different Soviet libraries for use by other interested parties.¹

"Mini-Thermidor": The American Revolution As Revolution

Another point made by Fursenko at the 1971 symposium provided valuable insight into the Soviet attitude toward these historical events. He disclosed that his new volume on the American Revolution would take the reader all the way back to the year 1765. Only in this way, he asserted, would one be in a position to demonstrate the rising wave of the revolutionary movement. Among milestones of the Revolution singled out for treatment by Fursenko were the "military rebellion," signing of the Declaration of Independence (viewed as the most important event), and the period of class battles which followed the end of the War of Independence and led to the acceptance of the Constitution, a period he called a "mini-Thermidor."²

Fursenko's juxtaposition of the American and French Revolutions which he enunciated both at the Moscow symposium and a short time before in France in a seminar at the Sorbonne, made him see the American Revolution in a broad perspective and reach certain conclusions. First, he asserted:

In comparison with the French Revolution the American one bore a moderate character. In American historiography a point of view now prevails the supporters of which affirm that the Revolution in America in essence was not a revolution. One of the most widespread theses in the contemporary literature in the United States is that of "consensus" and "continuity." The partisans of this concept depict affairs as if America never knew the class and social contradictions of the Old World. In harmony with this they generally minimize the conflicts of the American Revolution, declaring that it never had any "social goals." However, it is difficult to agree with this conclusion. The American Revolution was a class conflict. As a result of the Revolution the aristocracy and the well-to-do bourgeoisie established their political control.³

¹Materialy, op. cit., Volume I, p. 127.

²Fursenko, A. A. "The Final Word." In: Materialy Pervogo Simpoziuma Sovetskikh Istorikov-Amerikanistov, Moscow, 1973, Volume I, p. 273.

³Fursenko, A. A. "The American and French Revolutions (A Comparative Analysis)." In: Materialy Pervogo Simpoziuma Sovetskikh Istorikov-Amerikanistov, Moscow, 1973, Volume I, pp. 206f.

Second, Fursenko affirmed:

....there is no basis for excluding the American Revolution from the world revolutionary tradition. In 1918 V. I. Lenin in his "Letter to American Workers" wrote that the struggle for independence in America was for that time "a model of a revolutionary war." However, the contribution of the French Revolution and its services to history were incomparably more significant. "For its class, for that which it worked," Lenin said, "it did so much that the whole 19th century, the century which gave civilization and culture to all mankind, developed under the imprint of the French Revolution. In all parts of the world it [the 19th century] accomplished, carried out, realized in detail, completed that which the great bourgeois revolutionaries had created."¹

Fursenko regarded Lenin's last dictum as just as valid today as when it was first pronounced, and this indirect downgrading of the American Revolution made it easier for the Leningrad historian to challenge its apologists.

Fursenko's arguments were well received by the symposium. Reportedly, only M. M. Malkin, attached to the Armed Forces and Naval Academy in Leningrad, questioned Fursenko's definition of the federal Constitution of 1787 as being "aristocratic and reactionary." In his opinion it was merely a somewhat more conservative instrument than the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Constitution.²

Over four years have passed since the Moscow symposium, yet no significant new historical works dealing with the First American Revolution are known to have come off the Soviet presses during that period. Fursenko's new work remains a promise. Meanwhile, Soviet specialists in American history at the Academy of Sciences are reportedly engaged in working collectively on a comprehensive, even massive, history of the United States, and it is possible that this could be one of the reasons for the lack of individual efforts and contributions. No target date for the completion of this Academy enterprise has been disclosed.

The Bicentennial As Failure

Bolkhovitinov, a zealous participant both in the symposium and the work of the Academy of Sciences, did find time and energy to submit for publication at the end of 1973 one of his regular and well-informed surveys

¹Fursenko, A. A. op. cit., p. 209.

²Materialy, op. cit., Volume I, pp. 261f.

of the progress of United States historical research, this time on the Revolution.¹ He opened his report with a tightly-packed summary of Bicentennial preparations which by then had reached the point, **he wrote, where mere enumeration of the most important historical activities undertaken in the United States in connection with the forthcoming jubilee would warrant preparation of a special article.** In his preliminary progress report Bolkhovitinov mentioned a few of the efforts made on the federal as well as on the state and local levels and recorded some pertinent activities of such institutions as the American Historical Association, the Library of Congress and the National Historical Publications Commission.

Bolkhovitinov's account, although basically factual, was free neither of insinuations nor explicit criticisms. As Umanskii and Fursenko had done at the symposium, Bolkhovitinov now wrote about the commercialism and propagandistic nature of Bicentennial preparations as well as the Establishments' alleged intent to utilize the approaching jubilee to redeem the government's declining prestige, to counteract disillusionment of youth and to cement the moral fiber of American society. At one point Bolkhovitinov endorsed criticism of the work of American historians and of the National Historical Publications Commission, who were said to be limiting themselves to extensive publication of the papers of "great white men" while bypassing available source material on the people's protests in colonial America, on the experiences and fate of colonial Americans incarcerated in British prisons, and so on. In general, Bolkhovitinov, by nature a cautious man, preferred instead of taking a direct critical stand to seek cover behind native American critics of the Bicentennial preparations and in this particular case behind the American historian John Lemisch.²

Bolkhovitinov referred readers in search of further information on the Bicentennial to an article published by O. L. Stepanova in the January 1972 issue of the Soviet journal USA, officials organ of the Institute of the United States and Canada. The article in question, "Washington's Propagandistic Approach to the Bicentennial," was as tendentious as its title.

It pursued two objectives: 1) to make available a chronological listing dating back to 1966 of United States officialdom's various plans for the festivities, and 2) to charge that considerable difficulties were being encountered in finding the proper format and tone for an operation of such scale in the United States of today, with its severe dislocations at home and abroad, generation gap, alienation of youth, illiteracy, violation of civil rights of certain groups of citizens, and economic crisis. Even members of the official Bicentennial Commission set up by Congress were said to be beset by doubts, and the Soviet author of the article derived distinct pleasure in quoting from the Commission's report to the President, dated July 4, 1970:

¹Bolkhovitinov, N. N. "Some Problems of the Historiography of the Eighteenth Century American Revolution." In: Novaia i Noveishaia Istorია, 1973, no. 6, pp. 146-166.

²Bolkhovitinov, op. cit., p. 148.

We desire peace, yet find ourselves at war. We believe in justice and equality, yet there are wrongs and injustices in the land. We proclaim reverence for our God-given environment, yet tolerate its pollution. We believe in the brotherhood of man, yet there is violence in the streets, prejudice of the mind, distress and discord on the campuses.

As we move to solve the problems which confront us, we should derive strength and courage from our past. The ideals of human freedom which made us an independent nation in 1776 still live, vital, and daring, but are now put to new tests. Can this society indeed achieve equal opportunity and full citizenship for all its members, and will it commit itself to that task?¹

In her conclusions Stepanova sized up the future as follows:

Whatever controversies may arise as to the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the U.S., official Washington firmly supports the point of view that the jubilee is extremely important. Judging by everything, in the next few years a wide campaign in connection with the jubilee will be carried on for the glorification of the United States and of the social and economic system prevailing there. This campaign, however, can hardly have any serious success in face of the realities of American life with all its acute and painful problems.²

The Washington Post was another source for the not unwelcome information that efforts to make American youth a formal participant in the official Bicentennial program had encountered sour notes. The Soviet author referred specifically to an observation by then 26 year-old Steve Oxman, Rhodes scholar and Yale law student, reported by the Post on September 19, 1971:

Nothing is going to change because of a Bicentennial. Things are going to change because of a political process that has nothing to do with the Bicentennial....The nation and its heritage should not be glorified because that will alienate the young and because it is a form of chauvinism that is irrational.

Soviet Historians and American Historiography

Having failed so far to come forward with substantial and up-to-date works devoted to the American Revolution, Soviet specialists in American history have concentrated on a critique of developments in this field across the Atlantic.

¹America's 200th Anniversary. Report of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. Senate Document No. 91-76, 91st Congress, 2nd Session, Washington, D.C., 1970, pp. 3f.

²Stepanova, O. L. "Washington's Propagandistic Approach to the Bicentennial." In: USA, 1972, no. 1, p. 123.

Their chief target remains the so-called "neo-conservative" school of American historians of the 1960s. Soviet historians emphatically reject as short-sighted and confusing the theory of "consensus" and "continuity," arguing that it deprives events of their revolutionary character and significance, and they blame their American colleagues for having naively denied the existence of class antagonisms and class struggle in eighteenth-century American society. American protagonists of the so-called "New Economic History," who rely on modeling and the use of electronic computers, have also been exposed to severe criticism. The Soviet writer Umanskii, who has given special attention to their work, has accused them of using statistical data without proper analysis of manifold socio-political and ideological aspects of the processes in question. The "charm" of figures is said to have obscured and even undermined the true meaning of revolutionary events.¹

On the other hand, American historians of the "New Left" have been praised in Moscow for relinquishing the concept of the American Revolution as an elitist revolution and at long last recognizing the decisive role of the popular masses in shaping various phases of events. Their Soviet colleagues insist that, whether these "New Left" historians are prepared to admit it or not, the impact of the Marxist methodological approach is clearly visible in their work. Soviet historians also credited American Marxist historians such as Herbert Aptheker, William Z. Foster, and P. H. Foner with major and original contributions to the field.

Predictably, Soviet historians have also reacted favorably to recent efforts of some American historians to emphasize the role of ideological forces in the American Revolution and to interpret it as an "intellectual movement." Bolkhovitinov has observed that "Marxist researchers do not deny the important role played by ideas and revolutionary ideology in eighteenth-century America," and paraphrasing Pauline Maier's From Resistance to Revolution, added:

Obviously, not every colonial spent his evenings reading Francis Hutcheson's System of Moral Philosophy, although some did. Others learned about revolutionary ideas in their local press. The works of the "Real Whigs" helped the colonists in one way or another to better understand the events and helped to create a logical thrust toward revolution and independence.²

¹Umanskii, op. cit., p. 220.

²Bolkhovitinov, op. cit., p. 158.

Conclusion: The Soviet Theses

A review of Soviet historians' criticism of American research on the American Revolution reveals these basic propositions:

- 1) The first American Revolution was a revolution in the European sense of the word.
- 2) It was both a colonial and a social revolution.
- 3) The maturing of the revolution was due to a national, or rather a national liberation, factor. The American Revolution was a colonial revolution, a **struggle** of the colonies in revolt against the mother country, a revolutionary war for independence.
- 4) The American Revolution was, like the French Revolution, a bourgeois revolution. It differed greatly from the French Revolution as to depth, aims, methods, and the forms of the struggle.
- 5) The main reason for this was that neither the ancien regime, nor absolutism, nor a developed feudal system have been part of American history. Only rudimentary elements of feudalism can be discerned here.
- 6) As Frederick Engels pointed out, the American colonies were from the beginning "bourgeois" in character. The revolution in America belongs to the "intra-formative type"; what occurred there was a struggle for power within a bourgeois society.
- 7) Contradictions, social conflicts and class antagonisms determined the progress of the Revolution. The lower social classes--farmers, artisans, and small tradesmen--played an active role in the pursuit of the war and greatly influenced the course of events. But they were poorly organized.
- 8) Because of the diversified social origins of the active participants in the Revolution, its aims were of a mixed nature. Some were directed towards freedom, independence, and removal of obstacles standing in the way of the development of capitalist relationships; others towards preservation and protection of existing bourgeois privileges and order.
- 9) While in France, as Chateaubriand phrased it, "the patricians began the revolution and the plebs finished it," in America the "elite," who had initiated the Revolution, succeeded in keeping power right to the end. The Revolution secured for the whole American people the end of the authority of the mother country, but in spite of major contributions to the victory of the Revolution by the popular masses, it resulted in the strengthening of the political power of the ruling class of "large-scale" bourgeoisie and of slave-owning planters.

- 10) Termination of the war led to a sharpening of the class struggle. Shays' Rebellion was only one, better-known example of this. The Federal Constitution of 1787 represented the end point of the Revolution; it was a progressive and at the same time a conservative instrument designed to protect the interests of the triumphant bourgeoisie. The continuing legal toleration of slavery was one of the gravest defects of the Constitution.
- 11) The impact of the Revolution was very strong in the economic sphere. Commerce and industry benefited considerably. Yet, of greatest consequence were the changes which occurred in rural America. The elimination of incipient feudal relationships, liquidation of the estates belonging to the loyalists, and, most important, the opening of public lands in the Western territories made it possible for the new nation to enter, in the North and west of the Allegheny Mountains, upon the path of capitalist development in agriculture. Lenin described this type of bourgeois agrarian revolution as follows:

It may...proceed by having small peasant economies at the head which, in a revolutionary way, will remove the "excrescence" of the feudal latifundia from the social organism and then freely develop without them along the path of capitalist economy.¹

- 12) Soviet historians quote incessantly from available pronouncements on the subject by Karl Marx and Lenin. The most important of them follow:

Karl Marx - Das Kapital

As in the eighteenth century the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle-class, so in the nineteenth century the American Civil War sounded it for the European working-class.²

Lenin - "Letter to American Workers"

The history of modern, civilized America opened with one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars of which there have been so few compared to the vast number of wars of conquest which, like the present imperialist war, were caused by squabbles among kings, landowners or capitalists over the division of usurped lands or ill-gotten gains. That was the war the American people waged against the British robbers who oppressed America and held her in colonial slavery, in the same way as these "civilized" bloodsuckers are still oppressing and holding in colonial slavery hundreds of millions

¹Lenin, V. I. "Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy." In: Collected Works, 4th edition, Moscow, 1965, Volume 13, p. 239.

²Marx, Karl Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production. London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1974, Volume I, p. 20.

of people in India, Egypt, and all parts of the world....
The American people, who set the world an example in waging
a revolutionary war against feudal slavery, now find them-
selves in the latest, capitalist stage of wage-slavery to
to a handful of multimillionaires, and find themselves
playing the role of hired thugs who, for the benefit of
wealthy scoundrels, throttled the Philippines in 1898 on the
pretext of "liberating" them, and are throttling the Russian
Socialist Republic in 1918 on the pretext of "protecting" it
from the Germans....

The American people have a revolutionary tradition which
has been adopted by the best representatives of the American
proletariat, who have repeatedly expressed their complete
solidarity with us Bolsheviks...¹

¹Lenin, V. I. "Letter to American Workers." In: Collected Works, 4th
edition, Moscow, 1965, Volume 28, pp. 62, 63, and 69.

PART II--MASS INDOCTRINATION

The official Soviet view of the American Revolution is reduced to its simplest form in media designed for mass indoctrination of the reading public. These represent an important outlet for an ideological effort that blends lofty purpose, propaganda, education, and public relations.

The American Revolution and the "Great Soviet Encyclopedia"

A basic vehicle for disseminating the approved Marxist-Leninist point of view among the Soviet populace has been the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, "Soviet in treatment and universal in scope."¹ It took the Soviets more than twenty years, from 1926 to 1947, to produce the 65 volumes of this work's first edition. The 51 volumes of its second edition appeared at a much faster rate, between 1950 and 1958. The third edition has been in progress since 1970.

The first edition of the Encyclopedia, issued in 45,000 copies in 1945, lacked a special entry for the "First" American Revolution. The historical part of the general article on the United States of America included a short appraisal of it, intended to demonstrate that the lower classes failed to be properly compensated for their revolutionary effort. The reader was informed that, although the Revolution succeeded in liquidating feudal "survivals" of the colonial period, the servitude at least of whites, and the privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy, the "broad masses" of the population which were "fighting for democratic rights and for the land got practically nothing."² The real beneficiaries of the Revolution were said to be the well-to-do bourgeoisie, the land speculators, and the entrepreneurs. The War of Independence, in this Soviet version, had adversely affected farmers, artisans, and workers, and the increase in prices aggravated the plight of working classes. It was asserted that, owing to heavy taxation, farmers often lost their land to the new bourgeoisie. The article pointed to numerous uprisings of small farmers and workers occurring in the years 1786 and 1787 in various rural areas, the most significant among them being the one led by Daniel Shays, whose followers tried to carry the popular revolution a step further, but failed; still the uprising was portrayed as greatly influencing the future democratization of the country.

¹Horecky, Paul (ed.). Basic Russian Publications. An Annotated Bibliography on Russia and the Soviet Union. Chicago, 1962, p. 15.

²"United States of America." In: Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1st edition, Moscow, 1945, Volume 51, column 692.

In the aftermath of World War II, the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (published in 300,000 copies) included in 1952 a special contribution on the American Revolution under the heading "War of Independence in North America." The general findings were more or less as before, but with a definite shift to a more antagonistic vocabulary (such as "falsification" and "class struggle"). Following an initial statement that attributed success of the War to the "self-sacrificing" fight of workers and farmers, a second sentence carried the attack to American "bourgeois historiography" which "falsifies historical facts and in every way plays down the significance of participation in the War of Independence by the popular masses, by pushing into the forefront leaders of the movement from the ranks of the well-to-do bourgeoisie and the planters."¹ It was asserted that:

The American people played a decisive role in the victory of the North American colonies, but the ruling classes of the USA took advantage of the victory achieved by the people. The bourgeoisie, pursuing its own mercenary class interests, proved incapable of bringing democratic reforms to a conclusion: it refused to abolish slavery, to let broad sections of the American people enjoy political rights and to solve the agrarian question in the interest of the people.²

There were references to the fiscal plight of the farmers at the end of the War, and to the monetary benefits derived by businessmen, merchants, and industrialists during the English blockade. Stressed as by-products of the successful war were the sharpening of the class struggle and the opening of broad possibilities for the development of capitalism in America. Soviet readers were informed that political power in the newly created state belonged to a bloc of bourgeoisie and well-to-do planters and was fraught with deep contradictions. Negro slavery was portrayed as a serious obstacle to the growth of industry that ultimately led to confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the slave-owning planters.

The article on the "War of Independence in North America, 1775-1783" which appeared in 1971 in the third, post-Stalinist edition (volume 5) of the Encyclopedia (630,000 copies) defined the War more positively as a "bourgeois revolution which led to liquidation of the colonial yoke and to founding of an American national state."³ In comparison with the second

¹"The War of Independence in North America." In: Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 2nd edition, 1951, Volume 8, p. 591.

²Ibid.

³"The War of Independence in North America, 1775-1783." In: Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 3rd edition, Moscow, 1971, Volume 5, p. 286.

edition, the presentation of the conclusions was rather matter-of-fact. The historian I. P. Dement'ev, signer of the article, tried to strike a more proper balance in his assessment of the economic and social results of the revolution. On the favorable side he noted that the Revolution had caused disappearance of former bothersome regulations imposed by the British Parliament and Crown on industry and commerce, the end of large land holdings and of feudal survivals, gradual abolition of Negro slavery in the North and the sale of public lands. All these changes were said to have favored development of capitalism in North America, in the given historical context a positive phenomenon for Marxists since it hastened formation of a proletariat and was therefore a step toward revolution. On the other hand, he wrote that the Revolution did not succeed in solving a number of the problems it faced: that in the South slavery continued to exist, in all the states the right of suffrage was made dependent on high property qualifications, and, finally, public lands were parceled and sold in such a way that they came into the hands of wealthy land speculators.

Dement'ev's findings were by no means new to American history specialists among his readers. They had appeared practically verbatim nine years earlier, in 1962, in his article on the same topic in the third volume of the specialized Soviet Historical Encyclopedia.¹

Textbooks

Textbooks on modern history are a further means of reaching and indoctrinating a specific segment of the Soviet public--the student youth, especially oncoming generations of historians and educators. History is a most popular field of study in the Soviet Union. Sixty-four universities and seventy pedagogical institutes each have at present either a historical faculty or a department of history attached to them. The importance of history textbooks is reflected in the fact that professional historians engaged in research activities, in museums and archives, in libraries and publishing houses, and in teaching history in establishments of higher learning and secondary education, now exceed 200,000. Teaching and learning aids are regularly prepared by specialists in this discipline, usually by teams of collaborators. However, permission authorizing the publication and use of the finished product must in each case be obtained in advance from the pertinent government authority.

¹Dement'ev, I. P. "War of Independence in North America, 1775-1783." In: Sovetskaia Istoricheskaia Entsiklopediia, Moscow, 1963, Volume 3, columns 643-649.

Specimens of this type of material, available in the Library of Congress collections, deserve close examination. Quite a few have appeared during the past twenty to twenty-five years for use by students of the history departments of universities and educational institutes. All such publications carry a special chapter or section on the American War of Independence, and most use in their conclusions quotations from Lenin attesting to the revolutionary character of the War and its value as an example. The textbooks invariably combine positive and negative comments about the American Revolution. Of interest are the ratio between praise and critical comments, the nuances of tone, and the references both to American scholarship and contemporary political situations.

In their appraisal of the American Revolution and of the pertinent American historiography, Soviet history textbooks have become tamer with time. Modern History, a textbook published under the auspices of the Institute of History with the approval of the USSR Ministry of Higher Education, first in 200,000 copies in 1951 and then with a few changes two years later in 100,000 copies, for use in the history departments of universities and pedagogical institutes, serves as a good example of what Soviet students were being taught during the earlier period. The chapter on the "War of Independence in North America" closed with an assertion that "unmasking of the falsification of history of the USA by American bourgeois historiography, **as well as critique of the reactionary features of the early period of the history of the United States is an important scholarly and political task for Soviet historical scholarship.**"¹ In tune with this, chapter author M. M. Malkin violently attacked "apologetic" American bourgeois historiography (Bancroft, Beard and others) for soft-pedaling class contradictions in the United States, for glorifying bourgeois "fathers of the Revolution" such as George Washington and John Adams, and for concealing the role played by the popular masses in the progress of the Revolution. He chided contemporary American bourgeois historiography for juxtaposing "free new world" and the "old world." Such American historians, he wrote, proclaimed a "unique" development of the United States right from the beginning and an American monopoly of "democracy" and "freedom," in order to justify the claim to "leadership," i.e. domination of the world by the United States. Reactionary American historians, he warned, misinterpret the role of the working people in the War of Independence and vilify the revolutionary democratic traditions of the American people. They hate the people and real democracy, and therefore praise the use of force and the rule of terror. This was also, the Soviet author maintained, the reason why Hamilton--called an ideologist of reaction in the days of the War of Independence--had become the standard bearer of those in search of a "strong personality" and even of a fascist-type dictator in the United States.

¹ Akademiia Nauk SSSR. Institut Istorii. Novaia Istoriiia (Modern History), edited by B. F. Porshnev, S. D. Skazkin and V. V. Biriukovich, Moscow, 1953, Volume I, Chapter 6, pp. 183f.

As to the American Revolution per se and the reasons for the course it took, this textbook is replete with arguments designed to demonstrate the inability of a "national liberation war" to solve the socio-economic tasks facing a bourgeois democratic revolution--arguments not irrelevant to a modern context:

--Liberation from colonial **dependence**, which fostered **development** of the country and founding of a "national bourgeois" republic, was good for the whole people and a progressive phenomenon, but otherwise the popular **masses**, who had played a decisive "revolutionary" role in the **War**, failed to obtain what they were fighting for--land and democratic rights.

--The bourgeoisie and slave owners exploited the victory in their narrow class interests.

--Slavery, which did not exist in European society, not only did not vanish but flourished more than ever, and was bound to lead one day to civil war.

--Survivals of the feudal system were left intact.

--The bourgeoisie revealed only their narrow-mindedness and readiness to make a deal with the slave owners who, together with the speculators from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, came into possession of most of the land.

--Racial discrimination was sanctioned by the Constitution.

--The bourgeoisie and slave owners continued to exterminate the Indian tribes, who were forced to enter specially established reservations.

--The bulk of working people were not granted political rights.

--A dictatorship of slave owners and of well-to-do bourgeoisie became deeply rooted in the country.

Author Malkin investigated the causes of such a dismal end to an eighteenth century bourgeois revolution. He found counsel in the writings of Lenin, who insisted that in each bourgeois revolution logical consistency and a democratic development depended on the extent to which the bourgeoisie was forced to adopt democratic ideas professed by the lower strata of the population. Indeed, Malkin seemed convinced that all that was "really progressive and historically valuable"¹ in the American Revolution was achieved by the lower classes as mentor and motive-force of the bourgeoisie, although their pressure proved insufficient to overcome the

¹Akademiia Nauk SSSR, op. cit., p. 182.

resistance of reactionary forces and to elevate the revolution to a higher level. Besides, some of the more active and energetic elements among the revolutionary forces in North America left the movement to occupy the lands vacated by the Indians, leading Malkin to render--quite unexpectedly from a Marxian standpoint--a moral verdict to the effect that the lower strata in the American Revolution could not educate the bourgeoisie to act and think democratically, "for a people which exploited another people [in this case, the Indians] cannot itself be consistently revolutionary and democratic."¹

Another standard textbook, also entitled Modern History, for use by students in Soviet pedagogical institutes, appeared in Moscow in 40,000 copies in 1963. Chapter 3, on the "First North American Bourgeois Revolution," was contributed by Professor A. I. Narochnitskii, full member of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and editor of the entire work (he is today head of the Institute of History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a leading spokesman for Soviet official historical scholarship). The volume was evidently considered a success, for it was reissued in 1972 in 70,000 copies in an enlarged edition; except for an occasional clarification, the evaluation of the American Revolution remained exactly the same as in the original text.

Before returning to further examination of these two editions, it is appropriate to note two special aids for teaching modern history which were published in the 1950s in the interval between the Malkin and Narochnitskii texts. In 1956, the chair for world history at the Higher Party School attached to the Central Committee decided to issue its own teaching aid for the use of its students; this covered the years 1642 to 1870, introduced as "a period of victory and stabilization of capitalism in the advanced countries of that time."² The author of the chapter on "The War of the North American Colonies of England For Independence, and the Founding of the United States of America," Assistant Professor N. I. Somin, followed the familiar line of interpretation: the masses of the working people played a decisive role in the U.S. victory; the popular masses expected from a just revolutionary war not only national independence but also a broad democratization of the political system; however, all this was in vain. Industrialists, merchants and planters agreed to limited democratization but only on condition that the whole power of government should remain in their hands. The popular masses suffered greatly from the after-effects of the War. Shays' Rebellion demonstrated the sharpness of class contradictions in the newly established bourgeois USA. Somin's style of presentation, in spite of the character of the new audience, remained critical but not as aggressive as Malkin's. Somin regarded the Constitution

¹ Akademiia Nauk SSSR, op. cit., p. 182.

² Vysshaia Partiinaiia Shkola pri TSK KPSS. Kafedra vseobshchei istorii. Novaia Istoriia (Modern History), Moscow, 1956, Chapter 3, p. 3.

of 1787 as "a striking example of bourgeois class narrow-mindedness," but he was prepared to praise it as a step forward compared with the absolutist and feudal conditions prevailing at the time in the European countries and with the existing order of things in the colonies prior to the War of Independence.¹

The other aid to teaching modern history, released in 1959 in 16,000 copies, was an anthology of source materials, intended to be studied and discussed by the students in Soviet pedagogical establishments in conjunction with formal lectures on the subject. Chapter 2, devoted to the War of Independence in North America and the founding of the United States, offered in translation six basic texts selected for this purpose by N. M. Goldberg: a speech by Patrick Henry, Thomas Paine's Common Sense, the Declaration of Independence, the Statutes of the Confederation, a petition of the town of Greenwich of January 16, 1786, and excerpts from the Federal Constitution. Study of these documents was meant to help clarify three elements in the picture: the class character of the new bourgeois state, the nature of the progressive forces, and the sharpening of class contradictions typical of the newly established republic. The tone of the whole exercise was set by the Introduction to the chapter, which flatly declared that:

American imperialists try to hide reactionary domestic and aggressive foreign policies behind the slogans of former American democracy of which no trace is left today. The present American monopolists have completely wiped out the remnants of bourgeois democracy which was established at the end of the 18th century.²

Once again a reference to a hoary statement by Lenin, this time that "the American people, who set the world an example in waging a revolutionary war against feudal slavery, now find themselves in the latest, capitalist state of wage-slavery to a handful of multimillionaires,"³ was used to buttress this negative position.

As for Professor Narochnitskii, his conclusions presented in the 1969 and 1972 textbooks, opened a number of avenues to better understanding of the American Revolution. He continued to stress the role of the popular masses--farmers, small town bourgeoisie, and, in the second edition of his textbook also artisans--in the progress of war and revolution, and to deplore their lack of organization resulting in failure to bring to fruition the democratic hopes and aspirations of the people. The American Revolution thus ended as a bourgeois--not a bourgeois-democratic--revolution in

¹Vysshaia Partiinaia Shkola pri TSK KPSS., op. cit., p. 53.

²Britov, V. V. (ed.). Novaia Istoriia (Modern History), Moscow, 1959, p. 57.

³Lenin, V. I. "Letter to American Workers.", op. cit., p. 63.

spite of strong democratic trends present in New England. The leading role in the war and in the creation of the new state was exercised by the wealthy planters and the bourgeoisie. The United States of America was able to enjoy a constitution most advanced for its time, but by no means a truly democratic one, for it safeguarded primarily the interests of the planters and of the well-to-do bourgeoisie.

Without quoting the findings of the "ideological" school among American historians, Narochnitskii paid tribute to the impact of the English seventeenth-century bourgeois revolution and of the theories of English and French philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment on the intellectual leaders of the American Revolution. Narochnitskii viewed the American Revolution for his readers as one of the decisive battles in the revolutionary struggle of rising capitalism against the old feudal order. He quoted William Z. Foster and other Marxist historians to prove that the American War of 1775 to 1783 was part of a general revolutionary struggle of the peoples of America against the colonial yoke and the spread of feudalism. With the war of the colonies for independence brought to a victorious conclusion, basic obstacles to a capitalist development in this part of the world ceased in his opinion to exist: the hegemony of the metropole and the domination of the country by the British landed aristocracy.

But was capitalism preferable to the vanishing feudal system? In his text, Narochnitskii described how:

The new American republic of the bourgeoisie and slave owners entered upon the path of capitalist development to be accompanied by territorial expansion, decimation of Indians, growth of slave labor on plantations, enrichment of capitalists and estrangement between rich and poor.¹

All these facts made him question the veracity of American protagonists of the "exclusive" American brand of capitalism, which allegedly did not know either aggression or the sacrifice of the interests of the people to greedy capitalists and landowners.

The latest Soviet Modern History textbook available for inspection was issued in 1972 in 60,000 copies for use by the entire Soviet student body of future historians. The chapter on the USA was contributed by Sh. A. Bogina. It is hard to say whether the change in the political climate had something to do with it, but her assessment of the nature and importance of the American Revolution definitely differs in style from that of her precursors. Her presentation moves evenly. She offers the student a factual enumeration of the **positive** achievements of the Revolution. In Bogina's formulation:

¹Narochnitskii, A. L. (ed.). Novaia Istoriia (Modern History), 2nd edition, Moscow, 1972, Part I, Chapter III, p. 82.

The War of Independence was a bourgeois revolution which not only successfully solved the basic task of national liberation but brought about great socio-economic changes which considerably speeded up the development of capitalism in America.¹

The Revolution finished off all the elements of the feudal order. It created in the West a domain of open lands which permitted the growth of a capitalist agricultural economy. It stimulated trade and industry, and it laid the foundation for the forthcoming appearance of the modern working class in America. Finally, in the opinion of the author, it created a bourgeois democratic republic which was for its time a rather progressive development.

To be sure, Bogina scolds American bourgeois historians of the neo-conservative type for not having paid sufficient attention in the past fifteen to twenty years to significant changes in the life of eighteenth-century American society. But, unlike her earlier peers, she neither denigrates the American Revolution to defame the United States of today nor volunteers the services of Soviet historians to correct the prevailing American image of the Revolution. Her findings are also basically free of orthodox Marxist jargon. Last, seemingly more in sorrow than in anger Bogina reports that the working masses of the American people who took an active part in the revolutionary war failed to influence decisively the outcome of the Revolution. Thus the Revolution left Negro slavery intact. The land question was not solved in a democratic spirit. The unification of the country was barely initiated. Still, Bogina is not unduly perturbed: she states guardedly that "the solution of all these problems was left to the future development of the USA."²

In contrast to university students who, as we have seen, have had during their training several textbooks on modern history at their disposal, millions of Soviet school-children have for decades had to use textbooks on modern history prepared for them by one person, a historian and early promoter of American studies in the Soviet Union, A. V. Efimov. Commissioned as long ago as 1940 by the Central Committee of the Party to produce such a teaching aid, he enjoyed from then until his recent death a real monopoly in this field.

Efimov's personal evaluation of the American Revolution changed little during most of this time. The pertinent thesis of his 1957 textbook for eighth-grade pupils remained the same ten years later, in his 1967 textbook prepared for the entire Soviet secondary school system, and half the text appears again in the 1975 edition of his eighth-grade textbook. The following is, in summary, what Soviet school-children have had to learn about the American Revolution:

¹Iurovskaia, E. E.; Poltavskii, M. A. and Zastenker, N. E. (ed.). Novaia Istorii (Modern History), Moscow, 1972, Chapter III, p. 95.

²Iurovskaia, E. E., op. cit., p. 96.

As a result of the War of Independence the former thirteen English colonies became the first independent state in America. The War of Independence was simultaneously a struggle of the popular masses of the colonies, led by the bourgeoisie, against the British landed aristocracy. Thus the War is to be regarded as a bourgeois revolution which terminated and replaced the predominant position of land aristocracy by that of the bourgeoisie allied with the slave owners. The American bourgeoisie, having used this struggle of the people against the British crown for achieving power, continued to exploit the popular masses. The so-called American bourgeois democracy amounted in fact to the domination of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the War of Independence furthered the economic development of the United States. No longer could England hamper the growth of American industry and trade and hinder the colonization of western territories. The former customs stations separating the colonies from each other ceased to exist, but the continuation of slavery in the South was to lead nearly one hundred years later to a new civil war between North and South.¹

Source materials for further study in some of Efimov's textbooks included excerpts from the Declaration of Independence and from a 1786 letter by George Washington, which allegedly showed him to be in favor of the American Constitution but only as a tool in fighting popular movements.

In addition, Soviet youngsters were expected to be able to answer a number of questions as revealing in nature of Efimov's way of reasoning as they were of general Soviet thinking about the American Revolution. Soviet boys and girls were asked to tell their teachers:

- Why was the war of the American colonies at the same time a bourgeois revolution?
- What was the chief characteristic of this bourgeois revolution?
- What classes were most active in the American bourgeois revolution?
- What class played the leading role?
- What was the role of the popular masses in the Revolution?
- What were the, for that time, progressive features of the Declaration of Independence and what were its limitations?
- In what way did the United States Constitution safeguard the interests of the planters and of the bourgeoisie and in which way did it limit the rights of the people?

¹Efimov, A. V. Novaia Istoriia (Modern History), Part I, 16th edition, Moscow, 1967, p. 35.

Last, Soviet school youths were supposed to demonstrate, on the basis of their knowledge of the American eighteenth-century bourgeois revolution, both the impossibility for the bourgeoisie to be, in the long run, leader of the popular masses and the inevitability of a split between the bourgeoisie and the people in the wake of a victorious bourgeois revolution.¹

The general impression from scanning organs of mass indoctrination is that their handling of the American Revolution is unimaginative, dogmatic, and repetitious. What stands out is the Soviet effort to honor the popular masses--artisans, farmers, workers--as heroes and at the same time victims of this bourgeois revolution.

¹Efimov, A. V. Novaia Istoriia (Modern History), Part I, 13th edition, Moscow, 1975, pp. 52f.

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