

Russia Celebrates 300th Anniversary of the Founding of the Academy of Sciences

by William Jones

Feb. 15—On Feb. 8, in Moscow’s Kremlin Palace, the Russian Academy of Sciences held a grand gala celebrating the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The gala featured speeches and theatrical performances depicting the history of the Academy, and even included soldiers in

there existed in China a great culture with deep roots from which both Europe and Russia could benefit.

After meeting with Peter in 1711, Leibniz outlined a series of measures for him to follow in order to bring Russia into the modern age. This included plans for a printing and publishing trade, a system of second-



18th-Century uniforms and an impersonated Tsar Peter the Great—the founder of the Academy in 1724.

The real inspiration for the founding of the Academy was none other than the famous German philosopher and scientist, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who, learning of the Tsar’s visit to Europe and his newfound desire to introduce science into his country, made every effort to establish contact with him and to advise him on the direction he should take in that regard. Leibniz believed that were Peter to develop Russia, this would be a bridge to link Europe with China, a region in which Leibniz had contacts through his extensive correspondence with Jesuit missionaries living there. Leibniz clearly realized that



Line engraving by P. Savart

The Academy of Sciences, proposed to Russia’s Peter I by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (left), was founded by decree in 1724. Saint Petersburg, Russia.

ary schools and a university, the development of agriculture, the promotion of manufacturing, the studying of the Slavonic languages, the studying of the variations of the magnetic field, and conducting a series of expeditions into the Russian Far East to map out Russia’s vast, still unexplored territories.

At the center of Leibniz’s proposal was the creation of an Academy, much along the lines of the Paris Academy that Leibniz knew so well, or the Berlin Academy which he himself had founded in 1700. Peter ultimately followed many of

Leibniz's proposals quite rigorously.

Science's Role in National Development

Planning for the 300th anniversary began years ago, and will include many events around Russia this year. But the central focus is the anniversary day of February 8, known as the Day of Russian Science, and the grand gala at the Kremlin Palace.

During the opening ceremony, a chorus performed the Russian national anthem. Immediately behind the singers above the stage was projected a huge video image of Raphael's *The School of Athens*, clearly indicating the ultimate origins of science in Russia in the Golden Renaissance, transmitted through the great Leibniz.

President Vladimir Putin gave a speech praising the work of the Academy, noting that it will henceforth play a major role in the development of the country. Most interestingly, he referenced comments made by the great Academician Vladimir Vernadsky, the founder of the field of biogeochemistry, in his own history of the Academy. Vernadsky understood, Putin said, that "the independent scientific work in Russia started with studying our native Fatherland, and developing our endless lands," namely, with the series of expeditions to the East recommended by Leibniz. The First Kamchatka Expedition, commissioned by Peter in 1724, the same year as the founding of the RAS, was led by Vitus Bering.

Putin also made reference to another product of Vernadsky's thinking—his 1915 proposal for the creation of a Commission on the Study of the Productive Forces of Russia. During the time when Russia was cut off from the West by World War I, Vernadsky proposed that a commission be set up and expeditions dispatched to map the enormous resources within the great expanse of Russia, which could then be utilized to counteract the war blockade. Putin indicated that this is a model for his present policy of developing the



Photo by EIRNS/Stuart Lewis
Peter I (named "The Great") was Tsar of Russia, 1682–1725. He personally introduced the reforms that set Russia on the path to becoming a modern nation, including his creation of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1724.

resources of Siberia and the Far East in order to overcome today's Western sanctions.

Many academicians spoke of the glorious history of the Academy. Many of them also received awards during the ceremony, including some young scientists who have made creative contributions in their fields. The event also included a celebration of the 190th anniversary of the great Dmitri Mendeleev's birth, the discoverer of the Periodic Table of Elements.

Defying the Looting Policies

The Russian Academy of Sciences has gone through some very trying times since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Immediately after the 1991 breakup, Russia saw the introduction of "Wild West" capitalism, which destroyed much of the physical economy that had been built up during Soviet times. The Academy lost many of its functions and was largely decimated, while

many scientists left for the West after failing to find employment in an industry that was being torn apart and sold to the highest bidder from abroad. This "brain drain" severely damaged Russia's scientific capability.

Nonetheless Russia has gradually begun to recover, and the recent measures instituted by the Putin Government—enhancing the role of the Academy in the context of a renewed commitment to Siberian development—has reversed that process.

In his speech, Putin said increased funding was now going to the Academy and that he had raised the level of financial support for Academicians. He also underlined how important it was for the Academy to be focused on achieving practical applications for its scientific work, as these will enhance the workings of the Russian economy. Since the dog days of the 1990s, known by the academicians as the "Time of Troubles," Russia has continually been obliged to purchase what it needed, particularly in the realm of high-tech goods, on what Gennady Krasnikov, the President of the Acad-

emy, calls the international “supermarket.” Now with the forced cut-off of that market by the West, Russia has moved in the direction of producing those goods themselves and will eventually achieve “technological sovereignty,” the new watchword of the present era.

Putin elaborated on plans to involve the Academy in the country’s development, starting with its playing a major role in all development projects, including those of transportation, defense, medicine, education, and beyond. Demonstrating that commitment, Putin has made Krasnikov a member of the Russian Security Council, bringing the Academy closer to government decision-making processes.

The Academy will advise the government on major decisions regarding scientific and educational policy. In addition, its prerogative of determining what curriculum material goes into the educational system will be reinstated, clearly recognizing the fact that creating a growing cadre of young scientists is crucial for the continued development of the nation.

While the U.S. and the collective West have attempted to “isolate” Russia, using the Ukraine crisis to escalate a military campaign against the country, Russia’s ties with the non-Western countries of the Global South and particularly ties with its major neighbor, China, have, in fact, increased. The Academy has actually always maintained international ties. In its early days, the Academy depended on an influx of foreigners, with figures such as Daniel Bernoulli, Leonhard Euler, and Joseph-Nicolas Delisle playing a major role



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Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, addressing guests at the 300th Anniversary gala celebration of the founding of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Feb. 8, 2024.

until the emergence of such Russian giants as Mikhail Lomonosov. Benjamin Franklin was also made a member of the Academy by the first woman president of the Academy, Ekaterina Dashkova, whom Franklin, in turn, made a member of the American Philosophical Society. Presently, the Russian Academy of Sciences has 144 non-Russian members from 55 countries.

What Leibniz envisioned is today becoming more of a reality on a global scale, with the development of the Russia-China relationship and the emergence of the Global South. Unfortunately, among the Western nations, the spirit of Leibniz and his “community of nations” has all but disappeared, and the more brutal spirit of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) has become the predominant element in Western diplomatic thinking.

Science by its nature is universal. A single discovery anywhere in the world by a single individual, can benefit people everywhere. Conversely, the attempt to restrict scientific exchanges is detrimental to all of mankind. It is to be hoped that the horror that has been caused by NATO’s continuing war in Ukraine and Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza will begin to wake people up in the West to the real roots of their own civilization, which is itself based in the Golden Renaissance of the 15th Century. This has clearly occurred both in China and in Russia, where the work of thinkers like Leonardo da Vinci and Johannes Kepler are now being publicly celebrated. Only when Western countries make this realization can we achieve what Leibniz was striving for—a real community of nations working together for the common interests of mankind.



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Vladimir Putin (left) in a discussion with Gennady Krasnikov, President of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Jan. 30, 2024.