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## REVIEWS

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GREAT SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA: A TRANSLATION OF THE THIRD EDITION, vol. 1. Group Editorial Director of the Editorial and Translation Staff, *Jean Paradise*. New York and London: Macmillan and Collier Macmillan, 1973. xxxvii, 678 pp. \$50.00.

This reviewer has reluctantly approached the task of reviewing volume 1 of the English translation of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (*BSE*). It is a superhuman task to comment on the content of a general reference tool as a whole. Indeed, the history and methodology of encyclopedias has become a special field of intellectual history. In the 1930s, a circle (*kruzhok*) of friends of encyclopedic work in Russia set for itself the same task, that of the study of the history and methodology of Russian and foreign encyclopedias. Moreover, certain works of reference, such as bibliographies, dictionaries, and encyclopedias of any kind, defy comprehensive reviews by single reviewers. A reviewer may feel himself adequately prepared or even with superior knowledge in certain fields, but utterly helpless when confronted with the amassed knowledge of experts in every field.

Since its first appearance in 1926, the *BSE* has offered a broad canvas of Marxist-Leninist education and has been an indispensable reference work especially for questions concerning the Soviet Union. In other words, it is a reference work for the Soviet Union that is as "national" as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Americana*, or *Italiana*. Although the initial reception of the volume under review has been respectful (but by no means enthusiastic), the volume certainly does not reflect the publisher's extravagant claims. In his sober appraisal in the *Herald Tribune* of January 28, 1974, Theodore Shabad wrote: "In many respects it is a view distorted by official unwillingness to be candid about shortcomings, especially in the social sciences, but little if any ideology creeps into the abundant and valuable material on science and technology . . . . The American publisher is letting the official Soviet authors and editors speak for themselves, even if the result may border on the absurd by American standards."

A review of volumes 1-5 of the translation in the *Times Literary Supplement* of May 30, 1975 (p. 591) paid tribute to the courage of undertaking such a gigantic and unusual enterprise, but a skeptical undertone is clearly discernible. Hermann Pörzgen, the special correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, called the encyclopedia the best available reference work on the Soviet Union and a source of internationally recognized value but he commented that "the exact rendering into English is certainly a unique case in the history of encyclopedias; it probably presents to Americans a sometimes strange picture of the world as seen today through Soviet eyes" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 3, 1975).

On the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, Sovetskaiia Entsiklopediia, the publishing house of the *BSE* and of other reference works, was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor (*Orden Trudovogo Krasnogo Znameni*) by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, for active participation in propagandizing the results of Soviet science, technology, culture, and for faithful work in editing reference literature. Andrei P. Kirilenko, a member of the Party presidium and the speaker

at the festive meeting, praised the *BSE* for its scholarly authority and as an all-embracing collection of human knowledge which serves as a good reference for doctrine and for work. Kirilenko reminded his audience of Lenin's high esteem of encyclopedic work and of his contribution to the *Great Encyclopedia*—an article on Karl Marx. The decision of the Soviet government on February 13, 1925 to publish the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* was based on Lenin's judgment. Kirilenko further praised the *BSE* for its combination of strict scholarship and Communist partisanship, which illuminates social life from the ideological position of the working class.

The most penetrating evaluation and elaborate criticism of the *BSE* translation (especially as far as indexing is concerned) has been made by Dr. Patricia Kennedy Grimsted of the Harvard Russian Research Center and Ukrainian Research Institute ("Détente on the Reference Shelves?," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, June 1975, pp. 3–15). Her review argues so forcefully, logically, and convincingly that the publishers of the translation will surely have to moderate their advertised claims about the value of the work. Dr. Grimsted's precise and cogent argumentation, backed by examples, apparently distressed the publisher, who has indicated his intention of replying to the criticisms. But, in this reviewer's opinion, the criticisms cannot be successfully refuted. Dr. Grimsted has shown that, in spite of tremendous effort and the use of computers, this is not a satisfactory reference tool. Translating the volumes as they are published in Russian has produced enormous alphabetizing and indexing difficulties. Moreover, by the time the publication of the English translation is complete, much of the contents of the volumes will already be out of date and will be superseded by more current reference works.

Of course, one cannot help but admire the courage of the publisher, who persisted in the face of the enormous and seemingly insurmountable difficulties connected with this project. Unfortunately, the millions of dollars invested in the English translation of the *BSE* must be regarded as wasted money. The publisher has vastly underestimated the intricacies and difficulties of the task. In their own specialties, the combined wisdom of the illustrious names of the American academic community who endorse the translation must be enormous, but, apparently, not one of these scholars has tried to analyze all of the *BSE* entries in his field in order to test their suitability and applicability for cross-referenced English entries. It is alarming and depressing that this illustrious body of American consultants did not recognize the inherent difficulties and dissuade the publisher from launching a project involving the translation of a gigantic Soviet propaganda effort which is of only limited usefulness to the English-speaking world. The duties of the impressive panel of advisers are not clear; the description of their functions is very imprecise. The consultants did not select articles and hardly could have been expected to check the accuracy of all translations of articles in their respective fields. For this task you do not need experts in the field. The American consultants have no visible function, no responsibility for the contents of the English version.

A basic question also arises concerning the audience to which this translation is directed. Anyone interested in Soviet knowledge in a particular field of science will not be content with an abstract, but will want to know the sources in the Russian language. The type of information offered by the *BSE* certainly will not suffice.

Much has been written about the *BSE* as a work of propaganda. It has steadfastly approved and applied Marxist-Leninist convictions as conceived at the time of the writing and compiling of the respective editions. The *BSE* has become a symbol for the organization of the bulk of human knowledge and the manipulation of political, economic, and social information to fit Communist interpretations. These features have been played down in the American publisher's glowing praise of the reference work, which often uncritically repeats the verbose perfectionist claims of the Moscow editorial staff. To the promotion department of Macmillan, I heartily recommend the inclusion in the advertisements of the pertinent passages of Kirilenko's speech of February 28, mentioned above, where the *BSE* is hailed as the purest manifestation and promoter of Communist thought, adapted to Soviet national needs and international aims. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of the work should be clearly and objectively outlined for the prospective buyer.

The present reviewer dares to offer some additional independent and unorthodox critical views. The *BSE* is a bold Communist attempt to organize the whole world of knowledge into one ideological framework. To offer this work to the Western reader without notes or critical comment is not a service to mutual understanding, but a disservice to all the Western readers who have a right to objective information on the Soviet Union. (The encyclopedia *Sowjetsystem und demokratische Gesellschaft* [Herder Publishing House, Freiburg] in its English edition and its reprints on special topics has shown how the essentials of Marxist thought can be critically communicated to non-Marxists.) With respect to many of the articles, it must be said that, in general, Western scholars do not need an education on the Soviet high school level. In addition, the bibliographies of the *BSE* translation are not adapted to the needs of its users. Many Russian titles and those in less known languages (for example, Baltic) are untranslated.

The English translation of the *BSE*, as it stands now, is not adapted to the needs of Western individuals. Certain alternatives should have been taken into serious consideration:

First, a break could have been made from the traditional universalist point of view that a general encyclopedia must cover both natural and social sciences. It would be a great achievement if a "*BSE* Natural Science Series" and a "*BSE* Social Science Series" could appear separately. The distribution of the fields, especially of borderline cases, could be settled among specialists. As far as the treatment of the sciences is concerned, the *BSE* is a monument of national pride. This reviewer is convinced that, in view of the fact that natural sciences, pure and applied, have received exhaustive treatment compared with the social sciences and that what must be regarded as basic or "common" knowledge takes up inordinate space in this reference work, there was and is no need of translating all of this material. It would have been preferable to distill from the *BSE* the Russian or Soviet contribution to world knowledge in the various fields described and discussed. There is no indication that the American publisher's praise for the work as a whole is based on a detailed critical appraisal by Western experts of the treatment of fields such as biology, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and so forth within the general framework of the *BSE*.

Second, the publisher should have the courage to reconsider this project or seek a different mode of its realization. Or, even better, the Moscow editors should see to it that their work is extracted and translated in a more practical manner. For instance, a series of handbooks on the various cultural regions could be pre-

pared while the publication of the Russian edition is still in progress, with English as the language for the Anglo-American cultural region, Spanish for Spain and Latin America, French for France and the French-speaking countries, German for Germany and Central Europe, and so forth.

In order to make the *BSE* a "Sovietica"—the twentieth and twenty-first century's real counterpart of the *Britannica*—a new concept, a new approach, a basic reconsideration, a new "*Denkansatz*" is needed. This is a challenge not only for the editorial staff of the *BSE*, but for lexicographers the world over. The time lags between the publishing dates of the volumes of the third edition could be overcome by careful integration of the annual supplements and regular revisions of the bibliographies on a true international scope.

Third, the various editions of the *BSE*, more than any other encyclopedia, differ in content. The compilers have removed certain articles from succeeding editions and have heavily edited others. Here is a task for the consultants. They should advise Macmillan to publish a supplement to the *BSE* translation in progress, which would indicate the content of articles in previous editions of the *BSE* which were omitted in later editions. Such a volume would be an important contribution to the political and intellectual history of the Soviet Union and an instrument for objective study. It might also include the articles of contributors to previous editions which deserve to be reprinted in spite of omission from later editions. In that respect, I am thinking of articles in the first edition by men such as M. N. Pokrovskii, A. Lunacharskii, S. Ol'denburg, V. Picheta, and others. Such a supplement to the translation of the *BSE*, containing all substantial articles omitted since the first edition, and especially the biographies of those expelled from the columns of the *BSE* either temporarily or forever, is needed to give the Western world a complete Soviet encyclopedia. The National Technical Information Service (Springfield, Va.) acted correctly in extracting, translating, and publishing the biographical material in the first volumes of the *BSE*, but it had to stop this important and useful undertaking when Macmillan acquired exclusive translating rights to the *BSE*. The collection of *BSE* biographies, however, could serve Macmillan as a prototype for a series of *BSE* monographs which would make available to interested readers the bulk of the *BSE* material in their respective fields. Thus, the average reader could obtain, at a reasonable price, a compendium of the scattered contents of the *BSE* in his field of interest and specialization for practical daily use.

The foregoing suggestions, which might help solve the alphabetizing and indexing difficulties found in the complete English translation of the *BSE*, are offered in good faith, but with little hope of realization.

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RUSSIAN CIVILIZATION. By *David A. Law*. New York: MSS Information Corporation, 1975. 490 pp. \$16.00, cloth. \$10.00, paper.

The title of this book is misleading. It is not an analysis or survey of Russian civilization. It is, instead, a disjointed, poorly-written account of a few aspects of Soviet life based on liberal and uncritical reliance on Soviet sources and on the