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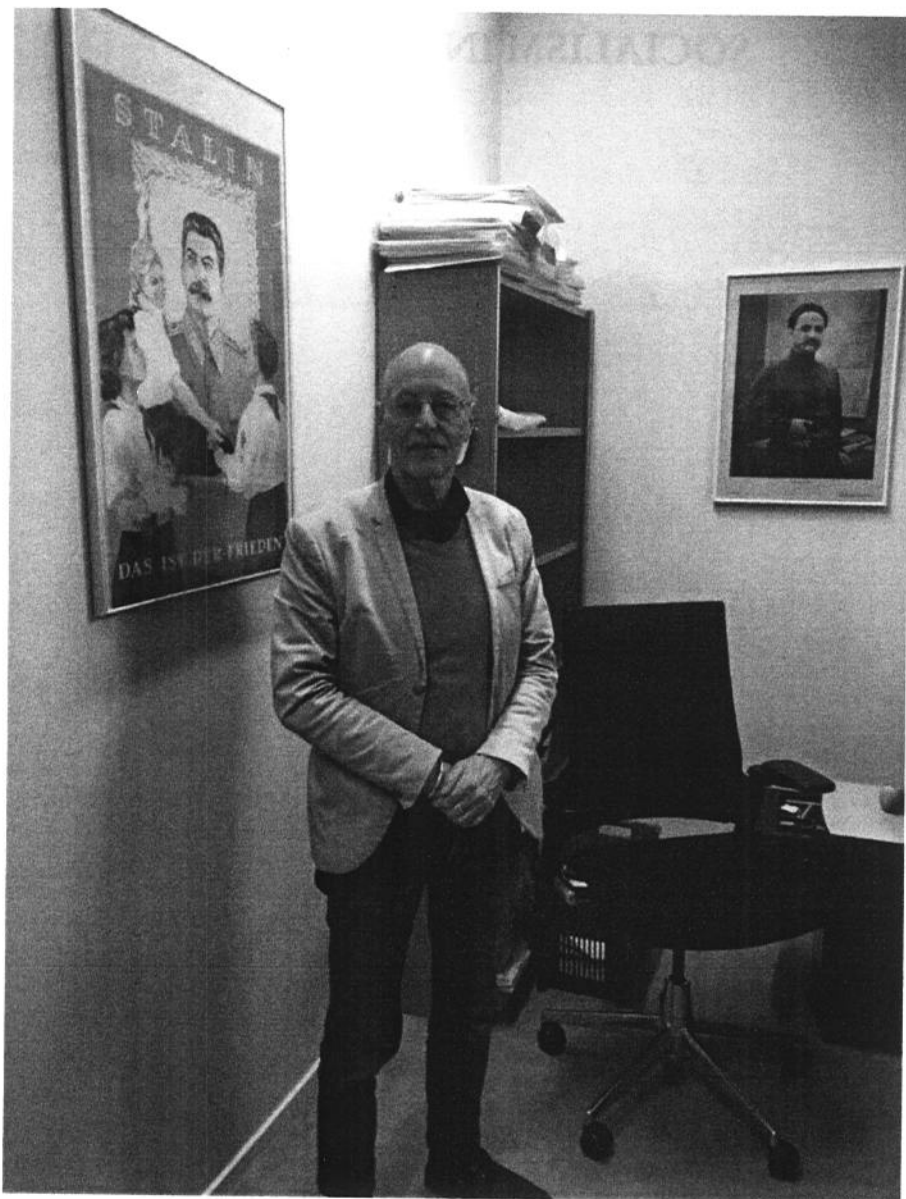
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SOCIALISM IN ONE ROOM

STUDIES IN HONOR OF ERIK VAN REE

Edited by Amieke Bouma and Michael Kemper

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INTRODUCTION: REEVALUATIONS

Michael Kemper & Amieke Bouma

Erik van Ree is the most independent scholar one can imagine, and at the same time the most disciplined one. Combining vast erudition and a sharp intellect with personal modesty and a great sense of humor, Erik harbors a permanent rebellion against formal authority and bureaucratic procedures. While being an arm chair scholar by natural inclination, Erik is also an enthusiastic traveler to shrines and cities around the world, and has constantly been publishing in the best global journals long before internationalization gained a firm grip on Dutch historical scholarship.

The title of the present Festschrift, *Socialism in One Room*, is of course a reference to Stalin's slogan of building a "Socialism in One Country", and reflects the centrality of Stalin and socialist ideology in Erik's life and work. But *Socialism in One Room* also captures the fact that Erik's scholarly production site – a modest office in our European Studies department, practically in the Faculty's attic – is a unit that is as independent and self-reliant as Stalin's "one-country socialism" was meant to be.

In the 1930s, the slogan of "Socialism in One Country" implied a recognition that the October Revolution had failed to spark a world revolution; global communism was shelved for later. World revolution is the theme of Erik's most popular and voluminous Dutch book, *Wereldrevolutie*, in which he discusses various world revolution plans of the 20th century;¹ and for many years Erik offered a course on world revolution for students of European Studies and History.

Also in Erik's own political life we find a "great retreat" from revolutionary fervor – in particular, from the Maoism of his youth. This is of course where any comparison stops. In Erik, the dogmatic revolutionary pathos of his 1970s made place for sincere skepticism: his vocation became the critical study of revolutionary

¹ *Wereldrevolutie. De communistische beweging van Marx tot Kim Jong Il* (Amsterdam, Antwerpen: Mets & Schilt, Standaard Uitgeverij, 2005).

The publication of this volume was supported by the Amsterdam School of Regional, Transnational and European Studies (Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam)



philosophies, and the quest to explore the intellectual edifices that revolutionaries established to defend their great ambitions and their miserable actions. This scholarly agenda is most manifest in Erik's *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* of 2002, in which he examines Stalin's writings and places them in relation to the various traditions of Marxism.² Few scholars in the world can claim a similar familiarity with the turns and manipulations of Bolshevik ideologists.

Socialism in One Room is equally alluding to Erik's work on political utopias "in isolation" – that is, revolutionary projects imagined as being limited to one country, city, or island. The distinct "national" and even "nationalist" aspects of social democracy and Bolshevism have been a constant line of inquiry in Erik's work. This is already clear from his doctoral dissertation, *Socialism in One Zone*, in which he analyzed Stalin's plans for (North) Korea after the Second World War.³ Erik published this book in December 1989 – exactly the days when the Soviet satellite regimes in Central and Eastern Europe fell apart, including the former "Eastern Zone" of Germany, the GDR. The culmination of Erik's scholarship on "socialist zones" came more than a quarter of a century later with his *Boundaries of Utopia: Imagining Communism from Plato to Stalin*.⁴ Here the audacity lies in Erik's rejection of the common notion that Stalin's "Socialism in One Country" was the historical *exception*, and that the theory of the world revolution was the rule. As Erik argues, there is much evidence for the assumption that it was the other way around: already in antiquity and the early modern era, and even more so in French, German and Russian socialist circles, utopian projects were mostly designed with the expectation that the nascent paradise on Earth must first develop in isolation, and must shield itself against an inimical encirclement, before it will eventually expand to other countries.

² *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin. A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

³ *Socialism in One Zone. Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1989).

⁴ *Boundaries of Utopia: Imagining Communism from Plato to Stalin* (Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series; No. 63) (London/New York: Routledge, 2015).

Erik van Ree's retirement in 2019 allowed him to fully concentrate on research and writing. At present he is preparing a book about revolutionary vanguards (including jihadist leaders) where he puts emphasis on the role of authority, rituals and emotions.

The wide spectrum of Erik van Ree's academic interests is reflected in the list of his publications that we offer at the end of the present volume. This list also includes some of his journalistic work – publications in the Dutch press in which he presented his standpoints on controversial topics such as drugs policies, Islam, and religious violence.

About this volume

Most but not all contributors to this book are Erik van Ree's colleagues who have worked with him for many years. While the chapters guide the reader into various topics, times, and countries, there is a clear focus on Soviet and post-Soviet history, with many of us taking direct inspiration from Erik's work.

Our collection of essays starts with a contribution by **Ronald G. Suny**, who introduces us to Erik van Ree's major works on Stalin and Stalinism. Do we have to understand the Stalinist system as a continuation of traditional Russian autocracy or, to the contrary, as a product and culmination of the Western Enlightenment tradition? Erik clearly favored the second opinion, and so does Ron Suny. But while Erik has been emphasizing the power of the Marxist ideological framework in which Lenin and Stalin operated, and their attempts to erect a coherent ideological edifice, Ron Suny accentuates the contradictions in the statements of the leading Bolsheviks, their confusion and wavering as well as their frequent changes of positions – in particular on issues like the world revolution and the feasibility of building socialism in only one besieged country. Suny raises the important question whether twentieth-century totalitarianism in the USSR was the logical and inevitable result (and thereby the end) of socialist ideology, or just one of its possible manifestations – leaving room for many others: "The aspirations

to end autocracy, capitalist exploitation, and imperialism in Marxism remain relevant, and perhaps still utopian, in our own times.”

Other contributions to this *Festschrift* equally focus on Lenin and Stalin but as images, both in their own times and today. Ewa Stańczyk introduces us to cartoons featuring Stalin in *Mucha*, a satirical magazine from interbellum Poland. The sarcastic cartoons in *Mucha* characterize Stalin as particularly brutal, even when compared to Hitler and Mussolini. The dominating theme is Stalin’s violence against Old Bolsheviks and against the leadership of the Red Army; these cartoons reflect the belief that Stalin was so busy with killing comrades that the USSR did not present an imminent threat to Poland. This would of course be proven wrong in September 1939, when Stalin occupied Poland’s eastern parts, in line with the arrangements he had made with Hitler.

Sudha Rajagopalan takes us to contemporary India, where Communist parties still have strong constituencies in some states. In 2018 a right-wing mob tore down a Lenin statue in the state of Tripura. This act of criminal vandalism triggered a public dispute about Lenin’s role for India’s anti-colonial movement of the 1930s. As Sudha Rajagopalan demonstrates, Lenin’s cooptation by India’s left completely de-coupled him from the atrocities of Soviet communism. By contrast, the current ethno-national right-wing government in New Delhi demonizes everything that smells of “foreign influence” – including Lenin.

The iconicity of Lenin is also paramount in Christian Noack’s contribution, which investigates the establishment of the Soviet system of sanatoria in the Crimea and on the Black Sea coast. Christian Noack demonstrates how two of Lenin’s decrees on spas – issued in 1919 and 1920, respectively – were celebrated in Soviet historiography as another proof of Lenin’s ingenious mind – all the while the contents of these decrees were anything but revolutionary. Like Ewa Stańczyk, Christian Noack uses cartoons from the Interbellum to capture the spirit of the early post-Tsarist sanatorium.

One chapter takes us on a musical journey. Sara Crombach explores the relationship between Stalin and the Russian composer Shostakovich, highlighting

the many ways in which Shostakovich’s work was shaped by its Stalinist context. The composer was suffering from Stalin’s whims: he was branded a ‘petty bourgeois’ in 1936, and was denounced as ‘antidemocratic’ and ‘formalistic’ a decade later. Yet in both instances Stalin also ended up rehabilitating and even praising the musician; obviously, Shostakovich provided the USSR with huge cultural capital. Sara Crombach takes inspiration from Erik van Ree’s *De mensenhater*, in which the human god is presented as a despot; in her interpretation, Stalin and Shostakovich were bound in a symbiotic relationship with Stalin as a flawed god, and Shostakovich as “a prophet who struggles with the impossible task of both serving this god while not renouncing his own faith at the same time”. Via an electronic link the reader is invited to listen to Shostakovich’s compositions from the various periods of that devilish symbiosis; some of the respective recordings were performed by Sara Crombach herself.

László Marács looks at the history of sports under socialism, tracing the remarkable successes of Soviet fencing from the 1950s onwards. As he demonstrates, Soviet interest in fencing reflected the political climate of the Cold War era. In the early Soviet Union fencing had been regarded as a ‘bourgeois sport’ and received little attention, but this changed in the 1950s when the USSR prioritized the acquisition of Olympic medals. In order to improve their fencing the Soviets demanded support from their satellite state Hungary, a country with a long tradition in fencing. In late 1951, a delegation of Hungarian fencers was brought to Moscow to prepare Soviet fencers for the 1952 Olympic games. Building on this exchange, the Soviets would bring their fencing team to considerable successes, and by the late 1960 they took over from Hungary as the leading country in this Olympic discipline.

The 1970s are of particular interest to Artemy Kalinovsky. The period of “developed socialism” was a time of relative high standards of living that created increasingly more expectations among the population, to which the state responded with ever more promises. Against the stereotype of “stagnation” Kalinovsky argues that the USSR created a new “politics of utopia”, one where the

utopia was not in the indefinite future but in the here and now. Artemy Kalinovsky draws our attention to the many Soviet institutes that were established all over the USSR to monitor income and equality development, and he also investigates the changing policies of city building and housing. Here Kalinovsky's case studies come from the USSR's Central Asian republics.

Two of our contributions deal with the history of Islam in the Russian part of the USSR. **Alfrid K. Bustanov** introduces us to Muslim ego-documents and other writings from the time of Stalin's terror. Based on Tatar-language manuscripts from private archives, Bustanov shows how the state violence against Muslims and Islam prompted the production not only of denunciations but also of apocalyptic texts. The retrieval of Tatar Islamic texts from the Stalin era allows us to pose new questions about continuity and change from the late imperial to the Soviet periods, and to challenge the widespread assumption that with the Great Terror, the Islamic text production had come to a complete end.

Michael Kemper discusses how the power of religion re-appeared on the Soviet radar in the late 1970s and 1980s. His chapter focuses on the very first Soviet dictionary of Islam – which happens to be a booklet in the Tatar language that first appeared in 1978. Back then the booklet was presented as an aide to atheist propagandists, a tool for denouncing Islam. Kemper argues that most of the entries of this booklet were simply factual; the clearly atheist elements were prominent, but a user would not find it difficult to simply ignore them. The booklet obtained a second life in 1993, when it was republished without the openly atheist elements and easily turned into a “religious” guide book.

Three of our contributions leave the Soviet context but remain in the field of ideological and academic constructs. **Bruno Naarden** brings us into the late 18th century, and in particular to one of Catherine the Great's fantastic projects – that of a dictionary of all languages. The Tsarina started to compile a glossary that was supposed to present 300 words in more than 300 different languages. This project was the first in this scope and ambition. In private letters the Tsarina confessed that this work was to meant to distract her from grieving over her deceased lover

Alexander Lanskoj (1784), but as Bruno Naarden shows, this work also reflected Catherine II's long-standing interest in historic linguistics as well as her political ambitions. While interest in science fitted Catherine's image as an enlightened ruler, she also seems to have harbored hope that the project would enlarge Russian international and imperial grandeur by offering evidence for the idea that Russian was the primordial language that linguists were looking for at the time. As Bruno Naarden observes, “half a century earlier, the project could not have taken place for lack of data. Yet half a century later, linguistics would have developed into different directions.”

Marcel Maussen and Meindert Fennema present a chapter about race and slavery in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville. One focus is on Tocqueville's idea that democratic societies will inevitably replace the aristocratic order (a concept that would later be pushed further by Marx and Engels), and his reflections on the incompatibility of slavery and democracy in the United States. Against this background Maussen and Fennema also analyze Tocqueville's practical proposals about how to abolish slavery in the French Caribbean dominions. Not dissimilar to Erik's work on Stalin, Maussen and Fennema explore the “internal logics” of Tocqueville's thought, and the limitations in his discourse.

David Hollanders offers a critical analysis of the European Central Bank and its austerity policies during the banking crisis. Hollanders employs historical metaphors: he compares the ECB to a feudal lord, and argues that national banks and nation states function as monetary and political vassals, respectively. Taking the case of Greece as an example, Hollanders discusses how the ECB ultimately forced the Greek citizens to pay off debts accumulated in their name on the ECB's terms – despite the 2015 referendum in which a majority of Greeks voted against the proposed bailout package. This leads Hollanders to conclude that, situated at the end of the chain, citizens of the Eurostates are little more than serfs who lack democratic control over financial policy, but who are held responsible for debts accumulated in their names.

In our final section, three long-standing colleagues of Erik van Ree reflect upon the intellectual environment in which he has been working. **Marc C. Jansen** does this by introducing us into the history of the Russia (Eastern Europe) Institute, a unit at the University of Amsterdam that existed from 1948 until 2001 when its co-workers were transferred to the European Studies department (to form our Eastern European Studies chair group). This Russia Institute was established with the goal of collecting information about the Cold War enemy – and this is what it did, clipping, collecting, and digesting newspaper articles from the Soviet Union. But was it a “Cold War institute” that produced valuable strategic information? As Marc Jansen demonstrates, the Institute’s co-workers largely followed their own inclinations, which were mostly of historical and literary nature. Their characters are at the core of Jansen’s essay, with many entertaining episodes.

Ben de Jong gives a personal portrait of Erik van Ree – whom he calls “An Obstructionist of the Highest Caliber”. Here the focus is on Erik’s popular-academic writings and his contributions to Dutch newspapers and journals. Central in these interventions was Erik’s radical defense of civil liberties, often against established assumptions and clichés. Central in this part of Erik’s work has been the defense of free thinking and of atheism against the claims and demands of believers and confessional leaders.

The book closes with **Nanci Adler**’s “Ode to Erik”, as another testimony to Erik van Ree’s generosity.

It is amazing that so many of those who enthusiastically accepted our invitation are now represented in this book; those who did not manage are excused by the circumstances. After all, we came up with the idea of this volume in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, in October 2020; and we finalized it in the midst of the Kremlin’s war in Ukraine, in March 2022. Like in so many cases discussed in our contributions, violence unfolds under the legitimizing cover of ideological constructs, with Putin employing a mixture of historical references and blatant lies to convince the world that Ukraine has no right to exist. The war turned us into

“experts” whose job is to make sense of confusing strategies and sinister designs; but it also reminds us that our duty as historians is to counter any ideological manipulations.