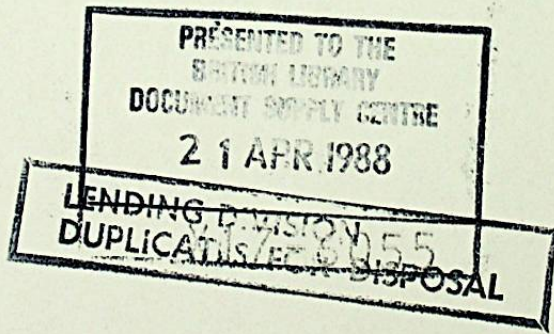


Geography of the

USSR

A REGIONAL SURVEY

Theodore Shabad



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Preface

THE AIM of the author in presenting this book is to make available to students, research workers, and others interested in the USSR an up-to-date treatment of the geography of that country. In preparing discussions, seminars, and reports on the Soviet Union there is generally felt a distinct lack of factual knowledge regarding such matters as the localization of industry, the status of the political-administrative divisions, the sites of current construction projects, and even the present names of important cities. This lack of factual background on the part of many interested observers of the USSR probably results from two main considerations: the scarcity of published materials in the English language and the dynamic nature of Soviet geography. While it is incorrect to assume that no geographical information on the USSR leaks through what has come to be known as the "iron curtain," the fact nevertheless remains that this information is generally not complete and not available to the non-Russian-reading student. In order to obtain a complete picture of the current geography of the USSR, innumerable notes and articles appearing in Soviet geographical literature, books, and periodicals have to be examined, analyzed, compared. This is clearly beyond the resources of students interested in research on a specific aspect of the USSR. To add to this difficulty, the geography of the USSR lends itself probably less than that of any other country to any definitive treatment because of its very nature. The rapid progress in industrialization, the creation of new cities and renaming of others, the altering of the physical landscape of the country by vast reservoirs, these and many other factors tend to make any geographic survey of the Soviet Union out of date within a short time. One can hope to do no more than to explain this characteristic feature of Soviet geography and to anticipate probable changes within the near future.

These are some of the considerations which prompted the author to prepare the present volume. It was not intended to give any definitive

treatment to the geography of the USSR, nor would that have been possible within the scope of this book. For this reason, it will be noted, current problems have been emphasized throughout the study, and among these questions, those of a political and economic nature have received the most detailed attention. Other sources would have to be consulted by any reader interested in the broad background of Russian geography.

The first part of the book is a general survey and is intended to describe some of the general principles, trends, and policies which guide Soviet geography. Here factual material is restricted to a minimum, and a general perspective of the entire field can be gained. Some attention has been devoted to every aspect of the geography of the USSR (again, with emphasis on political and economic problems), even to the point of including a section on the geologic history, with special reference to mineral deposits. Readers can easily pass over this section without losing the benefit of other sections of the book.

The regional plan adopted for the second part of the volume is novel in American presentation, but one which has been used in Soviet publications. It is based primarily on the political division of the country into sixteen constituent union republics. Of these, the Russian SFSR, by far the largest division, has been subdivided into a number of physico-economic regions. Smaller republics, such as the four Central Asian units, have been treated together under a common regional heading. The regional division by political units, rather than by natural geographic regions (for instance, the soil and vegetation zones), has been adopted because it seemed more in accordance with the emphasis in treatment. Certainly, the political-administrative divisions of the USSR are much more plausible as study units, because of their economic and national autonomous undertones, than would be, for example, the departments of France. Although the great number of study units tends to break the continuity of the volume and make it rather encyclopedic in nature, it was felt that this presentation was the only possible means of covering the entire country systematically and in great detail from the political and economic points of view. Each regional study is prefaced by an over-all survey of the area, in which special attention is devoted to the physical pattern, before the detailed description of the individual political divisions is attempted. Here the emphasis lies in the political and economic field, particularly such problems as toponymy, changes in the political-administrative framework, localization of industry, details of construc-

tion projects, as well as thumbnail sketches of the principal cities. This interest in individual urban centers is also prompted by the rapid pattern of urbanization, a distinctive feature of Soviet geography. The grouping of lesser political divisions into the regional study units was dictated by physico-economic considerations. Some groupings, such as the units making up the Urals, are rather universally recognized in Soviet literature, while others may be more arbitrary. Thus, it appears that Murmansk Oblast is sometimes also included within the European Northwest because of its transportation links with the Leningrad region. For the purpose of this book, it is discussed as part of the European North. Similarly, Gor'kiy Oblast may fall within the Central Industrial Region rather than within the Volga Region as it has been classed. These questions, however, hardly affect the treatment of the particular area, but may touch only on the emphasis in its economic links with adjacent regions.

Because the material for this book was collected largely during the period of the postwar Five-Year Plan of the USSR, construction projects scheduled by the Plan are emphasized throughout the text. Officially entitled the Five-Year Plan of Reconstruction and Development of the National Economy of the USSR for 1946-50, it is usually referred to here as the current Plan or postwar Plan.

To facilitate and complement the use of the text, the author has prepared a number of maps, some of a topical nature, others merely for locational purposes. Notes on methodology and on the transliteration of Russian names, some statistical tables, a bibliography, and a place-name index complete the work.

The human factor, insofar as it applies to the labor force, has not been discussed in this book, which is principally concerned with the localization of the economy. Particularly has no mention been made of the "corrective labor camps," which are known to exist in the USSR, but on which reliable data regarding localization, extent, and type of production are not sufficiently available.

The area of the USSR discussed in this book is contained within the *de facto* limits of the country as of the end of 1950. This area includes Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, where final disposition awaits the Japanese peace treaty, Kaliningrad Oblast (northern East Prussia), which is to be definitely adjudged by the German peace treaty, and the three Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, of which the

PREFACE

incorporation into the USSR has not been recognized by the United States Government.

The author has drawn upon many sources for his material and is particularly indebted to the staff members of the American Russian Institute, Inc., New York, for making available their facilities and to Martin A. Bacheller, of C. S. Hammond & Co., for the use of an extensive reference file. Of exceptional importance within the framework of the book were the 1947 election district data supplied by John V. Grauman, of the American University, to whom the author wishes to extend his sincere appreciation. Thanks are expressed also to Professor Stephen B. Jones, of Yale University, whose advice on problems of organization and treatment proved invaluable, and to Dr. William Bridgwater, Editor of the Columbia University Press, for his suggestions and encouragement during the preparation of the manuscript.

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