



Guarded Optimism

Martin Walker is only the third resident correspondent *The Guardian* has sent to Moscow. To follow in the footsteps of Arthur Ransome and Malcolm Muggeridge must have been a daunting prospect. It is still true, however, that despite better communications and the passage of time, the Soviet Union remains remarkably unknown to the outside world and that despite the restrictions, there is plenty for an enterprising journalist to tell as *Martin Walker* must have found in writing **The Waking Giant – The Soviet Union under Gorbachev** (Michael Joseph, £14.95 hbk).

Political Communications

Books about general elections can have a distorting effect on the writing of political history. They tend to make the elections seem more important than the politics. In other words, they put more weight on the three or four weeks of campaigning than on the three, four or even five years of politics in Britain.

Since the general election of 1945 we have had the Nuffield series under the auspices of Dr David Butler. Since the election of 1979 we also have a new series under Professor Ivor Crewe (in this case, **Political Communications: The General Election Campaign of 1983**, Cambridge University Press, £25), though so inbred is the genre that the first chapter is written by Dr Butler. Most of it is the

Setting the Record Straight

Fifty years after the Spanish civil war, *Jim Fyrt* has produced the first full account of the Aid Spain movement of 1936-39. **The Signal Was Spain**, published by Lawrence and Wishart (£6.95 pbk), is a brilliantly readable book which sets the record straight.

The work of the 200 British men and women who served in the medical units, recorded through diaries, letters and scores of interviews with survivors, forms a vivid, heart-breaking story.

The campaigns in Britain to collect money, food and medical supplies, to organise homes for 4000 Basque refugee children and support for the families of International Brigades, brought together in various ways everyone from commun-

ists to conservatives. The movement raised unprecedented amounts in cash and kind. The tensions and divisions inevitable in such a broad movement fall into perspective within the impressive constructive results and the degree of practical co-operation achieved.

Although a growing majority of the British public was against Franco, the movement was not strong enough to change government policy or save the Spanish Republic. Yet almost none of the many survivors Fyrt interviewed regretted their efforts for Spain or felt they had been wasted. The deep hatred of fascism engendered and the experience of practical democratic action helped to transform a whole political generation. ●

Margot Heinemann

There have been some good journalistic accounts (notably Hedrick Smith's now rather dated *The Russians*) which have brought many everyday aspects of Russian and Soviet life before a wider audience, and the TV teams are beginning to give us glimpses of different aspects of Soviet society.

result of a seminar held at the University of Essex as long ago as January 1984, so it has taken a long time to produce.

Quite the best contribution comes from Cecil Parkinson, not because he is more learned but because, as chairman of the Conservative Party, he was a practitioner. He sensed that the Tories could win an early general election when Labour only narrowly won the by-election in Birmingham Northfield in October 1982. But it still took a long time to convince the prime minister and the decision to go on June 9 was taken only on May 8.

For the rest, this is a book about margins; deviations in opinion polls and so on. As such, it is marginally interesting. Politics is about long-term swings and trends. ●

Malcolm Rutherford

ists to conservatives. The movement raised unprecedented amounts in cash and kind. The tensions and divisions inevitable in such a broad movement fall into perspective within the impressive constructive results and the degree of practical co-operation achieved.

Although a growing majority of the British public was against Franco, the movement was not strong enough to change government policy or save the Spanish Republic. Yet almost none of the many survivors Fyrt interviewed regretted their efforts for Spain or felt they had been wasted. The deep hatred of fascism engendered and the experience of practical democratic action helped to transform a whole political generation. ●

Margot Heinemann

years. His aim is to outline the political and intellectual environment in which the elite operates, and, specifically, to set the Gorbachev leadership in context.

The problems brought to the fore by the computer revolution, by an ailing economy, and the arms race are all dealt with. Foreign affairs, the social background of the new politicians, and cultural developments, are all described. His is a good, readable account, one which has the great merit of bringing the reader right into the events of the past year yet linking them with their long-term antecedents. It is a mea-

sured, even-handed account – guardedly optimistic that the social revolution will produce a more open-minded political leadership.

A reform-minded intellectual in the Soviet Union might agree with much of this. I am less sure than Martin Walker that the presence of educated politicians in a more modern and stable society warrants any predictions about political developments, but I would recommend the book to anyone who wishes to understand the situation Gorbachev has inherited and his attempts at reform. ●

Mary McAuley

A Sailor's Tale

Gabriel García Márquez is renowned in his novels for leading us into a world of apparent fantasy. We struggle with complicated narratives trying at the same time to keep track of numerous characters who bear the same name, following their exploits which are designed to take our imaginations to their absolute limits. Underlying the fantasy, however, there has always been a sharp, humorous and often sad portrayal of the many sides of life in Latin America.

The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor Jonathan Cape (£8.95 hbk) is a departure from the tradition of the novels of Márquez. To begin with, it is a true tale which is not strictly 'by' him. He gives birth to the story on behalf of one Alejandro Velasco. Moreover, the narrative, because it has to reflect Velasco, is pared down to a bare simplicity.

The tale is one of survival. Velasco was a member of the Colombian navy who fell overboard from his ship into the Caribbean sea and miraculously survived 10 days without food or water on a drifting raft. The book is the reconstructed story of those 10 days.

A departure for Márquez all this may be, but the very best of him is not lost on the way. The skills he employs to allow the peoples of Latin America to speak for themselves are utilised here to recapture the horror of Velasco's existence at sea so that you can feel your own survival instincts emerge, urging the young sailor to keep going.

However, it is not a book to be embarked upon lightly by those of delicate constitution. One glimpse at the passage where Velasco kills by hand an overfriendly seagull will show you what I mean. ●

Diane Dixon

Watching Protectors

News Out Of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid by Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer Hilary Shipman (£5.95 pbk/£12.00 hbk), is an extremely interesting and readable account of the TV media machine's approach to covering news out of, you've guessed it, Africa.

No qualms here in recommending this to anyone of any age: to those who want to know how we get to hear and see what we do on our screens about Africa (and most other places in the world); to those who see the Third World as a central part of the domestic political agenda; and even to those actively involved in development work and development education.

The authors hang their discussion on the media's approach to three recent famines – Biafra in 1968-70, Ethiopia in 1973 and Ethiopia again in 1984.

They describe the impact of new technology on patterns of news gathering (did you know that BBC TV and ITN have only nine correspondents resident overseas between them?) and tell a sorry tale of chance and frequent editorial indifference.

The current media interest in matters African is, they suggest, a fragile thing needing continued watchful protection. Criticisms? Some – but the good points of this book far outweigh its weaknesses. ●

Andy Mawson



SOVIET LITERATURE

FROM RADUGA PUBLISHERS MOSCOW

PETER THE GREAT (in 3 vols) £14.72/2081 836 pages
 Alexei Tolstoy founded the new historical novel 'The Great'. Translated by Alec Miller

ORDEAL. Book One. **THE SILENERS** Book Two. **THE GREAT** Book Three. **BLEAK MORNING**
 £12.95 (hardback) £12.95 (paperback) (3 vols)

The great Soviet novel of the Revolution. It was first published in 1917, the last part
 appeared in 1941. Translated by Valentin Alexandrovich Litvinov

MICHAEL SHOLOKHOV

SHOLOKHOV'S COLLECTED WORKS £14.50

AND QUIET FELL THE DWARF £14.72/14 20607 £18.00

This new translation by James Dempsey is the first complete translation of Sholokov's classic
 novel. The edition is illustrated with the author's help.

VIRGIN SOILS RETURNED (vols 1 & 2) 836 pages £14.72/1908 £9.00

THEY FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY (vols 1 & 2) 234 pages £7.14/21018
 All volumes are newly translated from the original Russian, in hardback editions.

These titles from Raduga are available in paperback and hardback editions. Many other titles from Soviet and Russian
 writers - GORKY, BLOK, TOLSTOY, etc. are available. HOW to order: send your catalogue or telephone ordering
 books direct from us please. All orders are handled over and supplied by mail.

The magazine for anyone who is interested in Soviet writing. Described by Margaret
 Forster as 'the best of Soviet literature'. The magazine consists of longer pieces. The magazine appears
 each month. One year's subscription is £12.95. The magazine has included the best and most controversial pieces by Valentin
 Alexandrovich Litvinov. It is a must for anyone who is interested in Soviet literature and be surprised.

CENTRAL
BOOKS

14 THE LEATHERMARKET · LONDON SE1 3ER · TEL 01-407 5447