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Report of the member of Thesis Council on the thesis

"Louis Fischer and Soviet-American Relations in the First Half of the XX Century."

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Outline

The dissertation presents a concise examination of the life and work of one of the most important journalists who covered Soviet-American relations in the twentieth century. It is based on extensive research. Shvetsov has conducted research in archives (particularly RGASPI), he has read numerous scholarly books and articles, and he has thoroughly examined the published writing of Louis Fischer. Although Shvetsov has not utilized the papers of Louis Fischer in archives in the United States (particularly at Mudd Library in Princeton, New Jersey), the breadth of his research is still impressive.

Specific Comments on Strengths and Limits of the Study


The Introduction mentions the work of many scholars in Russia and abroad. However, it does not develop a sharp critical perspective on the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of previous scholarship about American journalists and Soviet Russia or about American-Soviet relations in general. Several studies that are relevant to the discussion of Western visitors to the USSR and American opinion about Soviet Russia are not mentioned: Lewis S. Feuer, "American Travelers to the Soviet Union, 1917-32: The Formation of a Component of New Deal Ideology," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (Summer 1962), 119-149; Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Some statements in the Introduction seem to be inaccurate or confused. For example, the statement that "The mutual relations between the USSR and the USA in the first half of the XX century were correct" (164) appears to disregard the US intervention in the Russian civil war and the US refusal to have diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1933. Perhaps the problem is with the translation into English. The statement that "There are very few works about the influence of individual persons on Soviet-American relations" (170) seems to disregard the many biographies that have been written about individuals such as William C. Bullitt, George F. Kennan, and Charles Bohlen (though the memoirs of Bullitt and Kennan are cited in notes 455 and 456).

In Chapters 1 to 4, Shvetsov summarizes many developments in the life and work of Louis Fischer. He also expresses his opinions about some issues, but his ideas are not always well grounded or carefully developed. I will offer two examples. Shvetsov's opinion about "the USA desire to control Russian resources" (197) is presented without consideration of Lenin's efforts to induce American capitalists to take concessions in Soviet Russia. The assertion that in the early 1930s "the USA did not want the USSR to be strengthened economically" and Americans believed Soviet development "needed to be hampered" (244) disregards how many American engineers and business leaders actively contributed to the rapid industrialization of the USSR.

The brief conclusion raises some important questions about the formation of images of foreign nations, especially American images of the USSR. Shvetsov's ideas about this could be developed more fully and positioned in relation to some previous scholarly studies, including Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s* (2003) and my own book, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire"* (2007).

In my judgment, the thesis by A.A. Shvetsov meets the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.


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