

# ‘The first practical Soviet steps towards getting a foothold in the Antarctic’: the Soviet Antarctic whaling flotilla *Slava Irina Gan*

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**ABSTRACT.** After World War II (WWII), the USSR acquired a whaling flotilla as war reparations from the Germans. This event was the beginning of Soviet whaling in the Antarctic. It also motivated the USSR to sign the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and to use its whaling operations to exercise leverage with regard to political advantage in any future discussions on an international regime for the Antarctic.

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## Sources

This paper is based on a series of published, unpublished and archival materials. *The history of modern whaling*, written by Tønnessen and Johnsen (1982) and Naess’s *Autobiography of a shipping man* (1977) provided details of the building and exploitation of the factory ship which eventually became the mother ship of the Antarctic whaling flotilla *Slava*. Russian language books and articles on the subject include reminiscences of the chief of the main directorate of the Northern Sea route Aleksandr Afanasiev (Afanasiev 2003); the captain-director of the flotilla in 1946–1947 Vladimir Voronin (Voronin 1948); the captain-director of the flotilla in 1947–1959 Alexei Solyanik (Solyanik 1952, 1954, 1960) and other participants.

The published sources include material printed in Russian language newspapers (*Vecherniy Leningrad*); in Russian language journals (*News of the All Union Geographical Society*; *Information bulletin of the Soviet Antarctic expedition*) and in English language journals (*The American Journal of International Law*; *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR*), as well as in the book *Soviet Antarctic whaling data* (1995) which was written in both Russian and English. An internet article in Russian by the Ukrainian journalist Vladimir Katkevich based on recollections of whaling veterans and family archives of relatives of participants which appeared on the sixtieth anniversary of the beginning of Soviet Antarctic whaling is also cited. An Australian/US view of Soviet whaling is gleaned from a Department of External Affairs

document. Photographs and drawings of the ships and key players obtained from the museum of the Arctic and Antarctic in St Petersburg, magazines, newspapers and the internet are sources which provide an added visual dimension to the paper. All of these are cited in detail below.

## Introduction

International circumstances after WWII helped set the stage for the USSR to become actively involved in pursuing its Antarctic interests. On 1 December 1945, under the Potsdam agreement, the Tripartite Merchant Marine Commission completed the division of the main German shipping assets between the USA, UK and the USSR (Bulkeley 2005). One of these assets, the German whale oil factory ship *Wikingen* was allocated to the USSR as its share of war reparations (Tønnessen and Johnsen 1982: 515). The 12,639 ton *Wikingen*, designed by C.F. Christensen as a tank steamer with a factory deck superimposed on the basic tanker structure, was built by Swan, Hunter and Wigham Richardson Limited in Wallsend-on-Tyne (England) for the Viking Whaling Company in time for the Antarctic whaling season of 1929–1930. Its tank capacity was about 72,000 barrels of whale oil, while the factory could produce about 1,200 barrels of oil per day. It was one of the first whale oil factory ships, designed as both a processing facility and a tanker, with a slipway aft for hauling whales up on the deck. This feature revolutionised the whaling industry technique: instead of waiting for whales to come within range of a land station, it became possible to chase whales in the open sea. Initially known as the *Vikingen*, it was registered first in Britain, then, after the 1930–1931 whaling season, in Panama, but was always operated and crewed by Norwegian crews (Naess 1977: 36–41). Bought in 1938 by a German company and renamed *Wikingen*, it served in the German navy from 1939 and was seized by the allies at Kiel in 1945. The British re-christened it the *Empire Venture* and the UK Ministry of Food operated it in the Antarctic whaling grounds during the 1945–1946 season. The physical distribution of previous German assets after the conclusion of the war meant that



Fig. 1. Aleksandr Afanasiev (*Sovershenno sekretno* April 2008: 34).

the time had arrived to transfer the *Empire Venture* to its new owner, the USSR.

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the way that this new addition to the fledgling Soviet whaling fleet contributed to the USSR's Antarctic policy.

### The birth of the Soviet Antarctic whaling flotilla *Slava*

In 1936, the USSR was rumoured to have ordered a 25,000 ton floating factory to be built in Hamburg for pelagic whaling in the Antarctic, but this order was not completed (Tønnessen and Johnsen 1982: 415). After the conclusion of WWII, the leader of the USSR, Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), was eager to take possession of ships acquired from the Germans, which would finally fulfil the Soviet desire for a presence in the south polar region: he saw the ships as a practical means which would enable the USSR to pursue its political, economic and scientific interests in the Antarctic. Stalin dispatched the deputy people's commissar for the merchant fleet (from August 1942); later chief of the main directorate of the Northern Sea route (from August 1946) and member of the Tripartite Merchant Marine Commission, Aleksandr Afanasiev (1903–1991) to London with the instructions 'not to return without the whale oil factory ship and its catchers' (Afanasiev 2003: 253). Afanasiev (Fig. 1) organised the transfer at the official level and, as a precautionary measure, had the ships insured for 700 thousand pounds sterling or 7 million gold roubles (Afanasiev 2003: 259). He recalls that when he met

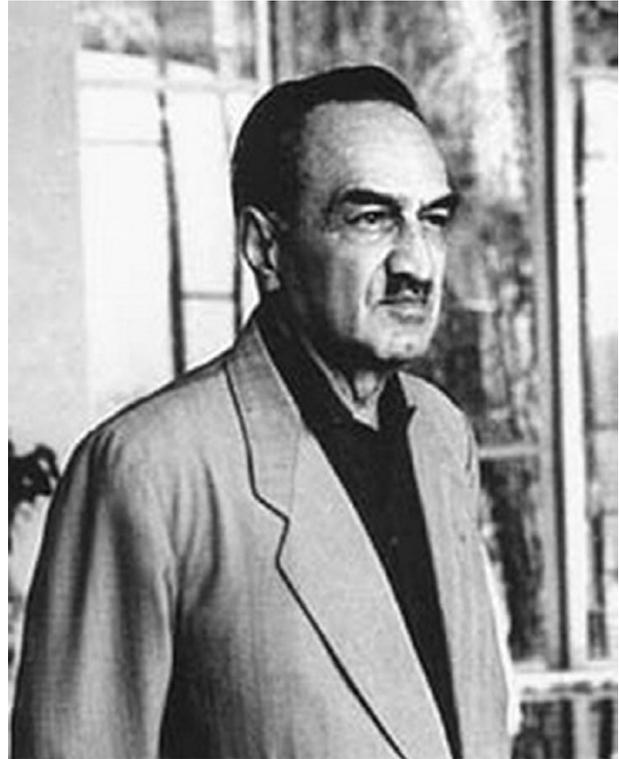


Fig. 2. Anastas Mikoyan (URL: <http://wwii-soldat.narod.ru/NARKOMY/ARTICLES/001-mikoyan.htm>)

Stalin after his return from the UK, the Soviet leader was extremely suspicious of the whole transaction. With the war time alliance rapidly deteriorating, Stalin was sure that the British would not allow the transfer to occur without incident. His distrust of his former allies led him to believe that they would rather set the ships alight than hand them over to the USSR. Afanasiev, however, managed to relieve Stalin's apprehensions: 'such a conflagration would cost them 7 million roubles' he said, as he handed Stalin the insurance policy (Afanasiev 2003: 260).

Also present at the meeting was Anastas Mikoyan (1895–1978), the deputy president of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Trade (from 19 March 1946), and the minister responsible for the whaling industry (Solyanik 1952: 5). In the course of the conversation, Mikoyan (Fig. 2) proposed a name for the newly acquired Soviet acquisition, which Stalin approved. In honour of the 'glorious' war effort of the USSR, it was to be known as the *Slava* ('glory' in Russian). Thus was born the Soviet Antarctic whaling flotilla (AWF) *Slava*, known in Russian as Antarkticheskaya Kitoboinaya Flotiliya (AKF) *Slava*. The word 'flotilla', or 'flotiliya' in Russian, refers to a permanent formation of a homogenous group of ships operating as a distinct unit in a particular location to achieve a specific purpose, in this case to catch and process whales. The individual whaling flotillas are the units which constitute the entire whaling fleet.

The British transfer of the *Empire Venture* to the Soviets took place on 26 September 1946. Aleksei Solyanik (1912–1984), a well known captain-director

of the Far Eastern crab catching flotilla entitled *Anastas Mikoyan* and previous master of an icebreaker, together with a crew, was sent to the UK to take possession of the flotilla from the British. Solyanik, however, ran into problems, since it appears that Stalin's distrust of his former allies was not entirely without foundation. Apparently, the flotilla had been left derelict for several months. All German/Norwegian and British (if any) equipment which had previously been fitted to the ship had been removed for use elsewhere in the British whaling fleet (Bulkeley 2005). This was a cause for mutual recriminations between the new and previous owners. The 'USSR [paid] for a general refit to the *Slava* flotilla in Britain' (Bulkeley 2005). Solyanik and his crew immediately set to work on repairs to the 'derelict' ships' (Katkevich 2006: 2). Repairs to the factory ship and the whale catchers were hastily completed in time for the flotilla to leave the UK for the next, 1946–1947, whaling season. The factory ship sailed on 22 December 1946, and the catchers sailed soon after.

So it was that victory in WWII and the consequent acquisition of a flotilla specially equipped for whaling operations in the Antarctic presented a practical opportunity for realising the desires of Soviet political leaders and scientists for a presence in the south polar region. Thus, after a hiatus of some 127 years, the USSR (which considered itself to be the legal heir to the geographical discoveries and scientific undertakings of Bellingshausen's 1819–1821 expedition) was able once again to show its colours in the Antarctic. Vladimir Vize, a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences stated on 10 February 1949 at a meeting of the USSR All Union Geographical Society that whaling and associated scientific investigations in Antarctic waters had at last ended 'the lengthy interlude in Russian Antarctic expeditions' (cited in Berg 1949: 145). The USSR had now acquired an unquestionable economic and scientific interest in that part of the globe. Stalin was determined to emphasise and legitimise this interest within the international community by political means. Towards the end of 1946, he instructed the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve the legal issues associated with Soviet activities in the Antarctic (Lukin 2009: 9–10). As a starting point, the USSR took the step of joining the governments of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, UK, Union of South Africa and the USA in becoming a signatory to the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, which the Soviet delegates Alexander Bogdanov and Eugene Nikishin signed on 2 December 1946. The USSR ratified the International Whaling Convention on 11 September 1948 (USSR 1950: 209). A study entitled *Soviet Antarctic whaling data (1947–1972)* published in Moscow by the Centre for Russian Environmental Policy in 1995, presents details concerning to what extent the Soviets actually adhered to the whaling convention. In one of the articles contained in the publication, I. Golovlev, the former chief state

inspector of whaling in the Antarctic, outlines how 'the USSR had falsified data on actual catches by Soviet whaling fleets in the Antarctic from 1948 till 1972' (Golovlev 1995: 11). By becoming a signatory to an international convention, however, the USSR gained a voice in determining policy relating to activities in the Antarctic. Wolk asserts that the formation and utilisation of a Soviet Antarctic whaling flotilla was one of 'the first practical Soviet steps towards getting a foothold in the Antarctic...'. (Wolk 1958: 44).

Stalin recognised the political and economic ramifications of this. He anticipated that successful whaling operations would lead not only to economic benefits for his war ravaged country, (the flotilla brought the country tens of millions of dollars profit – up to 50 million dollars worth of whale meat was exported to Japan alone (Selivanov 2007)) but that a physical presence in the region would add a greater weight to Soviet attempts to participate in any future negotiations in settling territorial claims and/or any arrangements for an international regime for the Antarctic. These actions were in keeping with the course that Toma believes the USSR government had already mapped out and iterated in its memorandum of 7 June 1950 to the governments of Argentina, Australia, France, New Zealand, Norway, the UK and the USA on the participation of the Soviet Union in any international settlement concerning the Antarctic as a response to the US proposal for an eight power condominium of the Antarctic claimant countries which attempted to exclude the USSR (Toma 1956). Besides mentioning 'the outstanding services rendered by Russian navigators in discovering the Antarctic', the memorandum underlines the great value from the economic point of view of the territory of the Antarctic and its adjacent waters: 'nine-tenths of the world's whaling is done precisely in the Antarctic waters. The USSR is engaged in the whaling industry and is a party to the International Whaling Convention of 1946. Its whaling flotillas regularly operate in the Antarctic waters' (USSR 1950: 208). The scientific importance of the Antarctic is not forgotten, 'inasmuch as this continent and the adjacent islands present a convenient base for conducting highly important meteorological observations which are of importance to the northern hemisphere too' (USSR 1950: 208). After outlining the Soviet interests of discovery, whaling and science, the memorandum concludes by proposing a course of action which would include the USSR: 'insofar as the destiny of the Antarctic is of interest to many countries, it would be expedient at the present time to discuss the question of the Antarctic regime on an international plane, with a view to reaching an agreement as would accord with the legitimate interests of all States concerned' (USSR 1950: 209).

### ***Slava goes south***

The USSR was intent on projecting its post war 'super-power' status as far as possible, even to the opposite side of the globe. The mission was difficult, but the Soviets



Fig. 3. Vladimir Voronin (URL: <http://funeral-spb.narod.ru/necropols/shuvalovskoe/tombs/voronin/voronin.html>)

believed that the stakes were well worth the effort. To ensure success of the new venture, Stalin considered it vital that the director of the new operations in the Antarctic have a history of exceptional achievement in analogous conditions. To his mind, the logical candidate for the undertaking was Vladimir Voronin (1890–1952), who had led the first expedition to sail the Northern Sea Route in one season during the second International Polar Year of 1932 (Fig. 3). Stalin personally instructed that Voronin be appointed captain-director of the flotilla (Afanasiev 2003: 260), although Afanasiev most likely had another contender in mind for this role. Afanasiev's candidate, Solyanik, had taken possession of the flotilla and brought it to Gibraltar for bunkering before sailing on to the Antarctic. But it was Voronin who was to take over command in Gibraltar, where he arrived on the tanker *Pamir*, which was sent to refuel the ships (Fig. 4).

During its first (1946–1947) season, the AWF *Slava* was one of 15 fleets from different countries taking part in whaling activities in the Antarctic. According to Voronin it consisted of the factory ship which in the 1950s had a crew of 'more than 370' (Solyanik 1954: 5) and eight catchers (Voronin 1948: 215; *The Norwegian Whaling Gazette* 1947: 348). In the 1950s each of these had a crew of 20 – 25 (Solyanik 1954: 5), while according to Bulkeley, the factory ship and seven catchers left the UK for Antarctica (Bulkeley 2005).

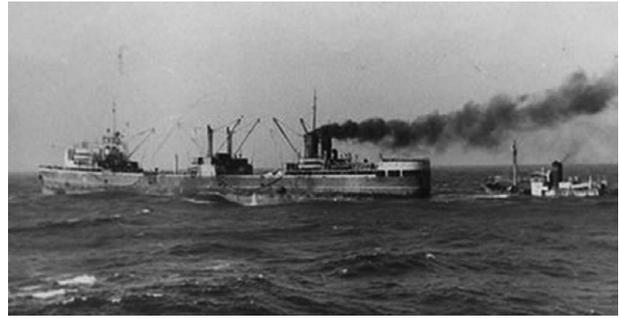


Fig. 4. *Slava* (Arctic and Antarctic Museum, St Petersburg).

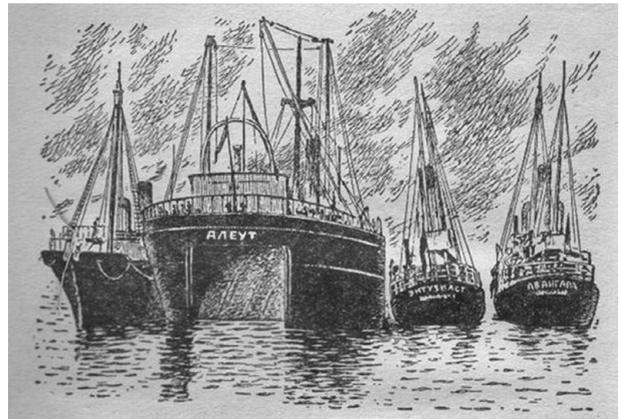


Fig. 5. *Aleut*. Drawing by N. Kondakov (Zenkovich 1954: 16).

The author has been unable to find the reason for the discrepancy in the quoted numbers of whale catchers, although a 1947 documentary film entitled *Za kitami v Antarktidu* [*Chasing after whales in Antarctica*] held in the archive of film and photo documents in Krasnogorsk, Russia, may shed more light on the subject. Unfortunately, the author has not had access to the film. Perhaps an extra catcher was brought from the USSR?

The task of manning the first Soviet AWF *Slava* with experienced polar mariners was not a difficult one. As indicated by Voronin, the Arctic and the main directorate of the Northern Sea Route was a reliable source of qualified personnel. The task of finding experienced whalers, however, was more of a problem. Although the Soviets operated the much smaller *Aleut* whaling flotilla (a factory ship and three catchers) (Fig. 5) in the far east from 1932, the *Aleut*, compared to the *Slava*, was a 'makeshift affair' (Katkevich 2006: 3). *Aleut* could provide some, but by no means all, of the necessary manpower for the *Slava*, compelling the USSR to look beyond its own borders for instructors who could train the Soviet whalers. Which country would be able to provide instructors for the Soviet whalers? The answer was patently obvious.

During its time as the *Vikingen*, AWF *Slava* was operated by a Norwegian crew; the country with arguably the most prodigious whaling experience was Norway. Consequently, it was to Norway that the Soviets looked

for assistance in training its whalers and operating its new flotilla. On 29 November 1946, the Norwegian government waived the December 1945 'crew law' and allowed the USSR to employ thirty Norwegian specialists (Tønnessen and Johnsen 1982: 523; Bulkeley 2005) 'supervised by a Norwegian captain Mr Nielsen' (Golovlev 1995: 14) to assist in whaling operations on the *Slava*. Veterans of the *Aleut* whaling operations in the far east were also employed, as were officers, sailors, navigators and mechanics from the demobilised post war Soviet navy (Katkevich 2006: 1). 'The Norwegian whalers taught us how to hunt whales in the Antarctic' (Solyanik 1960: 15), recalled Solyanik, although they 'were not in a hurry to impart the secrets of their craftsmanship, on the grounds that any increases in knowledge would accrue only over a period of decades' (Katkevich 2006: 8). A period of decades, however, was not the time frame envisaged by Solyanik: he advised the minister of foreign trade Mikoyan that 'hunting success with the Norwegians often depends on omens, and [is] dictated by superstitions' (Katkevich 2006: 8). He was sure that the Soviets had learnt enough of the basics of whaling without delving into its more esoteric aspects and that the Soviet whalers were quite capable of continuing without further instruction. Mikoyan heeded Solyanik's advice, with the result that in 1948, Nielsen was presented with a *Pobeda* [Victory] automobile in appreciation of his service to the USSR, and further Norwegian assistance to the AWF *Slava* was terminated. After the first two whaling seasons, the Soviets whalers were left to their own devices, even though Nielsen continued to doubt the 'success of Russian self-sufficiency' in their conduct of whaling operations (Katkevich 2006: 9).

Whether Nielsen's doubts as to 'Russian self-sufficiency' were accurate was a moot point. The whaling data suggests that the Soviets had no problem with hunting whales, to the degree that they took many more of them than allowed by the whaling convention. According to Golovlev, 'starting from the third cruise (1948/49) ... without Norwegian specialists the *Slava* totally ignored the whaling regulations' (Golovlev 1995: 14). The absence of the Norwegians allowed the Soviets to ignore the whaling quotas imposed by the International Whaling Commission, and 'an unprecedented poaching campaign began which can be characterized as a literal extermination of whales. It lasted until 1972 when international observers appeared on whaling fleets' (Golovlev 1995: 12).

While providing the USSR with whale oil, meat and other products of the whaling industry, the Soviet whaling flotilla was at times used to remind other nations engaged in the exploitation of the Antarctic about its country's longstanding link with that region of the globe. For example, Voronin recalls that 'at the end of February [1947] the *Slava* was at a distance of about 1200 miles from South Georgia Island. At that time it became necessary to send one of the catchers [*Slava I*] to South Georgia' (Voronin 1948: 218). He goes on to

point out that the island was discovered in 1502, visited in 1775 by Captain James Cook and on 27 December 1819 was visited by the Russian expedition vessels *Vostok* and *Mirny* under the Bellingshausen (Voronin 1948: 218). Bellingshausen's expedition had sailed along the southern shore of the island and had first named various geographical features such as Paryadin, Demidov, Kupriyanov capes; Novosilskiy bay and Annenkov Island (Shvede 1949). Voronin does not explain the reason for the necessity of calling in to Grytviken on South Georgia, although Ukrainian journalist and former seafarer Vladimir Katkevich, in an article marking the 60th jubilee of the commencement of whaling operations in the Antarctic, provides a clue. 'The press immediately reported that for the first time since Bellingshausen's expedition, Russians had set foot on the island. The visit to South Georgia had a largely political significance and was planned in Moscow' (Katkevich 2006: 7). In fact Bellingshausen did not actually land having been prevented from doing so by the weather.

After completing her inaugural voyage, *Slava* arrived in her home port of Odessa on 6 July 1947 (Voronin 1948: 222), where 'the whole of Odessa came out to greet her. All the ships in port blew their whistles. . . it was a very festive occasion, a real holiday for Odessa' (cited in Selivanov 2007). Voronin triumphantly informed the Soviet public that '[t]he Soviet whaling industry has a great future. I am sure that the time is not far off when not one, but several expeditions equipped with first class technology will leave our shores for the severe Antarctic coast. The people steering these ships through the unexplored seas of the southern latitudes will be the same ones who tamed and conquered the Arctic. . .' (cited in Konichev 1949: 115). Voronin, one of the more renowned men who had 'tamed and conquered the Arctic', had vindicated the trust that Stalin had placed in him. Having successfully fulfilled his mission, he returned to his work on the Northern Sea Route (Katkevich 2006: 8). His hopes for 'several expeditions equipped with first class technology' and the future of the Soviet whaling industry were left for others to realise. And realise them they did.

### Whaling, science and the inevitable politics

One of the outstanding personalities associated with the expansion of the Soviet Antarctic whaling industry was Afanasiev's original candidate, Solyanik, who was appointed captain-director of AWF *Slava* from the next (1947–1948) season. Solyanik occupied this position until the end of 1959, when he was transferred to the newly established *Sovetskaya Ukraina* Antarctic whaling flotilla (built in Nikolaev and based, like *Slava*, in Odessa) (Figs. 6, 7). He became captain-director of the new flotilla, which operated in the Antarctic in addition to *Slava*. A third flotilla, the *Yuri Dolgoruki* (based in Kaliningrad) was established in 1960 and a fourth, the *Sovetskaya*



Fig. 6. *Sovetskaya Ukraina* (Arctic and Antarctic Museum, St Petersburg).

*Rossiia* (built in Nikolaev and based in Vladivostok) in 1961.

The operations of the Soviet whaling fleet were not limited to whaling and showing the flag. Its objectives were somewhat broader: another of its aims ‘was to conduct scientific research in the region’ (Golubev 1949: 68). Members of several Soviet Arctic and Antarctic expeditions, the geographer Vyacheslav Averianov, and the glaciologist Yakov Koblenz affirm that, since 1946, ‘scientific observations and research had been carried on all Soviet whaling flotillas operating in Antarctic waters’ (Averianov and Koblenz 1970: 14). One of the flotilla’s ships was always given over to a scientific group, with scientists from the All Union Research Institute of Fishery and Oceanography and the State Oceanographic Institute on board conducting systematic research (Gusev 1961: 26) of the climate, flora, fauna, hydrology and ice (Kirillov and Rybnikov 1962: 287). ‘[T]he scientists... occupy themselves in studying the Antarctic. We conduct orderly hydro-meteorological observations, and in this, as with many other things, we are greatly assisted by the navigators and captains of the whaling ships. Our observations of the climate; air and ocean currents; causes, force and duration of storms in different Antarctic regions have a strong practical and scientific significance’ (Kotlyar 1952: 273), wrote one of the participating scientists. The practical aspects were to ‘actively assist the whalers in increasing their catch, [by] thoroughly studying the whales and their movements in the boundless oceans, thus simplifying their search for whale pods’ (Kotlyar 1952: 273).

The escalation of Soviet whaling operations and the associated scientific research was cause for a heightened sense of anxiety on the part of western governments. For example, at the conclusion of the International Geophysical Year of 1957–1958, a secret inward cablegram dated 25 April 1959 from the Australian embassy in Washington reported that ‘Soviet operations in the 1958–59 Antarctic season have included not only the fulfilment of publicized plans to expand into another part of the Antarctic – Queen Maud Land – but an unusual employment of the



Fig. 7. Aleksei Solyanik (Arctic and Antarctic Museum, St Petersburg).

USSR’s whaling fleet – headed by the whale factory ship *Slava* – for scientific and political purposes in the South Pacific Antarctic waters’ (Department of External Affairs 1959). One of these ‘political purposes’ was the *Slava* visit to Wellington in May 1958, a date which coincided with the Soviet 9 May Victory Day celebrations. Its captain, Solyanik, met the prime minister of New Zealand, Mr Walter Nash, and ‘played host to the famous Polar explorers Sir Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary’ who ‘spoke with admiration of the courage and valour of the Soviet scientists, flyers and seamen who took part in research work on the sixth continent’ (Solyanik 1960: 15). The good will visit was a follow up to the previous visits of the Soviet Antarctic expedition to Wellington in 1956 (Gan 2009) and for the international Antarctic symposium of 18–22 February 1958 (Nudelman 1959: 37). ‘Peace and friendship’ and a ‘deepening of understanding between the people of New Zealand and our country’ (Kort 1959: 416) was the proclaimed object of these visits. Solyanik also took the opportunity of spreading the word about the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s new peace initiative: ‘[h]umanity is impatiently waiting for the day when Khrushchov’s (sic) proposal for general and complete disarmament becomes a reality and the horrible menace of destructive nuclear wars disappears. That is why the eyes of the world are turned to Washington, London and Paris. The next step is up to them’ (Solyanik 1960: 15).

The writers of the cablegram from the Australian embassy in Washington, however, were not convinced by either Khrushchev’s or the leader of the whaling expedition’s peace loving rhetoric. They make the observation that, aside from politics, ‘[t]his unusual use of whaling vessels maintains continuity of scientific observations in the Bellingshausen Sea area started by the Research vessel *Ob* in the 1957–58 season’. They also suggest that ‘the continued interest in the area of the unclaimed sector, where American interests are strongest may also have significant political implications.’ Furthermore, they sound a warning about the increasing role of the USSR in Antarctic whaling: ‘[i]n addition to

boosting Soviet prestige and economic interests in the Antarctic Area, enlarged whaling operations will provide increased support to scientific efforts there. The oceanographic observations on density, salinity and temperatures would have additional military significance for submarine navigation and underwater sound propagation studies' (Department of External Affairs 1959).

### Conclusion

The first practical Soviet steps to securing a foothold in the Antarctic had resulted in the growth from one to a total of four Antarctic whaling flotillas which 'combined whaling with significant scientific work, directed towards extending knowledge of the region... Scientific work on the whaling flotillas [became] a part of the overall programme of Soviet Antarctic research' (Semenov 1964: 53). The greatly increased presence of Soviet ships in the Southern Ocean, their ability to traverse large areas, make high profile visits to foreign ports and display their advanced technology and scientific research demonstrated the seriousness of Soviet intentions to other nations. In this way, the USSR had 'skilfully insinuat[ed] its presence in Antarctica' (Boczek 1984: 839–840). It had also resulted in an added irritant to the already mounting unease of the Australian government at the Soviet presence in the south polar region.

The heightened awareness of Soviet Antarctic operations shown by western governments indicated that the USSR was indeed on the way to achieving its goal of becoming a major player in the Antarctic arena. By the time the nations with interests in the south polar region were ready to decide on an international regime for the Antarctic in the late 1950s, the 'first practical Soviet steps towards getting a foothold in the Antarctic' had led to the USSR firmly entrenching itself in that part of the world. There could be no question that it would not participate in any such decision.

### Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Vladimir Katkevich for providing additional information about *Slava* and the editors of the Moscow newspaper *Sovershenno sekretno* [*Top secret*] for providing the photograph of Aleksandr Afanasiev. She is also grateful to R.I.P. Bulkeley for the loan of his unpublished manuscript referred to below.

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