

IISH collections: Russia and Eastern-Europe

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Introduction

In the Russian and Eastern Europe collections at the IISH, Russia and the USSR are dominant. Additional collection development efforts cover most countries in Eastern Europe that became communist after 1945. The former Czechoslovakia and Poland are especially well represented and the Balkans slightly less so. Interest in the Asian part of the former Soviet Union is more recent.

The collections fit the traditional IISH profile: history of socialism and the labour movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. Because the setting in which the social movement emerged in Russia and Eastern Europe was so specific, this collection is distinctive. The agrarian question, for example, receives consideration, as does the role of the intelligentsia and the dissidents, as well as emigration movements and compelling nationalities questions.

The collections may be accessed in various ways. The [archives index](#) contains individual archival descriptions and a list of all archives by country: Bulgaria, (former) Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Soviet Union, (former) Yugoslavia. Books, periodicals, and image and sound materials are retrievable via the [library catalogue](#). In addition, the archives index, library catalogue and other data collections may be consulted via a single [search](#).

Archives

The material in the Russian collections at the IISH comes primarily from the papers of émigrés. First, the archives of the revolutionary populists of the 1870s ([Alexander Herzen](#), [Petr Lavrov](#), [Valerian Smirnov](#)) came into existence during their expatriation. The same holds true for the second category: archives of world-famous anarchists who were born in Russia, such as [Michail Bakunin](#), [Alexander Berkman](#), [Emma Goldman](#), and [Senya Flechine](#).

The third group of materials, which concern social democracy, also comes from émigrés. In addition to [Pavel Aksel'rod](#)'s vast collection of personal papers, there are smaller collections of [Georgij Plechanov](#) and [Aleksandr Potresov](#), who together with Vladimir Lenin, Vera Zasulič, and Julij Martov strove to introduce social democracy in Russia. After the Revolution of 1917 the social democratic movement created new archives on a more modest scale. From the late 1920s onward, material from [Trotsky](#) and his movement increased. Most of these archives reached the Institute well before World War II. After 1945, personal papers of Russian émigrés continued to be acquired, such as those of the anarchist [Ida Lazarevic](#), as well as the major archive of the [Association pour la Conservation des Valeurs Culturelles Russes](#) from Paris.

Even archives emigrate. The archive of the [Socialist-Revolutionary Party PSR](#), by far the largest and most illustrious organization archive in the Russian collection, reached the IISH (presumably via Paris, Prague, and Belgrade) in 1938 and 'survived' the war in Great Britain. The historian Boris Nikolaevskij (1887-1966) helped the IISH acquire many of these archives. He was a collaborator of the Institute from the start in 1935. As an exile, he had previously worked in Berlin as the academic correspondent of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. After a period of stiff competition between this IML and the IISH in the 1930s and strained relations during the Cold War, the IISH and 'Moscow' (the Central Party Archive within the former Institute for Marxism-Leninism was known as the RCChIDNI from 1991 and as the RGASPI from 1999) established an amicable relationship in the early 1990s. As a consequence, the IISH now has microfilm copies from the archive of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDAP) and the editorial archives of the RSDAP newspapers [Iskra](#) and [Social-Demokrat](#), as well as a lot of other materials.

Since the early 1990s the IISH has worked closely with Russian grass-roots initiatives to collect archives and gather documentation. The Institute has obtained copies of the [Memorial](#) and [Vozvraščenie](#) archives, comprising thousands of files filled with memoirs, surveys, literary statements and biographical data about victims of Stalinist terror. Finally, the archive of the [Alexander Herzen Foundation](#) (a Dutch initiative from the 1970s to publish the writings of dissidents in the West) contains a wealth of data from and about the *samizdat* and correspondence with Russian authors.

Library and Documentation Collections

Of course the IISH library contains dissertations, monographs, and journalistic impressions of the social history of Russia and Eastern Europe. In addition to archives, publications of the social movement itself, such as periodicals and leaflets, are available for research on this subject. This material - especially from Russia - is abundant and may be retrieved through different types of searches in the IISH library catalogue.

The scope of the library collections extends considerably beyond the boundaries of social history. This is thanks to the inclusion of several specialized libraries and subject-based collections of books, leaflets, pamphlets, and periodicals, such as the following:

- the Lavrov-Goc library was the PSR party library and contains approximately 10,000 titles, including Marx's Russian books with his personal remarks. This collection was once intended as a reference library for émigrés.
- the library of the [Bund](#), the Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeiterbund in Lite Polyn un Rusland, a collection comprising 20,000 leaflets and pamphlets, was acquired by the Institute in 1934, before it was officially established

- the library of the Russian social democrat [Boris Sapir](#) (1902-1989), who led a turbulent life of exile and emigration. He became the head of the IISH Eastern Europe desk in 1936 and remained affiliated with the Institute for many years after the second world war. His library comprises hundreds of titles on socialist history, humanities and the arts
- the [MNOB collection](#) contains newspapers, newsletters, and bulletins from movements ranging from leftist extremists to the ultra right wing, the women's and environmental movements and the like, from the Gorbachev era to the present; a vast collection of documentation materials is included as well
- the Szyszko and Solidarność collections together comprise most important documents published by the Polish free labour and opposition movements between 1970 and 1990
- the collection of the Czech social democrat [Karel Škrábek](#) (1919-2002), whose archive has been entrusted to the IISH as well, consists of 5,000 titles on social democracy, Marxism, the Prague Spring, and other subjects
- the collection of small newssheets and bulletins published during the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, gathered by the Dutch Ambassador Coen Stork, includes a great many local initiatives

Image and Sound

The IISH houses a large collection of [original posters](#) in constructivist and social-realist styles from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Twenty posters designed by local Azerbaijani artists in the 1930s are especially striking. Most depict healthy and happy workers, soldiers and mothers, and a friendly, smiling Stalin.

The '[musical letters](#)' reflect the same style but are from after the war. Musical letters are double picture postcards with a sleeve containing a small record of songs from the classical Soviet repertoire or melodies about world peace. The [Russian Children's Books](#) collection from the 1920s and 30s, illustrated by avant-garde artists, is fascinating. The photographs of the Image and Sound Department originate from archives and collections. Badges and insignia, commemoration tiles and other historical objects have been given the place they deserve in the Image and Sound department. The Image & Sound Department also contains video tapes about the war in former Yugoslavia and Croatian television recordings about Serb campaigns (1991).

Highlights

Here you will find web presentations featured previously that are intended to highlight a special collection, a particular aspect of a collection, or a new

acquisition. Click on this recent example or on one of the other highlights from the list.

[Kropotkin's funeral](#)

The funeral of the famous anarchist Peter Kropotkin in Moscow on 13 February 1921 was attended by many members of the anarchist movement. A dozen photos from our collections.

Other highlights related to Russia and Eastern Europe:

[Portraits of Lenin](#) / [Library collections Batser en Sapir](#) / [Library collection Miklos Kun](#) / [Bund collection](#) / [Communist Manifesto](#) / [Press Now](#) / [Russian refugees in Holland 1914-1918](#) / [Russian independent press \(web guide\)](#) / [Soviet childrens books \(web guide\)](#) / [Soviet education](#) / [Soviet posters](#) / [White Sea Canal](#)

See also [highlights](#) concerning other collections.

Contact

Please contact the Reading Room for general information about collections: ask@iisg.nl. You can submit your questions via www.iisg.nl/enquiries.php.

Gijs Kessler is in charge of the Russian and East European collections. If you would like to have an archive or collection transferred to the IISH, please contact him, gke@iisg.nl.

See [Services](#) for information on consulting the collections.

To support the institute you can join the [Friends of the IISH](#).