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Mikhail Ustinov

Mikhail Mikhailovich Ustinov came from a large noble family, as did his first cousin once removed, the famous British actor Sir Peter Ustinov. The future Russian consul in Melbourne was born in Moscow in 1861. His father, an army officer whose military career was cut short by illness, had a long-lasting affair with a Frenchwoman named Marie-Louise Tetevund, who bore him a son, Mikhail, and a daughter, Lidia. When his beloved died, the father married Olga Prezhentsova, the daughter of a landowner from Tula, but he did not neglect his children born out of wedlock; he ensured that they were formally recognised as his, and he and his wife brought them up. In 1876, Mikhail was sent to a naval cadet school in St Petersburg, after which, in 1882, he joined the Baltic customs flotilla. In the mid-1880s, he married Maria Nikolayevna Bolotnikova, who gave him a daughter Maria and a son Platon. In 1890, he retired from the navy and was transferred to the Foreign Ministry,¹ and, in 1893, received his first posting abroad, as vice-consul in Hakodate. After that he served as consul in Nagasaki and Hong Kong, and in 1902 was appointed consul general in Melbourne, where he arrived in May 1903.²

1 'Ustinovy', *Sbornik materialov po istorii roda Stepanovykh XVIII–XXI vv.* mistep-ka.narod.ru/barin-5.htm (accessed 3 April 2018).

2 AVPRI: 184-20-1076, p. 89.

Ustinov's consulship in Australia coincided with the Russo–Japanese war, in which Britain allied itself with Japan, and Australia actively supported the mother country, at least until the defeat of the Russian fleet at Tsushima. This meant that Ustinov's main effort lay in actively countering anti-Russian sentiment in the Australian press and government circles. However, his time in Australia was to be a relatively brief episode in his service career. He returned to St Petersburg in 1906, and in June 1907 was appointed consul general in Lisbon. The following description, by a correspondent of the Russian newspaper *Novoe vremia* [New Time], relates to this period of his life: 'Our Consul General here, Mikhail Ustinov, is a still-youthful man of brilliant education. He speaks and writes English and French just as well as his native Russian. He understands Japanese and even some Chinese, having previously served in Japan and China.'³

From 1913, Ustinov was consul in Montreal, but the summit of career was his posting as Russian consul general in New York, which he received in 1916. He naturally refused to recognise the October revolution or the Soviet regime, but continued to perform his consular duties for almost twelve more years. The US Government financed the work of the Tsarist consuls until the USSR was granted recognition in 1933; they had to see to the affairs of many Russian refugees in America. In July 1929, Ustinov informed the State Department that he was leaving the US for Europe.⁴ He set out for France, where his grandson Adrian then lived. He died on 5 May 1942, in the Belgian town of Waterloo.

3 Quoted in *Novaya zhizn'* (Harbin), 16(29) December 1910, p. 2. (First published in *Novoe vremia*, No. 331, 1910, p. 2.)

4 See *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1933*, Vol. II. The British Commonwealth, Europe, Near East and Africa, Washington, 1949, p. 824.

91. Ustinov to A. Benckendorff, Russian Ambassador in London⁵

Melbourne,
10 December (27 November)⁶ 1904
No. 160

[...] As I have already had the honour to report in dispatch No. 45,⁷ the local press has constantly manifested extreme hostility toward Russia since the outbreak of the war.

The operations of our cruisers in interdicting military contraband, followed by the latest regrettable incident in the North Sea,⁸ have completely obscured any sense of proportion, while the criticisms in the newspapers, were that possible, have become even more venomous, and the foul language viler.

A comparison of the coverage of events as reported by telegraph with reports of the very same events in British and continental newspapers fully confirms the previously expressed opinion that those accounts are being deliberately edited and distorted according to whatever impression they wish to produce in the colonies at any given moment.

Subsequent receipt of more impartial accounts has not changed anything. It is difficult for newspapers which have overstepped the mark to completely repudiate their former judgements, and they apparently never feel the need to do so.

5 Alexander Konstantinovich Benckendorff: Russian Ambassador to London in the years 1902–1916.

6 Ustinov gives only the November date. Indirect evidence indicates that Old Style is meant.

7 Dispatch No. 45 has not been located. Ustinov is referring to the Russo–Japanese War, which began in February 1904. In accordance with the Anglo–Japanese treaty of 1902, Britain in effect supported Japan, and Australia also assumed a pro-Japanese stance, which was reflected in both the Australian press and in statements from political figures. However, with Japan's increasing military success, and especially after the defeat of the Russian fleet at Tsushima in May 1905, the mood of a substantial proportion of the public and of the ruling circles began to change. Traditional nineteenth-century Australian fears concerning the Russian presence in the Pacific were replaced by fear of Japan, whose growing power came to be seen as the main threat to Australian interests there.

8 This refers to the so-called Dogger Bank incident. On the night of 21 October 1904, ships of the Russian fleet en route from the Baltic to the Far East to relieve the siege of Port Arthur fired on British fishing trawlers off the Dogger Bank in the North Sea. Having received intelligence reports of Japanese plans to attack Russian vessels in the Skagerrak and Kattegat straits, in dense fog the fleet commander mistook the fishing boats for enemy vessels. One boat was sunk and five damaged; two British trawlermen were killed and six injured. The incident provoked a heated anti-Russian campaign in the British and colonial press.

One is convinced of this by the fact that the French consul in Melbourne has repeatedly attempted to place extracts from French and even British newspapers which provide more balanced coverage of events,⁹ as well as information on questions raised regarding international law, concerning which, incidentally, they have no clear conception here (it is not part of the university curriculum). Meanwhile the editors have almost always paid no attention to these communications or published only excerpts, on the last pages and in minute print.

The same practice may be observed in Sydney. There a newspaper called the *Courrier australien*, subsidised by the French Government, is published at the French consulate-general. It regularly prints less one-sided selections from European newspapers, and frequent masterful leading articles regarding Russia and the war, but the local press has never borrowed anything from it, although they frequently cite this newspaper about other subjects.

In the absence of news unfavourable to us from the theatre of war, the columns are, as usual, filled with reports of internal uprisings in Russia, about its hopeless situation and, at times, vile insinuations about certain members of the Imperial family. All manner of slander is being poured upon our army and navy – in a word, everything possible is being done in order to discredit Russia.

At present the favourite topic is the cooling of the Franco–Russian alliance, which gives *carte blanche* to British aggressiveness.¹⁰

As usual the Sydney *Bulletin* is quite well, even sympathetically, disposed towards us, but unfortunately, a lone voice is the voice of no one.¹¹

Even before the North Sea incident, the indecent bias of the press had reached such a pitch that Senator Higgs raised a question in the Senate about restraining it, but did not gain any sympathy.

9 The French consul in Melbourne in the years 1901 to 1908 was Paul Maistre.

10 France was Russia's ally in Europe, and during the Russo–Japanese War the French press and public opinion favoured Russia. On an official level, however, while sympathetic to its ally, France declared its neutrality, thus allowing the British press to speak of a weakening of the Franco–Russian alliance.

11 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the *Bulletin* hewed to a nationalist Australian line. While sharing majority fears of the 'yellow peril', during the Russo–Japanese War it tended to favour the Russian side, seeing it as representing 'the white races'.

Mr Higgs requested that a proclamation be published,¹² inviting certain publications to refrain from printing dishonest, unfounded and biased articles, notices or caricatures clearly intended to provoke contempt in Australians for the great Russian nation.

The Government spokesman, Senator Sir Josiah Symon,¹³ replied that he assumed that Senator Higgs, always so protective of the dignity of the Senate and its valuable time, was probably not serious when he made his statement. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-1162, ff 19–21. In Russian.

92. Ustinov to Benckendorff, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
23 (10) December 1904
No. 163

[...] Influenced by the extraordinary and disproportionate agitation gripping the whole of England regarding the incident in the North Sea,¹⁴ several of the local parliaments have decided to express their loyal feelings to the Imperial Government.

The initiative belongs to the New Zealand Parliament, which decided on 12/25th October to express, together with their deep sympathy for the victims, the hope that this tragic happening will prove to be only the consequence of a huge misunderstanding.

The original resolution was formulated somewhat differently; it expressed the conviction that ‘no-one would lament the regrettable incident more than the Tsar and Russia.’ But during the debate the existence of a certain distrust towards us became obvious, as well as a noticeable irritation, so it was deemed more expedient to omit the words cited above completely.

12 Higgs: Senator William Guy Higgs.

13 Sir Josiah Henry Symon was Attorney General in the years 1904–1905.

14 See Document 91.

The forbearance of the New Zealanders is to a considerable degree due to the prudent foresight of their agent in London,¹⁵ who, foreseeing upon the first report of the disaster that the newspapers would not fail to adopt an excessively alarmist course, telegraphed to the Prime Minister, Mr Seddon, that in his personal opinion, the incident, notwithstanding its seriousness, would be settled peacefully.

Three days later the Federal Government followed New Zealand's example, but without its tactful restraint in expressing its sentiments, it proclaimed profound indignation at a 'cruel and wanton attack' upon innocent fishermen by the Russian Navy, and the hope that peace would be preserved through Russia's honest and direct observance of its obligations.¹⁶

This resolution was passed in the House of Representatives with acclamation and without any objections. In the Senate, however, it initially provoked a fairly lengthy debate.

A few sensible men raised their voices against the illogicality and inappropriateness of the wording. It was pointed out that the harsh condemnation, inconsistent with the peaceful declarations desired, was based solely on false and biased reports in the jingoistic British press, which was clearly bent on stirring up hostility towards Russia. The bias of the local press was described as 'villainous', while the disrespect and sharp tone of the wording was wholly ascribed to the hostility provoked in Australians by a group of unscrupulous journalists.

Objecting to these veracious statements, a representative of the Government, Sir Josiah Symon, lost all sense of proportion to such an extent that he unashamedly called the event 'murder', adding that the Tsar's weak apology was an affront not only to him as an individual, but also as a British subject.

I am enclosing a printed account of the session,¹⁷ which clearly shows to what extent jingoistic tendencies have developed here.

15 New Zealand's Agent General in London at the time was William Pember Reeves.

16 The resolution on the Dogger Bank incident was passed in the House of Representatives on 28 October 1904, and a resolution on the same matter was passed in the New Zealand Parliament on 25 October.

17 Enclosure not reproduced here.

Finding it impossible to remain silent over this affair, I addressed a letter on 2nd November, to the Prime Minister of the Federation, Mr Reid, upon whose initiative the resolution was drawn up. I have the honour to present herewith to Your Excellency a copy of that letter,¹⁸ as well as a copy of the Prime Minister's acknowledgement of its receipt from 7th November.¹⁹

I assume that this letter served some purpose, since in a political speech Mr Reid made on 9th November at the Lord Mayor of Melbourne's annual dinner, he alluded only in passing and with much restraint to the unfortunate incident in the North Sea, while other speakers refrained from mentioning it at all.

All the colonies in the Federation, with the exception of South Australia and Victoria, apparently were satisfied with the actions of the Federal Parliament, since their parliaments did not make any independent comment. The two colonies mentioned, however, telegraphed London via their Governors separately: South Australia only communicated sympathy, and Victoria's cable was in the same spirit as the Federal resolution. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-1155, ff 2-3. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

93. Ustinov to G. H. Reid, Prime Minister of Australia

(Annex No. 2 to Dispatch No. 163,
of 10/23 December 1904)
2 November (20 October) 1904
No. 151

[...]

Dear Prime Minister,

The records of the session of Federal Parliament in which the fatal Dogger Bank incident was discussed have just appeared in *Parliamentary Debates*.²⁰

18 See Document 93.

19 Acknowledgement not reproduced here.

20 See Document 91. *Parliamentary Debates*: in full, *Parliamentary Debates. Senate and House of Representatives, Commonwealth of Australia*, first published in 1902.

It is clear from these that Parliament, while expressing its very natural sympathy to the Government of her Britannic Majesty, saw fit to voice indignation at the 'outrage' committed by Russia and its Navy.

That resolution, adopted by the Government of a British dependency at the very moment when the cabinets in St Petersburg and London are seeking to achieve a peaceful and mutually honourable solution, cannot but produce a painful impression, the more so as that resolution is not founded on any official report, but solely on telegrams known to be edited, incomplete and tendentious.

In these circumstances, it seems regrettable that haste has been made to level such a categorical accusation, in terms which will give well-founded offence and are difficult to reconcile with the good relations which have until now always existed between the governments of the Russian Empire and Her Britannic Majesty. [...]

AVPRI 184 (London Embassy) -520-1155, f. 4. Author's copy. In French.

94. Ustinov to Second Department of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

[St Petersburg]

4 June (22 May) 1907²¹

[...] I have the honour to set forth below a review of the work of the consulate entrusted to me for the three-year period commencing May 1903 up to 17th April 1906.

Here it is necessary to point out that as I have no documentary data to hand apart from lists of dues, the information I quote from memory may not be absolutely accurate.

CONSULAR DUES: For the aforementioned period of three years (the last two thirds of 1903, the whole of 1904 and of 1905, and the first third of 1906), the dues in total comprise the sum of 795 roubles,

21 Ustinov left Australia on 15/28 April 1906. This dispatch, in effect a report on his work in Melbourne, was prepared in St Petersburg and addressed to the Second Department of the Foreign Ministry. Dated 22 May (OS) 1907, it was recorded as received by the clerical administration of the Department on 30 May. The dispatch therefore bears no number, and the author cites statistical data from memory, sometimes incorrectly, and with errors in the arithmetic.

32 copecks (in 1903 – 20 roubles, 25 copecks; in 1904 – 390 roubles, 16 copecks; in 1905 – 259 roubles, 62 copecks; and in 1906 – 124 roubles, 74 copecks).²²

The total is made up of the following:

- (1) Dues of all kinds from merchant ships 681 r., 07 c.
- (2) The certification of various documents, signatures and registration of passports 114 r., 25 c.

MERCHANT SHIPPING: The ships coming into port were exclusively Finnish sailing vessels. The crews are mainly natives of Finland, supplemented only when necessary by foreigners. Russian sailors, however, are rarely found on them. The ships come primarily to load grain, which they transport, from year to year, to Great Britain or South Africa. Therefore, their arrival coincides with the cereal harvesting season (approximately from December to May). They do not come at other times. These vessels usually arrive carrying only ballast and, if they do sometimes bring a cargo, it is usually one they have happened to pick up, and not a full one.

During the three-year period under review, the port was visited in all by 20 vessels with a total tonnage of 30,012 register tons. Given the conditions and the small number of vessels, the work of the Consulate is not onerous and amounts to the following: (a) the registration of ship's documents for the 30 vessels mentioned,²³ (b) 145 alterations were made in the records of 16 vessels, (c) assistance was rendered in the capture of several dozen deserters,²⁴ (d) affording consular care to several sick sailors and returning them to their homeland, (e) examining, relieving and placing in hospital a mentally ill skipper, who was later transferred to a ship to be conveyed to his homeland, (f) four declarations were made in order to lodge an extensive sea captain's protest within the stipulated period, and in only one instance were the detailed documents of the protest presented to the local authorities examined and certified.²⁵

22 Ustinov's total is incorrect here. It should read 794 r., 77 c. However, the total by category is indeed 795.32 roubles.

23 Earlier in this paragraph, Ustinov mentions only 20 Finnish ships, not 30.

24 This refers to sailors who deserted Finnish merchant ships flying the Russian flag and were taken on as crew by British merchant vessels, where the pay was much higher.

25 Captain's protest: a statement by the master or shipowner, lodged with the appropriate legal authorities to guarantee the protection of the property rights and interests of the shipowner while at sea or in port.

Besides this, there were several occasions when the Consulate was obliged to look into some commonplace misunderstandings arising from time to time with local port authorities, or between ships' masters and sailors, as well as constantly having to render assistance in seeking accommodation and employment for the latter when they remained on shore in unfortunate circumstances etc.

NOTARIAL SECTION: Negligible. Over the three-year period, the following documents were certified: (a) 30 warrants, all without exception issued by foreigners to commissioning agents in Russia for acquisition rights to patents of inventions, (b) four foreign passports and one Russian one, (c) a marriage certificate and the registration of three children's birth and baptismal certificates for two Russian subjects and (d) one certificate was issued on the basis of article 3.4.

RUSSIAN SUBJECTS AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE CONSULATE: In spite of statistical data indicating that the population of native-born Russians in Australia numbers several thousand,²⁶ there is no Russian colony to be found anywhere. Russians in Australia are mainly Finns and Jews and belong to the working or artisan class. These are people who have left their homeland for good, having broken all ties with it and have either become naturalised or intend to do so. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that they have no need whatsoever of the Consulate and only very rarely do they apply to it.

In the consular register of Russian subjects over the three years, only four people entered their names, and only one of them was a technician with practical training, who had long lived abroad and had come with his family intending to open his own workshop, with very limited capital, but he left Melbourne within six months. The other three were unemployed and in needy circumstances.

As for upper and educated classes, during this same period only six people visited the Consulate. Of these, five were travelling for pleasure, including a wounded officer from Port Arthur and a confidential agent from the

26 According to Australian statistics, there were 3,358 Russian nationals in the country at the time of federation (1901).

War Office sent to purchase a steamship for naval purposes,²⁷ and one native of the Baltic provinces married to an Australian woman and residing in Australia as an expert in the wine-making business.

Therefore, the work of the Consulate with regard to local Russians is almost non-existent.

Over the period under consideration it consists of rendering assistance in finding work for a few people and making enquiries in connection with their personal affairs. The only person to cause the Consulate any significant trouble was the agent sent to purchase a steamer, who was prosecuted in the local courts on a charge of breach of contract.²⁸

TRADE: There are no Russian commercial or industrial enterprises here. Nor have there been any Russian merchants, either local or visiting. There were a few occasions when certain Australian firms made inquiries concerning regulations for the importation of foodstuffs into Vladivostok and about the state of the timber industry in Siberia. There were also several minor enquiries from Russia, none of which, as far as the Consulate is aware, led to any practical result.

INCIDENTAL: During the eighteen months of the war, the Consulate engaged in much unobtrusive work in surveillance over military contraband.²⁹ Having virtually no well-wishers among the local inhabitants and not a single real fellow-countryman, it was necessary to keep a constant close watch on the newspapers of all the colonies and draw conclusions by means of comparison.

ADMINISTRATION: The Consulate engages in correspondence with local authorities, receives and answers enquiries from various ministries, and so on. There were also six or seven instances of correspondence with regard to small legacies left by local inhabitants to their relatives in Russia. Correspondence with Governors and their offices has been insignificant.

27 The 'secret agent' sent to Australia early in 1905 was Captain (rtd) P. F. Varavva, who was instructed to purchase the steamship *Peregrine* from the Australian company Howard Smith & Co. for the Russian Ministry of War, for use in carrying military supplies to Port Arthur. When Port Arthur fell, there was no further need to purchase the *Peregrine*, and the transaction was not completed.

28 When Varavva declined to purchase the *Peregrine*, Howard Smith & Co. sued him and secured his arrest, demanding compensation for its losses. The Russian consulate in Melbourne played an active part in securing his release on bail and in arranging his defence in court. In the end, Varavva was acquitted.

29 Ustinov is referring to the work of the consulate in observing Australian trade with Japan and the supply of goods with 'military applications' during the war (e.g. horses for the Japanese army, or the steamer *Rockton* as a Japanese transport vessel).

General correspondence on all matters amounts on average to approximately six hundred items annually, taking into account all incoming and outgoing correspondence.

Summarising all the above, it must be acknowledged that the ordinary, i.e. purely consular, work of the Consulate in Melbourne is insignificant. As for political work, in view of the specific conditions and isolation from the rest of the world, there is none.

All that remains is to look upon the Consulate as an observation post in a remote and unusual land.

At present the Consulate could also prove to be useful in the gathering of intelligence and the compilation of responses to enquiries concerning any agrarian³⁰ and social questions which might arise,³¹ although Australian and New Zealand conditions are so different from ours that such information would probably be of only theoretical interest.

That apart, all the Great Powers and the majority of secondary ones have their own representatives there. [...]

AVPRI 155 (Second Department) -408-1355, ff 13–17. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

30 Prior to the period under review, the specialist State Councillor Kriukov, now appointed Director of the Department of Agriculture, was posted to Australia and New Zealand by the Ministry of Agriculture. (Ustinov's note.)

31 Ustinov refers in his footnote to Nikolai Abramovich Kriukov, an eminent agricultural scientist, economist and ally of Petr Stolypin, Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs in 1906–1911. His visit to Australia in 1902–1903 and his study of its agriculture led him to write his book *Australia. Agriculture in Australia and the General Development of the Country* (*Australia. Sel'skoe khoziaistvo v Avstralii v sviazi s obshchim razvitiem strany*, Moscow, 1906). Kriukov made some use of his experience of the development of agriculture in Australia and many other countries in his work as Director of the Department of Agriculture, the post he held during the period of Stolypin's agrarian reforms.

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