

Remembering a Great Scientist of History

by Mary Burdman

The legendary Russian Professor Grigori Lvovich Bondarevsky (1920-2003), Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences, was honored at a memorial meeting at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow on Feb. 9, to mark his 85th birthday anniversary.

For more than 60 years, Bondarevsky was the great pioneer of Russian oriental studies, bringing an ever-growing knowledge of history, and a commitment to truth, to his work. This work included advising Soviet and Russian governments on Indian, South Asian, Islamic, and Central Asian affairs during six decades; training and advising some 100 candidates for advanced academic degrees; ceaseless activity in building relations between his nation and his beloved India, Kuwait, Iran, Cambodia, Great Britain, and other nations; writing 27 books and more than 300 articles; and amassing his great pride: his 7,000-volume library and archive of articles and reports going back half a century. The Professor was murdered on Aug. 8, 2003, while he was at work on a report on the situation in Chechenya for the Russian government.

The Professor was a dear friend, consultant, and teacher for my husband Mark Burdman, who himself died a year later, on July 8, 2004. He was also a great friend and collaborator of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche.

The distinguished participants and speakers at the memorial in Moscow included Prof. Rostislav Rybakov, Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies; Prof. Anatoly Khazanov, head of the Institute's Department of International Relations, which was founded by Bondarevsky; Academician V.S. Myasnikov, Deputy Director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies; Prof. Tatiana Shaumian, Director of the Center for Indian Studies; Prof. Leonid Medvedko of the Orient Institute; Professors Mikhail Savin and Nicolay Merzlikin of the Institute of Social-Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences; and his daughter, Dr. Lyubov Bondarevsky.

The theme that ran through all the speakers' words, was the Professor's great commitment to truth. For him, history was a *science*, and its reality could only be established by looking at the real historic records. He spent many years of intensive work in the vast archives of Russia, India, Great Britain, the United States, and other nations, establishing what actually happened in important events in history. He

also, every day, gathered information on what was happening in the world, from the news media and from his great number of friends and contacts in many countries. For him, there were no “current events”; there was always current history.

A Living Legend

I can only highlight the proceedings of the Moscow meeting, which was done in the Russian manner, in a series of tributes. Director Rybakov expressed his appreciation that so many—some 40 people attended—had come during a busy day, to commemorate this man. Every time he heard Bondarevsky speak, the Director said, he would be amazed at his fundamental approach to every issue, and the breadth of his knowledge; it always seemed impossible that someone could be so well educated, and so serious about so many issues. Always, Bondarevsky had a remarkable ability to look ahead, not only in his own work, but for that of his many collaborators. He was also a true citizen of Russia. He had many reasons to be disappointed in his life, but never allowed this to stop his work. He was not just the contemporary of his colleagues, but a contemporary of those who will come after us.

Professor Khazanov, who chaired the meeting, called Bondarevsky a brilliant and original thinker. The importance of his work, especially the colonial and post-colonial history of the nations of West, South, and Central Asia, was comparable to that of Heinrich Schliemann in Troy. Khazanov then quoted Helga Zepp-LaRouche’s commemoration of Bondarevsky in the Sept. 26, 2003 issue of *EIR*: “In an extraordinary way, his loss makes clear that human individuals are unique and irreplaceable; and even though this saying is always true, so much more huge is the gap in the ranks of his contemporaries, which he leaves behind. The Professor was a completely extraordinary personality, an intellectual of genius . . . and the lack of him makes Russia and the world a bit poorer.”

The full scope of Bondarevsky’s personality, said Khazanov, is not yet properly evaluated; it may well be that he will be understood only by the next generation. He was a living legend. Khazanov then described Bondarevsky’s remarkable career and work. The Professor built his academic work on *evidence*, not myths, as the many stories he himself told demonstrate. He was always working, no matter what hit him. His life proved how talent, and a love for truth and science, can bring a man to great heights.

Professor Khazanov, and every other speaker, also paid tribute to Alexandra Arkadievna, the Professor’s beloved wife of 62 years, and his best friend, collaborator, and helper in all his work. She herself had degrees in medicine and history, but dedicated her life to his work.

Khazanov’s words, that only in the future will the full scope of Bondarevsky’s personality be understood, were echoed by every other speaker. It was proposed that Bondarevsky’s key writings be re-published. The Professor’s first



Grigory L. Bondarevsky, a brilliant and original thinker, pioneered in the Soviet and Russian study of history, especially the colonial and post-colonial history of Asia.

doctoral thesis, written on the Berlin-to-Baghdad railroad in 1949, remains the classic work on the subject in Russia today, as does his famous, 2,000-page second thesis, later published in 1968 as *Russia and the Persian Gulf*. All of modern Russian Oriental studies are based on Bondarevsky’s work on the Baghdad railroad, Khazanov said.

Rings in the Water

Professor Medvedko said that to judge about someone who has passed away, you must think of his life as a stone thrown into water: You can only truly understand it, when you see the rings which spread out, farther and farther. The ripples from Bondarevsky’s life are spreading ever wider. In Russia today, there is much controversy over heritage, including that of the state. There is material heritage, but there is another heritage, that of the soul. This is something much greater, and can live much longer. Bondarevsky’s heritage, said Medvedko, is clear: the group of scholars to whom he passed his knowledge. His heritage also includes his great library, now carrying his work further among his friends and collaborators.

Academician Myasnikov praised Bondarevsky’s energy, and his love for Russia. His work for the Russian government was of great importance, especially his understanding of the history and causes of critical conflict areas, including Afghanistan. Bondarevsky had a great gift of foreseeing events in the international arena, and at the same time proposing many steps to prevent or lessen conflicts. Professors Savin and Merzlikin of the Institute for Socio-Political Research emphasized that Bondarevsky was a scientist at the highest level, who managed to reflect all the processes of our time.

The speakers at the memorial included Prof. Raila Mukimjanova of the Oriental Institute, who had been Bondarevsky’s student decades ago in Tashkent; Prof. Vitaly Sheremet

of the Orient Institute; Dmitry Kasatkin of the journal *Issues of Asia and Africa Today*; Prof. Mikhail Burian of the Center of Oriental Studies of the University of Lugansk in Ukraine; and myself. Dr. Lyubov Bondarevsky, herself a historian of the railroads of Persia and Iran, and who has done so much since her father's death to catalogue and distribute his books and papers, said she had, through this process, truly learned to know him.

I spoke, representing the Schiller Institute, to bring the greetings of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche to the memorial meeting. I described the impact of Bondarevsky's great vision of Eurasian cooperation on the work of the Schiller Institute. In many ways, the thinking of Bondarevsky cohered with that of Lyndon LaRouche, particularly in their conception of "current events" as, in reality, current history. The Professor was also committed to using his profound knowledge of history, to change its course, as demonstrated by his proposal to Helga LaRouche in 1991, to set up the Committee to Save the Children of Iraq.

The *Geistesmassen*, the "thought objects," created by Bondarevsky's wonderful mind, certainly live on after his death. When LaRouche recently proposed the cooperation of nations to ensure the vital supplies of raw materials, we knew that this was something that the Professor would agree was "of greatest importance."

His Life

Grigori Bondarevsky, who was born in Odessa, was admitted to Moscow State University in 1939, a remarkable achievement for a Jew in those times. Already then, he got his first precious permission to go into Russian Archives; he preserved his Archives pass to the end of his life. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Bondarevsky served in the Soviet special forces, and was among the elite troops deployed to protect Joseph Stalin during the Tehran Conference with Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, in late 1943. In 1945, because of his great knowledge of Central Asia, he was sent to Tashkent, where he became Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan and also founded the Chair of Oriental Studies at the University of Central Asia.

He returned to Moscow in 1956, where he carried on his work at the Institute of Oriental Studies, founding its Department of International Relations in 1956, and creating a brilliant team of scholars. From the 1960s, his great project was studying the colonial policies of Western powers, especially Great Britain, in the East. After 1976, Bondarevsky moved to the Institute for Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and was elected Academician of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences in 1995.

His remarkable work in the national archives of India, selecting and copying some 74,000 pages of historic documents, enabled him to bring this material to the Oriental Institute in 1978, where they form an invaluable resource today. Many of these documents were duplicates of originals held

in the London Public Records Office, the world's greatest archive, in the Professor's view.

In 1968, he was the first Soviet scholar to visit Cambodia; in 1969, he led a delegation of Soviet scholars to Iran; in 1971, he was first Soviet scholar to meet the Dalai Lama in India. He was also awarded honorary degrees in Great Britain.

India was his greatest love. In Tashkent, Bondarevsky had received Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru during his 1955 visit to the Soviet Union. Bondarevsky committed himself to ensuring that Nehru's book, *Glimpses of World History*, would be published in the Soviet Union. He edited the Russian translation and saw through the remarkable achievement of its eventual publication in 1981. Later, Bondarevsky had numerous meetings with Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, and many other Indian leaders and scholars. He was a recipient of the International Jawaharlal Nehru Award, and in 2000, President Raman Narayanan received him at his official residence to award one of India's highest honors, the *Padma Shri* medal. These honors will go on display at the Historical Museum of Russia next month.

The Professor also became an expert on the history of Kuwait, which knowledge became of great value in August 1990. He demonstrated how dubious it was, that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had "surprised" the United States, and that the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border had been established in the previous century.

Russian Patriot

Professor Bondarevsky summed up much of his own life work, in a 1998 interview with Kuwaiti television. Asked why he dedicated his life to history, the Professor said: "We have to understand the importance of history for the contemporary world. Look at the great political mistakes which have been made. When Napoleon invaded Russia, he had the arrogant illusion that the Russian peasants would support him. Napoleon put out leaflets, claiming he would free the serfs. But instead, the peasants went into the woods, and became partisans, fighting and defeating Napoleon. This was the reality: This was the real beginning of the Russian nation. Others should have understood this history."

He described Russia's unique role as a Eurasian nation, and how this contributed to his own work. Russia lived for 250 years under the Tartars, and as a result is much nearer to Asia than Western Europeans are, politically and culturally.

He also stated his profound love for his country. He was asked what he thought about so many Russian scientists now going to the United States or Europe to live and work. Bondarevsky himself had been invited to move to Britain, to take up a chair at one of its leading universities, but he had refused. "You have only one motherland in your life," the Professor said. "It may not be easy, it is not always easy to be a scholar in Russia, but it is *your* country. You have to defend it with your brains." Certainly Grigori Bondarevsky's great brain, was, and remains, a national treasure of Russia.