To An Inconvertible Friend

The Russians are sullen.
The Russians are sad.
With rubles a-plenty,
No goods to be had.

No one wants rubles,
Abroad or at home.
Not Moscow, not Kiev,
Not London or Rome.

The root of the problem
Is incontrovertible.
Soviet rubles
Are nowhere convertible.

Help! There's no foreign
Exchange in the bank.
To whom can they turn?
There's no one but Frank.

For thirty-five years
That remarkable scholar
Has valued the ruble
In terms of the dollar.

You doubt his persistence?
All doubt will go 'way
If you check with the boys
At the CIA.

So he turned on his powerful
Tools of analysis.
How to surmount
The ruble's paralysis?

He pondered, he theorized,
Racked all his brains.
And this is the lesson
He boldly proclaimed.

"To market! To market!"
His essay adduced
(With a proper citation to
Mother Goose).

"The convertible ruble
Is simply about
How the Market is in
And how Planning is out."

Someday the Russians
Will warmly thank Frank
For the loans they receive
From the Fund and the Bank.

But we, his companions,
Suspect that his heart
Is not in the lesson
He seeks to impart.

The Youth of the 'thirties
Still dwells in the Man.
Though his Head's in the Market,
His Heart's in the Plan.

And so, in this party
We gladly take part
To honor our friend,
Both the Mind and the Heart.
--Joe Berliner¹

1. Joe Berliner is Professor Emeritus of Economics at Brandeis University and poet laureate at the Harvard University Russian Research Center.