Stenographic record of a reception for English writers at the Union of Soviet Writers, chaired by Comrade A. A. Surkov[[1]](#footnote-1), 1 July 1952

THE UNION OF SOVIET WRITERS

STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

The reception of a delegation of English writers at the Union of Soviet Writers[[2]](#footnote-2).

1 July 1952.

Chaired by – Cde. Surkov А.А.

Moscow

S. Mikhalkov[[3]](#footnote-3), Professor Anisimov[[4]](#footnote-4) (Director of the Gorky Institute of World Literature), children’s author М. Prilezhaeva[[5]](#footnote-5), children’s poet N. Konchalovskaia[[6]](#footnote-6),

Pushkin specialist I. Novikov[[7]](#footnote-7), Dr of Philological Sc. А .Еlistratov[[8]](#footnote-8), editor of *Istoriia angliiskaia literatury*, works at IMLI of the Academy of Sciences USSR, the critic М. Apletin[[9]](#footnote-9), B. Polevoi,[[10]](#footnote-10) etc. (l.75-76)

(76-78) Alfred Coppard[[11]](#footnote-11) (representative of Authors’ World Peace Appeal) – novelist, author of stories

Doris Lessing[[12]](#footnote-12) – novelist and dramatist from Southern Rhodesia

Leeds University professor Arnold Kettle,[[13]](#footnote-13) literature scholar and critic

Naomi Mitchison,[[14]](#footnote-14) respected writer, was in the USSR 20 years ago

Douglas Young[[15]](#footnote-15) – poet and novelist, student, teacher (on behalf of the Scottish writers)

Richard Mason[[16]](#footnote-16) – novelist

Books have been brought over from the publisher Allen Lane[[17]](#footnote-17) (Penguin Books) – they are cheap and accessible to representatives of all classes. …

The publisher is interested in the achievements of Soviet archaeology.

1 question – (l.83-84) Douglas Young: – As a result of the war, a number of Her Majesty’s subjects married Russian women. From our point of view, this was all very good. If we were to start analysing the disagreements that have arisen between the two peoples since the war finished, then it seems to me that the difficulty which has arisen before Anglo-Russian families when they want to return to England has become one of the events that has had a large influence on public opinion in England.

[…]

Our people know nothing and have not received any kind of explanation as to why the Russian Government has made impossible a situation whereby Russian wives could be sent to their husbands in England. This event would have had a greater influence on ordinary people in England than any other. As regards writers and people who work in universities […] these are the genuine differences in the judging of human values that characterises our two countries.

Polevoi: When he was in England this question was put to him everywhere [...]

This is most of all about the laws of the state […]

During the war, many of our girls, for the most part, young girls, still understanding little of life, trusted their hearts not to those arms where they could be embraced. Our women have equal rights, they are our comrades, they are equal in everything with men, they are engineers, doctors, etc. Ending up abroad, especially in America, they will find themselves in the position of housewives, where no one will assert their equality of rights. Our consulate has been blocked up with applications from these women with requests to allow them to return to the Soviet Union as they consider that in that system they cannot live. In particular, out of 55 girls who became the wives of English officers and soldiers, 30 have made such applications to our embassy. It is as a protective measure, to warn our girls, our people, our co-citizens against such a situation into which they have fallen through their trusting natures, that the Supreme Soviet have adopted this law.

Let me pose a question to our English friends who are here now. We are talking about the fate of 55 Soviet girls who have been unlucky in marriage. From our point of view, every Englishman knows about this, every newspaper writes about this. When I was in England, English friends told me of the fact that 4500 English girls married coloured soldiers and officers of the American army. On the basis of US law they are not allowed into the USA with their husbands. No-one is concerned or interested in this. […]

Not everyone is our friend. Those whose malicious forces want to set upon our peoples and throw us onto a new field of battle, will they not use this question about wives to make our peoples argue? […]

Cde. Surkov: Let me add several words. I was in England and I had to, almost in every auditorium, answer this question. Where did I not go? – Glasgow, Edinburgh, Bradford, Sheffield – not one person asked how many million people we laid in brotherly graves; how many million women and children, wives and widows were tormented by Germans in their camps, but about these 55 girls I was asked in every town. Not one person asked me about the difficulties from the American and English occupation authorities with which our officers of the repatriation services had to pull out our children, our Germanised girls and boys. And there were such children; I saw them with my own eyes […]

Dear friends! It seems to me that the question about the English wives is not a moral question, or a question of everyday life. Then it would all be simple. This has been made into a political question. We haven’t made it so. And I don’t know whether people have that minimum of healthy thought that could allow the question to be settled thus: Bolsheviks are unfair people, they pronounce an unfair law which prevents 55 girls from being united with their husbands, but from this is made a means by which 200 million Russians will argue with 50 million Englishmen.

Naomi Mitchson:

What do we want to know? We want to clarify: out of what feelings can books be created in which the romantic feelings very close to our country would be expressed, books in which it would be said that the feeling of love is higher than everything. We would like to clarify the question which is raised in many books – about love above everything. Does this exist now in the Soviet Union, or does this love above everything not have meaning for the Soviet people?

Cde. Polevoi:

It is possible, of course, to write a book on this theme. Soviet law does not forbid the husband of a girl from coming to the Soviet Union, becoming a Soviet citizen and living with her. The possibility of resolving such a “classical theme” exists.

Douglas Young:

I want to thank Polevoi and Surkov for their answer. As you yourself know, this question is continually posed in England. We English writers want to be in a position to express your point of view when we return to England and have this question put to us.

Surkov: Not only to love, but also to protect our love […] with a rifle at our shoulder.

Cde. Marshak[[18]](#footnote-18) (l.89):

Love in our country is more respected than in any kind of other country. When R. Burns describes non-legal marriages in his verses, we feel that world is full of discord and feelings of hatred of race and skin colour. But in our country there is none of that. For the first time in the world such a love has been established that does not know differences between nationalities and skin colour. And every writer and poet writes about this [….]

Doris Lessing:

It seems to me that many people who are your friends feel that after the end of the war a tendency has appeared with you to go into yourselves. We understand why this has arisen. When you end up in the West, you find yourselves in an atmosphere of newspaper articles which are rude and hostile attacks against you which, from your perspective, are ridiculous. […] It seems to me that large groups of people exist – from the far left to the right – who think if you have the opportunity, if you are invited to the West on any occasion, you must make use of this and come. If the organisations that send you invitations even seem to you hostile, inside these organisations there are always people who find they are in confusion, who do not understand the surrounding situation and do not know themselves what is needed and whom you can help to find the right path if they will listen to your point of view.

[…] You must try to understand that there are people for whom there are no political convictions, who live from one day to the next under the torrent of a hostile press. Every possible story of espionage is fanned up to impossibility in our press. It is nothing less than a spiritual curtain which exists. As a result it turns out that people begin to imagine the Soviets as people having tails and horns. And suddenly Russian people come, ordinary people who talk like people, behave like people and think like people. This has an enormous influence.

Please answer in advance about the arrival by invitation.

[RSASPH, f. 17. inv. 137. f. 828 pp. 72-110]

Keywords: Cultural exchanges

1. Surkov, Aleksei Aleksandrovich (1899-1983) – Soviet poet, journalist, public figure. Leader of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1954-1959. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The meeting took place within the terms of the visit by a delegation of British writers to Moscow in 29 June-5 July 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mikhalkov, Sergei Vladimirovich (1913-2009) – Soviet writer and poet. Author of the anthem of the USSR and Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Anisimov, Ivan Ivanovich (1899-1966) – Soviet literary scholar, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 1952—1966 Director of the Maxim Gorky Institute of World Literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Prilezhaeva, Mariia Pavlovna (1903-1989) – Soviet writer, author of books about Lenin and Kalinin. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Konchalovskaia, Natalꞌia Petrovna (1903-1988) – Soviet writer and poet. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Novikov, Ivan Alekseevich (1877-1959) – Soviet writer, specialist on the life and works of A.S. Pushkin. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The most likely reference is to Elistratova, Anna Arkadꞌevna (1910-1974) – Soviet philologist, Doctor of Philological Sciences, specialist in the area of English Literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Apletin, Mikhail Iakovlievich (1885-1981) – Soviet literary critic. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Polevoi, Boris Nikolaevich (1908-1981) – Soviet journalist, writer, scriptwriter. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Coppard, Alfred Edgar (1878-1957) – British writer and poet. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Lessing, Doris May (1919-2013) – British writer on themes of the fantastic, until 1949 lived in Southern Rhodesia. Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Kettle, Arnold – literary critic, Marxist, member of the Communist Party, professor at the University of Leeds. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mitchison, Naomi Mary Margaret, Baroness Mitchison, (1897-1999) – Scottish writer and poet. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Young, Douglas Cuthbert Colquhoun (1913-1973) – Scottish writer, researcher and political figure. Leader of the Scottish National Party in 1942-1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Mason, Richard (1919-1997) – British writer. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lane, Alan (1902-1970) – British book publisher, founder of Penguin Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Marshak, Samuil Iakovlevich (1887-1964) – Soviet writer, poet, translator, author of children’s stories. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)