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MODERNIZING RUSSIA IN THE AERONAUTICAL AGE: TECHNOLOGY, LEGITIMACY, AND THE STRUCTURES OF AIR-MINDEDNESS, 1909-1939

BY

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B.A., University of Kansas, 1989
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THESIS

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O-517

Abstract

This dissertation examines the fundamental relationship between national culture, technology, and the idea of modernization through reference to Imperial and Soviet aeronautical culture. Utilizing contemporary newspapers, journals, films, private papers, military records, and recently declassified materials from Russian state archives, it identifies how successive governments in both Imperial and Soviet Russia appropriated aviation to strengthen political authority and to develop public support for new policy initiatives. The dissertation concludes that although private and state observers during the Imperial and Soviet eras shared certain fundamental assumptions concerning aviation's importance to Russian modernization, their approaches to the task of aeronautical development were radically differentiated by the ideological imperatives and social realities that conditioned the choices of Soviet rulers.

In addition to identifying the essential characteristics of Imperial and Soviet aeronautical culture, the dissertation offers new insight into the nature and direction of Russian society, culture, and politics in the years surrounding 1917. Through documentation of the interactive efforts of Imperial state officials and private citizens to raise public awareness of the importance of aviation, the dissertation contributes to the scholarly view that an emergent civic arena, independent from the tsarist state, was a salient feature of late Imperial Russia. In contrast, the Soviet approach to aeronautical modernization demonstrated the essential commitment of Party leaders towards a comprehensive program of forced modernization directed exclusively "from above" that sacrificed private associations and individual initiative in favor of centrally-planned collective action. Soviet officials' concurrent efforts to employ aviation as a symbol and instrument of the Party's scientific accomplishments point to technological legitimacy as a constant and essential feature of Soviet political culture.

To Athena

I had no idea how much I'd need her...

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Among the many friends and colleagues who supported me while in Moscow, none were more important to the completion of this dissertation than Nina and Viktor Dmitriev. I am deeply grateful for their friendship, encouragement, and love.

On the domestic front, Von Hardesty of the National Air and Space Museum first helped me to get this project off the ground in the spring of 1992. Christine Holden greatly assisted my research in Russia by providing me with contacts in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Helen Sullivan, Robert Burger, and the staff of the Slavic Library at the University of Illinois exercised their unrivaled knowledge and gracious patience in providing me with constant, vital reference support throughout my studies.

At the risk of waxing sentimental, I am pleased to acknowledge the particular influence of two individuals without whom I would never have possessed the temerity to begin (let alone complete) my doctoral studies.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Kansas I was fortunate to study under the direction of Maria Carlson, a scholar of the highest caliber and a mentor possessing inestimable generosity. She first encouraged me to pursue my love of Russian history and culture through a lifetime devoted to teaching and research. Time and again throughout my academic career she has offered me sage advice, expert direction, and vigorous moral support. It is not possible to overestimate her contribution to my education nor will it ever be possible to repay her for the debt that I have gratefully incurred as her pupil. More so that any individual, she is responsible for my becoming a historian.

Long after extenuating circumstances should have dictated otherwise, Andrew Verner continued to offer his considered thoughts on my work and to direct my dissertation towards its final draft. He also provided me with invaluable and much needed guidance in negotiating impediments within the profession. His unflagging willingness to encourage, challenge, advise, and instruct me was a cardinal reason that I was able to complete this dissertation and earn my degree. He remains an exemplary model of a dedicated scholar and a conscientious mentor.

Others contributing to the completion of this project include: Benjamin Uroff, who proved an enthusiastic interlocutor and sympathetic critic, Mark von Hagen, whose insightful commentary inspired me to set much higher standards for the final version than I had initially envisioned, and Jay Alexander who, in kindly offering his accomplished skills as an editor, assisted in polishing oftentimes flowery prose and clarifying convoluted syntax. Mark Steinberg, as well, found the time to read through the dissertation and was willing to accept the unenviable responsibility of serving on my committee. Diane Koenker functioned as my dissertation adviser.

Among the many friends that I made while living in Urbana, I am honored to count Robert Tomilson. His admirable example encouraged me to be more disciplined in thinking, more focused in professional life, and (alas!) even less circumspect in the condemnation of academic frivolities. Our fellowship was an inexhaustible source of substantive and reasoned ideas which sustained me throughout my term at the University of Illinois. In a similar manner, Alan Holiman, for almost a decade, has served as an all-too-rare model of professional virtue and Christian forbearance. Without his friendship and support I would never have believed.

Finally, I must acknowledge the contributions made by my family. Although they never quite understood why I wanted a Ph.D., my mother, father, and brother offered their unwavering support, encouraging (and when necessary cajoling) me to complete my studies. My wife Leesa, for much longer than she ever imagined, endured a host of burdens as I worked to bring this dissertation to an end. Her gifts of patience, compassion, and love throughout my graduate years were bested only by the gift of our daughter, Athena Marie Palmer, who was born in July 1996. For her part, Athena proved an utter hindrance to the completion of this dissertation. In demanding increasing amounts of time and energy, she hampered my research, slowed my writing, and served as a constant reminder of what is really important. For ensuring that this exercise would retain its proper perspective, I have dedicated it to her.

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I saw a banner there upon the mist.
Circling and circling, it seemed to scorn all pause.
So it ran on, and still behind it pressed

a never-ending rout of souls in pain.
I had not thought death had undone so many
as passed before me in that mournful train.

—Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno* (Translated by John Ciardi)

Introduction

Russian Air-mindedness in Historical Perspective

From *Novoe Vremia* 7 October 1910, page 4:

> Yesterday, the helium balloon "Vasilii Korn" piloted by N. A. Rynin and S. I. Odintsov touched down in the remote Perm-Kotlasskoi province of North-Western Russia. The result of an unsuccessful attempt to navigate the skies between the nation's capital and the Black Sea, the balloon's descent was greeted by the dismay of the region's peasant population. Terrified at the sight of the floating airship, and convinced that it was a sign of the Devil, the local inhabitants fell to earth beseeching God for salvation from the Apocalypse. Only after extensive discussions, carried out at gun point with the balloon's occupants, were the natives convinced of the craft's non-demonic origin.

For contemporary Russians, the chance encounter between balloonists and peasants recounted in the capital's daily newspaper was a telling example of the technological changes then sweeping the Empire. By the second decade of the twentieth century the technical accomplishments of Europe's leading powers were appearing with increasing frequency in the land of the tsars. As the rapid program of industrial expansion inaugurated under Tsar Aleksandr III in the 1890s and the radical land reform of Petr Stolypin introduced more and more Russians to the realities of the urban landscape, the frenetic growth of Russia's tardy railroad industry and the ever increasing numbers of automobiles on St. Petersburg and Moscow streets announced to *meshchanin* and *muzhik* alike the arrival of the modern, motorized age.

Yet of all the technical triumphs then in evidence in Russia, none was more celebrated than the prospect of human flight. As an age-old metaphor of humanity's desire for freedom and liberation, the "conquest of the air" emerged as an endearing symbol of the promise afforded by technology in liberating the nation from its earthly fetters. Having witnessed their nation's ability to overcome the very elements of nature, Russian observers came to believe that their nation too, would prove capable of conquering the ignorance and obscurantism so long associated with the continent's largest country. For inasmuch as aeronautics had introduced the peasants of the Perm-Kotlasskoi region to the marvels of the modern world, so too, many believed, might technology triumph over the forces of cultural stagnation and historical backwardness that had plagued Russia's quest to establish itself as a leading European power.

This dissertation chronicles the evolution of Russian aeronautical culture from the first decade of the twentieth century to the eve of the Second World War. Through an examination of

public reactions and state responses to the advent of flight, it identifies the distinguishing characteristics of Russian "air-mindedness" and traces their development across the historical divides of war and revolution. In doing so, this study demonstrates the vital role played by aviation and aeronautical policy in shaping national identities and contributing to the growth of civic consciousness (*obshchestvennost'*) in both Russia's Imperial and Soviet pasts.

Throughout the late Imperial and early Soviet periods, public and official attempts to assimilate technological advances in the field of aeronautics introduced a new, dynamic element into the nation's political and social discourse. Measured against the achievements of Russia's traditional European rivals, aeronautical successes became the focus of considerable public scrutiny as members of Russian civil society (*obshchestvo*) sought confirmation of their belonging to modern Europe. Initially appropriated by the tsarist government to serve as a medium for the mobilization of public support behind a faltering regime, aviation later became a vital component of Soviet propaganda offensives as the state, seeking to win broad social support for its revolutionary transformation of Russian society, politics, and culture, celebrated aeronautical triumphs as proof of Communism's ideological legitimacy.

In liberating the modern pilot from the terrestrial bonds that fettered him to his fellow man, machine-powered flight restored a Promethean sense of possibility to its earthbound observers. As mountains were conquered and continents traversed, aeronautical successes overturned conventional notions of space and time, compelling young and old alike to reconsider their relationship to the natural world. Reflected in the creative works of the continent's leading artists, aviation, like no other technical marvel, captured the European imagination and instilled in it hope of humanity's unlimited promise. As such, the study of aviation during the late Imperial and early Soviet periods presents an important opportunity to investigate fundamental questions regarding the relationship between culture, technology, and the idea of modernization.

The importance of technology to understanding the Russian and Soviet past has been underscored by recent historical monographs. In their studies of the Imperial weapons industry and Soviet electrification policy, for example, Joseph Bradley and Jonathan Coopersmith have demonstrated the vital role played by technological development in the process of Russia's modernization.[1] Other works by Richard Haywood and Edward Williams have traced the respective impacts of the railroad and the bell-casting industry upon Russian society and the

[1] Joseph Bradley, *Guns for the Tsar: American Technology and the Small Arms Industry in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Dekalb, Il., 1990) and Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880-1926* (Ithaca, 1992).

military.[2] These studies, together with Kendall Bailes' *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin* (1978) and Loren Graham's *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union* (1993), form the small, but valuable, body of research devoted to the history of Russian technology and science.[3]

Studies devoted to Russian and Soviet technology should not, however, focus solely upon the growth of particular industries or the expansion of specific scientific organizations. Alongside the individuals and institutions that contributed to Russia's technological modernization were the technologies themselves, many of which had a lasting impact upon the daily lives and socio-cultural perceptions of the nation's inhabitants. Notwithstanding existing studies of individual industries and scientific figures, historians have made little effort to examine technology within the broader contexts of Russian culture and society. Indeed, for all of its successes, contemporary Russian historiography has largely overlooked the important role played by technological and scientific innovations in shaping Russian culture. Although some promising scholarly work related to technology and Russian culture has appeared in individual chapters and essays, no monograph treating the interrelationship of technology and culture within the context of the Russian past exists.[4]

Historians of Western Europe have convincingly demonstrated that technology has had an impact in shaping social institutions and cultural perceptions. More than a decade ago scholars began to explore the important relationship between technology and culture as a defining element in the development of modern European consciousness. In *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (1983), Stephen Kern identified the many ways in which technological innovations such as the telephone, cinema, and automobile transformed traditional social relationships and shaped the

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[2] Richard M. Haywood, *The Beginnings of Railway Development in Russia and the Reign of Nicholas I, 1835-1842* (Durham, N.C., 1969) and Edward V. Williams, *The Bells of Russia: History and Technology* (Princeton, 1985).

[3] Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917-1941* (Princeton, 1978) and Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 1993). I have left out of this discussion studies related to the history of Russian and Soviet industrialization which strike me as constituting a historiographical category distinct from "technology" *per se*. Among the more important works devoted to industrialization are: William Blackwell, *The Beginnings of Russian Industrialization, 1800-1860* (Princeton, 1968); Theodore von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York, 1969); R. W. Davies, *The Industrialization of Soviet Russia*, 2 vols. (London, 1980); Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 1988) and Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge, 1988).

[4] One excellent account of technology's impact in shaping Soviet cultural forms is chapter 7 "Man the Machine" in Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford, 1989). Similar themes are tangentially addressed in chapter 14 "Technology and Legitimacy: Soviet Aviation and Stalinism in the 1930s" in Kendall Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin*.

cultural identities of European citizens. In a similar fashion, the impact of technology in conditioning Europeans' understanding of the "modern" was a key element in Marshall Berman's monograph, *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982).[5] More recently, Michael Adas has demonstrated that technological developments played an influential role in fostering Europeans' perceptions of their cultural superiority over the less-developed peoples of Africa and Asia, while David Nye and Wolfgang Sachs have explored the respective impacts of electrification and the automobile upon Western sensibilities.[6] These scholars have reoriented our understanding of the process of modernization, its meaning, and its influence in shaping popular images of the state and nation by focusing on the radical social and cultural transformations wrought by technological change. As a result, they have opened up important new fields for historical inquiry.

Of the many inventions and scientific discoveries that have shaped the course of history, perhaps none has sparked the human imagination more than the technology of flight. From ancient Greek mythology to the psychoanalytic subconscious, the image of human flight has long been acknowledged as a universal metaphor of liberation and freedom.[7] As a symbol endowed with spiritual and emotional meaning, flight has stimulated the genius of European inventors and inspired the creations of generations of artists. Given its hold on the human imagination, it is not surprising that the dream of flight has produced a scholarly literature dedicated to exploring its impact upon world culture. In separate studies devoted to aeronautical history and fable, Clive Hart has established the influential role exercised by flight upon the artistic creations of medieval and renaissance Europe.[8] Similarly, Laurence Goldstein and Felix Ingold have written on aviation's place within the canon of modern literature while Stephen Pendo and Michael Paris have chronicled the portrayal of aviation in the cinema.[9]

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[5] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, 1983) and Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982).

[6] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and the Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, 1989); David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992) and Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile: Looking Back into the History of Our Desires* (Berkeley, 1992).

[7] On the meanings of the Icarus mythos see Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (London, 1986), 28-29. For a discussion of the symbolism of flight within the framework of psychoanalytic theory see, Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York, 1994), 170-171.

[8] Clive Hart, *The Image of Flight* (Berkeley, 1988) and *The Prehistory of Flight* (Berkeley, 1985).

[9] Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, op. cit.; Felix Ingold, *Literatur und Aviatik: Europäische Flugdictung, 1909-1927* (Basel, 1978), Stephen Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema* (Metuchen, N.J., 1985) and Michael Paris, *From the Wright Brothers to* Top Gun*: Aviation, Nationalism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester, 1995).

In contrast to these efforts, other recent scholarly studies of flight have endeavored to combine the techniques of literary specialists with the methodological approaches utilized by professional historians.[10] As a result, newer histories of aviation have begun to explore the cultural (as well as social and political) factors that have shaped national responses to the evolution of aeronautical technology. In his recent study of the dawn of machine-powered flight, Robert Wohl examined the European-wide "passion for wings," situating the Continent's early fascination with aviation within the larger contexts of artistic modernism and industrial modernization.[11] Other studies have examined the evolution of American and German aeronautical culture in reference to those nations' social institutions and political cultures.[12]

Inspiring the creative introspection of the modernist imagination and attracting popular interest through the presentation of public spectacle, machine-powered flight conditioned popular perceptions of the nation while challenging the state to adapt to the changing circumstances of the modern world. Accompanying the physical changes that it effected, aviation produced new symbols and images that communicated meanings of power and authority to those associated with the century's most daring technology. The widespread appropriation of the airplane by the Continent's leading artists underscored the early recognition that machine-powered flight was a universal symbol of a nation's strength and dynamism.

While the imagery and reality of flight communicate symbolic meanings across spatial and temporal boundaries, these common meanings are typically shaped, altered or otherwise contested by cultural, political, and social relationships. These interactions create novel symbol-systems of flight that are particular to given places and times. Thus, while there may indeed have existed a European-wide "passion for wings" during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the subsequent evolution of an American "gospel of flight" (and the Germans' quest to establish a "nation of fliers") were indicative of the transformation of flight from an indefinite symbol into a determinate icon possessing contextual meaning within distinct cultural systems. In this way, national responses to aviation may be viewed as a series of "sign systems" embedded within

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[10] I have chosen to forego a discussion of the immense number of works that examine aviation from the standpoint of military and/or technical history. Although valuable in themselves for preserving the record of the aeronautical past, they neglect to address the social and cultural contexts of aviation. For examples of these works see the bibliography.

[11] Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven, 1994).

[12] Joseph Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* (New York, 1983) and Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

discrete historical structures and conditioned by specific cultural, institutional, and social traditions.[13]

My particular appropriation of the term "air-mindedness" is central to the approach developed in the following chapters. Initially coined by American observers to describe their nation's early, unbridled enthusiasm for the flying machine during the half century after its invention, "air-minded" has subsequently been employed by historians as a common descriptor for the interest shown by any nation, group, or individual in things aeronautical.[14] In this sense, the adjective "air-minded" and the related noun "air-mindedness" have been used by scholars to reference an enthusiasm for machine-powered flight. In the following discussion of Imperial Russian and Soviet aviation, I have chosen to employ the term "air-mindedness" in reference to the particular set of cultural traditions, symbols, and markers that, combined with existing political culture and social institutions, constitute a given nation's response to the advent of the aeronautical age. Defined in this manner, "air-minded" retains its accustomed meaning as the semantic equivalent of "enthusiastic about flight," while "air-mindedness" is used to communicate the specific historical factors that evidenced, expressed, and conditioned that enthusiasm. In short, the meaning and substance of "air-mindedness" are particular to the culture that one is studying. Although Americans, Britons, Germans, and French of the period 1909-1939 may all be said to have been enthusiastic about aviation (or, "air-minded"), the particular manifestations of that enthusiasm ("air-mindedness") were the unique products of their nations' separate historical and cultural traditions. The goal of this study is to examine "air-minded" Russia and to determine the historical, cultural, and political conditions that contributed to the formation of a specifically Russian "air-mindedness."

The airplane, however, is not simply a cultural symbol. It is also a military weapon, an economic instrument, and a convenient method of transportation. In fulfilling these functions aviation has served as a practical device for states attempting to modernize in the course of the twentieth century. At the same time, as an index of technological proficiency and human mastery over nature, aviation has symbolized the substantive progress made by man; assisting in the modernization of nations, while conditioning perceptions of "the modern." This project attempts to

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[13] My approach to understanding the symbolic meaning of flight in relation to specific cultural systems is indebted to semiotic theory. For a pioneering work that applies semiotic analysis to the study of the Russian past, see Yu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1984).

[14] Joseph Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, vii.

explore the historical nexus formed by the concurrence of aeronautical symbol and substance. My goal is to examine the intersection of aesthetic sensibilities pertaining to aviation (reflected in the arts and popular culture) with the political necessities of the state as both the Imperial Russian and Soviet governments strove to maintain (or develop) their authority while negotiating (or imposing) new political arrangements with their nation's citizenry during the first decades of the "aeronautical century."

The study of Imperial and Soviet aeronautical culture represents a novel attempt to assign new meaning to the history of Russia's twentieth century. In focusing upon the cultural, political, and social responses to aviation that developed during the years 1909-1939, this study situates technology (as opposed to ideologies, individual figures, or collective groups) at the center of scrutiny, while acknowledging the influence exerted by the latter upon the reception of the former. To the extent that my dissertation reflects the ascendancy of a cultural approach to exploring the past, I am indebted to such Russian historians as James Billington and Richard Stites.[15] Their work, together with more recent studies by cultural historians like James von Geldern and Hubertus Jahn, has established a high standard of scholarly research and synthesis.[16] Even so, the attempt to delineate the contours of Russian aeronautical culture cannot neglect the political, social, and institutional structures that conditioned official and private responses to flight technology. Following Mark von Hagen's study of the Red Army and Peter Kenez's investigation of the "propaganda state," I have attempted to document the interactions between those state agencies and actors responsible for articulating official aeronautical policies and to assess their ultimate contributions to the historical legacy of Russian flight.[17] This foray into the Russian past might thus be described (with some equivoque) as a "history from overhead" that seeks to derive new meaning from Russia's twentieth century by transcending the established perspectives "from above" (politics), "from below" (society), and "from the side" (culture) through a synthesis of the constituent social, cultural, and political factors that shaped (and were subsequently shaped by) the development of Russian aeronautics.[18]

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[15] James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*; Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* and *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (Cambridge, 1992).
[16] James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley, 1993) and Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia During World War I.* (Ithaca, 1995).
[17] Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Cornell, 1990) and Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, 1985).
[18] I have adopted the designation of cultural history as "history from the side" following Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, vii.

The following questions have served as a general framework for this study:

1) Why did Imperial Russia, the most backward of Europe's major states, seize upon aviation, the most advanced of Europe's new technologies, as a symbolic marker of its national political, technological and cultural standing? What practical steps did public officials and private citizens take to assist the development of Russian aviation, and to what extent were they successful in transforming erstwhile flights of fancy into modern aeronautical realities?

2) How did Soviet authorities come to terms with the challenges posed by their need to build a modern air fleet? Did their policies and attitudes towards aviation represent a new appreciation of the revolutionary value of flight technology, or did Soviet efforts to develop Russian aviation reflect methods and mindsets earlier established by Imperial aeronautical patrons?

3) How did Communist Party efforts to institutionalize public enthusiasm for aviation contribute to the legitimization of Soviet authority in the years that followed the Russian Civil War, and to what extent did the content of Soviet aeronautical discourse reflect the Party's changing political and social policies in the years preceding the Second World War?

4) Finally, what does an understanding of Russian aeronautical culture contribute to current debates concerning continuities between the late Imperial and Soviet eras? How might the approach used to study Russian air-mindedness offer scholars an alternative to the established formulae of social, political and cultural history, and what role should technology play in assigning meaning to the course of Russia's twentieth century?

This dissertation incorporates two broad avenues of historical research in an attempt to address these questions. The first is a detailed analysis of visual and written sources pertaining to the subject of Russian aviation. Utilizing contemporary newspapers and journals as well as cultural artifacts (such as short stories, propaganda posters, feature films, and aeronautical spectacles) my study examines the ways in which public visions of aviation reflected popular perceptions of the nation's international standing. The rapid proliferation of aeronautical journals during the waning years of the tsarist empire and the popularity of military air shows and aviation films in the Soviet era speak to the importance of flight within the nation's cultural tradition. More than simply an isolated oddity of interest only to its devotees, the question of flight attracted the attention of a broad national audience. As such, my study analyzes the treatment of aviation in the popular press by focusing upon the coverage of major aeronautical events in some three dozen leading journals and newspapers from St. Petersburg and Moscow.

A second category of sources, comprised of private papers, military records, and state archives, complements my study of the popular and official press. Utilizing recently declassified documents relating to state aeronautical policies from military, government, and Communist Party archives, I have identified the roles of officially licensed aeronautical clubs, state institutions, and the military in promoting public awareness of (and support for) the government's aviation programs. As scholars have already charted the development of these official organizations, my goal is not to undertake yet another history of Russian aeronautical institutions, but rather to clarify the social, political, and cultural mechanisms through which successive governments appropriated technological innovation as a means of building popular support for the state and the cause of aviation. In this way, my study seeks answers to the aforementioned questions through the application of an interdisciplinary methodological approach that concentrates on the interrelationship between state and society as each sought to define "modern" Russia through reference to the nation's aeronautical experience.

This dissertation concludes that although private and state observers during the Imperial and Soviet eras shared certain fundamental assumptions concerning aviation's importance to the modernization of Russian society, their approaches to the task of aeronautical development were radically differentiated by the ideological imperatives and social realities that conditioned the choices of Soviet rulers. Eager to demonstrate their nation's ability to meet the political and cultural challenges posed by Western Europe's technological acuity, Imperial citizens and the Imperial state seized upon aviation as a symbolic manifestation of their nation's path to modernity. To realize this goal, Imperial state officials looked to the development of private aeronautical clubs, circles, and societies as a necessary measure in establishing an independent national air fleet. In spite of the only limited success achieved by Imperial aviation prior to the First World War, the tsarist state's acceptance of private associations as partners in the "conquest of the air" and its subsequent initiatives to coordinate official policies with the activities undertaken by these organizations indicates that the social and political "polarization" traditionally ascribed to Imperial state and society should be reconsidered by contemporary historians.

In contrast to the interactive efforts evidenced by Imperial state and private aviation interests, the Soviet approach to aeronautical modernization demonstrated the dominance of the Communist Party in encouraging, directing, and controlling an all-Union campaign to build a "Red" air fleet. Faced with the disintegration of political and social networks as a result of years of violence and discord and mindful of technology's vital role in ensuring their nation's military

security, leading members of the Communist Party pursued a policy of aeronautical development throughout the 1920s that sought to reinforce their political authority while contributing to the defense of the nation. This policy was first realized in the form of a mass-mobilization campaign designed to marshal limited resources and to encourage "volunteerism" on the part of the nation's citizens. The methods chosen by Party leaders to develop Soviet aviation indicated their essential ideological commitment towards a comprehensive program of forced modernization directed exclusively "from above" that sacrificed private associations and individual initiative in favor of centrally-planned (and coerced) collective action.

Having established the basic institutional and social frameworks of Soviet aeronautical culture by mid-1925, Party officials abandoned the earlier practice of the mass mobilization campaign in favor of integrating the nation's aeronautical program into an emerging civil defense bureaucracy. Combining the eradication of "aeronautical illiteracy" with the tasks of raising public consciousness of chemical weaponry, providing basic military training for the country's youth, and developing a nationwide civil defense network, the Party leadership attempted to militarize the Soviet Union in preparation for the inevitable battle against the hostile forces of the world bourgeoisie. In an effort to rally public support behind aeronautical construction, Party leaders reverted to a strategy of consciously fostering citizens' fear of an impending invasion by embellishing reports of foreign, anti-Soviet activities. The fabrication of the "war scare," in this regard, was the central component of a broad political strategy aimed at creating an armed, vigilant, and militant citizenry prepared to assist the Party in its ideological quest to vanquish the forces of world capital.

Accompanying the drive to militarize the nation, aeronautical representatives advanced a new line in culture that emphasized the moral, social, and political superiority of a collectively inclined "Soviet civic-consciousness" over the egoism and individualism of the corrupt, capitalist West. Beginning in the late 1920s, flight crews and aeronautical associations were upheld as models of the socialist "collective" (*kollektiv*) while aeronautical productions increasingly attempted to inculcate social responsibility, discipline, and patriotism amongst Soviet audiences. These practices simultaneously (and consciously) served the Party's interests by uniting the nation's citizens in support of Soviet authority.

The internal reordering of the nation's aeronautical programs away from the pseudo-volunteerism of the early 1920s towards collective conformity and political loyalty was accompanied by the proliferation of external public demonstrations of the Soviet Union's

advancing aeronautical capabilities. Accompanying the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, Soviet officials turned to international aeronautical spectacles and record setting flights to legitimize their campaign of rapid industrial expansion. Focusing upon the airplane as the quintessential symbol of Soviet-inspired progress, political leaders upheld aeronautical accomplishments as key indications of the Party's successful program of economic and industrial modernization. These demonstrations were designed to rally domestic support behind the Party and its policies while attracting foreign attention to the achievements of the planned economy. In this way, aviation emerged as an essential instrument in Soviet efforts to establish Communism as a credible alternative to Western "bourgeois democracy" and Italian-German fascism in the political landscape of 1930s Europe.

Chapter I

Imperial Aviation between State and Society, 1909-1914

From the Russian State Duma, 22 February 1910:[1]

> "At a time when every country has flown by aeroplane and when private enterprise has taken part in [developing aviation] what have we done in Russia? Not a single one of our nation's people has flown, and yet police laws against the use of aeroplanes already exist and aviation is already under police surveillance. [*Applause from the left*]"
>
> —Vasilii Maklakov, Duma Deputy

> "Duma member Maklakov is indignant that no one in Russia has flown and yet laws governing aviation have already been established. What is so bad about that? We all understand that before we can allow people to fly, we must first teach the police to fly after them [*Applause from the right, laughter from all benches*]."
>
> —Nikolai Mar'kov, Duma Deputy

The Dialectics of Russian Air-mindedness

On the morning of 25 July 1909, Louis Blériot piloted a twenty-four-and-a-half horsepower monoplane, the "Blériot XI," across the English Channel from Baraques, France, towards the Shakespeare Cliff just west of Dover, England. The thirty-six-and-a-half minute flight was not an easy one. Blériot's "heavier than air" craft was just barely so and the wooden and canvas structure was continually buffeted by the strong air currents that swirled across the Channel. Wrestling to maintain control of his plane as it shuddered and swayed over the surface of the water, Blériot challenged his aircraft (and the force of gravity) in an attempt to bridge the narrow divide that separated England from the Continental mainland.

Blériot was not the first pilot to undertake this feat. Emboldened by the £1,000 prize offered by London's *Daily Mail* to the first individual to achieve this historic journey, numerous fliers had made public their intentions to accept the paper's challenge to brave the Channel crossing. The most recent attempt, some six days earlier, had ended in near tragedy when the Antoinette IV flown by Englishman Hubert Latham experienced mechanical failure and plunged

[1] GARF f. 102 DPOO 1909, d. 310 (Delo po nabliudeniiu za litsami izuchavshimi za granitsei vozdukhoplavanie), ll. 241-242.

some three hundred feet into the waters below. Miraculously, Latham survived with only minor injuries, and he vowed to renew his efforts as soon as he could obtain a new aircraft. In spite of Latham's dogged determination, fate deigned to smile on the Frenchman.

After crash landing in a field not far from Dover Castle, Blériot was treated to a hero's welcome. Hastily assembled and well attended receptions first in London and then Paris celebrated the "miraculous flight" of the "aviator-genius" as both British and French public opinion succumbed to an air-minded delirium.[1] For weeks, French newspapers trumpeted Blériot's exploit as "a great French victory" and compared the "conqueror of the English Channel" to such cultural icons as Lavoisier, Pasteur, and Curie.[2] Indeed all of Paris was in a frenzy, "seized by a violent attack of Blériot fever."[3] Captivated by "the most magnificent enterprise a century had ever seen," one Parisian daily proclaimed Blériot's flight an expression of the "imperishable genius" of the French race.[4] The *Times* of London was more reserved. While acknowledging the "merit" of the "plucky" Frenchman's flight, the paper nevertheless observed that Blériot "had been, so to speak, shown the way by Latham."[5] Without the example set by the English flier, the *Times* suggested, the French aeronaut would never have met with success. Such sentiments notwithstanding, the glory belonged to Blériot.

The feverish excitement that gripped England and France quickly spread to the Russian capital. For weeks the St. Petersburg and Moscow press had devoted scant attention to the "race for the Channel," but with word of Blériot's accomplishment the nation's leading newspapers rushed to provide coverage of the historic event. Reporters sent daily telegrams from London and Paris recounting every detail of the "heroic flight" and informing captivated readers of the countless receptions held in honor of the esteemed aviator.[6] As exhilarated newsmen proclaimed the triumph of the "Tsar of the Air," it became increasingly obvious that Blériot's flight had "opened a new chapter in the annals of human history."[7] No less so than the British or French, the Russian press acclaimed Blériot's achievement as an adventure of the ages.

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[1] For a complete account of the response to Blériot's flight see Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven, 1994), 57-66.
[2] *Le Temps*, 26 July 1909.
[3] *The Times*, 27 July 1909.
[4] *L'Echo de Paris*, 29 July 1909.
[5] *The Times*, 28 July 1909.
[6] The most complete accounts of Blériot's flight can be found in the dailies *Novaia Rus'*, *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, *Rech'* and *Sovremennoe slovo* 16-22 July 1909.
[7] *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 14 July 1909 and *Sovremennoe slovo*, 15 July 1909.

In many respects, the enthusiastic response to Blériot's exploit was a confirmation of the growing importance that Russians attached to the technology of flight. By the summer of 1909, residents of Russia's urban centers, much like their Western European counterparts, had already become accustomed to the language of air-mindedness, as the boulevard and regular press endeavored to keep track of aeronautical advances. Indeed, even the most casual reader of the Petersburg or Moscow press could not help but be informed of the changes taking place in the "century of speed" as newspapers and journals ran regular features discussing the potential profits (and possible perils) associated with the "art of flying."[8] From documentary reports on the latest inventions, to fanciful essays on the future of flight, the nation's press devoted increasing coverage to the battles being waged for the "conquest of the air."

Although aeronautical issues had long been a staple of the Russian press, the popular excitement generated by word of Blériot's flight was unprecedented. In response to the overwhelming demand for more information on the science of aviation, one major daily inaugurated a weekly column entitled "Aeronautical Mail-pouch" in which the paper's resident aviation expert answered questions sent in by curious readers.[9] For months queries poured in from all over the Empire requesting definitions of general terminology, explanations of specific technical problems, and clarifications concerning current world aeronautical records. The paper even received an unusual appeal from a peasant of Novgorod *gubernia*, who wrote to request technical assistance for the flying machine that he was constructing. Unfortunately, the "imprecise and muddled" descriptions sent in by the half-literate peasant prevented the paper's specialist from providing the finishing formulae for what might otherwise have been Russia's first native airplane.[10] From St. Petersburg to Kiev, from Moscow to Odessa and from as far away as Chita and Kharbin, excited Russians eagerly embraced the inauguration of the aeronautical age.[11]

The outbreak of Russia's air-minded delirium was not confined to the nation's reading public. Vacationing in southwestern France at the time of the Channel crossing, Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich hailed the flight as an "epochal event." After telegraphing congratulations to the triumphant pilot, the Grand Duke sent a hastily written letter to the editors of leading Russian newspapers requesting their support in establishing a public subscription for the

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[8] See, for example, the articles entitled "Peterburg cherez 50 let," *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 16 July 1909 and "Chto dast nam pobeda nad vozdukhom," *Moskovskiia vedomosti*, 18 July 1909 among many others.
[9] See *Novaia Rus'* beginning 26 July 1909.
[10] *Novaia Rus'*, 30 August 1909.
[11] *Novaia Rus'*, 2 August 1909.

construction of a national air fleet.[12] Convinced that the airplane was the weapon of the future, the Grand Duke would labor unceasingly for this new-found cause. Ultimately, he became the central patron of Imperial aviation.[13] Similarly, the newly appointed Minister of War, General Bren proclaimed his own optimistic faith that aviation would quickly develop into a useful military resource. Interviewed shortly after the flight, Bren expressed his belief that "the airplane...is the future." Much more so than the dirigible, he noted, "the airplane promises possible service to the army [as it] is less vulnerable, faster, and less expensive to build." As testament to his faith in the latest technology, the minister concluded his commentary with assurances that "once they are produced in sufficient numbers, [our] army will be well equipped with airplanes. I am a man of progress."[14]

The progressive faith in the promise of flight evidenced in the responses of the Grand Duke and the Minister of War was not, however, shared by every member of Imperial state service. Less than a week after Blériot's flight, the Russian secret police (Okhrana) took decisive steps to forestall the introduction of flying machines into the land of the tsars. "With the goal of hindering criminal elements from accomplishing their projects with the aid of aeronautical devices," the Department of Police instructed the nation's border guards "to maintain strict surveillance in preventing the importation of aeronautical machines and their parts across the frontiers of the Russian Empire."[15] After issuing this initial directive, the Okhrana established a "Special Commission on the Means of Battling the Possible Implementation of Criminal Designs with the Assistance of Aeronautical Machines."[16] The Commission convened a series of meetings during the late summer of 1909 to familiarize members of the Interior and War Ministries with recent advances in aeronautical technology and to design a comprehensive policy for thwarting airborne crimes. Although the Okhrana's ban on the importation of airplanes to Russia was soon overturned by the Ministry of Finance, the Third Section did succeed in establishing a series of covert measures designed to restrict and control the Russian public's access to aeronautical technology. Among the more notable policies adopted by the Okhrana were instructions requiring all aeronautical clubs in the country to register with police authorities (in order that both their members and airships might be more easily tracked). In addition, broad directives were issued to

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[12] Velikii Kniaz' Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Kniga vospominanii*, 2 vols (Paris, 1934), 2: 233.
[13] See below, 19.
[14] *Novaia Rus'*, 17 July 1909.
[15] GARF f. 102 DPOO 1909, d. 310, l. 4-a.
[16] Ibid., l. 19.

local *gendarmes* instructing them to "strictly monitor all flights as well as aviators and those attempting to learn to fly" within their jurisdictions. Similar commands were sent to the state's foreign agents who were ordered to compile dossiers on the activities of European air-clubs, especially "those clubs possessing ties to revolutionary organizations in Russia."[17] The Okhrana's determination in waging its war on planes was quickly made evident in late July when the secret police banned a newspaper advertisement that promised to deliver Blériot monoplanes ("the same plane that flew the Channel") for 5,000 rubles each to interested Petersburg purchasers.[18] Even before Russia's would-be aeronauts had learned to fly, the tsarist *gendarmes* moved to clip their wings.

The contrasting responses of these individual observers to Blériot's flight were indicative of the contradictions and conflicts that had long plagued Russian society. Overwhelmingly rural, authoritarian and impoverished, Imperial Russia was uniquely ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the aeronautical age. The least industrialized and most illiterate of the major European powers, autocratic Russia had long been noted for its frustrating inability to overcome the legacy of backwardness bequeathed to it by the historical past.[19] As such, to contemporary observers, Imperial Russia seemed an unlikely place for the realization of a technological revolution. And yet, by the second decade of the twentieth century, the technical heralds of European modernity were appearing with increasing frequency in the land of the tsars. Visible manifestations of the dawn of modernity, telephones and telegraphs, moving pictures and electric lights provided Russian citizens with the same urban amenities enjoyed in Western Europe and confirmed their long held faith in Russia's status as a European nation.

In this regard, the press and public's eager embrace of Blériot's success testified to their European perspective, to their faith in progress, and to their desire to identify with and be identified by the cultural and scientific achievements of Europe's leading thinkers. Anxious to contribute to the advance of European culture in the years that followed the Channel crossing, the Russian public appropriated aviation and aeronautics as defining proof of their modern heritage. Seizing upon the accomplishment of flight as a symbolic and material expression of Russia's greatness, the

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[17] Ibid., l. 80-b. For materials relating to the Okhrana's surveillance of individual pilots see GARF f. 102 DPOO 1910, d. 71 (Delo po nabliudeniiu za letalet'nami apparatami) and f. 102 DPOO 1911, d. 71.
[18] GARF f. 102 DPOO 1909, d. 310, l. 37. The advertisement appeared in *Novoe vremia*, 17 July 1909.
[19] For a comprehensive discussion of the impact of economic factors in shaping Russian backwardness see Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 1962).

nation's air-minded citizenry endeavored to advance Russian aeronautics as a demonstration of the nation's (and their own) cultural, intellectual, and technical vitality.

In sharp contrast to the public's embrace of the European airplane, the reactionary response of the Imperial Third Section was a *de facto* acknowledgment of the dangers posed by European dynamism to the antiquated rigidity of the tsarist system. Concerned lest this most recent product of European creativity provide new means for those challenging the autocracy's political supremacy, the secret police lashed out to forestall the future, retreating inward to escape the dangers posed by Western progress. Much like the ardent patriots who would later seek to re-write world history by inventing examples of Russian greatness, the members of the Third Section sought escape from reality to protect their own visions of the nation they defended.

The Grand Duke and the Minister of War, for their parts, expressed the distant though not inconceivable hope that the autocracy might yet prove capable of harnessing Europe's most recent advances to strengthen its hand against enemies at home and abroad. In co-opting the technological fruits of European culture, they envisioned a resurgent state that would reaffirm its moral and political legitimacy by demonstrating its mastery over the forces of the present. Combining the progressive optimism of the nation's public with the defensive self-interest of the nation's *gendarmes*, these state officials hoped to overcome Russia's legacy of backwardness by borrowing from abroad while building at home—means not unprecedented in the long history of their nation.

As an issue of concern for government officials and private citizens alike, aeronautics came to occupy a prominent position in the cultural and political landscape of Imperial Russia. Aware of technology's increasing importance to the prosperity of the nation and concerned lest Russia fall farther behind the rapidly developing West, representatives of the tsarist state and society advanced aviation as a principal agent in achieving their common vision of a technically proficient and culturally advanced Russia. The shared sense of purpose evidenced by public and private aeronautical proponents demonstrated the degree to which state and society were capable of transcending their tradition of discord to forge a collective vision of their nation's future. The question that remained was whether the tsarist government and public would prove capable of coordinating their efforts in advancing Russia's aeronautical interests.

Alongside the mixture of hope, trepidation, and self-preservation revealed in Russian reactions to Blériot's fateful flight was a final factor that would force the nation to come to terms with its future: time. In conquering channels, traversing mountains, bridging continents, and transcending geography, European technology promised to collapse temporal distinctions and

envelop space; robbing vast, eternal Russia of the erstwhile qualities of time and distance that, for centuries, had insulated the nation from too rapid or final a break with its "accursed past." As the nation's restive citizens increasingly clamored for the political rights enjoyed by their European counterparts and as Continental politics placed growing pressures upon a fragile and fractured social system, Imperial Russia was compelled to hasten its plodding tempo of modernization or risk extinction in the Darwinian struggle for European ascendancy. And yet, in accelerating the drive for modernization, state and society risked the possibility of magnifying the very tensions that threatened their relations. Thus, technology emerged as a fateful concern to the future of the Empire and aviation as an essential component of the Empire's fate.

Public Air-Mindedness and National Identity in Late Imperial Russia

The heady excitement generated by word of Blériot's flight was transformed into tangible reality for Russian citizens in the fall of 1909. Eager to display the capabilities of their airplanes in the months that followed the Channel crossing, French aeronauts undertook public demonstrations across the European continent. Less than eight weeks after French spectators flocked to bid farewell to Blériot and his monoplane as it set off towards the English shore, Russian audiences gathered to greet the arrival of Western pilots and their fantastic flying machines. On 15 September, the inhabitants of Moscow saw for themselves the miracle of heavier-than-air flight as the French aviator Legagneux organized a public display of his Voisin biplane for the benefit of Moscow's citizenry. Thousands of curious Muscovites flocked to Khodynka field just outside of the city to witness the first ever flight of an airplane in Russia. Although none of the five flights made by Legagneux on the 15th lasted more than a few minutes, his demonstration was a great success and he repeated his performance with an encore presentation on the 19th.[20] Subsequent demonstrations by Legagneux in St. Petersburg and Odessa (and the arrival of the aviator Giuid in November) attracted even greater numbers of spectators and generated further excitement in the cause of aviation.[21]

While French fliers entertained Russian audiences with feats of aerial daring, the Russian Ministry of War moved to establish a national aviation program. Upon returning from France,

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[20] For press coverage of Legagneux's flights, see *Niva*, "Polety aviatora Legan'e v Moskve," 1909, no. 40: 696; *Gazeta kopeika*, 16 September 1909; *Novaia Rus'*, 16 September 1909; *Novoe vremia*, 16 September 1909; *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 16 September 1909 and *Russkiia vedomosti*, 16 & 20 September 1909 among others.

[21] *Gazeta kopeika*, 12 October 1909.

Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich assumed a leading role in mobilizing support for Russian aviation. As the honorary chairman of the state's "Special Committee for the Strengthening of the Military Fleet By Means of Voluntary Subscriptions," the Grand Duke had been instrumental in raising donations to rebuild the nation's navy following the disastrous losses of the Russo-Japanese War.[22] Hoping to capitalize upon the work of the already existing Committee, the Grand Duke petitioned Tsar Nicholas II for permission to transfer funds from the naval Committee to a newly established commission, the "Special Committee for the Establishment of the Air-Fleet." He also requested that the tsar approve the circulation of a series of decrees intended to mobilize support for the construction of an air fleet.[23] Overcoming the skepticism of some members of the Russian military hierarchy, the Grand Duke secured the tsar's approval. On 6 February 1910, Nicholas announced that 900,000 rubles of the naval Committee's treasury be used for the development of Russian military aviation. The tsar subsequently proclaimed the inauguration of a nation-wide voluntary subscription to support the Committee in fulfilling its newly-adopted goals of training military officers to fly airplanes and establishing a reserve of fully equipped aircraft for military use.[24] In March, following the proclamation of the voluntary subscription, the Committee for the Establishment of the Air Fleet sent six military officers to France, where, two each, enrolled in the pilot schools run by Farman, Blériot, and Antoinette. Six enlisted men, who were to be trained as airplane mechanics, accompanied the officers.[25]

Besides preparing cadres to serve in the future air corps, the Committee took steps to secure the equipment and infrastructure necessary for developing Russian aviation. Concomitant with the decision to send officers abroad for training, the Committee placed orders with leading French airplane manufacturers for the acquisition of eleven airplanes, to be delivered by June 1910. The Committee then moved to establish training facilities in Russia. Hangars were constructed at St. Petersburg's Gatchina field to house the military's aircraft. A flight school, to be run by the French-trained Russian officers, was also established on site. Unfortunately, the Gatchina airfield proved a poor location. Owing to the harsh St. Petersburg winters and the

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[22] For background on the Special Committee and an account of its activities, see *Russkii morskoi i vozdushnyi flot sooruzhennyi na dobrovol'nyia pozhertvovania: Illiustrirovannyi ocherk deiatel'nosti Vysochaishe uchrezdennago Osobago Komiteta po usileniiu voennago flota na dobrovol'nyia pozhertvovaniia*, (St. Petersburg, 1913).

[23] Velikii kniaz' Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Kniga vospominaniia*, 2: 237.

[24] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59 (Otchet o deiatel'nosti osobogo komiteta po usiliu vozdushnogo flota), l. 78. The Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club was instrumental in helping the Committee to organize and administer the subscription campaign.

[25] Ibid., l. 79.

region's swampy soil, training flights were limited to the summer months. As a result, having already invested a considerable sum of money to establish the Gatchina facilities, the Committee was compelled to find a new site, capable of sustaining year-round training. A location was chosen in Sevastopol' and, following a delay in the arrival of the airplanes ordered from France, training began there in November 1910.[26]

Accompanying the activity of the nation's military authorities, private Russians enlisted in the battle for the skies through participation in the ever-increasing number of aeronautical clubs, circles, and societies that blossomed in the wake of the Channel crossing. To be sure, interest in aeronautical matters had been growing even before Blériot's flight focused public attention on the issue of heavier than air craft. By the end of 1909, such major cities as St. Petersburg, Moscow, Odessa, and Kiev could boast of their own private aeronautical organizations. Similar to the automobile societies that helped introduce cars to Russian city streets, air clubs provided private enthusiasts with a forum for pursuing their common interest in advancing the cause of a new technology. In addition, major organizations like the Moscow Society of Aeronautics and the Odessa Air-Club produced regular journals for the nation's reading public and, as interest increased and resources grew, they established flight schools of their own, turning the possibility of flight into a daily reality for those wealthy enough to afford the expensive training.[27] Through generating interest in the cause of aviation and training private citizens to master mechanical flight, aeronautical clubs created a consumer demand for airplanes, thereby subsidizing the growth of the isolated Russian factories capable of reproducing the Farman and Blériot models popular in Europe. By the fall of 1910, Russia already possessed three factories proficient at producing airplane chassis and one enterprise equipped to build the planes' motors.[28]

The rapid rise in the popularity of aviation was also reflected in the everyday customs and habits of the Empire's many citizens. "Blériot" cigarettes, "Aero-club" matches, "Aviator" candies, and "Aeronautics" chocolates were among the brand-names offered for sale to air-minded consumers.[29] Hoping to inspire interest in the development of aeronautics amongst Russia's far-flung inhabitants, the journal *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* (*Herald of Aeronautics*) and the First

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[26] Ibid.

[27] For a broad discussion of the evolution of aeronautical journals in Imperial Russia see chapter 5 of V. E. Sankov, *U istokov aviatsii: vozdukhoplavanie i aviatsiia v russkoi zhurnalistike* (Moscow, 1976), 56-103.

[28] The factories were the "First Russian Association of Aeronautics" (St. Petersburg), the "Russo-Baltic Carriage Factory" (St. Petersburg), the company "Aviata" (Warsaw) and the "Motor" factory (Riga). See, *Vozdushnyi put'* 2 (1910): 40.

[29] For reference to these products see "Aeroklub," *Smena* 3 (1934): 8-9.

Russian Association of Aeronautics jointly sponsored a "Mobile Exposition of Aeronautics" that embarked on a "fourteen-month, fifty-city tour of European and Asian Russia." Ultimately journeying as far as Vladivostok to "broaden provincial awareness of the successes of aeronautics," the exposition brought aviation to the nation's hinterlands.[30] Meanwhile, in the established urban centers of European Russia, cultured residents demonstrated their own fascination with machine-powered flight by hosting fashionable "aeronautical balls" (complete with floating dirigibles and plane-shaped confetti) for air-conscious party-goers.[31] Indeed, aeronautics had taken so rapid and complete a hold on the public's imagination that one leading journal could claim "interest in the question of aviation has spread like fire throughout the whole [of Russia] and throughout all classes of society...it has become fashionable and, as such, knowledge of [aviation] is now essential to every person who would consider himself to be a 'middling *intelligent*' (*srednii intelligent*)."[32] To meet the growing demand of the "aeronautical intelligentsia," leading publishers produced countless histories and studies of flight, while major newspapers sponsored special brochures and supplements devoted to aeronautics.[33] So popular had the topic of aviation become that "the windows of almost every bookstore [were] peppered with the most enticing titles and covers and new books on flight appear[ed] every week..."[34]

Of aviation's many material manifestations in the Russian Empire, none was more evincive of the public's air-mindedness than the proliferation of aeronautical shows and spectacles. Organized under the auspices of the nation's aeronautical clubs (and oftentimes subsidized by the state), expositions, exhibitions, public lectures, and flights ensured Russian citizens increasing contact with the products of the aeronautical age. Modeled after similar events made popular in Western Europe, such public spectacles showcased the new technology in the hopes of both educating spectators as well as instilling in them a passion for flight.

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[30] *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 11 (1910): 3-4.
[31] See "Aero-bal," *Tiazhelee vozdukha* 8 (1911): 11-12.
[32] *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 1 (1910): 4.
[33] Among a few of the original Russian titles on aviation and aeronautics produced in the two years following Blériot's flight are: N. Borozdin, *Zavoevanie vozdushnoi stikhi* (Warsaw, 1909); M. L. Frank, *Istoriia vozdukhoplavaniia i ego sovremennoe sostoianie* (St. Petersburg, 1910); A. A. Rodnykh, *Istoriia vozdukhoplavaniia i letaniia v Rossii*, 2 vols (St. Petersburg, 1911); L. Ruzer, *Vozdukhoplavanie: ego istoriia, uspekhi i budushchee* (St. Petersburg, 1910); K. E. Veigelin, *Zavoevanie vozdushnogo okeana: istoriia i sovremennoe sostoianie vozdukhoplavaniia*, (St. Petersburg, 1911); ?. Stamat'ev, *Vozdukhoplavanie* (Odessa, 1910), and D. Dubenskii, ed., *Vozdukhoplavanie* (St. Petersburg, 1910). The last two sources were published, respectively, by the journal *Rodina* and the newspaper *Russkoe chtenie*.
[34] *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 4 (1910): 5. The ellipses appear in the original.

Russia's first major aeronautical event, the St. Petersburg "Aviation Week," was typical of such undertakings. Sponsored by the nation's most prominent air-club, the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club (IVAK), St. Petersburg's "First International Week of Aviation" (like the German programs after which it was patterned) was intended to develop public support for the cause of aeronautics by demonstrating the capabilities of the nation's aeronauts.[35] Prior to the festival's opening on 15 April 1910, Russians' personal encounters with aviation had retained a distinctly foreign air, consisting only of demonstration flights undertaken by visiting French and English pilots. The International Aviation Week changed that. Opening less than one month after the press had triumphantly announced the inaugural flight of Russia's first aviator, Mikhail Efimov, and running concurrently with the public display of the first airplane constructed in Russia, the St. Petersburg Aviation Week offered the nation's citizens initial proof of their countrymen's ability to master the heavens.[36] Accompanying the five foreign fliers that took part in the spectacle, Nikolai Popov thrilled St. Petersburg spectators with a series of spectacular flights in the first public performance by a Russian aviator.[37] By any measure, the International Aviation Week achieved its goals of captivating Russians' interest and increasing excitement in the cause of aeronautics. During its course the Aviation Week (which, in response to public interest, actually ran for some two-and-a-half weeks) attracted no less than 160,000 spectators.[38]

Hoping to capitalize upon the popular enthusiasm generated by the "First International Week of Aviation," IVAK scheduled a second public aeronautical celebration for the fall of the year. Held at the recently completed Komendantskoe Aerodrome in St. Petersburg, the first "All-Russian Festival of Aeronautics" was intended to strengthen public interest in aviation by highlighting recent Russian achievements in the field.[39] In addition to lectures, exhibits, and

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[35] *Imperatorskii Vserossiiskii Aero-Klub. Zhurnal.* 33 zasedaniia soveta IVAK, 20 oktiabria 1909: 6 (*Vozdukhoplavatel'* 1 (1910)).

[36] For newspaper coverage of Efimov's first flight, see *Gazeta kopeika*, *Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti*, and *Novoe vremia* 23-26 March 1910 among others. The first servicable airplane constructed in Russia was dubbed the "Rossiia-A." Assembled by the First Russian Association of Aeronautics, the plane was modeled after the French Farman III biplane and was equipped with a fifty horsepower Gnome motor imported from the West. See, V. B. Shavrov, *Istoriia konstruktsii samoletov v SSSR do 1938 g.* (Moscow, 1986), 57-59.

[37] For extensive coverage of the Aviation Week see *Russkoe slovo*, 16 April-2 May 1910. Popov's flights were quickly followed by a series of well-publicized demonstrations in Moscow undertaken by the aviator Sergei Utochkin.

[38] Sankov, *U istokov aviatsii*, 84.

[39] The Festival ran from 8 September to 1 October 1910. Owing to the event's popularity unofficial demonstrations continued at the airfield until 5 October. For a complete account of the Festival and its related activities see N. Rynin, *Vserossiiskii prazdnik vozdukhoplvaniia* (St. Petersburg, 1910).

displays similar to those presented during the International Aviation Week, the All-Russian Festival of Aeronautics offered spectators a first-hand glimpse of the future in the form of airplane and balloon rides. Adding to the excitement, the three-week festival featured daily demonstration flights in which attending aviators competed for cash prizes in categories such as flight duration, altitude, and accuracy of landing. Participating alongside of familiar "sportsmen-aviators" like Mikhail Efimov and Sergei Utochkin, the nation's handful of military aviators (newly trained and recently returned from France) gave compelling evidence of the state's efforts to establish the Russian air fleet. In total, thirteen fliers competed for prize money that exceeded 20,000 rubles.[40] The most prominent manifestation of Russian "air-mindedness" to date, the All-Russian Festival of Aeronautics was an early demonstration of the nation's commitment to the new technology of flight.

Despite the early autumn's inclement weather which restricted all flights on eight separate occasions and the week-day activities scheduled at the aerodrome which required many spectators to abstain from work, the Aeronautical Festival attracted an audience in excess of 140,000.[41] Day after day, crowds flocked to Komendantskoe Field to witness "the greatest miracle of the twentieth century."[42] For those fortunate (and wealthy) enough to purchase a ride in an airplane, the experience provided lifelong memories and helped to convince them of aviation's vital role in serving the nation. For one such individual, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, P. A. Stolypin, an airplane ride with Captain L. M. Matsievich proved the decisive factor in winning his unconditional support for the air fleet. "Prior to today," the Prime Minister was quoted as saying, "I only believed in the technical possibility of flight. Now I am convinced of its practicality. And I predict that [Russian aviation] will enjoy a great future."[43]

While dignitaries and state officials played an important part in lending the festival a proper decorum, the overwhelming majority of the event's observers came from the city's lower and middling classes. This fact was not lost upon the director of the aeronautical society "Kryl'ia." Lamenting the absence of St. Petersburg's well-to-do in attendance at the aerodrome, the director commented that "by and large, individuals who cannot lend material support [to the aeronautical cause]" were those who frequented the festival.[44] If Russia was to match the success of the leading

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[40] Rynin, *Vserossiiskii prazdnik vozdukhoplavaniia*, 80-85.
[41] *Novoe vremia*, 8 October 1910.
[42] *Niva* 39 (1910): 681.
[43] *Rech'*, 23 September 1910.
[44] *Novoe vremia*, 8 October 1910.

European states, he continued, the more economically advantaged members of society as well as the government would have to contribute their active, financial support. A closer examination of the festival's ticket sales bears out the director's commentary. Of the approximately 140,000 tickets sold during the course of the festival, the vast majority (104,000) were sold to those of more modest means.[45]

In addition to appealing to the capital's citizenry, aviation appears to have captured the imagination of the St. Petersburg underworld. While being escorted to jail on the night of 6 October for questioning in relation to a murder investigation, an unidentified subject suddenly stopped near the Aleksandrovskii Bridge, looked skyward, and began shouting, "He's flying! He's flying!" As his police escort looked to the heavens to view the spectacle, the suspect pushed him to the ground and escaped into the fog. That same evening, in a different part of the city, Vasilii Mel'nikov and Ivan Maksimov were taken into custody for their part in the burglary of a perfumer. On the road to the police station, Mel'nikov "started acting crazy." Once he was jailed, his mental condition became more acute. Identifying himself as the aviator Matsievich, Mel'nikov began banging his head against his cell wall and demanded to be released, in order that he "could fly [his] airplane."[46] While most criminals, presumably, did not look to aviation as a means of escaping state justice, such incidents testify to the widespread appeal of aeronautics amongst Russia's many social and economic estates. Far from a foppish sport restricted to an isolated and privileged minority, aviation belonged to the popular imagination.

The prevalent public concern for aeronautics evidenced in these accounts was confirmed following a tragedy at the Aeronautical Festival. On the afternoon of 24 September the young naval captain and newly trained pilot Lev Matsievich was killed while attempting to establish a new Russian altitude record. In the wake of the accident, the nation's newspapers and journals were filled with stories dedicated to Matsievich's memory and the meaning of his death, while scores of Russians, from statesmen to factory workers, sent personal letters to popular publications testifying to the ways in which the pilot's death had touched their lives. Through his participation in the All-Russian Festival of Aeronautics, the young pilot had earned the respect and admiration

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[45] Tickets were divided into four pricing categories: five rubles, three rubles, one ruble and twenty kopecks. The most expensive permitted one access to the airfield's main grandstand and accorded one, obviously, the best view of the events. The twenty kopeck tickets provided access to the "commons area" that surrounded the field. While space permitted the sponsors to sell far more cheap tickets (which may, in part, explain the increased volume), daily reports indicate that these areas were far more consistently filled with spectators than the more expensive sections. See, for example, the coverage in *Gazeta kopeika*, from 8 September-4 October 1910.

[46] Both incidents are reported in *Gazeta kopeika*, 8 October 1910.

of the nation's public. And, in honor of the fallen flier, tens of thousands of Petersburg residents took to the streets on the day of his funeral, to pay their respects to an individual whose activity they viewed as truly heroic.[47] In the weeks that followed, articles and editorials appeared hailing Russia's aviators as the nation's best and brightest, the empire's greatest assets in asserting its might and power. Particular reverence was reserved for Matsievich. As the nation's first airplane casualty, the young pilot was lionized as a "hero" and "martyr," a warrior in the tradition of the ancient Russian *bogatyr'* (warrior).

Typical of the hagiography that materialized around Matsievich's memory was an editorial entitled "To the Sun!..." written by Ol'ga Gridina, a staff writer for the daily *Gazeta kopeika*. Testifying to the personal loss that she felt upon reading of Matsievich's misfortune, Gridina's essay endowed the flier's death with national and historic significance. Contrasting the young pilot's quiet simplicity to the "contemporary age of egoism and greed," Gridina praised Matsievich for "giving new sustenance to [Russia's] depleted pride."[48] Unlike the typical state servant who "risked nothing writing his daily proclamations," Matsievich's service required that he constantly "flirt with a hungry death."[49] Yet, "in sacrificing everything to conquer the elements," Matsievich had helped to "strengthen the fatherland" by advancing the aviation program. For this contribution, Gridina argued, Matsievich's name should not be allowed to pass from memory, and she took up a call, repeated in all of the nation's major publications, that a fund be established to construct a memorial for the dead pilot.

> I know that there are many unfortunate, suffering and hungry people, but I know also that man does not live by bread alone and that the human spirit cannot concern itself only with material affairs. We should at least sacrifice something for the sake of those who sacrifice everything for the greatness of their native land and for the happiness of generations to come.[50]

In an emotional appeal to the Russian people, the essay proclaimed the nation's moral obligation to honor its fallen hero. Gridina urged that a memorial be established, not on the "accursed spot" of Matsievich's crash (as one newspaper had suggested), but on "one of the liveliest sites in the nation's capital." Such a location, Gridina argued, would provide a "constant and distinct" reminder to Russians of the "sacrifice made by one of their own for the greater good of all."

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[47] For a description of Matsievich's funeral see Scott W. Palmer, "On Wings of Courage: Public *Air-Mindedness* and National Identity in Late Imperial Russia," *The Russian Review* 2 (April 1995): 212. I have incorporated significant portions of the article in this chapter.
[48] Ol'ga Gridina, "K solntsu!...," *Gazeta kopeika*, 26 September 1910.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

Gridina's hagiographic treatment of Matsievich and her attempt to win popular participation in the construction of a monument to the pilot were typical responses to the aviator's death. Similar appeals appeared in all of the nation's leading newspapers and journals. Likewise, all accorded the fallen pilot a degree of honor and respect usually reserved for the most august personages. One lengthy article, published in the weekly journal *Niva*, echoed many of the sentiments expressed in the *Gazeta kopeika* essay. Acknowledging Matsievich's activity as "an attempt to ennoble and advance the decrepit and impoverished forces of man and to grant [humanity] new, powerful resources for victory over nature,"[51] *Niva* celebrated the heroism and courage of the Russian pilot and endowed his accomplishments with world-historical significance. "In the Middle Ages," *Niva* continued,

> a man such as Matsievich would have been burned at the stake for attempting to overturn the human order...[Yet today], as we view him carried through the air on wings of courage, we love him as a hero, as one who prefers the heroic [path], full of courage and a judicious and expedient disregard for danger, to the simple and secure life of the common man.[52]

More than a simple aviator fulfilling his duty to the state, Matsievich was immortalized for the supra-human qualities that he had evidenced in advancing the aeronautical cause. As a representative of the nation's "conquerors of the air," he was viewed as a modern Prometheus helping to bring about man's final triumph over nature.

Indeed, of the numerous themes that emerged in contemporary literature following Matsievich's death, the aviator's role as a victor over nature was one of the most compelling. Some two-and-a-half decades before the Soviet press would hail the victories of the nation's fliers over the harsh polar environment, Imperial observers looked to aviation (and to Matsievich in particular) as proof of humanity's inevitable triumph over the forces of the natural world.[53] Although Matsievich's flight had demonstrated the frailty of the aeronautical enterprise, articles, essays and poems celebrated the vital role of the fallen pilot in helping to tame the chaotic elements (*stikhiia*). One short story, entitled "Above the Earth," depicted in transparent imagery the irrepressible spirit of modern man as exemplified by the heroic aviator. Written in the form of a peasant *skazka*, or fairy tale, "Above the Earth" described the efforts of "Tsar-Air" and his offspring "Clouds," "Wind," and "Storm" to thwart an aviator's unwelcome intrusion into their

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[51] *Niva* 41 (1910): 714

[52] Ibid.

[53] On this see John McCannon, "Red Arctic: The Political and Cultural Significance of the Arctic in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1994).

aerial kingdom.[54] After successfully defending their heavenly abode by casting down a lone pilot (Matsievich), the forces of nature "humbly succumb" to the flock of aviators that follows in his wake. Although "Above the Earth" represents the most entertaining example of the man versus nature motif, the subject of *stikhiia* frequently appeared in articles published after Matsievich's accident. Where one editorial warned that is was still too early for Russians to "lose respect for nature,"[55] another expressed happiness at the reality of man's conquest over the "heretofore unconquerable elements,"[56] while yet another marveled at the ability of Russia's aviators to master the natural world.[57] In each instance *stikhiia*, elemental and chaotic, was the object of the authors' reflections.

For contemporary observers, this close association of aviation with man's mastery over the elements seemed to suggest the possibility of Russia's corresponding mastery over the forces of history and the present. For, if men like Matsievich could grant the nation the keys to "fulfilling the dream of centuries," might they not also assist the country in overcoming the obstacles to its own modernization? In contemplating the potential benefits that aviation might provide the nation, several observers contrasted the modern realities of aeronautical technology with the "philistinism" (*nekul'turnost'*) and "savagery" (*dikost'*) of their native Russia. Reporting on an unsuccessful balloon flight, scheduled to traverse the region between St. Petersburg and the Azov Sea during early October 1910, *Novoe vremia* proclaimed the undeniable importance of the attempt for taking place "over the most barbarous and picturesque portion of the Russian land [inhabited by] dark and ignorant people."[58] Delighting in the cultural superiority accrued by aviation, several publications printed the story of an encounter that took place between the "dark masses" and the passengers of the balloon flight. Terrified at the sight of the floating airship and "convinced that [it] was nothing other than the Devil,"[59] local peasants of the Perm-Kotlasskoi region "fell to their knees and made the sign of the cross in expectation of the final hour."[60] After meeting with the balloon's two occupants, they were only reluctantly assured that their airborne visitors had not been sent from the nether regions to unleash the Apocalypse. The peasants' ultimate acceptance of

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[54] B. Trofimov, "Nad zemlei," *Gazeta kopeika*, 28 September 1910.
[55] V. Azov, "Kapitan Matsievich," *Rech'*, 25 September 1910.
[56] *Gazeta kopeika*, 25 September 1910.
[57] *Russkoe slovo*, 25 September 1910.
[58] *Novoe vremia*, 7 October 1910.
[59] "Mezhdu nebom i zemlei," *Niva* 43 (1910): 760. Similar encounters between peasants and aviators were often published in the Russian press. See also, for example, "Aviator," *Gazeta kopeika*, 6 April 1910 and "Polineziiskii vozhd' na aeroplane," *Niva* 11 (1913): 220.
[60] *Novoe vremia*, 7 October 1910.

the aerial invader demonstrated to contemporary observers the ability of aeronautical technology to overcome the backwardness and ignorance of Russia's hinterlands.

As the "conquest of the air" had made possible a corresponding "conquest of philistinism," many observers looked to flight as the means by which Russia might also overcome the cultural backwardness that had long distinguished the nation from the greater states of Western Europe. Daily reports from the nation's airfields routinely compared Russian accomplishments to the achievements of France and Germany, and elated reporters frequently alluded to the inevitable day when Russia would emerge as the pre-eminent leader in all aspects of the aeronautical race. Each new day "revealed new talents and new heroes in [Russian] aviation" and produced "brilliant successes" that demonstrated "the Russian Bear" was the equal of its French and German counterparts.[61] By the fall of 1910, "it had become obvious" to every observer that "Russian aviation [was] on a proper and firm path," and that the nation "[had] made colossal strides, matching, in many respects, the [aeronautical] achievements of [its] European neighbors."[62]

The importance of these histrionic ruminations, however, lies less in what they say about Russian views of aviation as in what they imply about Russians' views of their own nation. All too eager to contrast clichéd images of rural Russia's peasant inhabitants with the technological advancements evidenced in the nation's urban centers, the commentary of contemporary aeronautical observers suggests that the long standing dichotomy of Russia versus the West, which had dominated the nation's cultural landscape throughout the previous two centuries, had undergone a subtle shift. By the second decade of the twentieth century, a new vision had emerged that acknowledged (and criticized) those elements of Russian life that did not live up to perceived European standards, but insisted on Russia's rightful place alongside the other nations of Europe. Thus, if "the sense of cultural inferiority that had haunted Russian artists and intellectuals for generations" had indeed begun to fade in the years following 1905, the self-stylized vision of an advanced Europe remained a vital reference in the process by which contemporary Russians fashioned their national identity.[63] Characterized by the technical accomplishments and personal heroism that accompanied Russia's conquest of the air, aviation served as demonstrable proof for contemporary observers that Russia belonged to Europe. And if Russia could match European

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[61] M. Kochergin, "Est' u nas liudi!," *Rossiia*, 20 October 1910 and "Uspekhi Russkago vozdukhoplavaniia," *Zhurnal aerodroma* 1 (1910): 13.
[62] *Niva*, 1910, no. 41: 715 and *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 17 (1910): 5-6.
[63] Samuel D. Kassow, James L. West and Edith W. Clowes, "Introduction: The Problem of the Middle in Late Imperial Russian Society," *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1991), 9.

nations in the race to conquer the skies, might it not also match the cultural and political vitality of the West and its institutions?

The European subtext that informed public discourse on Russian aviation was first articulated in late 1907 by the founder of the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club, Vasilii Korn. In letters to the newspaper *Novoe vremia* and the journal *Vozdukhoplavatel'*, Korn lamented the sorry state of Russian aeronautics and questioned the ability of the nation to meet the social and technical challenges posed by flight. Hoping to inspire others to support his call for the establishment of a national aviation club, Korn measured Russia's future aeronautical endeavors through the prism of European advances.

> How can we explain the fact that we have developed [our flight technology] only to a level comparable to France during the age of the Montgolfier brothers? Is it really true that Russian genius exists in such an embryonic state that it is impossible [for us] to establish something of our own, even something of the most feeble nature? Is it really so difficult for us to measure up to Europe and, indeed, the entire cultured world?[64]

Arguing that Russia's aeronautical "primitiveness" stemmed from the nation's failure to develop social organizations that would "popularize the idea of aviation as a sport, and that might accommodate that sport to [Russian] society," Korn advanced Western European aviation circles as models for Russian emulation. By mobilizing popular support for aeronautical endeavors, he argued, Western air clubs had been able successfully to "[attract the broader] interests of society and to win over its sympathy to the bold and productive venture of humanity's conquest of the air."[65] As a direct result, European aeronautics had achieved "spectacular successes." In stark contrast, Russia's failure to develop a national program led one to question the nation's technical and cultural standing.

Aside from highlighting the important role of a stylized Europe in the formation of Russian national identities, Korn's proposals indicate a belief that late Imperial society was indeed capable of evolving forms of social association similar to those that structured the nations of Western Europe. In urging that Russia develop Western social organizations to "attract the broader interests of society," Korn explicitly acknowledged the vital importance of the civic arena as a key element in the solution of the nation's aeronautical dilemma. To this end, his sentiments support the view that prewar Russians were developing the sense of civic consciousness necessary for the evolution

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[64] V. Korn, "Russkii aero-klub (Pis'mo v redaktsiiu)," *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 12 (1907): 480.
[65] V. Korn, "Organizatsiia i zadachi russkago aero-kluba. (Pis'mo v redaktsiiu)." *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 1 (1908): 39.

of a civil society independent of the tsarist state.[66] Moreover, Korn's attempt to enlist public support for the development of aeronautics was not motivated simply by a desire to see Russia match its competitors' successes. Instead, he argued, Russia's late entry into the field had afforded the nation with a "favorable opportunity" to overtake the Europeans in all things aeronautical. If Russia could only follow the European model, Korn patriotically proclaimed, it would at worst be guaranteed the same success garnered by Europe. At best, the nation would "pass over Western European mistakes" on its way to establishing the most prominent aviation program on the Continent.[67] Through such an acknowledgment of European achievements, Korn presented the nation with an aeronautical policy that exhorted his readers to meet the European challenge while reassuring their faith in the certainty of a great Russian future.

The connection between aviation and culture alluded to in Korn's letters was stated more explicitly in IVAK's subsequent appeals for public support in the establishment of a national air fleet. Issued in early 1909, the club's appeals warned that Russia was in danger of falling further behind the more advanced countries of Europe and argued that only active, public support of aviation could save the nation from the continued ignominy of backwardness and philistinism. According to the Aero-Club, the advent of aviation had inaugurated a new epoch in the history of humanity. Recognizing the fundamental importance of man's conquest of the air, the Aero-Club announced to the public that "all cultured peoples of the world" had begun to mobilize their support for their nations' aeronautical needs. With the exception of Russia, which "remained only an observer and [had] not contributed a single thing to the treasure house of human knowledge," the states of Europe had made great strides towards developing national aeronautical programs.[68] "The productive forces of [our] huge country, a first-class power," continued one appeal, "have been utterly absent from this common cause of humanity." While others, "even the smallest states, have not spared any effort or any expense regarding this concern of colossal importance, [our] enormous country has remained silent and has decisively done nothing."[69] Unless Russia acted quickly, it would have little to contribute to the advance of aeronautics and the development of European culture.

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[66] For a detailed discussion of the relationship between voluntary associations and civil society during this period, see Joseph Bradley, "Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture, and *Obshchestvennost'* in Moscow," *Between Tsar and People*, 131-148.
[67] V. Korn, "Organizatsiia i zadachi russkago aero-kluba," 41.
[68] RGVIA f. 1, op. 1, d. 74101 (Bumagi po raznym predmetam), l. 112.
[69] Ibid.

The identification of the aeronautical cause with the nation's cultural standing, first articulated by the founders of the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club (and reinforced by subsequent national successes), quickly emerged as a prominent theme in the public discourse on aviation. In charting the progress of Russia's accomplishments, popular publications repeatedly measured success against the yardstick of European standards. Newspapers and journals routinely reported on Western aeronautical festivals and air shows, and they took every opportunity to compare their nation's efforts with those already underway in the major capitals of the West.[70] In essays, short stories and poetry, Russian readers were introduced to Herbert Latham, Louis Blériot and Alphonse Pégoud, whose exploits were chronicled as closely as those of native fliers. At festivals and exhibitions, Russian spectators became familiar with the names "Voisin," "Gnome" and "Farman;" the leading European manufacturers of airplane engines and equipment, while in public lectures Russian spokesmen reported on the stunning progress made by Germany and France.[71] In each instance, Western Europe was cited as a standard to be emulated, the leading force in the technical and cultural race to dominate the heavens.

In spite of a sincere desire to see their state attain a level of competence equal to that of the West, most Russians could not help but recognize that their aeronautical program did not yet match the standards set by Europe. For, notwithstanding Russia's undeniable achievements, Western European nations continued to develop their aeronautical prowess at a time when Russia was struggling to duplicate their earlier accomplishments. Faced with the continuing feats of European states like France and Germany, many observers attributed signs of Russian success to airborne exploits of only marginal significance. Oftentimes, the importance of Russian aeronautical feats was exaggerated by the nation's press as a means of affirming Russia's contributions to the development of world aviation. A typical example was the attention given to the inaugural flight of Russia's first military dirigible, the *Lebed'*. Constructed in France and purchased by Russia in 1909, the *Lebed'* could hardly be called a "Russian" aircraft.[72] Detailed accounts of the dirigible's twenty-two minute flight were nevertheless widely reported in the

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[70] Particular attention was given to the German zeppelin flights that took place during the summer of 1909. Lengthy reports, detailing these flights and providing extensive histories of the craft and their creator, appeared in many Russian dailies. See "Zeppeliny na bol'shom nemetskikh manevrakh," *Novaia* Rus'. 21 July 1909; "Zeppelinovskie dni," *Moskovskiia vedomosti*, 29 August 1909 and the two-part story, "Berlinskiia pis'ma," *Rossiia*, 29-30 August 1909.

[71] See, for example, the lectures delivered by D. V. Fel'dberg and A. I. Shabskii on recent visits to Western Europe summarized, respectively, in *Novoe vremia*, 10 October 1910 and 18 October 1910.

[72] Even the name of the airship (which means "swan" in Russian) was derived from its French manufacturer, Leboud.

nation's press.[73] At a time when "the questions of aviation concerned each and every individual" (and when zeppelins were undertaking extended tours of southern Germany!), the seven mile journey of the *Lebed'* was hailed as a "major development in the aeronautical world."[74] By demonstrating Russia's ability to launch a rigid airship, the *Lebed'*, supposedly, had "inaugurated a new era" in the history of the nation.

Similar hyperbole accompanied the public's reception of Lieutenant G. V. Piotrovskii's flight from St. Petersburg to Kronstadt on 22 September 1910. Recognized for the importance of his "historic" accomplishment, Piotrovskii was roundly praised for the "heroism" and "courage" that he had demonstrated in completing the twenty-nine kilometer journey.[75] Moved to tears by the news of the pilot's successful landing, one reader proclaimed Piotrovskii as proof that "the *bogatyr* spirit ha[d] not died out in Russia," and he compared the forty-minute flight to the nation's eighteenth-century naval victory against the Turks at Chesme.[76] As a demonstration of the country's might and strength, the flight to Kronstadt had "comforted a Mother Russia still grieving over the loss at Tsushima" and had "astonished the whole world" by confirming Russia's aeronautical prowess. "After so many bitter defeats," the writer continued, "a worthy son of Russia has renewed a bright hope in the hearts of our countrymen." More importantly, he concluded, Piotrovskii's flight, "has shown the world that Russia is no less than Germany."

Besides inspiring popular pride in the nation's fliers through the exaggeration of their accomplishments, Russia's aeronautical discourse produced a rhetoric that sought to distinguish a distinctive Russian sphere in the history of aviation. Perhaps presaging the national chauvinism and historical myth-making of the Soviet era, some Imperial observers attempted to re-write language and history as a means of promoting Russian air-mindedness and to demonstrate the nation's contributions to the development of world aeronautics.[77] Arguing that a widespread understanding of aviation terminology was essential to the successful proliferation of air-consciousness in Russia, the newspapers *Novoe vremia* and *Novaia Rus'* took up separate calls to establish a purely

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[73] See for example, *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 27 August 1909 and *Rech'*, 26 August 1909.
[74] "Pervyi polet Lebedia." *Niva* 36 (1909): 629.
[75] *Rech'*, 23 September 1910. Piotrovskii's flight was widely reported in all of the major dailies of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Nevertheless, celebration of the event was quickly overshadowed by the death of Captain Matsievich two days later.
[76] S. Bashmakov, "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu," *Novoe vremia*, 24 September 1910.
[77] For a discussion of the manufactured excitement that surrounded Soviet aviation achievements during the 1930s, see below, chapter 4.

Russian lexicon of aeronautical terms.[78] Hoping to "cleanse" Russian aeronautical literature of "unintelligible foreign and ancient words," one writer proposed a list of some one hundred alternative designations, "purely derived from the Russian," as a means of facilitating public understanding of aeronautical terminology.[79] While too much should not be made of these attempts to russify flight jargon, one cannot help but question the nationalist aspirations that may have motivated the desire to transform already familiar European terms such as "aviator" and "aero-klub" into their rather awkward (yet allegedly "purely Russian") equivalents "letatel'" and "vozdukho-klub." In a similar vein, one might argue that linguistic contortions such as "tolkatel'" and "ravnovesnik" were, to the average Russian, just as foreign as their European equivalents. At a time when the nation's aeronautical community was making a conscious effort to emulate Western technical successes, the effort to establish a purely Russian terminology seems a disingenuous artifice for the articulation of a "Russian sphere" in aviation.

While some contemporaries sought to fashion a Russian place in the skies through the appropriation of native linguistics, others looked to an imagined past in order to validate Russia's claim to aeronautical and cultural greatness. Perhaps as a means of compensating for Russia's present failings, many writers turned to history in the hopes of establishing Russia's airborne credentials. In newspapers, journals and popular pamphlets, fanciful stories of early Russian "aviators" were often repeated to lend authority to a belief in Russia's long established aeronautical tradition.[80] Similarly, works such as Aleksandr Rodnykh's *History of Aeronautics and Flight in Russia* and Vasilii Naidenov's *Russian Aeronautics: History and Successes* were published with the intention of "[providing] a complete account of what Russians have done on behalf of aviation."[81]

Typically, these historical claims to aeronautical mastery amounted to little more than unsuccessful peasant exploits from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One favorite tale involved a muzhik's 1695 attempt to "fly like a crane" by fastening homemade wings to his arms.

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[78] F. Kupchinksii, "Prakticheskie terminy vozdukhoplavaniia," *Novaia Rus'*, 12 November 1909. Kupchinskii's article was reprinted, accompanied by a supportive rejoinder, in *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 11 (1909): 737-747.

[79] *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 11 (1909): 737-738.

[80] One colorful story from the reign of Ivan the Terrible was recounted by N. Dneprov, "Pervye russkie tseppeliny," *Gazeta kopeika*, 31 August 1909. Note should be made of the title and date, as this story appeared at a time when the Russian press was devoting extensive coverage to German zeppelin flights.

[81] Aleksandr Rodnykh, *Istoriia vozdukhoplavaniia i letaniia v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1911) and Vasilii Naidenov, *Russkoe vozdukhoplavanie i istoriia i uspekhi* (St. Petersburg, 1911). The quotation appears in Aleksandr Rodnykh, *Kratkii ocherk po istorii russkago vozdukhoplavaniia*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg, 1910), 1.

That the peasant's flight ended in failure did not prevent the story from being cited as proof of Russia's early air-mindedness by countless contemporary publications.[82] Similar failures were cited in reference to Russia's having invented both balloons and parachutes.[83] Yet, if the precedents established by Russia's seventeenth-century peasants were not enough to convince contemporaries of their nation's historical claim to having pioneered flight, then the tenth-century exploits of the Kievan prince Oleg were certain to establish Russia's aeronautical lineage. In an attempt to capture a besieged city in the year 906, the prince ordered an entire cavalry regiment, constructed out of gilded paper, to be carried by the wind into the enemy's camp. The confusion and turmoil caused by the airborne distraction proved the decisive edge in the prince's conquest of the city and provided a pretext for later Russian claims to having pioneered flight.[84] Russians, it seems, had flown even before there was a Russia.

In addition to supporting such tenuous claims as having been the first nation to experiment with flight, Russian observers attempted to rewrite more familiar aeronautical history. According to an article entitled "The First Aviators," published by the newspaper *Novoe vremia* in September 1910, the public was to believe that Russia "[was] at one point the leader of the world in the conquest of the air."[85] Citing manuscripts studied by the curator of a recently opened Munich museum, the newspaper proclaimed the invention of the world's first airplanes to have been the product of Russian genius. Secretly constructed by the naval officer A. M. Mozhaiskii and engineer P. D. Kuz'minskii during the 1880s, a steam-powered Russian aircraft had preceded the Wright brothers' efforts by nearly two decades. A later model, constructed in St. Petersburg during the 1890s, was likewise heralded as the world's first biplane. However, like the "tsar-bell" (which could not sound) and the "tsar-cannon" (which could not fire), Mozhaiskii's airplane could not fly. This fact did not discourage the paper from suggesting that the nation had pioneered the science of aeronautics. Yet perhaps more encouraging to a contemporary reader, the *Novoe vremia* article was important for holding out the hope of future Russian success. Arguing that recent aeronautical

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[82] In addition to appearing in the Rodnykh and Naidenov works cited above, the story was printed in *Rossiia*, 29 October 1901. During the Soviet period, it served as the basis for the 1926 film *Wings of the Serf* (*Kryl'ia kholopa*). More recently, the story has appeared in V. A. Popov, *Vozdukhoplavanie i aviatsiia v Rossii do 1917 g.: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, (Moscow, 1956) and P. D. Duz', *Istoriia vozdukhoplavaniia i aviatsii v Rossii: Period do 1914 g.*, (Moscow, 1979).

[83] Rodnykh, *Kratkii ocherk...*, 4-5.

[84] See A. I. Sulakadzev, *O vozdushnom letanii i Rossii s 906 leta po R. Kh.* Sulakadze's account is a modified version of a story from the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. See *Povest' vremmenykh let*, vol. 1, (Petrograd 1916), 30-31.

[85] *Novoe vremia*, 30 September 1910.

accomplishments had demonstrated that Russia "is not very far behind Europe in matters of aviation," the paper challenged disbelief in the ability of the nation to overtake its Western competitors. In citing the incredible examples of Mozhaiskii and Kuz'minskii (as well as laying claim to Russia's invention, in 1731, of the world's first balloon), the article made more easily imaginable a belief in the glorious future of Russian aeronautics. In light of these alleged accomplishments proclaimed by scholars and the press, the aeronautical challenge posed by the West appeared a less exotic and more manageable problem. Historically, Russia had already demonstrated its ability to fly. The question that remained was whether the nation, when faced with the technical prowess of twentieth-century Europe, could transform such historical flights of fancy into modern aeronautical realities.

Aeronautical Discourse between State and Society

Russian aviation patrons staked yet another claim to aeronautical fame in the summer of 1911. Hoping to win further support for its cause by demonstrating the practicality of airplanes outside of the confines of an aerodrome, the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club organized an airborne race between the nation's two most important urban centers, St. Petersburg and Moscow.[86] Patterned after recent air races held in Western Europe, the premise of the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race was quite simple: participating pilots would leave St. Petersburg at staggered intervals and were to travel along a prescribed route towards Moscow, passing over mandatory checkpoints and landing (when necessary) at established sites equipped to service their craft. The first pilot to reach Moscow was to receive a small cash sum while the remainder of the competition's prize money (which approached 75,000 rubles) was divided into two categories for those pilots flying alone and those accompanied by a passenger. Additional prizes were to be awarded to pilots for the longest flights without a stop and to those who made the fewest stops *en route* to Moscow. The race's largest single prize was reserved for the pilot who reached Moscow with the fastest time.[87]

Held in the wake of the successful Paris–Rome and Paris–Madrid races, the St. Petersburg–Moscow competition was a daring attempt to demonstrate that Russia could match the organizational and technical accomplishments of the Continent's leading aeronautical powers. Accompanying the routine difficulties faced by their Western contemporaries in planning such an

[86] The Aero-Club's official account of the race can be found in K. E. Veigelin, *10-15 iiulia 1911 g. Perelet Sankt Peterburg-Moskva* (St. Petersburg, 1911).
[87] Veigelin, *Perelet Sankt Peterburg-Moskva*, 5-6.

event, the organizational committee appointed by IVAK was forced to contend with the isolated expanse of the Russian hinterlands. To help assure the safety and success of the nine participating pilots, the race was run along the highway connecting Moscow to the Imperial capital and entrants were provided with aerial maps of the region to assist them in navigating their journeys. Moreover, the Aero-Club attempted to mobilize local resources along the planes' path by calling on *zemstvo* officials to have medical teams standing by in the not unlikely event that misfortune occurred.[88]

Despite the safety precautions adopted by the organizational committee, the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race was beset by numerous accidents which quickly overshadowed the event and earned the Aero-Club the enmity of the press. Early in the morning on 12 July, a sizable crowd gathered at the airfield in Moscow to greet A. A. Vasil'ev, the fourth competitor to take off from St. Petersburg and the first to complete the 725 kilometer cross-country flight.[89] Having done battle with the "savagery and barbarity of the Russian countryside," Vasil'ev and his aircraft had emerged victorious "in spite of the obstacles placed before him by Russia."[90] Nevertheless, the expected air of celebratory triumph was quickly dispelled by news of the aviator's travails. Vasil'ev reported that the maps provided by the organizational committee were riddled with mistakes and that, as a result, he had lost his way twice (in one instance flying some 100 kilometers out of the way in a vain search for the checkpoint at Tver'). Forced to land his plane to ask for directions, Vasil'ev corrected the mistake and returned to the proper route only to encounter engine trouble some sixty kilometers short of Moscow. The pilot was compelled to wait overnight in a small barn following the delayed arrival of spare parts and only completed his journey on the morning of the 12th, arriving more than twenty-four hours after his departure from St. Petersburg.

After landing at the Moscow aerodrome, an extremely agitated and fatigued Vasil'ev castigated the coterie of Aero-Club officials and city dignitaries that had gathered to greet him. Complaining of the disorder and dereliction that the Club's organizers had demonstrated in arranging the competition, Vasil'ev publicly decried the pitiful conditions that he had encountered at the race's checkpoints as well as the poor signaling system and shoddy maps that he had been forced to endure.[91] Likening his flight to "penal servitude," Vasil'ev warned that the journey was "a summons to die" and suggested that "if the race doesn't end with the death of an aviator, then

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[88] On the safety measures taken by the organizational committee see, A. V. Kaul'bars, "Otchet ob organizatsii pervago v Rossii pereleta SpB.–Moskva," *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 8 (1911): 524-539.
[89] Ultimately, Vasil'ev was the only pilot to complete the race.
[90] "Perelet Peterburg–Moskva," *Niva* 30 (1911): 558.
[91] *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 11 (1911): 9.

we will have only God to thank."[92] What was intended to serve as a celebration of technological ascendancy quickly turned into a public-relations fiasco for IVAK as Vasil'ev repeated his criticisms in an open letter published less than a week after the conclusion of the race.[93]

Vasil'ev's critical tone was echoed in the nation's press as word of accidents involving the pilots Utochkin, Agafonov, and Maslennikov reached St. Petersburg and Moscow.[94] Public concern quickly escalated into a crescendo of indignation following the 12 July crash of the pilot Vladimir Sliusarenko in which his passenger, the twenty-six year-old aviation student K. N. Shimanskii, was killed. The press exploded. Proclaiming the race to be the "saddest moment in the history of Russian flight," the nation's news publications pointed to the "stupidity, arrogance and pure Russian 'know-it-all-ism'" of the organizing committee for having failed to foresee the "colossal defects" that had plagued the race.[95] The celebration of Vasil'ev's triumphant arrival in Moscow quickly gave way to "nightmarish days" in which newspaper headlines screamed "Enough Blood!" and impassioned editorials demanded an end to the "airborne butchery" taking place in the skies between St. Petersburg and Moscow.[96]

Although Vasil'ev inaugurated public debate concerning the (in)competence of the Imperial Aero-Club's organizational committee, it cannot be said that the pilot's words had inspired popular skepticism of the race in particular or the cause of aviation in general.[97] Such misgivings had been manifest even before the start of the competition. One indication of the press's growing concern with the status of the nation's aeronautical endeavors was evidenced in a lengthy article that appeared in the July 1911 edition of the journal *Zhizn' dlia vsekh*.[98] Published to coincide with the start of the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race, the article railed against the ever-increasing number of aeronautical accidents and fatalities both in Russia and abroad and attacked competitions (and the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race in particular) for providing monetary incentives for pilots to risk their lives. Employing bitter sarcasm, the author compared the social

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[92] *Svet*, 12 July 1911, 2.
[93] A. Vasil'ev, "Moi perelet," *Sinii zhurnal* 31 (1911): 5.
[94] For a survey of the race's developments and criticism of IVAK's organizational committee see the following newspapers, 12-17 July 1911: *Novoe vremia*, *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, *Peterburgskii listok*, *Ranee utro*, *Rech'*, *Russkoe slovo* and *Svet* among many others.
[95] *Svet*, 15 July, 1911; *Sinii zhurnal* 31 (1911): 6-7 and *Utro Rossii*, 13 July 1911.
[96] See the sensationalist stories "Koshmarnye dni," *Utro Rossii*, 13 July 1911; "Ne nuzhno stol'ko krovi," *Ranee utro*, 13 July 1911 and "Aviatsionnaia boinia," *Peterburgskii listok*, 13 July 1911.
[97] In his spirited defense of the race and the Aero-Club, Veigelin invoked Biblical imagery in suggesting that Vasil'ev's public castigation of the organizational committee was a "lance thrust with anger into the side of the nation's aeronautical program" and he blamed the aviator for spearheading criticism of the Aero-Club after the race. See Veigelin, *Perelet Sankt Peterburg–Moskva*, 56.
[98] A. Marker, "Aviatsiia," *Zhizn' dlia vsekh* 7 (1911): 957-963.

phenomenon (*bytovoe iavlenie*) of the aeronautical competition to society's earlier fascination with capital punishment. With the aid of advertisements and the press's shrill coverage of aeronautics, the writer argued, the public's appetite for destruction was whetted, just as it had been by the published notices that recounted the executions of the condemned. In fact, the article suggested, the "social phenomenon" of the aeronautical race was in many respects more disreputable than the individual condemnation notice as "everyone knows that from among these pilots someone has been condemned to death and an even greater number to mutilation." The only difference that seemed to separate the two events was that "[the pilot's] secret condemnation is fulfilled *not at dawn*, but during the day, before the bright light of the sun's rays and in front of a crowd of thousands, curious and bloodthirsty from their curiosity."[99] As if to lend statistical support to his moral opprobrium, the author announced that during the previous year more than thirty victims had died worldwide as a result of aeronautical accidents. But, he added wryly, "as proof of the great successes in aviation, experienced people have promised us simpletons that this year there should only be around 100 deaths." The "experienced people" proved right on the mark. In 1911, there would be 96 reported aviation fatalities.[100]

The reactions to the death of the young Shimanskii and the numerous mishaps that had plagued the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race cannot be explained simply as spontaneous responses to the mounting casualties resulting from Russian aeronautical activities. During the previous two decades, as the popularity of ballooning had increased, aeronautical accidents had multiplied, conditioning the Russian public to the dangers associated with flight. Moreover, the number of Russian fatalities in no way compared with those in Western Europe. Of the 96 aeronautical fatalities that were to occur throughout the world in 1911, only five (including Shimanskii) were numbered from among Russian fliers.[101] While this number was certainly an increase over the lone death of Matsievich in 1910, Russian casualties remained only a third of those occurring in either Germany or the United States and were more than seven times fewer than those in France during the same year.[102] Nevertheless, the public criticism over the outcome of the race and the rising tide of concern for aeronautical victims indicated that by the summer of 1911 Russian attitudes towards

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[99] Ibid., 957-958. The italics appear in the original.
[100] *Tiazhelee vozdukha* 1 (1912): 16.
[101] The *Tiazhelee vozdukha* article cited above incorrectly lists the number of Russian aeronautical casualties in 1911 as seven. For correct assessments, including the names of the deceased, see *Vechernee vremia*, 10 December 1911; *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 4 (1912): 15 and *Sevastopol'skii aviatsionnyi illiustrirovannyi zhurnal* 2-3 (50-51) (1912): 2.
[102] *Tiazhelee vozdukha* 1 (1912): 16

aviation had undergone an important shift.[103] If, in the fall of 1910, the press had been willing to dismiss fatal accidents as the "unavoidable risk" of a great, new venture and had boldly declared that the "genius of man" should not be allowed to come to a halt before the bodies of "the brave and daring victims" of aviation accidents, by mid-1911, it was sounding a much more critical tone.[104]

The Russian press's heightened sensitivity to these losses of life was, to a considerable degree, a reflection of the growing awareness that the aeronautical cause itself was undergoing a fundamental transformation. During the earliest years of the first aeronautical decade, Russian newsmen, much like their Western European counterparts, had been content to proclaim the marvels of mankind's latest invention and to praise the stalwart termidity of the flying "tsars of the skies" whose feats of technical skill promised to usher in a "new era of human history."[105] Celebrating pilots as modern incarnations of the ancient Prometheus, the press had extolled these men and their machines for subjugating the laws of nature to the interests of human progress. Enamored of the daring displayed by the airborne aviator, early accounts of aeronautical exploits employed romantic imagery of the individual pilot to promote a general faith in the hero of the skies. However, as engines grew more powerful and fuselages more sturdy and as once small bands of amateur fliers were transformed into cadres of professional pilots, idyllic visions of "humanity's conquest" rapidly gave way to nervous expectations that aviation would soon be employed in the pursuit of less noble, more martial goals. True, commentators at both ends of the Continent had ruminated on the military potential of the airplane as early as 1909.[106] But, in the intervening two years, European governments had taken practical steps in developing aviation to serve recognizable military goals, and as these efforts intensified it became increasingly obvious to those concerned that the atmosphere surrounding aeronautical advances had radically altered.[107]

In the weeks that followed the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race, the nation's leading aeronautical publications called attention to the changing circumstances of European aviation and

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[103] For a sample of press commentary on accidents at this time, see *Ranee utro*, 13 July 1911; *Vestnik znaniia* 8 (1911): 732-734 and *Sinii zhurnal* 19 (1911): 13 in addition to the sources cited above.
[104] *Novoe vremia*, 28 September 1910 and K. Priural'skii's article "V tsarstve vozdukha," in *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 13 (1910): 12 among many others.
[105] *Peterburgskaia gazeta* 14 July 1909 and *Russkoe znamia*, 14 July 1909. For a discussion of the excitement that surrounded the earliest flights in Europe see Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, 33-68.
[106] See, for example, the reaction of the Russian War Minister Bren to the news of Blériot's Channel crossing, cited above, note 14.
[107] John H. Morrow, Jr., *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921* (Washington DC, 1993), 11-29.

urged the tsarist government to take appropriate measures to meet the challenge posed by Western advances. During the fall of 1911, the Russian press closely documented the expanding role of airplanes and dirigibles in the military maneuvers of western neighbors and used these events as springboards for mounting criticisms of Russia's aeronautical preparedness.[108] Announcing that "the incredible influence of the airplane in military affairs and in the conduct of battle" had already "been proclaimed with heated enthusiasm not only in France, but amidst the social opinion and military circles of Germany and England," the nation's aeronautical press warned of the rapid growth of military aviation in Europe and evinced growing concern for the status of Russian aeronautical endeavors.[109]

The outbreak of war between Italy and Turkey on 29 October 1911 [n.s.] proved well-founded the concerns expressed by the press. Armed with a contingent of nine planes purchased from France, the Italian army employed its aircraft for assisting with troop reconnaissance and conducting limited bombing raids against enemy positions.[110] Although the Italians' use of airplanes during the war did not provide them with an overwhelming tactical or strategic advantage, it retained powerful symbolic significance for being the first application of aviation in military combat. For its part, the Russian press followed the events in North Africa with keen interest, publishing accounts of each new appearance by "the weapon of the future" and reporting on the Italians' efforts to augment their aeronautical capabilities by purchasing more planes from the French.[111] Such measures seemed highly appropriate. For, "while the war in Tripoli [could] not elucidate every aspect of the future of military aviation, it [had proven] the essential nature of possessing a military air fleet" and had demonstrated the "vital importance of such a fleet to a nation's armed forces."[112]

While Italian pilots applied their skills to tormenting the Turks from the skies over Africa, the French government was providing its European rivals with another demonstration of its unsurpassed aeronautical might. Supported by a state subsidy of some one million francs, military maneuvers at Rheims in October 1911 confirmed once again the enviable progress being made by the French aeronautical program. In the course of the event, some 140 planes (representing no less

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[108] See, for example, the series of detailed articles on German aeronautical developments that appeared in *Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti*, August-September 1911.
[109] *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 13-14 (1911): 4.
[110] Morrow, Jr., *The Great War in the Air*, 25.
[111] See, for example, *Peterburgskii listok*, 16 October 1911; *Ranee utro* 19 October 1911; *Birzhevyia vedomosti*, 21 October 1911 (evening edition) and *Peterburgskaia gazeta* 14-16 October 1911, among many others.
[112] *K sportu!* 3 (1911): 5.

than thirty different models) were displayed; a striking testament to the French commitment to the development of military aviation.[113] In contrast to this showcase by the French (and the continuing success of the German zeppelin program), the Russian military's effort to organize a September air exposition of its own had proven a failure. Of the four planes that applied to enter the competition, one was immediately disqualified for failing to meet the military's basic specifications, while another was destroyed when a temporary hangar collapsed in high winds.[114] The ill-fated competition met a premature end when the final two entries crashed during their initial flights.[115] At a time when the French were flexing their aeronautical muscle within the context of organized military maneuvers and the Italians were gaining valuable experience in aerial warfare, such failures were the cause of considerable public concern. One leading aeronautical journal voiced its anxiety by castigating the Russian military for not doing enough to advance the nation's aeronautical interests. And, by means of comparison to the spectacular French demonstration at Rheims, it ridiculed the Russian "air-fleet" as consisting of no more than "a dozen or so old training planes worn out from over-use." While acknowledging that Russia should take pride in the achievements of its individual pilots, the journal chastised the government for the lack of foresight and planning demonstrated in its handling of the military aviation program. As a result of state bungling, the journal concluded, "haphazardness and insufficiency" had emerged as "the distinctive characteristics of Russian aeronautics." Without fundamental reform of the military's aeronautical sections Russia would not prove capable of meeting the challenges posed by its western neighbors.[116]

The government agreed. During the winter and spring of 1911-12, the Russian Ministry of War undertook an internal examination of its aeronautical sections to determine what measures might be adopted to correct the inadequacies of the military flight program. The results of the investigation, first circulated in summer of 1912, indicated that press criticism of the government's aeronautical ineptitude had been well-founded. In his introductory cover letter to the Ministry report, the commander of the Officers' Aeronautical School, Major-General A. M. Kovan'ko, acknowledged that the heretofore haphazard attention paid by the military to the development of

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[113] *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 10 (1911): 678-681. For further treatment of the French maneuvers in the Russian aeronautical press see *Avtomobil' i vozdukhoplavanie* 19, 21 & 23 (1911) and *Novosti vozdukhoplavaniia* 1 (1911): 9-10.

[114] *Birzhevyia vedomosti*, 23 September 1911.

[115] For accounts of the crashes, see *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 10 September 1911 and *Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti*, 23 September 1911.

[116] *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 15 (1911): 3-5.

Russian aeronautics had prevented the government from best exploiting the new technology to its own advantage, and he urged the creation of a planned and systematic organizational structure to correct existing inadequacies and to ensure the proper future development of the nation's military aeronautical program.[117] Echoing the criticisms voiced by the press, Kovan'ko decried the "absence of planning" (*planomernost'*) to be the "single obstacle to the natural development and broadening of [Russian] military aviation;" and he blamed existing aeronautical institutions for failing to provide the nation with the leadership and expertise it required to succeed in this endeavor. Only through the rationalization of the military's aeronautical sections and the expansion of the role of trained technicians and specialists would it be possible to establish the framework necessary for the expedient development of Russian military aviation. Failure to adopt such measures, he warned, would have dire consequences as it would run the risk of entrenching Russia "in last place amongst the European states in the matter of aeronautical affairs."[118]

Similar to the letter that prefaced it, the Ministry's report drew attention to the necessity of establishing a clear and orderly chain of command for the handling of all matters aeronautical.[119] To this end, it outlined a series of institutional reforms that centered on the transfer of responsibility for the military aeronautical program from the Ministry of War's Central Engineering Administration (*Glavnoe inzhenernoe upravlenie*) to a newly created section attached to the General Staff. According to the report, the proposed changes would make possible the "hastening of tempos" regulating aeronautical development and would provide the state with its desired results at "a modest cost" and within a "short period." As if to bolster this claim, the report compared the task of establishing the Russian air fleet to the program of naval construction undertaken by Peter the Great at the beginning of the eighteenth century. As with Peter's navy, the report suggested, it would be possible for the state to make rapid gains in the expansion of its air fleet by initially obtaining the requisite planes and expertise from Western Europe while laying the foundations for future expansion through investment in domestic Russian aeronautical industries and enterprises. Notwithstanding this possibility, however, the report was quite clear that time was of the essence. While it was realistic to expect that Russia would prove capable of establishing an air force "more powerful than any [possessed by] its adversaries," the government could not waste

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[117] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 7 (Soobshcheniia po povodu planomernoi organizatsii voennogo vozdukhoplavaniia v Rossii), l. 49.
[118] Ibid.
[119] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 7, ll. 52-64.

time or allow the issue to be tied up by "official red-tape."[120] The advance of aeronautics was moving too quickly for that. As such, the report warned by way of concluding, "the government that fails to establish a rational organization (*planomernost' organizatsii*) now will find it difficult to later reestablish lost status and time" as rival powers would press ahead in the race to control the skies.[121]

If the Ministry's internal report acknowledged the disarray of the government's aeronautical policies, then the results of the Second Aeronautical Congress reflected comparable disorder in the ranks of the private sector. Similar to the First Aeronautical Congress held in St. Petersburg in April 1911, the Second Congress was intended to bring together representatives from the nation's private aeronautical clubs, sporting circles, educational and scientific institutes and the military to discuss current developments in the aeronautical world and to ponder the future evolution of Russian aviation.[122] Like its predecessor, the Second Congress (which convened in Moscow from 28 March to 1 April, 1912) devoted much of its time to the discussion of recent scientific and technical advances in world aeronautics. In addition to their academic reports, participants were called upon to address broader questions regarding the organization and direction of the nation's various public and private aeronautical endeavors.

In many respects, the Second Aeronautical Congress, like the military's maneuvers of the fall of 1911, proved a disappointment. In contrast to the 600 plus representatives who had gathered in St. Petersburg during the previous year, the Second Aeronautical Congress attracted less than 300 participants.[123] Accompanying this decline in attendance was a noticeable shift in the composition of Congressional delegates. Whereas the previous gathering had been characterized by the diverse backgrounds of its many attendees, the Second Congress was marked by a predominance of military and scientific personnel and a corresponding absence of representatives from the Russian "sporting element."[124] The presence of so many academic and military

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[120] Ibid., l. 54
[121] Ibid., l. 63
[122] For an overview of the events of the Second Congress, including a summary of the activities and reports of its various working committees see *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 9 (1912): 16-19 and *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 4 (1912): 319-322. Daily reports from the Congress were printed in many of the nation's leading newspapers. See, for example, the coverage in *Moskovskiia vedomosti*, *Novoe vremia* and *Utro Rossii*, 29 March-3 April, 1912. The official transcript of the Congress was produced by the Moscow Society of Aeronautics. See *Dnevnik vtorogo vserossiiskago vozdukhoplavatel'nago s"ezda*, vols. 1-5 (Moscow, 1912).
[123] For attendance at the First Aeronautical Congress see *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 9 (1911): 14. On the Second Congress see *Utro Rossii*, 29 March 1912.
[124] *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 9 (1912): 16.

representatives led some observers to note that the "narrow, specialized character of the Congress" meant that it possessed "no interest to the general public."[125] In addition to reduced attendance and limited popular appeal, the Congress made little progress regarding the most significant item on its agenda: plans for the formation of an "All-Russian Aeronautical Union." Citing the successes of similar organizations in Western Europe, proponents of an Aeronautical Union had called attention to the importance that a national administrative body might play in facilitating communication and increasing cooperation between the country's far-flung aeronautical enterprises.[126] The issue of the proposed Union, held over from the previous Congress, had, in fact, been the primary reason for the convocation of the Second Aeronautical Congress. Notwithstanding the importance of the matter, poor planning on the part of the organizers of the Congress meant that discussion of the Union was delayed until the Congress's final day. The delegates' subsequent, hasty decision to affirm the Union charter (drafted at the preceding Congress) and to entrust further decisions concerning the Union to the members of a "temporary committee" (elected at the preceding Congress) cast considerable doubt upon the Second Congress's utility.[127]

Besides its meager attendance and minor achievements, the Second Aeronautical Congress was noteworthy for the atmosphere of factional animosity evidenced in the course of the four-day gathering. In his report to the Okhrana, the state *gendarme* assigned to monitor the event pointed to the poor reception given the government's military representatives by the civilian delegates to the Congress. Writing on the Congress's inaugural, ceremonial session, the secret agent remarked on the occasion of "several offenses" that occurred in the course of the sparsely-attended meeting. By means of illustrating the "irritation with which many civilians spoke in regards to the military's predominance at the Congress," the police informant cited attendants' complaints regarding the "bureaucratic spirit" and "narrowness" imparted to the Congress by the presence of so many military servicemen. The extent of the breach between the Congress's two factions was most apparent during the participants' reading of salutary remarks when civilian representatives pointedly declined to applaud the military's speakers. The civilian contingent reacted in a similar fashion to the military's proposal that the Congress send a ceremonial telegram to the Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich "in honor of his activities in the development of Russian aviation." The

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[125] *Rossiia*, 3 April 1912.
[126] On discussion of the Aeronautical Union at the Congress see, *Novoe vremia*, 1 April 1912.
[127] See, for example, *K sportu!* 19 (1912): 3-4. The Union's charter was re-printed in *Tekhnika vozdukhoplavaniia* 4 (1912): 225-228 and *Dnevnik vtorogo vserossiiskago vozdukhoplavatel'nago s"ezda*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1912), 9-15.

cold reception given the Congress's military participants led the operative to conclude that, "if there does not exist an open, pronounced antagonism between the military and civilian aeronautical representatives, there does without a doubt exist a latent, more thoroughly hidden, estrangement [between the two factions]."[128]

Hoping to improve upon the strained relations evidenced at the Second Aeronautical Congress, the state-sponsored "Committee for the Establishment of the Fleet by Means of Voluntary Subscriptions" reached out to civil society in an attempt to broaden its own campaign to raise public awareness and funds to support Russian military aviation. Since revising its original mandate of building ships for the Russian navy to include the task of constructing an air fleet, the Committee had continued to conduct its activities in a narrowly circumscribed fashion, directing its fund raising efforts largely towards the nation's richest and most well-established personages. True, official publications could boast that by the middle of 1912 the Committee had succeeded in raising some 1.6 million rubles for the purchase of thirty-odd airplanes.[129] But a closer examination of these numbers suggests that the Committee's successes had been far less impressive. Of the moneys raised, a majority had come from pre-existing funds transferred from the Committee's earlier naval campaign.[130] By the Committee's own accounting, it had raised a mere 354,00 rubles from individual donations.[131] Measured against the 3.6 million francs and 4 million marks raised by French and German aeronautical subscriptions in 1912, Russian efforts were positively anemic.[132]

Cognizant of the need to broaden its fund-raising campaign in order to attract the support of the general public, the state Committee for the Establishment of the Air Fleet turned to the nation's independent press for advice and support. To this end, the Committee extended invitations to the editorial boards of the capital's leading newspapers and journals requesting that they meet with the Committee's governing body. The proposed topic of discussion was to be the means by which the Committee might best organize its campaign.[133] The meeting took place on 13 August 1912 and was attended by members of a dozen of St. Petersburg's major journals and newspapers.[134] As a prologue to the discussion, the Committee presented the assembled newsmen

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[128] GARF f. 102 DPOO 1912, d. 71, ll. 37-39.
[129] *Vozdushnyi flot–sila Rossii* (Moscow, 1913), 12.
[130] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 80.
[131] *Vozdushnyi flot–sila Rossii*, 16.
[132] *Peterburskii listok*, 14 August 1912
[133] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 69.
[134] Representatives of the following publications attended the meeting: *Birzhevyia vedomosti*, *Groza*, *Kolokol*, *Peterbugskii listok*, *Rech'*, *Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti*, *Sel'skii vestnik*, *Svet*, *Tsarskosel'skoe delo*, *Vedomosty SPb. Gradnochal'stva* and *Zemshchina*.

with a statement concerning its mission accompanied by newly-printed brochures and an accounting of the funds it had thus far raised. Following its presentation, the Committee solicited advice from the journalists regarding the "most favorable means of familiarizing the public with [its] activities" and requested that the attending editors print stories pertaining to the Committee and the air fleet in forthcoming editions of their publications.[135]

The press's execution of the official request to publish stories about the Committee was decidedly mixed. While most of the news agencies present at the meeting did oblige the government in the days following the conference with articles and essays concerning the state subscription, their individual responses varied widely.[136] The most impassioned implementation of the government's request came from the conservative newspaper *Svet*, which published a week-long series of frenzied, patriotic front-page articles supporting the Committee and attempting to mobilize the nation's citizenry to "the great cause of raising kopecks for the air fleet."[137] In contrast to *Svet*'s enthusiastic embrace of the state campaign, *Birzhevyia vedomosti* and *Peterburgskii listok* saw fit to publish single, short notices reminding their readers that the State Committee existed and informing them of the Committee's future plans.[138] The newspaper *Rech'* declined to print anything.

The widely divergent responses to the Committee's request for more press coverage did not reflect disinterest on the part of the press, as the nation's newspapers continued to devote considerable space to the topic of Russian aviation. Moreover, they continued to discuss aeronautical matters in decidedly patriotic terms. As demonstrated by the recurrent demand that Russia "not simply match the aeronautical capabilities of [its Western competitors] but surpass them," public discussion of Russian aviation remained a highly emotional and intrinsically nationalistic affair.[139] To this extent, the published responses to the 13 August conference indicated a growing recognition by the nation's news publications that patriotic support for the defense of the nation was not necessarily synonymous with public support of the policies of the state. While all agreed on the fundamental importance of aviation to the military preparedness and cultural prosperity of Russia, many disagreed with the government regarding the means by which policy had thus far been conducted. And they signaled their dissatisfaction by largely ignoring the request

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[135] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 69.
[136] For a survey of these responses, see the aforementioned newspapers, 14-20 August 1912.
[137] See *Svet*, 14-20 August 1912. The quote appears in the article, "Vozdushnyi flot–sila Rossii," 14 August 1912.
[138] *Birzhevyia vedomosti*, 14 August 1912 and *Peterburgskii listok*, 14 August 1912.
[139] *Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti*, 14 August 1912.

of the state-sponsored Committee. In this way, the decision by *Rech'* to remain silent towards the Committee's call for support (and the relative silence of papers like *Birzhevyia vedomosti* and *Peterburgskii listok*) did not reflect disinterest in the issue of Russian aeronautics. Rather, their responses were passive indictments of the government's capability to manage properly affairs of state. By effectively ignoring the Committee's appeal for support, these papers signaled their dissatisfaction with state aeronautical policy while continuing to preach the importance of aviation to the nation's prosperity.

While the outcome of the conference between state officials and public press representatives did not fundamentally alter the terms of Russia's aeronautical discourse, the meeting itself clearly indicated the government's recognition of the need to consult society in drafting a strategy for shaping the nation's aeronautical program. Keenly aware of the importance of haste in developing aeronautics for national defense and mindful of the rapid successes being attained in Western Europe, the state moved to accelerate its program of aeronautical expansion by reaching out to Russian society in a manner identical to campaigns undertaken in the West. In response, the press continued to publish calls for broader public participation in the aeronautical cause (as it had done since 1907) armed with the knowledge that, at least for the time being, the government was proving receptive to its proposals. Indeed, the state's interest in reinforcing its relationship with the press was further signified at the August meeting by the Committee's decision to appoint one of its members to act as a standing liaison between the Committee and the capital's press establishments.[140] Soon thereafter, the Committee took steps to improve press access to the nation's aeronautical fleet by helping to arrange flights for interested reporters.[141]

In the aftermath of the August meeting, the Committee for the Establishment of the Air Fleet redoubled its efforts to win public support for its mission and to attract private funds for the construction of new airplanes. With the intent of popularizing the idea of supporting Russian aviation, the Committee issued a series of postcards, gold and silver commemorative badges, cheap tin buttons (emblazoned with the Committee's adopted slogan: "The air fleet is the strength of Russia"), and even a board game entitled, "Air Battle: A Game of the Twentieth Century."[142] Together with these trinkets, the Committee attempted to broaden its appeal by producing a number of colorful, well-illustrated brochures aimed at educating potential readers of the

[140] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 69.
[141] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 16 (Pis'mo voennomu ministru o komandirovanii letchikov), ll. 46-47.
[142] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 67.

importance of aviation and the efforts undertaken by the state to improve the nation's air fleet.[143] Public involvement in the cause of the air fleet was further encouraged through writing competitions in which participants were asked to submit essays that would help "popularize the success of aeronautics" and "familiarize the Russian people with the cultural and military significance of aviation."[144]

Accompanying the Committee's merchandising efforts and the military's reorganization of its aeronautical departments, the government signaled its new-found commitment to aviation by immediately increasing expenditures on the nation's air force. Following the transfer of the aeronautical command from the Central Engineering Administration to the General Staff on 12 September, the government approved the release of some 2.4 million rubles in accumulated credits, previously held by the Engineering Administration, for the purchase of new planes and equipment.[145] In conjunction with this short-term measure, the General Staff undertook to devise a plan that would serve as the blueprint for future aeronautical development. Completed by the late winter of 1912, the General Staff's project was both big and expensive, calling for the purchase of nearly 400 planes and the expenditure of some 44 million rubles during the course of 1913-1915.[146] Thus, to the press's call for more aeronautical vigilance, the state responded with a policy predicated upon more rational planning, more public involvement, and the expenditure of (significantly) more money.

Notwithstanding the considerable sums spent by the Ministry of War, these short-term efforts failed to address a number of fundamental dilemmas facing the nation's aeronautical program. The first among these was the problem of pilots. The rapid expansion of aviation detachments required a simultaneous expansion in the number of fliers available to man the planes. Without pilots, Russia's air fleet would remain grounded; even as early as 1912, the military was faced with a shortage of qualified fliers.[147] To address the long-term need for pilots, the Ministry of War had decided in the spring of 1912 to expand its training program by expending some 1.05

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[143] Among the publications produced by the Committee were, *Kratkii populiarnyi ocherk vozdukhoplavaniia i aviatsii* (Kazan', 1913); *Russkii morskoi i vozdushnyi flot sooruzhennyi na dobrovol'nyia pozhertvovaniia* (St. Petersburg, 1913); and the previously cited *Vozdushnyi flot--sila Rosii* (Moscow, 1913).

[144] *Avtomobil' i vozdukhoplavanie* 17 (1911): 484.

[145] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 231 (Doklad po zaprosam Dumy o snabzhenii aviatsionnym imushchestvom), l. 12.

[146] Ibid., l. 14.

[147] According to one estimate, in the summer of 1912 the Russian military possessed some 100 aircraft but only sixty pilots. See *Vozdukhoplavatel'* 6 (1912): 486.

million rubles to relocate its flight school in Sevastopol' to the nearby village of Marmashai. The move, according to the Ministry, would provide the school with more room for growth, thus accommodating the increase in students expected to accompany the rapid expansion of the air fleet.[148] In the interim, the military attempted to meet the growing demand for qualified fliers by turning to the nation's private air-clubs and circles.

Aware of the problem faced by the Ministry of War, the Imperial All-Russian Aero Club had approached the government in the spring of 1912 with an offer to train military pilots free of charge at its facilities.[149] IVAK's apparent altruism was subsequently hailed by the press as an example of the ways in which the country's civilian aeronautical organizations could work with the government for the betterment of the national air fleet.[150] For its part, the state accepted the proposal and finalized similar arrangements with the private schools of the Moscow Society of Aeronautics and the Odessa Aero-Club. In exchange for training up to ten pilots a year, the Military Ministry agreed to compensate these private schools by providing them with a five hundred ruble subsidy for each pilot they graduated.[151]

The problems inherent in this arrangement became apparent soon after the graduation of the first group of privately-trained military pilots. Notwithstanding the air clubs' assurances concerning the quality of their training regimens, the students they produced did not meet the military's qualifications. The extent to which the privately-trained pilots fell short of military standards was made evidently clear when Second-Lieutenant Perlovskii, an IVAK graduate, crashed an army airplane on his maiden flight; ending the plane's career and with it his life.[152] The military was subsequently compelled to re-train all of the officers it had enrolled in the air club schools, thus forfeiting any benefits that it had hoped to gain from relying upon the private organizations. Compounding these difficulties, IVAK reneged on its offer to train the military's fliers for free. The club submitted a petition to the government demanding 1,000 rubles for each military flier that it graduated, together with 500 rubles for each of its civilian students that agreed to enroll in the Russian air fleet reserves. Moreover, the IVAK leadership had the audacity to request 25,000 rubles for the equipment of a new aerodrome and an additional increase of more

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[148] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 81.
[149] The Aero-Club's decision to train the military pilots is reported in *Imperatorskii Vserossiiskii Aero-Klub. Zhurnal.* 101 otkrytago zasedaniia soveta IVAK, 11 iiulia 1912: 122-123 (*Vozdukhoplavatel'* 9 (1912)).
[150] See, for example, the article entitled, "Ocherk deiatel'nosti aviatsionnoi shkoly IVAK," in *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 15 (1912): 2-5.
[151] RGVIA f. 1, op. 1, d. 76836 (Vozdukhoplavatel'noe delo), ll. 91-92.
[152] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 59, l. 168.

than 60,000 rubles to its *yearly* state subsidy to further the "fruitful activities" that it conducted on behalf of the nation.[153]

Aside from the problem of producing qualified pilots to man its planes, the Russian military was faced with additional misfortunes in the fall of 1912. These combined to cast further public doubt upon the capability of the state to cope with the task of constructing the air fleet. In an attempt to showcase the advances being made by Russia's nascent aeronautical industry, the military organized a five-week competition, scheduled to run from late August to early September, that would coincide with similar competitions taking place in the West. In keeping with its goal of promoting Russia's national aeronautical industry, the military specified that only planes "assembled in Russian factories" were eligible to contend for the competition's 55,000 rubles in total prize money.[154] Much like the previous year's military maneuvers, however, the competition sponsored by the Ministry of War proved less than encouraging. Hampered by inclement weather and beset by numerous accidents, the competition dragged on until late October, ultimately losing the interest of the press.[155] Of the three airplanes that were awarded prize money by the Ministry, only one, Igor Sikorskii's "S-6b" biplane, might truly be called a "Russian" airplane. The remaining two craft, both produced by the Moscow "Duks" factory were, in fact, nothing more than poor reproductions of outdated French Farman and Nieuport models.[156] During the course of the disappointing competition, the state experienced a further setback when a fire broke out at the yet to be completed training school in Marmashai, destroying a number of buildings and causing some 120,000 rubles in damages.[157] Still more bad tidings followed. On 7 September the army's dirigible *Iastreb* sprang a leak and crashed, breaking its gondola in half and causing considerable damage to the inflatable airframe.[158] Miraculously, none of the militarily-trained crewmen was seriously injured in the incident.

The press was quick to criticize the government for this most recent round of military misadventures. Writing "in regards to the Russian military competition" one leading aeronautical journal reported on the shoddy performance of the planes that took part in the event and posed the

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[153] Ibid., ll. 165-166.
[154] RGVIA f. 1, op. 1, d. 76836, l. 103. The Military Ministry's restrictions on the construction of the airplanes did not apply to their parts or supplies which could (and did) come from foreign manufacturers.
[155] The competition did manage to capture the interest of at least one aeronautical journal. For an exhaustive discussion of the technical specifications of the planes that took part in the spectacle see, *Tekhnika vozdukhoplavaniia* 8-9, 10 & 12 (1912).
[156] *Vechernee vremia*, 1 October 1912.
[157] *Sovremennoe slovo*, 8 September 1912.
[158] *Rech'*, 8 September 1912.

rhetorical question: "what did the competition do for Russian military aviation?" The journal's response: "Nothing. The planes were already well-known and, to be blunt, not a one of them may truly be considered a military vehicle." The journal concluded that the only news to come out of the competition was that the military had "wasted 75,000 rubles and received nothing in return."[159] Similar scorn was evidenced by the press in its coverage of the fire at the training school. In an editorial devoted to "Our Air Fleet," the capital's leading newspaper, *Novoe vremia*, castigated the government for having "squandered over one million rubles" to rebuild the aeronautical school at the new location. As a result, the paper charged, the Russian training program had been forced "to start over from the beginning," at a desolate site whose "lack of water and poor access played a crucial role in the amount of destruction caused by the recent fire."[160] The state, it seemed, had once again failed to meet the challenges posed by the aeronautical age.

The press's latest assault on the government's failures foretold serious inadequacies that were undermining Russia's attempt to build a modern air fleet. In this respect, the criticisms of the fall 1912 military competition suggested the systemic deficiency obstructing the nation's aeronautical program: the dearth of airplane factories. In the fall of 1912, the number of Russian factories capable of assembling aeronautical craft totaled a mere four, compared to nine in Germany and more than one dozen in France.[161] True, aviation had arrived late in the land of the tsars, but the continuing inability of Russian industry to match the production capacity of its Western competitors posed a serious threat to any hope of realizing the nation's grandiose aeronautical goals.

The crisis facing the Russian aeronautical industry did not escape the attention of journalists. As early as January 1910, the journal *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* had published an insightful article alerting its readers to the essential role that industry would play in the development of an aeronautical program.[162] But amidst the optimism and fanfare accompanying Russia's earliest airborne accomplishments, the warnings of the newly established journal failed to resonate among interested circles. Not so in 1912. Alarmed by the failures of the Russian military and keenly aware of the great strides being made in the West, the Russian press turned its attention

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[159] "Po povodu russkago voennago konkursa," *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 14 (1912): 1-3. See also *Novoe vremia*, 6 October 1912.
[160] "Nash vozdushnyi flot," *Novoe vremia*, 7 September 1912.
[161] S. A. Adasinskii, "Proizvodstvo samoletov v Rossii," in G. S. Biushgens, *et al.*, eds., *Aviatsiia v Rossii* (Moscow, 1988), 278-291 (*passim*); Morrow, Jr., *The Great War in the Air*, 37 and E. Chadeau, "L'industrie française d'aviation à la veille de la première guerre mondiale," *Revue historique des armeés* 2 (1981): 63-65.
[162] *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 3 (1910): 4-6.

to "the greatest obstacle (in addition to the lack of pilots) facing the air fleet: the absence of an established aviation industry."[163] Warning that "the time of sporting aviation [had] passed," only to have been replaced by an "era of military-industrial aviation,"[164] journalists urged the government to take immediate steps to dispel the "industrial indifference" (*promyshlennaia nezainteresovannost'*) that compelled the military to rely on foreign suppliers for aircraft. In the wake of the disappointing military competition, one observer explicitly linked the poor performance of the participating planes to the state's policy of purchasing aircraft from the West:

> We have obtained the majority of our aircraft from abroad. And we have obtained that which is cheap and readily available. The foreigners keep the more reliable and expensive equipment for themselves and ship us their inferior goods. It doesn't take a genius to realize that you get what you pay for.[165]

As a result of the state's reliance upon foreign manufacturers, this writer continued, the government had run the risk of causing further damage to the cause of Russian aviation. In fact, the grim consequences of dependence upon the West for aircraft had already been seen in the 1912 military competition. Thus, the journalist concluded rather prosaically, "we find ourselves in the control of foreign factory owners and their managers from whose orders, as if from bewitched charms, emanate dark phenomena and infectious temptations driving us towards great mistakes."[166] The message was clear: Russia desperately needed to establish its own domestic aeronautical industry to provide the weapons required for its own defense. And during the current "era of vital transformations in aeronautics" it was essential that more be done to realize this end.[167]

To its credit, the Ministry of War *had* attempted to patronize the Russian aeronautical industry, beginning in 1910, by placing its initial orders with those few Russian factories capable of producing the planes and equipment that it needed. Hoping to hasten the development of Russian airplane construction, the Ministry even adopted the practice of purchasing foreign planes and patents for the purpose of providing Russian enterprises with models to copy.[168] Such efforts to jump-start Russian aeronautical production, however, were bound to fail as they could not address the fundamental cause of the problem: the overall underdeveloped state of Russian industry. Lacking the machine tools, technicians, and skilled workers present in the West, Russian factories

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[163] *Vechernee vremia*, 27 September 1912.
[164] *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 20 (1912): 6 and *K sportu!* 17 (1912): 1.
[165] *Novoe vremia*, 6 October 1912.
[166] Ibid.
[167] *Tiazhelee vozdukha* 7 (1912): 2.
[168] See, RGVIA f. 1, op. 1, d. 75771 (O zagotovlenii tabel'nogo imushchestva dlia aviatsionnykh otriadov), ll. 1-8 and RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 2999 (Materialy o aviatsii v Rossii), ll. 66-67.

were hard-pressed to keep pace with the rapid advance of aviation technology. Even in those instances where they were capable of reproducing an imported airplane chassis, Russian manufacturers were forced to equip their planes with motors and propellers imported from abroad.[169] Meanwhile, as the nation's factories continued to receive new models to reproduce, Western European manufacturers continued to hone their skills, thus precluding the possibility that Russia might overtake its more advanced rivals. Compounding this dilemma was the fact that, despite state assistance, Russian factories were incapable of producing their Blériot, Farman, and Nieuport copies at prices competitive with the Western manufacturers' originals. Thus, as it endeavored to patronize national industry, the Ministry of War invariably paid higher prices for the older, inferior planes produced by Russian manufacturers.[170] This was the lesson of the 1912 military competition.

Notwithstanding the state's efforts to patronize Russian airplane construction, the aeronautical industry could not take flight without the active support of private business leaders and investors. As the most important source of start-up capital, private investment had proven a key element in the rapid growth of the French airplane industry.[171] Unfortunately, such was not the case in Russia. In a letter to the Commander of the Office of the General Staff, the owner of the First Russian Association of Aeronautics, S. S. Shchetin, detailed the dilemmas faced by the nation's airplane manufacturers:

> [The business of] airplane construction and production still has not received recognition from commercial-industrial circles or from credit unions which are completely unfamiliar with this new branch of industry. Thus, they consider it impossible to conduct any kind of operations relating to the enterprise...In addition to private credit institutions, the State Bank, in view of its complete lack of information regarding the business and the uncertain demand for airplanes, considers it impossible to extend loans to the aeronautical industry. Thus obtaining credit for airplane production is all but ruled out. Without credit, it is impossible to fulfill those orders that are made while, conversely, without fulfilling orders it is impossible to obtain the funds needed [to conduct one's business].[172]

The difficulties faced by the Shchetin factory were not unique. Lack of investment capital and the uncertainty of demand for planes were problems that plagued each of Russia's young aeronautical firms. While state purchases did provide some certainty amidst the vagaries of conducting business

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[169] RGVIA f. 1, op. 1, d. 75771, l. 1

[170] For an overview of airplane construction in tsarist Russia see P. D. Duz', *Istoriia vozdukhoplavaniia i aviatsii v Rossii* (Moscow, 1979), 209-211.

[171] Morrow, Jr., *The Great War in the Air*, 12-14.

[172] RGVIA f. 1, op. 1, d. 75771, ll. 11-12.

in the new field of aeronautical construction, lacking increased private investment (and a greater demand for new airplanes) the nation's aviation industry remained a highly speculative venture.

The reasons behind the failure of private enterprise to support aeronautics both concerned and confounded interested observers. In an attempt to draw attention to the plight of native industry, experts wrote of the "crisis" facing Russian aeronautics and endeavored to mobilize support for Russia's fledgling factories. One commentator went so far as to attribute the lack of financial support to the proclivity of the Russian character against risk taking.

> The Russian individual is wont to approach an undertaking full of risk and adventure and as regards the [success of aeronautics] this is a real hindrance. The Russian individual (even one with means) is parsimonious with his donations. He may recklessly part with a ruble here or there but, all the same, he wants to see where his money is going...Having financed the first [aeronautical] competitions in Russia, society is now in a particularly sorry state. It doesn't want to part with its earnings.[173]

Although such abstract musings obviously lacked empirical evidence, they did convey the widely held belief that civil society, like the state itself, was not doing enough to win the battle for airborne supremacy. While many commentators saw fit to reproach the private sector for its failure readily to contribute to the cause of aeronautics, few offered practical solutions to the problems at hand. More often than not, in place of answers or insightful analysis, the press simply repeated familiar comparisons between Russia and the West in the hope of cajoling the reading public to play a more active role in supporting the nation's air efforts.

While the journalists attempted to mobilize support for the cause of Russian aviation, the architects of the state's policy of "buy now, build later" had managed to achieve a modicum of success. By the spring of 1913, the commander of the General Staff's Aeronautical Section could point to a series of material accomplishments that indicated Russia's military aviation program had finally gotten off the ground. The numbers were certainly laudable. At the time of the transfer of responsibility for aeronautical matters to the General Staff in September 1912, the Russian army had possessed eight aviation detachments which, for the most part, existed only on paper. Of these eight detachments, only four were equipped with the full complement of six airplanes, while three of the remaining detachments shared a collection of eight machines. The final detachment could boast not a single aircraft. In the early autumn of 1912 the Russian "air fleet" thus consisted of thirty-two planes, with no special provisions having been made for ensuring their supply or for

[173] *Vestnik znaniia* 10 (1911): 902.

furnishing them with spare parts.[174] By May 1913, however, the Russian air force had made substantial progress. In just under eight months, the number of aviation detachments expanded to eighteen and the total number of planes therein from thirty-two to 112. Aside from those aircraft already in the field, ninety completed planes were awaiting deployment while an additional ninety-six, scheduled for delivery in the next six weeks, were on order from various factories. Thus, according to the estimates of the Ministry of War, "it [was] evident that Russian military aviation [had] taken a gigantic step forward in the last half year for, in comparison with foreign armies, Russia now occupie[d] second place (after France) amongst the states of Europe" in the total number of military airplanes that it possessed.[175] Similarly, the military's lighter-than-air detachments could boast comparable advances. By May 1913, the number of dirigibles under military command had increased from ten to fifteen, nearly doubling Russia's standing in both categories by which European ministries measured their lighter-than-air forces: total cubic capacity and horsepower.[176]

While the state continued to invest considerable resources in an attempt to purchase a military air fleet, the nation's constructors endeavored to match the engineering feats of their European counterparts. To this end, technicians like Ia. M. Gakkel', S. S. Shchetin and A. A. Antar struggled to duplicate aircraft designs of the leading French manufacturers Nieuport, Blériot, and Voisin.[177] Notwithstanding their best efforts, no Russian technician demonstrated more skill in the field of original airplane design and construction than Igor Sikorskii.

The son of a prominent professor of psychology, Igor I. Sikorskii (1889-1972) would emerge as Imperial Russia's greatest aeronautical figure.[178] As a child, Sikorskii's exposure to the futuristic fiction of Jules Verne inspired his interests in the possibilities of human flight.[179] With the encouragement and support of his family, Sikorskii early on resolved to devote his energies to the science of aeronautics. Following his graduation from the St. Petersburg Naval Academy in 1906,

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[174] RGVIA f. 2000, op. 7, d. 231, l. 12. In addition to the thirty-two planes it already possessed, the Ministry also noted that some 155 airplanes were on order.
[175] Ibid. The Ministry included in its calculations those planes recently completed (but not yet delivered) as well as those scheduled to be built within the next month and a half. In doing so, it arrived at an (optimistic) figure of 298 Russian airplanes.
[176] Ibid., l. 13.
[177] For a complete account of airplane constructors in Imperial Russia see chapter 2 of Shavrov, *Istoriia konstruktsii samoletov v SSSR do 1938 g.*, 38-174.
[178] Recent biographies of Sikorskii include: Dorothy Cochrane, *et al.*, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky* (Seattle, 1989); K. N. Finne, *Igor Sikorsky: The Russian Years* (Washington, D.C., 1987); and G. I. Katyshev and V. P. Mikheev, *Kryl'ia Sikorskogo* (Moscow, 1992).
[179] Cochrane, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky*, 21.

Sikorskii traveled for a brief time in France before enrolling in the engineering department of Kiev's Polytechnic Institute. Upon the completion of his engineering studies, Sikorskii in 1908 undertook to build his first flying machine, a rotary powered craft patterned after the contraptions he had viewed as a child in the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci. Despite his efforts, Sikorskii's earliest helicopters proved only partially successful. Owing to the limits of contemporary motors, these experimental aircraft were woefully underpowered and capable of only short "hops" in the air without passengers. In 1910, Sikorskii abandoned helicopters and turned his attention towards the construction of fixed-wing aircraft. Over the course of some sixteen months (during which time he worked out of a barn on his father's Kiev estate) Sikorskii produced a series of monoplanes and biplanes, each more airworthy than its predecessor. In a succession of test flights personally piloted by the inventor, Sikorskii's airplanes set Russian records for altitude and flight duration.[180]

The success of Sikorskii's earliest airplane series culminated, in the late summer of 1912, with the first-place finish of the inventor's "S-6b" biplane at the Military Ministry's aeronautical competition.[181] The victory greatly enhanced Sikorskii's emerging reputation as a premier airplane constructor and drew public attention to the vital issue of domestic aircraft design and production. Sikorskii's strong showing at the competition was followed by another significant achievement, the debut, on 6 October 1912, of his "S-5a" airplane: a modified version of the "S-6" capable of landing on water. The first functional hydroplane designed by a Russian, Sikorskii's aircraft was hailed by the press, and the constructor was lionized for his contributions to the development of the nation's aviation program.[182] Writing in the wake of the hydroplane's first successful flights, one paper emphasized Sikorskii's importance to the nation and called attention to the fact that, "outside of the focus of public scrutiny, Sikorskii continues his great undertaking, attaining victory after victory and compelling us to be proud of him as the first Russian constructor mighty enough to compete with foreigners and even...to surpass them."[183] While such imputations of innovative supremacy were perhaps a bit premature, Sikorskii's successes indicated that Russian inventors were indeed capable of approaching the standards set by Western designers. To this end,

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[180] Cochrane, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky*, 21-26 and Finne, *Igor Sikorsky: The Russian Years*, 28-29.

[181] See above, 50.

[182] On Sikorskii's hydroplane see, V. N. Bychkov, "Samolety v nachalom periode ikh razvitiia," in G. S. Biushgens, *et al.*, eds., *Aviatsiia v Rossii*, 258 and Shavrov, *Istoriia konstruktsii samoletov v SSSR*, 140-142.

[183] *Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti*, 9 October 1912. The ellipses appear in the original.

Sikorskii's earliest accomplishments were welcomed by the public as hopeful signs of the promise of Russian aeronautics.

Sikorskii's status as Russia's preeminent airplane designer was further enhanced in the spring of 1913 as the nation witnessed test flights of his latest creation: the world's first multi-engined airplane. Manufactured by the Russo-Balt Carriage Factory, Sikorskii's four-engined aircraft (initially dubbed the *Grand*) was of mammoth proportions. Surpassing sixty feet in length and graced with a wingspan approaching ninety feet, the *Grand* weighed in at close to two tons. Powered by four 100 horsepower Argus engines, the airplane could accommodate up to twelve passengers, inclusive of the two man crew required to operate the behemoth. More impressive still, the *Grand* was capable of lifting in excess of 1,600 pounds and could stay aloft for hours while maintaining a cruising speed of up to fifty-five miles an hour.[184] At that time the largest airplane in the world, the *Grand* represented a major accomplishment for Russia's hard-pressed aviation industry.

While Sikorskii's *Grand* was justifiably hailed by Russian contemporaries as a "revolution in the history of world aeronautics," the "airplane-giant" symbolized the numerous contradictions that characterized Imperial aviation.[185] A technical marvel incorporating design innovations that transformed the field of aeronautics, the *Grand* was an incongruous demonstration that Russia's underdeveloped and undistinguished industry was capable of inspired feats of genius.[186] Sikorskii's resolve to construct his multi-engined aircraft flew directly in the face of conventional wisdom. Aeronautical specialists had long believed that multiple engined airplanes were inherently unstable. Supported by the (mistaken) theory that the failure of a single engine would produce asymmetrical propeller thrust, throwing the craft into a violent and uncontrollable spin, most experts dismissed the possibility of constructing multiple engined airplanes. The detailed and careful experiments that Sikorskii conducted with the *Grand* (including piloting the plane with only two of its four engines running) convincingly proved the skeptics wrong. And yet, notwithstanding its success, the Russian *Grand* earned only grudging respect from European observers, who derisively referred to Sikorskii's creation as the "Petersburg Duck."[187]

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[184] *Tekhnika vozdukhoplavaniia* 9-10 (1913): 399-401.
[185] *K sportu!* 15 (1913): 12-14.
[186] For a discussion of the *Grand*'s place in the history of airplane design and construction see Shavrov, *Istoriia konstruktsii samoletov v SSSR*, 102-105.
[187] Von Hardesty, "Introduction" to K. N. Finne, *Igor Sikorsky: The Russian Years*, 18.

The perspicacity displayed by Sikorskii in the design and construction of the craft did not, however, extend to the more mundane consideration of the airplane's storage. Far surpassing the measurements of a typical aircraft, the *Grand* was so large that it could not fit into existing hangars. As a result, the 40,000 ruble airplane was initially stored outside, exposed to the elements and shielded from the eyes of curious onlookers by only a wooden fence.[188] Like the aviation industry itself, Sikorskii's airplane suffered from the inability of Russia's underdeveloped infrastructure to exploit the opportunities made possible by the nation's visionary scientists and inventors.

In contrast to the question of the *Grand*'s storage, considerable attention was devoted to the issue of the aircraft's name. Originally dubbed the "*Bolshoi Baltiskii*" (in deference to the factory where it was constructed) but popularly known as the "*Grand*," Sikorskii's airplane received "a more appropriate" title in July when it was officially re-christened the "*Russkii vitiaz'*."[189] August, noble, and (unlike the French moniker "*Grand*") authentically Russian, "*Russkii vitiaz'*" juxtaposed the heroic image of a traditional Russian warrior with the technological marvels of the modern world. Like the ancient *bogatyr'* that defended the nation from the Eastern threat of the Mongol tribes, Sikorskii's aircraft promised to conquer the skies and advance Russia's interests against its contemporary Western challengers. With this in mind journalists hailed the airborne victories of the "Russian Warrior," noting that the craft had "captured the attention of the entire civilized world" and that neighboring nations could only "watch with envy and dread" the flights undertaken by the largest airplane ever to be constructed.[190] Lost amid the fanfare of patriotic pronouncements that surrounded the appearance of the plane were unsettling facts concerning its airworthiness. Notwithstanding the aircraft's revolutionary design, two of the four engines used to power the *Russkii vitiaz'* were old and unreliable, a fact that seriously compromised the speed and safety of the airplane.[191] Ironically, even though brand new, Imperial Russia's most advanced aircraft was threatened by obsolescence.[192]

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[188] *Tekhnika vozdukhoplavaniia* 4-5 (1913): 243 and Katyshev and Mikheev, *Kryl'ia Sikorskogo*, 94. On the airplane's cost see, *Vechernee vremia*, 10 June 1913.
[189] *K sportu!* 21 (1913): 15. The name of the aircraft can be translated as either "Russian Hero" or "Russian Warrior."
[190] *Avtomobil'naia zhizn' i aviatsiia* 6 (1914): 19.
[191] *Tekhnika vozdukhoplavaniia* 9-10 (1913): 402.
[192] Ultimately, the *Russkii vitiaz'* would fall victim to the nation's inexpert industry. Sikorskii's giant was destroyed at the 1913 military competition when the motor from a Russian-made biplane, flying overhead,

A product of Sikorskii's creative genius, the *Russkii vitiaz'* was made possible by the generous financial support of Mikhail Shidlovskii.[193] A member of the State Council and director of the Russo-Balt Carriage Factory, Shidlovskii had built a reputation as a visionary entrepreneur through his pioneering work in the nation's nascent automobile industry.[194] Combining sharp business acumen with a willingness to risk capital on speculative ventures, Shidlovskii was a rare commodity in late Imperial Russia: a generous patron with money to spare. And he spared no expense in transforming Sikorskii's visions into reality. Shidlovskii's importance to the realization of Sikorskii's aeronautical projects was not lost upon aeronautical observers. In reference to the instrumental role played by the factory director, one leading newspaper drew a stark comparison between Sikorskii's good fortune and the situation facing the designer's colleagues: "Sikorskii has succeeded in funding his projects. But Sikorskii did not work alone in this regard. Gakkel, [V. N.] Khioni and [A. A.] Porokhovshchikov also once constructed airplanes, but where are they now? They are with hundreds of others who studied in Russian aviation schools. They have left the field [for lack of funding]."[195]

The press' acknowledgment of Shidlovskii's role in supporting Sikorskii's projects was a veiled indication of continuing concerns for the future of the Russian aeronautical enterprise. Returning to a theme first addressed in 1912, newsmen again voiced frustration at the lack of private and public resources made available for the development of Russian aviation. Measuring Russia's aeronautical successes against the public subscriptions and productive capacities of Western rivals, the Russian press concluded that the nation's aviation program was undergoing a severe crisis.[196] In an impassioned letter to the newspaper *Birzhevoi den'* written in response to the "ongoing debate" over the poor state of the nation's aeronautical ventures, the aviator A. Agafonov identified the absence of public funding as the key element in explaining the shortcomings of Russian aviation. In contrast to fliers in France and Germany who flourished thanks to the donations of sponsors and benefactors, Russia's private fliers, Agafonov argued, were denied

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came loose. The eighty horsepower "Duks" engine fell to earth, hitting the *Russkii vitiaz'* and demolishing the aircraft's port wing. See *Avtomobil'naia zhizn' i aviatsiia* 6 (1914): 21.

[193] Finne, *Igor Sikorsky: The Russian Years*, 39.

[194] Shidlovskii's factory was the first and only manufacturer of Russian automobiles in the Imperial era. See Finne, *Igor Sikorsky: The Russian Years*, 37.

[195] *Golos Rusi*, 9 February 1914. See also "Russkaia sportivnaia aviatsiia v 1914 g.," *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 3 (1914): 5-8.

[196] See, for example, the articles entitled "Nasha voennaia aviatsiia," *Vechernee vremia*, 15 June 1913; "Krizis russkoi aviatsii," *Ranee utro*, 12 July 1913; "Vozdushnaia opasnost'," *Golos Rusi*, 2 February 1914 and "My i sosedy," *Voskresenaia vechernaia gazeta*, 16 February 1914 among many others.

opportunities owing to the paucity of patrons (like Shidlovskii) willing to support exhibitions and fund research. As such, while military programs were given opportunities to grow, private aviators were treated like "neglected stepsons," forced to endure second-class status at the expense of military expansion.[197] The dangerous consequences of this situation were pointed out by numerous commentators who diagnosed such symptoms as the poor construction of Russian made aircraft, the underdevelopment of the nation's aviation industry and the questionable level of Russian military preparedness as emanating from the constraints facing private aviation.[198]

The sorry state of private aviation resulted, the press concluded, from the lack of initiative demonstrated by Russian society and the uneasy, uncooperative relationship that existed between state agencies and private aeronautical establishments. In an attempt to explain the "marasmus of Russian aeronautics," one angry commentator drew explicit connections between the "death of private aeronautics in Russia" and the unimpressive performance of the nation's voluntary subscription campaign.[199] In stark contrast to the success of French and German public drives that had, to date, raised some 6.5 million francs and 7.5 million marks for both military and private aeronautical concerns, the Russian campaign had succeeded in squeezing only two million rubles from the public with "not a single kopeck of the money going to private aviation." As a result, this writer complained, "with each new day private aviation in Russia approaches its death. We do not possess a single world record and we cannot claim a single victory....Where France and Germany each possess around 100 airplane factories, we have five. And where Germany has almost 100 aeronautical societies with 100,000 members, France has 80 with 40,000 members. In Russia there are ten, with a membership of only 2,000."[200] Other commentators drew lessons from these figures and pointed to state failures as a means of explaining the "complete emasculation" of private aviation.[201] Unlike the military ministries in Germany and France, which recognized the fundamental importance of a reserve of private fliers to military preparedness (and, therefore, encouraged the growth of independent aeronautical societies), the Russian government lent no support to the nation's air-clubs, thereby hindering the advancement of private aviation.[202] Compounding matters, one observer complained, the legal restrictions placed upon private aviation remained so strict as to "kill even the idea of the possibility of the existence of aviation outside of

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[197] A. Agafonov, "Pasynki russkoi aviatsii," *Birzhevoi den'*, 29 January 1914.
[198] "Kustarnym sposobom," *Svet*, 4 July 1914.
[199] "Tam i zdes'," *Utro Rossii*, 22 March 1914.
[200] Ibid.
[201] *Novoe vremia*, 9 February 1914.
[202] See also RGVIA f. 2000, d. 240 (Vyrezki iz gazet), l. 101.

state establishments."[203] Without state support private aviation could not flourish. Nevertheless, the state had thus far proven unwilling to work with private aeronautical organizations to advance their mutual interest in developing Russian aviation.

Notwithstanding the indignation leveled against the state for its alleged failure to support private aviation, the activities of Russia's numerous aeronautical societies raised serious questions regarding their ability to work effectively with government in preparing an air fleet for the nation's defense. In the spring of 1914, Russia's private aeronautical establishments convened in St. Petersburg for the Third Aeronautical Congress. Like its predecessors, the Third Congress was intended to help coordinate the activities of the nation's many circles, clubs and societies, to assess the present condition of Russian aviation and to provide a framework for the future development of aeronautics within the Russian Empire. Like its predecessors, however, the Third Congress fell far short of its goals.[204] In light of the "deep crisis plaguing Russian aviation," aeronautical observers expected that the Third Congress would devote its attention to developing solutions to the problems besetting the industry. One observer even suggested the creation of "a central command establishment that would regulate the aeronautical life of the *whole* country and unite the activities of local aeronautical organization;" a recommendation remarkably similar to plans for the still unrealized Aeronautical Union first proposed in 1911 and subsequently revived in 1912.[205] Unfortunately, the paltry results of the Third Aeronautical Congress made even the previous two gatherings appear productive. In a biting review of the Congress's activities, one disillusioned critic remarked that it "provided no possible means of familiarizing the public with the current status of Russian aeronautics, with all of its inadequacies and problems."[206] In support of his observations, this writer noted:

> Not one society...provided any sort of accounting of its undertakings or work. Even IVAK, the strongest Russian organization, [decided] for no apparent reasons not to fulfill its obligation of informing Congress participants of its activities and its status. Even more bizarre was the absence of representatives from a whole array of Russian aeronautical organizations...It would appear as if this was not the 'All Russian Aeronautical Congress' but rather the 'Moscow-St. Petersburg Aeronautical Assembly.'

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[203] *Novoe vremia*, 9 February 1914.
[204] For a survey of press criticism of the Third Congress see the coverage in the following newspapers: *Golos Rusi*, *Moskovskiia vedomosti*, *Novoe vremia*, *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, *Peterburgskii kur'er'*, *Rech'* and *Utro Rossii* 9-16 April 1914.
[205] *Moskovskiia vedomosti*, 9 April 1914. The italics appear in the original.
[206] "Bankrotstvo," *Utro Rossii*, 16 April 1914.

Characterizing the activities of the Congress as evidence of the "complete bankruptcy of private aeronautics in Russia," the press made evidently clear its disappointment with the achievements of the nation's aeronautical patrons.[207]

The harsh criticism directed at the Third Aeronautical Congress was, in turn, a reflection of press disillusionment with the capabilities of the Congress's individual institutional members. And this disillusionment was nowhere more apparent than in the growing vocal antipathy towards the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club. Although the disaster of the St. Petersburg–Moscow Race dealt IVAK's reputation a serious blow, the Aero-Club had never been immune from the criticism of the press. Notwithstanding the organization's standing as the first and most prominent air club in Russia, IVAK had long come under sharp attacks for its bloated hierarchy, regal atmosphere and lack of seriousness in serving the nation's aviation needs. As early as January 1910, one leading journal had openly derided IVAK, attacking the air club for attracting individuals who in no way contributed to the aeronautical cause. Claiming that "of the 700 members in the club, hardly two percent have any direct ties to aeronautics and can do anything in the field," the journal ridiculed IVAK for having obtained "the overwhelming majority of its members purely by chance and as a result of the fact that [aviation was] in fashion."[208] Similarly harsh criticisms of the Club were leveled by other observers. Characterizing IVAK's posh St. Petersburg headquarters (complete with fine chandeliers and tropical plants) as "a luxurious rout in which the Club's members and their guests could while away the hours," *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* disparaged the dilettantish organization for "having created an illusion for the public that [Russia] possesses an establishment capable of undertaking positive work for the nation's aeronautical program" when "in actual fact the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club has [done nothing in this regard]."[209] Three years later and despite of the club's best efforts, public opinion toward the organization had changed very little. In a vicious 1913 exposé of the air club, a leading weekly castigated the club's members as "a group of typical bureaucratic servants who rally together under the flag of a beautiful sport but [whose] 'honorable' activity has done nothing for aviation in general or the nation's aviation in particular." Rather than advancing the cause of Russian aviation, the article alleged, "club members, in hot pursuit of tawdry badges and formal titles, profane this great sport

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[207] Ibid. For similarly harsh reviews of the Congress see, *Novoe vremia* 10 & 11 April 1914; *Peterburgskaia* gazeta, 11 April 1914; *Peterburgskii kur'er'*, 11 April 1914; *Golos Rusi*, 12 April 1914 and *Rech'*, 15 April 1914.
[208] *Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'* 1 (1910): 8.
[209] *Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia* 3 (1910): 6.

and concern themselves, for the most part, with trying to enroll a few more ballerinas in the club...The Chairman of the Aero-Club, Count Stenbok-Fermor, is a rabid ballet fan. Good for him. To each his own. But what does ballet have to do with aviation?"[210]

The animosity directed toward the Imperial All-Russian Aero-Club was a striking indication of the ongoing difficulties faced by the nation's aeronautical organizations. As the most prominent proponents of Russian aviation, organizations like IVAK had expected to play instrumental roles in fostering the "air-consciousness" of the nation's citizenry. In helping to coordinate the Empire's voluntary subscription, sponsoring exhibitions, organizing competitions and training fliers, air clubs and societies had attempted to mobilize the nation, infusing ordinary citizens with a passion for flight and drawing upon their financial support for the establishment of a Russian air fleet. Including in their ranks members of the most elite political, scientific and cultural circles, aviation societies seemed destined to fulfill admirably the problems posed by the aeronautical age.[211] Nevertheless, by the middle of 1914 it appeared that even the most devoted aeronautical patrons had failed to solve a series of systemic problems that undermined attempts to establish a modern air fleet and threatened to rob the nation of its aeronautical dreams. From the continuing conflicts between state and private enterprises to the paralysis of the aeronautical congresses and from the difficulties of reproducing foreign airplane designs to the inability to establish an independent aviation industry, Imperial Russia had yet to overcome the formidable challenges posed by the modern age of flight. And yet, notwithstanding these continuing problems, the nation's aeronautical patrons could point to a series of real accomplishments that had contributed to the rapid development of Russian aviation: the creation of a nationwide network of aeronautical clubs, circles and societies devoted to expanding air consciousness, the organization of countless competitions and public spectacles that had raised public awareness of flight and, finally, the collection of funds that had helped to purchase a national air fleet ranking second only to the French in number of planes.

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[210] Konstantin Makovskii, "'Deiateli' russkago vozdukhoplavaniia...," *Sinii zhurnal* 35 (1913): 11. For yet another attack on the Aero-Club and its activities see M. N. Likharev, "A Vas'ka slushaet da kushaet ili nasha vozdukhoplavatel'," *Sinii zhurnal* 39 (1913): 7.

[211] Although no statistical analysis of air-club membership in Imperial Russia has yet been undertaken, a brief survey of the organizations' rosters indicates that they included leading representatives of both state and society. Among its members, for example, IVAK counted such illuminaries as P. A. Stolypin, S. Iu. Witte, P. N. Trubetskoi and more than two dozen members of the State Duma. See the club's membership rolls, regularly published in *Imperatorskii Vserossiiskii Aero-Klub Zhurnal.* 1908-1914 in *Vozdukhoplavatel'*.

Flights of Fancy

As war clouds gathered on the nation's western horizon, Russian citizens were feted with a final, fleeting glimpse of the aeronautical glory they had longed to attain. In the late spring and early summer of 1914, the public again turned its gaze skyward in tribute to the accomplishments of the country's greatest airplane constructor. Following the demolition of his prized *Russkii vitiaz'*, Igor Sikorskii had resolved to redouble his efforts with the creation of a second air giant, more stable, more airworthy and more practical than his original. First tested in the winter of 1913, Sikorskii's newest creation, the *Il'ia Muromets*, was unveiled to the public in a spectacular series of demonstration flights that sparked the imagination of the most obdurate skeptics and offered hope that Russia might yet attain prominence in the battle for the skies.

Like its predecessor, the *Russkii vitiaz'*, the *Il'ia Muromets* was a stunning achievement in airplane construction. Possessing a wingspan some twenty percent greater than the *Russkii vitiaz'* and capable of lifting more than 2,000 pounds, the *Il'ia Muromets* represented a significant improvement over Sikorskii's first multiple-engine airplane.[212] Of particular interest were the changes made by Sikorskii in the design of the aircraft's fuselage. Unlike the cabin of the *Russkii vitiaz'* which sat atop the plane's central frame, the passenger hold of the *Muromets* was incorporated into the fuselage, a design innovation that streamlined the airplane and would serve as the model for all future military and civilian passenger craft.[213] More impressive still were the dimensions of the new passenger compartment. Over five feet wide and six feet high, it was capable of comfortably accommodating up to a dozen people (although, on one flight, Sikorskii was able to cram sixteen passengers and a dog into the plane).[214] Specially equipped to meet passengers' needs on long distance flights, the fuselage was divided into several compartments complete with wicker chairs and small tables. The airplane also included a sleeping cabin and an observation platform which was mounted towards the rear of the craft. Additional features included a generator for producing electric light to illuminate the cabin, a heating system and a toilet.[215]

The presentation of the *Il'ia Muromets* to the Russian public was accompanied by delirious endorsements from the press. Forgetting (at least for the time being) the recent criticism they had leveled at the nation's aeronautical program, Russia's newsmen responded with a series of

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[212] For the technical specifications of the airplane see RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 2113 (Perepiska s GUGSh o formirovanii eskadrili 'Il'ia Muromets'), l. 191.
[213] Shavrov, *Istoriia konstruktsii samoletov v SSSR*, 222.
[214] Cochrane, *et al.*, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky*, 37.
[215] Ibid., 38.

patriotic pronouncements that glorified Sikorskii and paid glowing tribute to his latest creation. Proclaiming the appearance of the new airplane as proof that the "light [of creativity] truly shines from the East," the press acknowledged the now indisputable fact that Russian aviation could "soar so high and successfully."[216] Other no less awestruck observers used the occasion of the plane's unveiling to deride the accomplishments of the nation's competitors and to advance Sikorskii's flying giant as the new herald of the future of aviation.[217] The initial outburst of patriotic passion gave way to unrestrained nationalistic delirium in June of 1914 as Sikorskii undertook a round-trip flight between St. Petersburg and Kiev to demonstrate the capabilities of his airplane.[218] Hailing the "brilliant flight of the glorious Russian flier" aboard his "miraculous *bogatyr'*," the press trumpeted the "colossal practical meaning" of the St. Petersburg–Kiev flight and proclaimed Sikorskii's latest creation incontrovertible proof that "Russian fliers, in their craftsmanship, experience and endurance concede nothing to the so-called...German 'kings of the air.'"[219] With his "demonstration to the stunned world that Russia truly does possess dread military weapons for use against its enemies," Sikorskii had proven that "Russian military aviation [was] once again in the forefront of world aeronautics."[220]

The frenetic response to the presentation of the *Il'ia Muromets* took place at a time of growing European uncertainty and rising political tensions. Only the day before Sikorskii's air giant first touched down at the Kiev aerodrome, the press had reported on the assassination of the Hapsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, an event that shook the European community and that would ultimately precipitate the First World War. In light of the tense atmosphere that hovered over Europe in the summer of 1914, the bombastic reception of the *Il'ia Muromets* is more easily understood. For weeks preceding the St. Petersburg—Kiev flight, newspapers had been filled with reports documenting the strengths of the German air fleet and warning the public of increasingly frequent incursions by the German air force across the nation's Western border.[221] For nervous Russians, anxious for reassurance of their personal safety, the successes of the *Il'ia*

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[216] *Nizhegorodskii listok*, 20 February 1914.
[217] See, for example, *Golos Rusi*, 23 February 1914. Alongside of articles on the airplane the paper printed a cartoon that depicted a soaring *Il'ia Muromets* juxtaposed with an exploding zeppelin.
[218] For press coverage of the round-trip flight from St. Petersburg–Kiev flight see the following newspapers: *Golos Rusi*, *Kievskaia mysl'*, *Novoe vremia*, and *Peterburgskii listok* among many others. A narrative description of the flight can be found in Cochrane, *et al.*, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky*, 38-43.
[219] *Moskovskiia vedomosti*, 19 June 1914 and *Golos Rusi*, 25 March 1914
[220] *Avtomobil'naia zhizn' i aviatsiia* 7 (1914): 21 and *Russkoe znamia*, 22 June 1914.
[221] On the government's surveillance of the Austrian and German aviation programs see RGVIA, f. 802, op. 4. d. 3001 (Raporty o razvitii vozdukhoplavaniia za granitsi).

Muromets instilled the fanciful notion that the nation was prepared for the onset of war. And yet, like the fleeting wave of patriotic unity and national accord that would sweep over the nation in the first months of the conflict, the reassurance and hope provided by the *Il'ia Muromets* could not transcend the grim realities confronting Imperial Russia.

The inherent, systemic weaknesses of the Imperial aviation program were quickly revealed with the commencement of hostilities. In the early spring of 1914, the General Staff had approved a comprehensive plan for the reorganization and reequipment of the military's aviation sections. The five-year plan, which included the appropriation of some 300 new aircraft and the establishment of ten squadrons of *Il'ia Muromtsy*, had hardly been set into motion when the war began.[222] The Russian air command was caught off guard. In addition to the organizational chaos brought about by the administrative transition, the military's aviation detachments suffered from the anemic growth of the aeronautical industry. As late as July 1914, the Russian Empire still possessed only four factories capable of producing airplane chassis and two factories that could produce motors.[223] Although the number of factories equipped to build airplanes and engines would expand to eight by the fall of 1915, Imperial Russia entered the Great War woefully unprepared to challenge the colossal industrial capacity of its Western foes.[224]

Compounding the problem of production capacity, the nation's aviation factories were bedeviled by manufacturing problems that undermined the airworthiness of the planes they could produce. Despite the brilliant achievements of Igor Sikorskii's gargantuan aircraft, Russian factories continued to demonstrate remarkable incompetence in reproducing the basic French models that served as the foundation of the military's air fleet. Some six weeks prior to the start of the war, *Novoe vremia* published an alarming article decrying the abilities of the nation's manufacturers to duplicate widely used French Nieuport airplanes. The presence of military fliers in overseeing the airplanes' production notwithstanding, Russian factories, the article revealed, had proven incapable of producing quality replicas. Moreover, the factories' incompetence had cost at least one military aviator his life.[225] As a result of the "flimsy and slipshod production of Nieuport airplanes," one squadron commander issued an order forbidding his pilots from flying the

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[222] RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 3002 (Raporty o sostoianii aviatsii i vozdukhoplavaniia Frantsii i Germanii), ll. 99-107. On the formation of the *Il'ia Muromets* squadrons see RGVIA f. 29, op. 3, d. 1528, ll. 26-31.
[223] RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 2998 (Doklady voennomu ministru i perepiska s GUGSh o rezultatakh sledstviia po delu germanskikh vozdukhoplavatelei), ll. 89-90. The military estimated that these factories could produce thirty new airplanes a month.
[224] RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 3019 (Doklady o sostoianii i kachestva samoletov), l. 34.
[225] *Novoe vremia*, 14 June 1914.

aircraft.[226] In the two years since the disappointing military competition of 1912, Russian manufacturers had yet to perfect the process of reproducing already established airplane systems. It was a bad omen for a nation that had built its air fleet on the basis of imported aircraft.

In addition to exacerbating the perennial problems plaguing the Russian aviation industry, the Great War created new obstacles for the nation's airplane manufacturers. Within six weeks of the inauguration of hostilities, worried factory owners wrote frantic letters to the General Staff warning of the "persistent shortages" they confronted in attempting to replenish the military's aircraft. Owing to a "lack of motors and essential spare parts" Russian factories quickly encountered "extreme difficulties in building new planes."[227] To alleviate this problem factories sent representatives abroad to France and Britain, hoping to secure a steady supply of parts and motors.[228] When negotiations with the Western Allies proved ineffectual, factory agents were sent as far as Japan and the United States (and even to Denmark and Sweden) in a desperate attempt to procure airplanes and their components.[229] Compounding these problems, factory owners were forced to contend with the rising tide of worker unrest that grew in accordance with the dislocations of the war. Beginning in the summer of 1915 (and continuing until Russia's exit from the conflict), airplane manufacturing plants faced periodic strikes and work stoppages that interrupted production and further undermined efforts to supply the army with the aircraft it needed.[230] Ironically, just a few short months after celebrating its greatest triumph with the spectacular flights of the world's largest and most advanced airplane, Russia's aviation program was grounded for a lack of spare parts.

Imperial Russia's erratic response to the conquest of the air revealed the internal contradictions at work as state and society struggled to greet the advent of modernity. Politically divided and industrially underdeveloped, tsarist Russia could not meet the demands of the modern age of flight. In other times and in other contexts, the well-tested formula of importing Western expertise had proven an effective means of meeting the demands of technological modernization.

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[226] RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 2846 (Perepiska s aviatsionnym obshchestvom 'Shchetin' o nedostatakh konstruktsii samoletov 'N'iupor'), l. 32.
[227] RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 2621 (Perepiska s GUGSh o predostavlenii voennymi agentami za granitsei), l. 40.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Notwithstanding their best efforts, the factory representatives proved unsuccessful. See RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 2621, *passim*.
[230] For materials pertaining to strikes and work-stoppages in Russia's aviation factories during the First World War see RGVIA f. 802, op. 4, d. 3007 (Doklady voennomu ministru o roste zabastochnogo dvizheniia v aviatsionnykh fabikakh).

But as the twentieth century advanced, bringing with it the heralds of a mechanized modernity, temporal distinctions dissolved and spatial barriers collapsed, compelling the nation to transcend its past or be overcome by more capable neighbors.

The failure of the Imperial Russian aeronautical enterprise can be traced to the latent conflicts between state and society that emerged as each sought to establish developmental paradigms for the benefit of the nation. Notwithstanding their shared vision of an economically prosperous and technically proficient Russia, the tsarist government and tsarist society demonstrated a frustrating inability to coordinate their aims in the advancement of their mutual interests. Measuring themselves against the successes of their foreign counterparts and desiring to realize the social and political institutions of Europe's greatest states, private aeronautical organizations advanced a vision of technical progress that defined Russian society in the context of the West. And yet, in vacillating between the condemnation of and compromise with official state agencies, private aeronautical observers displayed an infirmity of purpose that simultaneously derided state efforts while demanding state support for the establishment of private aviation. For its part, the tsarist government pursued a no less contradictory policy. Acknowledging the need for public involvement in advancing the cause of the air fleet, the state nevertheless circumscribed the role of private individuals and monopolized the limited resources available to aviation. In failing to embrace one another as co-equal partners in the conquest of the air, the Russian state and Russian society each alienated the one constituency that may have proven most helpful in turning the nation's flights of aeronautical fancy into the daily realities of a modern air-minded nation.

Chapter II

A Dictatorship of the Air: The Creation of Soviet Aeronautical Culture, 1918-1923

> The war taught us much, not only that people suffered, but also the fact that those who have the best technology, organization, discipline and the best machines emerge on top; it is this that the war has taught us. It is essential to learn that without machines, without discipline, it is impossible to live in modern society. It is necessary to master the highest technology or be crushed.
>
> —V. I. Lenin, 1918[†]

> We will build aviation to defend our freedom and, perhaps, to help colonies regain their independence. We will build aviation for economic, cultural and military goals; an aviation of workers and the oppressed. We will persistently and relentlessly introduce aviation into the daily life and practices of the nation. We must always remember that aviation is not just a plaything, nor is it simply one of the many technical resources available to an army. Rather, aviation is the great instrument of the future. It joins the earth and the sea to the heavens, producing a great new arena for human creativity.
>
> —L. D. Trotskii, 1923[‡]

The Origins of Soviet Air-mindedness

I

On 1 March 1923, thirty-three of the Soviet Republic's newspapers embarked upon a mass mobilization drive to generate public support for the establishment of a national air fleet. Alerting the Soviet reading public to the essential role of aviation in securing the stability and safety of the workers' and peasants' revolution, the nation's most prominent dailies and journals inaugurated an extensive campaign to raise awareness of the state's commitment to the cause of "Red aviation." For more than four months following the publication of the 1 March announcements, the topic of aeronautics dominated the Soviet press as countless stories on "the weapon of the future" commanded readers to turn their attention to the air fleet and endeavored to educate the Soviet

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[†] V. I. Lenin, "Zakliuchitel'noe slovo po dokladu o ratifikatsii mirnogo dogovora 15 marta," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, tom 36 (Moscow, 1969), 116.

[‡] L. D. Trotskii, *Aviatsiia–orudie budushchego* (Ekaterinburg, 1923), 7-8.

public about the pressing need to conquer the air.[1] In the process, the Soviet press explored every facet of aviation, printing stories on such disparate subjects as the evolution of aeronautical warfare (and recent Western European developments in that regard) to the possible role of aviation in building the national economy.[2] From the airplane's value as a "bearer of culture" to its potential applications in fighting forest fires and swarms of locusts, no topic touching upon the issue of aviation was left unexplored by the nation's leading newspapers.[3] Indeed, so complete was press coverage that every day, for eight consecutive weeks, *Izvestiia* devoted the majority of its front page to the issue of aviation.[4]

The unrelenting attention suddenly devoted to the question of flight had appeared with little warning. Prior to the beginning of the publicity campaign the news media had shown only a passing concern for aviation. While reports on the progress of European aviation had been published on an irregular basis and articles concerning the activities of "Red aviators" had appeared periodically during the course of the Civil War and the nation's brief war with Poland, the press had given no prior indication that it was set to embark upon an extended public campaign.[5] More surprising still was the 9 March announcement that the first organizational meeting of a "Society of Friends of the Air Fleet" had recently taken place on the grounds of a Moscow military school.[6] Committed to ensuring that Soviet Russia achieve a level of military preparedness comparable to that of the capitalist powers of Western Europe and aware of the vital role that aviation would play in attaining this goal, leading figures of the aeronautical industry had resolved to establish a "voluntary society" to support the development of Soviet air-mindedness. To this end a group of representatives from the field of aeronautics gathered in Moscow on 8 March to

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[1] See "Orudie budushchego," *Pravda*, 3 June 1923; "Bol'she vnimanie vozdukhoplavaniiu," *Izvestiia KPSS*, 10 February 1923; "Vnimanie k vozdushnomu flotu," *Aero-sbornik* 1 (1923): 11-12 and "My dolzhny zavoevat' vozdukh!," *Pravda*, 25 May 1923 among countless others. The most complete coverage of aeronautical matters can be found in the newspaper *Izvestiia KPSS* (hereafter, *Izvestiia*), which led the press campaign.

[2] See for example, "Uspekhi aviatsii za granitsei," *Pravda*, 4 March 1923; "Aviatsiia dlia mirnoi raboty," *Pravda*, 3 June 1923 and "Promyshlennost' i aviatsiia," *Izvestiia*, 17 August 1923 among many others.

[3] On the relationship between aviation and culture, see *Izvestiia*, 2 March 1923. On the use of airplanes in combating natural disasters, see "Vnimaniiu Dobroleta," *Pravda*, 16 May 1923 and "Aviatsiia v bor'be s saranchei," *Izvestiia*, 10 May 1923.

[4] The coverage appeared from 1 March to 30 April. *Izvestiia* continued to run regular front page articles on aviation well into the month of August.

[5] Examples of early Soviet reports on aviation include: "Krasnye letchiki," *Izvestiia*, 4 July 1919; "Vozdushnyi flot," *Izvestiia*, 1 October 1920; "Eshche ob aviatsii," *Izvestiia*, 25 September 1920 and "Vozdukhoflot," *Izvestiia*, 28 January 1921. See also the regular coverage that appeared in the aeronautical journals *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota*, *Vozdukhoplavanie* and *Vozdushnyi flot*.

[6] *Izvestiia*, 9 March 1923.

lay the foundation for a "Society of Friends of the Air Fleet" (*Obshchestvo druzei vozdushnogo flota*, or ODVF). "Surprised to see many faces [at the gathering] that they did not recognize," the aeronautical representatives concluded that the press campaign "had [broadcast] the idea of a strong air fleet throughout the people" and that, in a spontaneous show of support for the Soviet aeronautical cause, legions of ordinary citizens had flocked to the meeting to voice their approval of the establishment of a Red air fleet.[7] It was an auspicious start for the mass-mobilization campaign.

The claims of public spontaneity made in the pages of the Party's press organs notwithstanding, the establishment of ODVF and the newspaper campaign that preceded it were the products of a planned, systematic and centralized strategy. Hardened by the experiences of the nation's civil war and alert to the continuing dangers posed by hostile foreign powers, Soviet Russia's political leadership had come to recognize the value of aviation in the conduct of modern warfare. As a reconnaissance instrument, method of transportation and weapon of psychological terror, the airplane would play an increasingly important role in future battles.[8] Dedicated to ensuring the ultimate victory of the workers' and peasants' revolution against the forces of world imperialism, the Soviet leadership resolved to modernize the Red Army through organizational restructuring and by providing it with more technologically advanced weaponry.[9] Among Soviet Russia's technological concerns, "aviation occupie[d] first place."[10]

The architects of Soviet air-mindedness faced a difficult task in their quest to build a modern, technologically proficient air force. Whatever benefits they might have derived from the aeronautical build-up of the Imperial era were largely depleted by the time the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917. Although the mobilization of Russian industry in 1915 had increased productive capacities, the aviation industry still could not meet the pressing needs posed by total war, nor cope with the immense dislocations that took place during the final months of combat.[11] Of the more than ninety-one Imperial aviation squadrons that ultimately saw duty during the First World War, only thirty-three (comprising some 300 largely unserviceable and obsolete aircraft)

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[7] "Obshchestvo druzei vozdushnogo flota," *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota* 2 (1923): 143.
[8] L. D. Trotskii, *Aviatsiia–orudie budushchego*, 2.
[9] For background on the decision to reorganize the Red Army, see Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca, 1990), 183-205. The Soviet government's recognition of the importance of modernizing military technology is documented in RTsKhIDNI f. 5, op. 1, d. 2520 (Razvitiie voennoi tekhniki s 1914 g.), ll. 1-26.
[10] L. D. Trotskii, *Perspektivy i zadachi voennogo stroitel'stva* (Moscow, 1923), 17.
[11] Lewis Siegelbaum, *The Politics of Industrial Mobilization in Russia, 1914-1917* (Hong Kong, 1983). On the supply problems faced by the Imperial air fleet in World War I, see above, chapter 2, 56-57.

remained operational by the spring of 1918.[12] The defection of air force personnel compounded the precipitous decline of the Imperial air fleet as scores of officer-pilots deserted the Bolsheviks in the wake of October to take up arms with White guardist forces.[13]

The challenges posed by the destruction of the Imperial air force were greatly magnified as a result of the widespread devastation caused by the Civil War. The cycle of violence occasioned by the events of 1918-1921 fundamentally transformed the Russian landscape and imposed daunting new obstacles for those seeking to propel the nation into the modern age.[14] By the end of 1921, Bolshevik leaders had witnessed the near total collapse of Russia's industrial production with factory output standing at less than twenty percent of its 1913 levels. Dizzying declines in the production of coal, steel and pig iron meant that even those factories capable of operating were faced with continuous shortages of essential raw materials. The condition of the agricultural sector was equally bleak. In 1921 the nation harvested just over thirty-seven million tons of grain, less than half of the amount collected in the last year before the war.[15]

The near total collapse of the Russian economy was accompanied by tremendous social dislocations that laid waste to Russia's major urban centers. In a desperate search for relief from the threats of famine and continuing unrest, the nation's urban populations fled the cities for the relative security of the Russian countryside. By 1920, owing to the urban exodus, the population of Moscow had declined to half of its 1917 level, while the former capital of St. Petersburg witnessed an even more catastrophic loss, plummeting from 2.5 million in 1917 to only 700,000 inhabitants in 1920.[16] The pressures caused by the mass flight from the cities were compounded by the burdens brought about by the demobilization of millions of Red Army men that began in the winter of 1920-1921. Returning to their native villages and towns, legions of former Soviet soldiers would ultimately serve as the "formative cohort" in providing the personnel necessary for the

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[12] V. S. Shumikhin, *Sovetskaia voennaia aviatsiia, 1917-1941* (Moscow, 1986), 19 and Alexander Boyd, *The Soviet Air Force Since 1918* (New York, 1977), 6.

[13] *Krasnyi vozdushnyi flot v grazhdanskoi voine v SSSR, 1918-1921* (Moscow, 1968), 21. For a personal account of the Civil War from the standpoint of a white guardist pilot, see Alexander Riaboff, *Gatchina Days: Reminiscences of a Russian Pilot*. Translated by Von Hardesty (Washington, DC, 1986).

[14] For recent histories of the Russian Civil War see: Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (Oxford, 1989); Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston, 1989) and W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York, 1987).

[15] All the figures are taken from Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (London, 1992), 19.

[16] Figures cited in Diane Koenker, "Urbanization and Deurbanization in the Russian Revolution and Civil War," in Diane P. Koenker, William Rosenberg and Ronald G. Suny, eds., *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History*, (Bloomington, 1989), 81.

administration of the new Russian regime.[17] But in the short term, with cities deserted and industrial production at a standstill, their arrival from the fronts in the Caucasus, Siberia, Ukraine and Poland only added to the chaos that prevailed in the Russian countryside.[18]

The destruction and dislocations occasioned by the Civil War proved problematic for the nation's new leadership. Schooled in the deterministic maxims of nineteenth-century Marxism, members of the Bolshevik Party adhered to an eschatological vision predicated upon a faith in the future triumph of industrial labor. Through the application of the scientific principles of dialectical materialism, Party theorists believed that they had reached an understanding of the past and that they would soon realize the ends of history in the establishment of the world's first socialist state. Guided by the principles of an urban ideology, Bolshevik leaders set out to recast the present in terms of a future modeled on the vision of a technically proficient and highly advanced industrial state. Notwithstanding such grandiloquent dreams, the harsh economic and political realities that they faced in the wake of the Civil War compelled Bolshevik leaders to turn their immediate attention to the basic tasks of rebuilding social networks and refashioning political institutions as they attempted to modernize the most backward of Europe's major nations.

Faced with severe shortages of food and consumer goods and impatient to resolve a growing manpower crisis brought about by the conflict with Poland, Soviet leaders quickly turned to the mass mobilization of the civilian population as a means of solving the nation's critical domestic problems.[19] To this end, the decision of the Ninth Party Congress (29 March-4 April, 1920) to approve a policy of compulsory labor and the subsequent creation of nation-wide "labor armies" were important early attempts to mobilize and "militarize" Soviet society for the task of building socialism.[20] Although these policies had been hotly contested by some factions within the Party (and would be abolished with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921), their implementation in the spring of 1920 was a clear indication that the Party leadership was

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[17] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Legacy of the Civil War," in Koenker, *et al.*, eds., *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War*, 392.

[18] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 129.

[19] Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 121-125 and Francesco Benvenuti, *The Bolsheviks and the Red Army, 1918-1922* (Cambridge, 1988), 162-168. For a discussion of the Bolsheviks' mobilization of labor as a utopian experiment, see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), 46-52.

[20] James Bunyan, *The Origin of Forced Labor in the Soviet State, 1917-1921: Documents and Materials* (Baltimore, 1967), 117-150. For an analysis of the term "militarization" and its utility as a descriptor of Soviet political culture in the 1920s, see the introduction to von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 1-12.

disposed to employing centrally controlled methods of mass mobilization to solve the problems they encountered in governing the nation. When the Civil War drew to a close, the Party hierarchy would return to such strategies as the means for completing the socialist revolution launched in October 1917.

As one of the first organized attempts to mobilize mass public support behind the revolutionary regime in the aftermath of the Civil War, the Campaign for the Establishment of a Red Air Fleet represented both the utopian propensities and political pragmatism of the young Soviet government. Committed to the task of overcoming Russia's backwardness and cognizant of the vital importance of technology to the establishment of a modern nation, leading figures of the Bolshevik Party embarked upon a mass mobilization campaign in the spring of 1923 to raise public awareness of the importance of aviation. Coordinating recruitment strategies first employed by Imperial aeronautical patrons with innovative approaches designed to foster air-mindedness in the masses, Soviet leaders purposely set out to create a new Soviet consciousness while establishing the institutional framework necessary for the development of the nation's aviation programs. The campaign thus helped to legitimize the gains of October by encouraging a sense of socialist solidarity amongst the nation's populace.

Accompanying the Party's efforts to mobilize support for the construction of Red aviation, the creation of ODVF promoted the larger ideological imperative of modernizing the nation by reconstructing political and social networks destroyed during the Civil War.[21] As a Party controlled agency designed to foment popular support for state aeronautical policies, the "voluntary society" ODVF would function on both the national and local level as an institutional transmitter for the inculcation of social values deemed essential to the success of the Revolution. In this way, the establishment of the "Friends of the Air Fleet" represented the dual nature of Bolshevik aeronautical policy as Party leaders attempted to realize the military necessity of establishing an air fleet while building social and political support for their ideological visions through the creation of an organizational network designed to promote volunteerism on the part of the nation's populace.

As an educational tool, bearer of culture, and ready means of rapid transportation, the airplane was esteemed by Bolshevik leaders for its utilitarian functions in effecting the establishment of a modern socialist order. Viewed in relation to the activities and goals pursued by pre-war aeronautical patrons, the Soviet approach to Red aviation represented a fundamental

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[21] For an account of the social disintegration produced by the Civil War, see Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth-Century Russia," *Slavic Review* 47 (Spring 1988): 24-47.

departure from the traditions of Imperial air-mindedness. No longer simply concerned with the symbolic value of aviation as a demonstration of cultural and technological progress, Bolshevik leaders appropriated the airplane as an essential tool in the construction of socialist culture. For its unparalleled abilities to improve material conditions, to contribute to defense and to serve as a medium in promoting national unity, aviation was employed by Soviet authorities as a key element in overcoming Russia's legacy of backwardness and as a means to assuring the triumph of socialism.

II

The impetus for the press campaign and for the construction of Soviet aviation was provided by the chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council (RMC), Lev Trotskii. In a series of memos circulated to the members of the RMC during the winter of 1922-1923, Trotskii drew attention to the pressing need for both military and civilian air fleets. Cognizant of the important role played by the airplane in the conduct of the First World War and convinced that aviation would prove a vital instrument in promoting the economic, cultural and military prosperity of the Soviet Republic, Trotskii urged the council's members to take immediate steps to establish Soviet aviation.[22] With this goal in mind, the Council's chairman called for the establishment of a "Society of Friends of the Red Air Fleets" and suggested that the military institute an annual "Day of Aviation" to draw public attention to the importance of Soviet aeronautics.[23]

In response to Trotskii's summons, the RMC set out to devise a strategy that would quickly lay the foundations of a Soviet Air Fleet while heightening public awareness of aviation's significance to the defense of the Revolution. The particulars of the RMC approach were spelled out in an exhaustive dispatch drafted by council member Sergei Kamenev. Kamenev outlined an intensive, eight-week media campaign to be aimed at educating the Soviet public of the need for an air fleet. The Kamenev draft was divided into two sections. The first of these described the weekly themes that would be addressed by the Soviet print media, while the second provided specific instructions regarding "the essays that should appear in the press" during each day of the eight-week campaign.[24] On 6 February, members of the RMC met with representatives of eight Soviet

[22] See RGVA f. 33987, op. 1, d. 558 (Doklad ob organizatsii grazhdanskogo vozdushnogo flota), ll. 1-18.
[23] Ibid., ll. 2-3.
[24] Ibid., ll. 71-77. The list of daily essays appears on ll. 73-77.

newspapers to direct them on how best to implement the strategy.[25] At the meeting, the papers' representatives were briefed on the measures thus far taken by the RMC to establish the air fleet and were provided with instructions by the council regarding the means they were to employ in publicizing the importance of the aeronautical cause. To ensure that the Campaign adhered to the agenda described in the Kamenev plan, the council created a governing Presidium, comprised of six of its members, to oversee organizational work and to monitor press content during the mobilization drive. The Presidium, in turn, established a three-man commission to draft, "in full legal order," a founding charter for the "Society of Friends of the Air Fleet." Following the Society's inaugural meeting on 8 March, responsibility for the administration of the aeronautical campaign would pass to ODVF.[26]

According to the mandate handed down to the voluntary society, the primary purpose of the Friends of the Air Fleet was to ensure the "establishment and strengthening of a military and civilian air fleet in the first proletarian republic."[27] To achieve this sweeping (albeit ill-defined) goal, ODVF numbered amongst its most important tasks: development of a stable and independent aviation industry, the promotion of scientific and technical research related to aviation issues, mobilization of social attention towards the need for a national air fleet, organization and development of sporting aviation, regulation and maintenance of national aviation records and, finally, publication of aeronautical journals and books to popularize aeronautics.[28]

The diversity and difficulty of the numerous obligations set before the organization required that ODVF possess a nationwide infrastructure in order for it properly to carry out its many responsibilities. Unlike the administration of the newspaper campaign, which was easily accomplished through existing networks of the press industry, ODVF's other activities could not be realized without mobilizing local spokesmen and representatives who would act on behalf of the society. Lacking individuals to collect donations, register new members, organize meetings and distribute literature, ODVF could not operate, let alone accomplish the goals established by its leaders.

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[25] Ibid., l. 55. Representatives from the following publications attended the meeting: *Bednota*, *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota*, *Voennyi vestnik*, *Izvestiia*, *Krasnaia niva*, *Rabochaia Moskva*, *Sovetskaia illiustratsiia* and *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn'*.

[26] Ibid. Among the members of the ODVF Presidium were such Party notables as S. S. Kamenev, V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, G. Ia. Petrovskii, A. V. Lunacharskii, A. A. Znamenskii, M. V. Frunze and F. E. Dzerzhinskii. Soon thereafter A. I. Rykov was appointed to chair the Presidium. The commission to draft the ODVF charter was manned by Kamenev, Lebedev and Znamenskii.

[27] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 14 (Tsirkuliary ODVF vsem otdelam), l. 5.

[28] Ibid.

ODVF's immediate need to recruit local supporters indicated the curiously inverted approach to organizational development pursued by the Party as it attempted to mandate the nation's aeronautical program. Characterized by the "rather awkward" circumstance in which "five people, sitting in an office, suddenly proclaim themselves a society,"[29] the Party's establishment of ODVF produced a public voluntary organization that included neither the public nor volunteers. In the weeks that followed the meeting of 8 March, ODVF leaders labored to conscript the local personnel and to establish the institutional networks that were required if the society that they had preemptively founded was actually to function. In order to realize these ends more quickly, Party leaders assigned responsibility for fulfilling ODVF mandates to already existing political and social organizations. On factory shopfloors, in trade union halls and within Party cells and military units individuals were enlisted to collect donations and to encourage their colleagues to join the society. Oftentimes, entire factories and associations were enrolled in ODVF on the basis of "collective membership."[30] In such cases, ODVF recruited ready-made chapters of dues paying members as well as new administrators (in the form of existing factory or trade union officials) who simply added ODVF matters to their long lists of responsibilities.[31]

As a result of these methods ODVF expanded quickly. Between 8 March and the beginning of August the organization's central presidium could boast that no fewer than 106,000 citizens had pledged their support by enrolling in the organization.[32] In financial terms, that support produced millions of rubles for the construction of Soviet aviation. The press, in turn, trumpeted these successes as part of its ongoing campaign both to demonstrate and generate nationwide support for building a Soviet air fleet.[33] In this way, the aeronautical drive moved forward under the curious momentum initiated by the Party's announcement that spontaneous popular support had produced ODVF. The Party, meanwhile, continued its impatient efforts to manufacture that same spontaneity. While the efficiency of the Party's methods in concocting and controlling the

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[29] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 40 (Stenogrammy i biulleteni 1-ogo vsesoiuznogo soveshaniia ODVF), ll. 171-172.

[30] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 21(Biulleteni nn. 4, 6-10 agitsektsii ODVF za 1923), ll. 209-210.

[31] GARF f. 9404, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 3-5. Upon enrolling in ODVF new members paid a fee of one gold ruble. For an example of the typical workload imposed upon a local Party functionary (and ODVF member), see Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, 1985), 140-141.

[32] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 40, l. 71. The ODVF leadership noted that it was awaiting the completion of an additional 460,000 membership applications.

[33] Notices concerning donations and the establishment of new ODVF chapters were published daily on the front page of *Izvestiia* between March and August 1923.

aeronautical crash campaign would ultimately be called into question, the fact remained that ODVF had been mandated into existence.

Having created the voluntary society Friends of the Air Fleet to serve the general task of popularizing and propagandizing the idea of Soviet aeronautics, the RMC quickly thereafter saw to the establishment of a second organization that would oversee the development of a civil aviation program. Directed by a three-man bureau consisting of A. M. Krasnoshchekov, Malkin and Seniushkin,[34] the "Voluntary Air Fleet" (*Dobrovol'nyi vozdushnyi flot*, or "Dobrolet") was founded on 17 March to act as "a self-financing commercial enterprise" that would "assist the needs of industry, trade and business" regarding the construction of a national air fleet.[35] Start-up capital for the commercial venture was supplied by the State Bank, which set aside some two million rubles to fund Dobrolet's early projects.[36] Subsequent funding for Dobrolet activities was to come from the issuance of stock shares, one million of which, beginning in late March, were initially offered for sale to Soviet enterprises and trusts at the cost of one gold ruble a piece.[37] To encourage sales, Dobrolet announced that any organization purchasing 25,000 shares would earn the right to use one of the venture's airplanes.[38]

With the funds supplied from the State Bank and those raised through the sale of its stock, Dobrolet was expected to fulfill a host of functions essential to the growth of Soviet aviation. Among its more important tasks, the commercial venture was entrusted to develop a national network of air communications, regulate airline routes, manage commercial relations with foreign airlines and oversee the purchase of airplanes from foreign suppliers.[39] In short, Dobrolet was to act as a commercial airline syndicate, managing all aspects of civilian air transport and overseeing the activities of affiliate organizations throughout the Soviet Union. Dobrolet's early efforts were made somewhat easier as sales of the syndicate's stock quickly exceeded expectations. By late April, *Izvestiia* reported that 800,000 of the initial offering of one million shares had been purchased by Soviet enterprises.[40] The unexpected success of the sale quickly led to the

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[34] Krasnoshchekov was the chairman of the Industrial Bank (Prombank), Malkin was head of the Commissariat of Transport and Seniushkin was a member of the Trade Union Central Committee.
[35] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 1 (Izveshcheniie ob organizovanim sobraniem Dobroleta), l. 3.
[36] RGVA f. 33987, op. 1, d. 558, ll. 19-21.
[37] Dobrolet began selling stock to private citizens in June 1923.
[38] *Pravda*, 22 March 1923.
[39] For a detailed description of Dobrolet's many responsibilities see its organizational charter in GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 2 (Ustava Dobroleta), ll. 1-18.
[40] *Izvestiia*, 26 April 1923.

announcement that a second offering of one million shares would be made available to corporate investors.

The auspicious debut of the Dobrolet stock offering was followed in May by the opening of the first regular commercial air route between the Soviet Union and a foreign state. A joint-venture undertaken by Dobrolet and the German aviation firm *Deruluft*, the Königsberg–Moscow air route was an early product of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed by Soviet and German representatives at Rapallo in April 1922.[41] As a result of the rapprochement with the Weimar government, the Soviet Union also granted trade and air traffic concessions to German companies in exchange for technical assistance in building the Soviet airplane industry. In the meantime, German produced Junkers and Fokker aircraft were sold in substantial numbers to Soviet aviation organizations. These planes would form the backbone of the Red Air Fleet throughout the 1920s.[42]

In addition to the material and commercial benefits that it promised to afford the nation, the establishment of the air corridor to Königsberg was a symbolic repudiation of the isolation imposed upon the Soviet Union by the governments of Western Europe. Shortly after the first flights had taken place between the two cities, one Soviet newspaper noted that the "threads of friendship" symbolized by the individual airplanes would "soon weave a strong and useful fabric" that would "serve to bridge the two nations."[43] Additional testimony of the air route's contemporary significance was that it attracted the attention of the most prominent propagandist of Soviet power, the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii. In celebration of the event, Maiakovskii penned a short poem entitled, "Moscow–Königsberg," that trumpeted the wonders of modern air travel and the labor of those who had made it possible.[44] Based upon the impressions formed by the poet aboard a recent flight to Germany, Maiakovskii's poem described the sensations that he experienced while in the air and offered his thoughts concerning the future of Soviet aviation. After ruminating upon the generations of dreamers and heroes who had worked to make human flight a reality, Maiakovskii concluded his poem with a tribute to the recent aeronautical accomplishment of the Soviet Union.

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[41] Initial flights between Königsberg and the Soviet capital had taken place as early as June 1922. However, the air route did not begin regular operation until the following year. For an overview of the Rapallo treaty and the resulting military cooperation between the Soviet Union and Germany, see John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941* (London, 1962), 144-163.
[42] Lennart Andersson, *Soviet Aircraft and Aviation, 1917-1941* (Annapolis, 1994), 37, 47-50. Andersson surveys German aviation activities in the Soviet Union between the two World Wars on pages 27-30.
[43] "Moskva-Keningsberg," *Izvestiia* 15 October 1922.
[44] V. V. Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1957), 90-93.

I
thank you,
my
invincible
steel-fisted class,
for
forging
frail me
in aerial formation.
I present
to you,
land of labor and sweat,
the fiery wreath
of the horizon.
We have taken off,
but not yet too far.

Without overstating the significance of the new air route, Maiakovskii's verse communicated his belief that the "air-river to Kōnigsberg" represented an important milestone in the quest to build Soviet aviation. It was both a meaningful achievement and an intimation of the new heights that the nation might yet attain.

Soviet aviation had, indeed, "taken off." With the establishment of Dobrolet and ODVF, the Soviet leadership had laid the foundations for what it hoped would be the rapid and successful development of a modern national air fleet. Nevertheless, Party officials did not clearly spell out the exact relationship between the "commercial venture" and the "voluntary society," leaving open to question the mechanics of their interaction. Lingering concerns regarding the organizations' respective roles would trouble the nation's aeronautical supporters for some time to come.

The failure to clearly demarcate the activities and missions of the two organizations may have reflected the Party leadership's own uncertainties regarding the wisdom of employing "capitalist" means to solve the aeronautical dilemmas of the world's first "socialist" state. Despite the ideological camouflage provided by its official designation as the "Voluntary" Air Fleet, Dobrolet was an entrepreneurial venture that sought to raise capital for Soviet aviation through the doctrinally suspect practice of selling stock shares. During a time of increasingly intense political struggle concerning the direction and nature of the state's economic policies,[45] Dobrolet's reliance upon purchased shares (in contrast to ODVF's voluntary donations and membership fees) seems to

[45] For an overview of this intra-Party struggle see Robert Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, 198-208. The gravity of these political debates was brought into sharper focus as a result of Lenin's worsening health. On 10 March, the Communist Party leader suffered a second stroke (the first had occurred in May 1922) that left him partially paralyzed and speechless.

have discouraged Party leaders from enthusiastically supporting the organization. Indeed, the relatively scant coverage devoted to Dobrolet in the press suggests that, at the very least, the Party's leadership preferred the "volunteerism" of the Friends of the Air Fleet to the "commercial interests" of the share-holding enterprise. In a similar vein, the composition of Dobrolet's governing bureau suggested the desire of Party officials to maintain a discreet distance from the financial venture. Of the organization's three founding administrators, none was a major figure of the Party apparatus.[46] In contrast, ODVF had been established, was governed and vocally supported by such respected Party hierarchs as Rykov, Kamenev, Antonov-Ovseenko and Frunze. For these ODVF officials and Party spokesmen, it would seem, the existence of the stock company was rationalized as an unfortunate necessity, the purpose of which was to supplement the voluntary donations raised by ODVF, to oversee the civilian air fleet and to support ODVF in the fulfillment of its mission. For them, Dobrolet was an ancillary organization created to serve the broader interests articulated by ODVF and not the other way around. And yet, the existence of the commercial venture indicated the willingness of high-ranking Party officials to adopt (or, at least, acquiesce to) market practices in order to facilitate the construction of the aeronautical program. Whatever their potential misgivings, Party officials accepted Dobrolet as a necessary expedient for quickly developing the nation's air fleet.

The creation of Dobrolet, ODVF and the inauguration of the all-Union newspaper campaign were not the only methods undertaken by the Party to win public support and raise money for the conquest of the air. As the spring of 1923 turned to summer, ODVF moved quickly to expand the scope of the aeronautical mobilization drive. Designed to "encourage all party, soviet and professional organizations as well as the entire population of workers and peasants to assist in the construction of a national air fleet," ODVF organized a nationwide Soviet "Week of the Air Fleet" (held from 24 June-1 July), as part of its general effort to increase membership in the society and to collect donations for the creation of a Red air force.[47] Similar to the strategy first employed by its Imperial predecessors, ODVF came to rely upon aeronautical spectacles as the central element in winning public support for the establishment of Soviet aviation. Accompanying celebrations in Moscow and Petrograd, ODVF sponsored a series of regional "aviation weeks" in

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[46] Although L. B. Kamenev (vice-Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and Chairman of the Moscow Soviet) was later appointed to chair the Dobrolet soviet, his conspicuous absence in most published and archival sources suggests that he did not play an active role in propagating the organization's mission.

[47] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 14, l. 3.

urban centers throughout the Republic. In places such as Vladimir, Orel, Riazan', Tula, Tambov and Kaluga, festivities were arranged to celebrate Soviet airborne efforts and to unite provincial residents behind the cause of socialist aviation.[48]

Organized and administered by the local ODVF chapters that had mushroomed in the months following the Party's February summons, aviation weeks showcased aeronautical technology. Offering such standard fare as flight demonstrations, educational exhibits and recruitment pavilions for those interested in contributing to or joining ODVF, these Soviet spectacles followed the well-tested patterns earlier established by Imperial air clubs. At the same time, Soviet citizens were encouraged to participate actively in the campaign through essay competitions, poetry readings and poster contests devoted to the topic of the Red Air Fleet.[49] Postcards, pamphlets and well-illustrated journals were offered for sale to the general public as part of the Society's efforts to raise aeronautical consciousness and to generate revenues for the construction of an air force, while mass-produced buttons, depicting airplanes with names such as "Il'ich," "Red October" and "the Red Army Soldier," suggested a subtle correlation between the new freedoms afforded by the modern age of flight and the new age of freedom made possible by the Bolshevik Revolution.[50]

To all appearances, the Soviet approach to mobilizing public support for aviation closely mirrored the methods earlier employed by the Imperial "Committee for the Establishment of the Air Fleet."[51] Eager to reach as broad an audience as possible, the RMC, like its Imperial predecessor, relied upon the print media and organized spectacle as the basic resources in informing the public of the importance of aviation. Combining aeronautical encounters with educational demonstrations and flag-waving slogans, both the Imperial and Soviet aeronautical campaigns aimed to increase popular awareness of aviation while inciting patriotic citizens to contribute their time and money to the cause of the nation's air readiness.

In contrast to the Imperial campaign, however, ODVF benefited from a close relationship with the institutions of state power. Whereas the Imperial Committee's appeals to the Russian press were dependent upon the willingness of individual editors to implement Committee requests, Bolshevik Party control over the Soviet press industry accorded the Military Council an

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[48] Ibid. See also *Izvestiia*, 23 June 1923.
[49] *Izvestiia*, 9 May 1923. For a sampling of the literary creations produced during one local competition (sponsored by the ODVF chapter in Perm) see *Rasskazy, stikhi, chastushki* (Perm, 1925).
[50] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 12 (Protokol zasedaniia agitsektsii ODVF ot 5 maia 1923), l. 1.
[51] See above, chapter 1, 49-50.

opportunity to mandate press content,[52] enabling the RMC to enlist the nation's leading publications in the fight to establish a Soviet "dictatorship of the air."[53] In stark contrast, the freedoms granted the Imperial press meant that editorial boards could (and oftentimes did) ignore official appeals to serve as heralds of the state's aviation campaign.[54] As a result, the Soviet campaign for the construction of a Red Air Fleet was characterized by a degree of thematic cohesion and unity of purpose never achieved in the Imperial era.

Another way in which the Soviet campaign differed from those conducted by Imperial patrons concerned ODVF's use of media technology. Although the popularization of moving pictures had proceeded apace during the Empire's waning years, the possibility of employing cinema to support the campaign for expanding air-consciousness had never occurred to Imperial patrons.[55] While it is true that airplane flights (in a curious juxtaposition of two new technologies) were among the very first images to be captured by Russian film makers, no attempt was made by Imperial aviation patrons to utilize film technology in developing aeronautical programs.[56] ODVF's leaders, however, demonstrated an appreciation of the cinematic art almost immediately upon seizing control of the state's aeronautical campaign.[57] Aware of the value that motion pictures might lend as visible evidence of the airplane's capabilities, ODVF turned to cinema as a means of overcoming the equipment shortages produced by the dearth of available aircraft.[58] The wisdom of this decision was made clear during the Moscow "Week of the Air Fleet." During the week, the first Soviet film to address the subject of aviation, a short feature entitled, *Contact!* (*Est' kontakt!*), attracted large audiences and generated tens of thousands of rubles for the construction of Red aviation.[59] The film's success and the growing popularity of the medium would lead to the further exploitation of cinema by the Bolshevik Party in advancing the cause of Red aviation.[60]

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[52] Jeffrey Brooks, "Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review* 1 (1989): 19.
[53] RGVA f. 33987, op. 2, d. 209 (Tsirkuliary i svodki soveta ODVF), l. 27.
[54] Chapter 1, 47-48.
[55] For a discussion of cinema in Imperial Russia, see Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (New York, 1992), 9-27.
[56] Examples of aviation in Imperial cinema include the following short films housed in the State Archive of Documentary Films (RGAKFD): "Nash zhurnal," Sevastopol', 1911, (catalogue number: I-12772); "Parad voisk v prisustvii Nikolaia II," St. Petersburg, n.d., (O-1961); "Pegas, no. 13, 1913," St. Petersburg, 1913, (O-12144) and "Peterburg no. 194-v," St. Petersburg, 1914, (I-12180).
[57] On the Bolsheviks' early appropriation of cinema as a propaganda tool see Richard Taylor, "A Medium for the Masses: Agitation in the Soviet Civil War," *Soviet Studies*, 1971, no. 4: 562-74 and "The Birth of the Soviet Cinema," in Gleason, *et al.*, eds., *Bolshevik Culture*, 190-202.
[58] *Kino-nedelia*, 14 October 1924.
[59] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 21, l. 262.
[60] See below, chapter 4.

The most important difference between Imperial and Soviet efforts to generate popular enthusiasm for the cause of the national air fleet, however, concerned the fundamental role exercised by Party leaders in determining the content and direction of the ODVF mission. Unlike Imperial aeronautical organizations, which recruited their members and conducted their business independent of the tsarist government, the activities and issues pursued by ODVF were intimately linked with policies and goals dictated by the Party. The highly centralized structure of the voluntary society, in turn, afforded ODVF leaders an opportunity to produce uniform messages and to coordinate recruitment strategies on a broad front throughout the nation. In stark contrast, the privately organized societies and circles of the Imperial era had demonstrated a frustrating inability to cooperate amongst themselves; a problem which, in turn, hindered their efforts to win state subsidies for the expansion of their mission. The failure of Imperial organizations to reach an agreement concerning the formation of an "All-Russian Aeronautical Union," for example, demonstrated a lack of direction and undermined public faith in the ability of private aeronautical associations to pilot Russia forward into the century of flight.[61] Constructed from the top down and administered from the center, ODVF did not suffer from the organizational shortcomings that had weakened the air clubs of the Imperial age. Created by the Party to serve the Party's interests, ODVF enjoyed a base of institutional support that could ensure a level of sustained activity eclipsing anything accomplished by IVAK and the other Imperial air clubs.

The approach chosen by Party leaders to propagate interest in a national air fleet demonstrated their ideological commitment to a comprehensive program of forced modernization directed exclusively "from above." Aware of the numerous problems posed by Russia's technological and cultural backwardness, Soviet leaders throughout the 1920s utilized mass-mobilization campaigns in the belief that such measures would allow them to efficiently direct social forces in rapid fulfillment of the national needs perceived by the Party.[62] From the standpoint of Soviet aeronautical concerns, such an approach provided dual benefits to those in power by encouraging popular involvement in the construction of the air fleet while reinforcing the Party's political authority. Hence, the enthusiastic popular response to the campaign heralded in the state-controlled press allowed Soviet leaders to justify their costly program of aeronautical expansion as

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[61] See above, chapter 1, 44-45 and 62-63.

[62] For a discussion of the influence of Bolshevik perceptions of cultural backwardness in shaping Soviet social mobilization policies during the 1920s, see William Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers: Modernization and Bureaucracy in a Public Mass Organization* (Princeton, 1973), 33-39. Among the numerous Party-led mass mobilization efforts carried out during the 1920s were campaigns to increase literacy rates, encourage atheism, develop a civil defense system and discourage drunkeness.

the fulfillment of popular sentiment.[63] Moreover, as the campaign came to be framed by the rhetoric of national defense, ideological purity and revolutionary vigilance, its successes could be implicitly construed as proof of popular support for the regime.[64] In the wake of such recent internal challenges to Party authority as the Tambov peasants' uprising (1920-21), the Kronstadt mutiny (1921) and the ongoing Basmachi rebellion in Central Asia (1918-1924),[65] the political capital imparted to Soviet leaders by nationwide "voluntary" participation in a Party-directed campaign bolstered their claim to speak on behalf of the nation's masses. No less important, the state-centered approach to aeronautical construction allowed the Party to control debate over an issue of vital military, economic and cultural significance. The establishment of ODVF and the inauguration of the air fleet campaign thus enabled the Party to manage the terms of Russia's aeronautical modernization while providing the Party with the political dividend of having enlisted large segments of the populace in a supportive display of mass "volunteerism." While it is true that the highly centralized and hierarchical structure of Soviet aeronautical modernization engendered problems of its own, as we shall see, the control exercised "from above" meant that the Party could impose a unity of purpose and clarity of direction as it endeavored to establish Red aviation.

The Red Air Fleet and the Construction of Socialist Culture

I

The vital relationship between the Party and the aeronautical campaign was clearly evidenced in the wake of the Twelfth Party Congress, which convened in Moscow from 17 to 25 April 1923. Following the conclusion of the Congress, participants were treated to a "ceremonial assembly" on 26 April designed to celebrate the recent establishment of ODVF and to chart a course for the organization's continuing efforts. Attracting a capacity crowd to the Hall of Columns (which had been decorated with red bunting and rows of model airplanes), the assembly served as an official pep rally to increase members' excitement and to heighten recruitment tempos

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[63] See above, 71.
[64] See below, 98-101.
[65] For an account of the Tambov uprising, see Oliver Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920-1921* (Stanford, 1976). On Kronstadt, see Israel Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917-1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* (Cambridge, 1983). The Basmachi challenge to Soviet authority is discussed in Martha B. Olcott, "The Basmachi or Freemen's Revolt in Turkestan, 1918-1924," *Soviet Studies* 33 (1981): 352-369.

as the air fleet campaign entered into the late spring and summer of the year.[66] Before a huge audience of "friends and workers of the air fleet," the Party's leading representatives (including A. I. Rykov, M. V. Frunze, N. I. Podvoiskii and, of course, Trotskii) spoke on the accomplishments thus far attained by ODVF, pondered its current standing, and reiterated the basic themes that the Party had chosen to popularize the aeronautical cause.[67]

In the introductory speech before the assembly, the architect of the voluntary society and the aeronautical campaign, Lev Trotskii, summarized the concerns that had inspired the formation of the ODVF and the inauguration of the drive to build a Soviet air fleet. Proclaiming the need to "conquer space" as the "fundamental task" facing the Soviet Republic, Trotskii's speech was a curious amalgam of dialectical reasoning and patriotic rhetoric that identified Russia's "vast space" (*prostranstvo*) as both the nation's "greatest ally and most terrible adversary."[68] As a geographical factor, *prostranstvo* had played a vital role in shielding the Revolution from foreign armies and White guardist insurgents during the years of the Civil War. Capable of seizing control of particular cities and locations, but unable to subdue the entire countryside, the forces hostile to Bolshevik power had succumbed to the seemingly infinite expanses of the Russian hinterlands. In this way, Trotskii reasoned, unlike tiny Hungary (where a Communist revolution had failed as a result of "isolation" and "lack of space"), Russia's tremendous size had proven a great asset in securing the Bolshevik victory and saving the Revolution.[69] Thanks to "swamps, lakes, dense forests and immense space," Soviet power had resisted the reactionary opponents of October and, when necessary, it would do so again, notwithstanding the "hundreds of thousands and millions of tons of poisonous gas, explosives and dynamite...directed towards the Soviet Republic" by the "rabid" forces of the Western, capitalist powers.

Despite the defensive benefits bequeathed by natural resources and geographical expanse, *prostranstvo* had also contributed to the prevailing backwardness of the country relative to the advanced states of Western Europe. In this sense, Trotskii credited the physical separation effected by *prostranstvo* for having created the cultural and economic "distance" that divided the nation internally and distinguished it from its European neighbors. Isolated from the progressive influences of the twentieth century, Russia's hinterlands had not achieved the level of economic,

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[66] The meeting was chaired by Rykov. See, *Torzhestvennoe zasedanie ODVF 26 aprelia 1923 g.* (Moscow, 1923).
[67] *Izvestiia* 27 April 1923.
[68] RGVA f. 33987, op. 1, d. 558, l. 143.
[69] Ibid., ll. 143-144.

cultural and social development present in the nation's advanced, urban centers. The enormous size of the Russian Empire had made possible a condition in which a "barbarous, nomadic economy [could function] alongside the most modern, American-style factories." Even in the contemporary, progressive Soviet Republic, Trotskii noted, the effects of *prostranstvo* were visible in the lives of its "backward tribes who live much like cavemen."[70] The geographical space that separated rural Russia from the nation's urban centers had thus contributed to the Imperial legacy of backwardness and threatened to impede the progressive vision promised by the Bolshevik Revolution. In this way, Trotskii suggested, *prostranstvo* was to be understood both in spatial and temporal terms. Just as it had shielded the Revolution from the forces of reaction, so too had *prostranstvo* isolated rural Russia from the advent of the modern age. The question that now faced the nation was how to overcome both the temporal and spatial barriers imposed by *prostranstvo* in forging a united, modern and advanced social order.

Trotskii's extended discussion of the perils of Russian *prostranstvo* was a clear indication of the Party's continuing concern with resolving the difficulties imposed by the nation's legacy of backwardness. Having overseen an urban revolution in Europe's most rural nation, Soviet leaders were faced with the troublesome task of attempting to reconcile Russia's agrarian realities to the industrial visions implicit in their Marxist ideology. The methods through which the Party might achieve the modernization of Soviet Russia was the subject addressed by Trotskii in a series of essays and speeches published in 1923 under the title *Problems of Everyday Life*.[71] Alerting his audience to the importance of organizational and educational work in solidifying the achievements of October, Trotskii announced that the nation was now compelled to turn its attention to "practical everyday work in the field of Soviet cultural and economic construction."[72] Through a long and patient struggle with the tyranny of habit and custom, aided by the application of important new technologies such as cinema and radio, Soviet Russia would raise the educational level of its citizens and facilitate the modernization of the economy and culture.[73]

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[70] Ibid., l. 145.
[71] L. Trotskii, *Voprosy byta* (Moscow, 1923). Subsequent citations are drawn from the translated compilation of Trotskii's speeches and essays, *Problems of Everyday Life and Other Writings on Culture and Science* (New York, 1973).
[72] L. Trotskii, "Not by Politics Alone," *Problems of Everyday Life*, 16-17.
[73] L. Trotskii, "Vodka, the Church, and the Cinema" and "Radio, Science, Technology and Society," *Problems of Everyday Life*, 31-35 and 250-263. The impact of Trotskii's discussion of cultural and economic modernization on intra-Party politics is briefly summarized in von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 185-188.

One important factor in the struggle to overcome the backwardness and inertia produced by *prostranstvo* involved the coordinated efforts of the Party and the Republic's citizens in developing an aeronautical program that would raise the nation's economic, military and cultural standing. As a "weapon in the battle with the malevolent qualities of *prostranstvo*" the airplane could defend the nation, facilitate communication and help supply rural regions by delivering goods and services. Moreover, unlike automobiles or locomotives (whose range of service was dependent upon costly networks of roads and rail beds), the airplane could fly anywhere so long as it had room to land (a prerequisite easily met in Russia). In fulfilling these functions aviation would provide the additional benefit of reducing the historical distance that separated rural from urban Russia. As a visible, functioning herald of Soviet power, the airplane would overcome temporal *prostranstvo* by "tearing the countryside away from its rural isolation, backwardness, cultural alienation and intellectual poverty."[74]

The modernizing capabilities promised by aviation could not, however, be realized without the direction and leadership of the Bolshevik Party.[75] As the "vanguard and medium of the proletariat's historical aims" and the "principal lever of every conscious forward movement," the Party was upheld as the motivating force behind the development of the Soviet nation and the inauguration of "new forms of life."[76] The material expression of these new forms of life, Trotskii proclaimed, would be realized through the Party's efforts to raise cultural standards by encouraging "public initiative" and the "activities of the masses."[77] To this end, Trotskii singled out voluntary societies as the "organizing instruments" of the socialist order to come. Working in conjunction with the state, local soviets, trade unions and cooperative units, voluntary societies like ODVF were identified as the "new social structures" that would give shape to Soviet society as a whole.[78] Nevertheless, the establishment and direction of such associations would be regulated by the Party, for it was only "within the framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat" that the "socialist content" of daily life could be assured and successful modernization could be achieved.[79] Ultimately, in the view of the Party's leadership, "socialist construction [was] planned construction

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[74] RGVA f. 33987, op. 1, d. 558, l. 145.
[75] L. Trotskii, "How to Begin," *Problems of Everyday Life*, 71.
[76] L. Trotskii, "From the Old Family to the New," *Problems of Everyday Life*, 37; "Habit and Custom," *Ibid.*, 26 and "How to Begin," 70.
[77] "How to Begin," 72.
[78] Ibid., 70-71.
[79] "Not by Politics Alone," 17.

on the largest scale."[80] Societies such as ODVF were to serve as the basic building blocks in assuring the fulfillment of the Party's plan.

Trotskii's discussion of the airplane's role in overcoming the challenges of Russian *prostransvto* was an example of the fundamental shift in aeronautical rhetoric that had taken place since the end of the Imperial era. Cognizant of the historical divide that separated Russia from the advanced states of Western Europe, pre-war citizens had embraced aeronautical successes as demonstrable proof of their belonging to the modern world. Contrasting the "philistinism and savagery" of Russia's rural countryside with the mechanical marvels of machine powered flight, Imperial observers saw human mastery over the elements as evidence that their nation could conquer the forces of both history and the present. In this way, aeronautical representatives had advanced aviation as a demonstration of their nation's ability to match the cultural and technical standards of the Continent's leading powers.[81] To effect this transformation, they had maintained, Russia need only adopt Western models and methods to serve as the organizational framework for the nation's aeronautical programs.

Similar to the vision earlier advanced by Imperial aeronautical patrons, Bolshevik leaders believed that the development of aviation was an important indication of the nation's ability to meet the challenges of the modern age. However, unlike their Imperial predecessors, who viewed the development of aviation as a manifestation of the broader advancement of the nation's cultural standing, Bolshevik leaders actively employed aviation as a useful instrument for popularizing concerns deemed important to the state and for mobilizing citizens in their quest to create a new Soviet culture. Whereas in the Imperial era aviation had been viewed as a *measure* of national progress, in the Soviet period aviation was understood as a *means* of achieving progress, a tool to be used in the realization of the Party's modernist visions. These visions, in turn, represented a fundamental re-ordering of the social, cultural and political principles formerly pursued by tsarist state and society. In attempting to unite the nation's divided citizenry through orchestrated displays of mass "volunteerism" Soviet officials gave evidence of the social-engineering imperatives that lay at the heart of their political visions. Valuing conscious, collective action as the best means of promoting Russia's modernization and determined to direct that process through centrally controlled state institutions, the Soviet leadership embarked upon a program of aeronautical

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[80] Ibid.

[81] See above, chapter 1, 28-29.

construction that differed radically from the private, independent and individual methods that had been practiced by their Imperial predecessors.

Understood in this way, the Soviet approach to generating (and institutionalizing) support for the cause of aviation suggests the underlying assumptions that Party leaders held concerning the characteristics and structure of developing "socialist" culture. Faced with the harsh economic and political realities bequeathed by the nation's legacy of backwardness, yet beholden to an eschatological vision of social and industrial progress, Party officials endeavored to circumvent the present through a comprehensive program of forced modernization directed exclusively from above. Through the creation of centrally-controlled, mass-based "voluntary" societies like ODVF, the Soviet leadership endeavored to reconstruct civic and social networks while realizing the ideological objectives of a technically proficient, industrially advanced and class-conscious Russia.[82] Joining Party objectives to the social "volunteerism" of the masses, ODVF contributed to the nation's unification while realizing the military necessity of constructing and maintaining a modern air fleet. To these ends, organizations such as the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet served as institutional scaffolding in the construction of the nation's socialist future.

II

The fundamental role of the Party in inspiring, organizing, and directing the conduct of the Red Air Fleet Campaign and the establishment of ODVF was lost amidst published reports of the manufactured excitement that surrounded activities to win popular support for Soviet aviation. In the innumerable speeches, essays and articles that appeared in the wake of the 1 March announcement, ODVF spokesmen repeatedly referred to the initiative and enthusiasm demonstrated by the masses rallying to the ever-expanding campaign.[83] Having recognized the "essential need" of the aeronautical enterprise, the Republic's workers, Party representatives claimed, "expressed their collective desire to construct an air fleet" through active participation in official programs designed to support Red aviation.[84] In cities and towns across the Republic, concerned citizens rallied to effect the realization of the aeronautical goals established by the Bolshevik Party.

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[82] Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 254.
[83] See for example, "Puti vozrozhdeniia Krasnogo vozdushnogo flota," *Aero* 4 (1923): 53, "Rabochaia podderzhka," *Pravda*, 26 April 1923 and "Puti sozdaniia vozdushnogo flota," *Izvestiia*, 23 May 1923, among others.
[84] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 30 (Stat'i Podvoiskogo i drugikh avtorov o razvitii aviatsii), l. 13.

Central to the Party's mobilization strategy was an attempt to establish the revolutionary credentials of aviation and to call attention to its continuing importance as the "flying catalyst of the world revolution."[85] ODVF publications thus highlighted the vital role played by the Red Air Fleet in defending the October Revolution and securing the Bolsheviks' victory during the Civil War. Essays trumpeting the training regimen and martial skills of Soviet airmen were published by leading newspapers to popularize a positive image of the nation's airborne cadres.[86] Airmen were also immortalized in such poems as "Red Fliers" and "To the Gladiators of the Air," which celebrated Soviet pilots as "daredevil defenders" and heralded their efforts to "Sovietize the heavens," thus ensuring peace and stability for the country's earthbound citizens.[87] Together with the hagiographic articles that appeared in the press, ODVF produced narrative collections that recounted the heroic wartime exploits of "Red eagle" fliers who had fought to vanquish the forces of restoration.[88]

This conscious glorification of Soviet pilots conformed with similar efforts to instill amongst the public respect and admiration for the soldiers of the Red Army. Throughout the 1920s the Party's efforts to legitimate its political authority involved wide-ranging attempts to raise public esteem for the accomplishments of the armed forces. On posters, in the press and through mass-produced pamphlets, the figure of the Red Army soldier was idealized as an example of Revolutionary vigilance, ideological purity and heroic sacrifice.[89] Lavish reenactments of Revolutionary "pseudoevents" (such as the storming of the Winter palace), mass-spectacles and theatrical performances were often sponsored and/or produced by Red Army units, creating a basic

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[85] *Aviatsiia i vozdukhoplavanie* 1 (1923): 1.

[86] Some of these included, "Krasnye zavoevateli vozdukha," *Izvestiia* 23 February 1923; "Ocherki krasnoi aviatsii: letchiki," *Izvestiia* 17 March 1923; "V akademii vozdushnogo flota," *Pravda* 22 May 1923; "U krasnykh letunov," *Pravda* 31 May 1923 and "Shkola i vozdushnyi flot," *Pravda* 7 June 1923. One of the more amusing attempts to generate enthusiasm for Soviet flight training was the poem "Academy of the Red Air Fleet: To Our Future Wings," written by the former futurist poet and Imperial aviator Vasilii Kamenskii. See "Akademii Krasnogo vozdushnogo flota (Budushchim nashim kryl'iam)," *Izvestiia* 1 March 1923.

[87] K. Martin, "Krasnye letchiki," *Izvestiia* 9 March 1923 and A. Zharov, "Gladiatoram vozdukha," *Izvestiia* 4 April 1923.

[88] Among the many ODVF publications celebrating Civil War aviators are: P. Adamovich, *Krasnye orly* (Moscow, 1923); *Krasnyi vozdushnyi flot na sluzhbe revoliutsii: boevye epizody* (Moscow, 1923); *Krasnyi vozdushnyi flot: iubileinyi sbornik, 1918-1923* (Moscow, 1923); A. V. Sergeev, *Piat' let stroitel'stva i bor'by vozdushnogo flota, 1917-1922*, 2 vols., (Moscow, 1926) and N. S. Bobrov, ed., *Kryl'ia sovetov: sbornik rasskazov i vospominanii* (Moscow, 1928).

[89] For depictions of the Red Army soldier in Soviet propaganda posters see Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven, 1988), *passim*.

mythology surrounding the Revolution and the soldiers that had made revolution possible.[90] Together with the annual festivities organized to celebrate the anniversary of the Red Army's establishment, these politically inspired cultural productions helped to enshrine the Soviet army as the most respected of the nation's new institutions.[91] The adulation simultaneously accorded to the pilots of the Red Air Fleet had the additional benefit of informing those elements of the population unfamiliar with the importance of aviation that airmen, too, played a vital role in defending the nation from foreign aggressors. Thus, the pilots of the Red Air Fleet (or, at least the characterizations of these pilots) were upheld by the Party and ODVF as animate icons of the Soviet age: daring young men willing to risk their lives in defense of the Revolution.[92]

Accompanying the efforts to document the revolutionary vigilance of Red airmen was a tendency on the part of ODVF officials to downplay the historical accomplishments of the Imperial air force. Unwilling to acknowledge that the Imperial military may have achieved some degree of success in the years preceding the October Revolution, the Soviet press and ODVF publications demeaned the legacy of the Imperial air fleet by largely ignoring it and its history.[93] In those instances when the Imperial past was mentioned, Soviet commentators stressed the hierarchical and pedigreed nature of the Imperial military air service, disparaging its "elitist" and "aristocratic" atmosphere in which members of the nobility dominated the officer corps.[94] In contrast to its Imperial predecessor, the new Red Air Fleet was hailed as a model of proletarian equality. Even before the inauguration of the air fleet campaign, *Izvestiia* trumpeted the fact that under Bolshevik rule workers and peasants already comprised sixty percent of the flying corps' personnel.[95] In

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[90] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 211-215. On the Red Army's participation in the staging of urban mass-spectacles, see James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley, 1993), 132-133 and Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 94-97.

[91] Not surprisingly, particularly extensive measures were undertaken in celebration of the Red Army's fifth anniversary in 1923. For laudatory accounts of the Red Army's achievements at this time see G. Ozerov, *Piat' let Krasnoi Armii, 1918-1923: sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1923) in addition to the extensive coverage contained in the contemporary Soviet press.

[92] The mythical image of the Civil War aviator remained an important theme of Soviet aeronautical culture well into the 1930s. The subject was also highlighted in feature films such as *Towards Aerial Victory* (1924), *On Wings, Higher* (1924), *Aero NT-54* (1925), *Men in Leather Helmets* (1928?) and *Wings* (1933). For a discussion of these films, see chapter 4.

[93] For two rare exceptions in the early Soviet era see, N. A. Iatsuk, *Aviatsiia i ee kul'turnoe znachenie* (Moscow, 1923) and A. E. Raevskii, *Zolotye gody avio-sport* (Moscow, 1924) both of which contain brief references to pre-Revolutionary Russian events. Interestingly, Iatsuk and Raevskii were former Imperial aviators who sided with the Bolsheviks in 1917.

[94] *Izvestiia*, 3 March 1923 and *Krasnyi vozdushnyi flot: iubileinyi sbornik, 1918-1923*, 33.

[95] *Izvestiia*, 18 February 1923. See also, "Uchoba letnomu delu," *Izvestiia*, 4 April 1923.

citing such figures, the newspaper gave evidence of the social advances achieved by the working-class as a result of October.[96]

The attention directed to establishing the proletarian credentials of the Red Air Fleet and its pilots was a clear indication of the vital role played by class as a legitimating icon in Soviet political culture. Contrasting the elitism and privilege of the ineffective Imperial air force with the "working class vigilance" of Soviet airmen, ODVF propagandists worked to raise public confidence in the military capabilities of the state while reinforcing the class canon central to Bolshevik ideology. Having come to power heralding the establishment of the world's first proletarian state, Bolshevik leaders endeavored to bolster their working class credentials by simultaneously appealing to and fostering the "class consciousness" of the laboring masses.

ODVF efforts to generate interest in aviation also relied upon frequent newspaper articles and mass-produced pamphlets that described the general dangers posed to the Soviet Republic by its Western bourgeois enemies. In countless speeches and essays, ODVF spokesmen warned citizens "not to forget for a moment that the Republic [was] surrounded by capitalist countries" and that "foreign capitalist sharks" were "arming themselves at a rabid pace" in order to "destroy Soviet factories, industries, cities and villages."[97] Accompanying these frenzied declarations by the press, brochures with titles such as *The War in the Air* and *The Air-Fleets of Our Enemies* were produced by local ODVF chapters to foster fears of war amongst the nation's populace.[98] These propagandistic tracts depicted the threat posed by the West in graphically uncompromising terms.

> The French General Foch, a true dog of imperialism, has described the important military role of the air-fleet...This cur salivates at the sweet premonition of a new fratricidal war. He cannot wait for it to begin. He is preparing poisonous gases and airplanes to destroy millions of people. THERE IS DANGER FROM ABOVE! This is why we shout, *comrades, there is danger from above!* Yes, we have already defended our Soviet land. We have stood guard over our seas. But our Soviet air remains unprotected.
>
> And Foch is not alone! We are encircled on all sides by maniacal Foches, Poincarés, Curzons and other "gentlemen." They cannot wait to assail us. They are preparing airplanes in order to attack us not only by land and by sea, but to enslave us from above as well...We must be prepared!

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[96] "Pervyi vypusk komanidrov Krasnogo vozdukhflota," *Izvestiia*, 6 February 1923; "Ocherki krasnoi aviatsii: letchiki," *Izvestiia*, 17 March 1923 and "Aviatsionnaia zhizn' v Petrograde," *Pravda*, 3 April 1923. The theme of upward mobility as one of the products of the October Revolution is developed in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1932* (Oxford, 1982).

[97] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 30, l. 19; *Aero-sbornik* 1 (1923): 31; *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota* 2 (1925): 47 and *Aviadrug* 1 (1924): 15 among many others.

[98] A. Anoshchenko, *Voina v vozdukhe* (Moscow, 1923) and F. Mikhailov, *Vozdushnye sily nashikh vragov* (Ural ODVF, 1924).

> We cannot be stupid sheep. *When a sword is raised against us, we must parry it!...We must prepare and build a military air fleet!*[99]

Such vituperative outbursts were designed to increase support for the air fleet by raising public anxieties concerning the possibility of a future war. More importantly, in conditioning citizens to fear the ever present reality of "bourgeois encirclement," ODVF publications helped to cultivate national unity by rallying citizens to actively support the Party's aeronautical campaign through heightened awareness of the danger posed to the Republic by Western governments.

Alongside ODVF's alarmist propaganda pamphlets, the popular press printed parables and tales that addressed the airborne threat posed by foreign enemies. Typical of these efforts was the short story "Squadrons of the World Commune," which depicted the danger of foreign intervention in similarly consequential (if, perhaps, less immediate) terms. In the wake of a Soviet victory in the "World Civil War," the isolated remnants of the international bourgeoisie have retreated to the island of Madagascar. There, under the dictatorship of Field Marshal Fokht (read, "Foch"), they plot a world counter-revolution. Through experimentation with the deadly tsetse fly, bourgeois scientists attempt to produce a poison gas that will be used to kill millions of innocent people. Alerted to the counter-revolutionaries' nefarious plot by an African emissary, the famous Russian pilot Aleksei Uralov mobilizes a multi-national squadron of fighter planes, bombers and dirigibles that dispatches the evil Fokht and saves the world from the bourgeois threat.[100]

Soviet fears of an impending airborne chemical attack from the West received institutional expression in the spring of 1924 with the formation of the "Society of Friends of the Chemical Industry" (Dobrokhim). Organized in response to the "feverish build-up of chemical weapons taking place in the West,"[101] Dobrokhim was to assist the Red Army in preparations for war by raising mass support for the chemical industry, encouraging donations to finance chemical research and schooling the entire population in the elements of basic chemical defense.[102] Modeled directly after ODVF, Dobrokhim's mission was to work alongside the aeronautical organization in developing the nation's chemical warfare capabilities.[103] Although Dobrokhim would never attain

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[99] F. Mikhailov, *Vozdushnye sily nashikh vragov*, 13-15. All italics and capitals appear in the original.
[100] Sergei Budantsev, "Eskadril'ia vsemirnoi kommuny," *Krasnaia niva* 18 (1923): 5-7. The airborne threat posed by bourgeois chemical experiments was also the subject of the 1933 feature film *City Under Siege*. See chapter 4, 190-194.
[101] *Izvestiia*, 20 May 1924.
[102] "Dobrokhim," *Pravda* 18 May 1924.
[103] For a brief overview of the creation of Dobrokhim, see Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*, 71-75. Dobrokhim and ODVF were combined in 1925 to form "Aviakhim" or, the "Society of Friends of the Aviation and Chemical Industries." On the union of the two societies, see below, chapter 4.

the size or scope of ODVF, its establishment, as part of a broader campaign to assure the "chemicalization" (*khimizatsiia*) of both the Red Army and the civilian population, underscored the Party leadership's abiding concern with the military threat posed by Western technical proficiency and its reliance upon state centered mass-mobilization campaigns to meet that threat.

ODVF spokesmen and Party representatives continued, in the meantime, to lay the foundations for airborne defenses by educating the public about the need to participate in the construction of Soviet aviation. Already far behind other European nations in the number and quality of planes that it possessed, Soviet Russia could ill afford to ignore the danger posed by its lack of production capacity. In a direct reference to the failed policies of the Imperial era, ODVF chairman Aleksei Rykov publicly warned that Russia "could not depend upon the technology, factories and creative genius of Western Europe" to provide the nation with an air force.[104] Only with the construction of its own airplanes through the establishment of an independent aviation industry could the Soviet Union achieve "aeronautical emancipation from Europe," thereby placing Soviet aeronautics on the "proper path" towards modernization.[105] To achieve these goals, however, it was essential that the nation's citizens play an active role in helping to "build an air fleet in *Russia*, by *Russian workers*, with *Russian materials* from the plans of *Russian engineers*."[106]

The Party's repeated public calls for the establishment of an independent Russian aviation industry echoed the similarly pressing appeals articulated by Imperial newsmen in the years that preceded the First World War.[107] Many commentators cited the "do nothing" and "destructive" policies of the Imperial era as examples that the Soviet Union should *not* follow if the nation was to avoid a fate similar to that of the now defunct tsarist empire.[108] The need to build Soviet aviation was all the more urgent in light of the rapid technological progress being made in aeronautics by the major military powers of Western Europe. Following Sergei Kamenev's hyperbolized proclamation that "every month and every day new reports reach us regarding the aviation accomplishments of our likely enemies," Soviet aeronautical representatives repeatedly expressed concern that the advances made by British and French airplane manufacturers would prove the

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[104] *Torzhestvennoe zasedanie ODVF 26 aprelia 1923 g.*, 13.
[105] Ibid., 14 and A. Porokhovshchikov, "Na pravil'nyi put'," *Izvestiia*, 23 March 1923.
[106] A. Blazhkova, "Vozdushnyi flot–sila Rossii," *Tekhnika i snabzhenie krasnoi armii* 1 (1923): 38. The italics appear in the original.
[107] See above, chapter 1, 53-54.
[108] "Obshchestvo druzei vozdushnogo flota," *Izvestiia*, 7 March 1923 and "Nasha pobeda," *Daesh Sibiri krasnye kryl'ia* 2 (1924): 5, among others.

decisive edge in the securing Western victory over the Republic's armies in the war to come.[109] Soviet officials likewise cited the British employment of aviation squadrons to suppress armed uprisings by Afghani and Somali rebels in 1919-1920 as demonstrations of the technical proficiency commanded by the imperialist West as well as "lessons" regarding the decisive role played by airplanes in determining battlefield fortunes.[110] Like the warnings sounded by the Imperial press during the 1911-1912 Italian-Turkish War, such examples were employed by Soviet spokesmen to prove the importance of aviation in modern warfare and to encourage public support of a national aeronautical program.[111]

Similarities between Soviet and Imperial pronouncements notwithstanding, the fact remained that aeronautical technology had undergone significant advances during the decade between 1912 and 1923. In contrast to the limited roles of artillery support and reconnaissance played by aircraft during the First World War, steady improvements in fuselage design and lift capacity, coupled with the proliferation of chemical weapons, indicated that aviation would assume an increasingly consequential position in future combat. Alert to the dangers these innovations posed, Soviet leaders pointed to the inevitable application of the airplane in waging "total war" against the Soviet Union's civilian population. In nightmarish scenarios that alternatively depicted a new intervention or war against Russia, Party spokesmen warned that the "flying dreadnoughts" possessed by Western Europe would launch "unseen and unheard" surprise assaults on the Republic that would bring death and destruction to the millions of innocents huddled behind the battlefield lines.[112] As they saw it, "escadrilles of airplanes, possessing great carrying capacities and ranges of flight would travel deep into the interior of the country, destroying not only the concept of the front...*but the difference between the military and the population as well.*"[113] Moreover, owing to the speed and range of European aircraft, the future war would be won "in only a matter of hours" as resistance collapsed, industry was destroyed and the whole population confronted the "chaos, anarchy and horror" of modern aerial warfare.[114]

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[109] *Torzhestvennoe zasedanie ODVF 26 aprelia 1923 g.*, 15 in addition to the following articles: A. Lapchinksii, "Vnimanie k vozdushnomu flotu," *Izvestiia*, 20 February 1923; N. Anoshchenko, "Pomni o Zapade!," *Izvestiia*, 23 March 1923 and Iu. Steklov, "Udvoim, utroim, udesiaterim usiliia!," *Izvestiia*, 16 May 1923.

[110] *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota* 1 (1920): 13 and Ia. D. Bliumkin, "Vnimanie k vozdushnomu flotu!," *Aero-sbornik* 1 (1923): 11-12.

[111] See above, chapter 1, 41.

[112] *Torzhestvennoe zasedanie ODVF*, 15-16. The quote is taken from L. V. Kamenev's speech before the assembly.

[113] L. D. Trotskii, *Zadachi Dobrokhima* (Moscow, 1924), 10. (Italics appear in the original.)

[114] "Sovetskoi Rossii nuzhen vozdushnyi flot," *Izvestiia*, 25 August 1922.

The Party hierarchy's fears of the expanding role played by aviation in modern warfare were quite similar to the concerns voiced by the governments and military ministries of Western Europe. Throughout the 1920s, aeronautical observers in England, France, Germany, and the United States warned of the growing importance of the airplane as a vital component in building a system of national defense. To this extent, the Party leaders' expressed interest in aviation reflected broader European concerns over how best to incorporate the new technology into existing military doctrine.

The presence of such shared sentiments notwithstanding, the Soviet approach to the modernization of the air fleet evolved within the framework of ongoing inter-Party debates regarding the proper functions to be assumed by military and civilian institutions in the future socialist state. From the closing years of the Civil War until Trotskii's *de facto* removal as head of the Red Army by the spring of 1924, the members of the Soviet high command debated fundamental issues of military doctrine and entertained a variety of proposals concerning the restructuring of the nation's armed forces.[115] Spearheaded by such Party luminaries as Trotskii, Frunze, Podvoiskii and Tukhachevskii, these debates focused on the best means to forge an effective fighting force to defend the interests of the Soviet state. In spite of real differences over issues such as offensive strategy, organizational structure and the wisdom of incorporating former Imperial officers into the Red Army, all of the major players in the debate recognized that the evolution of "total war" required an institutionalized "total response" in which civilian and military duties would be better coordinated to serve the needs of the state.[116] The Soviet response to the challenge of aeronautical modernization reflected this general consensus and helped to further the leadership's drive towards integrating a modern military establishment into the new society they were attempting to build.[117] As Party and ODVF pronouncements made clear, it was "essential to secure the union [of civilian and military aviation] and to achieve maximum coordination amongst all flying organizations" in order to develop an advanced air force.[118]

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[115] A discussion of these doctrinal debates appears in Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 127-143.
[116] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 243-252. The quotation marks are mine.
[117] Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*, 32.
[118] Trotskii, *Perspektivy i zadachi voennogo stroitel'stva*, 17.

III

ODVF efforts to win public support for the aeronautical program drafted by the Party were abetted, in part, by the diplomatic maneuvers of the Republic's European adversaries. On 8 May 1923, following a fervid anti-Soviet propaganda campaign in the British press, the British Foreign Office delivered a diplomatic note to the Bolshevik government that demanded redress of a host of grievances concerning Soviet policy towards Great Britain. In the event that the Soviet government did not meet the conditions stipulated in the memorandum, the British warned, the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of March 1921 would be revoked and the British chargé d'affaires would be recalled from Moscow. Coinciding with the widely publicized visits of the French Marshal Foch and the British Chief of the General Staff to Poland and the 10 May assassination of V. V. Vorovskii, the Soviet envoy to the Lausanne Conference, the "Curzon ultimatum" (as the note came to be called) shocked the Soviet government and heightened Russian fears of war.[119] The ultimatum also provided ODVF with additional material for waging its aeronautical campaign.

In response to the Curzon ultimatum, the Party leadership launched a massive propaganda offensive intended to illustrate the obdurate resistance and solidarity of the Republic's citizens in the face of the "villainous and predatory ultimatum."[120] On 12 May, a mammoth demonstration was held at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater to protest the assassination of Vorovskii and the demands set forth in the diplomatic note. Leading officials meanwhile mounted an impassioned press attack on the British government. Accompanying the spate of articles, essays and editorials that appeared over the following weeks, the Soviet press published numerous cartoons and poems that depicted Curzon and his diplomatic communiqué in sharply satirical terms.[121] Among the more noteworthy contributions to this collection was a poem by Maiakovskii entitled "It Means This!" ("*Eto znachit vot chto!*"), that used the occasion of the diplomatic ultimatum to justify support for the construction of the air fleet.[122]

What does it mean,

that Mister Curzon

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[119] For a complete account of the incident see chapter 6, "The Curzon Ultimatum," in E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-1924*, 173-181.

[120] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 21, l. 212.

[121] These appeared on the front pages of both *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* between 16 May-13 June.

[122] Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, tom 5, 55-56. The poem was published in *Izvestiia*, 23 May 1923. Curzon's note inspired Maiakovskii to write at least two other poems, "The Universal Answer" ("Universal'nyi otvet") and ("O tom, kak u Kerzona s obedom razrastalas' appetitov zona"). See Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, tom 5, 50-52 and 66-68, respectively.

has dispatched his thunderous note?
It means--
he may plot more quietly,
so build
an air fleet!
What does it mean,
that Mister Foch
openly parades in Poland?
It means--
knives are sharpening.
Look vigilantly to the heavens!
What does it mean,
that mug-faced fascists
brazenly
threaten our own?
It means--
prepare wings!
Strengthen the nation's defenses!

Recounting the recent series of Western actions threatening Soviet security, Maiakovskii asserted that the nation's defense would be guaranteed only after the nation had "spent its last ruble on airplanes." Once "red fliers herald [Soviet] strength in the heavens," he concluded, the populace might take solace in the knowledge that their safety was assured. This explicit association of Curzon's ultimatum with the air fleet signaled the Party's intention to use the diplomatic note as a vehicle to bolster public interest in the ongoing aeronautical campaign.

Following Maiakovskii's poetic admonition, ODVF announced the inauguration of a special campaign designed to further focus Soviet citizens' attention towards the drive to build the air fleet. The defiant symbol for the new campaign, a winged clenched fist emblazoned with the initials "O. D. V. F.," was widely circulated on posters and in the press while satirical postcards depicting Lord Curzon were produced for sale to the nation's public.[123] More important, ODVF established a special collection to raise money for the construction of a squadron of military airplanes. Observing that "the recent ultimatum handed to us by the English bourgeoisie [compels us] to quickly build [our] air fleet," the ODVF leadership proclaimed that it would meet Curzon's

[123] Ibid., l. 216 and "Ul'timatum ODVF SSSR," *Samolet* 2 (1923): 37.

preposterous demands with "an ultimatum of [its] own," to be delivered in the form of a new squadron of military aircraft.[124] Collections for the new squadron, which would bear the moniker "Our Ultimatum!" (*Nash ul'timatum!*), were to be raised throughout the Republic as a demonstration of Soviet citizens' unified opposition to the threats of the Western bourgeois powers. Working together with regional newspapers, factories and Party organizations, local ODVF chapters sponsored special collections to raise the capital needed to purchase individual planes. Between May and November 1923 the "Ultimatum Campaign" collected millions of rubles, providing funds for the construction of a squadron of eleven airplanes that was presented to Party officials on 11 November at the Trotskii Airfield outside Moscow.[125]

The appropriation of the "Curzon ultimatum" as a foil to win support for the Red Air Fleet signaled a shift in the Party's strategy to popularize aviation. Prior to the delivery of the diplomatic note, the program devised by the RMC had called for press and ODVF publications to devote the majority of their attention to the airplane's non-military applications in developing the Soviet economy and modernizing the nation's culture. In those particular instances when official organs addressed martial themes, they were to do so in only the most general terms, speculating upon the possibility of a second world war or a renewed intervention on Russian soil.[126] The Curzon note, however, provided ODVF officials with an opportunity to link the Soviet air fleet to a concrete and visible (albeit exaggerated) military threat. In focusing so much attention upon the diplomatic skirmish, ODVF officials endeavored to foster citizens' fears of war in order to sustain high levels of public interest in the aeronautical campaign. The integration of foreign events in the conduct of the aeronautical drive would become, henceforth, a constant feature of the Party's air-minded propaganda.

IV

The well-publicized presentation of the "Ultimatum squadron" and the continuing feverish pace of the aeronautical drive obscured numerous organizational problems encountered by the voluntary society as it mobilized the nation to establish the Red Air Fleet. As the campaign to answer Curzon reached its apogee in the early fall of 1923, the society's governing presidium

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[124] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 30, l. 22.
[125] RGVA f. 29, op. 1, d. 25 (Svedeniia o sostoianii ODVF na 15 Ianvaria 1925 g.), l. 280 and *Izvestiia*, 13 November 1923. The success of the campaign spawned other fund raisers including one for the construction of a squadron entitled, "Far Eastern Ultimatum" See, *Izvestiia*, 18 September 1923.
[126] RGVA f. 33987, op. 1, d. 558, ll. 73-77.

convened a Republic-wide meeting of national, regional and local ODVF representatives to coordinate strategies between the center and periphery and to address the problems thus far faced by the organization's rank and file members. Held in Moscow from 15 to 18 September, the "First All-Union Conference of ODVF" revealed that behind the claims of order and competence made by the Party's press organs both the voluntary society and the Campaign to Establish the Red Air Fleet had, in fact, suffered through worrisome bouts of confusion and disorganization. To redress these deficiencies, ODVF representatives were summoned to Moscow to receive instructions from the center regarding the future direction and administration of the campaign.

One telling indication of the difficulties faced by ODVF in managing the nationwide campaign was evidenced by the poor attendance of regional and local representatives at the conference. As the first session began on the morning of the 15th, many of the invited delegates had not yet arrived from such distant locations as Ukraine and the Caucasus. In addition to their absences were those encouraged by the capital city's metropolitan charms. For many would-be conference participants, the sights and sounds of Moscow proved more appealing than the prospect of lengthy discussions devoted to fund raising, recruitment strategies and mind numbing financial reports. No fewer than one dozen representatives registered with ODVF officials yet failed to attend even one of the conference's sessions.[127] The disappointing attendance prompted an apologetic disclaimer from ODVF Presidium member D. A. Petrovskii who noted that, if nothing else, the conference had at least allowed members to "get to know one another" and to familiarize themselves with ODVF's national leadership.[128] A more disconcerting sign of the society's disorderly state was the absence of Dobrolet director Krasnoshchekov who, according to General Secretary A. R. Orlinskii, had failed to respond to the presidium's request that he attend an organizational meeting that had preceded the conference. In a display of disapproval for such administrative delinquency, the gathered delegates voted down a motion to reserve a place for a Dobrolet representative on the conference's governing committee.[129] The vote was not the last sign of displeasure with Dobrolet expressed at the conference.

In their report to the gathered representatives, members of ODVF's central administration acknowledged that the rapid pace of the mobilization campaign inaugurated on 1 March had resulted in a considerable degree of organizational chaos. Despite the striking success of the subscription drive in enrolling more than 100,000 members in the voluntary society, Moscow

[127] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 40, l. 169.
[128] Ibid., l. 171.
[129] Ibid., l. 9.

found itself "horribly behind" in its efforts to marshal the resources collected in the provinces.[130] Lack of communication between national, regional and local organizations had produced numerous instances in which the society's different associations and chapters had worked at cross purposes collecting dues, distributing literature and delivering monetary donations to the central administration. In other cases, poor coordination between the central administration and local chapters meant that recruitment efforts had overlapped and agitational work had been unnecessarily repeated. This "parallelism," officials noted, wasted considerable time and undermined ODVF's efforts to run an efficient and systematic campaign.[131]

To address these organizational problems, ODVF's national leadership announced that, "following a long period of careful consideration," the decision had been reached to undertake a "bold leap forward" and restructure the administrative hierarchy that had "chaotically and spontaneously" developed during the aeronautical campaign. Noting that, in many cases, local ODVF chapters had been functioning "without guidance from the center," the Society's national leadership called attention to the need for "strengthening [ODVF's] central governing apparatus" to enable Moscow to coordinate activities better throughout the Republic and to assume full responsibility for administering the campaign.[132] A response to recent State Planning Commission (Gosplan) decrees concerning the "regionalization" (*raionirovanie*) of existing bureaucratic structures, this reorganizational effort was intended to "bolster the national organization and its ties to regional and local ODVF cells" by unifying all of the chapters under the aegis of the central Moscow authorities.[133]

According to the Moscow leadership, such restructuring was necessary to ensure that the organization meet the challenges that would be posed as the Society entered into a "new phase of activity." Thus far, members of the presidium proclaimed, ODVF's mobilization efforts had addressed only the general need of raising "air-consciousness" within the Republic. The campaign inaugurated by the press had succeeded in drawing the public's attention to the importance of aviation and in generating widespread enthusiasm for the construction of the Red Air Fleet.[134] In light of this success, however, the time had come for ODVF to turn its attention away from the "general work undertaken by the central press" in order to concentrate upon "concrete agitation"

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[130] Ibid., l. 71.
[131] Ibid., l. 38.
[132] Ibid., ll. 8-10.
[133] Ibid., l. 12. For a discussion of Party efforts to facilitate economic planning through the process of "regionalization" see E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924-1926* (New York, 1960), 273-303.
[134] Ibid., ll. 88-89.

that would develop specific issues and target particular constituencies.[135] The centralization of the administrative hierarchy would facilitate this process by enabling ODVF to overcome the "fits and starts" that had characterized the early campaign. By establishing closer ties between provincial organizations and Moscow, the Society would be better prepared to begin the "painstaking daily work" that it would need to undertake "in many places and over many years" to ensure the long-term success of the Soviet aviation program.[136]

The "new phase of activity," which necessitated the organizational restructuring, was to be marked by the implementation of two new policies. The first was intended to address the continuing need for a truly nationwide network of civic associations that would assist in developing social consciousness amongst ODVF members. According to Moscow, the "unification" of the Society's members was a necessary prerequisite to the strengthening and further growth of the nation's aeronautical efforts. In the absence of uniform local institutions, ODVF had thus far failed to exploit fully the human resources that it had assembled through its membership campaign. Upon joining the voluntary society, each ODVF recruit received a membership card in exchange for a five ruble donation. Yet no substantive programs existed to strengthen the bonds between the Society's members.

> Aside from the membership card there must be some kind of personal connection that will unite all of our members as one. We must weave and establish that connection or else we will not unite our membership together.[137]

Concerned with the organizational diversity that had manifested itself during the mobilization campaign, Party leaders moved to reassert the center's prerogatives and to bolster their administrative control over regional and local chapters by tying the voluntary society more tightly to the Party and its institutions. The ODVF leadership's repeated references to ending the "chaotic" and "spontaneous" early phases of the campaign were indications of their intent to impose conformity and compliance now that the institutional framework had been established for the nation's aeronautical programs.

To facilitate the "unification" of the Society's members, ODVF officials announced that "air circles," air clubs and "air corners" would be created within military units, factories and Party cells. These corners and circles would serve as social networks for ODVF members, supplying

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[135] Ibid., ll. 91-92.
[136] Ibid., l. 68.
[137] Ibid., l. 85.

them with recent aeronautical literature, ODVF directives and agitational materials. They would also serve as bases from which members could expand the Society through "concrete deeds and work." These institutions, the Moscow leaders hoped, would provide the dual benefits of "furthering agitational-enlightenment work while serving as a catalyst for the unification of [the] membership into one mass."[138] To hasten the growth of the Society, ODVF's leadership also announced that new emphasis would be placed upon "collective membership," the process by which entire factories, military units and enterprises joined the voluntary society as individual units. Through the expansion of collective membership, the ODVF presidium expected to increase the Society's total membership from some 100,000 to no less than one million citizens by the end of 1924. Finally, Moscow announced that the voluntary society would extend its publication ventures by inaugurating a new journal devoted exclusively to the air fleet and the activities of ODVF.[139]

The "unification drive" announced at the All-Union Conference represented more than just an attempt to bring local ODVF chapters into line with Moscow. The new policy also reflected the Party's growing insistence that individual members of the voluntary society assume active and responsible roles in assuring the growth of ODVF and the success of Soviet aviation. Through participation in aviation corners, air clubs and circles, ODVF members would be encouraged to work towards expanding the aeronautical campaign throughout the Republic.[140] They would also help contribute a growing sense of unity and purpose amongst the Society's widening membership. The "personal connections" fostered through participation in local circles and clubs were part of the continuing effort by Party officials to instill a sense of collective civic responsibility amongst the nation's masses. The theme of the individual's duty to society would come to play an increasingly important role in the pronouncements and directives issued by the Party and the ODVF hierarchy. In less than a year, the inculcation of "socialist civic consciousness" (*sotsialisticheskaia obshchestvennost'*) would supplant the development of aviation as the primary objective of the voluntary society.[141]

For all of the painstaking efforts undertaken by the Society on behalf of the Red Air Fleet, the policies announced by the ODVF leadership were an odd approach to developing the nation's aeronautical capabilities. In light of the widespread and endemic organizational problems

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[138] Ibid.
[139] ODVF's monthly journal *Samolet* began publication in November 1923.
[140] For a description of the Society's air corners and circles see below, chapter 3, 135.
[141] See below, chapter 3, 133.

acknowledged by the Society's governing presidium, the proclaimed objective of increasing ODVF's membership by a factor of ten in little more than twelve months' time was, at best, an impetuous proposition. Although the introduction of so many new members would certainly increase the financial resources available for the construction of airplanes, experience thus far had clearly demonstrated that in the absence of fundamental administrative restructuring many of those moneys would never reach Moscow. Such a rapid proliferation of members, moreover, would make exceedingly difficult any efforts to reorganize ODVF's nationwide administration. In similar fashion, the proclaimed intention of heightening and strengthening the individual member's "personal connections" with ODVF was contradicted by the leadership's actions to bring the Society's far-flung chapters closer in line with Moscow. At the same time that individual members were portrayed as the central components of the Society's success, the ODVF presidium undertook to suppress spontaneous, individual expressions of Soviet air-mindedness by subordinating the activities of all local and regional organizations to a centrally mandated Party line.

Accompanying the efforts to expand membership and to strengthen Party control over the organization, ODVF leaders announced that, henceforth, the Society would direct more of its resources towards recruiting members from amongst the nation's rural inhabitants. To date, ODVF's notable accomplishments had been achieved solely in major urban centers as aeronautical spectacles and recruitment campaigns were organized to entertain and enlighten municipal residents. In the meantime, peasant attitudes towards ODVF membership had remained "passive" and "uninspired." In order to ensure that the entire nation participate in the campaign to construct Red aviation, it was essential that ODVF "directly and forcibly pound (*zarubit'*) into the heads of the peasants" the vital need for an air fleet.[142] To facilitate this end, ODVF's leadership announced that the Society would begin coordinating its activities with provincial peasant mutual aid societies, utilizing those institutions (as it had trade union and Party cells) to provide the organizational framework necessary to propagate the Society's interests at local levels throughout the Soviet Union's rural regions.

Local representatives to the All-Union Conference expressed their unreserved support for the decision to turn the Society's attention towards the peasantry. Although individual members voiced differing opinions regarding the wisdom of utilizing the mutual aid societies, all agreed that the village was "enthralled with aviation" and that attempts to agitate in the countryside would

[142] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 40, l. 31.

meet with an enthusiastic response.[143] This agreement did not, however, extend to Moscow's plans for further centralizing the ODVF bureaucracy. Concerned that centralization would "put the brakes on local (*gubernii*a) efforts," numerous representatives rose to proclaim their opposition to the leadership's restructuring plans.[144] Citing the shortcomings evidenced in Moscow's early administration of the campaign, local representatives to the conference implored the ODVF leadership to grant more independence to *gubernii*a organizations.[145] One perturbed member went so far as to remind the presidium that "we [in the provinces] have experience too" and noted that "Moscow should not be the only one dictating how to run things."[146] The opposition expressed by provincial spokesmen notwithstanding, the ODVF leadership concluded that "sufficient agreement" existed to proceed with Moscow's new program.[147]

The Society's governing council proved more accommodating to representatives' complaints concerning ODVF's organizational accomplice, the commercial enterprise Dobrolet. In response to persistent questions from the floor regarding the voluntary society's relationship to and reasons for supporting the joint-stock company, Orlinskii drew a pointed distinction between the "voluntary methods" employed by ODVF and the entrepreneurial activities encouraged by the share holding venture. Unlike the profit-making philosophy upon which Dobrolet was founded, Orlinskii noted that ODVF "does not ask workers and peasants to purchase shares" but, rather, "asks them only to sacrifice" their hard earned rubles for the benefit of the nation. Whereas Dobrolet relied upon speculative investment as its means of raising capital, "ODVF, without any kind of craftiness, simply asks that citizens donate their rubles to the cause of the air fleet."[148] Although he acknowledged that competition for ruble subscriptions was bound to occur between the two organizations, Orlinskii assured that the superiority of ODVF's voluntary approach would ensure the organization success that its profit-motivated partner could not match. As if to assuage local representatives' doubts about the probity of his words, Orlinskii noted that although Dobrolet would continue to exist, it would do so "only as a department completely subordinate to ODVF." As such, he concluded, the society's members need not worry about "any dangers" arising from the existence of the "exploitive commercial organization."[149]

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[143] Ibid., ll. 50 and 52, for example.
[144] Ibid., l. 32.
[145] Ibid., l. 42.
[146] Ibid., l. 47.
[147] Ibid., l. 68.
[148] Ibid., l. 26.
[149] Ibid.

In response to both the open and veiled criticisms leveled at Dobrolet, Krasnoshchekov (who had finally arrived at the conference) rose to exonerate his organization and to undo any damage caused by Orlinskii's backhanded defense of the commercial venture. Noting that his company had already achieved considerable results in purchasing airplanes, constructing air fields and establishing aeronautical routes, the Dobrolet director pointed to the share-holding enterprise as the quintessential example of the way in which Soviet economic development should proceed. According to him, Dobrolet's commercial activities would impart experience to managers, laborers, financiers and political leaders that would prove invaluable in constructing not only an air fleet, but in reconstructing the nation's industry as a whole. "In order for Soviet industry to be able to work," Krasnoshchekov argued, "we must learn to count every kopeck and we must learn individual responsibility. Only when we learn to take responsibility for our own work will we learn how to do [business] properly...and this can only be done through commercial enterprises like Dobrolet."[150]

His impassioned appeals notwithstanding, Krasnoshchekov met with little success in convincing the gathered representatives that Dobrolet was both a necessary and beneficial means to assuring the development of the Soviet air fleet and the prosperity of the nation. Even after his address, rank and file members continued to raise doubts about the desirability and efficacy of the commercial enterprise. Their persistent opposition indicated the deep-seated mistrust of market forces that characterized Soviet political culture throughout the period of the NEP. This mistrust was subsequently confirmed by the Party hierarchy. Less than two weeks after the adjournment of the conference, Krasnoshchekov was arrested by the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate and charged with misappropriating PromBank funds in order to finance, among other things, "disgraceful drinking binges."[151] A more credible explanation for his removal from office may be that Krasnoshchekov's support of liberal free trade measures had earned him the enmity of powerful Party officials eager to distance themselves from the stigma of ideologically suspect "capitalist" practices.[152]

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[150] Ibid., l. 146.
[151] "Pochemu arestovan Krasnoshchekov?," *Izvestiia*, 3 October 1923.
[152] Canfield F. Smith, "Krasnoshchekov, Aleksandr Mikhailovich," *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 18 (Gulf Breeze, Fla., 1980), 45. Smith incorrectly cites 1924 as the year of Krasnoshchekov's arrest and imprisonment.

The First All-Union Conference of ODVF revealed the underlying tensions at play as the Party hierarchy endeavored to encourage and institutionalize enthusiasm for Soviet aviation and the construction of the Red Air Fleet. Through the fabrication of the mass-based society Friends of the Air Fleet, leading Party officials sought to modernize their nation's aeronautical capabilities while building support for their political programs through the creation of an organizational network that would promote "volunteerism" on the part of the nation's masses. The policy decisions announced by ODVF officials at the inaugural conference, however, indicated the contradictory purposes that the voluntary society was designed to pursue. Eager to bring increasing numbers of citizens under the control of a centralized bureaucratic hierarchy, ODVF officials were willing to subordinate needed reform of the society's inefficient administrative structure in order to rapidly (and unrealistically) expand the society's membership. To meet this end, Party leaders rushed to expand the policy of "collective membership" in which new ODVF chapters were created through administrative fiat rather than allowing existing chapters the time to recruit new members on an individual basis. While these methods would lead to the headlong growth of the society on paper, they also exacerbated the already difficult administrative problems faced by local ODVF organizations. Ultimately, the approaches chosen by Party leaders to mobilize support for Soviet aviation suggest that ODVF was what Peter Kenez has called a "pseudoorganization," a state-mandated substitute for private social organizations that suppressed local initiative and circumvented individual spontaneity while conscripting millions of citizens into the service of the state to labor on behalf of Party-dictated goals.[153] To this extent, the organization and its 1923 campaign foreshadowed the numerical fetishism and bureaucratism that would come to characterize Soviet culture following the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932).

The Soviet approach to aeronautical modernization contrasted sharply with the interactive efforts that had been undertaken by the Imperial state and private citizens during the waning years of the Tsarist Empire. Faced with the disintegration of political and social networks as a result of years of violence and discord, and mindful of technology's vital role in ensuring their nation's military security, leading members of the Communist Party pursued a policy of aeronautical development in the early 1920s that sought to reinforce their political authority while contributing to the defense of the nation. This policy was realized in the form of a mass-mobilization campaign designed to marshal limited resources and to encourage "volunteerism" on the part of the nation's citizens. The methods chosen by Party leaders to develop Soviet aviation were indications of their

[153] Kenez, *Birth of the Propaganda State*, 254.

early ideological commitment towards a comprehensive program of forced modernization directed exclusively "from above" that sacrificed private associations and individual initiative in favor of centrally-planned and coerced collective action.

Chapter III

Aeronautical Iconography and Political Legitimacy: Soviet Aviation in Service to the State, 1924-1929

Aeronautical Encounters in the Soviet Countryside: Air-mindedness as an Ideology of Dominance

From their very inception in the spring of 1923, both ODVF and the Campaign for the Establishment of a Red Air Fleet were designed to achieve the multiple goals of fostering public air-mindedness, building an air force, and reconstituting the social and political networks that had been destroyed during the Civil War. Accompanying these tasks, Party officials put airplanes to work by employing aeronautical images to raise public awareness of the possibility of foreign attack and to educate citizens of the Party's efforts to prevent this possibility. In this way, aviation served to legitimate the Party by linking Soviet leaders to a powerful symbol of progress and modernity. Initially, ODVF efforts to expand aeronautical consciousness had focused on the nation's urban centers. Concentrating their activities in major cities such as Petrograd and Moscow, ODVF officials quickly developed a network of local organizations by recruiting new members from factories, Party cells, trade unions, and the military. Party leaders' intention that ODVF become a truly "all-union" organization, however, meant that the society's propaganda would increasingly be applied to winning over rural residents to the cause of Red aviation.

The structuring element behind ODVF's attempt to raise the aeronautical consciousness of the peasantry was the ongoing effort of Party leaders to facilitate a "union" (or, *smychka*) between their urban constituents and the nation's peasant masses. Formally ratified by the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924, the policy of *smychka* had been underway, in earnest, since the end of War Communism in 1921.[1] As a central component of the New Economic Policy, the *smychka* would attempt to rectify the impasse between depressed agricultural prices and inflated industrial prices that had produced the "scissors" crisis during the fall of 1923. [2] In keeping with the Party's broader legitimating claim of embodying the interests of the workers' and peasants' state, the

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[1] *Trinadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b): Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1963), 633-646. For a narrative overview of the policy, see N. N. Saburov, *Bor'ba partii za ustanovlenie ekonomicheskoi smychki rabochego klassa s trudiashchimsia krest'ianstvom, 1921-1925 gg.* (Moscow, 1975), 66-76.

[2] For a discussion of the scissors crisis see Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (London, 1992), 88-91.

sought to generate rural support for Soviet power by encouraging political cooperation and cultural exchange between the nation's urban and rural inhabitants.

The groundwork for ODVF's own "turn to the village" (as the *smychka* euphemistically came to be known) had been established during the society's All-Union Conference of September 1923. Delegates to the Conference, in addition to addressing much needed administrative reform, spent considerable time developing strategies for enticing rural residents to become friends of the air fleet. Despite the noteworthy success of the campaign in enrolling well over 100,000 members by the end of 1923, ODVF officials were concerned about the society's lack of activity outside of major urban centers such as Petrograd and Moscow. To rectify this situation, ODVF launched an "All-Union Campaign in the Villages" on 15 December 1923 that was intended to "explain to the peasantry, in simple and clear words, the nature of aviation and aeronautics and their importance in defending the nation and assisting in its economic development."[3] Through direct appeals tailored to peasant audiences, ODVF hoped to encourage rural residents' "cooperation and fraternal assistance in the construction of Red aviation." The turn to the village would "liquidate aeronautical illiteracy" (*aviatsionnaia besgramotnosti* [*sic*!]) amongst the peasantry thus paving the way for a truly "all-union" effort to build the air fleet.[4] The incorporation of rural residents in the aeronautical campaign would produce the added benefit of hastening peasants' urbanization by bringing them into contact with new technologies and agricultural methods. In this way, the airplane would play a key role in supporting the political and cultural goals of the worker-peasant *smychka* by "drawing the village closer to the city.[5]

ODVF efforts to inculcate air-mindedness amongst the Soviet Republic's rural residents produced a new literature which differed from that disseminated to urban audiences. The pamphlets, short stories, poems, and tales intended for peasant consumption were designed to communicate specific messages regarding the economic prosperity of the peasantry, the budding friendship of city and village, and the Party's dedicated efforts to employ aviation in realizing these ends. A closer examination of the messages and methods used to raise the aeronautical consciousness of the countryside, however, reveals that even during the brief period of 1921-1925 when Party officials were actively working to court the peasantry, they simultaneously communicated an underlying condescension toward and disdain for their rural charges. This antipathetic sub-text of ODVF propaganda indicated the inimical, anti-rural sentiments that lay at

[3] "Aviatsionnaia kampaniia v derevne," *Samolet* 2 (1923): 30.
[4] Ibid.
[5] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 18-19.

the heart of the Party's ideological visions.[6] Its presence calls into question the possibility that the peasantry would ever be granted equipotent status within the worker-peasant state.

I

The collection entitled *The Aeronautical Adventures of Egor Poddevkin* was a characteristic example of the literary strategies employed by ODVF officials to raise peasants' consciousness of aviation and the *smychka*.[7] The publication was comprised of three short tales that related the encounters of an air-minded Red Army veteran as he traveled by plane through the Russian countryside. In the collection's first story, "The Enchanted Sled," Poddevkin journeys to the remote and listless settlement of Dremotovo. Located forty *versty* from the nearest market town, the "sleepy" village has been cut-off from the outside world by the onset of winter. [8] Unable to travel through the deep snowdrifts that cover the landscape, the misfortunate residents of Dremotovo "languish in a sea of snow, their energy sapped, unable to act." [9] The village is dying in its isolation. It "needs a tie to the city, especially now at a time when the urban proletariat is forging bonds of friendship with the peasantry." [10]

Dremotovo's winter slumber is stirred by the unexpected arrival of Egor Poddevkin. Late at night, in the middle of a howling blizzard, the leather-clad hero appears at the door of a local residence. The drowsy villagers are surprised to hear that he has traveled the 600 *versty* from Moscow in only one evening. They are still more astonished to learn that he has traveled by air.

Poddevkin introduces the local inhabitants to his ski-equipped airplane. They are frightened by the "winged monster" and are convinced that the city slicker's story and his metallic contraption are simply parts of an elaborate ruse. Their doubts are dispelled the following morning, however, when Poddevkin takes several into the air aboard his "flying sled." The demonstration convinces even the most skeptical amongst them that humans can, indeed, fly. They all acknowledge that had they "not seen it with their own eyes they never would have believed such a thing possible." [11] The peasants' world view is profoundly transformed by their aeronautical encounter. Thanks to Poddevkin's visit, the residents of Dremotovo have come to recognize the

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[6] For an account of the peasantry's treatment in the Marxist philosophical system, see David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (Chapel Hill, 1951).
[7] N. Riazanov, *Prikliuchenii Egora Poddevkina na samolete* (Moscow, 1924).
[8] The name of the village is derived from the Russian word *dremota* or, "slumber."
[9] Riazanov, *Prikliuchenii Egora Poddevkina na samolete*, 3-4.
[10] Ibid., 4.
[11] Ibid., 9-10.

value of the airplane and its practical applications in their daily lives. No longer will they "need horses, sleds, river barges and the like to travel through the forests and ravines." The airplane will do this for them. It will make their lives easier and more productive. As Poddevkin prepares to depart from Dremotovo, he reminds the villagers that this will all prove possible only if they work together to build the air fleet:

> Above everything else, I tell you that you must become members of the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet in order to strengthen your ties to the air. You must turn all of your energy toward this task and pool your resources so that you can purchase such a wondrous machine!

Having thus awakened the sleepy village to the realities of the aeronautical age, the pilot departs for his next destination.

Poddevkin's subsequent aeronautical adventures follow the basic pattern established in "The Enchanted Sled." In the story entitled, "The Miraculous Smoke," the Red Army veteran travels hundreds of miles over dense forests and swamps to reach the isolated settlement of Goriuchino. There, legions of insects plague the village's inhabitants. The foul vermin have invaded the villagers' homes where they "survive like *kulaks*" by sucking the blood of their impoverished hosts.[12] The villagers' misery is compounded by the ever present threat of forest fires. Goriuchino's residents live in constant fear of the annual conflagrations that consume the forests and rye fields which "would otherwise help to rebuild the entire Soviet Republic." Poddevkin's arrival offers the peasants hope. The intrepid pilot dispatches the insect menace with his crop dusting plane and then turns the craft to douse a fire. Having thus relieved the peasants and saved the forests, Poddevkin instructs, "villagers, build airplanes! For they will deliver you from all misfortune."[13] A similar message was imparted by the collection's final installment, "Devil in a Straw Hat," in which Poddevkin employs his cloud-seeding airplane to bring much needed rain to a parched village. Thanks to the timely intervention of the air-minded veteran, the harvest is saved and the villagers are kept from starvation.

The Aeronautical Adventures of Egor Poddevkin contain many of the basic themes that would be repeated in literary, cinematic, and graphic productions aimed at the peasantry. Concerned that rural Russians would be confused by and disinterested in detailed technical descriptions of aeronautical science, ODVF leaders repeatedly instructed propagandists to keep

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[12] Ibid., 11.
[13] Ibid., 18.

their messages simple and clear.[14] Rather than befuddling audiences with complicated discussions of aerodynamics the society's representatives were directed to focus upon the immediate, practical benefits that peasants would realize once the nation had succeeded in establishing its air fleet. To this end, ODVF literature repeatedly stressed the airplane's utility in assisting agricultural production, supplying the villages with goods and services, and protecting peasant households from the machinations of monarchists, capitalists, kulaks, and foreigners.

The message of the airplane's practicality was repeated in innumerable short stories and tales. In "How Uncle Vlas Became an ODVF Member," the aged peasant Vlas is initially suspicious of the "flying yeroplane-bird." [15] He is incredulous at the thought that humans can fly. Even if it is true, he sees no value in the enterprise. The return of his son from the Civil War front signals the beginning of Vlas' aeronautical conversion. Through a series of discussions with the young Red Army veteran, Vlas learns of the airplane's ability to battle both imperialists and insects, to assist with the harvest and to provide the village with goods from the city. Thus convinced that aviation will bring prosperity and security to the nation, Uncle Vlas sells a bag of flour to pay for his ODVF membership and, from then on, contributes money on a regular basis to the cause of the air fleet.

The short story triptych "How It Will Be" told rural audiences of still more ways in which airplanes would benefit the countryside.[16] In the collection's initial tale an airplane proves instrumental in delivering medical assistance. The peasant Marina's daughter is desperately sick, but her remote village is located more than fifty *versty* from the nearest hospital. Thanks to the presence of an ODVF airplane, a doctor arrives in the nick of time to save the dying girl. "With tears of joy, Marina ran outside and lovingly looked up at the plane, gleaming like the sun. After all, had it not been for the plane, her daughter would have died." [17] The two other tales of "How It Will Be" related (with somewhat less pathos) the airplane's usefulness in battling locusts and bringing crops more efficiently to market.

Demonstrations of the airplane's ability to ensure prosperity and save lives were not, however, the only messages communicated by ODVF publications. A closer reading of these

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[14] See, for example, Aleksei Rykov's admonition to the society's members in GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 23 (Otchet o rabote sovetov, prezidiumov, biuro prezidiumov, sekretariatov i sektsii Soiuza Aviakhim SSSR I Aviakhim RSFSR), l. 2 and discussions concerning the inauguration of the journal *Daesh motor* in RGVA f. 29, d. 52 (Protokoly zasedaniia redaktsionogo soveta ODVF), l. 34.

[15] "Kak diadia Vlas vstupil v chleny ODVF," *Aviadrug* 1 (April 1924): 19-22.

[16] "Kak budet," *Daesh Sibiri krasnye kryl'ia* 4 (1925): 15-19.

[17] Ibid., 17.

aeronautical texts uncovers a series of recurrent themes that were intimately linked to the Party's broader agenda. Through these themes, propagandists endeavored to embed a number of important political and cultural messages in the collective consciousness of the nation's citizens.

Just as the Red Army was "one of the focal points [used by] the Bolsheviks to inculcate socialist ideas amongst the populace," the image of the Red Army veteran emerged as a focal point in the Party's efforts to inculcate popular air-mindedness.[18] ODVF propagandists frequently utilized the figure of the returning soldier as the central structuring element of their aeronautical narratives.[19] In both the Poddevkin series and the tale of Uncle Vlas, for example, a Red Army veteran introduces aviation to the countryside, winning over skeptical peasants through aerial demonstrations and reasoned arguments.

The decision of ODVF authorities to link the image of the veteran to aeronautical construction reflected the Party's broader policy of employing Red Army soldiers to help build socialist culture. As Mark von Hagen has demonstrated in his study of *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, the Soviet political leadership looked to experienced soldiers "to fill the burgeoning bureaucracies and, most significantly, to reform, if not overturn, the established political order in the countryside."[20] As a graduate of the "school of socialism," the peasant-soldier was seen by Party leaders as a vital link in bridging the cultural and political gaps that separated rural Russians from their urbanist leaders. Tied to the village from which he came and shaped by the state that he had served, the Red Army veteran was believed to be well-suited to facilitating the *smychka* between city and village. In the symbolic world of ODVF propaganda, the portrayal of the empty-headed peasant turned politically conscious soldier was a clear metaphor of the revolutionary transformation of Russia from a backward agrarian nation to a modern industrial power that would take place under the leadership of the Communist Party.

The image of the Red Army veteran as the bearer of enlightenment and technological acuity was juxtaposed by the frequent appearance of the politically obscurant, scientifically skeptical (and oftentimes inebriated) Orthodox priest. Such negative portrayals of the Russian clergy were a direct outgrowth of the ongoing campaign to denigrate religion and promote atheism

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[18] Roger R. Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1996), 3.

[19] The Red Army veteran was portrayed in an identical fashion in the ODVF cinematic productions *Contact!*, *Toward Aerial Victory*, *On Wings, Higher* and *Aero NT-54*. See chapter 4.

[20] von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 8.

that had led to the founding of the League of the Militant Godless in the summer of 1924.[21] ODVF officials served the interests of the Godless by incorporating strong anti-clerical images in their air-minded publications. These caricatures drew a sharp distinction between the progress made possible by contemporary Soviet science and the backwardness of traditional Russian faith.

ODVF attitudes towards religion were developed most strikingly in the lengthy *skazka* entitled *Priestly Worries, Locusts and Airplanes*.[22] The tale involved the story of the isolated village Odintsovka and the efforts of its residents to rid themselves of the recurrent threat of locusts. When the insects first appear and threaten the harvest, the village's overweight and gluttonous priest, Ivan, admonishes the residents to pray for deliverance. Father Ivan claims that the locusts have been sent by God to punish the peasants for their sinful ways. For a fee, the priest offers to conduct a series of prayer services that will appease the Lord and save the crops. The naive and trusting villagers gratefully accept the offer. They allow the priest to "harvest the kopecks from their pockets" in the hope that his prayers will rid them of the locusts.

Every hour of every day	Ежечасно, ежедневно
The villagers gathered together to pray	Всем селом служить, молебны.
The priest Ivan prayed like the rest	Помогал ли поп Иван,
Or was it all just one big jest?	Иль вводил народ в обман.[23]

Despite the peasants' obedience to their priest, the insect menace does not disappear. The locusts destroy the grain and bring hardship to the village.

The situation for Odintsovka's peasants worsens the following summer. The locusts return for a second year in a row. Again, they threaten to destroy the crop and bring economic misery to the village. The panic-stricken and fearful peasants return to their priest. They implore him to perform more prayer services.

Holy father hear us please	—"Так и так, священной отче,
The whole village is on its knees	Всей деревней гибнем нонче!
The locusts have returned again	С саранчею нету слада,
Please pray to God without end.	Помолиться богу надо!"[24]

[21] For an institutional history of the League of the Militant Godless see Daniel Peris, "'Storming the Heavens': The Soviet League of the Militant Godless and Bolshevik Political Culture in the 1920s and 1930s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1994).
[22] ?. Berezov and A. Glagolev, *O popovskoi zabote, o saranche i o samolete* (Moscow, 1925).
[23] Ibid., 7.
[24] Ibid., 14.

Father Ivan enriches himself again at the expense of his flock. In return for his services he exacts an even greater amount of tribute from the impoverished villagers. He again performs his prayers.

The villagers attended Mass	И пошли в селе молебны,
Without a service no day did pass	Ежечасно, ежедневно.
But though they prayed both night and day	Но хоть служат чуть не месяц,
The locusts did not go away.	Саранча на том же месте.[25]

Odintsovka's peasants pay dearly for their naive faith. Despite the priest's invocations, the locusts destroy the harvest.

The peasants return to the fields the next spring to sow the very last remnants of their seed grain. There is trepidation and fear in their hearts. Will the locusts return? As the villagers nervously await their fate, Odintsovka is stirred by the arrival of a group of seasonal workers. Every summer, as the harvest time nears, scores of laborers return from their urban factories to help bring in the crops. This year, they are accompanied by a Red Army veteran.

The Red Army man soon learns of the villagers' plight. He hears tales of their annual battle with the insatiable locusts and the ongoing efforts to combat the insects with religion. The veteran summons the residents of Odintsovka together to inform them that he has an answer to their predicament. Wondrous machines have been invented that fly through the air. The Soviet Union possesses many of these "airplanes" which are often used to fight locusts by spraying fields with a special gas. Odintsovka's peasants listen with rapt attention as the Red Army veteran announces:

There is no place throughout this land	Ну, а где село не сможет—
Where Soviet power can't lend a hand	Власть Советская поможет
They will send without delay	И на помощь к нам придшлет
An aeroplane to save the day.	С этой целью самолет...[26]

With these words of encouragement, the Red Army man sets out for Moscow. He will soon return with the crop dusting airplane that will rid the village once and for all of its insect menace.

As the villagers eagerly await the veteran's return, they are chastised by Father Ivan for putting faith in the soldier. The priest is angry with his parishioners for abandoning God and he warns that more dire consequences await if the villagers do not repent. Days turn into weeks and

[25] Ibid., 17.
[26] Ibid., 21.

still the Red Army man does not arrive with the airplane. Odintsovka's residents grow more concerned with each passing day.

Almost three weeks following the veteran's departure, the villagers are horrified to discover that the locusts have returned. As Father Ivan beseeches them to again petition God, the peasants are plunged into despair. Should the locusts devour year's harvest, a great many people will die. Just then, when all hope appears lost, a "strange noise" is heard in the sky. It grows louder and louder as it approaches from afar. Anxious and fearful, Odintsovka's residents look to the heavens. There, they see a miraculous sight, the airplane promised by the Red Army soldier!

Again the airplane roared aloud	Вновь машина зашумела,
Climbed and flew behind a cloud	Поднялася, полетела,
Circling above the fields of grass	Закружилась над полями.
It released white puffs of gas.	Дыма белого клубами[27]

True to his word, the Red Army man has returned, bringing with him the most advanced technology the Soviet Union has to offer. He utilizes the airplane to dust the village's crops, killing the locusts and guaranteeing the success and prosperity of Odintsovka's harvest.

And the priest? Filled with shame	Ну, а поп? А поп с позором
How quickly, quiet he became	Быстро кончил разговоры,
He grabbed the hem from near his feet	Полы рясы подобрал
And hastily made his retreat.	Да сторонкою удрал.[28]

The derogatory depiction of Orthodox clergy appearing in *Priestly Worries, Locusts and Airplanes* was repeated in numerous ODVF propaganda productions. The lengthy poem-story *Friends of the Air Fleet, or the Airplane "Stepanida,"* for example, portrayed a rural clergyman and his faithful parishioners as obscurant opponents of Soviet aviation.[29] Meanwhile, in the 1925 film *Aero NT-54*, a drunken priest worked in close association with local moonshiners and criminals to thwart the aeronautical goals of a Red Army veteran.[30] Similar efforts to promote aviation at the expense of religious faith appeared on a regular basis in printed publications. The satirical journal *Krokodil* was particularly adept at blending air-minded propaganda with anti-religious images. In July 1923, at the height of the air fleet campaign, the periodical published a special issue devoted almost entirely to aviation. The issue contained a great many humorous tales,

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[27] Ibid., 31.
[28] Ibid., 32.
[29] R. Akul'shin, *Druz'ia vozdushnogo flota ili samolet "Stepanida."* Moscow, 1925.
[30] For a discussion of the film see below, chapter 4, 168-170.

cartoons, and *skazki* that promoted the aeronautical cause and attacked the Church. One particularly militant cartoon depicted a squadron of Soviet airplanes chasing Christ, the Mother of God and the Heavenly Host from the skies. The illustration was accompanied by the refrain:

In the heavens as wild affray	На небесах переполох:
God's been shot down by a plane	Погиб от самолета бог.
On the ground another one	И на земле наш самолет
Has the capitalists on the run.	Разрушит капитала гнет.[31]

The short poem "Aero-verses" attacked religion as well, referencing the desire of Party officials to replace popular faith in the traditions of the Church with a secular faith in the abilities of Soviet technology.

No longer will we consider ourselves worthless dust	Довольно считать себя никчемною пылю.
Who instructed us in the narcotic of faith?	Чему научил нас религии дурман?
Into the heavens we launch the aviation squadron	В небо запустим аэро-эскадрилью
Our religion is the airplane.	Наша религия—аэроплан.[32]

The close association of aviation and anti-religion was the logical outgrowth of the avowedly atheist and staunchly materialist philosophy of Communist Party leaders. As Party officials labored to complete their revolutionary assault on the institutions and images of the old Imperial order, they appropriated the airplane as a symbolic marker of the progress and prosperity that, they believed, would accompany the transition to communism. By routinely juxtaposing images of soaring airplanes with caricatures of drunken priests, fearful and naive peasants, and the torpor of the village community, ODVF propagandists thus advanced the broader vision of a dynamic, technically proficient, and enlightened urban Russia at the expense of the countryside. In addition to illustrating disdain for the Church and religious faith, ODVF's efforts to promote rural air-mindedness, as we shall see, revealed the Party's deep seated animosity towards the village and its residents.

II

[31] *Krokodil*, 15 July 1923.
[32] V. Sudnev, "Aero-stikhi," *Daesh motor* 5 (1925): 30.

The Party's efforts to encourage rural support for aeronautical construction were not limited to newspaper editorials and propaganda pamphlets. The mobilization of the press and publishing industries was accompanied by the production of stunning visual images intended to capture viewers' eyes and imaginations and to incite them to contribute time and money to the cause of Red aviation. Many of these images were produced by the nation's leading avant-garde artists. In 1923, the constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko was commissioned to design a series of logos for ODVF and Dobrolet which were later attached to newspapers and journals, stationary, lapel pins and membership badges. Other well-known artists including the suprematists Kazimir Malevich and Il'ia Chasnik incorporated aeronautical themes into their artistic productions and architectural designs while decorative aeronautical patterns appeared on textiles, teapots and even china.[33] From an aesthetic standpoint, the effort to employ aeronautical shapes and images in artistic creations reflected the desire to capture the new perspectives and sensations revealed by the development of a new technology. In more practical terms, these artistic productions helped to raise aeronautical consciousness by linking aviation to otherwise familiar and everyday objects.

The experimental efforts of artists and graphic designers notwithstanding, the most ubiquitous example of the exploitation of visual aeronautical imagery was the Party's use of the political poster. In a country that remained largely illiterate at the beginning of the twentieth century, visual images were an important medium for communicating otherwise complex and difficult ideas. In times past, this function had been served by the traditional peasant illustrated woodcut (*lubok*), Russian Orthodox iconography, and the newsprint graphics of the late Imperial era. Following the revolution, the political poster would become Soviet officials' graphic of choice. Throughout the 1920s Party leaders, cognizant of the ability of visual images to communicate ideological messages to diverse and oftentimes uneducated audiences, diverted considerable resources to ensure that their ideas and policies would be represented graphically throughout the country.[34]

Soviet aeronautical posters incorporated a wide variety of images and motifs carefully designed to communicate those messages deemed most essential by the Party hierarchy.[35] In the earliest years of the aeronautical drive, these messages focused upon familiarizing citizens with the

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[33] For examples of the air-minded creations of Malevich see Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven, 1994), 159-178. On aeronautical textiles, see the many examples contained in I. Yasinskaya, *Soviet Textile Design of the Revolutionary Period* (London, 1983).

[34] Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven, 1988), 1-7.

[35] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 21, l. 212.

airplane and educating them of the economic, military, and cultural benefits that would be realized following the construction of a national air fleet. Nearly all of these posters adhered to the Party dictum that ODVF propaganda materials be simple and direct, "accessible and understandable to the broad masses of workers and peasants."[36] As such, while a few posters produced by ODVF drew their artistic inspiration from the avant-garde experiments of Rodchenko and the constructivists, the vast majority were indebted to the less abstract and more readily comprehensible art of the realist tradition.

One widely distributed poster attempted to cajole citizens into joining ODVF by linking participation in the voluntary society to the question of patriotism. A clear imitation of Englishman Alfred Leete's recruitment poster from the First World War which depicted Lord Kitchener's stern-face admonishing young Britons "Your country needs YOU," the ODVF variant (complete with glaring pilot and accusatory index finger) asked the pressing question, "What have you done for the Air Fleet?"[37] (*plate 1*). A similar message (albeit accompanied by a more original illustration) was the basis of a 1923 Rodchenko poster that portrayed a Soviet airplane distributing the association's shares as it circled the globe. The poster's reproachful caption proclaimed, "Shame on your name if it does not appear on the Dobrolet roster" and warned citizens that "the whole country keeps watch on this roster" (*plate 2*). ODVF employed a similarly admonitory strategy in another 1923 Rodchenko production that announced, "Only a shareholder of Dobrolet is a citizen of the USSR."[38] By associating the individual's sense of community and personal responsibility with ongoing efforts to support the Red Air Fleet, these posters reflected ODVF's underlying mission to serve as one of the "new social structures" that would contribute to the construction of the coming socialist order.[39]

Soviet leaders faced real difficulty, however, in attempting to appeal to the patriotism and political loyalty of the peasant population. The Party's relationship with the nation's peasants had never been very good. The recent round of rural unrest in Tambov province, for example, had demonstrated the only tenuous loyalty that the Bolshevik government might expect from its provincial constituents. Compounding these difficulties was the latent mistrust of rural residents that shaped the perspectives of many leaders of the urbanist Communist Party. These factors

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[36] RGVA f. 29, op. 1, d. 52, l. 31.
[37] For a discussion and reproduction of the Leete poster see, respectively, White, *The Bolshevik Poster*, 46-48 and Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London, 1990), 25.
[38] Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work* (London, 1986) , 146.
[39] See above, chapter 2, 87-88.

dictated that the Party's strategy for raising rural air-mindedness would proceed along a different path than that chosen for metropolitan audiences. In place of appeals to patriotism and Party loyalty, rural aeronautical propaganda endeavored to convince peasant audiences that the Soviet state was cognizant of their needs and was willing to work with them to achieve the shared goals of economic prosperity and national security. To this end, many of the posters produced by ODVF depicted the friendship and cooperation of the peasantry and urban workers. In addition to serving the Society's interests in generating enthusiasm for aviation construction, these posters simultaneously advanced the Party's efforts to further the cultural and political *smychka* between city and countryside.

Aleksandrs Aspit's famous poster "The Year of the Proletarian Dictatorship" (1918) was one of the first works of Soviet political art to incorporate worker-peasant unity as its dominant theme (*plate 3*). Against the background of the dawn of the new socialist order a worker and peasant, arms in hand, stand vigil over the broken chains and oppressive symbols of the imperial past. Together they guard the gateway to industrial development and agricultural prosperity opened up by the Bolshevik Party.[40] Aspit's poster served as both a stylistic and substantive model for subsequent propagandists. The poster's colorful and careful framing appealed to the eye while its heroic and uncomplicated imagery was readily understandable to its chosen audience. Such symbolism was employed throughout the early 1920s as the Party's campaign to bolster its standing among the peasantry progressed. Not surprisingly, ODVF employed similar images in its own campaign to generate peasant support for the Red Air Fleet.

One such poster depicted two separate columns of workers and peasant resolutely advancing towards the viewer as a squadron of Soviet airplanes circles above (*plate 4*). At the head of both columns, representatives from each of the two groups encourage their comrades to follow their lead while holding high overhead a banner emblazoned with the initials M. O. D. V. F. (the acronym for the Moscow branch of the Friends of the Air Fleet). Beneath the illustration an inscription proclaims that the "revolutionary energy and iron will" of workers and peasants will ensure the construction of the new aviation squadron, "Red Moscow." The cooperation of the two social groups in building the new squadron is underscored by the framing of the poster. A centrally located obelisk draws the viewer's gaze inwards and up, towards the gleaming planes that circle over the heads of the converging citizens. Such imagery communicated the Party's abiding

[40] White, *The Bolshevik Poster*, 26.

expectation that aviation would play a crucial role in bridging the cultural, economic and technological rifts that separated the city from the village.

The unity of workers and peasants in the task of building Soviet aviation was also the theme of a poster sponsored by Ural ODVF. In this piece, a worker and peasant stand before an anvil laboring to turn a piece of heated metal into a useable tool (*plate 5*). As the worker strikes the iron with his hammer, the resulting sparks fly into the air and are transformed into a squadron of airplanes. The poster's caption makes the transparent imagery complete, "the 250,000 members of Ural ODVF will build the steel bulwark of the air fleet." The Ural ODVF poster was not terribly original from the standpoint of its artistic and thematic content. The blacksmith was a metaphor for socialist construction that appeared with considerable regularity in contemporary propaganda.[41] Nevertheless, the poster was significant for communicating the importance of urban-rural unity to the establishment of a modern air fleet. Only once workers labored together with peasants, the poster suggested, would the nation prove capable of achieving its aeronautical goals. In communicating this message, the Ural ODVF poster underscored the campaign's concern not only with building airplanes, but with forging the social, political, and institutional networks that would help to shape the socialist order.

In addition to posters aimed at furthering the *smychka*, ODVF produced a number of aeronautical posters directed solely towards peasant audiences. The themes and motifs that dominated these productions advanced the simple messages designed by ODVF authorities for the nation's peasant masses: the airplane is an important tool that will bring tangible benefits to Soviet citizens. One such poster, emblazoned with the slogan, "The Air Fleet is the defense of laborers," depicted a troika of airplanes soaring over a large field of grain while a peasant (portrayed in silhouette) points to the sky (*plate 6*). Such a seemingly incongruous combination of modern airplanes and the vast Russian countryside drew its inspiration from Trotskii's oft-repeated admonition that the air fleet would play a crucial role in modernizing the nation by bridging the vast space (*prostranstvo*) that separated the village from the city.[42]

In yet another poster produced for rural audiences, a peasant family stands at the edge of a ripening field. There, they greet the arrival of an approaching airplane. Strewn about on the earth beneath their feet are the chitinous shells of dead locusts. The caption reads: "Peasants! Dobrolet protects your field from predators!" (*plate 7*). Posters such as these, like the propaganda

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[41] Victoria Bonnell, "The Iconography of the Worker in Soviet Political Art" in Lewis Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Making Workers Soviet* (Ithaca, 1994), 341-375.
[42] See above, chapter 2, 86-87.

pamphlets, *chastushki* and short stories that accompanied them, communicated in clear and unambiguous terms ODVF's central message that the airplane would directly benefit the economic interests of the peasantry. On another level, it suggested that the air fleet would protect citizens from predators both real (locusts) and symbolic (kulaks and foreign agents).

The state's efforts to incorporate political art in the drive to win peasant support for the Air Fleet were not always so straightforward. In several cases, posters were produced which suggested the utilitarianism that underlay the Party's efforts to modernize and educate the nation's rural population. One brightly illustrated example employed the oft-used *skazka* to communicate its air-minded message of the airplane's agricultural utility (*plate 8*). In the poster-story, the young peasant lad Petia tends to the village's herds in the field. The arrival of a squadron of airplanes inspires him to travel to Moscow in order to learn more about aviation and its potential applications in assisting with the harvest. In Moscow, Petia joins an ODVF circle and pledges to devote his energies to the development of Soviet aviation. The poster-story concludes with Petia returning to his native village as an accomplished pilot. There, he puts his new skill to work as a crop duster protecting the local harvest against the threat of locust. In addition to demonstrating the usefulness of aviation, this posterboard communicated more subtle messages concerning the importance of the city and education to improving the peasantry's condition. Like so many of the newspaper articles, poems, stories and films directed towards rural audiences, this illustrated piece served the dual purposes of encouraging the *smychka* while drawing attention to the utility of the airplane.

In yet another poster, Soviet officials put aeronautical imagery to work in an attempt to raise the general educational level of citizens. The placard entitled, "The ABCs of Dobrolet," employed a nursery rhyme formula to introduce rural audiences to aeronautical terms and the many new organizations that Soviet authorities had created to realize their air-minded designs (*plate 9*). The poster was an air age primer designed to eradicate "aeronautical illiteracy" while assisting in the Party's ongoing efforts to raise conventional literacy in the villages.[43] Posters such as this one revealed the Party's continuing pragmatism in fusing the mission to build a modern air fleet with other pressing social and cultural concerns. As they endeavored to build an air fleet for the nation, Soviet officials simultaneously employed aviation as a tool in the construction of socialist culture.

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[43] For a discussion of scholarship on Soviet literacy campaigns see the introduction to Charles E. Clark, "*Doloi negramotnost'!*: The Literacy Campaign in the RSFSR" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, U-C, 1993).

III

Whatever benefits Party authorities realized from the dissemination of newspaper articles, propaganda pamphlets, political posters and films, the use of preserved images could not compare to the effect produced by the arrival of an actual plane at an isolated rural outpost. The overwhelming impression that aeronautical craft could make upon uninitiated peasant audiences had been recognized as early as the Imperial era.[44] In the years following the First World War, foreign military units had used airplanes to similar effect in terrifying and demoralizing indigenous tribesmen as they undertook campaigns of imperial conquest.[45] Party authorities were aware of these precedents and they were eager to take advantage of the impact that aircraft might have in furthering their campaign to raise peasant awareness. During the first "Soviet Week of the Air Fleet" (24 June-1 July, 1923), ODVF dispatched several airplanes to villages and towns in the districts that surrounded Moscow and Petrograd. Upon landing in their designated locations, the airplanes' pilots delivered speeches about the benefits of aviation, distributed ODVF literature and membership applications and invited those willing to join the society to board the craft for short excursions into the air.

This direct approach to swaying popular opinion was used again with great effect during the fall of 1924. In the village of Undol, located in Vladimir *gubernia*, a production crew gathered to shoot a short agitational film about a peasant's encounter with mechanized flight.[46] To assist in production, Dobrolet loaned the film crew a Junkers airplane which was used as a prop in several scenes. The plane also proved to be a useful promotional gimmick in publicizing the forthcoming film as Dobrolet officials organized free demonstration flights for the hundreds of local peasants and workers who served as extras in the movie.[47] As word spread of the flights, interested residents from all over the region flocked to observe the airplane. The crowds grew larger each day of filming, with some peasants journeying from as far away as twenty miles in the hopes of flying aboard the craft. Many of those who came to Undol camped outdoors near the plane for several nights "in expectation of more flights." [48]

The overwhelmingly positive receptions accorded these early flights confirmed Party officials' suspicions that direct contact between peasants and airplanes was a certain means of

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[44] See above, chapter 1, 41.
[45] See, for example, *Aero-sbornik*, 1 (1923): 12.
[46] The film was entitled, *How the Peasant Pakhom Studied Flying in the Village of Nesmelom*. For a discussion of the film see, chapter 4, 166-167.
[47] "Fil'm Obshchestva 'Dobroleta," *Kino-nedelia* 14 (37) (October 1924): 16.
[48] Ibid. See also, "Fil'ma Dobroleta," *Novyi zritel'*, 16 September 1924.

quickly expanding provincial enthusiasm for Red aviation. In response, the ODVF Agitational Committee embarked upon a special drive to ensure that increasing numbers of the nation's rural population would "go to aeronautical events, view airplanes close up, look them over, ask questions and (when possible) fly aboard them."[49] The most immediate result of the campaign to raise rural air-mindedness was a dramatic increase in the number of airplanes sent out from Moscow and other major urban areas to villages and settlements in the Soviet hinterlands. Although staged spectacles, similar to those first organized during the Imperial era, would continue to play an important role in mobilizing urban audiences for the aeronautical cause, the possibility of reproducing "aviation weeks" and elaborate aeronautical festivals was more problematic the further one traveled from the center. The advent of the "agitational flight" or, agit-flight (*agit-polet*), as these expeditions came to be known, resolved these difficulties by bringing the airplane to the countryside, thereby enabling ODVF to introduce aviation to millions of citizens who would otherwise never have the opportunity to experience the wonders of aeronautical technology.

The agit-flight involved much more than simply dispatching a plane or two to a remote village. The undertaking was a complex affair that required a considerable amount of planning and foresight (not to mention a degree of showmanship on the part of the air crews who were expected to enact a ritualized performance at each stop along the agit-plane's designated route). To maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the few aircraft at their disposal, ODVF officials grouped their planes into separate "agit-squadrons" which were assigned to patrol geographical regions stretching from far northern reaches near the Arctic circle to as far south and east as the Caucasus and Central Asia.[50] Individual planes were then dispatched along circuitous routes that oftentimes stretched for thousands of miles over sparsely populated territory. Mechanical failures, inclement weather, communication problems and shortages of fuel and spare parts were not uncommon occurrences for the pilots of ODVF's agit-squadrons.[51]

ODVF's agitational squadrons quickly developed a standardized routine that was performed at each of the rural stops along their flight paths. In the days leading up to the scheduled arrival of an airplane, local Party organizations, military units and official agencies advertised the upcoming event while local newspapers aided preparations by printing stories and essays (typically

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[49] *Chto takoe aeroplan i kakaia nikh pol'za* (Moscow, n.d.), 7.

[50] Initially, each "agit-squadron" was comprised of a single aircraft. The squadrons expanded to include as many as 7-8 airplanes each as aeronautical resources increased during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

[51] See GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 24 (Perepiska s ekipazhami samoletov po podgotovke agitobletov i doklady upolnomochennykh samoletov o rabote prodelannoi v period agitobletov, 2 ianvaria–30 marta 1926 g.), *passim*.

wired from Moscow) about Red aviation and its importance to the nation.[52] These measures were intended to incite the interest of local residents and to ensure an adequate turnout once the agit-plane arrived. Upon setting down at their destination, the crew of the agit-plane would disembark from the craft, deliver speeches on the benefits of aviation, distribute ODVF literature and recruit new members into the society's ranks by bringing locals on board for a tour of the airplane. The agit-visit would invariably conclude with a series of demonstration flights in which local residents were brought aboard the airplane for short excursions into the air. These demonstration flights were particularly noteworthy as they frequently combined ODVF efforts to raise aeronautical consciousness with the Party's ongoing campaign to promote atheism. In an effort to eradicate peasant "superstition," rural believers were taken into the air by pilots in order to prove that there was no God, angels nor other celestial spirits in the heavens. These anti-religious flights proved successful enough that they quickly became standard practice for all agitational squadrons. In their reports to ODVF and Party authorities, pilots routinely detailed the number of "air baptisms" (*vozdushnoe kreshchenie*) that they performed on their routes.[53] State authorities once again demonstrated the utility of aviation, employing it as the central element in the establishment of a new social ritual; a technological conversion by air created by the Party to counteract the spiritual conversion by water performed by the Church.

ODVF agitational flights met with considerable success despite the many environmental, human and mechanical problems that they routinely encountered. Between the spring of 1925 and the fall of 1926 Soviet air crews crisscrossed the nation, introducing the technologically uninitiated to the wonder of machine powered flight and winning over tens of thousands to the cause of Red aviation. During the summer of 1925 alone the agit-planes assigned to the principal "northern" and "southern" air routes covered more than 16,000 miles in an effort to bring aviation to rural Russians.[54] Along the way, they visited 133 individual settlements, undertook 909 demonstration flights, carried 3,047 passengers aloft and distributed almost four tons of literature and printed materials to the citizens that they encountered. Two other agit-planes, flying shorter routes between Moscow–Kursk–Penza–Vladimir and Moscow–Briansk–Tver', recorded comparable successes. [55]

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[52] Ibid.
[53] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 10 (Doklady upolnomochennykh samoletov o rabote prodelannoi v period agitobleta, 7 dekabria–29 dekabria 1925 g.), *passim*.
[54] The "northern route" originated in Nizhnii Novgorod and included amongst its major stops the cities of Chistopol', Perm, Kotlas, Arkhangel'sk, Kargopol' and Tver'. The agit-plane on the longer "southern route" departed from Voronezh and visited Stalingrad, Astrakhan, Orenburg, Samara, Saratov and Lipetsk as well as dozens of smaller villages and settlements.
[55] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 10, l. 4.

The official accounts left by these air crews indicate that agit-flights were a wildly popular and effective way of introducing the peasantry to the aeronautical age. In reports to their ODVF superiors, agit-flight crews repeatedly noted the "enthusiasm," "interest" and "deep concern" for aviation invariably expressed by rural audiences.[56] One such account, recorded while on mission to Kaluga province during the winter of 1924-1925, offered convincing testimony to the genuine excitement with which peasants embraced Soviet aviation. According to this report, the crew of the agit-plane was, "as always," greeted by scores of local residents. Despite the fact that the airplane's arrival was accompanied by sub-zero temperatures, the area's peasants had gathered in a nearby field hours in advance in expectation of the aircraft. Following the plane's landing, the locals remained outside in the freezing air for several more hours listening to the speeches delivered by the air crew, inspecting the aircraft and inundating the fliers with questions about aviation and the air fleet campaign. Those fortunate enough to fly aboard the agit-plane during the scheduled demonstration flights were "choked with happiness" for having been taken into the skies, and they tirelessly recounted the experience to any and all willing to listen.[57]

Strikingly similar reactions were reported by the journalist, author and literary critic Viktor Shklovskii who accompanied the crew of the agit-plane *Litsom k derevne* during the spring and summer of 1925 as it traveled throughout the Don River basin along the southern air route.[58] Shklovskii's experiences aboard the airplane (and its encounters with local inhabitants) were recorded in a series of articles published by leading periodicals. An essay written for the magazine *Zhurnalist* described the reception of the aircraft by the residents of the "remote town of Boguchar," a settlement in Voronezh *oblast'*. According to Shklovskii, the appearance of the agit-plane was a cause of celebration for the inhabitants of the Russian backwater. Young and old alike rushed to meet the aircraft following its landing, "running towards it," Shklovskii observed, "as if they expected the occupants to pass out money." The peasants' enthusiastic greeting was accompanied by innumerable questions concerning the plane, its capabilities and "what lay beyond the clouds above." So great was the villagers' fascination with this "scout of the heavens," Shklovskii noted, that many spent the night in the open field at the side of the aircraft.[59]

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[56] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 37 and 204-205.
[57] Ibid., 88-89.
[58] Shklovskii's presence was part of a broader initiative to raise the profile of the voluntary society by recruiting respected literary figures to participate in agit-flights. They published their on-board experiences in the form of newspaper editorials and short stories. Other famous writers enjoined to accompany agit-squadrons during the summer of 1925 included Boris Pil'niak, Vera Inber, and Vsevolod Ivanov. See, "Samolety sredi rabochikh i krest'ian," *Izvestiia*, 23 July 1925.
[59] V. Shklovskii, "Derevnia skuchaet po gorodu," *Zhurnalist* 8-9 (1925): 193-195.

While it is difficult to measure the veracity of such accounts, there is little reason to believe that they did not accurately reflect the thoughts and feelings with which most rural Soviet citizens greeted the arrival of the aeronautical age. In remote regions where isolated inhabitants still used oxen-driven plows to till the soil, the sight of a soaring airplane was certainly an awe-inspiring and momentous event capable of generating profound emotions amongst most every audience. The striking similarities that may be found in contemporary accounts of peasant–airplane encounters, however, suggest that much more than mere coincidence must be credited in explaining their shared features. To be certain, conscientious flight crews and air-minded journalists had a vested interest in accurately reporting the particulars of their individual encounters with the nation's peasantry. Factual descriptions of these meetings provided ODVF officials with important information that could be used to modify and direct the society's ongoing "turn to the village." Nevertheless, the encounter narrative (like the short stories, *skazki*, posters and poems produced by ODVF) was also a useful propaganda genre for communicating to citizens ideas about the Party, its programs, and political authority.

The political utility of the encounter narrative was clearly evidenced in Shklovskii's short essay, "Aboard the Agit-Plane 'Face to the Village'," published by *Ogonek* in the summer of 1925. Like the other essays in Shklovskii's agit-plane series, the publication was inspired by the journalist's observations of peasant–airplane encounters. "Aboard the Agit-Plane" describes the excitement, wonder and bewilderment with which a group of peasants greet the arrival of the agit-plane *Litsom k derevne*. The "isolated" and "unwashed" masses are awe-struck by the flying machine and are eager to absorb the instruction offered by the ODVF propagandists.[60] The agit-crew's presentation on the applications of modern aviation technology in assisting the rural economy contrasts sharply with the reality faced by the villagers. The poor peasants suffer greatly in their efforts to bring in the harvest. Threatened by insufficient and irregular rainfall and compelled to farm fields "gutted with ravines as with syphilis," they are condemned to a lifetime of backbreaking and unproductive labor.[61] The airplane, Shklovskii proclaims, will change all of this. It will ensure the prosperity of these impoverished farmers and raise the economic status of the nation as a whole by supplying the village and bringing the benefits of modern technology to the backward steppe. The article served as a platform for extolling the importance of aviation

[60] V. Shklovskii, "Na samolete 'Litsom k derevne'," *Ogonek* 30 (1925): 12.
[61] Ibid.

technology in modernizing the countryside, facilitating the *smychka* of urban and rural Russians and celebrating the Party as the agent of enlightenment and modernization.

More important than the airplane's ability to ensure economic prosperity was its power to transform the consciousness of Soviet Russia's rural citizens. In an essay, entitled, "What Lies beyond the Darkened Clouds?" Shklovskii used the encounter narrative to express an abiding faith in the civilizing role of aviation technology.[62] The essay recounts the reaction of a village elder who travels aboard an agit-plane for the first time. Following the completion of the demonstration flight, the old peasant is inundated with questions by his rural neighbors. Afraid of the unknown and unseen forces of nature, the peasants demand an answer to the pressing question, "what is beyond the darkened clouds?" (*Chto za khmaroi*?). Having experienced the reality of mechanized flight, the village elder lays aside the villagers' fears by instructing them that, "beyond the clouds there is only space."[63] Shklovskii concludes that this programmed encounter demonstrated the vital importance of aviation and modern technology in liberating the village from backwardness and ignorance. By laying aside peasants' irrational fear of the unknown, the airplane proved an essential instrument in educating the village. Thus armed with the tools of modern technology, Shklovskii proclaimed, the Soviet Union would prove capable of overcoming the "darkness" (*khmaroi*) of rural Russia.[64]

Shklovskii's ruminations on the modernizing role of aviation technology highlight the problematic relationship between city and country that characterized Soviet political culture of the 1920s. In much the same way that mid nineteenth-century proponents of European colonialism "fixed upon railroads as the key symbol of the superiority, material as well as moral, that Western societies had attained over all others," twentieth-century spokesmen for Soviet power focused upon the airplane as a central token in demarcating the superiority of their urban, industrial ideology over the traditions and practices of the rural village community.[65] Time and again in their propaganda tracts, periodicals and posters ODVF officials depicted the peasantry as naive, fearful, and superstitious; more willing to trust the avaricious clergy than the educated representatives of Soviet power. Notwithstanding the implicit claim of equality suggested by the Party's political-cultural "union" between city and village, ODVF propaganda belied the belief that the peasantry

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[62] V. Shklovskii, "Chto za khmaroi?," *Ogonek* 32 (1925): 14.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, 1989), 223.

could ever emerge as a co-equal partner in the proletarian dictatorship. As contemporary visual and written sources made clear, the peasantry was not understood to be the rural counterpart of the urban working class. It was perceived, rather, as a backward and retrograde social caste that required the leadership and tutelage of the technologically proficient proletariat in order to rise above its state of unconsciousness. The village was the antithesis of the modern and urbane city. It was an uncultured and churlish repository of antiquated tradition that, if left on its own, would continue to impede the development and prosperity of the nation as a whole.

The recurrence of these images points to the presence of a particular Soviet "ideology of dominance," framed by the Marxist theory of class struggle and moderated by the application of technology, in which the progressive, modern and air-minded Party would eliminate the "idiocy of rural life" by recasting the peasantry in the mold of the urban proletariat. [66] Similar to British colonial administrators and missionaries who were "convinced that only a large influx of Western technology could shake India from its lethargy and alleviate the poverty and backwardness of its masses," Soviet officials looked to the airplane as a civilizing element that would "quickly overcome the ancient darkness and superstition of village life" and, thus, "tear the countryside away from its rural isolation, backwardness, cultural alienation and intellectual poverty." [67] Five years before the Soviet government would launch its all-out offensive to urbanize the peasantry through forced collectivization, agit-planes and air crews flew cultural reconnaissance in an effort to eradicate rural traditions and modernize the countryside by "bringing the city to the village." [68]

Aviation served the Party's modernizing agenda in ways unmatched by all other technologies. The airplane's arrival bridged cultural and geographic divides, it disrupted long-held views of time and space, and it challenged faith in God and nature while offering impoverished peasant audiences the hope of improving their economic standing. Aviation produced wonder and amazement in the minds of even sophisticated viewers and it testified to the clear material superiority of the city over the countryside. As the masters of this new technological marvel, Party officials consciously endeavored to benefit from the Promethian impulses associated with flight. They manipulated aeronautical images to win rural support for the construction of socialist culture

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[66] I have borrowed the notion of an "ideology of dominance" from Michael Adas. On the "idiocy of rural life" see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, 1984), 84.
[67] Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 225; M. Shel', "Aviatsiia v dele khoziastva," *Daesh Sibiri krasnye kryl'ia* 3 (1924): 27 and RGVA f. 33987, op. 1, d. 558, l. 145.
[68] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 18-19.

while employing agit-planes and agit-flights to project their authority across the vast spaces of the Russian countryside. This close association of Soviet political authority and aviation was made strikingly clear in the following newspaper article, entitled, "Around the Airplane," published by *Nash krai* in March of 1926:

> A crowd of a thousand peasants and workers surrounds the plane within just a few minutes, forming a living ring around the aero-bird. There, they carry on a lively discussion.
>
> A *muzhik* in a full-length sheepskin coat breaks into a festive smile and proclaims, "Now there's a beauty! That's the way to chase flies, with a mosquito!"
>
> "There it is! That means Soviet power!," adds a woman standing to the side. "During tsarist times we only saw constables, the drunken pharaohs, with their noses to the ground. But now things are different. We don't go by ground, now we fly through the aerial space (*vozdushnoe prostranstvo*)...
>
> "Hey my dear, what's that thing there?...yaroplan, yerplane..."
>
> "That, grandma, is the agit-plane "*Litsom k derevne*."
>
> "Heh, heh, heh...I've lived sixty years and never seen such a wonder..."
>
> "Yeah, granny, soon there will come a time when everywhere throughout our free country, wooden ploughs will be replaced by tractors, trucks and these here airplanes."[69]

The peasants' feigned recognition of the airplane as a symbol of Soviet power in this clearly fictionalized encounter neatly captured ODVF's abiding goal that citizens equate aeronautical progress with the Party's ability to bring prosperity and happiness to rural Russia.

While its is impossible to measure the effectiveness of Party efforts to associate aviation with its political authority, anecdotal evidence suggests that the aerial turn to the village met with no mean success. As Sheila Fitzpatrick has discovered, the link between aviation and the Party was firmly entrenched in the popular consciousness by the late 1920s. During the agricultural collectivization campaign of 1929-1930, for example, peasants in the Duminichii district of the Western *oblast'* speculated that airplanes were being employed by state authorities to gather information on agricultural productivity. This aerial intelligence, the villagers believed, was then used by Moscow officials to set higher procurement quotas which enabled them to squeeze more grain from the village.[70] As a result of these rumors, local peasants came to further mistrust Party officials and they greeted the appearance of airplanes with growing suspicion. Such incidents suggest that ongoing efforts to raise rural awareness of the airplane's utility were far more successful than originally had been planned. They produced a reciprocity of perception in which some citizens viewed both aviation and the state in terms unintended by Party authorities. While

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[69] "Vokrug samoleta," *Nash krai*, 24 March 1926. All ellipses appear in the original.

[70] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford, 1994), 46-47.

officials labored to create a symbol system in which airplanes served as iconographic representations of the Communist Party's power, authority and modernity, at least some citizens transposed these official images, visualizing the Party as little more than an arbitrary authority that had augmented its power through the application of modern technology.

Aeronautical Iconography in Service to the State: Militarization, Industrialization, and Bureaucratic Centralization

I

In May 1925 the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet merged with Dobrokhim to form a new "voluntary" society that would function under the name "Society of Friends of the Aviation and Chemical Industries" or, "Aviakhim." The essential mission of the new unified organization differed very little from the missions previously undertaken by the two independent societies. Aviakhim continued efforts to raise chemical consciousness, to generate public support for state policies and to promote air-mindedness through the orchestration of aeronautical spectacles, air shows, and agit-flights.[71] These similarities notwithstanding, the creation of Aviakhim pointed to an ongoing transition in the aeronautical culture of the Soviet Union. Although aeronautical development would remain the society's most important function, the pairing of aviation and chemical interests indicated the Party leadership's fundamental concern with exploiting the military potential of flight technology. According to officials, the independent operation of separate societies devoted to chemistry and aviation had prevented the Party from properly coordinating two essential elements of the nation's defense. The merger was intended to rectify this situation by ending the societies' "unsystematic activity" and establishing a "unified program" that would bring the independently operating civilian institutions under a single administrative command more closely tied to Party and military authorities.[72]

The immediate result of the ODVF–Dobrokhim union was administrative confusion and disarray. By their officials' own admission, neither of the two public mass societies had been adequately prepared to tackle the numerous tasks assigned to them by the Party. Both suffered from a host of institutional problems that included poor coordination with Party organizations,

[71] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 23, l. 7.
[72] Ibid.

weak administrative authority, lack of direction, and an apathetic membership.[73] The union only aggravated these difficulties. Indeed, the extent to which ODVF and Dobrokhim official were unprepared to handle major organizational challenges was clearly evidenced during the course of the administrative transition. The "liquidation committee" established to oversee the ODVF–Dobrokhim merger proceeded in a slow, inefficient, and haphazard fashion, requiring almost one full year to complete the union following its perfunctory announcement in March 1925.[74] The apparent congruence of aeronautical and chemical interests notwithstanding, the union of ODVF and Dobrokhim proved to be an administrative nightmare.

The administrative difficulties associated with the societies' merger were compounded by the simultaneous efforts of Aviakhim officials to implement the new Party directive on "socialist civic consciousness" (*sotsialisticheskaia obshchestvennost'*) first discussed at the Thirteenth Party Congress and subsequently heralded in the press.[75] As the latest in a series of efforts to increase the efficiency of voluntary societies and to generate public activism in support of the regime's policies, the campaign for socialist civic consciousness endeavored to instill collectivist sentiments amongst the nation's populace and to incite active participation in public life by an otherwise passive citizenry through the development of "real workers' democracy" within civic organizations.[76] In practical terms, the most immediate result of the campaign was that it brought to an end the practice of enrolling new "volunteers" in public societies through collective membership.[77] In contrast to the support for collective memberships articulated by the ODVF administration at the outset of the aeronautical campaign in 1923, the conscription of entire factories and similar organizations came under heavy attack following the passage of the Party's socialist civic consciousness initiative. Collective membership was now denounced for having "crushed the initiative and spirit of individual cells" and for producing a listless organization that had failed to capture the interest of those pressed into "voluntary" service.[78]

In keeping with the new goal of reconstituting society "on the basis of *genuine* [voluntary] civic consciousness" (and in the hopes of redressing the innumerable problems that had beset

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[73] Ibid., l. 4.
[74] Ibid.
[75] See the Congress's resolution "Ob ocherednykh zadachakh partiinogo stroitel'stva" in *Trinadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b): Stenograficheskii otchet*, 604-617 and "O formakh massovykh organizatsii," *Pravda*, 25 February 1925.
[76] *Trinadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b): Stenograficheskii otchet*, 608-609.
[77] *Avia-agit doklad: konspekt* (Moscow, 1925), 34. On the origins of collective membership see above, chapter 2, 77.
[78] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 14 (Protokoly sovmestnykh zasedanii biuro prezidiumov Aviakhim), l. 4.

ODVF and Dobrokhim), Aviakhim's governing administration initiated a nationwide campaign to "re-register" all of the society's individual members.[79] The re-registration campaign effectively purged the ranks of Aviakhim as many less than enthusiastic ODVF and Dobrokhim members seized upon the opportunity to "dis-enroll" from the voluntary organization into which they had been previously conscripted. In at least some regions of the country, the society's loss of support was startling. One concerned official from the Donbass lamented that re-registration had proven "catastrophic" as "workers left [Aviakhim] by the thousands." Prior to the union, the combined enrollment of the region's ODVF and Dobrokhim chapters had totaled over 19,000. After the conclusion of the re-registration period, the number of members had plummeted to under 11,000, a loss of more than 43%.[80] The loss of members throughout the country as a whole, although not quite as precipitous, was statistically significant. Before the administrative union ODVF and Dobrokhim claimed membership figures of 1.5 million and 1.3 million, respectively.[81] Following the conclusion of the re-registration campaign in mid-1926, Aviakhim's membership had fallen to 1,986,000 or just 77.2% of the pre-union total.[82]

The administrative bumbling of the ODVF–Dobrokhim union and the voluntary exodus of dues paying members produced by the re-registration campaign pointed to a continuing pattern of mismanagement and bureaucratic interference that hindered the stated goals of Party officials. In language very similar to that used during the ODVF conference of 1923, Aviakhim officials acknowledged that the transition to the new organization had produced a bit of initial "chaos," but claimed that, by the spring of 1926, these problems had been solved and that newly achieved administrative efficiency and competency had placed Aviakhim "firmly on the rails of a genuine civic association."[83] In no time, they assured, the voluntary society would be functioning smoothly and energetically. One a broader note, Aviakhim representatives pointed to the significance of the societies' merger in contributing to the on-going process of socialist construction. In a characteristic example of Soviet bureaucratic double-speak, officials dismissed the "apparent crisis" brought about by the union as nothing more than "the maturation of the social organism," a necessary component in the development of the new society and proof that the joint ODVF–Dobrokhim enterprise was "actively contributing to the growth of Soviet civic consciousness."[84]

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[79] Ibid., l. 2.
[80] Ibid., ll. 15-16.
[81] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 23, l. 3.
[82] Ibid., l. 5.
[83] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 14, l. 2.
[84] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 23, l. 3.

The reorganization, amalgamation, and reshuffling of bureaucratic organizations exemplified by the ODVF–Dobrokhim merger revealed the contradictory nature of Soviet political culture in which Party officials endeavored to inspire local enthusiasm and individual initiative by mandating administrative changes from above. Dissatisfied with the level of energy demonstrated by their conscripted volunteers, Soviet officials moved to bolster members' commitment to chemistry and aviation by reforming the organizational structures that governed their activities.[85] Notwithstanding calls to fulfill the Party mandate of developing "Soviet civic consciousness" by encouraging citizens' personal initiative, heightened responsibility, and social activism, Aviakhim officials moved immediately to suppress the possibility of spontaneity on the part of the rank and file membership. Following the administrative union, the society's presidium disbanded local and regional aeronautical journals in favor of expanding the distribution of the central journal *Aviatsiia i khimiia*. The center also imposed rigid new guidelines concerning the proper organization of the nation's aeronautical circles, "avia-corners," and cells. To assist in these efforts, the society mass produced brochures and guidebooks that clearly detailed the precise components (from books and magazines to posters, charts, and instructional graphs) that should be present in each local organization.[86] In their haste to strengthen Party control over the society's individual cells, Aviakhim officials thus revisited the mistakes made by ODVF officials during the course of 1923. They sacrificed the possibility of genuine local initiative for heightened central authority and organizational uniformity while continuing to demand that individual members play a more active and responsible role in the day to day administration of local Aviakhim chapters. These efforts again revealed the paradox of Soviet political culture in which leading officials endeavored to encourage spontaneous social commitments by exhorting citizens to take active roles in voluntary societies while constantly narrowing the parameters in which citizens could act. Such measures all but ensured that Aviakhim would require still further "restructuring" in the not-too-distant future as the society's understandably dispassionate membership failed to respond to the administration's prodding. Still more disconcerting, Aviakhim officials would fall back upon the well-established formula of measuring success not in nebulous qualitative terms but, rather, by the more easily

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[85] For a similar pattern of institutional behavior in relation to the Party's anti-religious campaign see Peris, "Storming the Heavens," chapter 3.

[86] See the following instructional guides published by Aviakhim: *Avia agitatsiia i propaganda: metody i formy raboty* (Moscow, 1925); *Aviakul'tury v rabochii klub: material po aviarabote v rabochikh klubakh* (Moscow, 1925); *Avia-ugolok: materialy* (Moscow, 1925) and the previously cited *Avia-agit-doklad: konspekt*.

quantifiable yardstick of the organization's size. To this end, Aviakhim officials made clear their objective of rapidly expanding the society's membership, albeit on a "voluntary" individual basis.

II

The persistent administrative dislocations occasioned by the union and the re-registration campaign, however, did not prevent Aviakhim officials from building upon the assortment of aeronautical programs earlier initiated by ODVF. Throughout the summer and fall of 1925, as has already been noted, agitational flights into Russia's most remote regions brought aviation to increasing numbers of rural citizens. The scope of these flights increased the following year as Aviakhim expanded the number of agit-squadrons in operation from three to five.[87] "Avia-chemical expeditions" to Nizhegorodskaia *gubernia* and the isolated steppe of Dagestan were undertaken by the new organization as a means of underscoring the close connection between aviation and chemistry while the official pronouncement of "Aviakhim Day" (14 July) gave the nation's residents annual cause to celebrate the accomplishments of the volunteer society. Meanwhile, Aviakhim's publishing enterprise continued to print educational reading materials, popular stories, and propaganda tracts. Within eighteen months of the administrative union, officials could point to the publication of no less than twenty books and eleven free brochures with a total press run circulation of more than 884,000 copies.[88] Aviakhim also made considerable progress in terms of local networks, organizations, and cells. By the end of 1926, the society sponsored 37 clubs, 923 circles, 2,006 libraries, and 6,506 avia-corners throughout the Soviet Union.[89]

Aviakhim's most noteworthy contribution to the advancement of Soviet aviation, however, was its oversight of a trans-continental aeronautical expedition from Moscow to Peking during the summer of 1925. Inspired by the success of earlier flights between such locations as Baku–Tehran and Termez–Kabul, Soviet officials dispatched a squadron of six airplanes to the Chinese capital on 10 June to raise the international profile of both the Soviet Union and its aeronautical programs. Similar to contemporary long distance flights undertaken by European and American pilots, the Moscow–Peking expedition was an attempt by Party officials to ensure the Soviet Union a place amongst the ranks of the world's leading aeronautical powers. The flight was also endowed with political symbolism, for it coincided with the increasingly active opposition of the Chinese

[87] GARF f. r-9404, op. 1, d. 23, l. 3.
[88] Ibid., 11.
[89] Ibid., ll. 7-8.

Communist Party to the British colonial presence in East Asia.[90] To this end, Soviet officials intended that the flight also serve as a tacit demonstration of support for their Marxist comrades and the Soviet Union's "sympathy and friendship for the Chinese people."[91]

By contemporary standards the "Great Flight," as the Moscow–Peking expedition came to be known, was an ambitious undertaking. The aeronautical journey stretched along a south-easterly axis covering more than 4,000 miles of isolated and frequently inhospitable terrain from Moscow to Sarapul'–Sverdlovsk–Krasnoiarsk–Irkutsk and ultimately Peking. Along the route, landing sites were established at one dozen urban centers to service the squadron's airplanes and to allow the air crews time to rest from their strenuous encounters with mountains, steppe, and desert. Despite these precautions, inclement weather and mechanical difficulties forced most of the six participating aircraft to make unscheduled landings. One unfortunate crew was compelled to withdraw from the expedition less than three hundred miles from Peking when their aircraft's landing gear was destroyed during an otherwise routine descent.[92] Yet, by the time the Great Flight concluded on 13 July, five weeks after the squadron's departure from Moscow, four of the initial six airplanes had arrived safely in China. Considering the vast distance involved, the harsh and varied terrain over which the pilots flew, and the generally primitive technical support available to the participating crews, the completion of the Moscow–Peking expedition was a stellar accomplishment for Soviet aviation.

In addition to demonstrating the remarkable feats of bravery and endurance of which Soviet pilots were capable, the Great Flight underscored the utilitarian political motives that shaped the activities of Aviakhim and Party officials. To accompany the crews of the six participating airplanes, Soviet officials dispatched military spokesmen, journalists from the newspapers *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and *Leningradskaia Pravda*, as well as a representative from the State Telegraph Agency (Rosta) to monitor the progress of the Great Flight and to compose the feature stories that appeared daily in the nation's press.[93] Two Proletkino camera men also flew aboard the aircraft in order to provide a visual record of the expedition.[94] At each of the expedition's designated landing sites, these representatives helped organize aeronautical rallies by delivering speeches, displaying the airplanes, and disseminating the copious amount of propaganda

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[90] For an overview of the Party's policy towards China see, Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, 316-327.
[91] "Perelet Moskva–Mongoliia–Kitai," *Izvestiia*, 10 June 1925.
[92] *Izvestiia*, 18 July 1925.
[93] See, *Izvestiia*, 10 June-18 July 1925.
[94] *Izvestiia*, 10 June 1925.

material carried aboard the aircraft to the crowds of spectators that gathered to welcome the squadron. The Great Flight was, thus, more than an "expedition" organized to test the abilities of Soviet air crews and their aircraft. The undertaking was an international agit-flight that provided Party leaders with an opportunity to communicate their political messages to foreign as well as domestic audiences.

At home, Aviakhim publications and the periodical press utilized the Great Flight to draw citizens' attention to the great strides made by the Soviet Union under the leadership of the Communist Party. Press accounts of the expedition continually pointed to the advances made in the aeronautical industry by noting that four of the six planes participating in the flight had been manufactured either in whole or in part by Soviet factories.[95] Although the Soviet aeronautical program had been in existence only two short years, the Party's ability to inspire the "Bolshevik audacity and persistence of Soviet workers" had enabled the nation to make swift strides in the design and construction of modern aircraft.[96] As a result of the Party's leadership, the "victorious working class, tempered in the forge of revolution" had quickly overcome the "principal difficulties and obstacles that lay in the way of conquering the aerial elements."[97] As "new, incontrovertible proof of the immense and rapid development of the Soviet Union's technical and productive strengths," the Great Flight thus demonstrated "the colossal technical, organizational, and political accomplishments of the revolutionary proletariat."[98]

Official accounts also went to considerable lengths to distinguish the Moscow–Peking expedition from similar events undertaken by Western governments. Whereas the appearance of Western air squadrons in the lands of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East had long been associated with imperialist conquest, exploitation, and oppression, Aviakhim's flight to Peking demonstrated "the atmosphere of sympathy and trust" that allegedly characterized the relationship between the Soviet Union and the people of China.[99] One commentator noted that, "although the Chinese people have seen many foreign airplanes appear in their territory," the arrival of the Soviet expedition was the first time that airplanes had come from abroad "not to oppress, but to deliver fraternal

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[95] The Great Flight squadron was comprised of two Soviet model "R-1" postal planes, one "R-2" plane equipped with a foreign motor, one Soviet "AKI" passenger plane and two German made "Junkers-13" passenger craft.

[96] *Izvestiia*, 10 June 1925.

[97] I. Fel'dman, "Uspekhi Krasnoi aviatsii–delo ruk trudiashchikhsia," *Biulleten' Aviakhima posviashchennyi pereletu Moskva–Mongoliia–Kitai i uchastiiu sovetskikh planeristov v Ronskikh planernykh sostiazaniiakh v Germanii* (Moscow, 1925), 5.

[98] *Izvestiia*, 18 July 1925.

[99] *Izvestiia*, 11 June 1925.

greetings and sympathy" to the Chinese nation.[100] Foreshadowing the bombastic language that would become commonplace in Stalin-era diplomatic discourse, the nation's publications contrasted the beneficence of the Soviet mission with the militarism and duplicity of Western governments.

> We do not fly to Mongolia and China armed with machine guns and threats in the manner that has accompanied the appearance of bourgeois technology in these regions. We fly to the East towards our friends. Our mighty flight is singular proof of the strength of our friendship and the friendship of our strength (*sila druzhby i druzhba sily*).[101]

More important than the moral imperatives motivating the Soviet Union's flight to the East were the organizational differences that distinguished Soviet aviation from its Western counterparts. According to official accounts, both the origin of the Great Flight as well as the expedition's format had resulted from the social and political structures that had given rise to Soviet aeronautical culture. To this end, "Soviet civic consciousness" was credited with having made possible the successful completion of the Great Flight.[102] As a means of distinguishing the civic-mindedness of Soviet airmen from the individualism of self-interested Western fliers, press accounts drew readers' attention to American pilots, who took precautions to arrange special airplanes and equipment for their record attempting flights. In contrast to the self-promoting Americans, Soviet flight crews were expected to fly aboard standard unmodified aircraft even during undertakings as demanding as the Great Flight.

> We do not select special machines for our flights as the Americans do, for example, in their attempts to circle the globe. We do not make special orders for long distance flights nor do we advertise sponsors in order to purchase special planes. We use that which we already have. That is to say, we endeavor not to set records, but to verify the capabilities of the aircraft in our Air Fleet. As such, we naturally view our fliers not as racer-individualists (*gonshchiki-individualisty*), but as a worker collective that fulfills practical tasks without inflating the value of our resources.[103]

In drawing attention to the flight crew as a "worker collective," the press contributed to the development of one of the central structuring elements of contemporary Soviet political culture. Time and again throughout the 1920s and 1930s, official publications and pronouncements would

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[100] L. M. Karakhan, "Znachenie pereleta Moskva–Kitai," *Biulleten' Aviakhima posviashchennyi pereletu Moskva–Mongolia–Kitai...*, 3.
[101] A. Lapchinskii, "K pereletu Moskva–Kitai," *Aviatsiia i khimiia* 6 (1925): 11.
[102] *Izvestiia*, 10 June 1925.
[103] Lapchinskii, "K pereletu Moskva–Kitai," 11.

contrast the collectively inclined Soviet flight crew with the solitary figure of the Western bourgeois pilot as a means of highlighting the political and moral superiority of Soviet socialism over American and European capitalism.[104] Significantly, the collectivity attributed to the Great Flight was extended to include even those not directly involved in orchestrating specific flights. In this way, Soviet aeronautical accomplishments were celebrated not as successes realized only by the flight crews that accomplished their missions, but as achievements made possible by the collective effort of the entire nation.

> Without the help of ordinary organizations these undertakings would, doubtless, not be possible. Such a flight is a comprehensive test in which not only our fliers, our factories, our Soviet made airplanes and motors take part, but in which the entire, terrestrial organization (*zemnaia organizatsiia*) and labor of the Air Fleet participates on a Union wide scale.[105]

As Party officials endeavored to generate broad social support for the air fleet and its sponsoring organizations, they advanced a vision of the Soviet Union as a moral community, distinguished from the selfish individualism of Western nations by the "collectivist" and "cooperative" nature of Soviet socialism. In time, these sentiments would be translated into a vision of the nation as an extended "Great Family," united behind the cause of socialism and guided by the paternal hand of Joseph Stalin.[106]

III

Soviet aviation underwent yet another major institutional transformation less than twenty months after the completion of the Moscow–Peking Great Flight. In January 1927, Aviakhim merged with the Society for Assistance to Defense (*Obshchestvo sodeistviia oborony*, or OSO) to form Osoaviakhim, a "mega-society" devoted to civil defense and the military education of the nation's citizenry. The creation of Osoaviakhim represented a fundamental transformation in both the direction and content of Soviet aviation. Although Osoaviakhim continued to promote the development of civil aviation, the society now undertook efforts to train citizens in rifle marksmanship, chemical defense, and partisan warfare tactics. The society's new civil defense mission meant that Soviet aeronautical culture would take on an increasingly militaristic character.

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[104] See below, 148.
[105] Lapchinskii, "K pereletu Moskva–Kitai," 11.
[106] See below, chapter 4, 186.

The amalgamation of Aviakhim and the OSO represented the administrative culmination of the Party leadership's long standing effort to strengthen military preparedness through the militarization of the Soviet Union's civilian population. Although the incorporation of civilian organizations into the military command structure had been proposed as early as 1924 by Mikhail Frunze, the first real progress towards institutionalizing this goal was not achieved until 1926. In July of that year the Society for Assistance to Defense was founded through the administrative transformation of the pre-existing Military Scientific Society (*Voennoe nauchnoe obshchestvo*, or VNO).[107] Established in 1920 by the military academy of the Red Army General Staff in Moscow, the VNO was a professional military organization dedicated to the "scientific" study of the World War and Russian Civil War, the development of military doctrine and the education of Red Army officers.[108] The OSO's new charter ended the "parochial intra-army character" of VNO activities by creating a broader mass voluntary organization devoted to state defense that included civilian as well as military members.[109] As such, the creation of the OSO was an important step in the Party's efforts to militarize Soviet society in preparation for the impending conflict with the capitalist powers of Western Europe.[110]

In his introductory speech before the First (and only) All-Union Conference of Aviakhim in January 1927, the Commissar of Defense, Klim Voroshilov, explained the underlying military and political concerns that had motivated the Party's decision to create Osoaviakhim. According to Voroshilov, the current configuration of independent voluntary organizations had prevented Party officials from properly coordinating the nation's defenses. Although Aviakhim had undertaken "effective *cultural* work," its members "were not prepared to address, nor had they addressed, issues pertaining to the preparation of the state's defense."[111] This lack of attention towards civil defense by an association possessing such clear relevance to military preparedness had produced "negative results" that could only be eradicated by the administrative union. Once Aviakhim was joined to the OSO, Voroshilov informed the gathered representatives, the society's members would be able "to address the question of militarization and the education of the broad mass of workers and peasants in preparing state defenses."[112]

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[107] In keeping with Soviet practice, the transformation of the VNO from an exclusively military to a military-civilian society was carried out by Party directive and over the objections of the VNO membership. See, Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*, 76-77.
[108] Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*, 75-76.
[109] Ibid., 76.
[110] von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 246-247.
[111] GARF f.r-9404, op. 1, d. 37, l. 60. The italics appear in the original.
[112] Ibid.

The creation of Osoaviakhim would also assist the Party in "broadening" public participation in state military concerns by greatly increasing the number of citizens enrolled in the civil defense society. According the Voroshilov, civil defense was a concern in which "every citizen *wanted* to participate."[113] More accurately, of course, civil defense was a concern in which the *Party* wanted every citizen to participate, just as it had wanted citizens to participate in its previous campaigns to build the air fleet, increase literacy, stamp out religion, and popularize the radio. Like these earlier initiatives, the creation of Osoaviakhim reflected the underlying assumption of Soviet political culture that forced association, when coupled with the mindful and omnipresent tutelage of the Communist Party, could inspire the popular civic-mindedness and provide the institutional networks necessary for the proper functioning of "socialist society."

By way of justifying the Party's quest to expand the size and scope of the OSO, Voroshilov pointed to the relative weakness of Soviet defense organizations in comparison with those in neighboring states.

> We have right now more than two million members, a number that is both honorable and very serious but a number that, for our country, is very miserly. If you look towards even our closest neighbors, you will see that [civil defense] organizations exist in Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and in Rumania. In comparison with the populations of these countries, their organizations are much larger and more substantive than ours.[114]

In light of these realities, Voroshilov called the current Soviet civil defense network "an insignificant and amorphous mass" that could attain success only through the amalgamation of OSO–Aviakhim and the subsequent "active participation" of Osoaviakhim members in the unified work of the society. What this would mean on a practical, day to day basis however was unclear. Voroshilov's speech was weak on particulars. He presented no hard evidence to support the argument that an administrative union of OSO–Aviakhim union would prove the best way to achieve the Party's military goals. Instead, the Commissar underscored his convictions through rhetorical paroxysms, warning the assembled representatives that "there is not one single government in the world, not one single government on the whole planet, that has been so careless and lukewarm about the defense of its own borders as the Soviet Union."[115] The unification of OSO–Aviakhim, however, would rectify this problem. Unification would create a society

[113] Ibid. The italics appear in the original.
[114] Ibid., 64.
[115] Ibid., 67.

"comprised of the militarized members of the [two] organizations," who would take it upon themselves "to militarize the whole country" through participation in Osoaviakhim.

Voroshilov's presentation before the All-Union Conference concluded by noting that the current international situation compelled the Party to act quickly and decisively in rectifying the shoddy state of its defensive networks. Recent diplomatic setbacks in China and Józef Pilsudski's military coup in Poland the previous May had been viewed with alarm by the Party hierarchy. Accompanying these developments, continuing sour relations with such important states as Great Britain, France, and the United States compounded latent fears of an impending military confrontation. Speaking in regard to these fears Voroshilov warned,

> We find ourselves in a situation in which we are subjected to psychological pressure by those very sharks, the watchdogs of capitalism, who view each and every one of our peaceful steps as a threatening act, as "red" imperialism, and as preparation for war. They scream, shout, and clamor about us in order to fool their citizens and to drown out the noise of their own armament programs as they draw closer to the moment when they will attack our country.[116]

In light of these realities, Voroshilov concluded, the civil defense initiative represented by the OSO–Aviakhim union was a pressing necessity.

Although foreign events played an important role in raising awareness of the bourgeois threat, the fundamental factor feeding Party leaders' continuing fear of foreign intervention remained the ideological convictions that shaped their world view. As we have seen, Party spokesmen had put to good use popular fears of renewed warfare during the years 1923-1924 to engender support for ODVF and the campaign to build the Red Air Fleet. Although Soviet rhetoric concerning the impending approach of the world revolution had cooled from the frenzied, high-pitched proclamations that had been issued during (and immediately after) the Civil War years, the Party leadership remained convinced that a military confrontation with the forces of capital would prove the inevitable (and, ultimately, even desirable) result of the Russian workers' and peasants' revolution. In 1927, as the Party prepared to launch its collectivization and industrialization programs, the leadership again invoked the specter of war to justify its course of action and to mobilize public support for its policies. As Voroshilov made clear in his closing remarks to the All-Union Conference, the impending conflict with capital remained an ever present threat in the minds of Soviet officials.

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[116] Ibid.

> I can tell you on the full authority of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin that war for our Union is unavoidable and that war will come, if not today, then tomorrow; if not tomorrow, then within a year; if not within a year, than within five to ten years. Lenin was very clear about this. He wrote and spoke about it often. Now, we too, say and write the same in our official and unofficial promulgations.[117]

If the Party's reversion to war-mongering scare tactics signaled a return to already established patterns of institutional behavior, so, too, did the manner in which it implemented the OSO–Aviakhim union. Voroshilov's acknowledgment before the Conference that the creation of Osoaviakhim was undertaken "despite the disagreement voiced by some members [of the two societies]" and his subsequent admonition that "patriotism" for the individual societies be eradicated and replaced with patriotism for the united Osoaviakhim, were clear indications that rank and file opposition to the administrative merger had existed.[118] In this regard, the creation of Osoaviakhim was undertaken along lines similar to those that had accompanied the initial formation of ODVF and the subsequent creation of Aviakhim. In each instance the Party acted not in response to the genuine initiative of ordinary citizens but through administrative fiat; mandating bureaucratic changes from above in order to serve its own political and social goals. The only difference between the OSO–Aviakhim union and the previous campaigns initiated by Party officials was the colossal scope of the new enterprise. Osoaviakhim was a mammoth undertaking producing a truly all-Union organizational network of citizens that would boast more than twelve million members within five years of its formation.[119] To this end, the OSO–Aviakhim union signaled the onset of the "colossalist" mindset that would become a hallmark of 1930s Soviet culture. Similar to Gosplan (and, increasingly, the Party itself) Osoaviakhim was a massive, bureaucratic expression of Soviet leaders' conviction that they could engineer society through rationalized planning and centralized control. The "institutional collectivization" of the nation's two most prominent social organizations, in turn, revealed the totalistic (if not totalitarian) impulses of Soviet political culture as Party leaders endeavored to create a comprehensive civil defense network that would bind all citizens to the state through militarized local institutions under tight Party control.[120]

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[117] Ibid., 69.
[118] Ibid., l. 58. See also Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*, 84-85.
[119] Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*, 173. Odom correctly notes that the society's official membership figures were "misleading," perhaps overstating the effective membership by as much as 50 to 60 percent. Nevertheless, Osoaviakhim remained, by far, the largest social organization in the Soviet Union.
[120] The incorporation of Aviakhim into the military command structure may also have benefited Stalin in his ongoing efforts to depose Trotskii as a political rival. Trotskii's contribution to the development of the Red Air Fleet was well known both within the Party and amongst the general population. As the architect

IV

The most visible (and paradoxical) change in Soviet aeronautical culture brought about by the creation of Osoaviakhim was the proliferation of state sponsored spectacles designed to convince foreign audiences of the competency of the Soviet aviation industry. During the nearly four years that had preceded the creation of Osoaviakhim, ODVF and Aviakhim officials had devoted the overwhelming majority of their time and effort to inculcating Soviet air-mindedness and developing domestic support for the state's efforts to build the Red Air Fleet. Although similar efforts would continue under Osoaviakhim's administration (in the form of expanding the size and number of agit-squadrons and public spectacles), the organization, from 1927 onward, devoted considerably more time to promoting Soviet aviation abroad.

Osoaviakhim's new efforts to target foreign audiences through public spectacle may be explained, in part, by the onset of the First-Five Year Plan.[121] Having committed the nation to a program of rapid industrial development that included substantial increases in the nation's military budget (and, hence, aviation) the Party had much less need to lobby citizens' economic support through propaganda campaigns designed to raise aeronautical awareness. The decision to invest almost all available resources in the development of heavy industry ensured that those enterprises crucial to aeronautical concerns would be funded at sufficiently generous levels. As a result, the focus of Soviet aeronautical iconology now shifted from the airplane itself, to the industrial, technical, and political realities that made possible the mass production of airplanes. Beginning in the spring of 1923, Party leaders had worked to cultivate Soviet air-mindedness and to create public enthusiasm and esteem for the airplane as a symbol of power and progress. With the onset of the First Five-Year Plan, they now employed that symbol to support their broader program of industrial expansion and technological development. As the First Five-Year Plan progressed, "spectacle flights" became important vehicles for convincing audiences that new production policies, keyed towards heavy industry and the military, were producing propitious results. More

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of ODVF/Aviakhim, Trotskii had enjoyed a high profile at the organization's meetings and in the pages of its many publications. The creation of the new civil defense conglomerate ended these practices. Within a year of the administrative union, Trotskii's name was removed from Moscow's central air field. Shortly thereafter, he was expelled from the Party and exiled to Alma Ata.

[121] Although the First Five-Year Plan operated in effect from October 1928, preparatory work began as early as June 1927. See, Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (London, 1992), 142-143.

so than ever before, airplanes came to serve as an important yardstick for measuring Soviet industrial and technical achievements against the standards set by Western Europe.

A second factor contributing to the expansion of aeronautical spectacles was the Party's increasing concern with demonstrating the technical competence and military preparedness of its armed forces to potential foreign enemies. This aspect of Osoaviakhim's promotional strategy unfolded in 1927 against the backdrop of a series of diplomatic and foreign policy crises that severely undermined the Soviet Union's international standing and prestige. In the early spring of the year, the Soviet espionage service suffered a debilitating blow when its spies were uncovered and arrested in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Turkey, Switzerland, and Lithuania.[122] In April, Chinese police raided the office of the Soviet military attaché in Peking where they discovered incriminating documents indicating that Soviet agents had been interfering in Chinese internal affairs. One week later, General Chiang Kai-Shek began a systematic purge of the Kuomintang's Communist membership effectively destroying the Soviet Union's China policy. Still worse news followed. Escalating diplomatic tensions with Great Britain came to a head in May when the British government staged a policy raid on the extraterritorial office of the Soviet Trade Representative in London. The raid was followed by the British decision to revoke its 1921 trade agreement and break off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. As if to add injury to mounting insults, the chief Soviet diplomatic representative to Poland, P. L. Voikov, was assassinated by a Russian émigré in early June.

Party leaders responded to this rapid succession of foreign policy disasters by ratcheting up their public rhetoric concerning the dangers emanating from the capitalist West. Throughout the spring and summer of the year, Soviet newspapers were filled with sensationalist stories warning citizens of anti-Soviet military preparations underway in Great Britain, France, and China.[123] Satirical poems and cartoons depicting the fiendish plans of foreign statesmen like Neville Chamberlain and Johnson Hicks also helped raise public anxiety that the West was plotting to attack the Soviet Union. By early summer of the year, press coverage had reached such excessive heights that general panic began to spread amongst the population. Rumors of an impending invasion lead to the hoarding of grain and basic foodstuffs as citizens braced themselves for the inevitable conflict with the forces of European capitalism.[124]

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[122] Raymond W. Leonard, "The Kremlin's Secret Soldiers: The Story of Soviet Military Intelligence, 1918-1933," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1997), 181.
[123] See *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* 1 June-31 July 1927.
[124] Alfred G. Meyer, "The War Scare of 1927," *Soviet Union/Union Soviétique* 5 (1978): 7-9.

As if to assuage the public anxiety initiated and fed by the press, both the frequency and scope of aeronautical events increased as the "war scare" intensified. In an attempt to raise domestic confidence in (and foreign concern for) Soviet military aviation, Osoaviakhim officials organized a year-long campaign of high profile "big flights" (*bol'shie perelety*) intended to demonstrate the technical competence and aeronautical skills of Soviet airplanes and their air crews. Continuing the tradition of long distance journeys first established by the 1925 Moscow–Peking expedition, Soviet airmen embarked upon lengthy excursions between such locations as Tblisi–Moscow, Moscow–Wrangel Island, and Tashkent–Kabul. In mid-August, a Soviet constructed ANT-3 airplane (dubbed the "Proletariat") was dispatched on a 4,000 mile aeronautical tour of Western Europe that included brief stops at Stockholm, Paris, Prague, and Berlin. As was true of each of the year's "big flights," the Proletariat's journey was undertaken in order to "underscore the high quality of Soviet airplanes and the endurance of Soviet fliers" to audiences at home and abroad.[125] Perhaps to ensure that Continental spectators grasped this message, less than one month following the successful completion of the flight, the "Proletariat" repeated its performance with a second 4,500 mile tour of other European capitals.[126]

Long distance expeditions were not the only aeronautical spectacles undertaken during the course of 1927. Throughout the year, newly constructed squadrons were unveiled with much fanfare at airfields and aerodromes across the nation.[127] Meanwhile, airplanes named in honor of such Communist luminaries as Frunze, Dzerzhinskii, Stalin, and, of course, Lenin, appeared with increasing frequency at official Party functions and festivals.[128] As the number of these aerial demonstrations increased so, too, did their scope. In early November festivities held in conjunction with the celebration of the Revolution's tenth anniversary were accompanied by an "aeronautical parade" of more than three dozen aircraft, the largest such spectacle organized, to date, by the nation's aviation officials.[129]

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[125] "Polet vokrug Evropy," *Izvestiia*, 14 August 1927 and "Tri dnia vokrug Evropy," *Krasnaia niva* 38 (1927): 10.
[126] *Izvestiia*, 9 September 1927.
[127] See, for example, "Prazdnik v vozdukhe," 26 July 1927.
[128] The naming of airplanes in honor of esteemed comrades extended to revolutionary martyrs as well. In the course of the year airplanes bearing the names of P. L. Voikov as well as the condemned American anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were unveiled before the Soviet public.
[129] Shumikhin, *Sovetskaia voennaia aviatsiia, 1917-1941*, 133-134.

One of the year's more unusual efforts to demonstrate Soviet mastery of the skies was the "star flight" competition held on 19 June. Unlike other, more typical, aeronautical expeditions which were intended to demonstrate primarily aircrafts' speed and the endurance of individual pilots, the star flight was designed to test the teamwork and precision of the Red Air Fleet's cadres. Twelve flight crews were positioned at ten different cities located 550 to 1,150 kilometers from Moscow. Each was then instructed to proceed to the Soviet capital along a precise route and at a constant speed while maintaining a specific altitude for at least one-third of their journey. Ideally, if each of the crews followed their flight plan to the letter, all twelve would arrive at the air base at the same time. The air crew that arrived at the air base closest to its assigned time (while consuming no more than a designated amount of fuel) would be acknowledged as the star flight's winner.[130]

The star flight was heralded by the press as definitive proof that "high levels of readiness, training, discipline, and precision" were the characteristic features of the Red Air Fleet's pilots and airplanes.[131] The demonstration was also trumpeted as evidence that the nation had mastered technique. Of the dozen planes that took part in the star flight, ten had been designed and constructed domestically, a clear indication that the Soviet aeronautical industry had attained a high level of technical competence. According to one source, the Soviet-made aircraft had performed their missions quickly, efficiently, and with "clock-like precision," demonstrating the nation's ability to conquer space and time through the accomplished and rational application of modern science and technology.[132]

The orchestration of the star flight also pointed to the prominence increasingly attached to discipline and collective action within contemporary Soviet political culture. The race had been designed to test the ability of the participating air crews to coordinate their efforts and to achieve a designated objective by acting in unison. Although a single air crew was acknowledged as the star flight's "victor," the subsequent assembly held to celebrate the race focused upon the achievements of all the participating fliers. Press coverage appearing in the aftermath of the race similarly emphasized the collective nature of the flight while downplaying the significance of the individual pilots' successes. One article drew an explicit contrast between the star flight and the aeronautical achievements of Western airmen. Citing Charles Lindbergh's recent solo flight across the Atlantic

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[130] A second "star flight" involving two fewer aircraft but covering much greater distances was held on 15 September. See, "Vtoroi zvezdnyi perelet nachalsia," *Izvestiia*, 16 September 1927.
[131] "Itogi zvezdnogo pereleta," *Pravda*, 22 June 1927.
[132] I. Fel'dman, "Na boevom poste," *Krasnaia niva* 29 (1927): 8.

Ocean as an example of "bourgeois individualism," this piece proclaimed that "our Soviet cadres evidenced their superiority [to Western pilots] by acting not as individuals, but in unison, that is, as a mass."[133] This collectivity, the article continued, was particularly important to the future success of Soviet aviation owing to the fact that "*aviation, both in peace and war, is only useful when it is employed on the principle of the mass.*"[134] Such sentiments, while trumpeting Soviet achievements and downplaying Western success, pointed to the growing social and political significance that would be attached to the collective throughout the Stalinist era.[135]

The "year of big flights" reached its apogee in late summer with the return of pilot S. A. Shestakov and flight engineer D. V. Fufaev from a stunning 12,000 mile round-trip journey between Moscow and Tokyo aboard the ANT-3 airplane "Our Answer." Like many of the aeronautical demonstrations organized by Party authorities during the course of the year, the Moscow–Tokyo–Moscow flight was, in part, an attempt to allay citizens' fears of an impending invasion.[136] To this end, the flight sought to confirm that the Soviet Union's industrial capabilities and technical acuity were no less than that possessed by the West. In the keynote speech delivered before the celebratory ceremony held in honor of the returning fliers, the vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council I. S. Unshlikht addressed this very issue.

> This brilliant flight has proven to us that mass-produced Soviet aircraft completely satisfy the most rigorous tests that are applied to aviation technology. Recent years have been noteworthy for the series of accomplishments that we have achieved in general industrial production and our aviation industry in particular. During the past year the intensification of the USSR's industrialization program has produced outstanding achievements.[137]

Unshlikht's direct association of the aeronautical expedition with the nation's improving productive capacity indicated the airplane's emerging new role as a symbolic marker for the state's economic policies. Whereas earlier, ODVF and Aviakhim officials had advanced the airplane as a symbol of generic progress and modernity, Osoaviakhim officials now tied aeronautical symbolism to the Party's nascent industrialization drive. Although the Five-Year Plan would not begin, in earnest,

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[133] A. Rozanov, "Zvezdnyi perelet 1927 g.," *Aviatsiia i khimiia* 8 (13) (1927): 23-24.
[134] Ibid. All italics appear in the original.
[135] For an extended discussion of the collective and its role in Stalinist culture, see Chapter 4.
[136] "Znachenie pereleta Moskva–Tokio," *Izvestiia*, 2 September 1927. For an account of the flight from the perspective of the airplane's pilot see, S. Shestakov, "Nad taigoi," *Krasnaia niva* 8 (February 1928): 16.
[137] "Perelet Moskva–Tokio–Moskva zakonchen," *Izvestiia*, 23 September 1927.

until the spring of 1928, official statements such as Unshlikht's, suggest that Party members were already forecasting the Plan's successful realization months before its official inauguration. As the industrialization drive unfolded with the Five-Year Plans, airplanes and aeronautical spectacles would garner increasing attention from state authorities.

At first glance, the Party's appropriation of aeronautical spectacles such as the "star flight" to allay public concerns regarding the nation's ability to defend itself from a foreign invasion appears to have been a reasoned response to unexpected adversity. Anxious to calm a manifestly worried public and halt the run on grain and basic goods, Party officials responded with a show of strength intended to bolster citizens' morale and their sense of security. A closer examination of the circumstances surrounding the "war scare," however, suggests that the year's aeronautical productions (and the scare itself) were less spontaneous reactions to unforeseen and unfavorable events than the essential components of a consciously crafted strategy to mobilize support for the Party and its policy objectives.

Recently uncovered evidence from military intelligence archives indicates that, contrary to the vocal public posturing of Soviet officials throughout the course of the year, high ranking Party leaders did not believe that war with the West was imminent, or even likely, in 1927. Threat assessments conducted by the Red Army intelligence service in late 1926 and again in early 1927 had concluded that no immediate danger of hostilities between the Soviet Union and its capitalist neighbors existed. Even as late as July of the year, following the resolution of the crises in London and Peking, Mikhail Tukhachevskii reported that the Red Army's military planners were proceeding on the assumption that an outbreak of war remained an unlikely occurrence during the next five years.[138] Still further indication of Party officials' true mindset was the fact that the cornerstone of their comprehensive strategy for national industrialization, the Five-Year Plan, was set to commence only in 1928, much too late to affect the outcome of a war expected to erupt in the preceding year. Nevertheless, Soviet officials throughout the summer and fall of 1927 continued to raise the specter of an impending attack in their public speeches and in the press. Their actions have led one scholar to conclude that the "war scare" of 1927 was "almost certainly a deliberate

[138] Raymond W. Leonard, "The Kremlin's Secret Soldiers: The Story of Military Intelligence, 1918-1933," 182.

fabrication fully supported if not actually invented" by the highest ranking officials of the Soviet government.[139]

The mobilization of public opinion through the orchestration of the "war scare" was, by no means, an unique occurrence in Soviet political culture. In terms of its international context, careful staging, and highly visible incorporation of aeronautical demonstrations and symbolism, the "war scare" of 1927 bore a striking resemblance to the "Ultimatum campaign" that had unfolded during the spring of 1923. At that time, Soviet officials had used the pretext of a threatening British diplomatic note to raise public fears of the possibility of war in order to generate support for the Party's military programs and to raise donations for the construction of the Red Air Fleet.[140] Just four short years after Party officials had answered the Curzon note with an "ultimatum" of their own, they again mobilized Soviet citizens with threats of an impending war in order to generate a national "answer to Chamberlain." The consonance of these two episodes was underscored by the press. Throughout 1927 newspaper stories, editorials, and political cartoons made direct reference to the "ultimatum campaign" as an example of how the public should respond to this most recent foreign "threat."[141] Indeed, the differences between the two war scares were slight. Where, in 1923, public participation in aeronautical construction had been the object of officials' desires, in 1927 aeronautical symbolism was employed to augment a campaign intended to generate confidence in and support for a program of rapid industrial expansion. In both cases, however, the means undertaken to achieve these results was the same. The inherent conformance of 1927 and 1923 was directly addressed by Osoaviakhim spokesman V. A. Zarzar in an article published by the newspaper *Izvestiia*. Entitled "From the 'Ultimatum' to the 'Answer to Chamberlain'," the article evaluated the progress of Soviet aeronautical culture between the two war scares, favorably concluding that in both cases the nation's citizens had responded properly to the Party's exhortations by rallying to the nation's defense through support of aviation.[142]

Having failed in their impatient attempts to generate acceptable levels of enthusiastic public participation through the avocation of "voluntary" societies, Soviet officials resorted to threats of war and foreign invasion to motivate citizens' support for their aeronautical (and industrial) policy initiatives. Dedicated to the realization of an ideological vision that forecast the

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[139] Ibid., 183-184. My thanks to Dr.Leonard for providing me with all of the material relating to the "war scare." A similar, if less emphatic, conclusion is advanced by Alfred Meyer, "The War Scare of 1927," *op cit.*

[140] On the campaign to construct the aeronautical squadron *Our Ultimatum* see above, chapter 2, 98-100.

[141] See *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*, August-December 1927.

[142] V. Zarzar, "Ot 'Ul'timatuma' k 'Otvetu Chemberlenu'," *Izvetsiia*, 6-7 November 1927.

inevitable confrontation of the forces of labor and capital, Soviet spokesmen undertook to defend their revolution through the institutional collectivization of aeronautical, chemical, and civilian defense interests within a massive bureaucratic organization directly controlled by Party officials. The creation of Osoaviakhim and the campaigns organized by it during its inaugural year, represented the realization of Mikhail Frunze's earlier admonition that Party leaders "set as their goal the greater militarization of civilian institutions in anticipation of defending the Soviet Union during an armed confrontation" with the forces of Western Europe.[143]

The development of Soviet aeronautical culture can thus be understood best in terms of an evolutionary continuity rooted in the ideological predilections of Communist Party leaders and shaped by the contours of an emerging bureaucratic culture. Committed to the task of overcoming Russia's economic, military, and cultural backwardness through the appropriation of aeronautical technology, leading officials consciously endeavored to mandate the content and shape of Soviet air-mindedness "from above" through totalistic methods that sacrificed spontaneity and individual initiative in favor of centrally planned and coerced collective action. During the first two years of their organization's existence, ODVF officials devoted their efforts to raising public awareness of the importance and value of aviation in defending the nation and developing a modern economy. In pursuit of these aims, Soviet officials appropriated aeronautical images to educate citizens of the airplane's capabilities and to demonstrate the immediate, personal benefits that volunteers would derive from donating their time and money to the cause of the Red Air Fleet.

Having established the basic institutional and social frameworks of Soviet aeronautical culture by mid-1925, Party officials abandoned the earlier practice of the mass mobilization campaign in favor of integrating the nation's aeronautical program into an emerging civil defense bureaucracy. Combining the eradication of "aeronautical illiteracy" with the tasks of raising public consciousness of chemical weaponry, providing basic military training for the country's youth, and developing a nationwide civil defense network, the Party leadership attempted to militarize the Soviet Union in preparation for the inevitable battle against the hostile forces of the world bourgeoisie. Accompanying these efforts, Soviet officials increasingly relied upon aeronautical spectacles to promote both domestic and foreign awareness of Soviet aeronautical achievements and to rally public support behind the nascent Five-Year Plan to industrialize the nation.

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[143] Mikhail Frunze, "Ob itogakh," 74. Cited in von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 240.

V

On the morning of 23 August 1929, an ANT-4 airplane dubbed the *Land of the Soviets* lifted off from Shelkova airfield outside of Moscow on a four-week 13,000 mile flight to the United States of America. The airborne route chosen for the aircraft's four-man crew would carry the *Land of the Soviets* over the vast expanse of the Siberian tundra, across the Bering Straits, down though the Pacific northwest to the coast of northern California. From there, the airplane was scheduled to traverse North America along the trans-continental air-mail route which followed a rough line from Salt Lake City–Chicago–Detroit before reaching its final destination, New York City. The aeronautical journey would prove the decade's last major undertaking for Soviet aviation. Coming only four months after the Party's formal acceptance of the First Five-Year Plan in April, 1929, the Moscow–New York flight was intended to demonstrate the stunning advances already made by the nation's industry under the guidance of the Communist Party's rapid industrialization program. The flight also pointed towards the emerging fetish of "colossalism" that would come to dominate Soviet culture during the decade of the thirties.

The Moscow–New York flight, in fact, took place on the heels of a similar Soviet sponsored international aviation spectacle. Between 10 July and 8 August the two-man crew of the ANT-9 monoplane *Wings of the Soviets* carried nine passengers on a 5,600 mile circuitous tour of Western and Central Europe that included stops at such capitals as Berlin, Paris, London, and Rome. Similar to the Moscow–New York expedition which, according to Sergei Kamenev, it had "prefaced," the flight of the *Wings of the Soviets* was not intended to realize any specific aeronautical goals nor to set any particular international flight records.[144] Rather, the flight was undertaken in order "to demonstrate the new airplane's performance under the normal conditions of a typical European air route." Soviet officials hoped that such a flight would enable them to "assess the capabilities of the ANT-9 and to compare its performance with similar, three-engine European craft."[145] The positive results, they hoped, would provide evidence of the rapid advances recently made by Soviet industry.

According to the periodical press, the *Wings of the Soviets* exceeded the expectations of the nation's aviation officials. On each of the legs of its European journey, the ANT-9 met the challenge of at least matching the performance of rival foreign aircraft. More promisingly, the

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[144] S. Kamenev, "Posle pereleta 'Strany sovetov'," *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota* 12 (December 1929): 2.
[145] V. Zarzar, "Kryl'ia sovetov nad Evropoi," *Aviatsiia i khimiia* 9 (38) (September 1929): 3-4.

plane had even managed to best the standards set by a Rohrbach aircraft on its flight between Berlin and Travemünde, shaving more than ten minutes from the time established by the German-made plane.[146] Following the completion of the airplane's European circuit, Osoaviakhim officials proclaimed that

> the unqualified successes associated with the *Wings of the Soviets* demonstrated the indisputable fact that in all areas the scientific, technical, and industrial might of the proletarian state has taken a significant step forward during the last year, the year of the reconstruction of our national economy.[147]

These successes, in turn, would produce additional dividends by "illustrating the substantial growth of our aviation industry, thereby raising the prestige of Soviet aviation as a whole in the eyes of the USSR's laboring masses and in the eyes of our class enemies abroad."[148] In terms of their inspirational value, the accomplishments of the *Wings of the Soviets* were likened to "fireworks which, in their bright and concentrated form, demonstrate[d] to all laborers of the proletarian state, the levels of success that can be attained in the course of socialist competition and through the comradely collective work of the laboring masses." Such aeronautical demonstrations, Osoaviakhim officials gamely forecast, would "supply all laborers with new sources of energy" as they undertook efforts to fulfill the Five-Year Plan."[149]

The expectant hyperbole that greeted the completion of the European air tour was reproduced throughout the fall as the *Land of the Soviets* progressed across Siberia towards the western coast of the United States. As the plane traveled eastward, the nation's newspapers and journals eagerly tracked the progress of the air crew, extolling each leg of the journey as yet

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[146] Ibid., 4.

[147] V. Zarzar, "Itogi bol'shogo evropeiskogo pereleta samoleta 'Kryl'ia sovetov'," *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota* 9 (September 1929): 7. Foreign observers appear to have been much less sanguine about the *Wings of the Soviets* and its flight. Major Emer Yeager, an American military attaché in Poland who had an opportunity to inspect the airplane when it visited Warsaw, noted that "there was no particular attention paid to the arrival and departure of the plane" a fact that, he concluded, "bears out the rumors current here that this has not been the great triumphant flight that the Soviets had hoped it would be." See "Report from Maj. Emer Yeager, military attaché, Warsaw, Poland, 12 August 1929;" MID 2090, roll 20, frame 121; Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division Relating to General, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1918-1941 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M14430); National Archives, Washington, DC.

[148] RGVA f. 33989, op. 1, d. 65 (General'nyi sekretariat Osoaviakhima o rabote Osoaviakhima), l. 140.

[149] Zarzar, "Itogi bol'shogo evropeiskogo pereleta samoleta 'Kryl'ia sovetov'," 7.

another "victory" of Soviet aviation.[150] Meanwhile, Osoaviakhim officials produced patriotic newsreels documenting every aspect of the flight. These would serve as visual testaments to the success of Soviet industry.[151] When the plane finally touched down at Curtiss Air Field in New York, the newspaper *Izvestiia* rapturously proclaimed the flight to be "the greatest accomplishment in the history of world aviation."[152]

A closer examination of the Moscow–New York flight casts doubt upon the grandiose claims made by the press. To be sure, the Soviet constructed ANT-4 had flown more than 13,000 miles over isolated and inhospitable terrain, oftentimes under adverse and challenging weather conditions. In accomplishing its objective, the airplane had flown farther on a single mission than any Soviet aircraft to date. These achievements would suggest that the airplane's mission be judged an unqualified success. The *Land of the Soviets* had, however, required more than two months to complete its "heroic" journey. In fact, the mission was set back more than two weeks when the original ANT-4 (which departed Moscow on 8 August) crashed in Siberia, compelling officials to reschedule the start of the intercontinental flight for 23 August.[153] Once the new plane was underway, the aircraft's limited range, inclement weather, and all-too-frequent mechanical problems compelled the flight crew to make nearly two dozen stops between Moscow and New York.[154] At one point, in early October, mechanical failure forced an unscheduled landing in Waterfall, Alaska, where the crew waited nine days for the arrival and installment of a new engine.[155] Yet another new engine was installed two days later after the plane landed in Seattle, Washington. By the time the aircraft arrived in New York on 1 November, ten weeks had passed since the Moscow departure. All totaled, the *Land of the Soviets* averaged just over 175 miles a day on its trip to New York; hardly an inspiring (or even exceptional) accomplishment.

Measured against contemporary flights by British, American, and French aircraft, the range, durability, and flight speed of the *Land of the Soviets* appeared even less spectacular. On 20-21 May 1927, American airman Charles Lindbergh had captured the imagination of the

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[150] I. Groza, "Ot pobedy k pobede," *Aviatsiia i khimiia* 12 (41) (December 1929): 2. For a survey of press coverage, see the following: *Izvestiia*, *Pravda*, *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota*, *Krasnaia niva*, *Ogonek*, and *Samolet*, 8 August -15 November 1929.

[151] See, "Kryl'ia Oktiabria" (RGAKFD k/t O-20437-I); "Sovkinozhurnal No. 49/228, 1929" (O-2070); "Sovkinozhurnal No. 81/260, 1929" (O-2100-k/t) and "Sovkinozhurnal No. 84/263, 1929" (O-2103).

[152] *Izvestiia*, 5 November 1929.

[153] K. Genger, "Bol'shie sovetskie perelety," *Vestnik vozdushnogo flota* 10-11 (October-November 1929): 31.

[154] For the complete itinerary of the Moscow–New York Flight, see *Aircraft Year Book*, vol. 12 (New York, 1930), 134-135.

[155] *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 14 October 1929.

Western world by traveling some 3,600 miles in a thirty-three and one-half hour non-stop flight across the Atlantic Ocean.[156] Since then, scores of individual pilots and air crews had attempted to best the "Lone Eagle's" accomplishment with daring (and sometimes foolhardy) aeronautical feats of their own. In 1929 alone, more than two dozen airmen took part in international long-distance flights, including ten trans-Atlantic crossings and one (failed) attempt to circle the globe. Accompanying these efforts, the world's leading aviators routinely bested established altitude, speed, duration, and distance records as they continually strove to expand the capabilities of their aircraft and engines.[157] The possibility of these flights, of course, owed much to the rapid advancement of American and Western European aeronautical technology. As private firms and government ministries invested increasing resources into the development of new airframes and engines, the range, speed, and lift capacity of airplanes improved with each passing year.

Viewed in this context, the *Land of the Soviets* expedition appears less dramatic that its Soviet sponsors would have liked their contemporaries to believe. Although the flight did demonstrate the perseverance and fortitude of Soviet airmen, from a technological standpoint, the ten week-journey from New York--Moscow represented no great breakthrough. The Soviet airplane was too slow, its range too limited, and its engines far too unreliable to be considered a serious advance in aviation design and construction. These realities did not, however, dissuade propagandists from heralding the *Land of the Soviets* and its Moscow–New York flight as a "miracle in the air."[158] In numerous articles and editorials devoted to the journey, Soviet newsmen celebrated the completion of the flight as a triumph of Soviet industry and as proof that Soviet science and technology was rapidly overtaking that of the West.[159]

The technical shortcomings of the ANT-4 and the overextended duration of the Moscow–New York flight notwithstanding, the adventure undertaken by the *Land of the Soviets* was an important indication of the Soviet desire to enter into the ever-widening and quickening race for international aeronautical renown. Since the very first years of machine-powered flight, European governments had competed against one another to gain strategic advantage in the "battle for the heavens." As air-minded private citizens and public officials invested ever-more resources into the development of aviation, they appropriated aeronautical accomplishments as symbols of national

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[156] See, John W. Ward, "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," *American Quarterly* 10 (1958): 3-16.
[157] *Aircraft Year Book*, vol. 12, 123-144.
[158] *Izvestiia*, 2 November 1929.
[159] K. Genger, "Bol'shie sovetskie perelety," 31. See also I. Groza, "Ot pobedy k pobede" and M. Beliakov, "Moskva–N'iu-Iork," *Krasnaia niva* 48 (November 1929): 8-9 among others.

strength and vitality. As we have seen, in the earliest years of the 1910s, aviation and aeronautics emerged as a crucial yardstick by which Imperial patrons measured their cultural and technological status against the standing of Western Europe. For their part, Soviet leaders had signaled an awareness of aviation's important military and civilian applications with the establishment of the Friends of the Air Fleet in 1923. In the intervening years, under the auspices of ODVF's successor organizations Aviakhim and Osoaviakhim, they continued their commitment to aeronautical development by designating increasing resources to the construction of "Red" aviation. Now, as the 1920s drew to a close, Party officials pointed to the achievements of their airplanes as proof that socialist planning could construct both a modern air force and nation.

Inasmuch as the Moscow–New York flight was intended to support the policies and programs of the First Five-Year Plan, the *Land of the Soviets*' American journey also served as a goodwill mission that might improve relations between the Soviet Union and the West. Given the Soviet Union's continuing status as an international pariah, the fliers aboard the *Land* (and, for that matter, *Wings*) *of the Soviets* undertook their aeronautical mission as unofficial representatives of their nation. As many of the countries that the pilots visited had yet to recognize Russia's Communist rulers, options for official diplomatic exchanges remained severely limited. In addition to demonstrating the technological success made possible by planned and centralized industrial expansion, these flights served as political overtures that might break down the diplomatic barriers preventing official recognition and the beneficial trade agreements that might follow. In the same way that airplanes had earlier been used to transcend the vast economic and cultural expanses that divided Soviet Russia's far-flung citizens, they were now employed to bridge the ideological chasm that isolated the Soviet Union from its Western neighbors. The importance of the flight crew's symbolic diplomacy was underscored by Osoaviakhim officials in an express telegram forwarded to the fliers aboard the *Land of the Soviets* on the day before the airplane entered United States' airspace. Warning the air crew that they would be "at the center of attention of all those around them," Soviet officials took pains to remind their fliers "of the necessity of utmost amicability and absolutely proper conduct, discretion, and courtesy in [their] public appearances" as their "socialist fatherland" would be judged in accordance with their actions.[160]

The propagandistic nature of the Moscow–New York flight had played a central role in defining the mission from the earliest stages of its conception. Shortly after the public announcement that the Soviet Union would undertake an international flight to the United States,

[160] RGAE f. 9527, op. 1, d. 89 (Materialy o perelete 'Strany Sovetov' Moskva–N'iu-Iork, chast' 1), l. 110.

Osoaviakhim officials began working in close association with the U.S.-based Soviet trade company Amtorg and the Communist front organization "Friends of Soviet Russia" to ensure that adequately numerous and vocally pro-Soviet crowds would be on hand to greet the airplane at each of its major American stops. In the weeks leading up to the airplane's entry into American airspace, Amtorg solicited background materials on the plane and its pilots from Osoaviakhim officials in order to undertake "a broad information campaign among the American press" that would provide the desired context for the airplane's arrival.[161] Perhaps in fear of inciting the anti-Soviet sentiments of the American public, Soviet officials were careful to censor references to the pilots' service in the Red Army and their membership in the Communist Party.[162] Judging by the receptions that greeted the airplane's arrival, the information campaign was not without success. American newspaper reports indicate that sizable audiences were on hand to welcome the *Land of the Soviets* and its flight crew at several of the aircraft's stops. In Seattle and San Francisco "visibly excited" and "enthusiastic" crowds were reported, while in New York, a crowd "of approximately 8,000 Russian-Americans and Friends of the Soviet Union" turned out to welcome the airborne visitors.[163] The convivial atmosphere of the aeronautical tour was disturbed only in San Francisco, where anti-Soviet demonstrations cast a slight shadow on an otherwise bright reception.

From the standpoint of Soviet leaders' political concerns, the enthusiastic receptions offered the *Land of the Soviets* by American citizens proved no less useful than the successful completion of the agit-flight itself. In glowing articles devoted to the plane's reception, ecstatic newsmen cited Americans' popular response to the airplane's arrival as proof of the flight's international significance and as a demonstration of the politically persuasive power that accompanied aeronautical modernization. The periodical *Aviatsiia i khimiia* captured the exultant mood of state officials in a lengthy story on the "Greeting of the *Land of the Soviets* in New York."[164] According to the Osoaviakhim journal, as word of the airplane's arrival reached the metropolis, "workers left their jobs to gather at the office of the Friends of the Soviet Union" in

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[161] RGAE f. 9527, op. 1, d, 88 (Materialy o perelete 'Strany Sovetov' Moskva–N'iu-Iork, chast' 2), ll. 182-183.
[162] Ibid., l. 264.
[163] *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 14 October 1929; *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 October 1929 and *The New York Sun*, 2 November 1929.
[164] Petr Apriianskii, "Vstrecha samoleta 'Strana Sovetov' v N'iu-Iork," *Aviatsiia i khimiia* 12 (41) (December 1929): 22-23.

preparation for their foreign visitors. From there, they boarded buses, cars, and trains in order to reach Curtiss Airfield where the plane was scheduled to land.

> Everyone on the street bore a joyous expressions. How could they not rejoice, how could they not be enraptured, how could they not go out to greet the common accomplishment of our own workers, realized through Osoaviakhim USSR? How could they not celebrate in light of such a grandiose achievement of Soviet technology and aviation?

As the plane descended towards the earth, the crowd (which, according to the journal, numbered in the thousands and was comprised almost exclusively of workers), let out "joyous exclamations, like peals of thunder" in fraternal greeting to the Soviet pilots. Waving red flags and singing the "Internationale," the onlookers, "as if one mass, broke through the cordon of dark-blue policemen and rushed toward the taxiing airplane." Only the unexpected appearance of Charles Lindbergh's well-known blue and yellow airplane prevented grave injury from befalling excited spectators and pilots alike. Arriving to greet the international visitors, Lindbergh detracted public attention away from the Soviet aircraft, giving the crewmen ample time to park their plane safely in a nearby hangar.[165] In response to the boisterous New York greeting, Soviet officials concluded that the appearance of the *Land of the Soviets*

> has drawn together the American *narod* with the workers of the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of American workers celebrated this flight and demonstrated their pride in the bravery, experience, and endurance of the Soviet fliers. With this gigantic flight the American working class clearly saw what the proletariat can accomplish once it takes power into its own hands. Before them stood an airplane, constructed by Soviet engineers, built by Soviet materials, in a Soviet aviation factory; its technical quality no less than that reflected in the latest European and American machines. The *Land of the Soviets* was perceived as a symbol of the victory that will be attained by the working class, allied together with the peasantry, in freeing humanity from the imperialist yoke.

A similarly transparent attempt to extract political capital from the flight was revealed in two celebratory letters ostensibly submitted to the journal *Ogonek* by "Stepan," a Russian worker who was on hand to greet the *Land of the Soviets*' arrival in Seattle.[166] Despite difficult economic circumstances which oftentimes compelled him to forego eating, the patriotic laborer traveled from his home in San Francisco to the Pacific northwest in order to welcome the Soviet airplane and its crew.[167] There, along with the "tens of thousands" of workers and Soviet patriots who gathered to

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[165] *The New York Times*, 2 November 1929.
[166] "Sovetskii grazhdanin za rubezhom," *Ogonek* 49 (349) (15 December 1929): 5.
[167] Apparently, "Stepan" did not know that the *Land of the Soviets* would appear in the San Francisco Bay Area three days later. Whether this was a result of poor publicity by Amtorg and the "Friends of the

greet the plane, Stepan joined in singing the "Internationale" as testament to the great "technical achievement" of proletarian production. In light of his experience, "Stepan" expressed his certainty "that Soviet airplanes are good and sound, and that our fliers are much better than any others anywhere else in the world." He concluded his remarks by noting that "we, here, are proud of the Soviet state and we are using all of our strength to help it grow for it is our only salvation from the evil capitalists."

Notwithstanding the genuine interest and enthusiasm with which some Americans welcomed the *Land of the Soviets*, the clichéd and exaggerated reports prepared by Soviet newsmen on the reception of the ANT-4 revealed the politically utilitarian nature of the Moscow–New York flight. By directly and repeatedly associating the successful aeronautical journey with the international class struggle and the technical accomplishments of Soviet industry, Soviet officials gave evidence of aviation's continuing importance as an instrument of political persuasion. Similar to the "Great Flight," the "Star Flights," the round-trip journey between Moscow–Tokyo, and the innumerable ongoing agit-flights that had occurred in between, the flight of the *Land of the Soviets* was designed to generate support for the Communist Party by demonstrating socialism's ability to mastery science and technology.

Almost two decades ago historian Kendall Bailes identified the central role of Soviet sponsored aviation spectacles and record setting flights in detracting public attention from internal political abuses while generating support for Stalin and his policies.[168] According to Bailes, the recurrent and expanding use of aeronautical spectacles and symbols during the years 1933-1938 was an important component of a "subtle and implicit phenomenon of technological legitimation" that sought to provide a "façade of popular legitimacy" for the Stalinist regime through "emphatic demonstrations of the scientific basis of the Party's political hegemony."[169] To this end, Bailes convincingly argued, Party leaders advanced technological accomplishments such as hydroelectric stations, metallurgic plants, and especially airplanes as demonstrations of their right and ability to rule Soviet Russia.

Soviets" or a factual oversight by *Ogonek* ghostwriters is unknown. Whatever the explanation for Stepan's confusion, American newspaper accounts of the Seattle visit (and the photograph that accompanied *Ogonek*'s publication of his letters) indicate that the "Soviet citizen" grossly overestimated the size of crowd that greeted the airplane. See *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 14-16 October 1929.

[168] Bailes, *Technology and Society Under Lenin and Stalin*, 391.

[169] Ibid., 383-384.

More recent scholarship touching upon the issue of Soviet aeronautical culture has supported the interpretation first forwarded by Bailes. In her 1994 dissertation on public spectacles in Stalinist Russia, Karen Petrone described the important role of aeronautical festivals in supporting Party authority through the inculcation of patriotic and communal sentiments. According to Petrone, aeronautical productions such as long distance flights (and the celebratory ceremonies that followed in their wake) were important elements in Party attempts to draw citizens together during the 1930s through the construction of a "mythic geography" of the Soviet nation. Efforts to broaden public support for the regime were further underscored through the exploits of female pilots, which provided new indications of the expanding role that women would play in the coming socialist order.[170] Similarly, John McCannon has demonstrated the important function of polar aviation and aviators in developing notions of community and nation through the construction of a heroic mythology.[171] The findings first discussed by Bailes and subsequently elaborated by Petrone and McCannon have produce a scholarly consensus, of sorts, regarding aviation's function as a legitimating element within 1930s Soviet culture.

As we have seen, however, the legitimating function of aviation and aeronautics preceded the thirties by almost a decade. The practice of consciously utilizing aviation for political purposes did not, as Bailes and others have implied, originate with Stalin, nor was it the product of a technocratic impulse rooted in industrialization and the First-Five Year Plan. Rather, the legitimating function of aeronautics and flight was the fundamental condition of Soviet air-mindedness. It shaped and structured the nation's aeronautical culture from the very inception of the Red Air Fleet. From the Curzon Ultimatum to the war scares of the 1920s, from domestic agit-flights to international spectacles like the *Land of the Soviets*, Soviet leaders consistently linked aeronautical technology and symbolism to issues of political legitimacy. To be certain, as Bailes, Petrone, and McCannon have documented, the number, size, and scope of aeronautical spectacles would increase markedly during the 1930s. Nevertheless, their fundamental political function remained unchanged. To this end, while technological legitimation remains important as "a key to understanding Stalinism and the development of Soviet communism," it is no less important for scholars to recognize that technological legitimation was not a product of the Stalin years alone.[172]

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[170] Karen Petrone, "Life Has Become More Joyous Comrades: Politics and Culture in Soviet Celebrations, 1934-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994).
[171] See, John McCannon, "Positive Heroes at the Pole: Celebrity Status, Socialist Realist Ideals and the Soviet Myth of the Arctic, 1932-1939, *The Russian Review* 56 (July 1997): 346-365.
[172] See Bailes, *Technology and Society Under Lenin and Stalin*, 383.

Only when viewed in relation to the experiences of the 1920s, can the aeronautical exploits of the 1930s be placed in their proper context. They were not novel efforts to legitimate socialism born of the Stalinist imagination. Rather they were part of an evolutionary continuity in Soviet culture grounded in the machine-age dreams of Bolshevik ideology.

Plate 1: "What have you done for the air fleet?"

Plate 2: "Shame on your name if it does not appear on the Dobrolet roster"

Plate 3: "Year of the Proletarian Dictatorship"

Plate 4: "Workers and peasants, build the squadron 'Red Moscow'"

Plate 5: "The 250,000 members of Ural ODVF will build the Red Air Fleet"

Plate 6: "The Red Air Fleet is the defense of laborers"

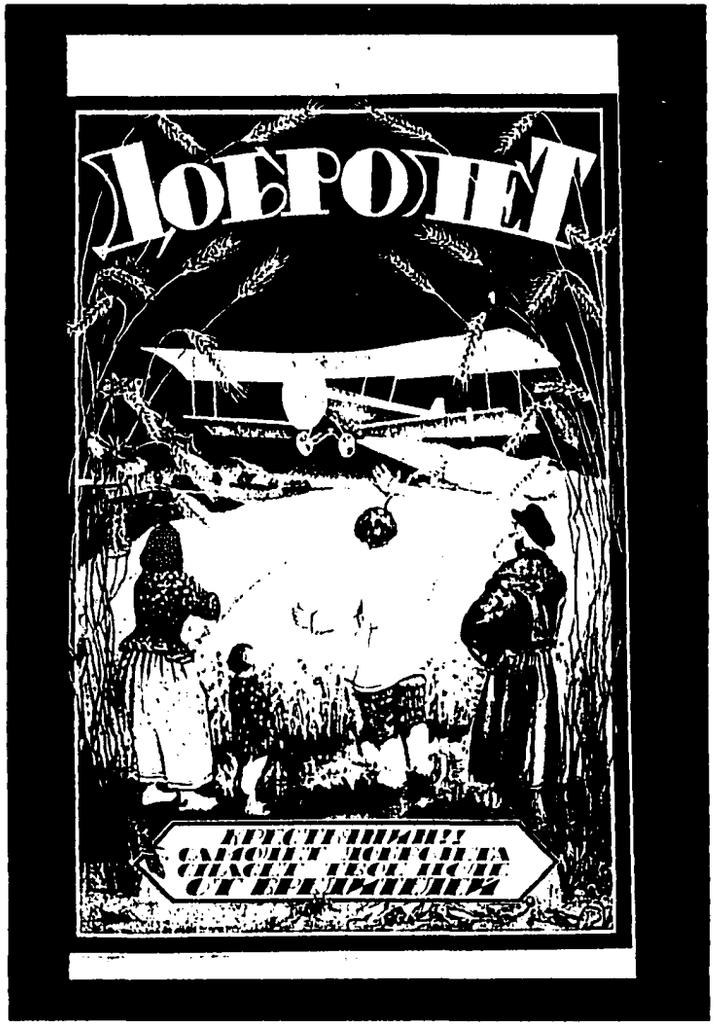

Plate 7: "Peasants! Dobrolet protects your fields from predators!""

Plate 8: "Air fleet poster-story"

Plate 9: "The ABCs of Dobroler"

Chapter IV

Red Wings on the Silver Screen: Cinematic Images of Soviet Aviation, 1923-1939

> [Cinema], which cries out to be used, is the best instrument for propaganda, technical, educational, and industrial propaganda, propaganda against alcohol, propaganda for sanitation, political propaganda, any kind of propaganda you please, a propaganda which is accessible to everyone, which is attractive, which cuts into the memory and may be made a possible source of revenue.
>
> —Lev Trotskii, "Vodka, the Church and the Cinema"[†]

Cinematography, Ideology and the Propaganda State

In recent years, historians have begun to explore the important contributions made by cinematography and film to the development of Russian and Soviet political culture. Focusing upon the birth of the film industry, the production of individual movies and their regulation by Communist Party officials, scholars such as Richard Taylor, Jay Leyda, Peter Kenez and Denise Youngblood have demonstrated the fundamental role of movies and movie making in both reflecting and shaping the social, political and cultural values of Soviet state and society.[1] Likewise, Richard Stites has discussed the thematic content of films within the broader context of Soviet popular cultural forms.[2] The efforts of these researchers have underscored the importance of the cinematic art as an interpretive device for understanding the Soviet past.

Cinema was an essential component in the construction of the Soviet propaganda state.[3] It provided Soviet authorities with an easily controlled medium through which they could communicate their political ideas in uniform images to audiences across Russia's vast geographical expanse. As a relatively new and immensely popular art form, cinema attracted great numbers of

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[†] Trotskii, "Vodka, the Church and the Cinema," *Problems of Everyday Life and Other Writings on Culture and Science* (New York, 1973), 31.

[1] Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, 1973); Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film*. Third edition. (Princeton, 1983); Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, 1992); Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 1992).

[2] Richard Stites, *Soviet Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (Cambridge, 1992).

[3] The term "propaganda state" was first coined by Peter Kenez. See, Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*.

citizens to the projection halls and auditoriums that featured the movies distributed by state agencies. This, in turn, assisted the work of the Party's propagandists as it provided them with captivated audiences eager to be entertained (and hopefully convinced) by the moving images that appeared before them on the screen.

The Party's commitment to exploiting the propaganda value of film has been well documented. In contrast to the oft-quoted opinion of Tsar Nicholas II that moving pictures were "an empty, totally useless and even harmful form of entertainment...[to which] no importance whatsoever should be attached,"[4] leading Soviet figures including Lenin and Trotsky eagerly embraced cinema as the "most important of all arts."[5] Their recognition of cinema's value was made evident in the years following the end of the Civil War as the state devoted considerable resources to rebuilding the film industry. This increased attention was accompanied by controversy. Throughout the early 1920s, film makers, critics and Party officials debated publicly the merits of the cinema and argued over film's proper role as an artistic, entertainment and propagandistic medium.[6] The presence of these discussions has led some scholars to conclude that this period in Russian cinematic history is best characterized as a time of intellectual freedom, innovative experimentalism and artistic pluralism.[7] Relative to the repression that set in during the late 1920s, this view is accurate. One must note, however, that even as early as 1922, cinema was consciously employed on a regular basis to serve the political and ideological interests of state authorities. A review of the corpus of cinematic productions made in the 1920s reveals the extent to which cinema was used to educate and indoctrinate the nation's populace in accordance with Soviet policies. From the campaigns against illiteracy and alcoholism, to improving sanitation, promoting the use of radio and (especially) denigrating religion, almost every major social initiative launched in the wake of the Civil War was accompanied by state subsidized films intended to further the interests of the Party.[8]

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[4] I. S. Zil'bershtein, "Nikolai II o kino," *Sovetskii ekran*, 12 April 1927, 10, quoted in Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 1; Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 16 and Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 37 to name a few.

[5] Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 29-30 and Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 29-30. See also the epigraph to this chapter.

[6] For a review of these cinematic debates, see Richard Taylor, "Ideology and Popular Culture in Soviet Cinema: *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*," in *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema*, edited by Anna Lawton (New York, 1992), 42-65.

[7] See, for example, Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus, 1989), 14-16 in addition to Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 38-41 and Stites, *Soviet Popular Culture*, 54-60.

[8] The following were just a few of the many films produced to support state-sponsored campaigns. Illiteracy: *How Kuz'ma Acquired a Mind* (*Kak Kuz'ma nabralsia uma*, 1924) and *From Darkness to Light*

The Campaign for the Construction of the Red Air Fleet began in the early spring of 1923. Immediately after Party news organs announced its inauguration, filmmakers set to work producing features to benefit the campaign and its sponsoring organization the "voluntary" society Friends of the Air Fleet (*Obshchestvo druzei vozdushnogo flota*, or ODVF). Initially, these productions amounted to little more than documentary newsreels. As time wore on, however, the aviation feature would emerge as a new genre in Soviet film.

Aviation symbolized the advent of the twentieth century in ways unmatched by other technological innovations. As mountains were conquered and continents traversed, the airplane overturned traditional notions of time and space, compelling citizen and statesman alike to reconsider their relationship to the natural world. Accompanying the physical changes that it effected, aviation contributed to the formation of a new aesthetic in which ideas of power and authority were communicated in terms of speed, altitude, flight duration and technical proficiency. Cinema, for its part, contributed to the expansion of modern sensibilities by capturing motion on film, creating fantastic, imaginary worlds and allowing audiences to participate publicly in the presentation of preserved spectacle. Cinema was a collective experience, ideally suited to communicating ideas and emotions to diverse audiences otherwise divided by cultural and linguistic differences. As such, it was also well-suited to meet the propaganda needs faced by Bolshevik leaders.

The appropriation of cinema to assist in the campaign to raise aeronautical consciousness established a symbiotic link between these two most modern technologies.[9] During the 1920s, when airplanes were scarce and the need to introduce them to the populace was pressing, cinema brought the reality of flight to mass audiences in the forms of newsreels and agitational short features. Projected images of light and shadow proved effective substitutes for the reality of canvas and metal as moving pictures provided the aeronautically uninitiated with initial glimpses of the technological changes sweeping their nation. The relationship between cinema and aviation was later transformed during the 1930s as multi-engined flying dreadnoughts ventured into the Soviet hinterlands to bring cinema to citizens otherwise unable to experience the metropolitan movie hall.

(*Ot mraka k svetu*, 1924). Alcoholism: *Dash for Moonshine* (*Gonka za samogonkoi*, 1924) and *The Story of an Advance* (*Istoriia odnogo avansa*, 1924). Promotion of radio: *Give Us Radio!* (*Daesh radio!*, 1925) and *Radio Detective* (*Radiodetektiv*, 1925). The battle against religion was the subject of no less than nine movies produced between 1922-1925. For an authoritative reference source on Soviet films made prior to the 1960s see, *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1961-1964).

[9] For a recent work that addresses the relationship between aviation and cinema see Michael Paris, *From the Wright Brothers to* Top Gun*: Aviation, Nationalism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester, 1995).

Equipped with on-board projectors and scores of state produced films, these "fly-in theaters" were essential components in popularizing both aviation and film. They assisted in the state's efforts to modernize the nation and to mobilize citizens for the tasks of socialist construction.

This chapter examines the important, but heretofore overlooked, genre of the Soviet aeronautical film. Between the establishment of the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet by leading Party officials in the spring of 1923 and the eve of the Second World War, Soviet film makers released no fewer than twenty-six features dedicated to the subjects of aviation and flight.[10] The appearance, on average, of one new aeronautical film every seven months during a time when movies were expensive to produce and filmstock was often in short supply was a remarkable indication of the importance attributed to aviation by Party officials. These figures, moreover, do not account for the significant number of non-aeronautical features that referenced aviation in passing or that contained substantive individual scenes involving airplanes or pilots.[11]

The study of the thematic content and plot structures of these cinematic releases reveals important new insights concerning the Party's attitudes towards aviation, political authority, technology, and Soviet society. As Peter Kenez has clearly documented, Communist officials played an instrumental role in controlling and manipulating the content of the nation's newsreels, propaganda shorts, and feature films for the purposes of promoting national unity and abetting the Party's plans for social transformation.[12] Even during the "golden age of Soviet film" from 1925-1929, filmmakers, declining to challenge the Party's hegemony, "accepted with seeming enthusiasm the values of the state and were content to propagate such values" in their cinematic productions.[13] This close correlation between cinematic content and state policy was nowhere more apparent than in the nation's aeronautical features.

At first glance, one might expect that Party officials closely regulated the content of aeronautical films because aviation was so intimately tied to issues of military security and international status. Eager to showcase the capabilities of Soviet pilots and display the prowess of Red Army forces for audience at home and abroad, Party officials had an interest in producing movies that would glorify the state's military aviation technology. A closer examination reveals

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[10] For a list of these, see the filmography that appears at the end of this chapter.
[11] In addition, Soviet film studios produced numerous animated features that touched upon aeronautical themes. Certainly the most noteworthy of these was the cartoon *Tarakanishche* (Sovkino, 1927) which told the story of how the animal kingdom is terrorized by an evil cockroach. At the film's end, a Soviet airplane sprays pesticide on the bug.
[12] Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 247-253.
[13] Ibid., 51.

that this was only occasionally the case. Although martial themes would become more prevalent towards the end of the 1930s as the perceived threat to the Soviet Union from Nazi Germany increased, the overwhelming majority of aviation films made prior to the outbreak of World War II did not address issues of military preparedness and only infrequently and/or indirectly referenced the Soviet armed forces.

Soviet pre-War aeronautical films may be divided into two general categories that correspond with both the dates of the movies' production as well as their dominant themes. The first category, aeronautical agitational films (or, *agitki*), were produced from the early to mid-1920s. These films were designed to assist the ongoing Campaign to Build the Red Air Fleet. All of these films were written, produced or directly subsidized by the Party's aeronautical organizations for the express purpose of introducing the populace to aviation and encouraging financial contributions to the aeronautical cause. Hastily produced and poorly acted, the vast majority of *agitki* were completely devoid of artistic and technical merit.[14]

The second category of pre-War aeronautical productions is comprised of full-length feature films dating from the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928. This group can be further divided into the sub-genres of "civil" and "military" aviation films, each of which was designed to impart specific political messages and civic lessons to their audiences. Although improved technical and artistic standards distinguish these films from the agitational productions of the 1920s, a close examination of their thematic content reveals that, like the overtly propagandistic *agitki*, they, too, were driven by uniform, consistent, and unabashedly propagandistic designs.

The transformation of aeronautical cinema from simple agitational short to complex feature film was part of a broader evolutionary shift in Soviet politics and culture that began, in earnest, with the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932).[15] Frustrated by their inability to resolve recurring procurement crises in agriculture, state authorities abandoned efforts to assimilate rural citizens into the urban environment (*smychka*) in favor of rapid centralization and the forced collectivization of agriculture.[16] The accompanying "cultural revolution" launched

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[14] Ibid., 34-36.

[15] Although the First Five-Year Plan operated in effect from October 1928, preparatory work began in 1927. See, Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (London, 1992), 142-143.

[16] For an overview of collectivization and the industrialization campaign see Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror Famine* (London, 1986); R. W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivization of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1980) and *The Industrialization of Russia*, 2 vols. (London, 1980) and E. H. Carr and R. W. Davies, *A History of Soviet Russia*, vol 4: *Foundations of a Plannd Economy, 1926-1929*, 2 vols. (New York, 1971-1972).

by the Party leadership in the spring of 1928 was as much a part of the extraordinary evolution of Soviet political and social life as were the policies of collectivization and industrialization.[17] It was intended to legitimate the new course in industrial and agricultural production by raising popular support for the state and its radical plan to construct a modern social order.

The cultural revolution marked a return in force to utopian thinking in culture and politics. Its activists demanded a complete break with the past in order to make way for the new, unadulterated "proletarian" culture that would accompany the Soviet drive to modernity. To achieve this goal, they called for an end to pluralism of expression and successfully battled to impose artistic uniformity and social conformity upon their fellow citizens. As two of the defining elements of the cultural revolution, the call for social conformity and the suppression of pluralism were celebrated within contemporary Soviet political culture as sure means of instilling the new, collectivist values believed indicative of socialist utopia. Beginning in the late 1920s, as state officials abandoned the tactics of the individual mass-mobilization campaign in favor of industrialization and forced collectivization, they turned to a broader (though no less coercive) strategy that attempted to produce a new political culture through the inculcation of "Soviet civic consciousness" (*sovetskaia obshchestvennost'*). In contrast to the civic consciousness of the bourgeois West (which, allegedly, emphasized the importance of individual achievement at the expense of society as a whole) Soviet civic consciousness was characterized by its recognition of the value of the collective (*kollektiv*) as the fundamental feature of developing socialist culture.[18] Together with messages concerning the need for social responsibility, discipline, patriotism and loyalty to the Communist Party, the *kollektiv* would serve as a dominate thematic trope in Soviet artistic and literary productions of the 1930s. Aeronautical feature films of the period reflect well these concerns. These movies were intended to sustain the Party in its quest to fabricate a cohesive civil society united behind the Party's ideological goals and supportive of the Party's efforts to transform the nation. They were important tools in the Party's efforts to direct the course of the cultural revolution and to instill in Soviet audiences the collectivist temperament, patriotism and political loyalty believed necessary for the construction of socialism.

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[17] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1932* (Oxford, 1982), 129.

[18] For a comparision of "Soviet" and "bourgeois" civic consciousness in reference to the development of aeronautical culture see, *Avia-agit-doklad: konspekt* (Moscow, 1925), 12-18.

Aeronautical *agitki* of the 1920s

The first Soviet film to feature aviation as its central theme was the 1923 *agitka Contact!*. Produced and directed by V. V. Maksimov for the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet, *Contact!* was intended to lend assistance to the Campaign for the Construction of the Red Air Fleet. In the face of a chronic shortage of airplanes following the Civil War, ODVF officials decided to utilize film in order to demonstrate the airplane's capabilities to the nation's populace. The strategy had the additional benefit of producing revenue as the money raised through public showings of the film was donated to the newly created voluntary society.

As was true of almost all of the agitational films made under Party auspices during the 1920s, *Contact!* was a low budget and hastily produced film that sacrificed any artistic pretense in order to communicate a basic and unambiguous message to its audience. The movie documented the efforts of an individual Soviet aviator to raise the air-consciousness of his fellow countrymen. Aware of the airplane's "great utility in serving humanity," he resolves to unite the entire nation behind the task of constructing an air fleet.[19] This simplistic story line was accompanied by visual images demonstrating the useful work made possible by the airplane in defending the skies, battling forest fires, spraying pesticides and delivering mail. Despite the movie's transparent message and documentary style, *Contact!* seems to have enjoyed popularity at the box office. ODVF records indicate that the movie attracted large audiences and raised substantial sums for the cause of Soviet aviation.[20]

Buoyed by the success of their first cinematic venture, ODVF officials released a second agitational film entitled *Toward Aerial Victory* in the spring of 1924. The film was written and directed by A. Anoshchenko, a veteran pilot of the Civil War and author of numerous ODVF publications. The movie toured peasant auditoriums and factory clubs throughout 1924 to generate enthusiasm and financial support for the establishment of the Red Air Fleet.[21]

Although box office records are not available for the film, newspaper reviews suggest that this second ODVF release was of an unusually high quality. The peasant gazette *Krasnaia niva* proclaimed that *Toward Aerial Victory* was positive proof that it was "possible to make an intelligent and artistic *agitka*."[22] Although the paper acknowledged that the movie's technical

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[19] "Est' kontakt!," *Kino, teatr, sport* 5 (7) (June 1923): 5.
[20] GARF f. 7577, op. 1, d. 21, l. 262.
[21] GFF sek. 1, f. 2, op. 1, d. 407, "K nadzemnym pobedam."
[22] *Krasnaia niva* 5 (October 1924): 934.

merits remained rather "primitive," it hailed the production as an entertaining, useful and surprisingly well acted piece. In a similar vein, *Kino-gazetta* remarked that *Toward Aerial Victory* was not only a "thoughtful and serious" movie, but that it contained "real artistic merit and would enjoy popularity" with Soviet audiences.[23]

The plot of *Toward Aerial Victory* was formulaic, incorporating numerous stereotypes that were standard clichés in Soviet propaganda of the 1920s. Following the conclusion of the Civil War, a Red Army man returns to his native village in order to raise awareness and support for the Soviet Air Fleet. He immediately sets to work organizing aeronautical circles, raising subscriptions, and lecturing fellow villagers about the benefits of aviation.[24] His efforts are assisted by a blind invalid who regales the local inhabitants with tales concerning the horrors of aerial gas attacks and the destruction of civilian populations wrought by military aircraft. The young soldier's consciousness raising efforts are soon threatened by reactionary elements within the village. He is forced to contend with rapacious *kulaks* and the superstitious fear of a parish priest who admonishes the villagers that demonic forces are associated with flying and that God will judge harshly those who take part in the unholy venture.[25] In the end, however, the soldier-hero succeeds. He puts the *kulaks* in their place, reorganizes the village cooperative, and establishes a new Komsomol circle all the while enlisting new members into ODVF and raising support for the Red Air Fleet.

From the standpoint of its low production quality, simple story line, and blatant didacticism, *Toward Aerial Victory* was little different from the dozens of agitational films made during and immediately after the Civil War. Similar to all of these short five to thirty minute films, it was intended to educate largely illiterate audiences about the policies and achievements of the Soviet regime.[26] What distinguished *Toward Aerial Victory* from other *agitki* was the film's direct link to ODVF's aeronautical campaign. As the movie was produced to assist the voluntary society's recruitment efforts, its themes closely correlated with those earlier established by ODVF's governing presidium.[27] At the time that the *agitka* was made, ODVF's most pressing task was simply to demonstrate the capabilities of the airplane and to convince audiences of its many utilitarian functions. The organization hoped that following citizens' cinematic exposure to

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[23] *Kino-gazetta*, 15 July 1924.
[24] *Rabochii zritel'*, 1924, 21:18.
[25] *Krasnaia niva* 5 (October 1924): 934.
[26] Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 80.
[27] See above chapter 2, 75-77.

aviation, they would enlist in and contribute to the campaign. Thus, like its predecessor *Contact!*, *Toward Aerial Victory* was designed to showcase aeronautics. Although *Toward Aerial Victory* added the innovation of a simple story line, the movie echoed *Contact*'s documentary admonition: airplanes are useful and important tools to the nation and citizens should help the state build them. The gravity of this message was underscored through the *agitka*'s use of newsreel footage. *Toward Aerial Victory* incorporated scenes of actual ODVF meetings (complete with appearances by Trotskii, Kamenev and Kalinin) in addition to scenes from a functioning Soviet airplane factory.[28]

Shortly after the appearance of *Toward Aerial Victory*, ODVF's subordinate association, the "Voluntary Air Fleet" ("Dobrolet") released its own aeronautical feature, the clumsily titled *How the Peasant Pakhom Flew on a Bird in the Capital of Heaven*.[29] The film was directed by S. M. Posel'skii and produced by ODVF's agitational section. Unlike ODVF's first two *agitki*, *How the Peasant Pakhom Flew* was specifically targeted to appeal to peasant audiences. The movie told the story of how the "village grandfather" Pakhom, while on a trip to the big city, is introduced to the miracle of aviation.[30] The silent film's accompanying text was written in the rhymed meter of a traditional peasant folk tale (*chastushka*) and read aloud to the audience by the propagandists that ran the motion picture projectors. Newspaper reports indicate that the movie was a "colossal success" with rural audiences.[31]

The great popularity of *How the Peasant Pakhom Flew* convinced Dobrolet officials to produce a sequel to the *agitka*. This second Pakhom adventure, entitled, *How Pakhom Studied Flying in the Village of Nesmelom*, concerned the efforts undertaken by the now air-minded peasant to help his grandson become a pilot. In spite of the opposition expressed by the boy's father towards such monkeyshines, Pakhom's support enables his grandson to realize his goal.[32] As the film's Russian title indicates, it, too, was written in the form of a peasant *chastushka*.[33] The film, like its precursor, was well-received by both audiences and the press. The reaction of the film journal *Kino-nedelia* was typical:

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[28] GFF sek. 1, f. 2, op. 1, d. 407, "K nadzemnym pobedam."
[29] The film's Russian title was *Kak muzhik Pakhom v stolitse v nebese letal na ptitse*. On the establishment of Dobrolet and its relationship to ODVF see above, chapter 2, 78 .
[30] *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 1, 59.
[31] "Fil'ma Dobroleta," *Novyi zritel'*, 16 September 1924.
[32] *Sovetskie khudozestvennye fil'my*, vol. 1, 60.
[33] The film's Russian title was *Kak Pakhom v sele Nesmelom zanimalsia letnym delom*. A second sequal entitled, *How Pakhom, Having Smelled Smoke, Enrolled in Dobrokhim* (*Kak Pakhom, poniukhav dym, zapisalsia v Dobrokhim*) was released in 1925. This third (and final) installment in the Pakhom series was produced to assist the "Society of Friends of the Chemical Industry." See, *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 1, 60.

> Metropolitan audiences tend to hold the opinion that *agitki* are coarse and inartistic. This Dobrolet picture serves as a excellent support for precisely the opposite opinion. In addition to addressing the agitational problem in the correct fashion, it unquestioningly attracts the lively interest of the audience to the question at hand.[34]

The interest and enthusiasm for *How Pakhom Studied Flying* was not extended to ODVF's other 1924 aeronautical release, *On Wings, Higher!*. Although the film's plot was nearly identical to the formula successfully followed by other aeronautical *agitki*, it was panned by the press.

> When a conscious, forward looking and energetic Red Army man returns to his native village, he leads a complete revolution. He puts the kulaks in their place, reforms cooperatives, enlightens people about politics and organizes a Komsomol circle. But is it really possible to so quickly and completely win over the villagers, convince them to forget about everything in the world except aviation and establish a fully equipped circle in less than a week's time? Who is going to believe this? For whom is this necessary? This is no way to agitate. One must approach the question more seriously and more deeply.[35]

Perhaps in response to such criticism, *On Wings, Higher!* quickly faded into obscurity. Only three historical references to the film exist.[36]

Still harsher criticism was reserved for the ODVF--Dobrolet combine's sixth cinematic production, *Aero NT-54*. Directed by N. T. Petrov and released in August 1925, the film was condemned by the newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda*:

> *Aero NT-54* isn't the first film to appear about aviation, but it is the worst. The writer and director have demonstrated a complete inability to make a strong and effective *agitka*. They take the slogan "Let us build airplane motors," mix it with the stereotypical American battle of good versus evil, paint it with shades of history and call it art.[37]

Other reviewers launched similarly caustic indictments decrying the *agitka*'s terrible lighting, lack of technical merit and generally shoddy production.[38]

From the standpoint of the film's message and political content, *Aero NT-54* differed little from the successful and well-received *agitki Contact!* and *Toward Aerial Victory*. The movie introduced few thematic innovations. Its conventional story line had been culled from such pulp

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[34] "Po povodu odnoi agitki," *Kino-nedelia* 7 (40-41) (November 1924): 17.
[35] "Agitiriu, no znai meru," *Rabochii zritel'* 21 (1924): 18. See also *Izvestiia*, 12 February 1924.
[36] See, *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 1, 43-44.
[37] *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 27 August 1925.
[38] *Rabochii i teatr* 28 (30) (July 1925): 16 and *Zhizn' isskustva* 21 (29) (July 1925): 16.

fiction propaganda as "How Uncle Vlas Became an ODVF Member," "The Airplane Adventures of Igor Poddevkin" and "Priestly Worries, Locusts and Airplanes," which were published by ODVF for the enrichment of the nation's reading public (and the society's coffers).[39]Although the titles of these pieces varied, they all followed a tightly scripted, predictable pattern. Typically, these stories told of a politically conscious and air-minded Red Army soldier's return to his native village. Once there, the soldier relates his military experiences and understanding of aeronautics to the naive and simple-minded rural residents. After some cajoling (and inevitable encounters with *kulaks*, priests and technological skeptics), the soldier convinces the local inhabitants of the value of the airplane and wins them over to the cause of the air fleet. *Aero NT-54*, like every other ODVF cinematic production, simply translated this established formula to the screen.

During the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, Red Army soldier Andrei Kokorev befriends the pilot constructor Peluzin.[40] When Peluzin's plane is shot down during a dog fight, the mortally wounded constructor implores Andrei to fulfill a final dying wish: to complete his work on an innovative airplane motor, the NT-54. Following the conclusion of the war, Andrei graduates from flight school and returns to his native village of Altukhov. There, he plans to fulfill his promise to the departed Peluzin at the same time "working like a simple farm-hand" in the village fields.[41] In the course of his stay in Altukhov, Andrei encounters several stereotypically stupid peasants, greedy *kulaks*, a drunken priest and the village's resident moonshiner all of whom, in various ways, interfere with his work on the new motor. Still more threatening to Andrei's efforts are the machinations of numerous spies who are bent upon stealing, or at least destroying, the blueprints for the NT-54.[42] Andrei finishes designing the motor in spite of his antagonists' devious plans. He cleverly thwarts the spies and witnesses his successful engine put to use powering the planes of the "Lenin Squadron."[43] The movie concludes with a smiling and satisfied Andrei proudly displaying his newly acquired ODVF membership card to delighted onlookers.[44]

Aero NT-54's plot and thematic elements were perfectly conventional for an ODVF production. Why then was the film so harshly denounced by its reviewers? The criticism leveled at *Aero NT-54* may be explained, in part, by the film's evidently poor technical quality. Although

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[39] For a discussion of these ODVF publications see above, chapter 3.
[40] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 32 "Aero NT-54," l. 61.
[41] Ibid., l. 63.
[42] Ibid., l. 65.
[43] The "Lenin Squadron" was the name bestowed upon a series of aeronautical detatchments built through ODVF fundraising activities during 1924-1925.
[44] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 32, l. 68.

shifts were discernible in the themes and issues that filmmakers depicted on the silver screen. The *agitki* produced during the 1920s by aeronautical organizations such as ODVF were straightforward accounts intended to attune audiences' attention to aviation and its benefits. Although some of these films attempted to incorporate basic narrative elements such as rudimentary plots and coarsely drawn characters, they never developed artistically beyond the level of the agitational short. Similar to the contemporary propaganda posters distributed in the hundreds of thousands by ODVF, these "living posters" instructed viewers in simple and clear terms to sacrifice their time and money in exchange for the benefits promised by aviation.[49]

The aeronautical feature films produced during the 1930s contrasted sharply with the *agitki* of the early and mid-1920s. These features were artistically and technically advanced. They contained well-developed plots, sympathetic characters and nuanced themes. Oftentimes, they were quite entertaining. In reality, however, these films were not about aviation. Set in flight schools, airplane factories, modeling circles and, occasionally, airfields, these features capitalized upon the continuing popularity of airplanes in order to attract citizens to the theater. There, audience members were treated to films that conveyed the Party's larger messages of civic obedience, social conformity and loyalty to the state.

Feature Films of the 1930s, Part I: Collectivist Visions and Civilian Aviation

The first aeronautical production to appear after the onset of the cultural revolution was the 1929 release, *Gogi: The Courageous Flyer*. The film was one of two aeronautical features produced by the Georgian company Goskinoprom Gruzii. It concerned the adventures of a small band of boys who attempt to master the arts of airplane construction and flying. Although few documentary records of the film exist, it remains important for foreshadowing the subsequent efforts of filmmakers to incorporate children and the theme of collective action into Soviet aeronautical features.[50]

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[49] "Living poster" was the term coined by the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, to describe the *agitka*. See, Richard Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 40-41. For a discussion of the iconography behind aeronautical posters of the 1920s see above, chapter 3, 118-123.

[50] A brief summary of the film's plot can be found in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 1, 253-254. See also, GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 177, "Gogi: otvazhnyi letchik."

The foursome of Gogi, Leva, Kolia and Alik dream of one day becoming pilots. In the hope of realizing this goal, the determined and dynamic Gogi inspires his friends to build their own airplane. Instructed by Gogi to secure construction materials for the airplane, the gang members obtain the necessary parts through less than respectable means. Alik and Leva steal from the local cooperative and Kolia strong arms a younger child into giving over the wheels from his wagon. When he learns of his comrades' misdeeds, the honorable Gogi decries their "criminal ways" and compels them to promise to return the materials once they have accomplished their aeronautical mission.[51]

The boys complete construction of their soap-box airplane and the day arrives for its inaugural flight. Local children gather at a nearby hill to witness the event as the pilot Gogi attempts the daring feat of being "the first to fly over the Caucasus mountains."[52] Gogi's efforts are thwarted by the laws of gravity and aerodynamics. The jerry-rigged plane is dashed to pieces and the "courageous flier" is gravely injured. Gogi awakens, bruised and battered, in the town's hospital. There, he and his friends (who have gathered to wish Gogi a speedy recovery) are lectured on the importance of joining the local Osoaviakhim cell. Thus chastened by their unfortunate experience, Gogi and his gang resolve to continue their interests in airplane modeling only within the framework of a state-sponsored aeronautical circle.[53]

Gogi: The Courageous Flyer imparted few subtle messages to its audience. The movie's didactic and moral lessons were intended to be clear to young viewers. Individual initiative in the absence of strict guidance, could be dangerous to one's life. Gogi, the most capable, creative and charismatic of the group of boys is given his comeuppance with the crash of his plane. The pursuit of aviation interests should be undertaken only within an officially sanctioned collective. The celebration of the conscious, collective spirit and the concomitant derogation of spontaneous individual initiative would become the constant message of almost every flight feature released during the decade 1929-1938.

The social themes addressed in *Gogi: The Courageous Flyer* were revisited in 1929's second aeronautical release, *I Want to Be an Aviatrix*. Similar to the Georgian production, *I Want to Be an Aviatrix* recounted the "battle of children to master aviation technology as they prepare to participate actively in socialist construction."[54] Unlike the previous release, however, this film

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[51] GFF f. 2, op, 1, d. 177, l. 2.
[52] Ibid., l. 3.
[53] Ibid.
[54] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 995 "Khochu byt' letchitsei," l. 1.

added gender conflict to the mix. The result was a thematically complex though technically sloppy film.[55]

If, as Victoria Bonnell has argued, the use of female imagery in the visual arts "gave expression to the Party's conception of collective identities," then *I Want to be an Aviatrix* was important for suggesting to Soviet audiences the proper social roles that could be occupied by women.[56] The movie was a milestone in Soviet aeronautical cinema for its inclusion of a female character into a genre that had been, heretofore, exclusively male. The experiences of the film's lead female character, however, communicated overt messages that were less about the social and political duties expected of women in Stalin's industrializing Russia than about the need for citizens to surrender individualism and spontaneity to the discipline and consciousness of the collective.

Thirteen year-old Tanya and her infant brother live in the Moscow suburbs with their mother, a seamstress. Tanya, a voracious reader and irrepressible day-dreamer, is kept busy at home raising her sibling and undertaking numerous chores while her mother works. Despite her outgoing personality and impressive organizational talents (in Taylorist fashion she "rationalizes" her chores, doing homework and washing dishes while rocking her brother's crib with her foot), Tanya is ignored by her male contemporaries because she is a girl.[57]

The organization of a Pioneer modeling circle sparks Tanya's imagination. Ignoring her mother's admonitions that she "would do better learning how to sew," she joins the group as it is preparing to enter an airplane design competition.[58] Tanya's entry into the modeling circle is meet with the great mistrust of the all-boy group. Vovka, one of the circle's more outspoken members, brusquely informs her that "we don't allow girls" and he advises Tanya to "stay out of such men's matters."[59] The Party representative who supervises the circle allows Tanya to participate over the objections of Vovka and the other boys. The young girl's status in the group suffers a further setback, however, when her first model airplane performs poorly on its maiden flight. Returning home from the group meeting, a dejected Tanya encounters the shadowy figure Ian Burinskii. Burinskii, a NEP-era "businessman" who specializes in marketing toys, tempts the young girl with an offer to sell her a working model which, he promises, will assure her first place in the upcoming

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[55] "Khochu byt' letchitsei," *Kino*, 2 October 1928.
[56] Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Representation of Women in Early Soviet Political Art," *The Russian Review* 3 (July 1991): 270.
[57] GFF, f. 2, op. 1, d. 995, 2.
[58] *Khochu byt' letchitsei* (Moscow, 1929), 4.
[59] Ibid., 5.

competition. Tanya resolutely refuses and informs the crass speculator that she is quite capable of building her own airplane.[60]

Circle members Vovka and Vitya observe Tanya's discussion with Burinskii and make note of the model merchant's address. They return to his workshop a few days later. There, thanks to a tip from Tanya, the circle's remaining members catch the boys in the shameful act of purchasing models. In response to this transgression, the collective publicly censures the two renegades, condemning them for "substituting their own hard work with the services of a speculator"[61] Thus chastised, Vovka and Vitya resolve to work through the night constructing their own planes for the next day's competition.

The day of the competition finally dawns. Tanya's new airplane flies well, promoting the success of the circle as a whole. As a result, Tanya wins the acceptance and admiration of her modelist comrades. The film ends with the transmission of a valuable lesson to the audience: "each and every dream, even the most audacious, will someday be achieved, if only through persistence and labor."[62]

The messages imparted by *I Want to Be an Aviatrix* both reinforced and expanded upon those introduced in *Gogi: The Courageous Flyer*. Like the Georgian production, the story of Tanya's travails emphasized the importance of belonging to an officially sanctioned group. Tanya, at first ostracized, is ultimately able to win social acceptance from her peers through her contribution to the success of the modeling circle. Her status as an outsider is mitigated by her willingness to participate in the activities of the group. In dutiful fulfillment of the tasks set before her, she overcomes the temptations of the socially suspect and dishonest Burinskii, informs on the dishonorable misdeeds of her less resolute comrades and produces an airplane that brings recognition to her circle. That Tanya's success is achieved within the framework of a state-sponsored organization is particularly noteworthy, as it underscored for audiences the importance of belonging to the collective.

Tanya's function as the Soviet Union's first air-minded heroine should not, however, be construed as a demonstration of the emancipatory possibilities open to women under Soviet rule. The character's on-screen appearance was not an official endorsement of the goal of gender equality. It was, rather, an attempt to communicate the Party's radical agenda of political, economic and social transformation which demanded the active participation of all Soviet citizens,

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[60] GFF, f. 2, op. 1, d. 995, 4.
[61] *Khochu byt' letchitsei*, 7.
[62] Ibid., 8.

regardless of age, ethnicity or gender. Tanya's role as "heroine" broke no new ground in advancing the "woman question" in Soviet cinema.[63] She is not a model intended to undermine traditional gender categories and inspire autonomy in young women. Although Tanya does succeed in fulfilling her dream to contribute to the construction of Soviet aviation, her success is possible only as a result of the intervention (and approval) of an older male character, the Party member who sponsors the aeronautical circle. Moreover, her final triumph is contingent upon her belonging to the collective. Without the instruction and discipline that she receives from the circle, Tanya would not have transformed her initial failure into success. Her achievement belongs less to her than it does to the entire group of modelists.

I Want to be an Aviatrix reflected the propensity of contemporary Soviet culture to manipulate female images to engender support for the Party's larger social and political agenda.[64] Tanya's individual talents, energy and aspirations are ultimately directed towards the fulfillment of the collective's goals which, in turn, are attuned to the collective needs of the Party. Like other movies to follow, *I Want to be an Aviatrix* was intended to educate audiences of their social responsibilities to the collective. Tanya was, thus, a model for all citizens, male and female, to follow as they labored to advance the Party's goal of constructing socialism.

The next aeronautical movie released by Soviet filmmakers continued to develop the themes introduced in *Gogi: The Courageous Flyer* and *I Want to Be an Aviatrix*. Entitled, *The Pilot and the Girl*, this third aeronautical feature film was released by the Ukrainian company VUFKU towards the end of 1929. Interestingly, the movie's director, as well as its major character, were female. Like its predecessors, copies of *The Pilot and the Girl* no longer exist, but it is possible to reconstruct the film's plot and thematic elements from archival and published sources.

Elena, a young woman from a small provincial town, has fallen in love with the dashing pilot Viktor Lugovoi. Attracted to Viktor, in part, for the romantic and heroic aura of his profession, Elena is blind to the flier's character defects. He is arrogant, egocentric and cares little about the emotions of others. Elena's affections are unrequited by the self-absorbed pilot whose thoughts and feelings, by his own admission, are off in the clouds.[65] Viktor loves flying, not Elena.

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[63] Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus, 1989).
[64] For a discussion of this in relation to propaganda posters see Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art of the 1930s," *The American Historical Review* 98 (February 1993): 55-82.
[65] GFF, f. 2, op. 1, d. 676, "Pilot i devushka," l. 4.

Elena's life is thoroughly transformed when she joins the local Osoaviakhim cell. Her participation in the group raises her awareness of her duty to society. She focuses her energy upon working to build Soviet aviation and devotes most of her time to the society's causes. One day, following a meeting of the cell, Elena encounters the long forgotten Viktor. At first, the pilot does not recognize her. Nevertheless, he is smitten by the beautiful and self-assured woman. Only later does Viktor realize that she is the one who had previously fawned over him. Elena, however, shows little interest in the pilot. Her participation in Osoaviakhim has sharpened her perception as well as her sense of civic duty. She now sees the cocksure Viktor for what he really is, "a petty Philistine and provincial Don Juan."[66]

Viktor is distraught by Elena's rebuffs. Realizing that he has lost the woman he loves, the intemperate pilot takes to drinking heavily; a clear violation of regulations.[67] His breach of discipline soon proves tragic when, with his skills impaired from the previous night's bender, the hungover pilot crashes his plane on a routine flight. The airplane is destroyed and Viktor is killed.

Elena responds to news of the fatal accident by organizing a subscription to build a new airplane. Her resolve to do so, however, does not derive from a desire to preserve Viktor's memory. Elena simply recognizes the need to replace the lost aircraft. As if to emphasize this point, the airplane is named not after the disgraced, deceased pilot, but in honor of the contributions made by women to Soviet aviation. The film ends with the newly constructed plane "Eighth of March" lifting off into the sky.[68]

Despite its promising title, *The Pilot and the Girl* did not directly concern the relationship between an airman and his sweetheart. For that matter, the film had little to do with the subject of Soviet aviation. *The Pilot and the Girl* was, instead, an effort to depict one woman's liberation from ignorance and naiveté and her corresponding attainment of social consciousness through participation in a Party-sponsored civic association. Like the character Tanya in *I Want to Be an Aviatrix*, Elena reaches her full potential only after entry into the aeronautical circle. She finds meaning and direction in life as a member of Osoaviakhim. Her fawning faith in the conceited Viktor is replaced by dedication to the programs and goals of her Osoaviakhim circle. Thanks to the Party's guidance, she attains a critical awareness of her social responsibilities, develops political loyalty and becomes a productive, motivated participant in the quest to build Soviet aviation.

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[66] *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 1, 337.
[67] GFF, f. 2, op. 1, l. 5.
[68] The Soviet government had previously proclaimed March 8th to be "International Women's Day."

Elena's transformation, clearly, should not be viewed as a statement of feminist revolt against an oppressive, patriarchal social hierarchy. While the naming of the plane in honor of International Women's Day may be interpreted as a transparent attempt to symbolically affirm the productive role of women in advancing socialist construction, it is little else. The film cannot be cited as an attempt to promulgate the cause of women's emancipation or advance feminist concerns. Elena, as did so many female cinematic characters of the era, plays the role of a naive maiden opposite a crass and conceited suitor.[69] That she does not fall prey to Viktor's charms is a result of both the pilot's exceptional ego and the timely intervention of Osoaviakhim. It is clear that Elena does not possess any innate, inner strength of character, nor does she develop it through personal tribulation or suffering. She is, simply, the passive recipient of enlightenment and knowledge handed to her by a Party-sponsored agency. *The Pilot and the Girl* thus addresses neither aeronautical issues nor feminist concerns. The movie merely reiterates the Party's message of the importance of the social collective in enabling citizens to attain critical consciousness. In doing so, it celebrates neither the individual's contribution to advancing socialism, nor the new possibilities ostensibly opened to women thanks to the advent of socialism.

The importance of the collective as the cornerstone of Soviet society was given even greater emphasis in the 1935 feature *One Stop to the Moon*. Similar to *Gogi: The Courageous Flyer* and *I Want to Be an Aviatrix*, *One Stop to the Moon* used the story of a young child's aeronautical adventures to communicate the Party's message of discipline, obedience and conformity within the collective. Hailed by the press as a "serious and fascinating children's film," the film contained social and political messages suitable for adult audiences as well.[70]

Young Lenia Glebov dreams of flying non-stop to the moon. He spends his days at school working on the equations he will require to navigate the stars. In his free time he labors to complete a miniature "Starflyer" which, he hopes, will provide him with the experience he needs to undertake a manned expedition into space. Late one evening, on a night when the moon is clearly visible, Lenia and some local children secretly gather to launch the rocketship. With great fanfare, the fuse to the gunpowder propelled craft is lit. The "Starflyer" takes off like a winged bottle-rocket straight up into the air. "In no time," Lenia proudly proclaims, "it will be on the moon."[71] To Lenia's surprise, however, the Starflyer, having reached the apex of its arched flight, turns back

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[69] See the brief discussion of contemporary cinematic roles for women in, Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 96-97.
[70] "Isskustvo i fantastika," *Kino*, 10 January 1934.
[71] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 1418, "Na lunu s peresadkoi," l. 11

towards the earth, crash landing on the roof of the kolkhoz granary. The detonation of the model ignites a fire. As the town's citizens rush to douse the flames, the children scatter. The granary is engulfed in flames.

In the wake of the fire, young Lenia is summoned to meet with the local political officer, Andrei Vestovoi. To the boy's great surprise, the Party representative expresses little anger over the accident that destroyed the granary. A veteran aviator who defended Petrograd from the Whites during the nation's Civil War, Vestovoi appreciates Lenia's fascination with flight and the initiative and intelligence that he demonstrated in building his "Starflyer." Nonetheless, the political officer lectures the youngster on his need for discipline, education and guidance if he is ever to realize the dream of one day reaching the moon. "Our nation," Vestovoi intones, "requires educated flyers, engineers and constructors." But, he notes, it is imperative that Lenia study diligently if the lad is to contribute to the advance of Soviet aeronautics. "Nothing ever comes one's way 'non-stop,'" Vestovoi admonishes.[72] Before an individual can walk, he must learn how to crawl and before Lenia can fly, he must learn how to construct models.[73]

To assist little Lenia in his quest to reach the moon (and to forestall further damage to the collective farm's buildings), Vestovoi announces that he will organize an aeronautical circle for the town's children. There, Lenia and his comrades will lay the educational foundation that will one day enable them to contribute to Soviet aviation. Vestovoi promises Lenia that following the impending arrival of his sister Natasha (an accomplished pilot who is coming to the kolkhoz to assist with agricultural operations), the circle will have an energetic leader willing to work with the kolkhoz's youth. Lenia rushes off to announce these glad tidings to his pals.

The subsequent arrival of the pilot Natasha inaugurates another adventure for the precocious and incorrigibly wayward Lenia. True to the political officer's word, Natasha lends assistance to the newly organized circle. She offers the children expert guidance and an abundance of literature concerning the laws of aerodynamics and the proper methods by which airplanes are constructed. In no time, the children are well on their way toward mastering the serious technical training that is required of true aviators.[74] Lenia's curiosity, however, remains unsatiated. He resolves to subject his glider to a personal test flight in order that he may determine its abilities and finally realize his dream of flying. Late at night, while the village is asleep, Lenia secretly attaches his glider to the tail of Natasha's plane using the coverage of some shrubbery to mask his mischief.

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[72] Ibid., ll. 14-15.
[73] Ibid., 17.
[74] "Na lunu s peresadkoi," *Repertuarnyi biulleten' po kino* 3 (1935): 5.

The following morning, as Natasha departs, her plane lifts off carrying Lenia and his glider into the air. The shocked members of the kolkhoz are horrified as the force of the launch rips Lenia's glider apart, dashing the plane and its young pilot to the ground. Lenia is hospitalized. Miraculously, he is not seriously injured.[75]

While recovering in the hospital, Lenia receives a letter. In it, a representative from the regional Osoaviakhim council the informs the boy that one of his airplane designs (previously forwarded to the council by an impressed Natasha) has caught the attention of a renowned aeronautical engineer. Owing to the unusually advanced nature of the designs, the council has decided to invite Lenia to take part in an upcoming glider competition in the Crimea. The invitation spurs Lenia's speedy recovery. He arrives at the competition as a member of the kolkhoz's Osoaviakhim circle. There, he is allowed to pilot the circle's entry.[76] The movie ends with a beaming Lenia flying the circle's glider *Novyi ruchei* through the sky.

The similarities between *One Stop to the Moon* and *Gogi: The Courageous Flier* are strikingly apparent. Both films recounted the efforts of a precocious pre-teen to realize the dream of flying. Both indicated how undisciplined behavior poses a danger to oneself and to others. In both films, the young boys are lectured on the value of discipline and directed study from a representative of the Party. Each of the lads comes to recognize the importance of the collective through participation in an official aeronautical circle. The two movies were mirror images of one another. The only real difference between the two plots involved their respective denouements. Where the first movie ends with Gogi's resolve to join the collective following his accident, Lenia is allowed to realize his goals in the safe and controlled environment of an Osoaviakhim competition.

Press coverage of *One Stop to the Moon* focused upon Lenia's role as a prototypical model for Soviet youth to follow. In the same way that Soviet art and literature of the 1930s created iconographic images of "new" Soviet men and women, transformed by the Party into politically conscious and socially responsible participants in socialist construction, Lenia was upheld as the archetypal "new child" from which the new Soviet citizen would mature.

> Lenia represents the new type of the exceptional child, preparing in Soviet schools for the tasks facing the country. His talent is uncovered completely in the Soviet way, amongst other children. This intelligent, gifted, cheerful young lad is not a *wunderkind*. He is not simply a little adult. Rather, he is depicted *in the middle* of his comrades, amongst a

[75] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 1418, ll. 28-29.
[76] Ibid., l. 37.

> group which reacts in different ways to his successes and his failures. *His individualism is, thus, realized in the collective.*[77]

The emphasis placed by the press upon Lenia's personal development within the community of the aeronautical circle reaffirmed the intention of the film's producers that *One Stop to the Moon* underscore the role of the collectivist spirit in shaping Soviet society. In the absence of strict supervision, Lenia's intelligence, inquisitiveness and spontaneity, prove dangerous to himself and the residents of the kolkhoz. These exceptional characteristics, like those evidence by Gogi in the earlier production, are not, in themselves, negative qualities. They do, however, demand the discipline, guidance and structure proffered by the collective if they are to contribute to the development of society. Lenia, ultimately, is made aware of this reality and attains a higher level of consciousness (as do all of the heroes within this cinematic genre) through the tutelage of the Communist Party.

Soviet aeronautical cinema returned to the themes of discipline, consciousness and the importance of the collective in what was, perhaps, the most successful of all Soviet aviation films, Iulii Raizman's 1935 production, *Flyers*.[78] Even prior to its debut in late April 1935, the film received rave reviews from the press. For weeks, newspapers, journals and film periodicals sang the praises of the production and dissected, from every conceivable angle, the movie's contribution to advancing cinema, aviation and Soviet culture. As if to lend artistic gravity to the advance publicity, reviews by such literary illuminaries as Ilf and Petrov and Iurii Olesha praised the film for, among other things, its "lyricism and feeling."[79] Yet another review, entitled, "Flyers on *Flyers*," recorded the rapturous responses of a group of aeronautical workers who had been invited to Moscow's *Dom kino* to view a early screening of the film.[80] So exhaustive was periodical coverage of *Flyers* that some two and a half weeks before the film premiered publicly on 25 April, an attentive reader of the nation's press would have been able to describe in complete detail all of the movie's characters, scenes and thematic elements.

Although *Flyers* was said to recount "the daily life and work of pilots at a flight school," the film, in actuality, lacks any definite plot structure.[81] The film is best understood as a character

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[77] "Na lunu s peresadkoi," *Kadr* 1 (104) (January 1935): 2. All italics appear in the original.
[78] Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 162. The movie was released in the United States under the title *Men With Wings*.
[79] "Govoriat pisateli," *Kino*, 4 April 1935.
[80] "Letchiki o *Letchikakh*," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 9 April 1935.
[81] "Molodost' nashei strany," *Kino*, 28 March 1935.

study of its three main protagonists: the air base commander, Rogachev, the experienced stunt flyer, Beliaev, and a younger female pilot, Bystrova, who has only recently completed her training.

It is a categorical mistake to characterize *Flyers* as "strikingly similar to American pilot movies of the time."[82] Although Raizman's film did, indeed, possess Hollywood's requisite components of an implied love triangle, conflict between rival officers and ample footage of soaring airplanes, fiery crashes and legions of leather-clad airmen, the movie's messages of social conformity, the suppression of individual spontaneity and unwavering obedience to the Party were alien to any American flight film produced before, during or after the 1930s. *Flyers*, in fact, conformed both in style and substance to the peculiar genre of Soviet civil aeronautical films that had been born with the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan. Although the movie involved adult characters rather than the school children featured in previous releases, its fundamental message of social responsibility within the collective echoed the lessons imparted by preceding features.

Flyers' connection to earlier Soviet aeronautical features is most evident when one examines the relationship between the film's three major protagonists. Rogachev, Beliaev and Bystrova are less autonomous, fully developed characters than they are idealized "types," the likes of which Soviet audiences had seen before. As the stern flight school commander and spokesman for collective discipline, Rogachev is a cinematic successor to the political officers, Party members and representatives of state authority that had appeared, albeit sometimes only briefly, in the aeronautical productions that had preceded Raizman's film. He is the on-screen personification of the ideal Soviet military pilot and Party member. Experienced, courageous and resolute of mind, Rogachev is unwavering in his loyalty and dedication to the Party. At the film's end, Rogachev receives word that he is to be transferred to the desolate, icy outpost of Sakhalin. His response to the news is as banal as it is expected:

> *Chief of the Placement Bureau*:
> "In short, it's an important post and it has defensive significance. It requires a man like you, but it isn't close. Hmm, what can I say...You see, it's not exactly near...Well, to be honest it is a bit far away...OK, I won't lie, it's 12,000 kilometers from here...
> *Rogachev:*
> Well, is the sun there?
> *Chief:*
> The rising sun itself.
> *Rogachev:*
> And the Party?

[82] Stites, *Soviet Popular Culture*, 87. The same claim is made by Stephen Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema* (Metuchen, NJ, 1985), 41 and Michael Paris, *From the Wright Brothers to* Top Gun, 99.

Chief:
Yes, it is.
Rogachev:
Is Soviet authority there?
Chief:
Yes.
Rogachev:
So then, what's the problem? Write the order![83]

As the film's principal representation of Soviet authority, Rogachev was the most celebrated of *Flyers'* three protagonists. The actor who portrayed the air base commander on screen, B. Shchukin, received unending praise from the movie's reviewers for bringing heroism and honor to his portrayal of a Party stalwart.[84]

Sergei Beliaev is the commander of one of the airfield's aviation squadrons. Dashing, debonair and supremely self-confident, he is a fearless stunt flyer and the best pilot the base has to offer. He is also an incurable show-off who lacks the discipline and sense of responsibility expected of a Soviet pilot. Beliaev "is reckless in his bravery, careless in his concern for the technical condition of his airplane and he values, above all else, meaningless displays of daring and dangerous air stunts."[85] In one of the film's defining scenes, Beliaev ignores a direct order from Rogachev not to test fly an airplane that has a faulty fuel line. As a result of his "aeronautical hooliganism," the plane crashes, landing the pilot in the hospital.[86] Beliaev's reckless disobedience is upheld as an example not be followed by the school's cadets. When he returns to the base after being released from the infirmary, the pilot is met by the stony glares of his comrades and a large banner urging all pilots, engineers and aeronautical workers to "Fight against Beliaevism." The unperturbed and unrepentant flyer refuses to abandon his cocksure ways. In the end, he is forced to answer for his insolence. Beliaev is permanently grounded by Rogachev.

In contrast to the disciplined Rogachev and reckless Beliaev, Galia Bystrova is an intermediary figure. She is awed by Rogachev's personality and looks to the commander for inspiration and guidance. Following Beliaev's crash, Bystrova admonishes the pilot to seek atonement by publicly confessing that he lacks discipline.[87] Despite her advice, Bystrova secretly admires Beliaev's heedless spirit and, for a time, contemplates the possibility that she may be in

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[83] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 1159, "Letchiki," ll. 14-15.
[84] *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 9 April 1935; "Molodost' nashei strany," *Kino*, 28 March 1935 and "Legkaia ritmichnost', bodrost', um," *Kino*, 17 April 1935.
[85] "Lirika optimizma," *Kino*, 4 April 1935.
[86] GFF, f. 2, op. 1, d. 1159, ll. 3-4
[87] Ibid., l. 5.

love with him. Torn between the two men, Bystrova falls under the influence of Beliaev's charismatic personality. She takes-off on her own unauthorized stunt flight. In response, Rogachev delivers a stern lecture to the pilot in which he reprimands her for lacking discipline:

> Youth, heroism, that is our country, our life. That is who we are. But when youth is transformed into foolhardiness and heroism into tricks, that is what we call philistinism. In the West, they earn their bread that way, but we recognize it as philistinism.[88]

Bystrova's transgression proves to be only a temporary lapse into unconsciousness. Following a brief grounding, she regains her focused composure and is allowed to fly again. Ultimately, her controlled daring garners her the privilege of being allowed to test fly a new airplane. She performs brilliantly, wins the accolades of Rogachev, abandons any feelings for Beliaev and is awarded a commission flying an air route over the Pamir mountains.

Flyers is best understood as a cinematic triptych in which the depictions of the three main protagonists combine to provide the audience with a highly stylized version of Soviet reality. It is, in the end, the quintessential cinematic adaptation of socialist realism.[89] In the absence of a linear plot, the movie unwinds through the dialectical interactions of its three characters. The disciplined Rogachev (consciousness) is challenged by the careless Beliaev (spontaneity). Each man exerts influence upon the impressionable Bystrova who, in realizing her own potential, resolves the antitheses of her two comrades and emerges as the true "heroine" of the film. The dialectical progression of the film, in turn, underscores its fundamental message of collectivity. The movie is built upon the threefold unity of Rogachev, Beliaev and Bystrova. All three are essential to the film's internal structure. In the words of one contemporary reviewer, "there are no negative personalities in the film. In all of the heroes on the screen, one can see [at different stages of development] our own Soviet people."[90]

The important didactic messages contained in Raizman's film were not lost upon audiences. Inspired by the call for discipline and obedience depicted in *Flyers*, the lucky aeronautical workers who had attended the advance screening in *Dom kino* responded to the production by publishing the following open letter, addressed to Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov, in the pages of the journal *Kino*:

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[88] Ibid., l. 7.
[89] For a discussion of the structuring forces that shape the standard socialist realist plot see, Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1981), 15-24.
[90] "Okrylennye liudi," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 10 April 1935.

> We, flyers, flight engineers, commanders and political workers who gathered in the *Dom kino* to view the new film *Flyers*, devoted to the people of Soviet aviation, do once again affirm, with all clarity and conviction, that undisciplined behavior, bravado and carelessness are the fundamental causes of misfortune.
>
> The Bolshevik Party, having established the greatest aviation in the world, undertakes to raise the aeronautical worker in the Stalinist fashion [*vospitat' po-Stalinskii*] and to make the Soviet airplane the safest means of transportation and the most powerful weapon of Soviet defense.
>
> Long live the Red Air Fleet!
>
> Long live Soviet cinematography, for portraying most accurately the air fleet's strength!
>
> Long live the Leninist Party and our beloved STALIN the developer of Soviet aviation![91]

These sentiments, in addition to highlighting aviators' awareness of the importance of discipline, indicated the growing importance that Stalin would assume as Party officials developed new myths to inspire Soviet citizens.

The political themes so artfully depicted in Raizman's *Flyers* received renewed attention in *Great Wings*, the final pre-War feature film to address social discipline and the collective as its main issues. The film was a fictionalized account of the 18 May 1935 crash that destroyed the agit-plane ANT-20 "Maksim Gor'kii," killing all forty-six passengers on board. At the time the largest airplane in the world, the "Maksim Gor'kii," was a show-piece of Soviet power. The plane represented both the technical accomplishments of the state as well as the fetish of "colossalism" that gripped the nation during the industrialization campaigns of the early and mid 1930s. The immortalization of the accident on screen was an attempt to glean some degree of political utility from the airborne tragedy.

Airplane designer and factory director Egor Kuznetsov oversees construction of a new, technically advanced airplane. The largest aircraft ever to be produced, the DP-9 will have enormous potential as a military weapon. Following its completion, the craft is subjected to a battery of test flights in which the plane performs very well. Kuznetsov, together with the best engineers and constructors from the factory, are aboard the DP-9 for its final test flight. As the aircraft gradually picks up airspeed, vibrations are felt in the tail section of the plane. Concerned about this unexpected development, the pilot considers aborting the flight and orders the passengers to ready parachutes. Kuznetsov, however, will not allow it. He is certain that the plane is

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[91] *Kino*, 10 April 1935.

structurally sound. He orders that the flight continue. Suddenly, the whole craft begins to shake violently. The passengers are told to abandon the airplane. Despite the efforts made to save those on board, the undisciplined cowardice of one of the constructors prevents several of the passengers from jumping to their safety. They perish with the plane.[92]

The crash of the plane and the loss of lives sends Kuznetsov into a deep depression. Although an investigatory committee rules that the constructor was not to blame for the accident, Kuznetsov considers himself responsible for the deaths of his comrades. In anguish, he pens a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party acknowledging his guilt for having failed the nation. Moments before Kuznetsov plans to end his sorrow through suicide, he is called to a meeting by the members of his factory. The huge shop floor is bustling with workers. They have gathered in a display of collective support for their director. There, as well, is the father of the pilot who died in the crash. He offers words of encouragement to Kuznetsov. "Build a new airplane, comrade director. My younger son will take the place of his brother."[93] "Surrounded by the thoughtful attention of the entire factory collective" Kuznetsov abandons any thought of taking his own life.[94] Soon thereafter, the factory receives an order from the Party to replace the lost plane with two new ones. As a demonstration of their initiative and devotion to the Party, the workers decide to build a whole squadron instead. The films ends with a view of the new squadron undertaking a successful flight.

Press reviews of *Great Wings* went to great lengths in praising the movie for its depiction of the Party's collective concern for its individual members. One rapturous reviewer proclaimed the film proof that "the tragedy of loneliness is not possible in the country of socialism" owing to the "solicitous attitude of the Communist Party towards its human cadres, and its sympathetic attention to the individual."[95] Still another pointed to the on screen exoneration of Kuznetsov as an example of the Party's benevolent regard for all of its members. "At that very moment when he is alone in his grief and on the brink of suicide, Kuznetsov is offered the hand of the Party, the Party that raised him, the Party that inspires the creative inquests of the Soviet people, the Party that inspires their reasonable risks and their boldest ideas."[96] Within the framework of the Party, this reviewer noted, Kuznetsov had been able to attain the heights of personal accomplishment through

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[92] *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 2, 121.
[93] "Bol'shie kryl'ia," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 27 February 1937.
[94] "Bol'shie kryl'ia," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 26 January 1937.
[95] Ibid.
[96] "Bol'shie kryl'ia," *Izvestiia*, 27 February 1937.

the construction of the DP-9. In the engineer's darkest moment of personal grief and self-doubt, the ever-present Party collective acted to redeem its lost member; consoling him, affirming his worth to the nation and challenging him to meet the new demands set before him by the state.

Like so many of Soviet cinema's aeronautical features, *Great Wings* underscored the importance of the collective as the only means through which citizens were able to fulfill their individual potential within Soviet society. The inspiration and personal redemption lent to Kuznetsov by the Party and the factory collective are different only in degree from the guidance and support offered to Gogi, Tania, Elena, Lenia and Galia Bystrova by the modeling clubs, aeronautical circles, Party agencies and state representatives that they encounter. Each of these cinematic productions aimed to foster a faith in the power of the collective, to instruct audiences of the need to overcome undisciplined individualism and to encourage conformity within the social, political and cultural institutions established by the Party. In these ways, the civil aeronautical feature films of the 1930s were integral components in supporting the ideological goals of the cultural revolution.

The civil aeronautical films of the 1930s were accompanied by a handful of other cinematic productions that indirectly served to advance the utopian agenda of the cultural revolution by contributing to the burgeoning cult of the pilot that was a prominent feature of 1930s Soviet culture. As paradigmatic representations of "new" Soviet men and women, pilots came to symbolize the talent, bravery and technical accomplishment of the nation as a whole.[97] They were glorified by Party and state agencies throughout the decade as a means of legitimating Stalin's personal authority and detracting public attention from the repression of the ongoing purges.[98] Combining two of socialist realism's central structuring myths, the conquest of nature and the image of the nation as a "Great Family," the pilot movies produced in the 1930s continued the state's tradition of exploiting the popularity of aviation to advance the Party's collectivist goals.[99] These movies' appropriation of epic scope and folkloric imagery indicated the utopian and "colossalist" impulses that lay at the heart of the cultural revolution.

The 1935 film *Air Mail* combined the fetish for flyers and contemporary fascination with arctic exploration in a manner that endowed the pilot with seemingly superhuman qualities. A small

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[97] Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 124-129. Clark's discussion of the aviator as a represenation of the "new Soviet man" is further elaborated in Hans Günther, "Stalinskie sokoly: analiz mifa tridtsatykh godov," *Voprosy literatury* 11/12 (1991), 122-141.

[98] Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 381-384.

[99] On the prevalence of these two structuring myths in Stalinist culture see chapters 4 & 5 in Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 93-135.

settlement located in a remote region north of the Arctic Circle is being ravaged by an outbreak of diphtheria. Despite reports of a quickly approaching winter storm, the experienced pilot Natasha Koroleva is called upon to deliver much needed medical supplies to the suffering population. Koroleva marshals all of her skill and courage to stay aloft through the blizzard, but she is ultimately blown off course by the gale force winds that batter her aircraft. She is forced to land her plane in the desolate taiga when, low on fuel, she loses radio contact with her home base. There, the pilot is fortunate to come across a young hunter who possesses an intimate knowledge of the region. Together, the two fend off packs of voracious wolves, survive the brunt of the winter storm and, ultimately, make their way to the settlement, medicine in hand, in time to save the stricken population.[100]

A similar tale of survival in the face of hostile natural forces was told in the 1938 Mosfil'm production *Victory*. The movie combined elements of reality and fantasy in playing to public interest in the Soviet Union's ongoing efforts to establish new world aeronautical records. A troika of brave pilots, led by the intrepid Klim Samoilov, has undertaken a very difficult assignment. They are attempting to become the first men to circumnavigate the globe non-stop aboard the Soviet "stratoplane," "Victory-1." They have already broken every world record when, towards the end of their journey, the aviators find themselves in the midst of an unexpected and mysterious electrical disturbance. As the storm grows into a raging frenzy, a bolt of lightning strikes the aircraft, igniting a fire in one of its engines. The aviators are forced to make an emergency landing on an island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean.

Samoilov's mother bravely receives the terrible news that her son's aircraft has disappeared. She has the strength of spirit to hide the sad tidings from her daughter-in-law, who waits at home for her husband with the couple's infant child. The world is alerted to the Soviet tragedy, however, when a Japanese radio station brazenly broadcasts the news that the Victory-1 has been destroyed in a crash. The Soviet people are fully aware that they can place little value in a "provocational announcement that originated in the capitalist world."[101] In response, they initiate a massive search for the lost crew and its airplane. Samoilov's mother (who also happens to be the commander of a squadron of stratoplanes) dispatches her younger son Aleksander (who also happens to be a pilot) on the dangerous mission to find his brother. The younger Samoilov sibling bravely overcomes the hostile elements, and even flies through a hurricane, in search of his brother.

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[100] *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, vol. 2, 189-190.
[101] Ibid., 170.

Upon finding him, "he returns the entire crew to Moscow, to Stalin, to their mothers, wives, friends and family" as a crowd of thousands assembles to greet the heroes' arrival.[102]

While the conquest of nature had been a standard theme in aeronautical literature and art since the dawn of machine-powered flight, by the mid-1930s the subject had taken on epic proportions in the Soviet Union. The 1934 air rescue of the Cheliushkin polar expedition was important in this regard for it refocused attention on the heroism of flyers in the face of adversity from the natural world.[103] The courageous actions of the "Cheliushkintsy," as the aviators involved in the rescue came to be known, spawned an entire series of films (as well as books, plays, song and poems) that retold in grandiose and mythological terms the exploits that took place in the arctic environment.[104] The events surrounding the Cheliushkin expedition were held up by Party officials as "living examples of the sort of Socialist Realism" that should be depicted in Soviet art and culture.[105] In response, novelists, poets, playwrights and cinematographers came to endow all pilots with mythological status, identifying them in folkloric fashion as "warriors" (*bogatyri*), "knights" (*rytsari*) and the ever present "falcon-flyers" (*sokoly-letchiki*) ready for battle with the forces of nature when called upon by the greatest warrior of all, Joseph Stalin.[106]

The mythic proportionality evident in *Air Mail*, *Victory* and the Cheliushkin productions represented an escalation of the "consciousness" versus "spontaneity" motif that had structured other, less expansively prosaic, films such as *Gogi: The Courageous Flyer*, *One Stop to the Moon* and *Flyers*. Where these productions had educated audiences of the individual's need to submit to the discipline of the Party in order fully take part in socialist society, the mythic pilot film suggested that the fully conscious socialist was, in turn, capable of disciplining the impersonal and uncontrollable forces of nature when armed with courage and technical acuity derived from the Party. This message represented an externalization of the dialectical formula that structured the cinematic aeronautical feature. Where previously aeronautical films had followed the pattern: undisciplined citizen submits to Party authority resulting in the citizen's realization of social consciousness; a new formula took shape in which the chaotic forces of nature were consciously overcome by a tenacious pilot resulting in an heroic act that brings glory to the nation and

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[102] "Tverdost' i nezhnost'," *Izvestiia*, 14 June 1938.
[103] Günther, "Stalinskie sokoly," 122.
[104] Films belonging to the "Chelushkin genre" include: *Heroes of the Arctic* (*Geroi arktiki*, 1934); *The Seven Brave Ones* (*Semero smelykh*, 1936) and *Valerii Chkalov* (1940). For a discussion of these productions and the imagery surrounding arctic aviators see, John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in Soviet Russia, 1932-1939* (Oxford, 1997).
[105] "Cheliuskintsy v Leningrade. Obrazets sotsialisticheskogo realizma," *Literaturnaia gazeta* 81 (1934).
[106] Günther, "Stalinskie sokoly," 132-140.

advances the cause of socialism. This shift in emphasis from the internal realization of individual consciousness to the external manifestation of consciousness through the transformation of the natural world became a hallmark of late thirties Stalinist culture.[107]

The emergence of the "Great Family" motif, in its turn, represented a similar elevation of the cultural revolution's collectivist message to the status of myth. By the middle of the 1930s, Soviet art and literature had begun to highlight the importance of kinship and family, utilizing them in place of the voluntary societies, social organizations and political institutions previously employed to communicate messages of civic responsibility and social allegiance. The new metaphor of the society/family provided Soviet propagandists with a single set of symbols that helped to legitimize the state's authority while encouraging loyalty on the part of citizens.[108]

In Soviet aeronautical culture, this symbolic transformation was manifested through public depictions of the personal ties that allegedly existed between aviators and the nation's political leaders. Stalin was alternatively portrayed as the "mentor," "teacher," or "father" of the nation's airmen while the pilots themselves were depicted as the "disciples" or "sons" of Stalin who dutifully and faithfully fulfilled their missions, thus realizing Stalin's will and bringing glory to the Soviet Union.[109] The press supported the myth-making process by recounting recurrent, ritualistic meetings between Stalin and his "flyer-falcons" in which the Great Leader instructed (*vospitat'*) his young charges and imparted to them both direction and consciousness. The familial symbolism latent in these encounters was underscored by the frequent designation of Soviet pilots as "Stalin's fledglings" (*Stalinskie pitomtsy*) or "Stalin's eaglets" (*Stalinskie orliata*).[110] These epithets were intended to draw attention to the mentoring relationship that supposedly existed between "father" and "son" while embellishing the exploits of the aerial heroes with folkloric language.[111]

Air Mail, *Victory* and the films of the Cheliushkin series strengthened the collectivist myths of the cultural revolution by depicting, in an allegorical fashion, the defeat of external enemies arrayed against the Soviet "community." Building upon press reports that routinely

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[107] Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 136-141.
[108] Ibid., 114-115.
[109] Ibid., 124-129; Günther, "Stalinskie sokoly," 126-127 and Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 386-387.
[110] See, *Slava geroiam!* (Moscow, 1936), 73; "Slava geroiam," *Literaturnaia gazeta* 44 (1936): 1; "Stalinskie orliata," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 11 August 1936 and "Letat' vyshe, dal'she, bystree!," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 18 August 1936 among many others.
[111] On the folkloric implications of the specific designation "falcons" see, Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 386. For a discussion of folklore's general place within 1930s Soviet society and culture see, Frank J. Miller, *Folklore for Stalin: Russian Folklore and Pseudofolklore of the Stalin Era* (Armonk, NY, 1990).

recounted aerial adventures in terms of "conquest," "triumph," "states of siege" and "the waging of offensives," pilot movies exploited the military associations latent in aviation to impart the message that Soviet pilots were capable defenders of their socialist motherland. As Hans Günther has noted, aerial battles with the cold, harsh and unpredictable environment were thinly veiled allusions to the Soviet Union's ongoing ideological struggles with the hostile capitalist world.[112] In "conquering" the violent and uncontrollable forces of nature, the pilots of the silver screen were endowed with a mythological status intended to imply that Soviet airmen would prove up to the task of vanquishing the less elemental challenges posed by foreign air fleets. These sentiments helped to contribute to the collectivist myth of the Soviet Union as an extended family by strengthening citizen's faith in the martial skills of the nation's valiant "pilot-sons." In this way, they further highlighted the important role of aviation films in fulfilling the collectivist goals of the cultural revolution.

Feature Films of the 1930s, Part II: The Fascist Threat and Military Aviation

In contrast to the subtle and oftentimes artistic manner in which civil aviation films communicated the cultural revolution's message of collective conformity, the treatment of military themes in Soviet aeronautical films was both brazen and heavy-handed. In part a response to the ideological challenge faced by the Soviet Union following fascist ascensions to power in Italy and, especially, Germany, the growing production of military aeronautical films also reflected the militant temperament of 1930s Soviet culture. The result was a series of three aeronautical productions that depicted the nation's battle against unrepentant revanchists, amoral capitalists and war-mongering fascists in starkly ideological and uncompromising terms.

The first aeronautical feature to address the issue of an impending attack upon the Soviet Union was the ominously titled production *City under Siege*. The movie, which was produced by Rosfil'm and directed by Iu. Genika, exploited contemporary fears (consciously fed by Party authorities) of the possibility of a surprise chemical attack on Soviet soil by a squadron of foreign aircraft.[113] Similar to nearly every military aviation film from the period, *City under Siege* implied, but never expressly stated, that Nazi Germany was the greatest threat to the Soviet Union's security.

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[112] Günther, "Stalinskie sokoly," 129.
[113] On Soviet fears of chemical weapons see above, chapter 2, 94-95.

The sinister chemist Professor Runge has been laboring for some time on a powerful new gas weapon for use against military and civilian targets. The evil fruit of his research, "Runget-88," promises to be the most deadly chemical agent known to the world. The concoction, which has the scent of fresh rose blossoms, can kill any living organism in less than twenty seconds.[114] In search of potential customers for "Runget-88," the professor entertains foreign representatives at his research laboratory. There, a number of agents gather to witness a graphic demonstration of the gas weapon's potency. A cat is placed inside of a sealed glass container. "Runget-88" is slowly released through a tube into the test compartment. As the gas fills the container, the shrieking cat convulses violently and dies. A wry smile is visible on Runge's face. The gathered foreign agents begin bidding on the gas. The screen fades to black.

The scene shifts to a new Soviet electrical station located in the center of a large city. The electrostation has been built in accordance with the most modern standards of world technology. The station, nevertheless, is situated in a precarious position not far from the Soviet Union's border with a hostile foreign state. "One good high-explosive bomb and the whole region would be paralyzed!"[115] Inside the electrostation, an inspection is being conducted on the station's equipment. The inspection is overseen by a foreign consultant hired to bring the station on-line. The consultant is Karl Runge, son of the chemist and creator of "Runget-88." The younger Runge is angry with the Soviet workers who man the station. "The most recent technology demands exact precision!" he tells the station's chief engineer Arkad'ev. "You were late with your adjustments by more than an hour."[116] In truth, however, Runge is not really concerned. His contract has expired and he is due to depart the Soviet Union for his homeland. Runge's return, however, is unexpectedly delayed when the station receives word that the fascist government of a neighboring state is launching a surprise attack upon the Soviet Union. The nation's borders are closed, preventing the young engineer from leaving. He is indignant. Like his father, Karl Runge is "apolitical" and he claims disinterest in the conflict between the Soviet Union and its adversary.[117] He protests the order that prevents him from departing, but to no avail. Furious with his Soviet hosts, Runge storms off in a huff.

The fascist forces, meanwhile, organize their assault. At an enemy air base, a group of flyers await their instructions. Their general announces the plan: white-guardist forces, allied with

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[114] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 192, "Gorod pod udarom," ll. 1-2.
[115] Ibid., l. 2.
[116] Ibid., l. 3.
[117] N. Prozorovskii, *Gorod pod udarom* (Moscow, 1934), 4.

the fascists, will parachute in behind Soviet lines. They will capture the new electrostation and, from there, provide the coordinates needed for a great attack upon the Soviet population. The assault will be accompanied by "destructive explosive devices and the scent of fresh rose blossoms..."[118] Soviet defense forces prepare to counter the fascist air assault. A reconnaissance station informs the general staff of the approach of the first wave of enemy planes. A squadron of Soviet aircraft is dispatched to meet the invaders. A second and third squadron follow as more and more enemy planes approach the city. With the civilian population in danger, the Soviet commander Ognev orders the last of his reserves into the battle. At a crucial moment, a lucky hit by the fascist bombers damages the command center of the electrostation. Without the station, the Soviet command cannot coordinate region's defenses. The station's technicians send for Karl Runge, but the engineer obstinately refuses to assist with the repairs. "It isn't my station," he demurs, "my contract has expired. Besides, I am not obliged to go running around on the streets when there are bombs falling from the sky!"[119] In the face of Runge's cowardice, the Soviet technicians undertake the repairs themselves. They are successful.

In the hope of diverting the enemy planes from the populated areas, Commander Ognev orders that the city be immersed in darkness save for the electric lights that adorn a recreational area on the outskirts of town. His ruse succeeds. The fascist bombers harmlessly empty their payloads of "Runget-88" upon the abandoned park. The strategy provides the defenders with time to reorganize their fighter squadrons. Reinforcements arrive and annihilate the fascists.

The destruction wrought on the power station by the enemy raid is completely repaired by the Soviet engineers in just one night. As the defenders of Soviet freedom rest, Karl Runge timidly enters the command center. He now wishes to be of service and acknowledges that he made a grave mistake in not coming to their aid when called upon. He is warmly greeted by the Soviet technicians and informed that the path to his homeland is now open. Runge is thankful and very glad, but not for long. An economic crisis has beset his nation. Electricity to his hometown has been cut-off. His fellow countrymen "now live under conditions not seen since the Middle Ages." In contrast, the Soviet electrical station is flooded in light while "day and night the station labors to guard the peace of the country of Soviets."[120]

City under Siege addressed a number of themes that were standard fare in Soviet propaganda of the 1930s. From the standpoint of the Party leadership's latent military fears, the

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[118] Ibid. The elipses appear in the original.
[119] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 192, l. 6.
[120] Prozorovskii, *Gorod pod udarom*, 6.

film's basic structural device of a surprise aeronautical attack on civilian populations was a common subject that had been used tirelessly by propagandists to alert citizens of the need for greater military vigilance.[121] As early as 1923, Party spokesmen had highlighted such a possibility in order to encourage citizens' full participation in the construction of the Red Air Fleet. They continued to sound similar warnings throughout the twenties and thirties to raise public enthusiasm for the Party's efforts to establish the civil defense network Osoaviakhim. Numerous other feature films highlighting Osoaviakhim's role in preparing citizens to defend themselves from the imminent threat of foreign invasion were produced to benefit the society.[122] The prevalence of such productions indicated both the Party's continuing concern with the threat posed by hostile foreign powers and its willingness to exploit that concern to cultivate national unity.

The moral turpitude of the capitalist West was a similarly popular theme in contemporary propaganda.[123] As early as 1924, state officials had publicly warned citizens of the aerial threats posed by the "predators of world capital" whose only goal was "to put to evil uses the scientific discoveries of the bourgeoisie."[124] Financed through the labor of the suffering masses and "serving the goals of imperialist conquest and pillage" western science and industry threatened the lives of innocent Soviet citizens.[125] *City under Siege* preserved this propagandistic tradition through its graphic depiction of Runge's deadly chemical experiments. The chemist's decision to entertain bids on his poisonous gas agent communicated to audiences the inherently amoral nature of the capitalistic West. His research is motivated by profit and he is willing to place dangerous weapons in the hands of the Soviet Union's enemies solely for the sake of his personal gain and without regard for the safety of innocents.

The defeat of the invading fascist forces also underscored messages concerning Soviet self-reliance and invulnerability. Despite the younger Runge's abandonment of his post during a critical moment in the battle (an allusion to the oft-repeated axiom that the Soviet Union would be abandoned by the west in its fight against fascism), the electrostation's Soviet personnel demonstrate their ingenuity by quickly mastering this "most advanced technology" and returning the station to operational status. Meanwhile, the damage wrought by the surprise invasion proves

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[121] See above, chapter 2.
[122] One early example was the film *Two Rivals* (*Dva sopernika*, 1928) which told the story of citizens banding together with the help of Osoaviakhim to repulse a hostile invasion. See, GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 218, "Dva sopernika."
[123] See above, chapter 2, 93-94.
[124] *Eskadril'ia "Lenin"* (Moscow, 1924), 35 and 37.
[125] Ibid., 30-31.

to be minimal. The fascist bomber squadrons are tricked into releasing their payloads on an abandoned park before they are annihilated by fast approaching squadrons of Soviet fighter planes. The damage to the power station is credited to an incidental stray bomb. This apparent paradox, which would be repeated in subsequent films, indicated the Party's contradictory efforts to communicate the gravity of fascism's threat while downplaying the possibility that enemy forces could actually do damage to the Soviet Union.

Similar to *City under Siege*, the 1936 production *The Motherland Calls* used the scenario of a surprise attack as the vehicle for communicating broader messages concerning Soviet technical proficiency, national self-reliance and the need for vigilance in the defense of the community.[126] *The Motherland Calls* was also another transparent effort to depict the ever-present threat of unprovoked Nazi aggression.

The famous flyer Sergei Novikov and his capable air crew return home following the completion of a long-distance test flight aboard an advanced aircraft. The mission has run smoothly and the aircraft has demonstrated the unmatched technical mastery of the Soviet aviation industry. As the airplane begins its descent, Novikov and his crew encounter an unexpected fog bank. The pilot's vision is obscured and the safety of the plane's final approach is threatened. Novikov steers the craft sharply to the side to avoid hitting a radio tower shrouded by the fog. In the process, some of the cockpit's equipment is jarred loose and a heavy metal canister strikes the pilot on the leg, reaggravating an injury that he suffered during the Civil War. The steadfast Novikov overcomes this unforeseen challenge and lands the aircraft safely despite his pain. He and his crew are rapturously greeted by the workers of the factory who organize a grand reception in honor of the "proud falcons."

The celebration of the air crew's return is interrupted by news that a treacherous surprise attack on the Soviet Union has been launched by "the enemy." Radio announcements broadcast the grave tidings that "without warning and in violation of our peaceful agreements, the wolf has cast aside his sheep's clothing! Enemy forces have crossed our frontier in an attempt to seize Soviet soil. The enemy must be destroyed, crushed, annihilated and wiped from the face of the earth! War has commenced!"[127]

The news of the insidious attack is met with the disciplined resolve of the Soviet people. They rally to the support of the nation's officials as crowds gather to acclaim loudly the "leader of

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[126] The film was released in the United States under the title *Call to Arms*.
[127] GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 2069, "Rodina zovet," l. 6.

the Soviet people, Comrade Stalin." Newsreel footage of Stalin, Voroshilov and Kalinin appears on the screen, followed by scenes of Soviet tanks, airplanes, soldiers and citizens mobilizing to repulse the foreign invader. The members of the factory collective fall into line as they, too, quickly and efficiently organize themselves into shock brigades and labor battalions. The positive results of these Union wide efforts are quickly evidenced. The enemy is thrown on the defensive. Radio announcements (which are interspersed with battle scenes of advancing Soviet forces) update the audience on the progress of the wider war. The invasion has been halted. The Soviet Red Army will now launch a massive counter-offensive.

Inspired by the groundswell of love for the Soviet Union, Novikov's young son, Iurka, decides that he, too, must join the battle against fascism. He pens a note informing his family that he is leaving for the war, packs up some belongings and sets out to fight the fascist menace. Novikov arrives home soon thereafter to inform his loved ones that he must return to active duty. He will leave for the front immediately. As good-byes are said, the scene is interrupted by another radio announcement. A squadron of enemy heavy bombers, flying in the direction of the local aviation factory, has been intercepted by a detachment of Soviet fighter planes. During the ensuing melee, the Soviet planes routed the aggressor's forces. All of the enemy's aircraft were annihilated save for a single bomber, identified by its markings as "W-22." This aircraft managed to elude destruction by taking cover in a cloud bank. Citizens are instructed to be on the lookout for the lone enemy bomber as "it may release its destructive payload in an effort to expedite its return flight home."[128]

The scene now shifts to the young Iurka, who walks along a desolate road in the direction of the front. High overhead the low drone of an airplane engine is faintly audible. The noise grows in intensity as the aircraft nears. It is the enemy bomber W-22! Recognizing the airplane's fascist insignia the alert boy rushes to take cover from the approaching craft, but to no avail. The enemy bomber discharges its deadly cargo. As the poisonous toxins contained in the plane's chemical bombs are released into the air, Iurka fumbles with his gas mask. He is too late. Overcome by the lethal fumes the young boy convulses and dies; an innocent victim of fascist brutality.

The young lad's lifeless body is returned to the distraught Novikov family by a group of Red Army soldiers. Only now, in the wake of the tragedy, is the note left by Iurka discovered by the boy's grandmother. Hardened by the personal loss that he has suffered, Commander Novikov resolutely answers the call of his motherland. He departs for battle. There, he leads a squadron of

[128] Ibid., l. 10.

Soviet fighters assigned to annihilate the enemy's air force. Novikov's mission is a brilliant success. The fascist air force is completely destroyed and the way is cleared for the Soviet counter-invasion.[129] Novikov is now free to pursue his personal vendetta against the fascists. He flies out in search of the W-22. When he discovers the enemy airplane, the pilot turns his fighter loose upon the hated symbol of fascist barbarism. The bomber is destroyed and, as the end of the war approaches, Soviet forces quickly advance into enemy territory.

The Motherland Calls reiterated the collectivist themes that had been so prominent in earlier non-military aeronautical productions. Novikov's family is intended to serve as a microcosm of the Soviet nation. The retribution that the pilot achieves for the death of his son is a transparent metaphor for the vengeance that the state would seek against those attempting to harm the Stalinist "Great Family." This collectivist spirit of *The Motherland Calls* earned the praise of the movie's many reviewers.[130] One commentator gave the film particularly high marks for its depiction of "our Soviet patriotism, our loyalty to our motherland and the willingness of Soviet laborers and citizens to sacrifice their lives in defense of their country."[131] *The Motherland Calls*, according to this reviewer, was less a military production than it was a celebration of the collective spirit of Soviet socialism.[132] In support of this view, the reviewer pointed to one "particularly effective" episode in which Novikov's airplane flies over the local aeronautical factory. As the plane passes by overhead, the factory's workers rush to the windows to boast of their handiwork. "Look at the ailerons, they're my labor!," shouts one enthusiastic worker. "No, no," says another, "pay attention to the fuselage! That's what I did! That's the beauty of the machine."[133] The factory members' response to the appearance of the plane indicated, according to this commentator, Soviet citizens' sense of pride and accomplishment in recognizing their individual contribution to the success of the nation as a whole.[134]

Images of familial retribution and collective participation notwithstanding, the predominant message of *The Motherland Calls* was the Soviet Union's ability to withstand the onslaught of unjustified fascist aggression. In this regard, the film was little different from its only slightly less bombastic predecessor *City under Siege*. Both productions depicted the Soviet Union as a peace-

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[129] Ibid., l. 12.
[130] See, *Kino*, 5 September 1935; *Izvestiia*, 18 March, 1936; *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 19 April 1936 and *Pravda*, 12 May 1936 among others.
[131] S. Ginzburg, "Rodina i ee geroi," *Isskustvo kino* 6 (June 1936): 4.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 5. The scene can be found in GFF f. 2, op. 1, d. 2069, ll. 2-3.
[134] Ginzburg, "Rodina i ee geroi," 6.

loving nation, victimized by a rapacious warmongering neighbor state. Both films highlighted the importance of Soviet citizens' discipline and patriotism in successfully repulsing the enemy's invasion. And both suggested that the damage wrought by foreign forces would be relatively insignificant before the tide of battle was turned and the Red Army advanced into enemy territory. Similar to the propaganda pamphlets and Party publications of the 1920s, feature films such as *City under Siege* and *The Motherland Calls* were intended to unite citizens behind the state while reassuring them that the nation's defensive concerns were in the capable hands of Soviet authorities. The only real difference between these two movies was, perhaps, the more uncompromising tone of the latter production. Where *City under Siege* ended with the positive image of the productive power station generating electricity for the construction of socialism, *The Motherland Calls* employed a more strident symbolism. At the movie's end, the audience is shown the burning skeleton of the vanquish bomber W-22. As the enemy aircraft is engulfed in flames, the hated swastika that decorates its tail section slowly melts, signaling the final defeat of fascism in a torrent of fire. The screen fades to black.

The final military aeronautical film made before the onset of the Second World War was the 1938 Mostekhfil'm production *Deep Strike*. An artistically coarse and technically shoddy film, *Deep Strike* reiterated themes identical to those developed in *City under Siege* and *The Motherland Calls*. Like its predecessors, the film was intended to depict "the readiness of the valiant Red air force" and the "rapid, successful counter-offensive" that would follow any surprise attack attempted by hostile fascist powers.[135]

Red Army pilot Aleksandr Kosykh has recently been awarded the prestigious "Order of Lenin" for his contributions to the defense of the Soviet Union. Friends and family gather at his house to celebrate the honor that has been bestowed upon him. Under the watchful gaze of a portrait of Stalin, the assembled guests convene around a piano to sing the Soviet national anthem. The phone rings. Kosykh and his comrades must leave at once for their air base. A surprise attack on the Soviet Union has been launched by a hostile neighboring state!

Kosykh and the other aviators take to the air to repel the foreign invaders. Their fast flying airplanes quickly intercept the approaching bombers and, in no time, the enemy squadrons are completely destroyed. All that remains of the invading force is a lone, high-altitude dirigible that has somehow managed to evade the Soviet fighter planes. As the airship slowly sails above Soviet territory, it releases a handful of small, ineffective bombs that strike the earth causing only

[135] "Glubokii reid," *Pravda*, 4 February 1938.

inconsequential damage. Alert to the presence of the enemy aerostat, a brave Soviet pilot ascends higher into the sky, pushing his airplane to the limits of its ability in order to overtake the craft. He finally attains the proper altitude and quickly dispatches the ponderous zeppelin with his airplane's machine gun. The flaming airship plummets to the earth. The initial assault has been repelled.

The scene now shifts to the opposition's military headquarters, located behind the front lines. The general in charge of the fascist air fleet (who bears an uncanny resemblance to Herman Göring, Commander-in Chief of the German Luftwaffe) informs his aviation officers of the mission now before them: a secret air assault on an important Soviet air base. Before the General is able to conclude his briefing, however, air raid sirens and the sound of exploding bombs are heard from outside. A surprise Soviet air strike has preempted the fascists' plans! Enemy pilots scramble to launch their aircraft as the Soviet Red Air Fleet bombards the command center. By the time that the air strike is completed, all that remains of the fascist air corps are the smoldering chassis of incinerated planes.

Soviet scout planes advance over enemy air space. They are the lead element of a massive counter strike directed at the enemy's "military-industrial center," the city 'Fort.' The scout planes encounter the enemy's anti-air defenses and several are shot down by enemy guns (although their crew members are able to parachute to safety). One scout ship, damaged in the fracas, has lost the use of its starboard engine. As the aircraft's pilot, Ivan, searches for a location to set down his plane, he spies the underground air base from which the enemy will launch its own aerial counter strike. Ivan instructs his crew men to release the plane's bomb load. Although the air base is damaged, enemy planes begin to take to the sky. The brave pilot knows what must be done. He orders his crew to abandon the plane. Once they have parachuted free from the aircraft, Ivan directs his aircraft downward, toward the mouth of the cavern in which the base is hidden. The enemy airfield is paralyzed by the fiery crash that consumes Ivan and his plane. Thanks to the pilot's selfless sacrifice, the path of the Soviet air assault is now clear. Fort is pummeled by an unrelenting air assault, the fascists are routed and Soviet ground troops advance deep into enemy territory.

Deep Strike echoed the strident patriotism and martial pomposity first evidenced in the aeronautical features *City under Siege* and *The Motherland Calls*. Like these earlier films, *Deep Strike* employed the standard cinematic story line in which a surprise enemy attack is followed by the swift response of the Soviet military and the utter annihilation of the fascist aggressors. As always, the goal of the film was to promote patriotic sentiment and to instill confidence in Party

officials amongst the general public. The film's adaptation of this hackneyed formula was not, however, without its detractors. One reviewer went so far as to acknowledge that the ease with which the on-screen fascists were dispatched by the Red Air Fleet was strikingly unrealistic. "Of course, a sudden attack on an air field would lead to many losses, but a modern airfield is not simply a garage where machines sit half a meter apart from one another."[136] This "deficiency" in the movie's portrayal of the fascist opponent weakened what, otherwise as an "important and useful film." Other commentators were less willing to find fault with *Deep Strike* and they praised the production for its patriotic portrayal of the Soviet Union's heroic air force.

> The film's strength consists of the fact that it reflects the power of Soviet aviation, the nation's unconquerable might and the people's love for their brave falcons. When our airplanes quickly and skillfully suppress the enemy's anti-aircraft batteries and destroy the air field before the enemy's planes are able to take off; when the enemy's fighters are destroyed and routed; when the Soviet navigators guide their squadron straight to its goal in the dark of night, in other words, when the film demonstrates the unrivaled quality of our aviation, it rings convincing and true.[137]

This article concluded by noting that as a result of the film, the everyday labors of Soviet airmen are placed within their proper perspective. Thanks to *Deep Strike*, their heroism and courage would serve as examples for ordinary citizens.

In elevating the hagiography of the nation's military pilots to such an extraordinary level, *Deep Strike* anticipated the heroic myth-making that would be realized fully during the Second World War. As the Red Army weathered the brunt of the German Wehrmacht's offensives during the years 1941-1944, the Soviet state undertook to create a new generation of heroes more suitable to the realities of wartime Russia. In place of the youthful modelists, "falcon-flyers" and polar aviators that had graced the silver screen during the 1930s, the Party created legends out of real-life heroes whose wartime exploits were upheld as inspirational models for Soviet citizens to emulate. Individuals such as the leg-less pilot Aleksei Maresev and the partisan fighter Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia were exploited by state officials to motivate citizens towards acts of bravery and to unite the nation behind the Party and its ideology.[138] Another such hero was the military pilot Nikolai Gastello. On 26 June 1941, Gastello, the commander of a Soviet bomber group,

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[136] Ibid.
[137] "Patrioticheskii fil'm," *Kino* 5 (February 1938): 1.
[138] Rosalinde Sartorti, "On the Making of Heroes, Heroines, and Saints," in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, edited by Richard Stities (Bloomington, 1995), 187.

elected to crash his damaged plane into a column of enemy tanks in an effort to delay the German advance on Moscow.[139] Had Gastello seen *Deep Strike*, a film that had premiered just three years prior to the German invasion? Was he aware of the example set by the Russian "everyman," Ivan, who sacrificed himself to ensure the Soviet victory? Was Gastello's decision motivated, at least in part, by a desire to realize the standards of the nation's on-screen martyrs? Whatever the answer, this extraordinary incident, in which life imitated art, provided more propagandistic fodder for a political system committed to creating art that appeared larger than life.

With the advent of the new generation of military heroes (and the subsequent explosion of World War II nostalgia) the on-screen icons of the pre-War era quickly faded from collective memory. Today, the aeronautical films of the 1930s are virtually unknown to Russian, let alone Western, audiences. They are the obscure relics of an earlier age whose calls for collective consciousness, individual sacrifice and unwavering love for Stalin and his Party strike modern viewers as hollow and trite. Nevertheless, these films remain important as visual testaments to a political system that carefully, consciously and constantly endeavored to create a modern social order through the utopian principles of state-sponsored socialism. In serving the interests of Soviet authorities, the aeronautical feature films of the twenties and thirties demonstrated cinema's political utility. They were employed to legitimate the Party's ideological goals and to mobilize audiences for the construction of socialism.

As Party goals evolved over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, both the nature and content of the nation's political culture underwent a fundamental transformation. Accompanying these changes were modifications in the manner in which aeronautical images were depicted on the silver screen. In their earliest manifestations as simple *agitki*, the aeronautical features produced under ODVF auspices echoed the organization's primary objective of educating audiences of the potential benefits made possible by airplanes. The goal of these films was nothing more than to popularize aeronautics and to convince citizens to donate their time and money to building the Red Air Fleet.

The onset of the cultural revolution and the crash industrialization campaign of the First Five-Year Plan fundamentally transformed Soviet aeronautical cinema. Hoping to lay the foundations for an unadulterated "proletarian" culture, Party leaders imposed rigid new policies

[139] Ibid., 181.

that ended creative pluralism in the arts and demanded ideological conformity in political, social and intellectual life. One reflection of the new call for uniformity was the concomitant elevation of the collective as a key element in defining the individual's role within Soviet society. Together with messages concerning the need for social responsibility, discipline and patriotism, the collective served as a dominant thematic trope in Soviet artistic and literary productions of the 1930s. This was especially true in the case of aeronautical cinema. Exploiting the popularity of aviation to attract audiences to the theater, aeronautical feature films were used in the years following 1928 to glorify Soviet technical accomplishments and to communicate to citizens the need for a new "Soviet civic consciousness," rooted in the principles of collective action, social conformity and loyalty to the Communist Party.

Alongside efforts to elevate the collective, Soviet propagandists endeavored to fabricate new social myths that would serve the state's interests in uniting citizens behind the Party and its political leaders. Aeronautical films featuring heroic "flacon-flyers" and fearless polar aviators contributed to the fiction of the Soviet "Great Family" as metaphors of kinship and family assumed increasing prominence in Stalinist Russia. Meanwhile, the conquest of the elements was employed on screen and off as folkloric allegory sought to establish the heroic abilities of the nation's pilots in battling the untamed forces of the natural world. The final genre of the aeronautical cinema, the military films of the mid-1930s, developed in response to the growing threat posed by the fascist governments of Europe. Artistically coarse, bombastic and simplistic these features reverted in purpose and manner to the overtly propagandistic style of the 1920s *agitki*.

Conclusion

The energetic responses of Imperial and Soviet political authorities to the challenges of the aeronautical age reflected the ascendancy of aviation technology as a European-wide marker of national strength and vitality. In the three decades that separated Blériot's Channel crossing from the close of the 1930s, the airplane was transformed from a curious plaything of inventors and sportsmen into an everyday instrument essential to the economic prosperity and military security of governments and nations throughout the world. As five and ten-minute flights made by wood and canvas fliers gave way to intercontinental journeys accomplished by multi-engined dreadnoughts, aviation emerged as the leading symbol of the power and prosperity of nations. In light of aviation's prominence, it is little wonder that contemporary artists and intellectuals, statesmen and citizens would come to reference theirs as the aeronautical century.

No less so than other Europeans, Russian observers seized upon aviation as a symbol of their nation's international standing. Eager to contribute to the advancement of European culture in the years that followed the dawn of flight, Russian citizens appropriated aeronautical achievements as defining proof of their modern status. Closely following the advances made by their French, German, and British counterparts, Imperial aeronautical patrons and Soviet state officials struggled to duplicate foreign successes in an effort to overcome their nation's legacy of backwardness. By co-opting the technological fruits of European culture, they hoped to reinvigorate Russia, thus preparing it to meet the political and military challenges of the modern age.

Although their aeronautical policies and programs would be conditioned, in part, by economic and social factors not subordinate to their authority, both Imperial and Soviet aeronautical patrons achieved considerable measures of success in their separate quests to conquer the heavens. For their efforts, Imperial patrons succeeded in popularizing aviation amongst the general public, enticing urban citizens through public spectacles and air-shows to enlist in the state-sponsored campaign to build an air fleet. Although they proved unable to solve the intractable riddle of their nation's underdeveloped industrial base, they could point to technological breakthroughs like Sikorskii's winged behemoths as evidence of Russia's aeronautical competence and as intimations of achievements to come. Soviet officials, too, enjoyed considerable successes. These were manifested in the burgeoning (if artificially inflated) membership in aeronautical societies, the rapid growth of the aviation industry, and the highly visible international show-flights

of Soviet airplanes and air crews. Through the efforts of its aeronautical organizations, the Party succeeded in building an independent Red air fleet, while enlisting aeronautical symbols to support state policies and to legitimate the authority of its political leaders.

Despite these shared features and similar accomplishments, the structuring elements of Soviet aeronautical culture differed fundamentally from those that had shaped Imperial aviation. Where Imperial officials turned to the independent press and private institutions to assist in the development of national air-mindedness, Soviet officials seized upon compulsory measures to enlist millions of citizens into aeronautical organizations closely controlled by Party authorities. While the Imperial state worked in cooperation with society to strengthen the nation against its foreign rivals, Soviet officials abandoned private associations in their quest to establish Red aviation, favoring instead a comprehensive program of forced modernization that might reinforce their authority while constructing an air fleet.

In addition to identifying the distinguishing characteristics of Imperial and Soviet air-mindedness, these findings have important implications for the study of Russian history. They offer new perspectives to scholarly discussions concerning the nature and direction of Russian society, politics, and culture in the years before and after 1917. More than three decades ago, Leopold Haimson laid the foundations for an approach to the Russian past based upon the methodologies of social history. In a two-piece article published in 1964-65 on "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia," Haimson proposed the (then) revisionist theory that one key to understanding Imperial Russia's fate might be found in the changing composition of the urban labor force in the years immediately preceding the First World War.[1] Through a statistical examination of labor unrest in the period 1905-1917, Haimson concluded that rising numbers of politically-motivated industrial strikes (resulting from an influx of new cadres of more radical ex-peasant factory laborers) led to the growing polarization of urban society in the years leading up to 1917. The polarization of the working-class from the more educated segments of civil society was accompanied by the polarization of the social elite away from the tsarist state as members of the privileged intelligentsia grew exasperated in their efforts to extract political concessions from the regime.[2] These findings led Haimson to conclude that, in the final analysis, "changes in the

[1] Leopold Haimson, "Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," *Slavic Review* 23 and 24 (December 1964 and March 1965): 619-642 and 1-22, respectively.
[2] Ibid., 639.

character and temper of the industrial working class in the immediate prewar years" and not the exigencies of war themselves, ultimately accounted for the collapse of tsarism.[3]

Haimson's interpretive innovation produced a sea-change in the study of Russian history. His arguments challenged long-held assumptions concerning the nature and evolution of Imperial society and opened the way for new approaches to understanding the Soviet period.[4] If the political conflict reflected in the Revolution of February 1917 could be traced to social and economic tensions of the pre-War era, then October 1917 could be understood not as an unfortunate (and avoidable) *coup* resulting from Bolshevik conspiracy and the dislocations of the War, but rather as a popularly supported and socio-economically conditioned revolution. Haimson's approach provided the thematic and methodological inspiration for a new generation of historians who sought to document the social and economic undercurrents of the Bolshevik Revolution by turning scholarly attention "away from political elites towards the people in the streets."[5] In numerous monographs devoted to the political, social, and cultural milieus of Russian industrial laborers, these scholars identified the factors behind working-class support of the Bolsheviks in October 1917.[6]

Evidence of popular support for the Bolshevik Revolution notwithstanding, the subsequent evolution of the one-party state, the purges, and show-trials produced a dilemma for scholars. If the events of October 1917 indeed reflected the social, economic, and political aspirations of the industrial working class, how could one explain the subsequent destructive and state-directed developments of the Gulag and Terror? The attempt to address this apparent inconsistency led to new directions in the study of the Soviet past that focused increasing attention upon the 1920s and 1930s.

In order to account for the excesses of the thirties, scholars such as Stephen Cohen, Moshe Lewin, and Sheila Fitzpatrick drew distinctions between the more-or-less democratic order intended

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[3] Ibid., 17.

[4] For articles referencing Haimson's pivotal role in the development of Russian historiography see, Ronald G. Suny, "Towards a Social History of the October Revolution," *American Historical Review* 88 (1983): 51; Ronald G. Suny, "Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics." *Russian Review* 53 (April 1994): 165-182 and John Eric Marot, "A 'Postmodern' Approach to the Russian Revolution? Comment on Suny," *Russian Review* 54 (April 1995): 260-264. Multiple-article discussions have appeared in *Slavic Review* 47 (1988): 599-626 and *Russian Review* 45 (1986): 355-413 and 46 (1987): 375-431.

[5] Ronald G. Suny, "Towards a Social History of the October Revolution," 51.

[6] Among the more important of these works are: Marc Ferro, *October 1917: A Social History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. by Norman Stone (Boston, 1980); Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981) and David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power* (London, 1984).

by Lenin and the authoritarian reality effected by Stalin. They argued that the revolution of October 1917 was fundamentally transformed by social and political pressures facing the Party in the years that followed the Civil War.[7] In support of this view, attempts were made to identify possible "alternatives" to the horrific events of the 1930s by investigating the policies and personalities that had been defeated by Stalin during the course of the 1920s. Particular attention was devoted to the "New Economic Policy" (NEP) as an indication of the alternative direction that the country might have taken had other figures triumphed or had Lenin lived.[8] Ultimately, these scholars endeavored to demonstrate that the popularly supported social revolution launched in 1917 may have been thrown off-track by the aberration of Stalinism. By decoupling Stalin's crimes from Lenin's intentions, these historians hoped to preserve the moral legitimacy of socialism while simultaneously demonstrating that the system, despite a temporary detour into terror, had the capacity to return to its democratic and progressive roots.

In recent years, new scholarly research has challenged the fundamental notion that polarization was the chief characteristic of late Imperial society and politics. The numerous contributors to the collection of essays *Between Tsar and People*, in particular, proposed a more nuanced view that draws attention to the complex and changing social realities of late Imperial Russia through an examination of "the interrelationship between social change and social identity."[9] Their multiple and diverse investigations suggest that, notwithstanding the Imperial order's less than solid social and political foundations, promising signs of progress during the period 1890-1914 pointed toward the evolution of a stable and prosperous civic arena.[10] More recently, this view has been reinforced by scholars such as Louise McReynolds, Joan Neuberger, and Peter Gatrell who have identified constituent elements of Imperial civil society in their respective monographs on newspapers, criminal activity, and the arms industry.[11]

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[7] Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1937* (New York, 1973); Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (Princeton, 1974) and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1932.*

[8] Lewis Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society Between Revolutions, 1918-1929* (Cambridge, 1992); Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington, 1991) and Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1968) among others.

[9] Samuel D. Kassow, James L. West, and Edith W. Clowes, "Introduction: The Problem of the Middle in Late Imperial Russian Society," *Between Tsar and People*, 3.

[10] Ibid., 14.

[11] Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime* (Princeton, 1991); Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley, 1993) and Peter Gatrell, *Government, Industry, and Rearmament, 1900-1914: The Last Argument of Tsarism* (Cambridge, 1994).

The study of contemporary aeronautical culture offers further evidence to support the view that an emergent civic arena, independent of the tsarist state, was a salient feature of late Imperial Russia. The constant, coequal interaction of Imperial citizens and state officials in matters pertaining to aeronautical development (not to mention the broad popular appeal of aviation across economic and social lines) demonstrated the extent to which state and society could transcend their differences in pursuit of collective aims during the years that preceded 1917. While public and private aeronautical patrons may, at times, have found it difficult to agree on particular policy choices, they nevertheless recognized the essential need to develop native aviation and they proved willing to work together in pursuit of this common goal. Upholding the aeronautical clubs and circles of Western Europe as models to be emulated, private citizens organized voluntary associations that would establish Russian aviation while strengthening social networks essential to the prosperity of civil society. Mindful of the private sector's vital role in assisting their plans, state authorities patronized these voluntary institutions, supporting and subsidizing citizens' efforts to build airplanes, organize air shows, and win over the public to the cause of aviation. The meaningful interaction of public and private aeronautical interests during the period 1909-1914 contradicts earlier assertions that an irreparable rift between state and society had emerged within Russia on the eve of World War I. That calls for still further cooperation increased both in number and intensity as the war approached, indicates that a desire for accommodation with the state (as opposed to continuing fragmentation) characterized the mindset of a significant segment of Imperial society.

Similarly, the record of Soviet aeronautical development raises important questions regarding earlier scholarship on the nature and evolution of the Soviet system. As we have seen, from the very inception of the Soviet Union's first aeronautical organization, the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet (ODVF), in the spring of 1923, Party authorities endeavored to consciously control both the content and direction of Soviet air-mindedness to serve political, cultural, and military interests considered crucial to the development of a socialist order. Initially, these efforts took the shape of a Party directed mass-mobilization drive that sought to generate public enthusiasm for aviation through the collective enrollment of citizens into a putative "voluntary" society. To assist in these efforts, ODVF leaders touted the military and economic advantages that Soviet citizens would accrue through participation in the campaign to build the Red air fleet.

Although the 1923 campaign achieved considerable success in terms of the number of individuals "enrolled" into the society, the mass-mobilization drive failed to meet Party officials'

expectations. Rather than creating a serviceable organization that could effectively harness the enthusiasm of its participants, the attempt to decree ODVF into existence produced a highly centralized "pseudoorganization" that suppressed local initiative and circumvented members' spontaneity while conscripting millions of citizens into state service to labor on behalf of Party-dictated goals. Faced with a numerically impressive but lethargic and uninspired membership, Party leaders attempted to mandate genuine enthusiasm by enacting a series of bureaucratic and administrative "reforms" that strengthened the Party's control over the nationwide organization and its local chapters. The most important of these reforms took place in 1925 when, in an attempt to establish a single program that would assist the nation's military interests, Soviet officials merged ODVF with the chemical society Dobrokhim to form the new organization, Aviakhim. Less than two years following the ODVF–Dobrokhim union, Party officials again attempted to alter the content and form of Soviet aeronautical culture by merging Aviakhim with the civil defense society OSO. The transformation of ODVF from a civilian-based aeronautical "voluntary society" into the military-dominated civil defense organization Osoaviakhim signaled the growing militarization of Soviet political culture and demonstrated the Party's continuing commitment to a comprehensive program of forced modernization that consistently sacrificed private associations and individual initiative in favor of centrally-planned and coerced collective action.

In contrast to studies that have attempted to distance the phenomenon of Stalinism from the Bolshevik regime, this dissertation indicates that, in the case of aviation, fundamental continuities of form and practice characterized the evolution of Soviet culture during the years 1923-1939. The application of aviation technology to legitimate the political authority of the Communist Party, was not, as some scholars have mistakenly assumed, the product of the Stalinist era. Rather, it was the essential condition of Soviet air-mindedness, structuring the nation's aeronautical culture from its inception in 1923 and serving as a continuous link to the Stalinist period of the 1930s. While the size and scope of aeronautical demonstrations, spectacles, and shows would certainly increase after the First Five-Year Plan, their fundamental function of technological legitimation remained unchanged.

The evolutionary continuity of Soviet culture was ultimately reflected in the changing structure and thematic content of the nation's aeronautical films. Like the demonstrations and spectacles orchestrated by aeronautical organizations, aviation films of the 1920s and 1930s were shaped by the policies, principles, and general aims that Party leaders pursued in their efforts to modernize the nation. In their earliest manifestations as simple *agitki*, the aeronautical features

produced under ODVF auspices echoed the organization's primary objective of educating citizens of the airplane's military, economic, and cultural utility. The goal of these films was to build support for the Party's aeronautical initiatives and to convince audience members to donate time and money to building the Red Air Fleet. Beginning in the late 1920s, as state officials abandoned the tactics of the mass-mobilization campaign in favor of centrally directed industrialization and forced collectivization, the content and messages of aeronautical films shifted. Aviation features, like other artistic forms, were increasingly used to sustain the Party's efforts to fabricate a cohesive society united behind the Party's ideological goals and supportive of the its efforts to transform the nation. To this end, the aeronautical film (like the airplane itself) was an important tool in fostering "Soviet civic consciousness," the collectivist temperament, patriotism, and political loyalty that Party leaders believed was essential for the construction of socialism.

As was true of other scientific and technical accomplishments (such as automobiles, electrification, and the cult of state planning), aviation was employed by Soviet officials as a means of demarcating their superiority over potential challengers at home and abroad. It was a central component of "technological legitimation" that sought to create popular support for socialist construction through demonstrations of the Party's scientific accomplishments. What distinguished aviation from other legitimating technologies was the airplane's singular ability to transcend time and space, to condition perceptions of the new modern age while contributing in tangible ways to the very process of modernization. In a nation that remained overwhelmingly rural, the airplane was a powerful reminder of the vast space that separated city from village; space which, in the perception of urban-minded Party leaders, threatened to impede the process of modernization and upset the path of Soviet progress. In seizing upon aviation as both a symbol and instrument of socialist modernization, Party officials revealed the technocratic impulses that had given birth to their urban revolution. Through the application and development of modern technology they attempted to accomplish a radical break with the past. They sought to overcome rural traditions of backwardness and inertia in a final attempt to recast the countryside. In the end, their efforts to realize these machine-age dreams gave rise to an ideology of dominance that both evidenced the legitimating function of modern technology and conditioned the structure of Soviet air-mindedness.

Filmography

Soviet Aeronautical Feature Films, 1923-1939

†= Film viewed by author
§= Film no longer extant

§*Contact!* (*Est' kontakt!*). V. Maksimov. Sevzapkino, 1923.

§*On Wings, Higher!* (*Na kryliakh vvys'*). B. Mikhin. Goskino, 1923.

§*How the Peasant Pakhom Flew on a Bird in the Capital of Heaven* (*Kak muzhik Pakhom v stolitse v nebese letal na ptitse*). Ia. Posel'skii. Kinosektsiia ODVF, 1924.

§*How Pakhom Studied Flying in the Village of Nesmelom* (*Kak Pakhom v sele nesmelom zanimalsia letnym delom*). Ia. Posel'skii. Kinosektsiia ODVF, 1924.

§*Toward Aerial Victory* (*K nadzemnym pobedam*). A. Anoshchenko. Goskino, 1924.

§*Aero NT-54* (*Aero NT-54*). N. Petrov. Sevzapkino, 1925.

§*Men in Leather Helmets* (*Liudi v kozhannykh shlemakh*). A. Lemberg. Unknown, 1928.

Gogi: The Courageous Flier (*Gogi: otvazhnyi letchik*). N. Kakhidze. Goskinprom Gruzii, 1929.

§*I Want to be an Aviatrix* (*Khochu byt' letchitsii*). K. Gertel'. Kinofil'm, 1929.

§*Kaan-Kerede* (*Kaan-Kerede*). V. Feinberg. Sovkino, 1929.

§*The Pilot and the Girl* (*Pilot i devushka*). A. Pereguda. VUFKU Odessa, 1929.

§*Wings* (*Kryl'ia*). I. Kravchunovskii. Rosfil'm, 1933.

†*City Under Siege* (*Gorod pod udarom*). Iu. Genika. Soiuzfil'm, 1933.

One Stop to the Moon (*Na lunu s peresadkoi*). N. Lebedev. Lenfil'm, 1935.

†*Aerograd* (*Aerograd*). A. Dovzhenko. Mosfil'm and Ukrainfil'm, 1935.

In the Footsteps of a Hero (*Po sledam geroia*). V. Nemoliaev. Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1935.

†*Flyers* (*Letchiki*). Iu. Raizman. Mosfil'm, 1935.

The Flying Painter (*Krylatyi maliar*). L. Esakia. Goskinprom Gruzii, 1936.

†*Call to Arms* (*Rodina zovet*). A. Macheret. Mosfil'm, 1936.

§*Great Wings* (*Bol'shie kryl'ia*). M. Dubson. Lenfil'm, 1937.

†*Deep Strike* (*Glubokii reid*). P. Malakhov. Mostekhfil'm, 1937.

†*Stories of Hero-Fliers* (*Novelly o geroiakh letchikakh*). A. Umanskii. Ukrainfil'm, 1938.

Victory (*Pobeda*). V. Pudovkin. Mosfil'm, 1938.

Fighters (*Istrebiteli*). E. Pentslin. Kievskaia kinostudiia, 1939.

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Genii vremen
Golos Rusi

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Izvestiia KPSS
Kadr
Kino

K sportu!
Kievskaia mysl'
Moskovskaia gazeta
Moskovskiia vedomosti
Niva
Nizhegorodskii listok
Novaia Rus'
Novoe vremia
Peterburgskaia gazeta
Peterburgskii kur'er
Peterburgskii listok
Priroda i liudi
Ranee utro
Rech'
Rodina
Rossiia
Russkii invalid
Russkoe slovo
Russkoe znamia
Sankt Peterburgskiia vedomosti
Sinii zhurnal
Sovremennoe slovo
Sovremennyi mir
Sportivnaia zhizn'
Svet
Utro Rossii
Vechernee vremia
Vestnik znaniia
Zemshchina
Zhizn' dlia vsekh

Kino, teatr, sport
Kino-front
Kinonedelia
Kinorepertuar
Komsomol'skaia pravda
Krasnaia niva
Krasnaia zvezda
Krest'ianskaia gazeta
Krokodil
Leningradskaia pravda
Literaturnaia gazeta
Literaturnyi kritik
Novyi zritel'
Ogonek
Pravda
Proletkino
Rabis
Rabochaia Moskva
Rabochii i teatr
Rabochii zritel'
Repertuarnyi biulleten' po kino
Smena
Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie
Sovetskii ekran
Sovetskii Soiuz
Sovetskoe isskustvo
Sovetskoe kino
Trud
Vecherniaia Moskva
Zaria vostoka
Zhizn' isskustva

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Aero i avtomobil'naia zhizn'
Aeromobil'
Aero-sbornik
Aviatsiia i vozdukhoplavanie
Avtomobil' i vozdukhoplavanie
Avtomobil'naia zhizn' i aviatsiia
Kryl'ia
Novosti vozdukhoplavaniia
Sevastopol'skii aviatsionnyi illiustrirovannyi zhurnal
Tekhnika vozdukhoplavaniia
Tiazhelee vozdukha
V tsarstve vozdukhe
Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia
Vestnik vozdukhoplavaniia i sport
Vestnik vozdushnogo flota
Vozdukhoplavanie i sport

Soviet Aviation Periodicals

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Aviadrug
Daesh motor
Daesh Sibiri krasnye kryl'ia
Krasnye kryl'ia
Samolet
Vestnik vozdushnogo flota
Vozdushnyi flot
Vozdukhoplavanie

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Curriculum vitae

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Education

Ph.D.: History. October 1997, University of Illinois, U-C.
Master of Arts: History. May 1991, University of Illinois, U-C.
Bachelor of Arts: History. Slavic Languages and Literatures. May 1989, University of Kansas (with honors).

Areas of Study

Russia, Modern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, Russian Literature.

Honors and Awards

National:

Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Study (Woodrow Wilson Center) Short-Term Grant	August 1997
FULBRIGHT-HAYS Dissertation Research Fellowship	1994-1995
International Research Exchange (IREX) Fellowship	1994-1995
Foreign Languages and Area Studies Fellowship (FLAS)	1996-1997, 93-94, 92-93

University of Illinois:

List of Teachers Ranked Excellent by Their Students	1995-1996, 91-92, 90-91
Graduate College Travel Grant	Fall 1995
Russian and East European Center Grant	Fall 1995, Spring 1993
Graduate College Dissertation Research Grant	Spring 1994

Publications

"O vliianii transatlanticheskogo pereleta Ch. Lindberga na amerikanskoe i evropeiskoe obshchestvo." [The Impact of Lindbergh's Trans-Atlantic Flight on American and European Society]. *Iz istorii aviatsii i kosmonavtiki*. Vypusk 67, 1995, pp. 179-191.

"On Wings of Courage: Public *Air-Mindedness* and National Identity in Late Imperial Russia." *The Russian Review*. Volume 54, April 1995, pp. 209-226.

"A Crisis of Faith: Boris Savinkov and the Fighting Organization, 1903-1912." *Scottish Slavonic Review*. Number 18, Spring 1992, pp. 35-53.

Professional Papers

"Soviet Aviation and Political Legitimacy: Aeronautical Iconography between City and Village, 1923-1926." Paper presented at the Central Slavic Conference. Lawrence, Kansas. April 1997.

"A Dictatorship of the Air: The Creation of Soviet Aeronautical Culture." Paper presented at the National Convention of the *American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies*. Washington, DC. October 1995.

"Charles A. Lindbergh and the Culture of Aeronautics." Paper presented to the National Committee of the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology. *Russian Academy of Sciences*. Moscow. April 1995. [In Russian].

"Shklovskii and the Machine: Modernist Visions and the Promise of Technique." Paper presented at the National Convention of the *American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies*. Honolulu, Hawaii. November 1993.

Teaching Experience

Adjunct Assistant Professor. Russian and East European Center. University of Illinois. 1997-present

Coordinator and principal lecturer for the interdisciplinary survey "Introduction to Russian and Central Eurasia," a course required of all undergraduate REES majors at the University of Illinois.

Lecturer. Russian and East European Center. University of Illinois. Spring 1997

Designed, coordinated, and taught "Introduction to Russia and Central Eurasia."

Instructor. Department of History. University of Illinois. Spring 1996

Designed and taught the undergraduate capstone seminar "The European Revolutionary Tradition, 1789-1917."

Teaching Assistantships. Department of History. University of Illinois.

Western Civilization to 1660. Summer 1997, Fall 1995, Fall 1991

Western Civilization, 1660-present. Summer 1996, Spring 1992

United States History, 1864-present. Spring 1991, Fall 1990

Related Professional Experience

Member, Midwest Workshop of Russian Historians Organizational Committee. Spring 1997 and Spring 1993.

Committee Member, Imperial Russian Search. Department of History, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Fall 1995.

Guest commentator for the call-in program "Let's Talk!" WIBW in Topeka, Kansas (AM radio 580). Topic: Contemporary Russian Politics and Society. August 15, 1995.

Visiting scholar at the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow, October 1994-June 1995.

Participant in the University of Illinois faculty-graduate student research exchange with the Russian State University for the Humanities. Moscow, Spring 1994.

Participant in the College Teacher Effectiveness Network. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Fall 1993.

Research assistant for the Russian and East European Studies Center. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, January-August 1990.

Participant in the Cooperative Russian Language Program sponsored by the Council for International Educational Exchange. Leningrad State University. Spring 1989 and Summer 1988.

Professional Memberships

American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies
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Languages

Russian. Reading knowledge of Serbo-Croatian and French.