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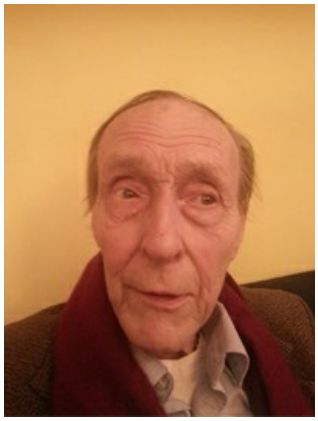
David Wedgwood Benn



There is no space to record the full extent of my debt to CREES which goes back to the late 1960s. Therefore I shall give only one specific example.

I had been investigating the use of opinion polls in the Soviet Union in the period between the two World Wars and discovered, with the aid of CREES microfilms, that they did indeed exist (mainly to gauge readers' reactions to newspaper articles). Then in the early 1930s surveys faded, and barely legible, CREES microfilm of an article entitled 'Concerning a harmful method' (published in 'Kommunistickaya revolutsiya' No. 8, 1931).

It reported that the Academy of Communist Education in Moscow had recently undertaken a pilot survey of attitudes to industrialisation and collectivisation which, unusually, was designed to test anti-regime sentiment. Respondents were asked, for example, whether they agreed with the statement that 'Life has become very difficult. It is necessary to think not about socialism but about there being no queues'. The above article angrily declared that 'the anti-Leninist nature of this method is quite apparent' and that it had been formally banned by the Communist Party's Culture and Propaganda Department. One of the reasons for the ban, as later explained, was that 'tests based on political material could not fail to lead to counter-revolutionary conclusions' (See V.I. Kolbanovskii, 'Pedagogicheskoye Obrazovanie', No. 5, 1936).

My first book on 'Persuasion and Soviet Politics' (1989) drew on a number of sources including Glasgow University, the British Library and the Lenin Library in Mosow. I should exmphasise however that it could not have been written in its existing form without the help of CREES.

One other important point: I was not the only beneficiary of its archives. In 1990 during a visit to Moscow on behalf of the BBC Russian Service, I interviewed Academician Tatyana Zaslavskaya, then engaged in setting up a new polling institute (the forerunner of the present Levada Centre). She was unaware of the circumstances in which polls had been banned in the 1930s and I gave her the above citations. Therefore she too benefited from the CREES archives.

A VOTE OF THANKS TO CREES.

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