

BOEKBESPREKINGS/ BOOK REVIEWS

E. KANDYBA-FOXCROFT. *Russia and the Anglo-Boer War 1899—1902*.
CUM Books: Roodepoort, 1981. 407 pp. R19,95 (exclusive).
ISBN 0 86984 212 9.

The Anglo-Boer War has lately aroused a great deal of interest in South Africa as well as in Europe and the United States of America. Several studies have accordingly been published on the participation or role of these foreign powers in the military struggle between Britain and the Boer republics. Documentation on Russia and this war is, however, inaccessible to most historians because of the language barrier. This accounts for the fact that previous to Mrs Foxcroft's study no work — particularly based on Russian sources — has been published in English on Russia's attitude and conduct during the Anglo-Boer War.

Born in Russia, the author left there in 1920 as a child. In 1946 she obtained an M.A. degree in Modern Languages, and soon after the Second World War emigrated with her family to South Africa. Her background and superb knowledge of the Russian language have enabled her to undertake a subject of this kind, but it was also her interest in the Anglo-Boer War which urged her to begin research on the Russian attitude to it. Since 1962 she has visited Russia five times to collect material for her study.

Russia's foreign policy and relations with other powers are discussed in the first chapter. Her fear of and antagonism to Britain, in the form of the British Empire, dictated Russian foreign policy in the late nineteenth century. Internal difficulties such as a looming revolution, and strikes which the Tsarist government had to cope with on the eve of and during the Boer struggle for independence, form the subject-matter of Chapter 2.

In the next chapter public opinion in Russia on the Anglo-Boer War is analysed. With few exceptions, all Russians blamed the British government for forcing a war on the Boer republics. On the other hand the majority of Russians had identified the Boer cause with their own; there was great admiration for Boer courage, defiance, and skill, and the determination to defend their independence against the mighty British Lion. Tsar Nicholas II himself was very favourably disposed to the Boers, although admittedly much of his liking for them was affected by his dislike for Britain, which he hoped to see defeated.

A large section of the Russian public agreed that the causes and events leading to the war (Chapter 4) lay in the presence of gold and diamonds in South Africa. The Uitlander question also gave Britain the opportunity of interfering in the internal affairs of the Transvaal, and she used it under the pretext of protecting the interests of her subjects. Most Russians therefore hoped that the European powers, including their own government, would mediate as soon as possible with the object of concluding peace and giving the Boers their freedom and independence.

At diplomatic level the Tsarist government made several attempts to achieve peace (Chapter 5). Russia, however, was not in a position to declare war on Britain or to act singlehanded, and a policy of neutrality and compromise had therefore to be adopted. In spite of Russia's initiative in organising a collective intervention in February 1900 and again in 1901 the other powers such as Germany and France were unwilling to intervene, while Britain declined any offer of mediation.

Diplomatic relations between Russia and the South African republics (Chapter 6) were friendly; correspondence were exchanged on a variety of subjects and a deputation of the Transvaal government visited St Petersburg in August 1900. (Incidentally the account of Russia's offer of medical aid to the Boers is not quite appropriate in this chapter and should have been dealt with in Chapter 11).

Chapter 7 deals with Russian comments and impressions about wartime London, and consists mainly of press reports and despatches by Colonel Ermolov, Russia's military attaché in the British capital. The next two chapters give a Russian view of the British Army (Chapter 8) and the Boer Army (Chapter 9). The first part of Chapter 8 deals with general evaluations and comments about the British Army; the second specifically with the opinions and experiences of Lt. Col. M.A. Stakhovich, Russian military attaché to the British forces in South Africa. His views and deductions are not as accurate as those of Lt. Col. Romeiko-Gurko, his compeer with the Boer forces. Although Stakhovich lived in luxury and was much entertained by the British, he was almost a prisoner and not allowed to witness any military engagements when these were not in Britain's favour. Gurko, on the other hand, could come and go as he wished and was told whatever news there was.

Military operations in South Africa are discussed briefly in Chapter 10; this comprises *inter alia* a description of some of the major battles, the concentration camps, the system of blockhouses, and the British "drives" (as they are called) on the Boer commandos.

Russia's share in medical aid to the Boers is assessed in Chapter 11. In January 1900 a fully-equipped Red Cross ambulance corps, as well as supplies of surgical instruments mainly subsidised by the Russian government, was despatched to the Boer forces. At almost the same time another medical detachment, the Russo-Dutch ambulance corps, was sent to South Africa. It had been equipped entirely by private Russian funds. Both detachments established hospitals and did some very useful work, nursing the sick and wounded Boers.

Among the Russians who came to South Africa to join the volunteers fighting on the Boer side were professional men, advocates, teachers, and even a woman (a medical doctor) who, disguised as a man, fought alongside the Boers. In the last chapter the reminiscences of four Russian volunteers provide informative reading-matter.

For her contribution in bringing new historical perspectives to the Anglo-Boer War, Mrs Foxcroft deserves the thanks of anyone keenly interested in this stirring episode in South African history. The thorough way in which she has scrutinised documents hitherto closed to most researchers, and the objective presentation of her facts, are also highly commendable.

Included in the publication are some 30 photographs and illustrations of historical figures and of Russian gifts to the Boers; eighteen interesting and elucidatory appendices, some with facsimiles of relevant documents, supplement the text. The bibliography is extensive and the index useful. A Russian map of the theatre of war, published in 1900 (but unfortunately not mentioned in the table of contents), appears on the fly-leaf at the end of the book.

The typography is excellent and only a few printer's errors occur, e.g. *wee* (p. 40); *calculatig* (p. 58); *possibe* (p. 85); *Benckendorf* (p. 95); *Lamsdorf* (p. 98); *Campbell Bannerman* (p. 112); *Commander in Chief* (pp. 145–146, 179 and 227); *miltiary* (p. 158); *Anglo-Board War* (p. 164).

This well-written work is indeed a welcome addition to the literature on the Anglo-Boer War and can be recommended unreservedly.

C. C. ELOFF
Human Sciences Research Council