

LETTER FROM MOSCOW BY MICHAEL CONSTABLE



**There's no
Xmas shop-
ping in**

**Moscow, no Xmas trees,
no Xmas lights, no Xmas
presents. There is none of
that here....**

Here it's called New Years – New Years shopping, New Years trees, New Years lights, New Years presents.

Nevermind, it rang my Pavlovian bell anyway; I went shopping.

I found myself pressed in the crowd at Detskymir (Children's World) Department Store, shouldering towards a first floor toy counter.

I shuffled closer, shoulders parted to reveal something olive drab on the counter, shoulders closed. Shoulders parted again, a Babooshka shoved me through the gap and there on the counter, its muzzle staring me in the eye, was the cannon I wanted for Christmas in 1953.

Cast metal, rubber tires, worm gears, cocking lever, magazine – it could lob a fire cracker thirty feet, it was the one all right and I wanted it.... The cash registers whirred, the muzak blared, the slush melted through my boots.... It's a war toy, I do cartoons about war toys, war toys are bad, I left the store. No cannon.

I went back after New Years to examine the arsenal.

I counted twenty toys: sets of plastic soldiers at the cheap end of the scale, 1 ruble; a battery-powered life-size AK-47 rifle at the top end, 20 rubles.

There were no Sci-Fi warriors, or changebots of superhero action dolls.

The play weapons are patterned mainly on World War II equipment reflecting the many WWII movies on TV and at the cinema. The war toys don't have their own TV programmes here like the Rambo and G.I. Joe cartoons.

The package is simple, a box that contains a cannon, shows a cannon. No "enemy" is depicted.

War toys are not advertised here. Shoes, soap and tooth paste aren't advertised either. There is no advertising. But this may be changing. The economy is being restructured. Instead of central direction and subsidy, manufacturing is being put on a profit-loss basis. If a toy company is going to succeed it's going to have to do it on sales alone. Sales orientation means advertising and new products.

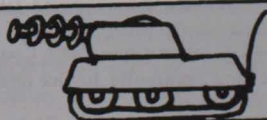
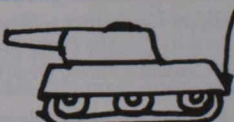


For the Soviet toy industry it means an enterprising management team may put out a line of *Action Ivan*® and his mortal enemy *Jihad Joe*®. Research may already be underway for a planet-zapping space walker.

I think it's time for mutual arms reduction in the play room. What Soviet toys lack in electronic sophistication they make up for in cast iron durability. I think parity does exist, particularly in the USSR-USA toy tank forces (see diagram)

I would suggest the elimination of categories A, B and E and the phasing out of C and D as their batteries run down.

The Soviets should be allowed research and experiment in the action figure and planet blaster sectors pending a comprehensive war toy elimination agreement. This will only happen when we get rid of the real stuff that toys are but a reflection of. □

Michael Constable is a professional illustrator and lives in Toronto. He was in Moscow last December.

	USSR	USA
A	FLASHING LASER RADIO GUIDED	
B	RADIO GUIDED	
C	WIRE GUIDED	
D	BATTERY POWERED	
E	WIND-UP	DISCONTINUED