

Generally, though, all credit must be given to Monteath not only for publishing these sources, but for writing on a previously unexamined incident in Australian history.

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Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920s–1940s, edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press Academic Monographs, 2008, 312 pp., \$39.95 (e-book); \$49.95 (print on demand), ISBN 9780522855302 (electronic resource) or 9780522855333

Many words have been spent to show why political travellers to the Soviet Union were, at best, naïve dupes or, at worst, complicit in their engagement with the Soviet ‘experiment’ over the two to three decades following the Russian Revolution. The apogee of such criticism is Paul Hollander’s *Political Pilgrims* (1981), long a touchstone for those setting out to write about the political traveller.

Hollander’s account has its flaws. In it, he shows a tendency to generalise, to construct a typology – the ‘political pilgrim’ – and apply it broadly to the experiences of many individuals. He characterises, or even construes as pathological, the behaviour of his subjects (‘intellectuals’). Furthermore, *Political Pilgrims* has spawned a raft of weak historical analyses. Australian political travellers have not been spared: witness Andrew Campbell’s recent claim that the late Manning Clark’s goatee beard – so close in style to that of Lenin – resembled a paean to the triumph of Soviet Man (*National Observer*, 71 (2006: p. 51).

Political Tourists, a collection of essays edited by Carolyn Rasmussen and Sheila Fitzpatrick (daughter of noted political traveller and labour historian, Brian Fitzpatrick) thus offers a welcome challenge to more orthodox accounts. Aside from the introductory chapter, each contribution offers a biographical examination of an individual Australian’s experience as a political traveller. For the most part, each essayist attempts to relate the complex circumstances manifesting themselves in their subject’s engagement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Fitzpatrick’s excellent opening essay sets the tone for the rest. In this overview of the travel experiences of sixty-four Australians, based on research undertaken in the archives of the infamous Soviet agency VOKS (or All-Union Society for Cultural Contact with Abroad), she establishes a number of key themes relevant to the analytical deficiencies of Hollander’s *Political Pilgrims*. These themes recur across the collection.

The flawed stereotype of the ‘political pilgrim’ undergoes critical reappraisal. There is no doubt that some viewed the Soviet Union with a quasi-religious reverence and were subsequently duped by their hosts into seeing a utopian society that did not exist. Fitzpatrick acknowledges that historians have correctly identified these individuals as ‘pilgrims’. Other contributors are equally upfront. Ros Pesman declares on her opening page that subject Ella Winter wrote as a ‘pilgrim, the true believer who was certainly a “fellow traveller”’ (p. 102). For Leonie Coltheart, Jessie Street’s itinerary ‘reads like an off-the-peg “standard inventory of attractions”’, consistent with the experiences of those who fitted Hollander’s typology (p. 283). *Political Tourists* is not, therefore, an exercise in whitewashing or moral relativism. Upon reading it, however, one quickly becomes aware that while some travelled as ‘pilgrims’, most did not. Rather, as the title suggests, they

travelled to the Soviet Union as political tourists, eager to learn, but not necessarily compelled to pay homage.

The strength of this book lies in this recognition that most Australians who travelled to the USSR – even those identified as ‘pilgrims’ – were driven by professional concerns. Rasmussen highlights Professor J. Neill Greenwood’s lack of interest in politics and concentration, instead, on the economic, social, and scientific aspects of Soviet society in a vain attempt to find empirical solutions for the 1930s depression. Phillip Deery reveals Eric Ashby to be both a scientist frustrated with a society whose scientific progress he attempted to observe and a traveller who managed to ‘straddle the dichotomy’ of ‘uncritical friend or implacable foe’ of the USSR (p. 261).

Political Tourists makes it clear that the USSR did not represent the ideal society for some travellers. Instead, it was one that did certain things better than their own and thus served as inspiration for the improvement of life at home. Coltheart emphasises this important point with regard to Jessie Street: her subject’s glowing account of gender equity in the Soviet Union was not intended to serve that nation’s propaganda interests, but rather to encourage her own compatriots to imitate its more progressive approach. Joy Damousi’s account of psychiatrist Reginald Ellery’s initial enthusiasm for the Soviet Union likewise reveals his professional desire to see psychiatric care in Australia on a par with what he believed he had witnessed in the USSR.

The role of pre-existing personal concerns in determining travellers’ experiences of the USSR becomes similarly apparent on the pages of *Political Tourists*. For example, Jeff Sparrow emphasises the entwinement of politics and personal feelings in lovers Guido Baracchi and Betty Roland’s interaction with Soviet society. John McNair offers a long perspective on the travel experiences of the notorious Katharine Susannah Prichard. With the suicide of her husband Hugo Throssell, he says, Prichard turned to the cause of international communism as source of meaning and succour. Not surprisingly, this vicarious engagement impossibly compromised her reportage of the ideology’s principal champion. Previous accounts have overlooked or discounted such concerns, often for the sake of contemporary political point scoring.

In sum, *Political Tourists* represents a successful challenge to the shibboleths central to the phenomenon of the ‘political pilgrim’. In doing so, its contributors approach old controversies in a fresh, nuanced fashion. More importantly, they make it difficult for future studies to rehash the same tired formulae when examining the experiences of those who, foolishly or otherwise, glimpsed the future in the USSR.

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The Secret War: A True History of Queensland’s Native Police, by Jonathan Richards, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2008, 308 pp., \$39.95 (paperback), ISBN 9780702236396

Before 1859, while Queensland was still part of New South Wales, the Native Police operated out of the Australia’s first colony. In 1975, L.E. Skinner published *Police of the Pastoral Frontier: Native Police, 1849-59*, which has long been the primary account of these early years. In 1990, Bill Rosser published *Up Rode the Troopers: The Black Police in Queensland*. Others have written lesser accounts, weaving the horrors of the Native Police through histories of the Queensland frontier. *The Secret War* provides another important