Alexander Dallin

(1924–2000)



Alexander Dallin figures very prominently among the founders of the field that came to be known as Soviet/Russian area studies. He left a large legacy in the institutions he helped to build, in the students he mentored over the decades of his career (I count myself lucky to be among that number), and in scholarship that was marked by balance, fair-mindedness, scrupulous attention to evidence, and intolerance for conventional wisdom. His primary scholarly contributions were to the fields of modern European history, comparative politics, and international relations.

Although he was a tireless researcher, much of his knowledge was shaped by his life experience and family background. Son of a prominent Russian-Jewish Menshevik, David Dallin (born David Lewin), Alex was born May 21, 1924, after the family had fled Bolshevik Russia for Berlin. He reached adolescence in an ever more threatening Nazi-dominated Europe; the violent Kristallnacht events of 1938 in Germany made clear to him that he would have to arrange for his family to flee Hitler's Berlin. The family sought safe haven in Paris (January 1939), where Alex made contact with the anti-Nazi resistance and eventually with American consular officials to organize the passage of his mother and himself to the United States in a perilous journey through southern France, Spain and Portugal. Before departing France, Alex helped the rescue effort for other endangered socialist intellectuals and political activists by creating false identities for blank passports. He was able to deploy his by then considerable fluency in German and French.

The family reached New York City in November 1940 and settled into apartments in the Morningside Heights neighborhood. Alex finished his secondary education at George Washington High School, where a classmate was Henry Kissinger; as a high school student, he was a member of a French club that tried to establish links to the French resistance group in Paris and to support United States involvement in the war against fascism in Europe. He started college at the City College of New York and worked part-time at the Slavonic Division of the New York Public Library to try to help the family make ends meet.

His college education was interrupted in March 1943 when he enlisted in the US Army, where he quickly ended up in Military Intelligence and interviewed German prisoners-of-war. After his discharge in March 1946, he returned to CCNY to complete his major in international affairs, graduated magna cum laude, and was admitted to the Columbia University graduate program in modern European history and the Russian Institute. He completed a master's essay on German-Soviet relations during the years 1939–1940 and later wrote a separate certificate essay for the Russian Institute on Russian-Polish relations 1914–1917. After passing his doctoral oral examinations, he began work on his dissertation on German policy in occupied Russia during World War II.

In 1950 Clyde Kluckholm, the distinguished anthropologist and director of the Project on the

Soviet Social System at Harvard University's Russian Research Center, invited Alex to join the project together with Alexander Inkeles, Michael Luther, Joseph Berliner, and other outstanding social scientists. The research team was sent to Munich to interview Soviet refugees in displaced persons camps. This was one of several projects that helped define the new interdisciplinary organization of knowledge known as area studies. He returned to the US in 1951 to the position of Associate Director of the Research Program on the USSR in New York and finished his doctoral degree at Columbia in 1953. Next he was appointed director of research at the War Documentation Project in Washington, DC, where he read and analyzed many documents that would significantly enrich his future book, *Russia under German Rule, 1941–1945* (first published in 1957, republished in 1981), which won the Wolfson Prize in History and remains a classic after nearly 50 years.

In 1956 Alex was appointed to the faculty of Columbia University as an assistant professor in international relations, was quickly promoted to associate and full professor; in 1965 he was appointed the Adlai Stevenson Professor of International Relations. Alex brought his careful scholarly training to contemporary problems of American foreign policy; among his most frequent topics were Soviet international behavior, international communism, and US-Soviet relations: *The Soviet Union at the United Nations* (1960), *Diversity in International Communism* (1963), and *The Soviet Union and Disarmament* (1965).

He also served as director of the Russian Institute (now Harriman Institute) from 1962 to 1967 and acting director of the Research Institute of Communist Affairs. The 1968 crisis at Columbia University found Alex a member of the Executive Committee of the Faculty and of the Faculty Senate; he tried to mediate between the student demonstrators and the administration, urging political negotiations and opposing the use of force on both sides. His efforts led to embittered relations with many colleagues and former friends, but he helped author a set of recommendations that led to an administrative restructuring at Columbia which helped the university to begin to recover from the violent upheavals. Out of opposition to the war in Vietnam, he resigned his positions as consultant to the US government.

After spending 1970–71 as a visiting scholar at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University in California, Alex was offered a position at the University as Professor of History and Political Science, with a shared appointment at the Hoover Institution. From his new California base, he continued to teach, write, and contribute to the building of national and international area studies. He served as director of the Stanford University Center for Russian and East European Studies (1985–89; 1992–94). He was a member of all the major research funding committees in the field, including IREX, when it was still known as the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants (1960–66), and served as first Chairman of the Board (1978–80) of the National Council for Soviet and East European Research (today's NCEEER). He was elected President of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (1984–85), after having earlier served as President of the Western Slavic Association (1978–80) and Program Chairman for the AAASS National Convention in Asilomar, California (1981). During a difficult period in US-Soviet relations (1983–84), Alex co-chaired the Fifth Soviet-American Historical Colloquium, jointly sponsored by the American Historical Association and the Academy of Science of the USSR. After the end of the Soviet Union, Alex joined the organizing committee for the European University in

St. Petersburg and oversaw the New Democracy Fellows Program, which offered students from the post-Soviet states the opportunity to pursue graduate education in the social sciences at Stanford.

He continued his scholarship, in works like *Black Box: KAL 007 and the Superpowers* (1985). In these books, many important edited works and conference chapters, Alex was constantly engaged in the foreign policy debates of his day, as he was through his membership in the Council on Foreign Relations and Amnesty International. Most of the volumes he edited were the results of conferences he had helped to organize. His extensive international contacts and insistence on hearing all sides of the question meant that these conferences more often than not brought American scholars in contact with their European and Soviet/Russian counterparts. He eagerly sought out collaborative authorship and editorship because he welcomed the challenge of learning something new. Together with Gail Lapidus and Dorothy Atkinson, he co-edited one of the first important collections on *Women in Russia* (1977); with Condoleezza Rice, he co-edited *The Gorbachev Era* (1986). The Yale University Press Annals of Communism series published *Dimitrov and Stalin 1934-43: Letters from the Soviet Archives*, which he co-edited with the Russian scholar F. I. Firsov; just months before his death, series editor Jonathan Brent persuaded Alex to edit a companion volume to the Annals series, "A Guide to Soviet History." Characteristically, Alex's partner in this venture was to have been Alexander Chubarian, Director of the Institute of World History (Russian Academy of Science).

Alexander Dallin died July 22, 2000, on the eve of his departure for the VI World Congress for Central and East European Studies in Tampere, Finland; there he was scheduled to take part in two panels, one of them a blue-ribbon concluding plenary session, "The Path of Russia." The Congress opened with a moment of silence in Alex's honor; Alex was past President of the host organization, earlier known as the International Council for Soviet and East European Studies (1985–90) and presided over the Third Congress which convened in Washington, D.C. in October-November 1985. Alex Dallin's involvement with ICCEES was characteristic of his active engagement in several important scholarly institutions, an engagement that grew out of his sense of public or professional service and out of his remarkably sustained commitment to the common interests of the American and international scholarly communities.

Finally, Alex's contribution to scholarship can be seen in many other of his activities. He served on several editorial boards, student and faculty exchange programs, waged battles to assure adequate support for area studies in major university libraries, and oversaw *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, an invaluable resource for scholars of contemporary Soviet affairs.

His commitment to public service in the field engaged him in numerous departmental and university committees, and he did so with a sense of obligation and integrity that has earned him the title of a true citizen of the international scholarly community.

—Mark von Hagen

Note: I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Alex Dallin's widow, Professor Gail Lapidus (Stanford), in providing much of the biographical information for the early part of this essay.

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