

Moscow weighs the fate of historic Shukhov radio tower

Tim Rivers
19 March 2014

The Shabolovka Street radio tower in Moscow, the first structure to be built by the new Soviet government between 1919 and 1922, is now threatened with demolition because of a boom in real estate speculation in central Moscow. From the time the workers state emerged from desperate conditions produced by the First World War, the civil war within Russia and the wars of imperialist intervention, the Shukhov Tower, as it is known in honor of its designer, has stood as a prominent symbol of the historic achievements of the October 1917 Revolution.

Rising from a modest circular trench footing, it seemingly springs into the air to rise 150 meters. The tower was designed to be more than twice its current height and would have surpassed the Eiffel Tower as the tallest structure in the world, had it not been for the acute scarcity of metal in the isolated workers state. A marvel of mathematical and engineering science, the taller structure would have required only one quarter of the material contained in its Parisian counterpart.

Shukhov tower has been the subject of controversy for a number of years, as it suffered from official neglect. In 2009 Russian President Vladimir Putin approved funds for its restoration, but nothing was done. Vladimir Shukhov, the great-grandson of the tower's designer of the same name, is leading an international campaign to prevent the tower's dismemberment. He explained to the *World Socialist Web Site* that because of laws governing height restrictions for development in Moscow, the site is especially coveted by wealthy speculators.

Instead of being limited to nine stories, or 35 meters, a building replacing the Shukhov Tower could bypass legal obstacles and rise to the height of the structure it replaces. Leading architects, engineers and academics from throughout the world have signed a petition to

preserve the tower, and a demonstration has been organized to protest imminent moves to dismantle it. No date has been set for demolition, but a final decision by the Russian authorities may come as soon as the beginning of next week.

The *Moscow Times* carried a short announcement on February 12, 2014 entitled, "1920's Soviet Radio Tower to Be Dismantled." In a mix of cynicism and misrepresentation, Nikolai Nikiforov, the minister of communications who exercises jurisdiction over the site, told the paper, "The only possible option for a solution to the problem is a two-stage reconstruction and renovation of the radio tower, which stipulates in the first stage its dismantling for the conservation and preservation of elements for later restoration."

A photo montage commemorating completion of the tower in 1922 shows the full crew required for construction.

While the structure is in sore need of maintenance, it is, contrary to the minister's assertion, in no danger of imminent collapse. The appropriate approach to restoration would be to replace individual parts, in situ, as part of a program of regular maintenance. Its position on a rise of ground not far from the Kremlin is itself of historic importance.



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