Сергеев Евгений Юрьевич, *Большевики и англичане. Советско-британские отношения, 1918–1924 г.г. От интервенции к признанию*, Санкт Петербург: Наука, 2019, 832 с. ISBN 978-5-02-040532-5

Professor Evgenii Sergeev presents historians with a fundamental new study. It was written with reference to 73 collections, from Russian and British archives in approximately equal measure. There are 1,323 entries in the bibliography, with 2,693 notes (many of which are extended; for example, the note about the commentary on ‘Zinov’ev’s letter’ has 55 entries, pp. 804–806). The publication also has an index of names (unfortunately only in Cyrillic), and a collection of clear, meaningful illustrations. The study analyses the period from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, when Soviet Russia withdrew from the war, until the attempt by Ramsay MacDonald’s Labour government to develop political and economic relations with the Soviet Union. The work is written in a classic historical style, following a linear projection of time. On occasions, however, the author sets off into deep, almost criminal, analyses (for example, the case of the 26 Baku commissars). One special feature of this study is its use of material from Britain’s secret services (MI5), which gives an unexpected twist to otherwise well-known circumstances (for example, in the summer of 1920, British spies recorded an anti-Soviet position expressed in a private conversation by the Soviet foreign trade commissar Leonid Krasin, and in 1922 they intercepted a letter from Vladimir Lenin to a friend in Switzerland, in which the revolutionary leader gave a pessimistic assessment of the revolution’s outcomes, see: pp. 371, 717). Generally speaking, the work is aimed at professional historians, even though its intention is to appeal to a broader public. The author seeks to draw a vector of compromise between the often diametrically opposed British and Bolshevik positions, and the corresponding British and Soviet (or Russian) historiographical assessments. But he does not always succeed at this. Nonetheless, the historical basis of the study does come across as quite original.

The book begins with an account of the process of Russia’s withdrawal from the Entente coalition. One of the more interesting details is the mission by the famous writer and ‘silent’ agent Somerset Maugham

to Petrograd in the autumn of 1917, with the goal of helping the government of Alexander Kerensky and keeping Russia in the coalition (p. 15). But once the Bolsheviks had seized power, the aims of the British were determined by strategic rather than ideological motives. It is said that until the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, London was 'very close' to acknowledging Lenin's government (pp. 38–48). The British special envoy Bruce Lockhart worked especially hard towards this, having been given the task of neutralising German influence on the Bolshevik government.

After the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (3 March 1918), Lockhart's relations with Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Lenin were not broken off, as both Moscow and London shared a common aim, to stop German expansion into the depths of Russia. So, according to the author, the beginning of British intervention in Russia was 'based on a contract' (between the British and the Bolsheviks). Even though diplomatic relations were established between the RSFSR and Germany after the ratification of Brest-Litovsk, and German diplomats formally received preference in Red Moscow, the British would practically always beat the Germans to the door of Georgy Chicherin's commissariat (p. 79). Of course, the flexible position of the Bolsheviks could not go on unrestricted. From the beginning of the summer of 1918, Lenin started giving greater priority to the German ambassador Wilhelm von Mirbach, and on 23 June the Kaiser signed a secret directive halting further encroachment into Russia; while on 9 August in Moscow, the flags were symbolically lowered from the consulates of the Entente countries (pp. 86–94). This means that from this point, Britain's intervention in Russia became 'open'. Understandably, this narrative does not comply with either the Anglo-Saxon image of 'Bolshevik cannibals' or Soviet/Russian historiography templates about the 'marauding intervention in Murmansk'.

Alas, there is no time for being surprised, as the reader is soon confronted with details of the 'conspiracy of the envoys', and the file on the murder of the British military attaché Francis Cromie associated with the conspiracy. The author analyses it like a professional criminologist, and reaches an unusual conclusion: it is alleged that Cromie was not shot dead by chekists who stormed the British Embassy in Petrograd (when searching for conspirators, this version remains the most widespread today), but that it was actually Cromie's own colleagues who were standing behind him. They are alleged to have been agents infiltrated by Felix Dzerzhinsky and the Intelligence Service, and 'feared being uncovered' (pp. 118–119). While this version is not easy to believe, our attention is immediately drawn to the research in another file: who was guilty of

the murder of the 26 Baku commissars? The author has certainly made a great effort to solve this puzzle. And understandably so. The murder of the 26 commissars enraged society in Soviet Russia at the time, and later on in the USSR, where English imperialists were blamed for the commissars' deaths. In Britain meanwhile, the accountability of its officers in this event was denied. Thus, a number of actors feature in this case in this monograph: they include the Turks, the Central Caspian Directorate and its leader Fiodor Funtikov, General Lazar Bicherakhov, and a whole group of mysterious characters, not to mention the British officers Lionel Dunsterville, Wilfrid Malleson and Reginald Teague-Jones (Ronald Sinclair), who were given a special task in Central Asia (white man burden). As a result, in the monograph, the British officers are only given a Pontius Pilate role, as the real murderers were from the semi-criminal underground (pp. 168–179). The commissars' file is also surprising for how it is remembered in history: after the collapse of the USSR, an enormous monument to the commissars in the centre of Baku was demolished, as the former heroes had become seen as executioners in both the Red and ethnic terrors.

A special theme is the expression of the Great Game in Asia, between Bolshevik-ruled Russia and England. Unfortunately, the author does not distinguish the theme very much. Chapter 7 of the monograph 'Heightened British-Soviet Relations in Asia in 1919–1921' ends with the conclusion that 'Soviet-British collisions in Asia can no longer be called a new round in the Great Game' (pp. 188, 370). This conclusion is quite surprising, as it remains unclear what meaning the author gives to the mentioned game. In one way or another, the facts given in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 7 speak for themselves. From the beginning of 1918, a picture is painted where, on one hand, the Bolsheviks prepared a propagandist landing in Egypt and India via Turkey, Afghanistan, Persia and Turkestan, and on the other, British agents assembled an anti-Bolshevik barrier from the Caucasus and Transcaucasia, Afghanistan, Persia, Trans-Caspia, Bukhara and Chiva. The process was crowned by the famous Curzon ultimatum of 1923, where, in addition to many other points, demands were made to recall Soviet ambassadors-agitators from Afghanistan and Persia. However, the crisis that emerged marked the transition of Soviet-British relations into a period of relative stability.

Historians might also be interested in how the east Baltic theme is presented in the context of Soviet-British relations. Chapter 6 of the monograph is called 'The Baltic Problem. The Soviet-Polish War and Negotiations on a Trade Agreement in 1919–1920'. However, the three

Baltic States (*балтийской проблеме*) are not given much attention. There is only a historiographical list on the theme (p. 693), and the statement that in terms of the east Baltic, London 'did not have a co-ordinated policy' and 'operated in a trial-and-error manner' (p. 260). A discussion and assessment of Soviet policy concerning the Baltic States is avoided (the silence on the issue is reminiscent of the position of Soviet authors in the interwar period). The author focuses most attention on the Soviet-Polish war of 1920, and the Soviet-British negotiations that took place at this time in London.

We can find some important details in the narrative on the course of the Soviet-Polish war. First, it seems that on 26 July 1920, a majority in the cabinet of David Lloyd George approved of the opinion of the defence secretary Maurice Hankey that Germany rather than Poland could be a realistic stronghold against Bolshevik aggression (pp. 286, 708); second, Trotsky telegraphed G. Chicherin on 6 August 1920: 'If instead of a truce with us, on condition that Wrangel is dismissed from the Crimea and we withdraw from Poland, Britain will try to deliver a new blow, we shall then immediately turn our diplomatic guns on Persia, Turkey and India' (p. 283). These details seem to confirm the version that in the summer of 1920, Moscow and London were approaching a strategic agreement on the basis of adequate exchange. But this is clearly not the author's intention. Therefore, several critical comments are forthcoming.

First, the monograph does not distinguish between the propagandist remarks from Soviet leaders about world revolution and their actual strategic goals in the summer of 1920 (p. 299). As a result, in the book, Soviet theses about eventual withdrawal from Poland are on the same level as Lenin's urge to 'Sovietise Hungary, Italy ...' and Stalin's agreement made in the same spirit that they must 'raise the anchor ...' (pp. 280–282, 697–698). Second, the correspondence between Lord Curzon and Chicherin of 17–26 July 1920 betrays a diplomatic debate on what type of conference should be sought: multinational or Russian-English (eventually with the Entente). However, this difference is not conveyed in the monograph, which instead goes down the track of secondary discussions about an ambiguous conference 'in one of the Baltic countries' (p. 285). Third, the Polish question, in terms of logic, is not associated with the issue of attacking Wrangel's army. However, in this case, the author should have paid attention to an aspect that was played out as a refrain in Soviet-British negotiations in London: regardless of the provision on both sides to refuse to engage in hostile activities, this did not suffice unless France followed suit. This argument was explained,

for example, on 6 August by Leonid Kamenev, the head of the Soviet political delegation in London, and it was backed by Lloyd George. But the discussion, which went on for six hours, is given only one sentence in the monograph (p. 283). The author's attention, meanwhile, is diverted to the contraband activities of Kamenev recorded by British intelligence. It is known that this fact, together with Soviet roguery over conditions for Poland, aroused an enormous wave of anger in London. But it is worthwhile adding that all of this came out into the open only when the Red Army experienced a defeat near Warsaw (pp. 304–314, 717–722). Without going into greater detail about the peripeteia of August 1920, I have to say that it is hardly worth searching for an actual compromise without first weighing up two synchronous processes: the decision to provide political and military backing for Wrangel's army in southern Russia, and the Soviet goal of having favourable articles published in the *Daily Herald* about the diamonds brought to London.

To conclude this review, it is worth turning our attention to places in the text where English and Russian cultural characterisations are given (pp. 146–147, 175, 177, 185, 246, 249, 253–255 ...). They testify to distinct differences. The political systems of England and Russia are also different. But history shows us that English-Russian relations are conflictual, but unfortunately not just, and not so much because of those differences. Professor Sergeev's monograph is an excellent way of finding an answer as to why they are conflictual.

Česlovas Laurinavičius

Lithuanian Institute of History