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978-1-107-10288-0 - Soviet Internationalism After Stalin: Interaction and Exchange Between the USSR and Latin America During the Cold War

Tobias Rupprecht

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## Soviet Internationalism after Stalin

The Soviet Union is often presented as a largely isolated and idiosyncratic state. *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin* challenges this view by telling the story of Soviet and Latin American intellectuals, students, political figures and artists, and their encounters with the 'other' from the 1950s through the 1980s. In this first multi-archival study of Soviet relations with Latin America, Tobias Rupprecht reveals that, for people in the Second and Third Worlds, the Cold War meant not only confrontation with an ideological enemy, but also increased interconnectedness with distant world regions. He shows that the Soviet Union looked quite different from a southern rather than a western point of view, and he also charts the impact of this new internationalism on the Soviet Union itself in terms of popular perceptions of the USSR's place in the world and its political, scientific, intellectual and cultural reintegration into the global community.

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## Preface and acknowledgements

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Historians should be aware of the fallacies of individual memory and retroactive construction of traditions and origins. Yet I am pretty sure that the first vague idea for this book dates back to 1 May 2006. Fidel Castro gave what turned out to be his last May Day speech on Havana's Plaza de la Revolución. Coincidentally, I was travelling in Cuba with a friend, and we decided to join the huge crowd, brought together by hundreds of school buses from the entire island to the sweltering heat of that huge square. The midday sun was soon unbearable, and so was Castro's lengthy speech about the achievements of his revolution and the on-going evil-doings of imperialism. After half an hour or so, we left. The lasting impression from this somewhat atavistic spectacle was that of a group, standing next to us just in front of the stage, waving a big banner of the PDS (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus), the successor organisation of the East German communist party. Their pink wristbands gave them away as guests of one of the many all-inclusive beach-side holiday resorts, territory off-limits to ordinary Cubans. We had gotten a vivid picture of poverty and repression on the island in the weeks before and felt somewhere between amused and embarrassed about our compatriots. Our Cuban hosts had not understood why we wanted to go to the silly rally in the first place. As we got back to their home two hours later, we could see live on Cuban state television that Castro was still blustering and bragging, and selected European visitors were still endorsing him, about the bright future of socialism. Our friends' television set, just like their Minsk refrigerator and many cars in the street, was Soviet-produced.

These curious fragments of self-benefiting leftist romanticising of Latin America and the flotsam of Soviet internationalism in the Third World stuck in my head when I got back to Tübingen, where I had to come up with a topic for my final paper in contemporary history. I wondered whether Soviet citizens had a similarly idealised view of Latin American revolutions-cum-nice tropical amenities. There had been extensive contacts with Cuba, and to a lesser extent with Chile

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and Nicaragua, after all. I realised that we know quite a bit about the ramifications of the grand geo-political conflict of the second half of the twentieth century on the lives of people in the West, but basically nothing about what this Cold War meant for people in the Second and Third Worlds. Did Soviet citizens partake in the global activities of their state? And what did Latin Americans actually think of the former Soviet Union and its activities in the hemisphere during the Cold War?

Almost nine years passed from these very first ideas about a research project on the Soviet Union and Latin America until the book entered final production. The list of people who have accompanied it and contributed to its genesis is accordingly long, and I have incurred a fair amount of intellectual and personal debt. Klaus Gestwa in Tübingen was a staunch supporter from the very beginning; I am very thankful for his personal and enthusiastic commitment, especially in the dire straits of the early phase. It was in Ute Planert's lively seminar on trans-national historiography that I first heard of global history – and, the impressions from Cuba still on my mind, noticed the conspicuous absence of both Russia and Latin America from the debates. After graduation, appositely celebrated with rum and vodka, Jannis Panagiotidis provided the link from Tübingen to Florence. In the fantastic academic and culinary setting of the European University Institute, Steve Smith was a great supervisor for my Ph.D thesis and a very generous donator of many a *pranzo*. Dietrich Beyrau, Sebastian Conrad, Kiran Klaus Patel, Philipp Ther, Federico Romero, Antonella Romano and Daria Bocharnikova all provided useful advice and important input at various stages of the process of research, conceptualising and writing.

Ruth Gbikpi and Alex Howarth from the EUI library proved dedicated hunters for all sorts of literature, no matter how obscure or hard to find. Edurne Iraizoz and Maria-José Chousal were wonderful language teachers. Phil Jakes took over the big task of proof-reading and moulding the language of this book into something akin to idiomatic English. José Guillermo Londoño gave a very precious hint about Latin American alumni from Soviet universities and was, together with his wife Lucero, a consummate host in Medellín. Antonella Fazio provided the Florence–Bogotá link; her family put me up and kept me well fed and very safe in Colombia. I am deeply indebted to Hugo Fazio for his generosity and commitment to my research. Carlos Tapias and Luis Eduardo Bosemberg in Bogotá and Máira Ervolino Mendes in Brasília alleviated the process of research in South America, which included unforgettable moments as well as ones of serious sweating, cursing and desperation.

Rumour has it that historians evaluate Russia according to their first personal experience there. If I present Soviet internationalism in too rosy



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a light in this book, Anton Lebedev and Gabriel Fogaça, who were close friends through many adventures in crazy Moscow, are partly to blame. Aleksandr Sizonenko, Katya Samsonkino, Yelitza Marcela Avila, Ingrid Schierle and Marc Elie all helped under different circumstances. Fellow archive rats Pia Koivunen, Claus Bech Hansen, Manfred Zeller, Moritz Florin, Victoria Smolkin, Markus Berg and Vladislav Drilenko were wonderful company and much appreciated for many discussions over after-work beers. Sergio del Castillo provided links to his native Peru; I was devastated to hear he died tragically on New Year's Eve 2010 in Moscow.

Round tables of historians of eastern Europe at Moscow's German Historical Institute (DHI) as well as the Universities of Cologne, Tübingen, Bremen, Munich, Bochum, Göttingen, Berlin and Bonn displayed varying degrees of enthusiasm as for the contribution of global history to the way we think about the Soviet Union. In every case, I appreciated the opportunity to present my work. At several international workshops and conferences of Latin America and Cold War historians in Florence, Rio de Janeiro, Princeton, Jyväskylä, Boston and Paris, the feedback was usually more benign – thanks to the exotic Soviet topic, I assume. I am grateful to Jeremy Adelman, Leslie Bethell, David Engerman, Michael Goebel, Delia Gonzales de Reufels, Anne Gorsuch, James Mark, Nicola Miller, Dina Odnopozova, Balázs Trencsényi, Arne Westad, Vladislav Zubok and anyone else who gave input and commented on my presentations at these and other occasions.

This final typescript has profited greatly from two anonymous reviewers with the rare ability to couch trenchant points of criticism and advice in words of enthusiastic encouragement. I would also like to express my appreciation to Karen Anderson Howes, who did a great job giving the final touches to the text during the copy-editing process.

As a sad and oft-bemoaned matter of fact, working conditions in academia in most European states allow usually only those young scholars who have the backing of their families to pursue careers. The original transcription of Ph.D ('Parents have Doubts') may hold true also for *i miei*, but they never made me feel their scepticism. For this and many other reasons, this book is dedicated to them.

The Russian, Spanish and English versions of Wikipedia as well as the online English translator dict.cc saved enormous amounts of time, which older generations would have spent, often in vain, browsing through thick paper encyclopaedias and dictionaries. The DHI Moscow and the EUI Florence gave lavish funding to realise my research in distant areas of the world. I never made it back to Cuba though: Castro may no longer rant for hours on May Day, but he and the political system he created are alive and grant no access to most foreign researchers.

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The transliteration of Russian follows the international scientific ISO 9 standard, with the exception of commonly known personal names and terms in the main corpus of the text, but not in the apparatus. Institutions, organisations and groups are rendered in their Spanish original names, which I assume are comprehensible to the English reader. The Russian ones are referred to in their original terms upon first mention, and in their English translations only subsequently.