

SOVIET PLACE-NAMES: TRANSLITERATION OR ANGLICIZATION?

The complex matter of rendering the place-names of one country into the language of another has been raised in a note in *Arctic* 14:244-6 by D. A. Sinclair and V. Topchy. They are specifically concerned with rendering names in Soviet territory into English.

They urge that these names should not be transliterated into roman letters as they stand, but that they should be anglicized. As an example they give Chukotskiy Poluoostrov, which they would replace by Chukchi Peninsula. Now a first reaction to this common-sense approach is almost bound to be favourable. As Sinclair and Topchy say, the reader can now see that this place is a peninsula, and that the Chukchi live there. On their way to this conclusion they rightly dispose of certain aberrant forms (Chukotsk Peninsula, Chukot Peninsula), and make the point that any anglicized form must be linguistically correct (incidentally, Chukcha Peninsula would be just as correct). To this general principle they add certain qualifications; for instance, not all Russian generic parts should be translated, but to avoid confusion those meaning administrative areas should be retained in transliterated form (Oblast, not province); and so also should any translatable word in a Russian specific part (Severnaya Dvina, not Northern Dvina). Hard and fast rules cannot be laid down, they say; but "the trend towards universal transliteration should not be allowed to prevail merely because it represents the easy way out for the authorities".

This attitude, I repeat, may well seem reasonable. However, where will it lead? In the first place, to a reversal of the policy of the major official map and chart producing bodies in the English-speaking world (who now use the form Chukotskiy Poluoostrov), and to the gargantuan task of agreeing on anglicized forms to replace the transliterated ones. This was the authors' stated object (for I take it we all agree that the ordinary user will follow the forms given in maps and gazetteers, and that

any change must therefore be made by the makers of these); and merely to point out that such a course is unrealistic is obviously not enough. If our map makers are basing their policy on wrong principles, then it is right, even if difficult, to try to persuade them to change their principles. But are they using the wrong principles?

To operate the Sinclair-Topchy policy anglicized forms must be agreed on for all Soviet place-names. Less than total cover is not acceptable, for users must be able to refer to any place-name, and if it is not on the list they will coin their own anglicized form, which may be wrong (remember that, as Sinclair and Topchy say, no hard and fast rule can be laid down for this process). Logically, this should then be extended to all other place-names in languages with which English speakers are unfamiliar, so that in effect world cover of anglicized names is required. For the sake of argument let us limit discussion to the case in point — Soviet place-names. Even this small part of the problem involves many thousands of names — far more than appear on any British or American map now produced or likely to be produced. Obviously, only the government exercising sovereignty over the area is able to provide a full list of names for it. So the largest-scale Soviet maps would have to be obtained and suitable anglicized forms agreed on for the names on them. However, anyone working in this field knows that large-scale Soviet maps are not available. So it will not even be possible to find out all the Russian names in advance to work on them. The attempt, then, to make available an anglicized form of all place-names in the USSR is more than just very large; it is in practice impossible.

There is a more vital objection to the propagation of anglicized forms. It will lead to a parallel propagation of other nationalised forms — gallicized, germanized, italianized, and so forth; and this proliferation can be shown historically (for all this has happened in the past, and the not so distant past) to be a most fruitful source of confusion. Ensomheten, Insel Einsamkeit, and Os-

trov Uyedineniya are the same place. Surely the most sensible thing is for all to call it by the name given it by the country exercising sovereignty? Then the only differences will be the comparatively minor ones of spelling due to the use of different transliteration systems. Thus there is a positive reason for using transliterated forms, in addition to the negative reasons against using the alternative: readier identification of place-names when they occur in languages other than English. This surely is the most important of all. For the main consideration that must prevail is to be able to look up names in gazetteers and maps (which will not always be American or British) without being a linguistic expert and a clairvoyant about the particular idiosyncrasies of each author.

These considerations led me earlier¹ to conclusions that I have found no reason to modify, and that are just the opposite of Sinclair and Topchy's; that Soviet place-names should be rendered into English by a simple rule of thumb, the simplest being transliteration of both generic and specific parts; and that difficulties resulting from this are much less harmful than the confusion resulting from the alternative course of anglicization. Fortunately, this is just what the U.S. Board on Geographical Names and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use have agreed to do².

What about the difficulties that, it is readily admitted, do still remain? The greatest, probably, is the need to make clear to the reader that (continuing with our original example of Chukotskiy Poluostrov) poluostrov means peninsula. On a map or in a gazetteer this is easily done by means of a glossary. In literary use some explanatory phrase, perhaps in parentheses, may be necessary. This may be cumbersome, but is not intolerable. Another difficulty is how these words should be said, as opposed to written. To talk about Chukotskiy Poluostrov is affected, but is it unreasonable to say Chukchi Peninsula while writing Chukotskiy Poluostrov? There are many precedents for differences between the spoken and the writ-

ten language.

It may be argued that certain anglicizations are so well established that they have become part of the English language and have therefore a right to be used. This point is conceded, but their number is very small. The only ones that seem to me to fall into this category are Moscow, the Crimea, the Caucasus, and Siberia (the Urals can be quite simply and correctly rendered as Ural).

A further small point is the question of double transliteration. Ustalu's paper quoted by Sinclair and Topchy refers to an aspect of the problem—the names of places incorporated into the USSR since 1939—not encountered in the Arctic. There the problem is one of assimilating the names given by explorers of various nationalities. To restore the original spelling would be a pleasant gesture toward the explorer who gave it. To do so would involve considerable research (Ostrov Kheysa, for instance, was originally Hayes Island, not Haze Island, or Keys Island, or any other possible variant). Furthermore, the original name often had very little currency, whereas the Soviet version is in frequent use. Anyway, it is much more important that the place should be easy to find in works of reference than that the historical origin or meaning should not be obscured (that is bound to happen often anyway). However, in lists of place-names or text stressing the historical side the original form can always be given in parentheses after the transliterated form.

In general, then, the present trend of official map and chart makers is to be welcomed as the only practical solution to the problem. The principle they now use may have been adopted for the "rather narrow military strategic considerations" deplored by Sinclair and Topchy, but it also happens, in my view, to be the best of the various alternatives.

TERENCE ARMSTRONG

¹Polar Record 5:408-26.

²Principles of geographical nomenclature. London: Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. 1954.

Reply to Dr. Armstrong

For the specialist in a restricted branch of geographical research transliteration may present no obstacle to recognition nor appear cumbersome and aesthetically repulsive. However, since geographical references come into all manner of scholarly and general publications it seems a pity that the specialist is now to forswear his responsibility for providing readily usable terms. The point that may have escaped Dr. Armstrong's attention is that the writers and publishers of more generalized works cannot accept simple transliteration provided by the official map-makers as a ready solution and are therefore left to their own various devices.

An indiscriminately transliterated map, useful as it may be for special purposes, is neither an exact copy of the original, due to certain difficulties of transliteration, nor its proper counterpart.

We do not advocate mere anglicization as a virtue in itself, but rather suggest a system that would retain geographical accuracy without seriously disrupting the free flow of written and spoken English. Neither do we propose a wholesale translation of names. "Loneliness Island" might have its romantic appeal, but that is scarcely enough to justify its adoption. On the other hand, to insist on "Ostrov" in place of "Island" whenever the feature in question occurs within Soviet territory is precisely the type of evasive rigidity that we deplore.

International uniformity in rendering foreign geographical names raises a problem somewhat similar to that of Esperanto or any other universal language. The fact that British and American transliterated maps are available, say, to the Germans does not mean that the Germans in their turn will render Franz Josef Land as Zemlya Frantsa Iosifa. In any case, unless British and American maps and gazetteers are greatly inferior, there is little advantage in resorting to any other but the

original source, and a situation like that is likely to involve only experts, who presumably can deal with it.

What is not available in the original does not cause an immediate problem of transposition, but to pronounce "Archangel" and to spell "Archangel'sk" would needlessly aggravate that unfortunate aspect of the English orthography that has long been a source of irritation to such prominent masters of the language as George Bernard Shaw. Furthermore, to restrict anglicized forms to the spoken usage is not only utterly pointless but also definitely impossible. Even if the impossible could be done, here it would merely result in a double standard and — in the absence of normative works on oral usage — in a proliferation of haphazard spoken forms. Since these forms, with or without parentheses, will sooner or later find their way into the written language (if they have not already done so), what we have in the final account is the perpetuation of the present chaos: transliterated normative official reference works and a "free for all" in the wide-open field of assimilation.

The use of parentheses in the manner suggested by Dr. Armstrong might be helpful in exceptional cases, but even then it is much more logical in an English context to provide the current foreign name in parentheses when necessary for easier identification and use the original historical or properly anglicized form in text. The form "Chukotskiy Poluostrov (Chukchi Peninsula)" is not dissimilar to the form "Tovarishch Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev (Mr. K.)".

In most cases the full transliterated form of foreign place-names is not vitally important to the general user and therefore he cannot be expected to learn the generic geographic terms in every language of the world. However, if all he has at his disposal for reference in English is a few small-scale haphazard works, while the policy of official map-making bodies remains that of restricting their activity to special-purpose maps with foreign tongue-twisters, one can justifiably say that the consumer is

being neglected for the convenience of the producer.

What is required most urgently is an authoritative medium-scale map and gazetteer of foreign areas, the Soviet Arctic among them, which would end the growth of spurious anglicized forms instead of perplexing the reader by a flood of unintelligible foreign terms. Far from being gargantuan, the task is obviously not too much for a properly qualified committee to handle both quickly and efficiently.

Although an exhaustive reference work is undeniably the best solution and the final goal, the position that "less than total cover is not acceptable" clearly has no valid grounds. Indeed, if the medical profession decided not to treat any patients because they cannot treat the whole of humanity at once and cannot cope with some diseases, they would find their decision extremely difficult to justify.

D. A. SINCLAIR
V. TOPCHY

The Roald Amundsen Institute for Polar Technique

The Roald Amundsen Institute for Polar Technique has been founded as a living memorial to the great polar explorer Roald Amundsen. It will operate as a non-profit, independent organization devoted to furthering research in polar technique and carry on such research in the spirit of Roald Amundsen. Its main sponsor will be the Norsk Polar Navigasjon A/S, Ny Ålesund, Svalbard.

The Governing Board of the Institute will be made up of persons working in fields concerned with polar techniques. Governors serve in a personal capacity and not as representatives of the agencies, whether government or private, with which they are associated. The staff of the Institute will include active polar investigators, who shall spend part of the year in the polar regions.

Purposes of The Roald Amundsen Institute

- (1) To initiate and encourage research in the field of polar technique.
- (2) To collect and preserve records and material relating to the field of polar technique.
- (3) To make such records and material available for practical use by properly qualified persons and organizations.
- (4) To arrange for training of persons who wish to qualify for work in the polar regions.

- (5) To establish and maintain a polar technique research station in the Kings Bay area, Svalbard, where students and scientists from Norway and other countries may be indoctrinated in polar technique.
- (6) To establish and maintain close contacts with other polar institutes engaged in similar or related fields of study.

Fields of research in polar technique

The Roald Amundsen Institute aims to attract the interest of the younger generation, who will eventually be the planners and builders of future settlements and industrial centres in the polar regions. The field of polar technique will be a broad one, extending from polar survival to polar settlements and industrial planning. Research will be carried out in the following fields of polar technique:

- (1) Polar survival.
- (2) Polar transportation.
- (3) Polar navigation.
- (4) Polar engineering.
- (5) Polar resources and raw materials.
- (6) Polar settlements and industrial planning.

Long term plans

A temporary research station for polar techniques has been established at Kings Bay, Svalbard. It will serve well for work during the arctic summer season. However, it is the intention of the Governing Board to expand this station gradually by adding new buildings,