

## Editorial

*Anticipations* - an attempt to forecast twentieth-century trends, published in 1901 - has earned Wells criticism on several grounds, but in one respect at least it has proved to be remarkably accurate. In Chapters 7 and 8 he envisages the growth of a European Community centred on the Rhine. Sceptical of Pan-Slavic unification, he foresees East and West Europe uniting by the beginning of the twenty-first century to realise the "splendid dream of a Federal Europe", though if this development is retarded by German imperialism a series of wars may have to take place before the Germans learn the value of compromise and accept integration under the leadership of their middle class. Britain, he assumes, will see itself as part of the English-speaking community led by the USA rather than as an extension of the continent. Russia is liable to collapse into disorder, "a place for famines". Ninety years on, with the traumatic ending of Soviet Communism, Wells's bold speculations have suddenly become a fairly accurate description of the world in which we live. It seems appropriate, therefore, to devote this year's *Wellsian* to scrutiny of issues and events arising from Wells's interest in East European affairs.

In January 1914 Wells made a brief trip to St.Petersburg and Moscow. While in Russia, he renewed his acquaintance with the writer Maxim Gorky whom he had befriended eight years earlier in the USA. Wells's visit is reflected in the 1915 novel *The Research Magnificent*: Chapter 5 touches on the precarious state of Russian civilisation, Chapter 4 portrays savage tribal conflicts in Albania and Bulgaria. In due course the visit was also the basis for a far more carefully written account in Chapter 12 of *Joan and Peter* (1918).

Wells welcomed the Russian Revolution of 1917; nor was he hostile to the subsequent Bolshevik coup, which Gorky defended to him in their correspondence. It was Gorky's request for help for the starving Russian intelligentsia that led Wells and his son "Gip" to visit Petrograd and Moscow in September, 1920. Wells addressed the Petrograd Soviet and, as our cover photograph shows, met Lenin in the Kremlin. After returning to Britain, he disputed the evil nature of the Communist regime with critics such as Winston Churchill, befriended the Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky and continued to send aid and books to the Russians. His *Russia in the Shadows* (1920) criticises the Communists' doctrinaire attitudes, but accepts their regime as the only credible source of order - perhaps unduly swayed by the considerable resemblance between the Russian situation and some of his own apocalyptic fantasies, such as *The World Set Free* (1914) in which the collapse of civilisation through warfare allows a technocratic elite to create a revolutionary new state. A similar ambivalence is present in books like the *Outline of History* (1920), *The World of William Clissold* (1926) and *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1931) where he writes, "Dogmatic, resentful and struggling sorely, crazy with suspicion and persecution mania, ruled by a permanent Terror, Russia nevertheless upholds the tattered banner of world-collectivity and remains something splendid and hopeful in the spectacle of mankind" (Chapter 10:8).

Determined to help reform the Russian regime and reintegrate it with the West, Wells again visited Moscow in July 1934 for an interview with Stalin. This meeting of minds proved disappointing. Gorky too resisted Wells's advocacy of "reactionary" ideas such as free speech and birth control. Wells sums up his mingled hope and frustration in the *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934). *Stalin-Wells Talk* (also 1934) gives the text of the Kremlin interview plus commentaries. It is instructive to compare Wells's measured approach with that of the other contributors to the booklet: the ruthless totalitarianism of Bernard Shaw, the naive gullibility of Ernst Toller, the astute undermining of all three by J.M.Keynes.

In Chapter 2 of *All Aboard for Ararat* (1940) Wells at last manages to grasp the Soviet stick by the right end: here he argues that democracy is necessary even in a collectivist Utopia, not because the masses will ever be in a position to directly "rule", but because an open society deters those who do make the political decisions from abusing their position: "The more eyes there are to watch the elite, the better".

Half a century later, our contributors try to put it all in perspective. David Smith traces Wells's attempts to get to grips with the volatile map of Eastern Europe; Mary Mayer accuses Wells of ignoring the truth of Communist tyranny; Leon Stover points to the totalitarian elements in Wells's thinking which encouraged this; Juliusz Palczewski, our sole East European contributor, prefers to look at the counterbalancing, libertarian aspects of Wells's thought, lest in burying Soviet Communism we bury our social idealism with it. All four of these essays were originally given as papers to the H.G.Wells Society's annual residential conference held at Imperial College, London, on 21-22 September, 1991. I know those present will look forward to renewing their acquaintance with them. Additional articles by David Lake and Sylvia Hardy complete what I hope is an informative and stimulating issue of the *Wellsian*.

Our journal aims to strike a balance between the various aspects of Wells's work. Having largely devoted this issue to history and politics, we will be returning to his literary achievements in future issues. Potential contributors may like to note that the centenaries of Wells's most famous works of fiction will soon be upon us, starting with *The Time Machine* in 1995. Any original articles on these books will therefore be received with special interest.

M.D.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**David C.Smith** is Professor of History at the University of Maine and author of *H.G.Wells: Desperately Mortal*.

**Mary Mayer** is a freelance Russian translator, specialising in literature, literary theory and science fiction. She is the author of *Breaking Eggs*, a play about the Russian poets Mayakovsky, Esenin and Pasternak, performed on the Edinburgh fringe in 1986. She is currently writing a Ph.D thesis on H.G.Wells and Russia at the University of Westminster and will be spending a month during the summer of 1992 researching in the Gorky Archive in Moscow.

**Leon Stover** is Professor of Anthropology at the Illinois Institute of Technology and author of many books including *The Shaving of Karl Marx*, a series of imaginary dialogues between Wells and Lenin.

**Juliusz K.Palczewski** is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Wroclaw, Poland. His books include *Utopist Without Illusions: H.G.Wells*.

**David Lake** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Queensland. He is currently preparing a scholarly edition of *The First Men in the Moon* in association with David Y.Hughes.

**Sylvia Hardy** lectures in English at Nene College, Northampton. She has recently been awarded a doctorate for her thesis on Wells.

**Michael Draper** is Acting Head of English at Luton Sixth Form College. His study of Wells's fiction is available as part of the Macmillan/St.Martin's 'Modern Novelists' series.