

hostage whilst the fighting was going on. The system of military commissars was formally established as the PUR – Politicheskoye Upravleniya Respublika and it became the party's eyes and ears in the armed forces. This is just one of the many official bodies noticed here: Sovnarkom, Prolet'kult and Rabkrin were Russia's first taste of Communist bureaucracy.

The worst of the deprivation is described in the article on War Communism, the economic counterpart of the civil war. Food was requisitioned from the peasantry by detachments of the Red army (the "Prodotriady"). The food went to the hungry towns with the result that the villages starved. There was some cannibalism. But the towns starved as well, so workers deserted them to seek out food in the countryside. This meant industrial production collapsed and there were no goods to exchange for food. Farm output slumped even further.

Another of Lenin's anxieties was money. There is a nice story, noticed here, about the Imperial Gold Reserve, valued at 650 million gold roubles. Seized during the revolution, the Bolsheviks held it in Samara. However, lodged there, it was in danger of being captured by the White armies, so to keep it safe it was floated in barges up the Volga to Kazan. When the Whites overran Kazan, they shipped it off to Siberia. I wonder what happened to all that money?

If we use it as a biographical dictionary (almost half the entries are biographies), Dr Smele's book is a fascinating read: General Vladimir Tolstoy – a "white" Cossack commander who escaped Russia to Australia and ended up with a job on the Sydney harbour docks; General Miller, another white commander who later became active in Romanov circles in Paris, the informal capital of monarchist exiles in Europe. In 1937, he was kidnapped by the NKVD, taken to Moscow and shot.

But not all the stories are sad ones. Sergei Chakhotin came through it all: the son of a tsarist diplomat, he was successively a white propagandist, a Soviet trade official and a research biologist in Berlin; he survived a Nazi prison and died at the age of 90, an honoured scientist of the Soviet Union. Chakhotin was a lucky man. By contrast, Vasili Chapaev died at 32. Chapaev was a soldier for the Bolsheviks who died in the battle of Ufa in 1919. Later, Soviet propaganda needed heroes and found one in this peasant soldier, glorifying his memory in later years with a novel, a biopic and even a popular board-game: Igra v. Chapaev!

The fate of many loyal Bolsheviks was a pitiless one. Alexander Beloborodov, leader of the Urals Cheka and the man who signed the death warrant for Nicholas and the royal family was himself executed on Stalin's orders in 1938;

Stepan Petrichenko, leader of the Kronstadt sailors and later a spy, died in a Soviet prison camp in 1947. They were just two of the thousands of dedicated party workers who suffered at Stalin's hands.

I cannot fault *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Civil Wars* on grounds of comprehensiveness but the work is pre-eminently a book of factual detail. I would have preferred to see more subject entries on topics like rail transport, munitions, desertions, atrocities, trade, food supplies, war finance, cavalry and the procurement of horses. (This was not a sophisticated war: it was fought on horseback and on foot.) Everyday social realities do not figure much in the book. The combination of atrocious cruelty, hunger and a bitter climate made Russia a truly hellish place to live in but this reality gets lost in the welter of historical detail. Of course, the work is not meant to include impressions of ordinary life – Smele leaves that to other writers. His book is a quarry of information for them to draw on – and more entries would have made a big book even bigger! The other omission is maps. To make sense of the civil war, and in huge Russia of all countries, maps are an acute necessity.

Rowman & Littlefield have stuck to the series format: two tightly bound standard octavos. But at 700 pages each, they are fat, awkward little volumes which are not easy to handle. Small quartos would have been better for such a mammoth book. All in all, Dr Smele has made a valiant attempt to cover every scrap of information about this grim decade, its politics and warfare. There is no mention of collaborators: the book appears to be a single-handed effort.

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RR 2017/147 Nation-Master

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Gratis

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NationMaster is based on such a great idea. The premise of having gratis one source that would allow quick comparison of countries has merit. Many assignments ask students to do just that. Headlines from both the popular and scholarly press lament young people's lack of geographic literacy with good reason. Too few students could begin to take a world outline map and fill

in the country names, much less demonstrate any knowledge of the background, physical features, ethnic populations, religions or health care access. A first perusal of *NationMaster* was exciting. It is possible to compare countries, get profiles of individual countries or categories such as agriculture, crime, social issues, education and many more. The devil is in the details, though, and with closer scrutiny, it is disappointing. Too often the information and statistics are out of date in a time when changes are unfolding at a dizzying pace. In addition, it is difficult to discern where the exact data comes from, making it difficult to look for newer statistics from the issuing agency. Two requests for further source information and updating frequency went unanswered.

Using the example of the United Kingdom, the population data are from 2014, the GDP from 2012, the groups it belongs to include Christian Countries, Cold Countries and Heavily Indebted Countries, among others. It is confusingly listed as ranked first and last for Geography – Area and David Cameron is listed as Prime Minister. The agricultural statistics were taken from 2001 Food and Agricultural Organisation data, as well as data from 2003, 2005, 2007, 2004. The most current statistic was from 2010. Weather statistics are from 2009. Confusingly, linking to the terrorism in the UK opens the door to many terrorist incidents, with the number of British nationals killed, which made sense in a fashion but what seemed logical was to find the number of incidents in the UK instead.

The comparing two countries option is easy. Choosing Canada and Australia, the user sees a side-by-side comparison with cost of living, crime rates, GDPs, health and people compared. Clicking on the label for the topic gets a ranked listing of the countries – for example, clicking on the murder rate label, an alphabetical list of the countries and their murder rates pop up. Some items articulate some differences, such as, in the example of Canada and the USA, one is “slightly larger” and the other “slightly smaller” than the USA. Below the side-by-side comparison chart is a source list. The most recent statistic is from 2009.

For Australians, there is a very fun and useful feature. Users can find affordability, safety, convenience a “hip score” of neighbourhoods in various cities around the country.

There are so many issues, from indifferent punctuation and capitalisation to inane factoids such as “Poland is full of history”. The problems with *NationMaster* detract from the possible value of this website.

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Penguins, Pineapples and Pangolins: First Encounters with the Exotic

Clare Cock-Starkey

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While perhaps less of a “reference” in the more traditional sense of the word, as this is not a book one would turn to in order to find a fact or single piece of information, this volume is still to some extent a reference work. What Cock-Starkey presents her reader with is a selection of experiences relating to the exotic natural world.

Ever wondered what happened when kangaroos were first encountered by the English in Australia? Captain William Dampier describes them as being “as big as a sheep”. What about how the first exotic fruits were discovered and tasted? The orange that we now take for granted as part of our diet was in fact an eleventh-century crusader introduction, and even some 400 years later, in India its true delicacy was still observed with Sir Thomas Herbert writing in 1677 that they “may well be remembered, they were so succulent and dainty, and of course so curious a relish as affects the eater beyond measure”.

These examples provide just a small glimpse into what this fun and accessible volume has to offer the curious reader. Not only does it make it possible to learn about those intrepid explorers who were brave enough to search out the world and bring it back to Europe both literally, and in their notebooks or journals, it also makes it possible to learn about how they made their discoveries and what their reactions were.

Used as a quick reference guide to establish the origins of exotic animals and birds, food, fruit and plants or people, places and customs, this is a handy book. Accessibly written, well evidenced, referenced and resourced, it is also absorbing, quirky and amusing. Furthermore, it takes us back to a time when, wanting to know more about our world meant risk, danger and the thrill of adventure. The accounts relayed in this book were not discovered at the click of a button but through hours of research; their original discoverers too set out on adventures to uncover facts. The