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ZAPOROZHE.  
BIRMINGHAM'S TWIN CITY  
IN THE U.S.S.R



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ZAPOROZHE:  
BIRMINGHAM'S TWIN CITY  
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## ZAPOROZHE: BIRMINGHAM'S TWIN CITY IN THE USSR



Zaporozhe is almost certainly the least well-known of Birmingham's twin cities - many people have simply never heard of it, few people know where it is and even fewer know anything about it. The aim of the following account is to give a brief description of Zaporozhe, its history and some of its main features.

### Location

Zaporozhe is situated some 1500 miles to the east of Birmingham and further to the south - it is roughly on the same latitude as Salzburg in Austria. As a result of this it is much hotter in summer than Birmingham but because of the influence of the continental climate of the Soviet Union it is much colder in winter. The Soviet Union consists of fifteen republics and Zaporozhe is situated in the second largest of these, the Ukraine. The Ukrainian language though similar to Russian is a separate language and would be spoken by many people in Zaporozhe or Zaporizhzhya to give it its Ukrainian name, and some of the local papers and broadcasting would be in Ukrainian, although of course most people would understand Russian. To avoid confusion, in this account the Russian version of place names etc will be used.

Zaporozhe lies some 650 miles to the south of Moscow and about 100 miles from the Sea of Azov and about two hundred from the Crimea and the Black Sea. It lies on the River Dnieper at a point where it is divided into two by a large island, Khortitsa, just below an area of the river which in times past was impossible to navigate because of rapids. The name Zaporozhe means 'beyond the rapids' and in the past was used for the whole area below the rapids which was inhabited by the Zaporozhian Cossacks, a warlike people who frequently fought the Russians until they were pacified in the eighteenth century. At one time their main centre was on the Island of Khortitsa. The site of the present city was originally a fort set up in 1770 under the name Aleksandrovsk which subsequently grew into a small town. It was renamed Zaporozhe after the 1917 revolution.

The city is the capital of Zaporozhe oblast', the surrounding administrative district, rather like Birmingham acts as the capital of the West Midlands County. The oblast covers an area of around 11,000 sq. miles and has a total population of two million. It is an important grain growing area.

The population in 1897 was only 19,000 and by 1926 had increased to 56,000 but it has expanded rapidly since then to 282,000 in 1939, 435,000 in 1959 and according to the census in 1979 was 781,000. This made it the sixth largest city in the Ukraine and 26th in the USSR as a whole.

The reason for the city's rapid growth is that it was chosen for the site of one of the first major hydroelectric schemes begun by the Soviet government in their campaign to increase dramatically the electricity available to the country. The power station, known as Dneproges ('ges' pronounced 'guess') was started in 1927. A huge dam was built across the river and the power station built along side had a capacity of 650,000 volts. The water of the Dnieper formed a huge lake behind the dam, submerging many of the former rapids, and a lock was built to allow boats



to pass the dam, thus linking the north and south parts of the river for the first time. The first stage of the power station was completed in 1931. The availability of electric power meant that many factories were sited in the city and it soon became one of the Soviet Union's major steel producers.

### The Second World War

The Second World War or the Great Patriotic War as it is known in the Soviet Union, began on June 22nd, 1941 when German forces invaded the country. Zaporozhe fell in the Autumn of 1941 despite heroic resistance which enabled the equipment of many factories to be evacuated and many tons of valuable metal to be removed from the city. The city was held by the Germans for over two years and had the doubtful privilege of receiving two visits from Hitler. Some 58,000 people were shipped off to Germany to work as slave labour and in all some 35,000 people died in the city during the war. Underground groups continued resistance but it was not until the autumn of 1943 that the city was finally liberated. The Germans attempted to blow up the dam but at great risk a group of sappers managed to reach the dam and to cut the fuses. Many memorials in the city recall events of the war and the heroes who gave their lives for the city.

When the Germans were finally expelled the city stood in ruins; many blocks of flats, schools, hospitals and factories had been destroyed. Although the dam had been saved both it and the power station were badly damaged. Like many other parts of the Soviet Union the city was faced with enormous problems of rebuilding the shattered ruins and in particular the power station and the main steel works. The work was difficult and carried out in appalling conditions, and progress was slow. In August 1946 Leonid Brezhnev, the present Soviet leader, but then an up and coming communist party official was appointed first secretary of the oblast and city committees of the party with particular instructions to speed up the work on the steel works "Zaporozhstal". He has described in his memoirs his experiences in the city. There was no water, electricity or heating; the city had no lights or transport, and robberies and street crime were rife on the dark streets. Specialists who visited the city from UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) considered that the steel works were not worth trying to rebuild and that it would be better to build a new factory elsewhere. Brezhnev worked hard to solve the problems but even he was criticised in the main Russian newspaper "Pravda" for not meeting the almost impossible schedules and received a phone call of rebuke from Stalin. With the start of the cold war the rate of work was increased even more but the target was met and Brezhnev received a promotion in November 1947 to run the neighbouring oblast of Dnepropetrovsk.

### Main Features of Zaporozhe

Although both Zaporozhe and Birmingham are industrial cities Zaporozhe has one important advantage in that it is based on a major river. Moreover because of the rapids above the town there was little commercial navigation and the riverside was left largely unspoilt. This area of the city has been developed attractively with large areas of greenery. In addition the island of Khortitsa in the river remains largely undeveloped and is retained for recreational purposes with many sanatoria and factory rest homes.

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The city has what must be one of the longest main streets in the world, Lenin Prospect, which stretches in all for about ten miles from the outskirts of the city through the central area and ends at the power station dam where the road continues across the dam on to the opposite bank under another name. Lenin Avenue contains many of the city's main buildings both administrative and cultural, with some impressive modern buildings. Very few early buildings survive in the city, and not unexpectedly given its rapid growth there are large areas of monotonous blocks of flats, though there has been considerable improvement in the design of these in recent years. There are still a few corners of the town where old whitewashed cottages surrounded by gardens still survive, though their numbers are rapidly being reduced. The city is absorbing many of the small villages on the outskirts and these are becoming new residential areas.

One famous tourist attraction on the outskirts of the city is the Zaporozhian oak - it is said to be some 600-700 years old and a survivor of the oak forests which once covered the area.

### Education and Culture

Zaporozhe does not have a university but it does have four establishments of higher education: the industrial institute with around 5000 students; the engineering institute with around 9000 students; the medical institute with 4000 students and the teacher training institute with 3000 fulltime students and 1500 evening and part-time students.

There are approximately 100 general secondary schools, ten musical schools, one art school, 13 special secondary schools for training in particular fields and 24 vocational technical schools for training in various technical skills.

The city is served by around 200 libraries, 47 cinemas, 52 palaces of culture and clubs attached to factories etc and three theatres. The theatres are the Ukrainian music and drama theatre which gives performances only in Ukrainian; the puppet theatre set up in 1972 and a young peoples theatre set up in 1979. There is also a concert hall and a circus. The art gallery was opened in 1972 but according to Dr Cannon Brookes, the former keeper of the department of art of Birmingham's city museum who visited Zaporozhe in 1977, the collection is mainly post 1960 and contains no paintings of real significance. The children's art school is very active and has held exchanges with Wroclaw (Poland) and Lahti (Finland) which are among Zaporozhe's other twin cities.

### Sport

Zaporozhe's best known sportsman is the weightlifter, Leonid Zhabotinskii, who won the Olympics title and many other championships. One of the most popular sports is handball and the city has three top teams. The major football team "Metallurg" plays in the first group of the Soviet league, the equivalent of our second division. Rowing on the river is another popular sport and there are facilities for swimming, shooting and many other sports.



## The Administration of Zaporozhe

As an oblast centre Zaporozhe contains in addition to the city administration the oblast administration (rather like Birmingham has both the West Midlands County Council as well as the city council). As Birmingham's twinning contacts are with the city administration this will be described first. The city of Zaporozhe is run by the city council or soviet, which meets four times a year and elects an executive committee for day to day administration, headed by a chairman. It is this person who deals with the Lord Mayor of Birmingham since there is no precise equivalent of the British post. This chairman stays in his post for several years and is a full time administrator. Other members of the executive committee have responsibilities for particular aspects of the city's administration. Elections to the city soviet are held every 2½ years but these are largely a formality as there is only one candidate in each ward and it is largely a matter of confirming the candidate who has been nominated, though he must receive the votes of 50 per cent of the electorate. Candidates in local elections sometimes don't - but this is rare!

The oblast administration is organised on similar lines with an oblast soviet and oblast executive committee and chairman. The oblast administration deals with the largely agricultural oblast outside the city.

Many people have probably heard about the Communist Party which is the only political party in the Soviet Union. How does this fit into the scheme of things? In fact not all the members of the soviets are members of the party, although most of the members of the executive committee are likely to be members. At the same time, however, the communist party has its own organisational structure which exists in parallel with the system of soviets and exerts considerable influence on their actions through its members. Although the party's main function is to offer principled guidance it quite often concerns itself with detailed matters, thus duplicating (and usurping) the formal duties of local government organs. In Zaporozhe the party's affairs are run by the city committee of the party which is headed by its first secretary; similarly there is an oblast committee headed by the oblast first secretary. As we have seen, this post was once held by Leonid Brezhnev, and the person holding this post is undoubtedly the most powerful person in Zaporozhe. The party committees are responsible to the republic central committee and to the USSR central committee in Moscow, and carry out their instructions.

## Industry

Zaporozhe is an industrial city and its industry makes use of the cheap electricity supplied by the city's hydroelectric station and local raw materials. It is perhaps best known as a steel producer, producing almost half of the Soviet Union's stainless steel and ball bearing steel and one third of the cold rolled steel sheet. It also produces almost half of the country's transformers as well as titanium, aluminium and the "Zaporozhets" small car. Over 400 products from Zaporozhe's factories are exported to 70 different countries.





### Dneproges

As we have seen above the power station was rebuilt after the war, but it has recently undergone considerable further expansion with the completion of a second major power station associated with the dam which more than doubles the generating capacity to 1,500,000 kilowatts. At the same time a second larger lock has been completed which will permit the passage of much larger ships to the Baltic and White Seas and the Mediterranean via Zaporozhe.

### Zaporozhe Car factory ("Avtozaz"):

This factory used to make agricultural equipment up to 1960 but was then re-equipped to produce the Soviet Union's first very small car, the "Zaporozhets", about half of the current output of 150,000 is adapted for invalids. Any comparisons with the Mini or the Metro are rather misleading since it is technically a long way behind them and as far as is known none have been imported into this country. In a recent discussion on the car industry in the Soviet press the factory's director admitted that there were still many problems to be solved to improve the car's quality. He blamed the work force for this state of affairs as up to 40% were casual workers and quality control was carried out by young girls. It is exported to 17 countries, including, in the West, Austria and Italy.

Zaporozhstal': this is one of the Soviet Union's major steel works and exports to fifty countries.

Other major factories produce special steels, aluminium, ferrous alloys, titanium and magnesium, silicon polymers for enamels antibiotics and fertilisers; transformers, aircraft engines, abrasives, glass, ships etc.

### Useful names and addresses in Zaporozhe

N.B. 1. Russian and Ukrainian names have three components: a first name, a patronymic which gives the first name of the person's father, and a surname. Thus Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov means Ivan (the son of Ivan) Ivanov and Vera Petrovna Ivanova means Vera (the daughter of Peter) Ivanova. Female surnames usually have the ending -a. As people are often introduced by the first name and patronymic some confusion can sometimes arise.

2. Russian addresses unlike English are written country - city-street - name of person. There is a system of postcodes and the basic code for Zaporozhe is 330000 but in most cases the detailed postcode is not known.

If you are writing to one of the addresses below the address should start: USSR, Ukraine, Zaporozhe, - followed by the details given below.

3. The names in this section have been taken from reports of visits etc and in some cases are not complete and may have changed since the visit was made. I am always pleased to receive any additions to this list.



Executive committee of the City soviet: 206, Lenin Prospect

Chairman: Valentin Yalansky

Deputy Chairman: Ivan Pedash, Nikolai Iosifovich Kuchinsky

Members: Aleksandra Danilovna Sreda (cultural section);

Vladimir Ilich Ivastenko (trade section);

Vasily Krupy; Mr Mishanin.

USSR-Great Britain Friendship Society:

Chairman: L.I. Boitsov (director of the ferrous alloy factory)

Chief secretary: Viktor Ivanovich Aleksandrov, (158 Lenin Prospect)

Secretary: Valentina Semenovna Garevskikh, (G.S.P. 497, 74A Patriotic Street  
Institute UkrNiispetsstal)

The society is based on corporate membership of large factories and educational establishments etc. not on individual membership as in Britain.

Other institutions:

City committee of Young Communist League: 206 Lenin Prospect

City Cultural and Department: 12 Tregubenko Street

City Education Department: 1 April 12 Street

City Health Department: 193 Lenin Prospect

Teachers' Club: 51 Kirov Street

Teacher Training Institute; 66 Zhukovsky Street

Medical Institute: 26 Mayakovsky Prospect

Engineering Institute: 64 Zhukovsky Street

Public catering college: 45 Ilich Street

Union of writers: Pushkin Square

Union of artists: 3a Central Boulevard

Union of journalists: Pushkin Square

Puppet Theatre: 48 Lenin Prospect

Music and Drama Theatre: 41 Lenin Prospect

Art Gallery: 76b Forty Years of Soviet Ukraine Street



City Sports Committee: 6 Forty Years of Soviet Ukraine Street

Oblast Trade Union Council (Chairman - Mr Pavlov): 5 Trade Union Square

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Schools etc.: the name of a teacher is given if known. KID is the Russian abbreviation for Club of International Friendship.

Secondary School No. 62 (Evgeniya Dmitrevna Titova): 9 Forty Years of Soviet Ukraine Street

Secondary School No. 11 (Mariya Ivanovna Moskvina): Transport Square

Secondary School No. 31 (Evgeniya Samoilovna Erenberg): 4 Dobrolyubov Street

Secondary School No. 59 (Deeva, Lyubov Vasilievna): 10 Kremlevskaya Street

Secondary School No. 94: KID, "Alaya Gvozdika" 3a Yatsenko Street

Secondary School No. 84: KID "Rovesnik"

Pioneer Palace: Zaporozhe 330063, 60 Gogol Street, Pioneer Palace, KID.



#### A note on contacts with Zaporozhe

Contacts with Zaporozhe by post are generally a slow business and at least a month must be allowed for the fastest reply. Letters from Britain probably take two to three weeks or sometimes longer, while letters from the USSR take one to two weeks. In addition many Soviet institutions (and individuals!) are slow to reply, though in Zaporozhe I heard complaints that schools in Birmingham failed to reply to letters!

#### Projects for schools

There are probably only a few projects that can be linked directly to Zaporozhe, for example the Cossacks, Zaporozhe in the Second World War; differences between Zaporozhe and Birmingham but it is probably difficult to find much information in English on these. Some general projects on the USSR could be linked to Zaporozhe, for example the Soviet system of education, the industrial development of the USSR, the career of Brezhnev etc.

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This account was prepared by the Birmingham Branch of the Great Britain-USSR Association with the help of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies of the University of Birmingham. Please contact the association's local representative for further information: M.J. Berry, 19 Ascot Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9EN. Tel: 449 0727.