

THEORETICAL PROBLEMS OF GEOGRAPHY

V. A. ANUCHIN

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EDITORS' PREFACE

The publication in 1960 of V. A. Anuchin's *Theoretical Problems of Geography** must be viewed in retrospect as a major event in the history of Soviet geographical thought. Anuchin's work is important in a number of respects that justify making it available to an English-reading audience:

1. It remains the most significant Soviet statement on the theory and philosophy of geography. Anuchin examines the history of the development of geographic thought from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism and proposes a philosophy and theory for a *unified* geography. In the process he adds interesting new insights and dimensions to works currently available in Western languages.
2. The work has achieved unusual stature as a polemical study. As the most comprehensive and forceful Soviet statement on the need for a unified or monistic geography, it has generated an unparalleled and continuing debate in Soviet

*V. A. Anuchin, *Teoreticheskiye problemy geografii* [Theoretical Problems of Geography], Gosudarstvennoye Izdatel'stvo Geograficheskoy Literatury [State Publishing House of Geographical Literature] (Moscow, 1960).

academic and other circles. Ironically the English-language reader has been able to follow much of this debate through translated articles that have appeared in *Soviet Geography; Review and Translation* and other journals, while denied access to the original treatise that is the source of the controversy.

3. Anuchin's argument in favor of the unity of geography, his stress on the geographical environment as the proper object of geographical study, and the need for greater emphasis on practical and applied work are current and relevant themes in Western geographical circles.

For these reasons then it seems highly appropriate that *Theoretical Problems of Geography* be added to the geographical literature in the English language. Although it is likely to become a basic reference work for student of geography and Marxism-Leninism, it is not without difficulties for the reader who will find it has faults typical of much philosophical and polemical writing — prolonged definitional discourses, exaggeration and overgeneralization, and repetition. The translation that is offered here is essentially a literal one; a freer translation could have conceivably improved the ease of reading but at the expense of distorting the nuances and finer points of the philosophical arguments.

For the convenience of the reader several additions accompany the original Anuchin monograph:

1. An introduction by Professor David Hooson, a leading scholar of Soviet geographical thought and close observer of the Anuchin controversy, which provides the setting in which the book appeared, and a summary of its reception and significance.

2. A summary of the major conclusions of the book in Appendix 1; this will permit the reader to review quickly the major points developed at length in the original study.

3. A selected bibliography of commentaries on Anuchin's work (Appendix 2) that have appeared in the English-language journals, which will permit the interested reader to trace the evolution of the debates generated by Anuchin's work.

The editors, in bringing Anuchin's work to a new audience hope that another significant step will be accomplished in the international exchange of ideas among scholars. If new insights result and Soviet-Western dialogues are enhanced, our goal will have been achieved.

Roland J. Fuchs
George J. Demko

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PART ONE
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

By David Hooson

Although more than a decade has gone by since Anuchin's book appeared, the intellectual climate and the state of development of world geography seem to make the 1970s, if anything, an even more propitious time for putting out an English translation than prevailed immediately after its original appearance in the Soviet Union.

In the first place, no one can fail to have become conscious of the sudden revelation of "environment" or "ecology" as urgent, if rather vague concepts in the minds of a broad spectrum of the population in the industrialized countries. The fact that the environment is increasingly being apprehended as a pervasively humanized, rather than merely a physical category, greatly broadens the potential significance of Anuchin's elaboration of his central concept — the *geographical environment*. On the plane of academic geographical thought, there can be little doubt that a parallel qualitative change of fundamental importance is taking place in America and certain other countries. In some respects it may be said to be "counterrevolutionary," in relation to the so-called quantitative revolution of a decade or so ago. Rather like the Romantic Protest of the early nineteenth century against the intellectual sway of the Enlightenment, a reaction seems to have set in against what is now seen as an unduly mechanistic preoccupation with technique, precision, analysis of contemporary systems, and over-emphasis on economic at the expense of social, historical, or environmental factors. Alongside this development has been a revival of interest in geographical theory conceived more in terms of long-term purpose and philosophy than short-run method and technique, though in the latter case, one hopes, taking care to preserve and incor-

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porate whatever insights of lasting significance have come out of the quantitative revolution. Thus, Anuchin's book, surveying the theoretical scene — past and present — of geography as a whole, and carefully building up and elaborating his unifying theme — geographical environment — strikes several chords in tune with the developing needs and spirit of the subject in American and other Western countries.

More specifically, the book is an original document of key significance to the recent development of Soviet geography, having stimulated one of the most far-reaching and sharp debates in Soviet academic circles in modern times, comparable with the Lysenko controversy in biology. Moreover, though not always conceded, it seems to have been instrumental to no small degree in changing basic theoretical and practical positions, both in academic geography and the Soviet planning agencies.

Quite apart from these two compelling topical reasons for putting out the book in English at this time, there is the plain fact, which would in itself justify a translation, that the book remains the only one in Soviet history to set out to investigate the theoretical basis of geography as a whole through historical and philosophical analysis, while coming to definite conclusions about what geography is and where it should go from here. This said, it remains to outline briefly the historical context in which the book appeared, and its astonishingly mixed reception in the 1960s.

THE INCUBATION PERIOD

It is necessary to recall the atmosphere in the Soviet Union in the middle 1950s in order to appreciate why and how the book was written. All aspects of Soviet intellectual life in the years following the death of Stalin experienced the release of a ferment of reforming ideas and vigorous argumentation that had lain dormant or muted for a quarter-century. As a result of the Stalinist period, geography had become overwhelmingly physical in character¹ and the nonphysical aspects of the subject were in some danger of being squeezed out and absorbed by other disciplines. Moreover the prevailing doctrine

maintained the clear and necessary separation of physical from economic (i.e., all nonphysical) geography, with their supposedly mutually exclusive sets of laws, so that the integrated study of man in relation to his environment, long a central theme in period, was ruled theoretically illegitimate.

The depth of conviction shown by Anuchin and other geographers about the urgency of radical reform and restructuring of geographical theory owed much to their keen awareness of a broken heritage in Russian geography — and the lateness of the hour. For geography had had a long and distinguished history in Russia before the Stalin era² and it seemed improbable that any of the founding fathers of the subject at that time would have approved of the turn subsequently taken by Soviet geography, any more than would Lenin, Plekhanov, Engels, or even Marx himself.

Thus a thoroughgoing “thaw” in Soviet geographical theory was taking place in the mid-fifties, as practitioners reestablished spiritual contact with their academic forebears (for the Russians are at least as nationalistic as anyone else!), redefined their own positions, and in general effected a shift in the center of gravity of the subject toward the human side. Anuchin turned out to be the most articulate and uncompromising in staking out new paths for the subject and in reinterpreting the past, though obviously not to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

These few years preceding the appearance of Anuchin's book in 1960 were, then, fluid — even heady — ones for Soviet geography, during which vigorous new periodicals appeared, the volume of publications grew rapidly, and the content of geography became steadily more balanced. International contacts were eagerly reestablished — 1956, for instance, saw Soviet geographers attending their first international geographical congress for two decades and also reviewing at great length the volume on *American Geography: Inventory and Prospect*. The not unsympathetic tenor of this and other reviews of foreign work contrasted strikingly with the xenophobic vituperation that had been common form a few years before.³ These early years of the Khrushchev de-

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cade, in spite of their inconsistencies and “hare-brained schemes” (as they were afterward dubbed) can now be looked back upon as, in relative terms, something of a Golden Age for the Soviet intellectual. It was a period of confident ebullience, with the great psychological boost of Sputnik as well as destalinization and the publication of books by previously (and subsequently) banned writers, alongside the radical restructuring of the economy and a more outgoing and relaxed foreign policy (before the setbacks of the Sino-Soviet rift and the Cuban missile crisis). Thus 1960 was as good a time as any in recent years to publish a controversial book challenging established academic doctrine in the Soviet Union.

THE BOOK'S IMMEDIATE RECEPTION

The relatively tolerant political atmosphere of the time notwithstanding, it is doubtful whether Anuchin's book would have seen the light of day if it had not possessed one or two influential supporters among the senior geographers, the most important of whom was N. N. Baranskiy. At the age of eighty he was regarded with a unique mixture of respect and affection by most of the profession, and his background and authority were unassailable. An early revolutionary from Siberia and an acquaintance of Lenin, he was at the same time a humane scholar, thoroughly steeped in the geographical traditions of Russia and the West. He retained considerable objectivity and academic sobriety throughout, while dealing, unlike most geographers of his time, with vulnerable human topics. For a generation he was the major figure in economic geography (taken in a broad sense) at Moscow University and, through his long-lived textbooks, in the secondary schools as well. Thus when Baranskiy, in an early review of Anuchin's book, characterized it as “a courageous and . . . a deeply scientific work . . . let us hope that it will be much in demand, both in the Soviet Union and abroad . . . its great value is completely obvious,”⁴ the impending battle was bound to be one of titans. For as Yu. G. Saushkin, another influential, but younger, supporter, said, “It required a great deal of boldness to write such a book, since very authoritative

scholars, periodicals, and publications have spoken out against a 'unified geography,' dubbing it 'theoretically shameful.'⁵

Of these authoritative scholars, two have loomed largest in this case, taking the lead in the opposition to Anuchin's main thesis, I. P. Gerasimov and S. V. Kalesnik. Both are physical geographers who had played a major role in the elaboration of the doctrine of the theoretical separation of physical and economic geography. They are the only two geographers who are full members of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and hold the two most powerful official positions in Soviet geography — director of the Academy's Institute of Geography and president of the All-Union Geographical Society respectively. Both have been strong opponents of Anuchin's, both theoretically, in print in the journals of their own institutions, and practically, as influential members of the councils of the faculties of geography at Moscow and Leningrad universities, to which Anuchin's book was submitted for the Doctorate of Geographical Sciences. His bid for the doctorate at Leningrad University was unanimously turned down in 1961. The following year he submitted it to Moscow, where the public dissertation defense was a dramatic affair attended by hundreds of people. By that time the case had become a *cause célèbre* and rank-and-file sympathy on his home ground was strong. Nevertheless the final vote fell just short of the required two-thirds majority (though later on Anuchin was quietly awarded the doctorate, on a technicality).

Fortunately for English-speaking readers, the monthly journal *Soviet Geography: Review and Translation* (edited by Theodore Shabad and published by the American Geographical Society of New York) was born in 1960, the same year as Anuchin's book. Since one of its chief aims was to introduce Americans and others to the variety of opinions on theoretical matters held by Soviet geographers, it is hardly surprising that this journal has been sprinkled with articles pertaining to the controversy sparked by Anuchin, still continuing today but occurring most thickly in the early 1960s. Anyone who wishes to gauge the intensity of the impact of Anuchin's writings on

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the whole Soviet geographical profession, and to get some inkling of the *nuances* of the complex issues as well as the line-up of individuals and to some extent, institutions, should make a point of following through these discussions, which are listed in the bibliography at the end of this book. Space forbids anything like a comprehensive analysis of this discussion here, but it is an essential adjunct to the book itself and is concerned with problems, notably the proper understanding of the significance of environment and the difficulties of integrating successfully the heterogeneous phenomena of geography, which are as perennially interesting and important in Western as well as in Soviet geography.

One should have a proper feeling for the deadly seriousness of these discussions, the courage frequently needed, the amount at stake in the challenge to existing doctrine, and the fluctuating, unpredictable character of the political climate within which the arguments had to be carried on. The sensitive Western reader can scarcely fail to detect unfamiliar innuendos that seem to have been hangovers from the fear-ridden Stalinist years. In this controversy, the chief "Achilles' heel" of Anuchin and some of his supporters, which seems to have been persistently aimed at by their opponents, is any presumed association or mutual approbation with "bourgeois," particularly American geographers. One quotation from Kalesnik deserves to be mentioned here, both because of its obvious relevance to our present enterprise and because of its innuendos of the kind that still cast a cloud over Soviet intellectual endeavors. He says "Anuchin's book is bound to be well received abroad. It will undoubtedly be translated into foreign languages because all foreign adherents of a unified geography will seize upon his book as a sensation, especially piquant because it originates in the Soviet Union where, according to general consensus, the tombstone of a unified geography has long been overgrown with weeds."⁶ All this, in spite of the fact that Kalesnik was presumably glad, along with the other editors of *Soviet Geography: Accomplishments and Tasks*, to have that volume published in English that same year. Similarly, O. A. Konstantinov, in the course of a particularly virulent review of Anuchin's book,

after quoting the latter's relatively sympathetic references to some American geographers says "Now we know to whom V. A. Anuchin appeals and with whom he has something in common."⁷ Attempts were even made in the course of his dissertation defense at Moscow University to smear Anuchin by citing passages, supposedly kindred in thought to his, from the author of the present introduction, who had just been dubbed "a reactionary American geographer" by Academician Gerasimov at that same defense. One can find many other examples of guilt by association with foreign geographers in the annals of this controversy, all of them, it seems, perpetrated by opponents of Anuchin. Similarly Saushkin, an early supporter of Anuchin's, was severely pilloried by a group of economists and geographers who, in a collective letter to a Soviet journal, charged him with "distortion" and traitorous statements in an article that he published in an American journal (*Economic Geography*) in 1962. Saushkin, in his hard-hitting reply, deplores "the fact that some geographers still have not rid themselves of the rough methods of unsubstantiated accusations and intimidations used in the period of Stalin's personality cult."⁸

THE ARENA BROADENS

When the argumentation in the geographical journals had gone on apace for two or three years and, together with the publicity surrounding Anuchin's dissertation defenses, had made the issues seem well known as well as relatively intractable in Soviet academic circles, a leading ideological spokesman of the Communist Party stepped in and gave, as is customary in such cases, an *ex-cathedra* statement before the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences.⁹ In it L. F. Ilyichev denounced the Stalinist definition of the environment as "a purely natural category" and the fact that this edict seemed to remain the theoretical pretext for the construction of "an insurmountable wall" between nature and society. Although he chided Anuchin for apparently wanting to include all aspects of society itself in the concept of geographical environment, the general thrust of Ilyichev's pronouncement, in the context of the disposition of authority in the USSR, indicated an un-