



# Between the Hammer and the Sickle

*Simon Vickers*

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## **Between the Hammer and the Sickle** Simon Vickers

After negotiating with the Soviet authorities for one and a half years, Simon Vickers, together with three others, secured permission to cross the USSR with a freedom undreamt of since before 1917. Sensing that the current era of glasnost might be short-lived, they took advantage of the first - and possibly the last - such opportunity to gain an insight into a world divorced from Europe for so long. They decided to make their trip by bicycle, from Leningrad to Vladivostock. In their gruelling 12,000 kilometers journey, they crossed Russia, Kazakhstan and Siberia, spending three months alone in Siberia where black bears roam wild. The differences in national character of the British, French, American and Russian team members add a diverting element to this story of their six-months journey, which took them across ten time zones, from the Baltic to the Pacific. What makes it particularly extraordinary is the account of their daily contact with Soviet citizens, many of whom had never met Europeans before. Frequently guests in Soviet homes, they gained a true insight into their lives, hopes and fears. Through conversations the travellers had on these encounters, a picture of Russia emerges which is different from both their expectations and the picture we have of it in the West. This is an account of a country in turmoil, trying to come to terms with its history, and in many ways remaining curiously unchanged.

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