

THE HALCYON

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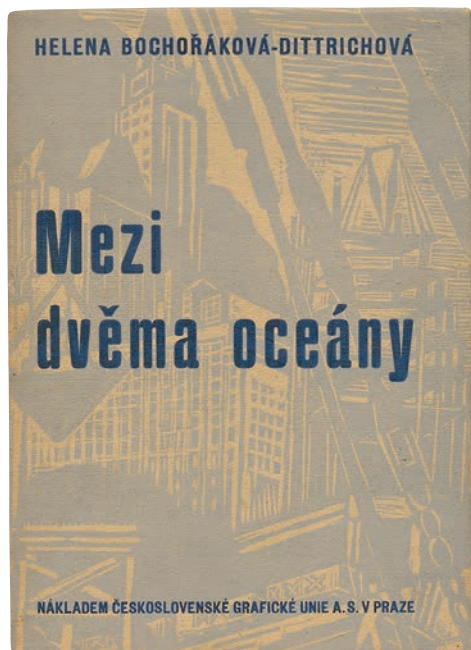
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1929), which focuses on the day-to-day life of a middle-class girl from childhood into adulthood through a sequence of woodcuts.² After completing her studies, Bochořáková-Dittrichová and her husband travelled widely across Europe, to the United States, the Soviet Union, and Asia Minor. Two of their journeys resulted in the publication of travelogues, the following of which were purchased to complement the Fisher Library's holdings on women and travel: *Mezi dvěma oceány: dojmy z cesty po Spojených Státech Amerických* ('Between Two Oceans: Impressions from a Trip to the United States of America,' Prague, 1936), and *Dojmy z SSSR*, in two editions.

The Bochořáks travelled to the United States in 1930–1931. They visited New York, Washington, Boston, and Chicago, and then journeyed across the Rocky Mountains to Utah, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. Helena was struck by the dazzling vertiginous skyscrapers of New York City, describing the vibrant hub of capitalism from up high: 'A modern fairy tale, the city of dollars lies deep, deep below me. I am hypnotized by its beauty, I cannot tear my eyes away, I want to see more and more, I lean over the railing of the roof. An endless sea of houses, a sea of concrete and iron as far as the eye can see.'³ Three years later, the couple went to the Soviet Union as part of a study tour for Brno teachers organized by the Czechoslovak Teachers' Organization. They visited major cities in the Russian SFSR and Ukrainian SSR, including Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Moscow, Kharkiv, and Kyiv, and got to see agricultural and industrial initiatives rising from the first Five-Year Plan, such as a *kolkhoz*, or collective farm, a metallurgical plant, and the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station in Ukraine. Their itinerary was standard for the time and encompassed visits to government and social institutions, factories, new buildings, and former churches and monasteries turned into museums of atheism. Tour guides from Intourist (a Soviet state-operated travel agency) closely supervised these visits and ensured that local officials enumerated production statistics and touted the benefits of collective work to their foreign guests. Bochořáková-Dittrichová recorded these facts and described the places they visited in *Dojmy z SSSR*. Her impressions in this book are not ideological, neither supportive of, nor opposed to, the Soviet

Reading Between the Lines: The First Five-Year Plan in Soviet Ukraine

In his political report to the Central Committee at the sixteenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party in 1929, Stalin outlined that the chief elements of the socialist offensive were to increase the rate of industrialization and the development of state and collective farms, to eliminate capitalist elements in town and country, and to mobilize the masses around socialist construction.¹ The policy of rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture during Stalin's first Five-Year Plan from 1928 to 1932 is well documented in the holdings of the Robert S. Kenny Collection at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, with writings by and about Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin as well as works by American and British Marxists and other leftists, some of which include first-hand travel accounts to the Soviet Union during this period. Recently, we have acquired additional material associated with the first Five-Year Plan, with a focus on its implementation in Ukraine. The new acquisitions include a foreign visitor's observations of the results of the plan and publications from the perspective of its implementation, a run of a journal published by the Workers' and

Peasants' Inspectorate (RSI, or Robsel), belletristic-proletarian publications extolling social reforms, and two books for children introducing them to Soviet economic policy.

The travel account *Dojmy z SSSR* ('Impressions from the USSR,' Brno, 1934) by Helena Bochořáková-Dittrichová (1894–1980) includes her impressionistic observations and expressionistic woodcuts describing and illustrating a visit to the Soviet Union in 1934. Helena was born to a middle-class family in Vyškov, Moravia (then a part of Austria-Hungary) and grew up in Haná and Brno. In Brno, she met and married Vladimír Bochořák (1887–1973), a high-school teacher. From 1919 to 1922, Bochořáková-Dittrichová studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague where she graduated with a specialization in graphic arts (the first woman graduate of the Academy). In 1923, she received a scholarship to study printmaking in Paris. There, she encountered and became influenced by the wordless novels (or woodcut novels) pioneered by the Belgian graphic artist Frans Masereel (1889–1972). This discovery led to the publication of *Z mého dětství* ('From My Childhood,' Prague,

regime. She wrote down and drew what she heard and saw. Yet, in the manner that she collated her observations and conversations, she created sharp contrasts of the social conditions in the Soviet Union, conveying how collectivization and industrialization were replacing nature and displacing historical populations.

For example, Bochořáková-Dittrichová described her visit to the constructivist concrete-and-glass Derzhprom (the State Industry Building), built in Kharkiv between 1926 and 1928. Reminiscent of her time in New York City, she took the elevator to the roof of what was then the first modern skyscraper in the Soviet Union and the largest government building complex in Europe to take in the view of the whole city (Kharkiv served as capital of the Ukrainian SSR from 1919 to 1934). She saw from there 'its factories, parks, and new workers' colonies' as well as its 100,000-seat stadium.⁴ Later, while driving around the city and into the countryside, she noticed factory upon factory producing bicycles, threshers, and tractors. She reflected on the expanding city and how 'the new Russian spirit is conquering ever larger areas of the wild steppe. And the steppe is slipping away and away somewhere far away.'⁵

To help celebrate the ever-expanding factories and industrial complexes as observed by Bochořáková-Dittrichová, and the machinery to run them, Soviet writers and artists turned to delivering ideological messages through typographically engaging children's books. One such book is *Сітки, цвяхи, ланцюги* ('Mesh, Nails, Chains') published in Kyiv in 1932. The rhymed text is by Mariia Kudelia (1911–193?), a Ukrainian poet who worked in a knitting factory and composed verse on themes such as highways, tractor drivers, and iron ore, and is supplemented with illustrations by the graphic artist Boris Kriukow (1895–1967). The book presents young readers with textual praises of factory labour and bright illustrations of machinery and tools needed for industry: 'in the first 5-year plan we are building hundreds of new factories and plants and mines and ports. ... We are providing new machines: threshers, tractors, and combines. We need them in every branch of the

economy. ... Wherever you go, wherever you look, you will see them everywhere, they are there: mesh, nails, chains.'⁶

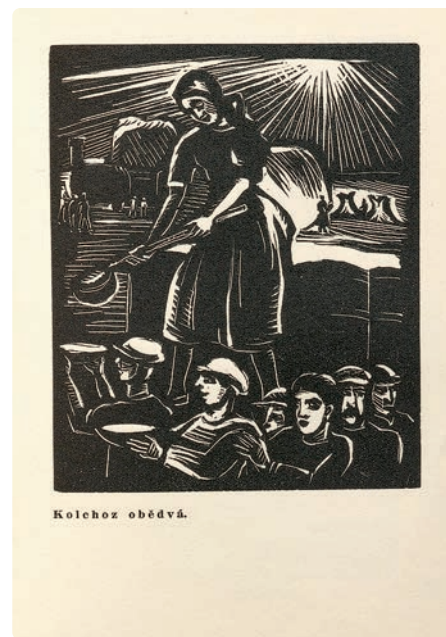
Following a tour of one such factory, Bochořáková-Dittrichová visited a collective farm, established in 1931 in the village Hostomel, just northwest of Kyiv (a director of Intourist prevented an earlier outing to visit a collective farm at Rohan, near Kharkiv), a visit detailed in *Dojmy z SSSR*. On the way there, she observed dilapidated churches and crumbling wooden crosses, sites neglected after the



expulsion of their clergy during the first year of the Five-Year Plan. The guide, the farm's accountant, rattled off statistics about the workforce, the farm buildings and fields, and crop yields, indicating, without mention of the two previous years' great famine, that their harvest would be twenty-five percent better this year. When asked how the profit is shared among the workers, the accountant replied, 'Whoever does not work, let him not eat.'⁷ Later, when Bochořáková-Dittrichová entered one of the cottages that were a part of the collective, a Ukrainian peasant woman said that she and other villagers no longer used their traditional tiled clay stoves to bake bread. She explained to her guests that 'The ban came, we stopped,' and now they had to travel to Kyiv with bread

tickets to buy their rations.⁸ The Kolkhoz lunch now consisted of a communally distributed cabbage soup ladled out to each worker.

The RSI, the auditing and industrial management body of Soviet Ukraine, published the journal *Під контроль мас* ('Under the Control of the Masses') in Kharkiv from 1930 to 1931. This body supervised the production and procurement of grain that would result in the *Holodomor*, or famine of 1932–1933, when Soviet authorities forcibly removed grain and foodstuffs



from farmers in Ukraine, many of whom had resisted collectivization. An issue from 1931 features on its cover a photograph of farm workers loading sacks of grain, most probably for transport to Russia in the north and east. The first page carries a stark reminder from the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party that party and procurement organizations 'must firmly understand that only that grain can be considered procured that is not stuck in the so-called deep points, but has been transported to station points, grain elevators, and mills.'⁹

To help further visualize the grain procurement and transportation process coordinated by the RSI, we can turn to the pages of another children's book, *Пятилетка* ('Five-Year Plan'), by Boris



Sergeevich Evgen'ev (1903–1984) published in Kyiv in 1930. He narrates to the pioneer generation about the changes taking place in their country and how the workers, their fathers and mothers, are building new roads and railways, which in five years will run 'through forests and mountains, past cities and villages' and will transport 'various goods from the city to the village and grain from the village to the city.'¹⁰ The colourful and inventive artwork by Leonid Emilievich Gamburger (1899–1984) depicts seeders, tractors, mowers, and grain depots for growing, harvesting, and storing grain, with one illustration showing machinery arriving to Ukrainian villages and grain-box cars moving from the village to the city.

Grain was not the only natural asset of the Ukrainian SSR. The republic accounted for more than half of all coal, cast iron, and iron ore production, and about half of steel output in the All-Union economy. To drive production and strengthen military-industrial potential, the state needed power. In *Dojmy z SSSR*,



Bochořáková-Dittrichová describes a subsequent visit to DniproHES (the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station), 'a modern fairy tale of human ingenuity' which, similarly to Derzhprom in Kharkiv, workers constructed quickly in the period from 1927 to 1932 (it became the largest operating hydroelectric power station in Europe).¹¹ Upon completion the station supplied power to large agricultural and industrial complexes on both sides of the Dnieper River and the cities that rose out of the steppe to support them. The floods that came with the dams erased the presence of a German settlement from the time of Catherine II, 'the waves of the river have covered it.'¹² Bochořáková-Dittrichová narrates how traces of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, for whom the rapids served as protection and the river islands as their fortified camps during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, are past, and 'soon will almost belong to the realm of myth. The Russian presence obliterates the last trace of them.'¹³

The natural steppe, historical peoples, and the religious and rural way of life in Ukraine were not the only things lost under Russian rule and presence. Even the great industrial monuments of socialist construction erected during the first Five-Year Plan, ones which Bochořáková-Dittrichová described, are gone or in ruins. Retreating Soviet forces blew up DniproHES in 1941. More recently, Russian forces destroyed the Azovstal Iron and Steel Works in Mariupol through heavy shelling, and severely damaged Derzhprom following a missile strike. The recent acquisitions described above offer a historical prism for how to consider the past (and present) battle for Ukraine's resources and how that story gets told.

Ksenya Kiebusinski
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East European Resource Centre

ENDNOTES

- 1 Joseph Stalin. *Political Report to the Sixteenth Party Congress of the Russian Communist Party* (London: Modern Books, 1930), 94–95.
- 2 The E. J. Pratt Library at Victoria University holds a copy of this book (call number: VICRARE 000960).
- 3 Helena Bochořáková-Dittrichová. *Mezi dvěma oceány* (Prague: Nákladem Československé grafické Unie, 1936), 20.
- 4 Bochořáková-Dittrichová. *Dojmy z SSSR* (Brno: Exod, 1934), 96.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 6 M. Kudelia. *Sitky, tsviakhy, lantsiuhy* (Kyiv: Bil'shovyk, 1932), 7.
- 7 *Dojmy z SSSR*, 122.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 9 *Pid kontroliu mas* (Kharkiv: Komisiia) no. 13–14 (July 1931), 1.
- 10 Boris Evgen'ev, *Piatiletka* (Kiev: "Kul'tura," 1930), 13.
- 11 *Dojmy z SSSR*, 129.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 128.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 136.