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Michael J. Strada, Harold R. Troper. *Friend or Foe? Russians in American Film and Foreign Policy, 1933-1991.* Lanham, Md/: Scarecrow Press, 1997. 255 pp. $59.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-3245-9.

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Down With Communism!

For more than seventy years, America's motion picture industry–a profession never noted for consistency–has generally depicted the Russians in no-holds barred, negative terms. Beginning with the October 1917 upheaval, Hollywood, armed with only marginal information, hammered away at the barbarism of Lenin's fledgling government while rooting for its capitulation in silent two-reelers such as *Siberia* (1926), *Mockery* (1927), and *A Sammy in Siberia* (1929). After Stalin's takeover, anti-Soviet films continued to excoriate Bolshevism in every frame. Titles such as *Tovarich* (1937), *Ninotchka* (1939), and *Public Deb #1* (1940) kept the propaganda pot boiling with the same bromides: the godless Russians–worshipers of autocracy–were no match for good old-fashioned Yankee know-how.

But Pearl Harbor changed everything. Overnight, the Soviet Union–now an important ally lauding Jeffersonian democracy and FDR's Fireside Chats–appeared on Home Front screens as heroic, undaunted, and fearless. Clearly, the avuncular Uncle Joe (his media nom de guerre) was America's best friend, and his hard-hitting Red Army kept the Wehrmacht on the run. Audiences everywhere cheered when Gregory Peck destroyed important Nazi strongholds from his forest lair while–over in the Ukraine–Comrade Dana Andrews, Midwestern twang and all, plunged his bomber into the path of German forces. How about Humphrey Bogart? Wasn't his damaged merchant marine vessel saved by the Russian Air Force?

But the U.S./Soviet harmony quickly fell apart at war's end. Soon another conflict, the Cold War, fostered new hostilities between the two powers. After Winston Churchill created the Iron Curtain, Hollywood changed reels and once more, Russian villains–wearing ill-fitting leather jackets and quoting from the Manifesto–threatened America's security. Now Hollywood directors geared up for another fight and their propaganda message minced no words: down with communism! How long would this war last? More than forty years.

What, then, propelled this propaganda war? Why did Hollywood grind out such anti-Soviet screenplays that international poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, in a rare Western-style press conference, labeled "warnography?" How did geopolitics and ideology influence the motion picture industry? These are some of the questions answered in a detailed study, Friend or Foe? Russians in American Film and Foreign Policy, 1933-1991. Written by Michael Strada and Harold Troper, this book–beginning with FDR's formal recognition of the Bolshevik government–traces the volatile relationship between the two nations right up to the Communist Party's collapse.

As the two authors explain, Hollywood's "attitudinal pendulum" cut a wide swath. During the War, the Soviets, motivated by love for their Motherland, reached levels of apotheosis in such pro-Stalin tracts as Mission to Moscow and Song of Russia. Later, when relations fell apart, villainous Russians permeated the screen and threatened America's internal security in *Red Dawn*, *Invasion U.S.A.* and *World War III*. Why not? Collectively, American producers, believers in good old-fashioned capitalism, asserted that anything worth doing must be worth overdoing.

Occasionally, a few titles suggested less conflict and more understanding especially in the Atomic Age. Stanley Kubrick's zany *Dr. Strangelove* and Sidney Lumet's frightening *Fail Safe*, provided "the yin and yang of antinuclear parables" because both films portray the government and military as not only responsible for the problem, but also the problem itself. On a lighter note, Norman Jewison's *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming!* spoofed everything in sight: government leaders, top-heavy bureaucrats, and parochial jingoism.

In all, Strada and Troper poured over 150 films and

their sharp eyes–coupled with scrupulous research and clear, analytical prose–spotted everything. Complete with a thorough filmography, extensive bibliography, and well-chosen stills, this book is, without question, the best reference text available on this subject. What, then, is the history of Hollywood's interpretation of Russia? Who are the villains? The heroes? Do these films deserve recognition as unwitting artifacts of cultural history? *Friend or Foe?* tells all.

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