

Centenary of the Russian Revolution (1917-2017)

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Edited by

Andreu Mayayo i Artal, Alberto Pellegrini
and Antoni Segura i Mas

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FOREWORD

On the occasion of the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the *Centre d'Estudis Històrics Internacionals* of the University of Barcelona (Center for International Historical Studies, CEHI-UB) has carried out a number of academic initiatives to deepen the study of the Russian revolutionary phenomenon, as well as the repercussions and the long-term consequences of that momentous event.

Among the most significant results of the collective work done by CEHI-UB members, we can mention a series of lectures about the Revolution organised by the University of Barcelona; a course for university students held throughout the spring of 2017; and the publication, in book format, of a collection of essays by a Spanish publishing house (Andreu Mayayo and José Manuel Rúa, eds., *Y el mundo cambió de base. Una mirada histórica a la Revolución Rusa*). As a conclusion of this work, the University of Barcelona has held, in October 2017, an international congress (*Centenary of the Russian Revolution, 1917-2017*), that has been attended by leading specialists in the field, both Spanish and foreign.

This volume collects all the conference papers, expanded and revised for English publication; it is also further enriched by the inclusion of three chapters expressly written for the book, as well as an introduction and final conclusions that help contextualise the text and confer coherence.

This book is part of the research project “Spanish Civil War and three decades of war in Europe: legacies and consequences (1914-1945/2014)” (ref. HAR2013-4160-P).

INTRODUCTION

THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1917 IN RUSSIA

JULIÁN CASANOVA

Revolutions are extraordinary events that have a huge impact on the histories of nations and the world. Theda Skocpol, the author of a now classic study in comparative history on the three “major” revolutions in France, Russia and China, has defined them as “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures (...) accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below”.¹

In contrast to the accounts of militants and activists, Skocpol argues that revolutionary processes, apart from their egalitarian dreams, entail the construction of new state forms and that “successful” revolutions end with the consolidation of a new state power. In short, revolutions may change a host of things, including the class hierarchy and social values and institutions, but above all, they create states that are more bureaucratic, centralised and repressive than the ones they replace.

No better setting exists to examine all of these profound changes than the Russia of 1917. Not a single aspect of its society, economy, politics or culture remained intact. The rule of the Romanov dynasty, which had begun three hundred years earlier with the coronation of Michael I (1613-1645), disappeared overnight. At a stroke, the entire edifice of the Russian state came down. Some months later, the Bolsheviks seized power in the most abrupt and momentous change in the history of the twentieth century. Therein lies the importance of Russia’s double revolution, the first in February and the second in October of 1917, which in turn toppled the Tsarist regime and the provisional government of Alexander Kerensky.

The state that emerged from the Bolsheviks’ revolution and their victory in the Civil War that followed challenged a world then under the domination of Western empires, defied capitalism, and very soon faced off

¹ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

against the other new actor on the scene, Fascism. It inspired communist movements and other major revolutions like the one in China. After the Second World War, it also exerted a strong influence on anti-colonial movements and on the design and construction of the Cold War world.²

Given the magnitude of events, it is no wonder that historians offered a variety of interpretations, with points of agreement and points of contention, giving rise to what Edward Acton identified in 1990 as consolidated views of the revolution or “schools of thought”.³

While some defined the revolution from the outset as a “popular revolution” led by the Bolshevik party or a revolution of the united proletariat according to its description in Soviet propaganda, anti-Soviet and anti-Marxist historiography always identified it as a “coup d’état” that triumphed through violence and terror.

Apart from these liberal and Soviet interpretations, a new historiographical school emerged in the 1970s. It was represented basically by young British and US historians who, despite their numbers and diversity, were given the label of “revisionists”. Through their research, they set out what could be called a “social interpretation of the Russian Revolution”, which ran in parallel to some of the basic guideposts then orienting a swath of Western historians, from the *Annales* school to British Marxists, and which consisted in sidestepping ideological generalisations, writing the history of social groups, and applying perspectives and methods from the social sciences.⁴

² The international dimension of the Bolshevik revolution and the importance of the phenomenon of power, of groups and movements competing for power, and of the conflicts unleashed by possessing or seeking power, have been the highlight of a large amount of research conducted in recent years. A fine example is the latest book by S.A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ Edward Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London: Arnold, 1990). Although Acton cautioned that none of the schools was “homogeneous” because there had been a number of significant shifts over the past seven decades (p. 3), the British historian conceptualised them as “orthodox Soviet”, “liberal” and “libertarian”. In addition, since the end of the 1960s, a new generation of “Western” historians, the “revisionists”, had emerged with a willingness to re-examine the schools critically and to demonstrate “their commitment to social history and quantitative methods, and their use of sources hitherto barely tapped” (p. 1).

⁴ It is this new generation of “revisionists” that has substantially modified our understanding of twentieth-century Russia. A good number of its members, representatives of various national historiographies including Russia’s, contributed writings to an excellent volume compiled by Edward Acton, Vladimir Cherniaev

With a shift of focus from leaders and high politics to social movements and groups, the revisionist historiography downplayed interpretations focused on the manipulation of the working classes by radical intellectuals. Following on from the research of E.P. Thompson, they brought to light the experiences of the lower classes, peasants and workers, as well as the crucial role of soldiers and sailors, and redefined the role of the Bolshevik party and its connections to popular aspirations.

The class character of these revolutions became more finely nuanced from the 1990s onwards, thanks to a new historiography on social and culture identities that looked at gender, religion, symbols and images. There was a shift in direction from the material and political domain toward the cultural and anthropological. Because the revolutions also occurred over the length and breadth of a vast multi-ethnic empire, a history began to be written “from the margins”. As opposed to “Russocentrism”, it acknowledged the cultural and social complexity of national and ethnic identities.⁵

A large number of the historians who published their works after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent opening of the archives stressed the constant state of crisis that existed between 1914 and 1921. Their accounts begin with the First World War and end with the closing battles of the Russian Civil War and the establishment of the Soviet Union. What many knew and studied as the Russian Revolution was, in reality, a series of simultaneous and overlapping revolutions of the intellectual elites, the middle classes, the workers, women, soldiers and peasants against the Tsarist autocracy, against the social order, against the war and the military’s hierarchical system, against the landowners, and in favour of land redistribution.⁶

and William G. Rosenberg, *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution* (London: Arnold, 1997). It is interesting and significant to compare Acton’s approach in *Rethinking* to the one in his introduction to the new volume, entitled “The Revolution and Its Historians: The *Critical Companion* in Context” (3-17), which discusses the impact of postmodernism and the new cultural history.

⁵ When following this evolution, it proves highly illuminating to contrast the papers of other new historians of the recent historiography, such as Ronald Grigor Suny from the US, who wrote “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution”, *American Historical Review*, 88 (February 1983): 31-52; and particularly, “Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics”, *The Russian Review*, vol. 53, April 1994: 165-182.

⁶ Good examples of the new research appear in the compilation of papers previously published in different places which were brought together by Martin A. Miller in *The Russian Revolution: The Essential Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); in E.R. Frankel et al (eds.), *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*

The chief tendency in recent historiography, which has been enriched by dozens of local studies, microhistory and the opening of archives, is to stress that the events in Russia were part of what the US historian Peter Holquist has called a “continuum of crisis”, a constant state of crisis, which passed through various stages between 1914 and 1921—world war, revolutions and Civil Wars—that lacked any clear-cut dividing lines.⁷ Various authors who began to publish their works after 1991, the year in which the state that had arisen from the Bolshevik seizure of power disappeared, speak of a “kaleidoscope of revolutions”—a kaleidoscope or diverse and changing combination of causes, events and results, with flesh-and-blood people at the centre of the story.⁸

The latest accounts put an emphasis first of all on the importance of the First World War as a catalyst for revolution. The deep rift between a changing society and the Tsarist autocracy, which began to appear decades earlier in violent demonstrations from above and below, created enormous potential for the development of the conflict. However, it was the Great War, a consequence of the imperial rivalry maintained by Russia with Germany and Austria-Hungary, that led to the mobilisation of roughly fifteen-and-a-half million men between August 1914 and early 1918, with total losses of over seven million including the dead, disappeared, wounded and maimed. The war’s tragedy, according to most specialists, lay at the root of the revolutions of 1917.

In this way, the war exacerbated the deep divisions in Russian society, and the army in wartime turned into an enormous group of revolutionaries, whose own unease and turmoil could not be separated from the violent unrest that shook society as a whole. The crisis devolved from rebellion into revolution when the soldiers sided with the workers and especially

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and in the cited *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921*.

⁷ Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). For more information on the impact of opening the archives, see the analysis and numerous autobiographical notes of the Australian Sheila Fitzpatrick, one of the pioneering figures in social history since the end of the nineteen-sixties: “Impact of the Opening of Soviet Archives on Western Scholarship on Soviet Social History”, *The Russian Review*, 74 (July 2015): 377-400. See also Donald J. Raleigh, “Doing Soviet History: The Impact of the Archival Revolution”, *The Russian Review*, 61 (January 2002): 16-24.

⁸ For a defence of the concept of a “kaleidoscope of revolutions”, see Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 220, in which Read also supports Peter Holquist’s chronological proposal of a “continuum of crisis”.

with the women who were protesting against food shortages, and when the members of the moderate opposition abandoned the autocracy to form new bodies of power.

The key contributions on this period of the war address the decline of the imperial army; the breakdown of the food supply system at a time when there were shortages of staple goods for millions of soldiers at the front and for the general populace back in the rear-guard; the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing areas under German occupation; the role of women protesting the food shortages, and especially the soldiers' wives, the so-called *Soldatki*.⁹

Women, soldiers/sailors, peasants and industrial workers were the main actors in the strikes and demonstrations that took place in the third winter of the war, the coldest and most complicated one, in the face of a crisis of authority and lost confidence in the regime. Their actions would lead to severe disturbances of public order, desertions from the front, and ultimately a profound transformation in the power structure that had dominated Russia for centuries.¹⁰

⁹ A key source on the fundamental issue of the Russian imperial army and its collapse during the First World War is Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, 2 volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980-1987); the provision of food, as Peter Holquist shows in detail in his study on how the war led to revolution (*Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*), became one of the most important issues of state intervention and public debate. Peter Gatrell, whose research puts the figure of refugees at six million at the beginning of 1917, draws on a phrase from F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous novel *Tender Is the Night* to refer to "a whole empire walking": *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). For more on the *Soldatki*, see the innovative research of Sarah Badcock, "Women, Protest, and Revolution: Soldiers' Wives in Russia during 1917", *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004): 47-70.

¹⁰ Some years ago, Barbara Evans Clements began to comb through the world of women—women peasants and workers—and the world of the intelligentsia in order to produce biographies [*Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979)] and innovative studies ("Working-Class and Peasant Women in the Russian Revolution, 1917-1923", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 8, 2, 1982: 215-35), which she later synthesised in her book *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For a more wide-ranging book with much more biographical material, see Anna Hillyar and Jane McDermid, *Revolutionary Women in Russia 1870-1917: A Study in Collective Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). For many years, the subject of the peasantry was neglected in most studies of the revolutions of 1917, with the historiography generally taking greater interest in the role of the intelligentsia and industrial workers. In recent decades,

With the fall of the Tsar and the February revolution, all legal and ethical controls and restrictions toppled. From then on, in a context of growing anarchy, Civil War and economic meltdown, a highly unstable period witnessed the search for a new political and social order. From February 1917, Russia hurtled at breakneck speed through a liberal phase, then a socialist phase that was initially moderate but turned more radical, and then Lenin and the Bolsheviks took what had been a revolution for the power of the Soviets, which had enjoyed broad popular support, and turned it into a one-party dictatorship.¹¹

The two revolutions also had an enormous impact among the non-Russian peoples of the empire, approximately half of its total population. While nationalist movements had started to challenge the autocracy in 1905, they became radicalised over the course of the war as some of the empire's peripheral regions, such as Poland and the Baltic area, fell under German occupation and a portion of their populations were evacuated. The end of the authoritarian system, the abolition of censorship and a wave of political and social changes emanating from Petrograd and other major Russian cities gave the nationalists a golden opportunity to organise themselves and mobilise their fellow citizens through their bonds of national identity.

As the works of Ronald Grigor Suny effectively show, stark distinctions existed between ethnic identity, based on differing customs and languages, national consciousness, which found greater expression in the political arena, and a nationalism that sought to establish some type of state based on national homogeneity. Among eighteen million Muslims, nationalism was a very weak force, especially in Turkestan, where the majority of Muslims lived, whereas in the Baltic region, the predominance of Germans

however, historians have put the peasantry at the centre of the narrative. The previously cited works of Holquist, Read and Smith are clear examples, as are those of Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin, 1998) and Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Many avenues were opened up by the work of Teodor Shanin, *The Awkward Class: Political Sociology of the Peasantry in a Developing Society, Russia, 1900-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). The monograph that best reflects some of the new approaches is one by Aaron B. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹ The stages of the revolution and the speed with which it hurtled from one stage to the next are underscored by Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 287.

and the Tsarist state's periodic campaigns of Russification had spurred the emergence of powerful nationalist movements.¹²

The Bolsheviks' seizure of power is the other key occurrence in which the latest studies rise above the old quarrels between Soviet and anti-Soviet historiography, instead underscoring the importance of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" and how the popular support for these grassroots institutions paved the way for the Bolsheviks.

In Wade's view, the revolution of October 1917 was a "popular struggle" for this very reason and it only later became a "Bolshevik revolution". According to Read, the Bolsheviks carried out a political coup, but it was only possible because of massive popular support for the power of the soviets, the growing movement of land seizures, war-weariness and terrible economic hardship. A coup d'état in its purest form, Read argues, is a change of personnel at the highest echelons of political power, a state that is seized by conspirators and coup perpetrators. By contrast, in October 1917, in Russia, "there was precious little state to seize".¹³

The idea that power was seized as a result of a coup against a democratic government is challenged by Smith as well: "It had all the elements of a coup (...) except for the fact that a coup implies the seizure of a functioning state machine. Arguably, Russia had not had this since February". The provisional government lacked legitimacy from the start. Since the summer, it had become bogged down in a series of successive crises—at the front, in the countryside, in the factories and on the non-Russian periphery. Few governments could have coped with such a situation, much less one lacking a reliable army.¹⁴

By adopting this line of research, it is possible to discard myths and misconceptions that have long clouded our understanding of such a violent transformation. Against the myths and clashing views, Wade argues that "it was neither a simple manipulation by cynical Bolsheviks of ignorant masses nor the carefully planned and executed seizure of power under Lenin's omniscient direction". Ultimately, the backing of the workers,

¹² Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationality and Class in the Russian Revolutions of 1917: A Reexamination of Social Categories", in Nick Lampert and Gabor Rittersporn (eds.), *Stalinism: Its Nature and Aftermath – Essays in Honour of Moshe Lewin*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, 1992: 211-241.

¹³ The Wade quote is from *The Russian Revolution*, from which the subsequent quote on myths comes as well; the quote from Christopher Read comes from *War and Revolution in Russia*, 118.

¹⁴ S.A. Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38.

soldiers and peasants for the soviets, the institution dedicated to promoting social revolution, combined with the fateful decision of the provisional governments to carry on with the war. Meanwhile, the fiasco of the Kornilov putsch had already demonstrated that the right was in disarray and that counter-revolution had no prospect of victory at the time.

The Civil War helped the Bolsheviks to hold onto power because it posed a clear choice between supporting them and the revolution or siding with the Whites and counter-revolution. Many of their opponents were forced to abandon resistance and assist in the Bolshevik victory as the lesser of two evils. The war against the Whites was, thus, the perfect excuse for the Bolsheviks to crush many popular aspirations and freedoms in the name of the military imperative.

In the process of the Civil War, everything that had characterised the October revolution—active participation in a popular movement driven by a programme of peace, land and all power to the soviets—came to an end. The Bolsheviks attained absolute and uncontested power between 1920 and 1922 because, in a situation of disorganisation, the strongest was the one who was the least weak—and this was their great accomplishment and advantage.

Since 1989, it has become more difficult to look at these revolutions, particularly the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, without an awareness of the appalling violence that accompanied them. Many people today, influenced by a substantial proportion of the historical accounts and by the political uses of history in a world in which the struggles for equality and a fairer distribution of wealth have been marginalised, reduce the revolutions to violence. On that line of reasoning, the revolutions in Russia, especially the Bolshevik one, mark the beginning of a cycle of violence that leads inexorably to the horrors of Nazism and Stalinism, identified after 1945 as the chief paradigms of totalitarianism.¹⁵

Without forgetting the terrible social costs of these transformations, however, we historians cannot and must not avoid analysing why the revolutions took place, particularly in Russia, and why the different forms of socialism, moderate or radical, held so much appeal and promise for millions of workers, soldiers and peasants. The differing moral evaluations of communism, its utopia, the dreams and nightmares that it spawned, are of little use in explaining how and why revolution broke out in Russia in

¹⁵ The notion that the revolution is no longer regarded with “sympathy” today, along with the implications that this idea has for the study of its history, is addressed by S.A. Smith in “The Historiography of the Russian Revolution 100 Years On”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 16, n. 4, Fall 2015: 733, 748-749.

February 1917 or in understanding the Bolsheviks' seizure of power and the effects that all these events were to have on the shape of the world in the twentieth century.

The collapse of the Soviet Union made it possible to investigate and interpret with greater perspective the spiral of conflicts, changes, dreams, deceptions and violence set in motion by the First World War and persisting afterwards in years of revolution and civil wars. To understand the complex social and cultural situation in the Russian empire, a good number of historians have added new views on class, gender, national, ethnic and religious identities, which have been incorporated into the political and social history of the revolutions since the late 1960s.

The historiographical reckoning is diverse, exceptional, at the stature of the major debates over the French Revolution. The present collective volume is a fine example of the advancement of knowledge about this turbulent period and a good sign of the attention that has been given to the subject by a number of leading Spanish historians for some time now. Only through rigorous research of this sort, with critically minded and widely disseminated readings of the past, do we increase our understanding and strengthen the task of the historian.

CHAPTER ONE

TSARISM'S LAST ADVENTURE: RUSSIA AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

ALBERTO PELLEGRINI

A hot summer's day is breaking in the Volhynia region in what today is western Ukraine, between the Pripet marshes and the first spurs of the Carpathian mountains. In these vast plains, populated by a few cities such as Lutsk and Ternopil,¹ tens of thousands of well-equipped, well-led Russian soldiers have been moving forward from the east, under the deafening noise of cannon fire, in a military operation of an unprecedented scale. For their part, their hapless Germanic enemies, when they are not being battered by the relentless pounding of the artillery or by gunfire, are surrendering *en masse* or are desperately fleeing westwards after suffering a defeat of catastrophic proportions.

Readers interested in twentieth-century military history might assume that the image just described corresponds to the monumental engagements of the Second World War on the Eastern Front between the Nazi Wehrmacht and the Soviet Red Army. The geographical references would point to the Lvov-Sandomierz Offensive, of July 1944, when the troops of Ivan Konev overwhelmed their enemies and reached the River Vistula.

And despite the appearances, this impression is false; the year is 1916, not 1944, and the conflict is not World War II, but World War I. The Russians moving from the East are not soldiers of the Red Army, but of the Russian Imperial Army; their leader is not Konev but Aleksei Brusilov; their adversaries are not members of the Wehrmacht but the Austro-Hungarian Army, buckling under the weight of the Russian "steamroller".

¹ In the text I have attempted to reproduce the place names in common usage during the years of the First World War: thus, I will talk of Königsberg rather than Kaliningrad.

However, within a year of this triumph over the Austrians, the same victorious army would disintegrate in the midst of revolutionary chaos, with thousands of soldiers intent on occupying the land of the aristocrats instead of continuing the fight against the Central Powers. Desertions, encouraged by the incessant propaganda of the Bolsheviks, crushed the already low morale of the combatants, and the collapse of the home front—especially in the starving imperial capital—thwarted the last attempts of the Provisional Government to keep Russia in the conflict, in the name of solidarity with its allies in the Triple Entente and of a new democratic and revolutionary conception of the war.

Inevitably, the decomposition of the Russian armed forces in 1917 is a feature of any account of the Russian Revolution, a revolution which, in many historiographical interpretations, was largely brought on by military failure and by the colossal human losses resulting from the country's tragic involvement in the First World War. As a result, the idea of a Russian army capable of obtaining significant victories, and of a state which, in spite of everything, was still able to supply and arm millions of men in 1916, clashes head on with the stereotypical view of a Tsarist Russia whose final collapse can be traced back to the country's fateful entry into the war in the summer of 1914.

The basic problem, in my view, is the fact that the Eastern Front of the Great War has aroused little historiographical interest over the past decades: the “unknown war”, as Churchill famously called it, has been little understood and even less investigated.² In the Soviet historiography, the Tsarist war against the Central Powers, often tarred as an imperialist adventure, served almost exclusively as a prelude to the far more significant events of the Revolution; and for their part, western historians have devoted only a few pages to the great battles of Eastern Europe, focusing instead on the trenches and bloodbaths of the Western Front. Even today, the names of Verdun, the Somme and the Marne are familiar to millions of people; but who has heard of Przemyśl, Gorlice-Tarnów or Gumbinnen?

Fortunately, in recent years this tendency has to some extent been reversed, and western specialists have been able to offer a more coherently argued and less stereotyped historiographical account of the Russian involvement in the First World War.³ At the same time, Russian historians

² Winston Churchill, *The Unknown War: The Eastern Front* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931).

³ For a summary of the latest historiographic trends in Russia and in the West, see Giovanna Cigliano, “La Russia nella Prima guerra mondiale: percorsi della storiografia russa e anglo-americana sul fronte orientale,” *Ricerche di storia*

have also disassociated themselves from these earlier interpretations, vigorously studying aspects of their country's participation and contributing to the international historiographical debate—for example, in the case of the controversy surrounding the origins of the conflict.⁴ In the meantime, as Victor Jefets has rightly pointed out in a recent article, the study of the Great Russian War still faces two main dangers: first, the persistent threat of oblivion; and second, the appearance of new historiographic myths—emerging either inside the academic community or in society as a whole—that make it difficult to understand the issue in all its complexity.⁵

For this reason, in the brief space of this chapter I aim to trace the story of Russian participation in the First World War—that is, its form at the outset of the conflict, and the way it developed between 1914 and 1917. I will then focus on the military operations in which the Russian armies were involved and the dynamics of diplomacy which, from the days of the July Crisis of 1914, shaped Russia's intervention in the war. I do not mean to present a detailed analysis of the evolution of the domestic situation or of the momentous social and economic consequences of the war for the population at home, since these are issues that have always attracted more attention from historians as essential elements of an introduction to the revolutionary events of 1917.

Russia and the July Crisis

One of the most widely discussed issues in the study of Russian participation in the First World War has always been the responsibility of the Tsarist government in the outbreak of the conflict and the role it played throughout the July Crisis of 1914. It is true that in the interminable debate on the causes of the Great War most historians are still inclined to point the blame at Germany and Austria-Hungary, and to a lesser extent at Serbia, in the sequence of decisions that led the continent into catastrophe. Indeed, on 6 July, barely a week after the attack in Sarajevo on June 28, the Germans extended the famous “blank cheque” to their Austrian allies for the punishment of Serbia, and it was the Germans who opened

politica, Quadrimestrale dell'Associazione per le ricerche di storia politica, no. 3 (December 2015): 303-322.

⁴ See Joshua A. Sanborn, “Russian Historiography on the Origins of the First World War since the Fischer Controversy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 2 (April 2013): 350-362.

⁵ Victor Jefets, “Reflexiones sobre el centenario de la participación rusa en la Primera Guerra Mundial: entre el olvido histórico y los mitos modernos,” *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 42, no. 2 (2015): 185.

hostilities against Russia and against France.⁶ For its part, the Vienna government, urged on by hawks like its Chief of Staff Conrad, sent Belgrade an ultimatum that they knew to be unacceptable.⁷ Finally we should not forget the machinations of Serbia and its scheming rulers during the months leading up to the crisis and, above all, in the preparation of the fateful assassination.⁸

In recent years, however—without downplaying the role played by Germans, Austrians and Serbs—other historians have stressed the responsibilities of Russian politicians in the thirty days that elapsed between the Sarajevo attack and the beginning of hostilities: responsibilities which, these historians claim, place Russia firmly among the group of suspects mentioned when the culprits of the disaster are singled out.⁹ The new interpretations, though disputed and sometimes even criticised, have had the merit of putting all the ambiguities, uncertainties and misconceptions that characterised the decision-making of the Tsarist rulers in the summer of 1914 under the historiographical spotlight, as well as Russia's fundamental role in the complex dynamic that led the continent

⁶ The thesis of German responsibility at the start of the First World War has been widely studied by Fritz Fischer. See Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967). More recently, Max Hastings has also indicated that Germany “seems deserving of most blame” for the conflict: Max Hastings, *Catastrophe 1914: Europe Goes to War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 102.

⁷ See for example David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), 10-11, 15. For an exhaustive analysis of the historiographical approaches to Austrian responsibility at the start of the Great War, see Samuel R. Williamson Jr., “Austria and the Origins of the Great War: A Selective Historiographical Survey,” in *1914: Austria-Hungary, the Origins, and the First Year of World War I*, ed. Günther Bischof, Ferdinand Karlhofer and Samuel R. Williamson Jr. (New Orleans: UNO Press, 2014), 21-33.

⁸ Serbian responsibilities have been stressed by (among others) Christopher Clark. See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper, 2012), 33-64.

⁹ This interpretation has been developed mainly by the British historian Dominic Lieven and, more controversially, by the North American Sean McMeekin; in Spain, it has been taken up by (among other) Francisco Veiga and Pablo Martín. See Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame: Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (London: Penguin, 2016); Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 41-75; VEIGA, Francisco Veiga and Pablo Martín, *Las guerras de la Gran Guerra (1914-1923)* (Madrid: Catarata, 2014), 24-32.

to war—a war that, in the words of Dominic Lieven, “was first and foremost an eastern European conflict”.¹⁰

If we examine the position of the Russian government during the July Crisis, it is worth highlighting a series of key points that will help to understand the dynamics of Russian actions and their causes. First, already in the final years and months of peacetime, Russian foreign policy was strikingly inconsistent. With its enormous territory, its vast natural resources, its growing population and its rapid economic growth of recent times Russia was part of the select group of great European powers, and its leaders were fully aware of this. It is no surprise that most of the Tsarist politicians had great designs for their country: the most prudent wanted to maintain the positions achieved, taking advantage of the country’s diplomatically favourable status obtained through the alliance with France and Great Britain to continue strengthening the empire; while other more ambitious leaders supported an aggressive expansionist policy that would satisfy the country’s traditional aspirations in key strategic areas such as the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire.

These ambitions coexisted with a persistent concern which has been a distinctive feature of Russia’s foreign policy throughout its history: the fear of losing its rank as a great power and being overtaken by other rising nations (especially Germany, whose increasing penetration in the Ottoman territories seemed to confirm the Russians’ worst fears). This apprehension, heightened by recent military and diplomatic failures—from the defeat against Japan in the 1905 war to the humiliation suffered in the Bosnia crisis of 1908—¹¹ reflected the awareness of many Tsarist leaders that the country was slipping behind its potential European rivals.

At this delicate juncture, the wavering of the devious Russian foreign minister, Sazonov, also had a decisive effect. Throughout the July Crisis, Sazonov was caught between the fear of a generalised conflict—which many politicians and Tsar Nicholas II himself wished to avoid, and for which they believed Russia was insufficiently prepared—and the ambitions of the hawks, who saw a war in Europe as a way of uniting the country around a common cause, reaffirming its status as a great power, and reviving imperial expansionism at the expense especially of the Ottoman Empire (whose capital Constantinople had for a long time been

¹⁰ Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 2.

¹¹ On the Bosnian crisis and the Russian response, see Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York: Random House, 2013), 429-438.

coveted by the most avid nationalists).¹² If we add to this picture the pressure exerted on the Russian government by the most nationalistic wing of the press, which favoured the spread of anti-Western feeling among the population, and the role of the Tsar's ambassador in Belgrade, the fanatical Serbophile Nicholas Hartwig, we will see how complicated was the situation facing the men who would eventually lead Russia into the abyss: men who, like many of their European colleagues, acted so unconsciously and suicidally—like sleepwalkers, to use Christopher Clark's apt phrase—in the days that preceded the catastrophe.

Indeed, in those decisive days of the early summer, the position of Saint Petersburg was fundamental in the preparation of the disaster. Although there is no incontrovertible proof that Russia openly conspired to break the peace, there are sufficient indications of the country's contribution to the generalised collapse of European diplomacy. Russia, whose secret services had probably known about the Sarajevo plot, did not appear particularly distressed by the murder of the heir to the Austrian throne; nor did she try to reduce the tension by trying to intercede between Vienna and Belgrade, but instead gave repeated signs of inflexibility, especially after hearing the harsh terms of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. On the official visit of the French President Poincaré to St. Petersburg, which began on July 20, the Russians and the French adopted a defiant, aggressive tone, reaffirming the solidity of their alliance and showing very little sympathy for the demands of the Austrians, who, for their part, appeared intent on crushing their opponent.¹³

Convinced of the imminence of a conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, and fearful of suffering a new diplomatic humiliation if they did not respond robustly to the ultimatum sent to a country which aroused great common feeling among the population, on July 24 the Russian leaders took the momentous decision to prepare for the mobilisation of its armed forces. This decision, championed by Chief of Staff Yanushkevich, and supported by a Sazonov who had overcome his previous hesitations, was ratified at the ministerial council held the following day, thus initiating the "period preparatory to war" included in the military plans, and was key to turning the Austro-Serbian dispute into an international

¹² For Russian leaders like the head of military intelligence Yuri Danilov, "the road through Constantinople passed through Vienna and through Berlin." See McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 26. It is worth noting that many Russian documents evocatively referred to the Ottoman capital as "Tsargrad", the city of the Tsar.

¹³ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 443-450. Interestingly, the official records of Poincaré's visit to Saint Petersburg have never been found.

conflict involving the Great Powers.¹⁴ The Russian politicians, victims of the implacable military logic of mobilisation—a mechanism which, once set in motion, cannot be turned back—and torn between fear and ambition, were unaware that the resolution they had taken represented a decisive step towards the precipice, and offered a perfect excuse to Germany to present them as the aggressors.¹⁵ At this point, as Austria and Serbia officially declared hostilities on July 28, hesitation no longer held the Russians back, and nor did the famous exchange of letters between Nicholas II and his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm: on 1 August, Russia was at war with Germany.¹⁶

Disenchantment: the Russian war of 1914

Despite the uncertainties, in Russia and in other European countries the beginning of the conflict was met with optimism and enthusiasm, which was also shared by the population and stimulated by propaganda.¹⁷ To quote Orlando Figes, “in those first heady weeks of August there was every outward sign of ralliement”.¹⁸ The political and military leaders foresaw a rapid affair that would be resolved with a few decisive battles and would end before Christmas: the colossal size of the Tsarist armies forces, with its nearly four million men mobilised in the first days of war, cast a spell over both its enemies and its allies, who imagined the “Russian steamroller” opening up the heart of Europe and preparing the ground for a military parade all the way to Berlin.¹⁹

Unfortunately for Russia, none of its leaders (nor anyone else in the other belligerent countries) understood the nature of modern industrialised warfare, characterised by the presence of new weaponry such as machine guns that granted a decisive superiority to the defending side even when it

¹⁴ Peter Hart, *La Gran Guerra (1914-1918. Historia Militar de la Primera Guerra Mundial)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2013), 47-48.

¹⁵ For the Russian position during the July Crisis, see Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 313-342.

¹⁶ Although not, at the moment, against Austria-Hungary. Surprisingly, Vienna declared war on the Russian Empire only a few days later, on August 6, when the fighting had already begun throughout Europe.

¹⁷ On the Russian war propaganda, see Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia During World War I* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 251.

¹⁹ Joshua A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse. The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23.

was heavily outnumbered by the attackers. Nor had anyone considered the scale of the logistical problems of having to supply and feed huge masses of combatants; or the importance of having sufficient reserves of men and matériel to take advantage of any possible initial advantages derived from numerical superiority. All these oversights proved particularly costly for the armies of Nicholas II, which, in spite of its vast size, suffered from grave structural defects that severely compromised its combat ability. The feared "Russian steamroller" was composed of huge numbers of soldiers with little instruction or training and who in some cases lacked even the basic equipment for war; it was seriously lacking in heavy artillery, which was to prove decisive in the coming battles on more than one occasion;²⁰ the stocks of matériel were very limited, the telephone lines almost non-existent, and the rail network was too chaotic and poorly organised to transport replacements and supplies to the front line.²¹ To make matters worse, the military commanders of this colossus with feet of clay were incompetent and decrepit;²² in the words of Barbara W. Tuchman, the Russian officer class was filled with

aged generals whose heaviest intellectual exercise was card playing and who, to save their court perquisites and prestige, were kept on the active list regardless of activity. Officers were appointed and promoted chiefly through patronage, social or monetary, and although there were among them many brave and able soldiers the system did not tend to bring the best to the top.²³

The Russian military planners were obliged to take on Germany and Austria-Hungary simultaneously and faced a series of important strategic dilemmas. Military logic would have advised them to concentrate the bulk of their forces against the weaker Austrian army so as to strike a devastating blow in the early stages of the war, and at the same time prevent the Austrians from invading Serbia. As for the strategy against

²⁰ In the years prior to 1914, under strong pressure from the Tsar himself, Russia had allocated large amounts of money to the reconstruction of its Baltic fleet; this meant that it had to postpone the planned modernisation of the artillery. See Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 103.

²¹ For an analysis of the Russian army on the eve of the war, see David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War: The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2015), 32-53.

²² The Tsarist officer class has been analysed in depth by John W. Steinberg, *All the Tsar's Men. Russia's General Staff and the Fate of the Empire, 1898-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

²³ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Dell, 1963), 78.

Germany, the initial plans suggested a defensive approach—even including withdrawal from Poland, which appeared very difficult to defend. However, military logic clashed with the diplomatic imperatives: knowing that at the very beginning of the war Germany had directed the bulk of her forces against France and had adopted defensive positions on its eastern border, the Franco-Russian Entente requested the Tsarist forces to come to the aid of their ally by launching a fierce offensive against the Germans as well. Thus, in the summer of 1914, the Stavka (the Russian High Command) chose to apply a variant of the plan drawn up in 1910, which divided its forces and sent its First and Second Armies to invade the lightly defended East Prussia, and stationed four more—the Third, Fourth, Fifth and Eighth—along the Austrian border and prepared for the attack on Galicia. Unfortunately for the Russians, this strategy would only sow the seeds for the later disasters.²⁴

However, at the beginning of the operations Russia seemed to be in a position to achieve its ambitious objectives, especially in East Prussia. The German Eighth Army of Prittwitz—after a victorious initial skirmish in Stallüponen—launched an attack on the Russian First Army of Rennenkampf, which had begun its invasion of the enemy territory from the east more rapidly than expected. At the Battle of Gumbinnen on August 20, despite limited supplies of artillery munitions, Rennenkampf's 200,000 men halted the German attack, and obliged Prittwitz to carry out an improvised retreat. It was the first Russian victory of the war.²⁵

This early battle had important consequences for both sides in terms of morale and also of strategy. The German military command contemplated with horror the possibility of abandoning the territory of East Prussia to the invaders, withdrawing behind the Vistula, and giving up the major city of Königsberg; as for the Russians, the victory of August 20 lifted their spirits, and seemed to reaffirm their belief in a straightforward victory. Even more significant were the strategic consequences. Faced with the awful prospect of losing East Prussia, the German chief of staff von Moltke replaced the stunned Prittwitz with the men who would become the scourge of the Russians in the following years: Ludendorff and von

²⁴ On Russian military planning before the conflict, see Evgenii Iur'evich Sergeev, "Pre-war Military Planning (Russian Empire)", 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer and Bill Nasson, (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), last updated October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/pre-war_military_planning_russian_empire?version=1.0 (last accessed March 12, 2018)

²⁵ Hastings, *Catastrophe 1914*, 271.

Hindenburg. The new commanders rejected the idea of withdrawal and prepared to take on the Russians, while Moltke decided to transfer some forces from the Western Front to aid the Eighth Army. This decision, considered for a long time as fundamental to the course of the war because it slowed down the German advance in France and ultimately allowed the Allied victory at the Marne, in fact changed little: the troops sent arrived too late to make a significant contribution to the later battle of Tannenberg, while the German failure in the West was mainly due to the excessively ambitious nature of the original Schlieffen Plan. On the Russian side, the invasion of Prussia continued, as Samsonov's Second Army advanced from the south with its 230,000 men. Though lacking the support of Rennenkampf, whose advance had practically stopped and who was now separated from the Second Army by the region of the Masurian Lakes, the commander-in-chief of the Russian North-Western Front, Zhilinskiy, pressed Samsonov—who was also vying for his share of military glory—to finish off the German forces in East Prussia.

Unfortunately for the Russians, the Second Army was sorely lacking in cohesion and organisation and was unprepared for a confrontation with the tactically more able Germans: the movements of its units were slow and cumbersome, its logistical network was deficient and its communications were often unencrypted. The Germans intercepted these communications and, aware of the lack of coordination between the invading armies, re-deployed their troops to tend a perfect trap to Samsonov, who thought that he was heading towards an easy victory.²⁶ The fate of the Second Russian Army was sealed between August 26 and 30, in the encounter that would become known as the Battle of Tannenberg: Samsonov and his men were surrounded and subsequently annihilated by the masterful manoeuvre devised by Hindenburg, Ludendorff and, above all, by the highly intelligent Chief of Staff of the Eighth Army, Max Hoffmann. By the end of the battle, the army of Samsonov—who committed suicide on the night of August 29/30—had ceased to exist as a fighting force after losing more than 170,000 men, and the Russians had suffered a textbook defeat that put paid to their plan to invade German territory (which they would not in fact reach again at any point during the war) and badly shook the confidence of its commanders, although they managed to conceal the news from their French and British allies.²⁷

²⁶ Stephen Walsh, "The Russian Army and the Conduct of Operations in 1914," *British Journal for Military History* 2, no. 2 (February 2016): 74-77.

²⁷ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 63-67. On the Battle of Tannenberg, see also the recent work by John Sweetman, *Tannenberg 1914* (London: Cassell, 2002).

A few days later, to put an end to the threat to its eastern regions, the Germans prepared to face the forces of Rennenkampf, whose advances had been halted by the defences of Königsberg: in a series of battles that came to be called First Battle of the Masurian Lakes, from September 7 to 14, the Germans once again asserted their greater tactical ability and inflicted serious losses on the Russians. Faced with the possibility of being surrounded, Rennenkampf chose to withdraw completely from East Prussia and indeed only the speed of the retreat saved his forces from complete destruction. Thus, by the end of September, the Russian invasion of Germany, which had initially aroused so many fears in Berlin, had ended in abject failure: more than 250,000 casualties, the total destruction of the North-Western Front, and the daunting realisation for the Russians that they would face much stronger, faster and better trained enemies in the fighting that would follow.

If Russian morale did not collapse completely after Tannenberg, and if the Western allies continued to maintain a certain confidence in the fighting capabilities of Nicholas II's armies, this was largely due to the development of operations in the other sector of the Eastern Front, where the Tsarist forces faced the Austro-Hungarians in southern Poland and Galicia. Over a very broad front, characterised by the dispersal of the troops and the lack of adequate lines of communication, the inept Austrian Chief of Staff Conrad decided to undertake the invasion of Russian-occupied Poland with two of his armies—the First and the Fourth—without discussing his strategy with his German allies. By the end of August the Austrians had obtained some partial successes (in Kraśnik and Komarów), where they were also helped by the incompetence of the Tsarist commanders, exemplified by the contrast between the Stavka, led by Grand Duke Nicholas, and the commander in chief of the South-Western Front, Nikolai Ivanov.

However, Conrad was even less adept than his rivals: after already dividing his initial forces, ordering them simultaneously to attack Serbia and Russia, and emboldened by the first advance of his soldiers to the north, the Austrian leader forced his Third Army and the Kovess Group to move eastward, where they were massacred by Brusilov's Eighth Army and Ruzsky's Third Army at Gnila Lipa.²⁸ In spite of the dramatic situation on its eastern flank, with the Russians entering Lemberg (the Empire's fourth largest city) on September 3, Conrad made another colossal mistake, withdrawing his northern forces in the belief that

²⁸ For a detailed analysis of Conrad's strategy, and errors, see Geoffrey Wavro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

Plehve's Fifth Army had been totally defeated. The result was another disaster: at the Battle of Rawa Russka, Plehve and his men won a decisive victory that destroyed the Austrian lines in Galicia and allowed the Russians to occupy the entire province.²⁹

Thus, in the least known and least studied of the three great land campaigns of 1914 (the other two being the Marne and East Prussia), the Russians managed to obtain a victory of considerable proportions which, for a moment, diverted attention away from the disaster of Tannenberg. In the Galicia campaign, the Tsarist forces had suffered tremendous human and material losses—almost 250,000 casualties—but they had demonstrated their fighting ability and had reacted swiftly to the first difficulties, thanks especially to the skilful leadership of some of their commanders such as Plehve and Brusilov. Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, had received a devastating blow from which it would never fully recover, losing its best divisions and being obliged to yield to the Russians a large part of its national territory (with serious consequences for the civilian population and especially for the Jews, who suffered brutally at the hands of the invaders).³⁰

In spite of all this, the positive results obtained against the Austrians could not dispel the general feeling of failure surrounding the ambitious Russian strategy of the first months of the war. According to the Stavka's plans, the Tsarist army was to have executed two major operations simultaneously: in the south, an attack on Galicia that would have gained access to the Hungarian plains; and in the north, with a penetration into the eastern German territory, in theory lightly defended, which would have achieved a potentially decisive victory in the initial phase of the conflict. And yet both options ended in failure—due to their excessive ambition, the insufficiency of the forces assigned to them, and the colossal logistical mistakes committed.³¹

In the combats against the Austrians, despite the creditable initial triumph, Russian attempts to penetrate the enemy lines were frustrated by the arrival of autumn. At battles like Limanowa, which took place in terrible weather conditions and in particularly difficult terrain, and cost

²⁹ On the fall of Lemberg and the Battle of Rawa Russka, see John R. Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle: The Battle for Galicia and the Demise of Austria-Hungary* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2015), 213-244.

³⁰ Ian Kershaw, *Descenso a los infiernos. Europa 1914-1949* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2016), 113-117. For an overview of the Galicia campaign from the Austrian perspective, see Richard Lein, "A Train Ride to Disaster: The Austro-Hungarian Eastern Front in 1914," in Bischof, *1914: Austria-Hungary*, 110-119.

³¹ Walsh, "The Russian Army", 87-88.

both sides thousands of casualties, the Austrians managed to halt the advance of the Tsarist soldiers in the foothills of the Carpathians and thus prevented both the capture of the strategically important city Krakow and the advance into Hungary. Further north, in central Poland, the newly formed German Ninth Army and the Austro-Hungarian First Army faced the Russians; in October, Hindenburg decided to pre-empt the enemy's plan to attack Silesia by launching an offensive in the central sector of the front. Despite the defeat at the Battle of the River Vistula, the attack managed to delay the assault on the eastern German provinces thanks above all to the destruction of the railway network around Warsaw. Later, in a bloody battle near Lodz that ended without a clear victor, the German Ninth Army once again slowed the Russians down, eventually stabilising the front line and thus forestalling any possibility of an invasion of Silesia, at least until the arrival of spring.³²

Russia had missed the opportunity to win a decisive victory, had lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers and, above all, had revealed a characteristic that would remain constant throughout the conflict in the Eastern Front: the Tsarist forces were more than capable of defeating (even trouncing) the Austrians, but they were unable to overcome the far more skilled and faster Germans. It is no surprise that in the following months it would be precisely the forces of Hindenburg and Ludendorff that would inflict the hardest blows with a series of victories which, by the summer of 1915, were on the verge of provoking the total collapse of Russia and whose political consequences could hardly have been more profound.

A new enemy, and a new front: the Caucasus, 1914-1915

On 29 October, 1914, as part of a plan designed by Minister of War Enver Pasha and the German Admiral Souchon, the Ottoman Navy of the Black Sea launched an unannounced raid against a series of Russian cities including Odessa and Sevastopol. The bombardment marked the entry into the war of the Ottoman Empire alongside the Central Powers, which was ratified a few days later by formal declarations of war. The Ottoman attack was no surprise to the countries of the Entente, as it was a logical consequence of the diplomatic rapprochement between Berlin and Constantinople and of the policies implemented by the Turkish rulers in

³² On the Battle of Lodz, see Prit Buttar, *Collision of Empires: The War on the Eastern Front in 1914* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 356-387.

the years before the conflict.³³ Germany had long had commercial and economic interests in the Middle East, and in the eyes of the Ottoman leaders it was the only power able to guarantee the survival of the exhausted empire in the face of threats from its aggressive neighbours.³⁴

The beginning of hostilities against the Ottoman Empire received a mixed reception in Russia. On the one hand, the announcement of the war against the Turks was met with great enthusiasm by a large part of the population and helped to strengthen the morale of the home front just as the hopes of a rapid victory on the western borders were fading away. In addition, for the hawks in the government, the war represented the opportunity to settle scores with a long-standing enemy and take control of the much-coveted Turkish Straits (as well as large portions of Armenia), and also to remove the threat represented by the growing German interference in the Ottoman Empire. The military mission of the German general Liman von Sanders, who in 1913 had been entrusted with organising and modernising the Turkish defences in the Straits, and the expansion of the Ottoman Navy of the Black Sea (bolstered by the incorporation of two German cruisers, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*) had been a source of constant concern for the Tsarist military, who even before the conflict had already planned a surprise attack on the Ottoman capital to resolve the difficult strategic situation that was developing in the Middle East.³⁵

On the other hand, the Turks' entry into the war also represented a substantial new threat. In the first place, the opening of a new battle front in the Caucasus arrived at an inopportune moment for the Russian forces, already under heavy pressure in Poland and Galicia; in addition, the need to defend the borders against a probable Ottoman attack prevented the planned reinforcement of the armies already deployed against the Austrians and the Germans. Secondly, the Turkish belligerency led to the definitive closure of the Straits, isolating Russia from its western allies and (most importantly) dealing a terrible blow to its exports, a large proportion of which habitually passed through these waters. Finally, the planned landing in Constantinople might have guaranteed Russia control of this key strategic position, but there was absolutely no way of executing the

³³ Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires. The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108-113.

³⁴ Hew Strachan, *La Primera Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2004), 105-111.

³⁵ On Liman von Sanders's mission and its implications, see Robert J. Kerner, "The Mission of Liman von Sanders. II. The Crisis," *The Slavonic Review* 6, no. 17 (1927), 344-363.

operation, given the inferiority of the Tsarist forces in the Black Sea—even though this plan had been the main item on the agenda at the important ministerial conference held in Saint Petersburg on February 21, 1914.³⁶

Despite these difficulties, the Russians were the first to engage in the Caucasus. The Bergmann Offensive advanced into enemy territory on 2 November, with the aim of occupying some border areas near Köprüköy and thus preventing possible raids by the irregular Kurd forces into Russian Armenia. However, the Ottomans put up stronger resistance than the Tsarist High Command had overoptimistically forecasted, defeating the invading army and forcing it to retreat. The victory invigorated Enver, who launched his Third Army against the Russian positions: despite heavy losses the Turks managed to cross the border and occupied Ardahan at the end of December, also threatening the key city of Sarikamish.³⁷ The scale of the Turkish attack caught the Russian commanders completely by surprise, and panic (intensified by the news of an uprising of the Muslim population in the regions affected by the fighting) spread rapidly among the Tsarist military leaders, who now faced the awful prospect of a full-scale invasion of the Caucasus.

Fortunately for the Russians, the Ottomans committed an elemental error in the planning of their attack which was to have transcendental consequences. Their soldiers lacked adequate winter equipment, and Enver ignored the warnings of his colleagues; on 26 December, in appalling weather conditions, he ordered an attack on the enemy positions. The commander-in-chief of the Russian Caucasus Army, Nikolai Yudenich, decided to resist in order to prevent an attack on Kars: between the end of December and early January, Yudenich struck a huge blow against the invaders, already decimated by disease and the cold, and recovered the territory lost in the previous Turkish advance. At the Battle of Sarikamish, the Russians annihilated the Ottoman Third Army, which suffered horrifying losses (some 80,000 casualties of the 100,000 men initially in the field) and never recovered from the disaster; the army ceased to exist as an operational military force, and the door was open for successive Russian offensives towards Anatolia.³⁸

The Ottoman disaster in Sarikamish also had other important strategic and political consequences, which profoundly affected the course of operations in the Middle East theatre and caused terrible suffering among

³⁶ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 33-35.

³⁷ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 123-124.

³⁸ On the Battle of Sarikamish, see Eugene Rogan, *La caída de los otomanos. La Gran Guerra en el Oriente Próximo* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2015), 195-202.

the civilian population. In the military field, the Russian victory aroused French and British optimism about the possibility of an easy victory over the Turks: faced with paralysis in the West, Paris and London were keen to open new fronts and, in the process, knock out what they considered the weakest of Germany's allies. On the Russian side, throughout the winter of 1915—in fact, as early as the end of 1914—overtures were being made to the Franco-British to relieve the pressure on the Tsarist forces in the Caucasus, for example by planning a maritime operation against Constantinople. The subsequent, disastrous campaign of the Entente in Gallipoli should be seen in a context in which Western strategies fell into line with Russian ambitions: Tsarist diplomats and politicians—through allusions and subtle threats about the possibility of signing a separate peace with Germany—managed to obtain support from Paris and London for their designs on Constantinople, and persuaded the French and the British to launch an attack on the Straits which the Russians were not in a position to carry out themselves.³⁹ The manoeuvring of the Petrograd politicians,⁴⁰ especially Sazonov, was thus crowned by the diplomatic success of March 1915, when both British and French officially ratified the Russian plan to dismantle the Ottoman Empire—a plan which, once the war was over, would have left the whole of the Turkish Straits and a large part of Armenia in Tsarist hands (without forgetting its ambitions with regard to Silesia, Prussia and Galicia).⁴¹ For Petrograd, once Sazonov's requests concerning the post-war situation had been accepted, the outcome of the attack on Gallipoli was of only relative interest—so much so that, in spite of their promises, Russian aid for the landing was minimal.

In terms of horror, the bloodbath that the Gallipoli campaign became was surpassed by the apocalypse that unfolded in the turbulent border regions of the Ottoman Empire, where the ethnic rivalries between Armenians, Kurds and Turks (which had been the cause of massacres of civilians for decades) reached a point of no return with the war.⁴² While the tremendous responsibility of the Ottoman rulers in the lethal cocktail that culminated in the Armenian genocide is undeniable, it is worth remembering that the Armenian insurgency was supported and encouraged

³⁹ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 120-140.

⁴⁰ The Russian capital changed its name from St Petersburg to Petrograd on 31 August 1914, as the original name was considered too German-sounding.

⁴¹ Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads. A New History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 335-337.

⁴² On the tensions and rivalries on the Russian-Turkish border, see for example Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 46-72.

by the Russians, who used the Armenians to weaken the enemy resistance by promising them, in the words of Tsar Nicholas II himself, “liberation from the Ottoman yoke”.⁴³ Thus, on April 20, 1915 the Armenian militias mounted an uprising near the front line, barricading themselves in at Van and awaiting the arrival of Yudenich's troops—an act that provided the excuse for the Ottoman authorities to implement their genocidal plans for the peoples of Anatolia. In early May the Russians took advantage of the insurrection to launch an offensive on their left flank, with the aims of securing their rear in Persia and of providing aid to the Armenians. The attack was initially successful, and towards the end of May the Tsarist troops were able to force the Turks out of the region and relieve the defenders besieged in Van. However, with tens of thousands of Armenian refugees in the liberated city in their charge, the Russians also encountered fierce Ottoman resistance. After a few successful encounters Yudenich's initial advance was slowed down at the Battle of Manzikert in the second half of July, which ended in unexpected defeat; faced with the failure of the offensive, Russia opted to abandon the positions won in the spring, and withdrew from Van. Despite the previous calls for Armenian liberation, the Russian commanders did little to prevent another civilian tragedy: their decision to withdraw put paid to any organised attempt at evacuation of the civilians, and the mass flight of Armenians ended in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Basically, as has been underlined by many historians, Russia's policy in the Caucasus responded above all to her own ambitions: the liberation of the oppressed Armenians might represent an effective propaganda coup for public opinion at home and abroad, but it could not alter the country's military strategy or undermine its true diplomatic interests.⁴⁴

After the evacuation of Van, hostilities in the Caucasus remitted until 1916 as both Ottoman and Russian forces regrouped. This break in the fighting should not come as a surprise, as the Caucasus always represented a secondary front in the Tsarist strategy. No one in Petrograd was under any illusions about the fact that the destiny of the conflict would be decided in Europe, against Germany and Austria-Hungary. And it was precisely in the plains of Eastern Europe that the Russian Empire faced a potentially devastating crisis in 1915 against its most dangerous enemies.

⁴³ The interpretation of McMeekin is particularly controversial; he highlights the Russian faults at the beginning of the Armenian genocide. See McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 141-174.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 141-142.

The Great Retreat of 1915

After the terrible battles of the autumn of 1915, the situation on the Eastern Front did not change significantly during the harsh winter that followed. Although there was no lack of fighting, the encounters of the first months of the year were generally inconclusive, and were very much a reflection of the strategic discussions taking place at the highest level. In the Stavka, the military remained embroiled in disputes over the future Russian offensives: the leader of the North-Western Front, Ruzsky, proposed an assault on Silesia or Prussia, while his colleague Ivanov, in command of the South-Western Front, favoured the continuation of the attack on the Austrians in order to force their definitive collapse. On the German side, despite the doubts of the new Chief of Staff Falkenhayn (who was more inclined to prioritise the Western Front), Hindenburg was eager to deliver a heavy blow to the Russians in Poland, complete the definitive liberation of East Prussia, and provoke the collapse of the enemy positions.⁴⁵

Thus, in February, the German Eighth and Tenth Armies stole a march on the Stavka and attacked the Russian lines defended by Sievers' Tenth Army at the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes. Despite the ice and the snowstorms the Germans managed to advance more than one hundred kilometres, inflicting almost one hundred thousand casualties on the Russians and entering enemy territory as far as Augustów. However, the German victory failed to break the defensive lines to which the main part of the Russian forces withdrew; nor was it able to force a general withdrawal from Poland. The advance thus became another tactical victory that did not achieve relevant strategic results. Nor did it help the Austrian movements in the Carpathians; Conrad's winter offensives caused terrible losses to his army and ended in abject defeat, as they failed to rescue the important garrison besieged in the Przemyśl fortress which finally surrendered on March 22, costing Austria-Hungary the loss of 203,000 men.⁴⁶

The dramatic situation of the forces of the old Habsburg Empire—which had lost more than half of its troops since the summer of 1914 and now faced the imminent declaration of war by Italy to the south (a declaration that would finally come in May)—forced Falkenhayn to reconsider his strategic options, and to put aside his hostility towards

⁴⁵ Hart, *La Gran Guerra*, 179-180.

⁴⁶ On the winter war in the Carpathians, see Graydon A. Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

Hindenburg and Ludendorff and their grand plans of an offensive in the East. Falkenhayn's intention was to save the Austrians and provide them with the aid urgently requested by Conrad himself. Moreover, if events had unfolded as planned, Germany could have forced Russia to withdraw from the war through a separate peace agreement and could thus have concentrated her forces on the Western Front, at that time at a standstill. Thus, throughout the month of April, with the Russians oblivious to the enemy movements, Falkenhayn finalised his preparations: he forced Conrad to accept a unified command under von Mackensen's new German Eleventh Army, and achieved substantial material superiority in the sector near Krakow, where his troops would unleash the initial attack (352,000 soldiers against 219,000 Russians, 1,272 field guns against 675, and 430 heavy guns and mortars against just four).⁴⁷

On May 2 the Tsarist High Command, who had ignored all the warnings about the build-up of enemy troops in the sector, was taken aback by the forcefulness of the offensive executed by the Austro-Germans "with Germanic precision".⁴⁸ The ferocious artillery bombardment destroyed the fragile Russian positions almost immediately, and the Battle of Gorlice-Tarnów became a resounding victory for the Central Powers: Dimitriev's Third Army was crushed by the unstoppable enemy advance, and von Mackensen's troops forced their way far behind the Russian lines, reaching the River San towards the middle of May. In disarray after the attack, the Russian forces withdrew from the previously occupied territory: in June, the Austrians were able to reconquer Przemyśl, and later Lemberg itself.⁴⁹

Seeing the scale of the success, the German High Command once again followed Hindenburg's lead. While the offensive continued from the south in the direction of Brest-Litovsk, other operations were launched elsewhere on the front: specifically, in the northern sector, towards the Baltic countries and the heart of Poland, in an attempt to envelop the bulk of the Russian army. Although Falkenhayn finally opted for a more prudent approach, preferring smaller-scale battles based on material superiority and trying not to venture too far into the Russian heartland, the fact is that throughout July 1915 the armies of the Central Powers

⁴⁷ Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 154.

⁴⁸ Francisco Veiga, Pablo Martín and Juan Sánchez Monroe, *Entre dos octubres. Revoluciones y contrarrevoluciones en Rusia (1905-1917) y guerra civil en Eurasia*. (Madrid: Alianza, 2017), 213.

⁴⁹ On the Battle of Gorlice-Tarnów and the operations between May and June on the Eastern Front, see Richard L. DiNardo, *Breakthrough: The Gorlice-Tarnów Campaign, 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: Prager, 2010), 69-101.

continued to crush the Tsar's soldiers, who were severely handicapped by the desperate lack of ammunition and rifles. The Stavka finally ordered a general withdrawal from Poland, consenting to the loss of Warsaw, occupied by the Germans on August 4. The subsequent fall of the theoretically powerful fortress of Novo Georgievsk—with its huge ammunition depots and supply of cannons—accelerated the Russian withdrawal, a colossal manoeuvre which became known as the Great Retreat and concluded towards the middle of September, after the Germans had also occupied Brest-Litovsk and Vilnius.⁵⁰ The arrival of autumn, however, halted the Austro-German advance: the Great Retreat, finally executed in a relatively ordered fashion by the Tsarist command, had repositioned the Russian forces along a line that was much shorter and easier to defend and was supported by natural obstacles like the Pripet marshes, between Belarus and Ukraine, which were extremely difficult to cross. In addition, the progressive extension of the supply lines, the exhaustion, the human losses and the autumn mud frustrated further advances of the Central Empires, and the front became more or less stabilised throughout the successive months.

The Russian disaster of the summer of 1915 had tremendous consequences for the Tsarist state, at all levels. First, the Russian armed forces suffered horrific human losses in the course of the combats and the retreat: approximately one and a half million men lost, counting the dead (151,000), the wounded (683,000) and those taken prisoner (895,000); the toll was especially high among the most trained officers.⁵¹ No less serious was the loss of war material: thousands of guns and large quantities of ammunition ended up in enemy hands, especially after the fall of strongholds such as Novo Georgievsk and Kovno. The Great Retreat meant, in addition, abandoning the vast regions of Poland, Lithuania and Courland, rich in economic and material resources, to the Germans; in fact, in a matter of weeks Russia lost a third of its factories, 12.4% of its pre-war national income, 10% of its iron and steel production, and 23.3% of its European population.⁵²

However, even more important than the human and material losses were the social and political consequences of the disaster. Russian morale abruptly collapsed, especially among the populations most directly affected by the fighting, by the retreat, and by the Russian High Command's

⁵⁰ Norman Stone, *World War One: A Short History* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 87-88.

⁵¹ Marc Ferro, *Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Routledge, 2002), 69.

⁵² Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War. A Social and Economic History* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 29-30.

decision to apply a scorched earth policy in the regions evacuated ahead of the enemy advance. Hundreds of thousands of civilians embarked on a desperate exodus towards the interior: the arrival of these hungry refugees in the streets of Moscow or Petrograd aggravated the crisis of confidence of the citizens, and as they crammed into trains in their tragic flight eastwards they put further pressure on the chaotic and deficient Russian transportation system, which was increasingly unable to guarantee food supplies to the large urban centres.⁵³ Finally, the Great Retreat sparked important political reactions inside the Tsarist state. The liberal-democratic opposition, believing that the war effort was being badly managed by the authorities, began to demand a more energetic leadership of the conflict and—amid rumours and suspicions about the supposed sympathies of the Russian aristocracy and the imperial family towards the Germans—insisted that the Duma be reconvened and Nicholas II be marginalised or even removed from power.⁵⁴ And as the authorities whipped up Russian nationalist feeling with attacks on the Jewish and German communities, the Tsar reacted to the disaster by replacing the Grand Duke Nicholas at the end of August and taking personal command of the army himself. The decision had the merit of instilling some optimism among the soldiers at a particularly grave moment and seemed to reaffirm the Romanovs' commitment to victory, but nevertheless proved ineffective (the Tsar lacked the military skill necessary to lead his troops) and above all politically foolish. Isolated at the headquarters in Mogilev, Nicholas lost control of the capital and left all decisions in the hands of his incompetent wife the Tsarina Alexandra and her protégé Rasputin, as mistrust among the population escalated over the following months.⁵⁵

Faced with all these disasters, it might seem surprising to argue that the Great Retreat of 1915, from the military point of view, was not as catastrophic as it might at first appear: and yet there are a great many factors that support this interpretation. In the first place, the retreat—strategically speaking—benefited the Tsarist armies: the burdensome outpost of Poland was abandoned and new, more sensible defensive positions were established, which in fact facilitated the creation of strategic reserves in the rear and avoided the complete encirclement of the soldiers by the simultaneous advance of Mackensen and Hindenburg.⁵⁶ The Germans, for their part, had obtained a sound victory, but they had not

⁵³ On the refugees, see Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Veiga, Martín and Monroe, *Entre dos octubres*, 217-219.

⁵⁵ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 269-278.

⁵⁶ Hart, *La Gran Guerra*, 185.

achieved their most ambitious objectives: they had not destroyed the bulk of the enemy forces, nor could they continue further into Russian territory. In short it was a tactical success but not a decisive one, and it did not serve to exert any diplomatic pressure on the Russians. Even though they could not count on effective aid from their Western allies, the Russians were able to ignore the overtures made by the Central Powers and by some neutral intermediaries; they refused to sign a separate peace with Vienna and Berlin and reaffirmed their commitment to the Entente, which was officially ratified by Nicholas II on August 3.⁵⁷

In addition, the Great Retreat forced the Russian commanders to undertake a thorough reorganisation of their armed forces and their war industry, in order to avoid further disasters and to turn their army into an efficient combat machine once again. Thus, from the second half of 1915, as new recruits swelled the ranks of the army and the lines of command were being overhauled, Russia's industrial capacity was boosted by the total mobilisation of the factories.⁵⁸ The production of ammunition for the artillery increased every month, from 852,000 cartridges in July 1915 to 1.5 million in November; total output went from 11.2 million rounds in 1915 to 28.3 million in 1916; the army, meanwhile, increased in number from 3.9 million men in September 1915 to 6.2 million in February 1916.⁵⁹ As the difficult year of 1915 came to an end, the forces of Russia were preparing for a decisive effort, an effort that, over the following year, would record some highly notable successes on the battle fronts.

The swan song of Imperial Russia: the military operations of 1916

At the end of the summer of 1915 the Eastern Front fell relatively quiet, without any significant fighting between the two sides during the final months of the year. While Austria-Hungary and Germany devoted themselves to crushing resistance in Serbia, which was fully occupied by the end of November, Russia was still focused on the difficult task of reorganising its army after the earlier disasters. In the accords reached at the Chantilly conference in December, the Allies agreed on a series of coordinated operations for the summer of 1916 designed to exert pressure on the Central Empires on all fronts. However, the plans were frustrated by the German onslaught on the French positions at Verdun: having failed

⁵⁷ Veiga and Martín, *Las guerras de la Gran Guerra*, 81-82.

⁵⁸ Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 108-131.

⁵⁹ Strachan, *La Primera Guerra Mundial*, 153-154.

to obtain a decisive victory on the Western Front, Falkenhayn had opted to wear France down in a bloody battle of attrition, and thus force her out of the war.

It was the desperate situation of Verdun that led the French commander Joffre to turn to the Tsarist High Command for help: to aid their ally in distress, the Russians were to go onto the offensive on the Eastern Front at the earliest opportunity. The Stavka decided to attack in Belarus, where Evert's Second Army easily outnumbered the German Tenth Army led by von Eichhorn. On 18 March 1916, after two days of intense but very inaccurate artillery bombardment, Evert's forces launched an attack at the Battle of Naroch Lake, trusting that they would be able to break through the enemy lines. Unfortunately for Evert, the Russian advance, already made more difficult by the weather, was frustrated almost immediately: the attackers managed to gain only some 10 kilometres before they were stopped by the resolute German defence, which had been able to withstand the artillery fire. The battle ended in late March in resounding failure for the Russians, whose mass assaults—based on the “human wave” tactic—proved totally inadequate to break down von Eichhorn's solid positions. Once again, the Russian forces were unable to defeat the Germans and they sustained heavy losses.⁶⁰

Despite the significance of the defeat of Naroch Lake, on other fronts the year of 1916 began with a series of notable successes for the Tsarist armies. In Persia, for example, Russia had stationed troops in the Tabriz area as a guarantee of her tutelage over the Shah's government; since late 1914 these troops had been fighting the Turks who had infiltrated the region, stimulated by the pro-German sympathies of a large part of the leadership in Tehran. After their occupation of Ardahan in December 1914, the Turks forced the Tsarist contingent out of Tabriz, thus threatening the Entente's positions in a country which possessed vital oil resources. In the second half of 1915, Yudenich charged General Baratov's First Cossack Corps of the Caucasus with expelling the Ottoman forces and the small nuclei of German soldiers from Persia, in order to remove the Central Powers from the region and secure the flanks of the British advance in Mesopotamia. In late 1915 Baratov and his troops occupied Tehran, where they obliged the Shah to form a government favourable to the Entente, and then, in early 1916, they completed their operation with the occupation of Hamadan and Kermanshah, forcing the Turks to withdraw and reaching a position very close to Baghdad by

⁶⁰ On the Battle of Lake Naroch, see Prit Buttar, *Russia's Last Gasp. The Eastern Front 1916-17* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2016), 96-117.

springtime. Although in the summer a new Ottoman incursion momentarily broke through the Russian lines and brought renewed fighting to the interior of Persia, at the end of the year Baratov counterattacked and drove the enemy out, thus ensuring victory in a key region for the Entente.⁶¹

While these operations were underway in Persia, Russia managed to deliver another blow to the Turks in the Caucasus, an area where there had been no major fighting since the autumn of 1915. The Ottoman Empire—which over the course of 1915 had been attacked in Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia—had been unable to adequately reinforce its Third Army, which was still very weak after the Battle of Sarikamish: nobody in the Turkish High Command foresaw a Russian attack on a front considered of minor importance during the winter of 1915/1916. However, Yudenich had progressively built up his army and now enjoyed significant numerical and material superiority: on January 10 the Tsarist forces launched the Erzurum Offensive, which caught their rivals completely by surprise. At the Battle of Köprüköy Yudenich broke through the Turkish lines, inflicting tremendous losses (almost a third of the Turks' initial combat strength): the victory opened the way for the Russians to occupy the stronghold of Erzurum, key to the control of the Central Anatolian Plateau, which fell on February 16. The Tsarist forces, however, did not stop in the city but went on to record new victories throughout the first half of 1916. In April, a skilful operation executed by land and sea gave the Russians control of the port of Trabzon; and at the beginning of the summer, Yudenich's soldiers stopped a desperate Ottoman counterattack and managed to occupy Bitlis and Erzincan, before halting at the end of July. Russia had reaped a remarkable triumph, which its domestic propaganda capitalised upon to the full: the control of Trabzon facilitated its logistical operations in the region and ensured the ascendancy of its fleet over the Black Sea. After the rout of its Third Army, the Ottoman Empire was in desperate straits.⁶² The Russians saw the prospect of a victorious conclusion of the war against the Ottomans: the last organised forces of their enemies were fading away, and from their new positions they could plan a final and decisive assault towards the heart of Anatolia, or towards Mesopotamia, in the next year.

Just as the last offensive operations were unfolding in Anatolia, the Eastern Front saw the Russians' greatest success in 1916—probably the greatest obtained by any of the protagonists throughout the First World

⁶¹ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins*, 185-191. The author, however, stresses that the Russian operations in Persia did not help the British, who were humiliated at the siege of Kut in 1916.

⁶² Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 136.

War.⁶³ According to the agreement reached in Chantilly, Russia was to launch a major summer operation to coincide with the efforts of its allies in the West. However, after the failure of Lake Naroch, the Russian military were not convinced that the time was right for an offensive: Generals Kuropatkin and Evert, in charge of the Northern and Western Fronts respectively, were reluctant to attack the German positions again, and only General Brusilov, recently promoted to the command of the South-Western Front, declared himself willing to act. On April 14 the Stavka, presided over by the diffident Nicholas II, gave its authorisation to Brusilov's plan, which envisaged an assault on the Austro-Hungarian positions south of the Pripet marshes to be carried out by four armies, the Fourth, the Eighth, the Ninth and the Eleventh. To coincide with the attack, Evert's forces were to move decisively in the north.

The offensive—which had to be brought forward to early June to help the Italians, at that time under pressure from the Austrians on the Alpine front—was planned by Brusilov with enormous care and with a high degree of tactical innovation. The intelligent Russian general had learnt from the mistakes made in the previous offensives and prepared an attack on a very broad front so as not to allow the enemy time to regroup after the first penetrations, and placed his reserves in an area near the first line, to take immediate advantage of the first breaks in the front. In addition, he carried out a thorough reconnaissance of the enemy positions, also using aviation; he improved the coordination of the artillery (whose fire had often proved too imprecise) and the instruction of his soldiers; and he took great care to conceal his intentions from the Austrians.⁶⁴

On June 4, Brusilov began his offensive, preceded by a rapid, precise and concentrated artillery attack that disoriented the Austrian soldiers. Next, four waves of Russian soldiers were launched against the enemy lines, which collapsed quickly despite being well defended. In a couple of days, the Austro-Hungarian forces were annihilated, overcome by the impetus of the attackers: the Russians recovered Lutsk and Czernowitz, and captured hundreds of thousands of enemy soldiers in a triumph of epic proportions that did wonders for morale throughout all the countries of the Entente. The collapse of Austria-Hungary was total: as his Slav soldiers surrendered in droves, a powerless Conrad watched the destruction of the bulk of his army on the Eastern Front and, on June 8, had no choice but to turn to Falkenhayn for immediate help.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ferro, *Great War*, 87.

⁶⁴ Hart, *La Gran Guerra*, 267.

⁶⁵ Buttar, *Russia's Last Gasp*, 139-169.

The German High Command could not turn its back on its battered ally, but it imposed draconian conditions on Conrad in return for the help requested: the suspension of his Italian offensive, and total German control over the Austrian forces throughout Galicia. As the first German reinforcements arrived, the advance of the Russians began to slow: in the second half of June Brusilov granted a rest to his exhausted troops, hoping that, further north, Evert would launch his planned attack on the enemy positions. However, Evert continued to hesitate and obtusely and repeatedly postponed his offensive, losing several vital days.⁶⁶ Finally, at the beginning of July, when the Stavka ordered him to attack, his Fourth Army was forced back at the Battle of Baranowici, suffering significant casualties and thus losing the opportunity to join Brusilov in striking a decisive blow against the entire Eastern Front. Brusilov himself, although disappointed by his colleague's lack of support, returned to the offensive in early July: his troops reaped new successes and came within reach of the Carpathians, though they met increasing enemy resistance. The Stavka allocated more and more troops to Brusilov's sector⁶⁷ (causing the collapse of the transport system in the process) but the pace of the offensive slowed down as the summer went on: Hindenburg, who had replaced Falkenhayn as chief of staff at the end of August, stopped the Russians at the Battle of Kowel, and finally brought the Tsarist advance to an end in September.⁶⁸

At this time, another problem arose to add to the paralysis of the offensive: at the end of August, after months of uncertainty, Romania officially joined the Entente, declaring war on the Central Powers in the hope of taking Transylvania from Austria. The Romanian troops immediately launched a poorly organised offensive through the Carpathians which failed to achieve any significant gains, and the Austro-German reaction was not long in coming. Towards the middle of September, Germany coordinated the counterattack, with Mackensen advancing from the south with a mixed force of Bulgarians, Ottomans and Germans, while Falkenhayn moved forward from the north with his Ninth Army. The Romanian army thus faced a pincer that threatened to destroy it, and had no choice but to withdraw: although Brusilov's Russian troops came to the aid of the remains of the Romanian forces and managed to stabilise the front in Moldova towards the end of the year, the truth is that

⁶⁶ Orlando Figes speaks of "military stupidity" in reference to the position of the Russian High Command regarding the planned Evert offensive. See Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 281.

⁶⁷ In addition, these troops who were less and less well trained. See Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 199-200.

⁶⁸ Stone, *World War One*, p. 90.

the campaign of Romania ended in a notable victory for the Central Powers, which on December 6 occupied Bucharest.⁶⁹

But despite the Romanian disaster, the Brusilov Offensive was a great victory for Russia: not only had it forced the Germans and the Austrians to abandon their attacks on Verdun and the Italian front, but it had practically wiped out the Austro-Hungarian forces, which, by the end of the campaign, had lost a horrifying number of men, between prisoners (400,000) and casualties in combat (600,000).⁷⁰ However, the Russian losses were also very high—probably around one million among the dead, wounded and prisoners—and in the eyes of many Russian citizens the limited territorial gains did not seem to compensate for the enormous sacrifice. Awkward questions came to be heard about the duration of the war and about the prospects of victory over the powerful Germans.

In short, from the military point of view the Russian Empire continued to demonstrate a notable capacity for combat and resistance. What is more, at the end of 1916, its general situation was perhaps more hopeful than that of its Western allies, if we consider that two of its three great enemies, the Austrians and the Ottomans, were practically inoperative, and that its production of war material was steadily increasing and could even guarantee the Tsarist soldiers some superiority over their enemies. The problem, for Russia, lay in the increasingly fragile resistance of the Tsarist government, subject to increasing pressure from an exhausted and hungry civil society which would ultimately lead to its collapse in the February Revolution of 1917.

1917: the end

The progressive deterioration of the social situation in the Russian Empire (accompanied by strikes, political crises and, in Central Asia, even armed uprisings)⁷¹ reached its point of no return in February 1917. The starving masses of women and factory workers in Petrograd began a series of protest demonstrations which were soon seconded by the garrison of the capital, leading to the rapid collapse of the regime and the constitution of the Provisional Government dominated by the liberal democrats. While the military operations were halted, the new government—convinced of the need to continue fighting alongside the Entente until victory was

⁶⁹ On the Romanian campaign, see Michael B. Barrett, *Prelude to Blitzkrieg. The 1916 Austro-German Campaign in Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁷⁰ Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 168.

⁷¹ Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 188-192.

achieved—reaffirmed Russia's commitment to the war, hoping to “democratise” the conflict in order to defend the revolutionary conquests and the national territory threatened by the Germans. However, the progressive decomposition of authority caused by the fall of Tsarism had a devastating effect on the already fragile morale of the troops, and the famous “Order Number 1” issued by the Petrograd Soviet on March 14 (which established that government orders concerning the armed forces should be respected only if they did not contradict the orders of the Soviet) dealt a tremendous blow to military discipline. While throughout the Empire the strikes and land occupations increased, and while peripheral nationalisms presented an increasing resistance to the continuation of the war, at the front the soldiers' committees multiplied, the number of desertions grew, and military commanders were openly criticised and challenged by their own troops.⁷²

Many voices in the Stavka warned that a new offensive against the Central Powers would cause the widespread collapse of the front and might bring down the Provisional Government; and yet, at the beginning of the summer, the Russian troops were again sent forward to attack the enemy positions. Many factors influenced this fateful decision: the government's commitment to its Western allies; the diplomatic and economic pressure exerted by these same allies; the fear of a new German attack that might threaten the capital (a fear that was unfounded, since Germany was putting its money on a diplomatic “peace offensive” to remove Russia from the war, and had no plans for any large-scale operations); the conviction that, in order to end the conflict through a general peace, Russia was obliged to obtain military success; and the hope of revitalising the morale of the soldiers precisely thanks to a victorious offensive.⁷³

Unfortunately, the leaders of the Provisional Government—and especially its new strong man, Alexander Kerensky—failed to see that the decision to continue the war was becoming increasingly unpopular with the population and that it was playing into the hands of the Bolsheviks, who favoured immediate peace, even if it meant defeat and the surrender of part of the national territory. So Kerensky, throughout the spring, toured the front promoting the cause of the “democratic war” among the soldiers with rousing speeches, and the new commander-in-chief Brusilov—in spite of his serious doubts about the morale of the troops—prepared for the attack. The Kerensky offensive began on July 1, 1917, with a violent

⁷² Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 309-310.

⁷³ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 407-410.

artillery attack on the enemy lines in the direction of Lemberg: the numerical superiority of the Russians allowed them to gain ground and create significant gaps in the Austrian defences, but within a few days Brusilov's advance slowed and finally ground to a halt on July 19. The fierce resistance of the Germans, as well as the indiscipline and the lack of morale among the reserve troops, caused the Russian army to collapse. In addition to mass desertions, entire units simply disobeyed orders and refused to fight. In the wake of this ignominious disaster—not mitigated by the simultaneous, and successful, contribution of the Russian Fourth Army to the defence of Romanian positions in the south—Brusilov was sacked, and Russian involvement in the conflict effectively came to an end, representing a devastating blow for the increasingly beleaguered Provisional Government. The Austro-Germans were thus able to take advantage of the total disintegration of the enemy army, which by the autumn had lost around three million deserters, and delivered their last blows in late summer. The Austrian attack on Ternopil, which pushed the Russian lines back tens of kilometres, was followed by the German assault on Riga, the fourth largest city in the empire, which fell in early September with hardly a shot fired.⁷⁴

The loss of Riga, in fact, marked the end of the fighting on the Eastern Front. A few weeks later, the Bolsheviks put the Provisional Government out of its misery by seizing power in the October Revolution, and immediately entered peace negotiations with the Central Powers after declaring a general ceasefire on December 15. While these negotiations dragged on throughout most of the winter, the severe peace terms that was eventually signed in Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918 (after one last German onslaught, Operation *Faustschlag*, which met no organised resistance) represented the only practicable solution for Lenin's government, since the Russian army had simply ceased to exist.

Russia and the Great War: the collapse of a system, not of an army

Russia's participation in the First World War ended in defeat, a defeat that was confirmed at Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Nevertheless, the triumphant Central Powers would themselves surrender a few months later to the Western allies. And yet, as we have just explained, the Russian defeat was not a military one; it had other causes which are well known and have been studied in depth. The Russian army, in spite of its repeated failures

⁷⁴ Hart, *La Gran Guerra*, 323-325.

against the Germans, had shown a notable military capacity throughout the conflict: it had inflicted considerable losses on its Ottoman and Austrian enemies (while Italy and Great Britain recorded only failures in the Alps and in Mesopotamia); Russia had greatly enhanced her production of armaments and had even developed innovative combat tactics (later studied and imitated during the Second World War) when, on the Western Front, many commanders still subscribed to a strategy of attrition that was unable to penetrate enemy lines and only increased the number of casualties on both sides. In strictly military terms, on the eve of the February Revolution the Russian situation was not much worse than that of France and Britain, who seemed incapable of finding any way to defeat Germany and her allies.

Rather, the Russian defeat, and the revolution, were caused by a colossal failure of governance inside the Tsarist political system: a political system too fragile to withstand the enormous tensions caused by a conflict of an unprecedented scale. Russia was not, of course, the only country in which the war exacerbated social tensions among the population; in Italy, for example, a series of revolts in Turin in the summer of 1917 caused some sixty deaths and hundreds of wounded. Nor was it the only one where the exhaustion of the soldiers provoked riots, desertions and protests among the front units—many French divisions staged open rebellions after the disaster of the Nivelle Offensive in 1917. But Russia was the only country in which the political order in place prior to the war collapsed completely during the conflict itself. The short circuit that occurred in Russia was in many respects the consequence (probably foreseeable) of the country's intrinsic weaknesses—weaknesses that Tsarism tried to hide, and ignore, while pushing ahead with the war. Thus, in a careful examination of these weaknesses and of the reasons that led the country to revolution, the interpretations that see an inexorable progression from military to political collapse emerge as simplistic exaggerations. In fact the army only fell apart in 1917, when the “glorious February” had already thoroughly undermined state authority throughout the country; until then, on the battlefields, Tsarist Russia was not being decisively defeated.

CHAPTER TWO

REVOLUTION AND WORK: FROM SOVIET TAYLORISM TO STALINIST STAKHANOVISM

JOSÉ MANUEL RÚA FERNÁNDEZ

Compare these Parisians, storming heaven, with the slave to heaven of the German-Prussian Holy Roman Empire, with its posthumous masquerades reeking of the barracks, the Church, cabbage-junkerdome and above all, of the philistine.

—Letter from Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, London, April 12, 1871

The Russian Bolsheviks saw themselves as the new Parisian Communards, poised to storm heaven. The triumph of the military uprising in Petrograd seemed to confirm the success of the operation, clearing the way for the introduction of the Council of People's Commissars headed by Lenin and then a revolutionary government ready to enact measures of a socialist nature. What unfolded in the months after the Bolshevik triumph, however, showed starkly the divergence between what was desired and initially planned and what was possible and even necessary in the face of the harsh realities. Facing an extremely adverse national and international panorama, on countless occasions the new regime opted to do "what it could do" rather than "what it wanted to do". It proved a terrible exercise in realism, with circumstances forcing constant adaptation and sometimes outright improvisation, and it became the only way possible to hold onto power and safeguard the revolution's early gains.

The dire situation of the opening months of 1918 extended to a wide range of areas, from the political (where a confrontation with the Constituent Assembly ultimately led to its dissolution) to the economic (with a production and subsistence crisis that rocked the industrial cities), by way of the military (a new German offensive and the first clashes of the Civil War) and the diplomatic (with the new regime facing international isolation). For the subject of the present paper, we will focus our attention

on the economic area and the world of labour, but without forgetting the starting point: the material difficulties in carrying on with the war effort and satisfying the material necessities of the populace. The people were facing a sharp drop in real wages, as the income of an average worker fell to only 24% of its 1913 value. The logical consequence was that the percentage of wages spent on food had risen from less than 50% in 1913 to 75% in 1919. In addition, the unemployment caused by power outages and capital flight had left nearly a million industrial workers jobless by the first half of 1918.

Economic hardship was transforming the urban landscape and the demography of the cities, with factories like Lessner and Erickson employing only 200 workers compared to the 7,000 that each had employed only a year earlier. Changes in the sociological composition of the cities wrought changes on the organisational structure of the vanguard party, as the number of Bolsheviks in Petrograd fell from 50,000 at the start of the October Revolution to only 13,000 six months later. One of the leaders, the union boss Alexander Shliapnikov, described the situation well, saying that the party in power risked being reduced to “the vanguard of a class that didn’t exist”.¹

Industrial Workers, “Sack Men” and Compulsory Labour

Against this background, the only alternative for many workers was to become “sack men” and travel regularly into the countryside to obtain provisions in exchange for valuables or products they themselves had manufactured. These armies of sack men only heightened the organisational chaos and sense of disarray in the factories. New committees, which were put in charge of the management of factories with five or more workers after the passage of the Decree on Workers’ Control on 14 November 1917,² permitted absenteeism rates as high as 33% on any normal working day. Industrial workers regarded the decree as the application in the factories of the Decree on Land, and so they expected industrial assets and output to be divided up among them just as the land was being divided up among the peasants. As a result, much of their work time was devoted to making items to trade on the black market for foodstuffs, together with

¹ Orlando Figes, *La Revolución rusa (1891-1924): La tragedia de un pueblo*. (Barcelona: Edhasa, 2010), 668.

² According to the Julian calendar. The decree was approved on November 27 according to the Gregorian calendar.

fuel and tools from their factories: industry supplied exchangeable products to the “sack men”.

The Decree on Workers’ Control had resulted in industrial management by assembly. The challenge was to combine assembly management in each workplace with the collective planning of industry. The chaos triggered by the lack of coordination among the different committees (with textbook cases like the railway)³ led the government headed by Lenin to launch a programme of industry nationalisations from March 1918 onwards. First came the railway system, which was crucial to overcoming the supply problem shaking the cities and to organising the war effort. Ultimately, the programme came to be known famously as War Communism. It was precisely on the railway where the Taylorist system was first applied by the Bolsheviks in order to rationalise and optimise resources to increase productivity. When it came time to translating intentions into concrete policies, two measures stood out: first, at Trotsky’s behest, railway work was militarised to eliminate any potential resistance in a sector in which the Mensheviks held the majority of the trade unions, and second, piecework was implemented as a method to stimulate production. By April 1918, Lenin had already announced in a speech to the Supreme Economic Council that he intended to introduce a piece-rate system of wages and harsher punishments for violations of labour discipline. The railway network was also the first area where industrial planning was put into practice, with the Commissariat of Transport developing a five-year plan to rebuild and repair the rail lines.

In this context, it is interesting to look back through Lenin’s writings to *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* from April 1918, where he reconsiders the workers’ dynamic to date (with all power going to factory committees) and the reorganisation of production in an attempt to increase economic efficiency. To this end, it was necessary for the state to impose centralised planning (the Supreme Economic Council) and to appoint technicians and administrators to run enterprises. The “bourgeois” character of the technicians, their high salaries (which broke with egalitarian conceptions from the early days of the Revolution) and the principle of discipline and authority that came with the change in the

³ Each rail line set up its own committee and did not allow locomotives to leave its jurisdiction out of a fear of losing them to neighbouring committees. The situation doomed convoys to endless delays at the borders of a jurisdiction, where they would stop and wait for other locomotives. It is easy to deduce the enormous difficulties arising from the committees’ exclusive conception of the means of transport when the time came to implement an integrated nationwide railway system.

management of enterprises—all these things were interpreted by many workers as a return to the days prior to the October triumph. For the Bolshevik leadership, by contrast, it was a question of making use of the methods, techniques and knowledge from the most advanced capitalism in order to reconstruct the economic fabric with a socialist orientation set by the state. Equality as the highest principle in the economy took a back seat to efficiency.

The new direction adopted on the economic front was consistent with Trotsky's thinking on the military front: the best officials were needed even if it often meant bringing in former Tsarist officials, just as it meant bringing back former capitalist managers in industry. The coincidence, however, went beyond the needs of the moment. Trotsky raised the possibility of extending centralised management and iron discipline to the rest of society too, pushing forward coercive methods that would take firm hold with the Stalinist forced collectivization and five-year plans. In the words of Orlando Figes, both Trotsky's and Stalin's approaches were based on "the bureaucratic fantasy of imposing Communism by decree".⁴ Trotsky's plans even extended to the trade unions, which he viewed as dispensable in a socialist society where the workers' state looked after workers' interests. On this point, however, Lenin forestalled the elimination of trade-union power and it was resolved at the 9th Party Congress (March 29-April 5, 1920) that a portion of administrators would be appointed by the trade unions. The reason for putting a halt to Trotsky's offensive against the unions was simple: confrontation with the trade unions, in Lenin's view, would bring the Soviet government to an end. Since 1919, the trade unions had been assigned the task of managing industry, not immediately but only once the workers had been properly educated and trained. It fell to the trade unions and workers' councils to carry out the political education of the masses (Marxism, communism, etc.) along the lines set by the party.

Following Trotsky's approaches, another aspect of the militarisation of society was the introduction of compulsory labour, with the state exercising command and control of employment. For the workforce, this could only mean abandoning their freedom of choice:

The introduction of compulsory labour service is unthinkable without the application, to a greater or less degree, of the methods of militarisation of labour. This term at once brings us into the region of the greatest possible superstitions and outcries from the opposition [...] If organised economic life is unthinkable without compulsory labour service, the latter is not to be

⁴ Figes, *La Revolución rusa*, 785.

realised without the abolition of fiction of the freedom of labour, and without the substitution for it of the obligatory principle, which is supplemented by real compulsion.⁵

The underlying idea in promoting compulsory labour was as straightforward as it was powerful: “He who works not, neither shall he eat”.⁶ Trotsky himself developed the idea in his report to the 9th Party Congress:

If the organisation of the new society can be reduced fundamentally to the reorganisation of labour, the organisation of labour signifies in its turn the correct introduction of general labour service. This problem is in no way met by measures of a purely departmental and administrative character. It touches the very foundations of economic life and the social structure. It finds itself in conflict with the most powerful psychological habits and prejudices. The introduction of compulsory labour service presupposes, on the one hand, a colossal work of education, and, on the other, the greatest possible care in the practical method adopted.⁷

In the circumstances, stronger discipline and poorer working conditions led to a sharp rise in strike activity in the first half of 1920, with 75% of factories experiencing days of protest over the period. Not until 1924, a year before the industrial indices would finally surpass the figures for 1913, did Soviet industrial growth record an upturn, driven by piecework (with rates paid by the piece) as the chief mechanism of incentive to raise worker productivity, while not forgetting the promotion of emulation and competition among different production teams. All these changes would occur in the context of the New Economic Policy (NEP) launched in March 1921. However, with the return of former technicians and administrators to the helm of enterprises, and with the appearance in the party of *NEPmen* during the period (the *NEPmen* were nouveau riche who grew rich from the legalisation of trade), something that Figes has called “plebeian resentment”⁸ began to develop and grow, eventually becoming a

⁵ Leon Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy (Terrorism and Communism): A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (New York: Workers Party of America, 1922), 137-142.

⁶ Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy*, 135. Lenin also insisted on the idea in his text on emulation: “‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat’—this is the practical commandment of socialism.” Vladimir I. Lenin “How to Organise Competition?,” *Collected Works. Vol. 26* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 414.

⁷ Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy*, 136.

⁸ Figes, *La Revolución rusa*, 839.

foundation of Stalin's accelerated industrialisation, which would finish off the *NEPmen* and throw the technicians into the spotlight.

Workers' Culture: Between the State and Autonomy

Faced with the enormous challenge of getting a socialist economy up and running, the Bolsheviks did not waver in adopting the economic and labour models of politicians and businesspeople who were ideologically far removed from their positions (or even diametrically opposed to them), but they did believe in the possibility of extrapolating them to Soviet reality in a revolutionary sense. This is how contemporaries like the German Walther Rathenau and the American Henry Ford became sources of inspiration for the Soviet revolutionaries. They drew on the concrete form given by Rathenau to state planning in key industries like armaments and provisions in the First World War, and they took Ford's practical application of the scientific organisation of work in the form of his conveyor belt on the assembly line.⁹

Together with their political pragmatism to find solutions to the real problems of industry, the fundamental pillar in their construction of a socialist economy and a new society had to be education. The reins were handed to *Narkompros*, the People's Commissariat for Education under the commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky, which was tasked with pursuing literacy and public education along humanist lines and with the aim of overcoming the division between intellectual and manual labour. In parallel with the government's objectives in the field of workers' education and training, there was already a tradition of associations within Russian Marxist and workers' circles keen to promote an independent proletarian culture, such as the *Vpered* group (1909-1912) led by Alexander Bogdanov, who had co-founded the Bolsheviks with Lenin. Along the same lines, another important consequence of the October Revolution was the emergence of *Proletkult*, a workers' association not linked to state or party that also strove to end the separation between manual and intellectual labour. For Lenin, by contrast, the paramount aim was not to consolidate a workers' culture with independent organisations,¹⁰ but rather to eradicate illiteracy and train workers with the skills needed to

⁹ In the case of the US magnate, "even the inhabitants of remote villages knew Ford's name (some of them thought he was a sort of god who guided the work of Lenin and Trotsky)". Figes, *La Revolución rusa*, 809.

¹⁰ Distrust in this type of organisation can already be seen in 1903 in Lenin's famous "What Is To Be Done?" in which he criticised the trade-union approach in prioritising economic objectives, because it could devolve into political reformism.

operate industrial machinery. Hence the development through *Narkompros* of a polytechnic education system devised by Nadezhda Krupskaya to socialise technical knowledge that would permit the launching of a modern industrial economy under Taylorist premises and, by extension, to acquire the capacity to manage state institutions.

Together with the dissemination of technical know-how by the state and by workers' organisations, a further aim was to promote a veritable cultural revolution in the world of work. As noted in the excellent work of synthesis on Soviet Taylorism by Jorge Sgrazzutti and Antonio Oliva, the objective was to understand the entire process of economic and work-related changes as part of

a broader issue inscribed within the context of a cultural revolution that seeks to transform economic function at its roots through the structure of a state in transition and the education of the masses in the new challenges.¹¹

For Sgrazzutti and Oliva, the primary ways to achieve this goal were emulation, cooperativism and something called Communist Saturdays. In the first case, emulation sought to overcome “the incredibly brutal suppression of the enterprise, energy and bold initiative of the mass of the population, of its overwhelming majority”¹² inflicted by the competition rife in large-scale industrial capitalism. Socialist emulation, by contrast, would permit the full development of the capacities and talents of workers. For the socialist government to succeed in the organisation of emulation, it was necessary that “all ‘communes’—factories, villages, consumers’ societies and committees of supplies—must compete with each other as practical organisers of accounting and control of labour and distribution of products”.¹³

Turning to the second point, Lenin understood the development of cooperativism as a fundamental step in the construction of socialism, once the working class had seized the power of the state and the state had control over the means of production. Not only did such a step involve

¹¹ Jorge Sgrazzutti and Antonio Oliva. “Aportes para la comprensión del taylorismo soviético de Octubre a la NEP (1917-1929),” *Anuario Digital*, no. 29, 2017, 14.

¹² Lenin, “How to Organise Competition?,” 404.

¹³ For Lenin, the programme of this accounting and control would be simple and clear: for “everyone to have bread; everyone to have sound footwear and good clothing; everyone to have warm dwellings; everyone to work conscientiously; not a single rogue (including those who shirk their work) to be allowed to be at liberty, but kept in prison, or serve his sentence of compulsory labour of the hardest kind”. Lenin, “How to Organise Competition?,” 413-414.

economic transformations, but it also meant that “the entire people must go through a period of cultural development”.¹⁴ Interestingly, Lenin drew a distinction between the utopian cooperative movement of the Englishman Robert Owen and his followers—“they dreamed of peacefully remodelling contemporary society into socialism”¹⁵ without taking into account such fundamental issues as the class struggle or the attainment of political power—and cooperativism when the state was in the hands of the working class and “the mere growth of co-operation” was synonymous with “the growth of socialism”. In keeping with these views, Lenin concluded that “if the whole of the peasantry had been organised in co-operatives, we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism”.¹⁶ The most optimistic forecast for the expansion of cooperativism to the entirety of the populace (under the schemes of the NEP) varied between one and two decades.

Lastly, we turn to the Communist Saturdays known as *subbotniks*, which were campaigns of work that was theoretically voluntary. The designation of Communist stands in contrast to the adjective socialist, which was attributed to social labour under the control of the state (clearly in the hands of the working class), which stipulated the conditions and pay for such work. By contrast, Communism referred to a kind of regime, still far away for the leading figures of the October Revolution, “under which people form the habit of performing their social duties without any special apparatus for coercion, and when unpaid work for the public good becomes a general phenomenon”.¹⁷ At this point, therefore, Communist Saturdays would be a genuinely Communist experience because the labour was “work done to meet the needs of the country as a whole, and it is organised on a broad scale and is unpaid”.¹⁸

¹⁴ Vladimir I. Lenin, “On co-operation,” *Collected Works. Vol. 33* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 470. In another passage, Lenin speaks directly of the need for an authentic cultural revolution in order to achieve “the organisation of the entire peasantry in co-operative societies”. Lenin, “On co-operation,” 474.

¹⁵ Lenin, “On co-operation,” 473.

¹⁶ Lenin, “On co-operation,” 474.

¹⁷ Vladimir I. Lenin, “Report on *subbotniks* delivered to a Moscow city conference of the R.C.P.(B). December 20, 1919,” *Collected Works. Vol. 30* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 284-285.

¹⁸ Lenin, “Report on *subbotniks*,” 286.

Was Marxism-Taylorism an “Official Doctrine”?

Among the senior revolutionary leadership, it was clear that improved labour efficiency and higher productivity inescapably required the adoption of modern Taylorist techniques under the scientific organisation of work. Both Lenin and Bogdanov attached great value to Taylorism as a key resource to rationalise the organisation of work, but Bogdanov was critical of Taylor’s interest—and the interest of Taylor’s followers in Russia, such as Aleksei Gastev—in the skilled worker. Bogdanov, by contrast, focused all his attention at the level of the average worker and his involvement in factory cells. For Lenin and Trotsky, however, state-introduced Taylorism was the way to train workers in modern socialised production. The recipe was simple: they had to take what was good in capitalism and use it to build socialism. Frederick W. Taylor’s stopwatch time studies, which strove to eliminate “idle time” by dividing a work activity into different tasks, timing each task and eliminating the unnecessary ones, was to be adopted as the new ABC of Communism in the workplace, and by extension, turning a perfecter of Taylorism like Henry Ford into a genuine revolutionary touchstone. In addition to Taylor’s studies, they also incorporated the motion studies of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, who analysed models and photos of various workers performing the same task and sought to elucidate the type of movements that were most fitting to perform the task, according to the criterion of maximum efficiency. Both Taylor’s and the Gilbreths’ time and motion studies started from two basic premises: there is one best way to get every job done, and the one best way must be determined through scientific study. Lenin and many Bolsheviks shared these premises, and the Central Institute of Labour was set up to disseminate Taylorism in Russia and to train new specialists.

We might well ask about the origins of Lenin’s interest in Taylor’s ideas, which would eventually develop into deep admiration. Whereas he defines Taylorism as a “scientific system of sweating” in 1913,¹⁹ in the original version of *The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Government* in 1918 he says that

“from the trust managers, we must take a lesson in socialism from capitalism’s big organisers [...] we must enlist to the service of the Soviet power a great number of bourgeois intellectuals, especially from among

¹⁹ Vladimir I. Lenin “A scientific system of sweating,” *Pravda*, 60, March 13, 1913. Published in Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works. Vol. 18* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 594-595.

those who were engaged in the practical work of organising large-scale capitalist production”.²⁰

This learning was necessary for the economic and industrial development of the new country rising out of the ashes of the former tsarist empire:

Big capitalism has created systems of work organisation, which, under the prevailing conditions of exploitation of the masses, represent the harshest form of enslavement by which the minority, the propertied classes, wring out of the working people surplus amounts of labour, strength, blood and nerves. At the same time, they are the last word in the scientific organisation of production, and as such, have to be adopted by the Socialist Soviet Republic.²¹

As we have just seen, Lenin had no qualms in commending the results of Taylor’s work, going so far as to say that

we must not for a moment forget that the Taylor system represents the tremendous progress of science, which systematically analyses the process of production and points the way towards an immense increase in the efficiency of human labour.

It was, therefore, a scientific knowledge that, when “properly controlled and intelligently applied by the working people themselves, will serve as a reliable means of further greatly reducing the obligatory working day for the entire working population”. In other words, Taylorism is a necessary tool in the construction of socialism, a socialism that, once established, will mean a reduction in work activity, thanks to the Taylor system, down to “six hours of physical work daily for every adult citizen”, which will in turn enable all workers to dedicate “four hours of work in running the state”.²²

Lenin’s adoption of Taylorism was simply a logical consequence of his ideological positions, according to James G. Scoville: if Marx had carried out a scientific analysis of capitalism and presented his approaches as the

²⁰ Vladimir I. Lenin, “Original version of the article *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*”. *Collected Works*. Vol. 42 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 77.

²¹ Lenin, “Original version of the article,” 79.

²² Lenin, “Original version of the article,” 80.

ones befitting a type of scientific socialism, then Taylorism as a science of work would naturally have to be adopted by his followers.²³

On Lenin's "conversion" to Taylorism, Victor G. Devinatz notes that the change in the Bolshevik leader's attitude occurred gradually, and that he saw the adoption of the Taylor system only as a temporary measure in the phase of state capitalism. While in a 1914 article Lenin wrote of the Taylor system as a new form of man's enslavement to the machine²⁴ which had reduced the time required to perform tasks in the workplace "while the capitalist increases profits and the workers have to work many times harder for slightly more pay",²⁵ he also dispelled any doubt whatsoever about its usefulness as a means to increase productivity under the control of workers' organisations:

The Taylor system—without its initiators knowing or wishing it—is preparing the time when the proletariat will take over all social production and appoint its own workers' committees for the purpose of properly distributing and rationalising all social labour.²⁶

As he took pains to repeat in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, the issue after the October revolution was to apply "much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system".²⁷ Once they were in power, the adoption of Taylorism, together with piecework, became essential to overcoming the economic difficulties at the time: "We must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our ends".²⁸

However, we should not confuse Lenin's pragmatism with an undue enthusiasm for the implementation of Taylorism. As he himself would acknowledge at a meeting of the Executive Committee in April 1918, it amounted to a "step back".²⁹ For representatives of the party's left wing

²³ James G. Scoville, "The Taylorization of Vladimir Ilich Lenin," *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 40, 4 (October 2001), 625.

²⁴ Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Taylor System—Man's Enslavement by the Machine", *Put Pravdy*, 35, March 13, 1914. Published in LENIN Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works. Vol. 20* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 152-154.

²⁵ Victor G. Devinatz, "Lenin as Scientific Manager under Monopoly Capitalism, State Capitalism and Socialism: A Response to Scoville," *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 42, 3 (July 2003), 514-515.

²⁶ Lenin, "The Taylor System," 154.

²⁷ Lenin, "Original version of the article," 258.

²⁸ Lenin, "Original version of the article," 259.

²⁹ "We, however, must tell the workers: yes, it is a step back, but we have to help ourselves to find a remedy." LENIN, Vladimir I. Lenin, "Session of the All-Russia

such as Yevgeni Preobrazhensky and Leonid Serebryakov, this sort of approach could only foreshadow the defeat of the socialist project by portending a return to capitalist methods. Lenin, by contrast, took a less Manichaeian, more dialectical view of capitalism: in short, a more Marxist view. Capitalism was not merely the incarnation of absolute evil, but in a more complex manner, according to the words of Devinatz, it was “a combination of the brutal exploitation of workers with great achievements in science and culture”.³⁰ Along the same lines, the return of the “bourgeois specialists” to administration (whether in factories or state institutions) was not a problem, provided that their return served to train workers in the tasks involved, especially the most conscious workers (within the logic of the vanguard party), so that they themselves could perform activities of this sort in the future. According to Devinatz, once socialism was established, it would then correspond to the workers to decide on the continuation of Taylorist methods. Following the historiographical debate on Lenin and his conception of the scientific organisation of work, however, Scoville takes a different view, arguing that the use of these types of methods and the need to rely on specialist technicians, conceived of as a social group distinct from the working class, would last somewhat longer in time. This can be gleaned from Lenin’s remarks before the Supreme Economic Council in April 1918, when he refers to such specialists as “a separate social stratum, which will persist until we have reached the highest stage of development of communist society”.³¹ Accordingly, when Lenin speaks of communist society and not of a socialist transition or state capitalism, it seems clear that Taylor was supposed to remain an ally of the Communists for a long period of time.³² That intention was reflected in the twenty training and research centres dedicated to the scientific organisation of work in 1921, which had witnessed a half-million workers passing through their halls.

C.E.C. April 29, 1918”. *Collected Works*, Vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 301.

³⁰ Devinatz, “Lenin as Scientific Manager”, 517.

³¹ Vladimir I. Lenin, “Draft theses on the role and functions of the trade unions under the New Economic Policy,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 42 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 384.

³² James G. Scoville, “Was Lenin Truly Taylorized? A Rejoinder to Devinatz,” *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 43, 2 (April 2004), 481.

Aleksei Gastev: The Ovid of Engineers

A discussion of these sorts of initiatives in research and training on the scientific organisation of the enterprise in the Soviet Union leads us necessarily to one of its pioneers and its most iconic representative: Aleksei Gastev. Gastev, who was a poet, a trade-union activist and a founder of the Central Institute of Labour in 1920, was hailed by Russian poet Nikolai Aseev as “the Ovid of engineers, miners and metalworkers”.³³ Gastev’s revolutionary fervour was closely bound up with his passion for science, and this is clearly reflected in his poetry. Particularly notable are the six editions of his 1918 volume *Poeziya rabochego udara* (*Poetry of the Worker’s Blow*, or more figuratively, *Poetry of the Factory Floor*), in which he defends a romantic view of industrialisation and conceives of man and machine as a whole. The workers, with “nerves of steel” and “muscles like iron rails”,³⁴ will find the true extensions of the human body in machines. His ambitious aim was to transform Russian society and culture with the assistance not only of Marx and Engels, but also of Taylor, the Gilbreths and Ford.

Gastev began his education following in the footsteps of his father, a teacher by profession. Expelled from a teacher training institute for his revolutionary activity, Gastev wound up working at a metallurgical company. Revolutionary activism would prove one of the characteristic features of a man who was more closely tied to the revolution than to the party (he did not become a member until 1931) and who would fall victim to the Stalinist purges in 1938 and be murdered shortly afterwards, between 1939 and 1941.

At the time of the Decree on Workers’ Control, Gastev was secretary of the metalworkers union and he pushed for the introduction of a piece-rate system for workers, interested as he was in modern piecework systems. Because of his interest in the scientific aspects of workplace organisation, he contributed to the journal put out by *Proletkult*, which was said in the 1920s to have 400,000 members and to distribute ten million copies of its publications. Gastev’s proposals reached the very highest echelons. No better proof can be found than that, in June 1921, after making a request to Lenin for a line of finance for his projects at the Institute, Gastev received five million gold roubles.

³³ This description appears in the poem *Gastev* by Nikolai Aseev. Cited in Kendall E. Bailes, “Alexei Gastev and the Soviet controversy over Taylorism, 1918-1924,” *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIX, 3 (July 1977), 373.

³⁴ Aleksei Gastev, *Poeziya rabochego udara*. Cited in Bailes, “Alexei Gastev,” 374.

For Gastev, industrial workers could be divided into five distinct categories according to the ability and creativity needed to perform the tasks assigned. In his particular classification, the type of work that was completely standardised and utterly lacking in personal subjectivity (which Gastev put as type number 3 in his classification) would become the work of the future *par excellence*, replacing all the other categories. According to Gastev, a future marked by standardisation of this sort would bring a world of work governed by the anonymity of its members, which would be identified by letters or numbers. The mechanisation of labour relations would not be simply metaphorical but real, given that “machines from being managed will become managers”. It was to be presumably a harmonious world governed by precision, in which everyone worked in unison:

the movement of these collective complexes is similar to the movement of things, in which there is no longer any individual face but only regular, uniform steps and faces devoid of expression, of a soul, of lyricism, of emotion, measured not by a shout or a smile but by a pressure gauge or a speed gauge.³⁵

Gastev's particular utopian dream, according to Kendall E. Bailes, would later be revised to make room for greater individual creativity. Yet it could easily spiral into a dystopian nightmare for the vast majority, as Yevgeny Zamyatin showed in his novel *We*, published in 1920, which depicts a society in which love is forbidden and mechanised collectivism is carried to extremes, leaving the workers (classified by numbers) devoid of any private life. Putting aside the philosophical and literary critiques of Gastev's disturbing futurist fantasies, other contemporaries also attacked his ideas from a political standpoint, as was the case with the historic Bolshevik leader Bogdanov. Through *Proletkult*, Bogdanov strove to promote a collectivist psychology among the workers that would not stifle their creativity. For Bogdanov, the existence of a workers' organisation structured on the basis of cooperation was essential. If supervisors or managers were necessary for cooperation, they would nevertheless be selected through recognition by their fellow workers, not through appointment by some outside authority. Bogdanov's idea was that any roles from organiser to producer were interchangeable. His most forceful critique of the role given by Gastev to technicians and supervisors was that he “strongly suspected that lurking behind Gastev's description of

³⁵ GASTEY, Aleksei. *0 tendentsiyakh proletarskoi kul'tury*'. Cited in Bailes, “Alexei Gastev,” 378.

proletarian culture was an élite of engineers, standing above the proletariat and controlling it completely".³⁶ Also emerging from the ranks of *Proletkult* was Pavel Kerzhentsev, who founded the *Liga Vremya* (League of Time) in 1923. The League of Time was a workers' movement that pursued maximum labour efficiency on the basis of the commitment of the workers themselves, who were organised into company cells (reaching 20,000 members by 1924, according to internal figures). In the view of the League of Time, leadership in the struggle to rationalise time must not correspond either to the "aristocrats of the working class" or to the "priests of scientific management".³⁷ The workers themselves must lead the campaign against wasted time and extrapolate the effort to all areas of life, without resorting to wage inducements or other types of reward; proletarian pride alone was to be enough.

Stakhanov Takes Over

The NEP drew on studies relating to the scientific organisation of work to increase productivity in the factories and it combined such research with the phenomenon of emulation, which sought to spread improvements in any one enterprise to all the others. Following a Fordist model, changes of this sort were accompanied by wage increases intended to incentivise their adoption by workers. However, the demise of the NEP and its replacement by the Stalinist five-year plans and forced collectivisation brought a radical shift in the way productivity gains were to be achieved. While material inducements continued to exist, they were combined with other factors such as a fear of reprisals of all kinds, within a new labour context overshadowed by Stakhanovism. Stakhanovism was a productivity strategy driven by the authorities, but under the semblance, for propaganda purposes, of a grassroots movement. According to the official line, the movement had first surfaced among ideologically committed workers ready and willing to beat the production estimates (limits) derived from the conservatism of administrators and managers. If the great enemy to be defeated by the scientific organisation of work under the NEP had been the workers' poor working habits, Stakhanovism emerged during the second five-year plan (1933-1937) when the shadow of suspicion now fell on the technicians, who were liable to be seen either as a conservative element because of their lack of ideological zeal or as an outright counter-revolutionary because of their purported acts of sabotage. As Vladimir

³⁶ Bailes, "Alexei Gastev," 380.

³⁷ Bailes, "Alexei Gastev," 390.

Shlapentokh has noted, “the movement was closely linked to the mass terror. Along with the purges, the Stakhanovite movement was one of the most important means for legitimating the rule of Stalin”.³⁸

With the passage of time, the Stakhanovite movement was put in its place, even in the Soviet Union. The *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* offers a good example of the regime’s conceptual evolution on the true nature of the movement, as Shlapentokh himself has indicated. From 11 laudatory columns in 1947, the movement had only three columns in 1957 (leaving out its purported spontaneity and its overt hostility toward technicians) and only two in 1976 (which no longer mentioned its theoretical achievements in comparison with capitalist levels of productivity).³⁹ The reason for the shift is simple: Stakhanovism was associated with Stalin at a time when the Soviet Union was trying to turn the page on the legacy of the “red tsar”.⁴⁰

The movement, which was initiated in the Donbass colliery of Irmino by Alexey Stakhanov on August 31, 1935, was hardly a spontaneous affair. According to the account used in the propaganda, Stakhanov had succeeded in beating his assigned production quota. However, without Konstantin Petrov, a local party secretary who organised the staging of International Youth Day, it is unlikely that Stakhanov would have been made a Hero of Socialist Labour in 1970. But nor can we say that it was a manoeuvre orchestrated by the highest echelons of the Politburo, or ignore the atmosphere permeating the industry, where there was strong encouragement to intensify production rates. Another matter altogether is the use made by the party leadership of the news that had arrived from Irmino. While on holiday in Kislovodsk on 1 September 1935, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, the People’s Commissar of Heavy Industry, read about the exploits of a miner named Stakhanov on the last page of *Pravda*. Stakhanov had mined 102 tonnes of coal and earned 200 roubles on his six-hour shift. While the credit for the record did not belong to Stakhanov alone (two other miners had helped him), it did signify a multiplication of individual production by 5.23. At that point, a large-scale propaganda campaign kicked into gear. In the words of R.W. Davies and Oleg Khlevniuk, the idea among the party leadership was “that it would lead to extraordinarily large increases in production, without any further increases in investment”, and they additionally saw it as an opportunity for

³⁸ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Stakhanovite Movement: Changing Perceptions over Fifty Years,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 23 (1988), 268.

³⁹ Shlapentokh, “The Stakhanovite Movement,” 263-264.

⁴⁰ This is the moniker given by Simon Sebag Montefiore in his biography *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson History, 2003).

“displaying and securing the unity of the nation”.⁴¹ In reality, the party controlled the movement at all times, using its political orientation to attack technicians and engineers and justify the Stalinist purges, while also managing its internal makeup at all times by setting the percentages of party members, women and young people that were required in its ranks.

The Stakhanovite movement took on a dirigiste dynamic that was closely linked to the structures of political power and also entailed the perversion of the very values that the movement claimed to defend (ideological commitment, social emulation, objectives of collective welfare etc.). It soon attracted more than a few opportunists and careerists eager for promotion and reward. Proof of this can be seen in the first conference of Stakhanovites in Moscow in 1935, where the attendees were lavished with the exclusive material privileges of the ruling elite. Even Stakhanov himself used his fame to leave his job in the colliery, become an instructor some months later, and ultimately take on bureaucratic and propagandistic tasks at the Ministry of Coal Industry.

Economically, Stakhanovism did not achieve any substantial increases in the performance of workers, and the improvements obtained in some sectors were coupled with excesses in the hunt for saboteurs. As pertinent studies note, “the effects of Stakhanovism were quite short-lived. Its economic significance already began to decline in 1936, and in 1937-38 it was submerged by large-scale repression in industry”.⁴²

Conclusions

The journey initiated by the ascendant Bolsheviks to safeguard the revolution and push forward with the construction of socialism in the former Russian empire involved enormous transformations in all areas. The world of work proved no exception, as the new leaders took over the industrialisation of the country and ousted the capitalist investors. At first, the transformations in the world of labour sought to increase worker participation in the factories and enterprises under the Decree on Workers’ Control. Wartime necessities and the logistics of supplying the urban populace, however, eventually led to increased state control through nationalisations and the imposition of War Communism. To face the enormous challenges, Taylorist methods and techniques became the revolutionaries’ allies. This is evident not only in the support for their

⁴¹ R. W. Davies and Oleg Khlevniuk, “Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 6, Sept. 2002, 897.

⁴² R. W. Davies and Oleg Khlevniuk, “Stakhanovism,” 898.

implementation given by Lenin and the party leadership, but also in the development of projects of all kinds to promote the scientific organisation of work, such as the Central Institute of Labour led by Aleksei Gastev. Building on scientific investigation, the search for the most efficient way to perform and organise working methods activity so as to achieve peak performance took on a revolutionary purpose. After the war, the NEP focused its efforts on restoring (and even increasing, where possible) pre-war levels of output and productivity. To this end, Taylorism, its methods and the politically rehabilitated role of technicians and administrators all played a key part in restoring industrial capacity. As a symptom of modernity, the enthusiasm to rationalise time spread to other spheres of life and it inspired grassroots movements among the workers, which were aimed at empowering them inside the workplace through training that would provide them with the skills needed to become managers and organisers. Even as Stalinist Stakhanovism carried on the struggle to increase productivity and maintain material rewards, it signalled a paradigm shift. The discussion no longer focused on the extent to which specialists and technical organisers of work were allies in the construction of socialism, or how knowledge of this sort could be transferred to the remaining workers; now, increases in productivity were also bound up with the uncovering of potential saboteurs among the workers who objected to the changes and, above all, among “bourgeois technicians”, who were the usual suspects during the period of the Stalinist terror. The scientific organisation of work relinquished the spotlight to revolutionary vigilance. In any event, both Soviet Taylorism and Stalinist Stakhanovism shared a common enemy: wasted time. The difference lay in how they strove to address the issue and find a solution, whether based on scientific methods or on a climate of general suspicion. Where not even a hint of doubt remained, however, was in the notion that wasted time was counter-revolutionary.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

SERGE WOLIKOW

Revisiting the international dimension of the Russian Revolution today, we can see that the revolution ushered in a new era on a global scale. For the first time, the masses became the protagonists of the political scene, setting in motion a process which is still not complete a century later.

It seems fair to say that the contemporary world was inaugurated by the Russian Revolution, in conjunction with the world war. The revolution triggered upheavals and kindled great hopes, and also caused great disappointments. The attempt to reassess the Russian Revolution now responds a desire to understand the event in its broad sense: that is, the whole of the revolutionary process in Russia, inside the international context of the world war. It was a time when the balance of power was shifting with the entry into the war of the United States, the sheer brutality of the combat, and the crises facing the European armies as the hostilities continued.

Evoking the history of the Russian Revolution from a global and international point of view, then, requires us to consider the context of the world war but also to measure the revolution's impact at the international level. At the same time, we should not neglect the history of this revolution in Russia itself or the revolutionary process between the years 1917 and 1921. Historical research can help to illuminate and understand this process by exploring the numerous archives in Russia covering these events. Over the last four decades, the studies of many researchers have brought about a renewal of the history of the Russian Revolution.

In this text my aim is merely to demonstrate the international dimension of the October 1917 revolution by focusing on the creation of the Communist International in 1919. This world organisation was part of the project of the Russian Revolutionaries who envisioned the spread of the revolution at the global level. The Communist International, then, was

conceived as the world party of the revolution, with its centre provisionally based in Moscow. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, the interaction between the Russian Revolution and the Communist International became more pronounced as the international prospects of the revolution began to fade. The Bolshevik party became a model that the communist parties from other countries must follow, and the defence of the Russian Revolution became their main mission. The Bolshevisation of these parties fed on their admiration for the USSR at a moment when the defence of the Soviet project was the overriding priority, but it also corresponded to the decline of the global revolutionary movement.

The origins: the imminent world revolution

In March 1919, two years after the revolution and a few months after the end of the First World War, the proclamation of the Comintern was part of a long series of convulsions in the international labour movement. The war had shattered the international socialist organisation: how could it reconstitute itself when revolutionary agitation appeared to be winning over so many European countries? The difficulty of the task ahead was compounded by the many differences and oppositions created by the war, which had no means abated with the end of the hostilities. The forces at the heart of socialism which invoked the spirit of revolution and had carried the banner of opposition to the war were disorganised and disparate—except in Russia, where the Bolsheviks imposed themselves over the other socialist currents. In Russia, however, the power of Lenin and the Bolsheviks was threatened by the rising internal opposition, supported by the democracies which had emerged victorious from the world war but were now terrified by the prospect of revolutionary contagion.

This is the background to the founding congress of the Communist International, which opened on March 2, 1919 in Moscow. Thus, after London, the seat of the International Workingmen's Association founded by Marx in 1864, and Brussels, the seat of the Socialist International created in 1889, the Russian capital became the headquarters of the Third International.

In 1917, in his April Theses, Lenin had stressed the need to adopt the term “communist”, and to “change the denomination of the Party” from Bolshevik to Communist. He also affirmed the need to create a new International: “Thesis n°10. A new international: We must take the

initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social-chauvinists and against the ‘Centre’”.¹

After the capitulation of the Socialist International in August 1914, Lenin had tried, unsuccessfully, to assert his ideas at the international conferences held in Switzerland, at Zimmerwald in 1915 and at Kienthal in 1916. These conferences had rallied the minority socialists who were opposed to the policy of the *Union sacrée* but were divided with regard to the path to follow in the new circumstances.

Trotsky, in his manifesto for the Kienthal conference, had emphasised the need for regeneration via a rupture with European social democracy:

A new International can only be built on the basis of the unfaltering principles of revolutionary socialism. The allies of governments, ministers, domesticated deputies, advocates of imperialism, agents of capitalist diplomacy, grave-diggers of the Second International, cannot take part in its creation.²

Throughout 1917, Lenin insisted on the necessity of building a Third International. In 1918, the communists’ assumption of power in Russia and the continuation of the war delayed the project, but it began to take shape again once the conflict was over.

The Russian Revolution now seemed to announce the beginning of an international (if not a global) revolutionary process. Revolutionary movements sprung up in Germany and the old Empire of Austria-Hungary; the revolutionary forces, still in the minority, drew inspiration from the Russian example and defended the idea of a Republic of Soviets. The most important among them was the Spartacus League, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. For the Bolsheviks, the spread of the revolutionary wave in Europe was confirmed at the beginning of 1919: “Now, on January 12, 1919, we see a vigorous ‘Soviet’ movement not only in the different parts of the old empire of the Tsar.” Though the German Revolution was put down in early 1919, soviets were formed in Hungary, and in Britain the shop-stewards system was created along the lines of the workers’ councils. At the same time, revolutionary Russia, in the grip of Civil War and foreign intervention, was surrounded and isolated.

¹ *Pravda*, April 7, 1917, in Vladimir Ilitch Lénine, *Œuvres complètes*, volume 24 (Moscou: Editions en Langue Française, 1953), 14. Available at <http://www.marxists.org/francais/lenin/works/1917/04/vil19170407.htm> - fn5 (last accessed June 13, 2018).

² *Naché slovo*, January 1916.

Once the war was over, some socialist parties dreamt of reinstating the old international organisation, and sought to renew contacts. An international meeting was convened in Berne in February 1919 by European socialist leaders to promote the reconstitution of international socialist unity. The Bolsheviks hoped to mobilise the revolutionary energies which were growing in many countries; the increasing sympathy that the Russian Revolution inspired among the ranks of the workers' movement and the rise of the revolutionary movement since the end of the world war, especially in Germany, led the Russian leaders—Lenin foremost among them—to predict a rapid spread of the revolution on a global scale.

The Bolsheviks intended to make a political and symbolic statement by proclaiming the creation of an organisation destined to lead the revolutionary movement forwards and to prevent any attempts to revive the Second International. This is the thrust of the letter signed by Bolshevik leaders and foreign communist groups residing in Russia, in January 1919, calling for the convening of an international conference to found the Communist International:

The attempts of the social-traitor parties to join together and further help their governments and their bourgeoisies in order to betray the working class after granting each other a mutual 'amnesty', and finally, the extremely rich revolutionary experience already acquired and the world-wide character of the whole revolutionary movement—all these circumstances compel us to place on the agenda of the discussion the question of the convening of an international congress of proletarian-revolutionary parties.³

The difficulties of travel and the weakness of the organised revolutionary movements explain the poor turnout of delegations at this congress, finally held from March 2 to 6, 1919, which was dominated by the presence of Lenin, Trotsky and Rakovsky. Lenin's interventions, and the theses adopted, centred on the current state of the revolution: the soviets were presented as the concrete expression of proletarian democracy, the practical solution to its problems. In all countries, the further development of the soviets was the key item on the agenda. As in Russia in early 1917, action was needed to ensure that the communists on these councils should win over the majority of the workers.

The main task of the new International, whose creation was precipitated by the Russian leaders, was to coordinate and push forward these

³ Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste (1919-1943)* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 77.

revolutionary movements; their rapid spread would help to consolidate the world revolution and, thus, to defend the revolution in Russia.⁴ At the end of the congress, Lenin expressed his optimism:

this First Congress of the Communist International, which has made the point that throughout the world the Soviets are winning the sympathy of the workers, shows us that the victory of the world communist revolution is assured.⁵

The revolution in progress

The Comintern was born of the Russian Revolution and of the shock it caused in a world already convulsed by world war. The belief in an imminent global revolution underpinned the foundational texts of the organisation and of the writings of all those who prepared and announced its creation. But the representation of this revolutionary movement in progress has a history of its own that is crucial to an understanding of how the strategy of the new International was implemented.

The situation inside the international socialist opposition followed on from the tension during the war between the “centrists” and the revolutionary current. The Bolsheviks wanted to be the spokesmen of the Spartacus League, whose recently murdered leaders of the League, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg, were honoured at the congress. The affiliation was affirmed by a solemn declaration which dissolved the organisation of Zimmerwald and made the Third International its heir:

The undersigned members of the Zimmerwald movement declare that they regard its organisation to be dissolved and propose that all the documents of the Bureau of the Zimmerwald Conference be transferred to the Executive Committee of the Third International.⁶

When Lenin called for the creation of a new International, he did so in a political situation which had now become favourable to the communist cause. This was the argument he used in his various interventions at the

⁴ Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern, a history of international communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: MacMillan Press, 1996); Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste*.

⁵ Lénine, March 6, 1919 speech. In Lénine, *Œuvres complètes*, volume 28, 509.

⁶ Signatories: Rakovsky, Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky and Platten. Declaration made by the participants at the Zimmerwald conference. In *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions des Quatre premiers congrès mondiaux de l'internationale communiste 1919-1923* (Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1934), 16.

beginning of the year 1919 and especially during the founding Conference, during which his forecasts for the spread of the revolution were particularly optimistic. Lenin greeted the delegates by mentioning the international situation that made it possible:

Comrades, our gathering has great historic significance. It testifies to the collapse of all the illusions cherished by bourgeois democrats. Not only in Russia, but in the most developed capitalist countries of Europe, in Germany for example, civil war is a fact.⁷

The developments in many European societies seemed to announce a generalised breakdown of the imperialist system and bourgeois democracy, and the spread of the Soviet model:

Not only in the East European but also in the West European countries, not only in the vanquished but also in the victor countries, for example in Britain, the movement in favour of Soviets is spreading farther and farther, and this movement is, most assuredly, a movement pursuing the aim of establishing the new, proletarian democracy. It is the most significant step towards the dictatorship of the proletariat to, towards the complete victory of communism.⁸

The imminence of the revolution justified the creation of the new International whose role would be above all the diffusion of revolutionary ideas. This revolution in progress would be an international civil war which would deploy novel forms of mobilisation such as the soviets and committees able to challenge the old units of organisation such as parties and unions.

At international level, nation-states and parliamentary systems were being substituted by soviet-style political systems, heralding the advent of the international republic of soviets. Though the main task was to disseminate the Russian experience of the soviets, Lenin nevertheless thought that the course of events in Western Europe would no doubt be different, and faster than in Russia:

We must say that winning a Communist majority in the Soviets is the principal task in all countries in which Soviet government is not yet victorious... Of course, we are not in a position to prescribe the path of

⁷ Lenin's inaugural speech.

⁸ Lenin's closing speech. In Lénine, *Œuvres complètes*, volume 28, 501.

development. It is quite likely that the revolution will come very soon in many West European countries.”⁹

Among the tasks assigned to the new International was the coordination of a revolutionary movement in effervescence, but which faced determined enemies. Thus, the Manifesto adopted by the congress declared that, in contrast to the previous Internationals, the new one was defined by its support for revolutionary action.

If the First International presaged the future course of development and indicated its paths; if the Second International gathered and organised millions of workers; then the Third International is the International of open mass action, the International of revolutionary realisation.¹⁰

In sum, the Comintern's strategy was to build on the revolutionary impetus of an international civil war and to coordinate the forces of communism without imposing a particular organisational structure.¹¹ The question merited only a few lines in the documents adopted with regard to the proceedings of the new International; nothing definite was said about the member parties, except that they would have a seat on the Executive Committee when they became members of the Comintern.¹²

In 1919, as the civil war in Russia intensified, the creation of the Communist International responded to the Bolshevik leaders' hopes for the expansion of the civil war throughout Europe. Nevertheless, absorbed by internal issues, the resources they devoted to the international organisation were limited, even though bureaus were set up in Amsterdam and Berlin.

1920: The time of international organisation

In 1920, as the communists reaffirmed the prospect of the revolution and presented it as imminent, the focus now shifted to the importance of

⁹ Lénine, *Œuvres complètes*, volume 31, 499.

¹⁰ *Manifesto of the Communist International to the workers of the entire world*, in *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 34.

¹¹ For an interesting view of this issue, see Israel Getzler, “Lenin’s Conception of Revolution As Civil War,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 1996, no. 3.

¹² Silvio Pons, *La Rivoluzione globale, Storia del comunismo internazionale 1917-1991* (Torino: Einaudi, 2012), 25-27.

organised political activity and the development of the national sections.¹³ Despite the defeat of the revolutionary forces in Hungary, in Bavaria Lenin welcomed the mobilisation of the Western proletariat to defend the Russian Revolution and to support the strikes in Germany against the Kapp putsch organised by far-right military leaders.

However, after the military victory in Russia and the war with Poland, the strategy of the Comintern underwent a shift, which Zinoviev described in the following terms:

The Communist International until now was primarily an organ of propaganda and agitation. The Communist International becomes now a militant organisation which will have to assume immediate direction of the movement in the various countries.¹⁴

The documents adopted at the Second Congress in 1920, the resolutions, the statutes and the text of the 21 conditions all echoed the certainty that the old world was on the verge of collapse and that the forces of the proletariat, which were capable of bringing about and leading the revolution, must be organised without delay: "The world proletariat is on the eve of decisive battles. We are living through an epoch of direct civil wars. But the decisive hour is near".¹⁵

Lenin was critical of the positions of various German or Italian leftists, but the arguments were to do with tactical questions with respect to the existing political institutions rather than the revolutionary process as such. Social and political criticism fed a representation of the revolution as the destruction of an old world that was irrevocably condemned. Capitalism had made the vast majority of humanity into a proletariat; imperialism had thrown these masses out of balance and forced them into the arms of the revolutionary movement:

Minds are still filled with much error, confusion, prejudice, and illusion. But the movement as a whole is of a profoundly revolutionary character. It is all-embracing and irresistible. It spreads, strengthens and purifies itself;

¹³ Aldo Agosti, "The Concept of World Revolution and the 'World Party for the Revolution' (1919-1943)," in *The International Newsletter of Historical Studies on Comintern, Communism and Stalinism*, vol IV/V, 1997/98.

¹⁴ Grigory Zinoviev, *What the Communist International has been up to now and what it must become*, p 141. In *Les questions le plus pressantes du mouvement ouvrier international* (Petrograd: 1920), 141.

¹⁵ "Résolution sur le rôle du Parti communiste dans la révolution prolétarienne", in *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 49.

it casts off all the old rubbish. It will not halt before the rule of the world proletariat has been attained.¹⁶

The socialist parties before 1914 denounced capitalism on account of its contradictions and its misdeeds. For the Comintern, capitalism had reached the stage of imperialism and, since the war and the Russian Revolution, had entered an irremediable generalised crisis. The bourgeois parliamentary institutions, which for a time had brought progress, now had to be challenged because they constituted the ideological mainstays of the counter-revolution. The mission of the revolutionaries was to overthrow the political system of the bourgeois state by substituting it with a new state organisation based on the councils of workers and peasants:

Civil war is on the order of the day throughout the world. The motto is: power to the Soviets. The Soviet system is not an abstract principle through which communists oppose the parliamentary system: The Soviets are an apparatus of proletarian power which must do away with and replace parliamentarism during the struggle and only by means of this struggle.¹⁷

The establishment of new Soviet republics by substituting the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie with that of the proletariat was therefore the central objective of the new communist parties, and their actions were to be directed and organised by the Comintern: “The Communist International is the practical organiser of a great world struggle that has no equal in history.”¹⁸

The cautious admission of the new parties— the 21 conditions imposed

The Comintern thus had a new, unprecedented responsibility.

As long as one party or the other comes to express its sympathy and nothing more, the Communist International has nothing to lose. But when it is a question of the desire of the parties which yesterday still belonged to the Second International, to enter into the Third International, we must be careful.”

¹⁶ “Le monde capitaliste et l’Internationale communiste”, *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 78.

¹⁷ “Les tâches principales de l’Internationale communiste”, *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 43.

¹⁸ *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 45.

This prudent stance meant that the candidates applying for entry to the Comintern would be vetted in accordance with a particular conception of the international organisation itself. “The above-mentioned parties, it seems to us,¹⁹ must get a very clear idea of what the Third International is and of the obligations assumed by each party by entering into it.”²⁰

So these communist parties had to be disciplined, determined and committed to the revolution. These conditions for admission to the Communist International²¹ were a tactical manoeuvre to eliminate the reformists and the “centrists”, who were suspected of wishing to capitalise on the success of the new organisation. The conditions also had a strategic dimension insofar as their aim was to build an organised, centralised party of revolution capable of acting in an international situation marked by the spread of civil war.

The formation and development of communist parties

The formation of communist parties thus became the central issue at the Second Congress of the Communist International. The discussions and decisions that concluded the congress traced out the lines of what was expected of the parties as national sections of the Comintern; for example, they had to adopt the new name of “Communist Party” and distance themselves from the activities of the socialist parties. The 21 conditions for membership of the Third International, adopted by the Congress, stressed above all the nature of the action of the parties from that point onwards: parties whose objective was revolution and the conquest of political power.

Combining both legal and illegal activities, the communist parties were to break with parliamentarism, but without abandoning the electoral system. The parliamentary representatives and journalists were to subordinate their activities to the Party and reject reformist policies, without giving up the aim of winning over the majority of the members of the socialist parties and converting them to communism. The need for a proletarian party was reaffirmed after lengthy debates. On this issue, the Russian experience appears convincing; perhaps the disappointments of the

¹⁹ The parties cited are the “Independent party of Germany, the French Socialist Party, the American Socialist Party, the British Independent Labour Party, the Swiss Socialist Party and some other groups.”

²⁰ *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 48.

²¹ The 21 conditions were written to filter, and finally to limit, the admission of social democratic currents that the communists considered could not be assimilated—for example, the Italian maximalists or the French *reconstructeurs*.

German or Hungarian revolutions also support this view, since neither country possessed a real proletarian party.

So in all countries it was necessary to build new parties which were clearly distinguishable from the old socialist parties, which were repeatedly described as “bankrupt”. The adoption of these 21 conditions of membership of the Communist International triggered major discussions within the socialist parties in the different countries; in most cases, the communist parties were built around a revolutionary minority which affirmed its will to join the Third International and which, excluded from the socialist ranks, decided to form a new party immediately designated as communist. That said, the creation of the new parties—at Halle in Germany, at Tours in France, and at Livorno in Italy—took on very different forms.

In sum, although the revolution had triumphed in Russia, it had not triumphed internationally—despite the optimism of the words and thoughts of the president of the Comintern:

The civil war, far from weakening, increases in intensity. The war of Soviet Russia against aristocratic Poland has an immense international dimension and opens up particularly favourable prospects for the international revolution.²²

The Comintern's strategy derived from an international situation which would require a reinforced structuring: rather than the coordinator of the different movements, it now became a centralised political *état major*. Underlying the words justifying the change is a different conception of the revolutionary process, as Zinoviev affirmed in the following way:

The Communist International and the parties which compose it have to accomplish an immense task. The Communist International is destined to become the *état major* of the international proletarian army that is growing before our very eyes. The international communist movement is developing with the speed of an avalanche. The international proletarian revolution is spreading. The Communist International must know how to organise and direct it. The mission of the Communist International is not only to prepare for victory, to guide the working class during the conquest of power, but also to lead all the activity of the working class after this conquest.²³

²² Zinoviev, *What the Communist International has been*, 161.

²³ Zinoviev, *What the Communist International has been*, 163.

So the conception of a structured world party in charge of the direction of the revolution was only formalised in 1920; it did not emerge either in the course of the world war, or even in the aftermath of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power.

The Congress of the Peoples of the East: Baku, September 1920

The Congress of the Eastern Peoples was held in Baku in September 1920, under the aegis of the Comintern, following its Second Congress. Baku, in the south of Soviet Russia, was on the borders of the Turkish and Arab worlds and not far from India.²⁴ Several announcements had been drafted by the Executive Committee with the aim of widening the meeting's appeal far beyond the workers' organisations:

We are addressing ourselves primarily to the workers and peasants of the Middle East, but we will be delighted to see among the delegates representatives of the oppressed popular masses from much more distant countries—representatives of the Indias—as well as representatives of the Muslim peoples, who live freely in union with Soviet Russia.

The Congress attracted more than 2000 delegates, despite the obstacles put in place by the British authorities and also by Turkey and Iran (in fact, several delegates were killed before the congress, while others met the same fate on their return home). Beside the Communists, with slightly more than half the participants, the national movements were also well represented. Most of the delegates came from the Caucasus and Central Asia, but there were others from China, India and the Arab world. The Communists belonged to the newly created parties in areas controlled by the Red Army and the Bolsheviks or were from neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Iran; there were also immigrants from Western Europe or America and most frequently from Russia. In any case, these groups were divided among themselves and in fact were little more than embryonic movements. Over the course of the congress there was agreement on the need to oppose the great Western powers, above all Britain, but there were also tensions between the Bolshevik conception of world revolution centred on proletarian action in the industrialised countries and the revolutionary struggle for national independence defended by Muslim movements in Russia and on borders of Central Asia.

²⁴ Edith Chabrier, "Les délégués au premier congrès des peuples d'orient," in *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, vol. 26, no. 1, January-March 1985, 21-42.

Zinoviev skillfully borrowing some nationalist vocabulary to outline the objectives of the Comintern:

Comrades! Brothers! The time has come to start organising a true holy war of the people against thieves and oppressors. The Communist International is turning today to the peoples of the East and tells them: Brothers, we call you to holy war and firstly against British imperialism ... May this statement be heard in London, Paris, all the cities where the capitalists are still in power! May they heed the solemn oath made by the representatives of tens of millions of toilers of the East, that the rule of the British enslavers shall be no more, that the capitalist yoke that weighs on the workers shall be no more!

Despite the general euphoria, some dissonant voices were heard at the congress. Muslim leaders, especially those from Turkestan, denounced persecutions against religious rites and complained of colonial practices. Nabourtabekov's remarks were the most explicit: "Get rid of your counterrevolutionaries, of your foreign elements who sow national discord, rid us of your colonisers working under the mask of the Communists."

The congress produced two manifestos, and set up a Council of Propaganda and Action that would eventually peter out but which led to the creation of an Institute of Propaganda in Tashkent and the University of the Toilers of the East, with branches in Baku and Irkutsk which would soon teach several hundred students.

The uncertainties of world revolution: the new international context and interaction with the Russian situation

From 1921, however, the international revolutionary spirit began to decline: world revolution remained on the agenda, but it was no longer considered to be imminent. The Comintern, created and organised to lead the proletariat to victory in a revolution that had already begun, now faced a new political situation that was strangely similar to the one that the revolutionary organisations prior to 1914 had encountered.

The central issue on the Comintern's agenda was how to create the political conditions for the revolution. What form could revolutionary political action take in a non-revolutionary situation? What did "preparing the revolution" actually mean? These questions dominated the debates and the work of the Comintern from 1921 onwards, and the variety of the responses proposed marked the history of the organisation's political thought.

The turn towards a United Front: A first attempt at accommodation

At the beginning of 1921, the newly formed communist parties set to work on making the coming revolution a reality. These parties decided to carry out exemplary acts of rebellion to reaffirm their own identity and that of the International, but by the spring all their efforts had ended in failure: the bourgeois States retaliated and crushed the strikes and the mobilisations, and the communists found themselves isolated in Poland, Italy and Germany. What was more, Comintern envoys frequently found themselves involved in events which they could not support.

Disputes on questions of strategy were particularly heated in Germany. The German Communist Party (KPD), led by Paul Levi, was criticised for its policy of allying with the socialists against the far right on the day after Kapp's attempted military coup. In agreement with Radek, who represented the Comintern leadership, Levi sent an open letter to the various workers' organisations defending their common economic and political interests against the extreme right.²⁵ Levi was personally censured for his attitude towards the Italian Socialist Party at the founding congress of the Communist Party in Livorno; he was accused of adopting a different point of view from the Comintern's envoy, Rakosi, and of being too conciliatory towards the centrist tendency of Serrati who favoured joining the Comintern but rejected the exclusion of the Reformers. Finally, the split was minor, as Zinoviev had expected. But this was the moment when Italian labour movement encountered its first major difficulties—especially the Socialist Party, one of the first parties to have supported the Third International in 1919.

In Germany, Comintern envoys Bela Kun and Gouralsky encouraged the launch of a general strike to protest against the disarming of the party's militia. The March action, criticised by Levi but supported by the new KPD leadership, ended in disaster. Levi was expelled from the party and initially the Comintern reaffirmed the validity of the party's analysis that the situation was favourable for revolution.

Finally in Russia, after the revolt of the sailors and soldiers of Kronstadt against the Bolsheviks, and with famine decimating entire regions of the country, the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik party made a radical turn at the instigation of Lenin. Lenin astonished delegates by declaring the need to change the economic policy and give up the hope of

²⁵ Jean-François Fayet, *Karl Radek (1885-1939). Biographie politique* (Bern: Peter Lang 2004), 360.

building a communist society on the top of the ruins of what had gone before. Specifically, he advocated a partial return to a market economy, above all in the agricultural sector, with the privatisation of small businesses and a policy of openness towards the outside world.

If this Tenth Congress in March 1921 can be seen as the one that moderated revolutionary strategy with the adoption of the NEP, it was also the moment when ideological obduracy took hold of the Bolshevik party. These two aspects are often considered in isolation but in fact they are closely interrelated and are difficult to separate. This was the new face of Russian Communism, which was rapidly taking control of the whole of the Comintern's activity. The hopes of revolution were fading, and most communist parties and many of the leaders of the International had great difficulty in seeing how they could adapt to this new situation while remaining true to their principles. The extremists on the far left, especially in Germany, defended the exemplary nature of even minor actions, provided they were steeped in the revolutionary spirit.

The repercussions for policy of the Communist International, 1921 and 1922. The United Front

At its Third Congress, in July 1921, the Comintern stated for the first time, and with some caution, that the revolutionary phase which had begun in 1917 was now complete:

The first period of the revolutionary movement after the war is characterized by the elemental nature of the onslaught, by the considerable formlessness of its methods and aims and by the extreme panic of the ruling classes; and it may be regarded by and large as terminated.²⁶

The Comintern now proposed a new conception of the world revolution as a long-term process. Even so, the situation did not disqualify the revolutionary prognosis of the Communists:

The world revolution, which is produced by the decay of capitalism, the accumulation of the revolutionary energy of the proletariat and its organisation into a militant, triumphant force, will require a long period of revolutionary struggle.²⁷

²⁶ "Thèse sur la situation mondiale et la tâche de l'Internationale Communiste", 3^e congrès de l'IC, in *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*.

²⁷ "Thèse sur la tactique", 3^e congrès de l'IC, *Manifestes, thèses et résolutions*, 94

These analyses underlie the formulation of the new slogans “To the masses”, “Single proletarian front” and “Workers’ and peasants’ government” which summarised the orientation that the communist parties’ activities were now expected to follow.

Lenin’s forceful criticism of sectarianism and leftist extremism led to the assertion that the main task of the Comintern was now to extend the influence of revolutionary ideas among the working class. The struggle for achieving immediate demands, hitherto neglected by the Communists and abandoned to the Social Democrats, was of central importance: “this does not mean, however, that the proletariat has to renounce the fight for its immediate practical demands until after it has established its dictatorship”.

So the revolutionary atmosphere of the previous meeting of the Communist International was in short supply at its Third Congress. The shift in Russian domestic politics and the failure of the German Communist Party fuelled the debates. In fact, the leaderships of the International and the Russian party were sharply divided.²⁸

Trotsky, who had previously had little protagonism in the CI, reasserted his position during this congress by presenting a voluminous strategic report on the international economic situation.²⁹ He analysed at length the economic policies of the major capitalist countries and the strategy of their ruling classes. Stressing the decline of the European powers in relation to the United States, Trotsky reiterated the new contradictions between the different countries and the economic problems they faced with the end of the war economy. The international landscape he described highlighted the possible areas of action of Russian foreign policy, but also drew attention to the recovery of the bourgeoisie in the different countries.

From then on, priority was to be given to defensive economic struggles which alone could offer a response to this new balance of power. This realistic analysis of an international situation in which the prospect of revolution seemed to be vanishing was taken up by Lenin in his interventions on the tactical issues raised in a general report presented by Radek. The two Russian leaders thus challenged the supporters of what they termed the “theory of the offensive”.

Only the full commitment of Lenin and Trotsky was able to secure this vote, which in fact did little more than paper over the cracks:

²⁸ Edward H. Carr, *La révolution bolchevique*, volume 3 (Paris: Minuit, 1974), 392-393.

²⁹ Léon Trotsky, *La nouvelle étape* (Paris: 1922). Substantial extracts were published in the collection of texts presented by Pierre Broué: Léon Trotsky, *Le mouvement communiste en France (1919-1939)* (Paris: 1967), 105-112.

differences of opinion persisted, particularly among the delegations of the German, Italian, Czech and Polish parties. This strategic and tactical retreat of the CI, which encountered opposition from the European communist parties, was also reflected in the field of colonial and eastern policy. The revolutionary atmosphere of the Baku meeting was all but absent at the Third Congress, which presented no more than a cursory review of the Asian communist parties; there was no denying the impact on communist activity in the Middle East and Central Asia of the new Russian foreign policy, which had endorsed the signing of treaties with Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and Britain.

Either explicitly or tacitly, the Russian leaders pledged not to support any communist activity that might inconvenience their new diplomatic partners. This contradiction between the interests of Soviet diplomacy and the activity of the CI had a lasting effect on the development of communist parties in the colonial countries, and paralysed communist activity in many countries where the national question was the essential political issue.

The meeting of the First Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee, held in Moscow in spring 1922, devoted much of its attention to the issue of the United Front. The background to the question and the methods to be used for its implementation sparked a heated debate. Finally, and quite exceptionally in the history of the CI, unanimity was not obtained as the French, Italian and Spanish communist parties all voted against the proposal.

However, this exceptional situation did not lead to a fully-blown crisis. The context is the essential issue here: the debate was dominated by the upcoming Diplomatic Conference in Genoa, to which Russia had been officially invited for the first time, although the question of the international conferences was only briefly addressed at the end. Despite their forceful criticisms, the CI leaders showed understanding towards the positions of the reticent communist parties.

The key for the leadership of the CI was the success of international initiatives related to the Genoa Conference. Radek spoke at length of the importance of these international meetings, proposed in December by the leaders of the socialists and trade unions. These proposals, which were accepted by the Communists, aimed to make the voice of the workers heard by the States: "at the moment when the bourgeoisie is meeting in order to share out the world, it is necessary to unite the proletariat around points of minimum agreement."

"The new Presidium considers that the declaration of the French, Italian and Spanish comrades can be admitted and seems quite

satisfactory.”³⁰ This evident compromise was dictated by the international situation and by the objectives of the CI and the Soviet state, whose main priorities were their great diplomatic manoeuvres in Europe. Having to show tolerance towards certain recalcitrant national sections was therefore a minor inconvenience.

This first shift in Comintern strategy, then, embodied the contradictions that would progressively undermine the organisation. The developments of late 1921 and the first half of 1922 contained all the hallmarks of the subsequent history of the Communist International: Russian domestic policies dominated by the NEP, a change in the international situation marked by a shift of alliances, and the organisation’s links with the Soviet state and the various communist parties and other political forces in the capitalist states.

For the first time since the massive rupture caused by the war and the revolution, a degree of cooperation between the different currents of the European labour movement was envisaged. But the talks between the Communist International and the Socialist Internationals at the meeting in Berlin in April 1922 ended in failure. The communists emphasised the need for joint action against capitalism while the socialists insisted on a discussion of the fate of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, imprisoned and judged in dubious circumstances. Despite this deadlock, the Fourth Congress of the Comintern held at the end of 1922 reaffirmed its support for the United Front but at the same time responded to the revolt against the Executive by asserting its authority over the recalcitrant national sections.

The “government of the workers”: a slogan without a future

The motto of the “government of the workers”, adopted at the Fourth Congress in December 1922, pushed the United Front approach to its logical conclusion; it defined the communist attitude towards socialist-led governments and gave a governmental perspective to joint action, envisaging the conditions under which communist parties might participate in government. This new orientation constituted more than a simple modification of party activity; it gave communism a new dimension, a sense of permanence, and a sense of engagement in the national political struggles of the countries of Europe and North America. The shift in focus

³⁰ *Compte-rendu de la Gestion du Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste (1920-1921)* (Moscou: 1921), 225.

had concrete effects on the policies of the communist parties of the Far East, especially in China. It represented an attempt to implant communist parties in countries where there was no longer any prospect of revolution and where the organised labour movement remained predominantly under social democratic influence. For the moment, the implementation of the United Front remained limited, at least in Europe. In the various communist parties, there was a strong feeling of disenchantment: the scars of the split had not healed and the parties expressed in various ways their reluctance to cooperate with social democrats as part of a policy of alliances and joint struggle to meet the immediate demands of the day. For their part, the leaders of the Communist International were also aware of the threat the new orientation could pose; when the communists were persuaded to participate in regional coalition governments with the socialists in Saxony and Thuringia in 1922 and 1923, they were dragged down with them as these governments collapsed under the pressure from the conservative forces of the Weimar regime.

At the trade union level, the new orientation had immediate positive effects, allowing the establishment of communist influence in the trade unions of certain countries such as Czechoslovakia. Overall, however, the record is meagre. The leaders of the Communist International, especially Zinoviev, defended the programme in spite of the difficulties encountered; but in fact it was gradually abandoned in favour of the policy of *Bolshevisation*, adopted at the Fifth Congress held in June 1924. The “turn to the left” of the Fifth Congress was engendered much more by the internal problems of the CI than by any changes in the international situation which, in fact, was relatively stable.³¹ Officially, the Fifth Congress did not mark the disappearance of the United Front, but the movement was substantially modified and diminished. The as yet undefined outlines of a leftward, doctrinaire turn began to appear, combining the desire for analysis and action with a withdrawal into a communist structure that was to become increasingly bureaucratic and centralised.

The decision-making procedures within the Communist International underwent a significant transformation, marked by the decline of the great representative assemblies, the Congresses and the Enlarged Plenums of the Executive Committee, and the strengthening of the positions of more exclusive bodies such as the Presidium and the Secretariat. The changes in strategy, the modification of the analyses and interventions of the

³¹ Maurice Andreu, *L'internationale communiste contre le capital, 1919-1924*, (Paris: PUF, 2003).

Communist International were now recorded *a posteriori*, some time after the Congresses or Plenums—and also some time after their implementation.

What remained of the world revolution, and the Russian Revolution, on Lenin's death?

When Lenin died in January 1924, the Comintern already faced serious difficulties. Most of the problems that had emerged as early as 1921 remained unresolved: if the organisation of the communist parties was weak, so was their membership. European social democracy had regathered its strength and the global domination of the European and American bourgeoisie was firmly established in spite of clashes with national movements in North Africa and the Middle East. With the exception of China, where a national revolutionary movement in cooperation with the Communists was active until at least 1927, and of course in the USSR, the domination of the liberal democracies was maintained.

At the Fifth Congress in July 1924—the first to be held in the absence of Lenin—Zinoviev reluctantly accepted the collapse of the prospect of revolution, which had always been the cornerstone of communist organisation. At the Fifth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the International, in April 1925, and especially in 1926, during the sixth and seventh meetings, it became quite clear that Zinoviev's earlier optimism had been unfounded. However, in agreement with Trotsky, Zinoviev linked the fate of the USSR to that of the world revolution.

The “united opposition” affirmed until 1927 that the Comintern should take a different approach to the spread of the world revolution, by learning from the defeats suffered in Great Britain and China by Communist-driven mass movements. For the opposition, the path of the world revolution remained unchanged: slowed down temporarily by events, it should start up again to allow the USSR to build socialism.

However, at the end of 1924, Stalin and then Bukharin developed a completely different conception. According to Stalin, at the international level the revolution was marking time, and no Communist party had managed to seize power; therefore, the USSR had become the concrete expression of world revolution. As a result, the construction of socialism in the USSR—that is, the construction of socialism in one country, became the highest revolutionary goal of the new period. By helping the USSR, the various communist parties around the world were helping to defend and consolidate the positions of the world revolution, which was tied to the fate of the USSR. This perspective had the merit of proposing a

coherent conception of the world revolution to the communist parties, but it raised serious questions about the *raison d'être* of the Comintern.³²

Bukharin offered a broader, distinct conception of the world revolution, between the Seventh Plenum in 1926 and the Sixth Congress in 1928. He thus expanded on an idea envisaged by Lenin and Trotsky, in 1921-1922, of a long-lasting process of world revolution that would experience victories and setbacks. Bukharin distinguished three components that he called the “columns of the world revolution”: the USSR, which was building socialism, the revolutionary workers' movement of the great Western capitalist countries, and the national movements of the colonised or dominated countries. This vision of the world revolution as an articulated process conferred relative autonomy on its various components. The communist parties were to develop their own goals to meet their own particular situations; the defence of the USSR was a concrete dimension of their objectives, but was not the only one. Finally, broadly sceptical about the possibilities of revolution in Europe in the immediate future, Bukharin placed his hopes in the national and revolutionary movements of the East, despite the reverse in China.

Until 1928, Stalin's and Bukharin's views coexisted with, and outweighed, those of the opposition because they appeared more realistic and coherent—especially to party and Comintern officials. At the Sixth Congress, even though Bukharin's ideas were adopted in the Comintern programme, they were then criticised and finally rejected as right-wing and opportunist because they ignored the new revolutionary radicalisation in the Western capitalist countries.

Finally, at the Tenth Plenum in June 1929, Bukharin's project gave way to the Stalinist conception, centred on the USSR. Stalin's view nevertheless revived the ideas of the old opposition speculating on an imminent wave of revolutions, linked to the deterioration of the international situation.

So the world revolution was now subordinated to the arrival of a new cycle of war and revolution. The defence of the Soviet Union was now the revolutionary horizon for the communist parties and the Communist International, whose submission to the foreign policy of the USSR was affirmed.

³² On this point, see Serge Wolikow, “The Comintern as a World Network”, in Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 212-231.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSPECTIVES ON THE REVOLUTION

ANDREU MAYAYO I ARTAL

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Karl Marx: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

With the dawning of the twentieth century, a compact mass of workers emerged from the darkness and marched resolutely into the light. Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's painting *The Fourth Estate* (1901) took ten years to find its ultimate form in a constant dialogue between reality and desire at the very height of the debate on the social question. In the spring of 1891, Pellizza attended a demonstration of day labourers in his village of Volpedo, a small municipality in the Piedmontese province of Alessandria near the border with Lombardy. The protesters gathered in Piazza Malaspina, a square overshadowed by the stately ancestral home of the noble family after whom the square was named. For Pellizza, the emotional impact of the event was so great that he completed a preliminary sketch by the end of that April. Bearing the title *Ambassadors of Hunger*, the work featured three figures at the head of a dense multitude ready to make themselves and their demands heard.

In 1895, Pellizza took up the sketch again. After three years of hard work filled with new drawings and even with photographs of his neighbours, he produced a formidable oil painting on canvas, which he called *La Fiumana* to signify a river in full spate. On the one hand, his work underscored the vigorous, unstoppable torrent of people brimming with just cause. On the other hand, the three figures at the forefront now included a desperate woman cradling a baby in her arms and calling out to the central figure in a clear allegory of Humanity, giving the scene an impressive teleological power. And as if the painting alone were not

enough, Pellizza drives home his message of social commitment with a poem written in the margin of the canvas in dedication to the emergence of “ordinary folk who swell the rising tide of Humanity” (in Italian, *genti corrette ad ingrossar [la Fiumana dell’umanità]*), where refusal to get involved is a crime. In a clear nod to Karl Marx, Pellizza’s poem also urges philosophers to leave their books behind and lead a movement that has been long in coming and now heads steadfastly and unwaveringly towards the blazing sun of righteousness and justice.¹

Even so, Pellizza was not entirely satisfied with the result. Moved by the Bava-Beccaris massacre, he started again on what would become his third and final recasting of the painting. In May 1898, the workers of Milan rose up in protest against their living conditions. When General Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris violently crushed their uprising, the result was dozens of deaths, hundreds of people wounded and thousands arrested, including the core leaders of Italian socialism headed by Andrea Costa, Filippo Turati and Anna Kuliscioff. Pellizza worked for three years to imbue the central figures and the front line of protesters with more personality, looking for a new harmony of shapes and colours, which the painter would define as harmony with life itself, appealing directly to the spectator’s eyes. Pellizza abandons the concept of a “rising tide of Humanity” and replaces it with an unambiguous class identity poised for confrontation—the class struggle—and absolutely sure of its own invincibility. In 1901, Pellizza finally signed his completed work and gave the stunning canvas, which measures nearly three metres high by five-and-a-half metres wide, a new name: *The Fourth Estate*. His painting becomes a doorway into the century of the Social Revolution. A socialist one, to be sure.

Seventy-five years later, the filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci employed the painting as a frontispiece in his movie *1900* (released in 1976). Bertolucci’s film, which features a powerful soundtrack by Ennio

¹ *The Rising Sun* (1904) is another of Pellizza da Volpedo’s most striking paintings. The image of the rising sun as a symbol of socialism would become commonplace in working-class publications. Garibaldi himself wrote to his friends in the Emilia Romagna region a year after the Commune: “The International is the blazing sun of the future”, in Luigi Arbizzani, Pietro Bonfiglioli and Renzo Renzi, *Su, compagni, in fitta schiera: Il socialismo in Emilia-Romagna dal 1864 al 1915*. (Bologna: Capelli Editore, 1966). Unlike Mazzini, who placed the nation as a higher priority than the social question, Garibaldi viewed nation-building as tied to the interests of the working classes. This is why Garibaldi became a focus of vindication for the socialist movement. Communist partisans in the Second World War took the name of Garibaldi brigades.

Morricone, tells the epic tale of agricultural labourers in the Po Valley in the first half of the twentieth century and culminates in the defeat of Nazism and Fascism in 1945. A year after the film's release, Spain held its first free elections since the death of Franco and the Catalan Communist Party (PSUC) drew inspiration from the gesture of one of the figures in Pellizza's painting (the third one from the left), who extends enormous open hands toward the spectator, to produce what was regarded as the finest poster of the election campaign, featuring the slogan: "My hands: my capital / PSUC my party". In an election that did not have full democratic safeguards, the Catalan communists nevertheless won nearly 20% of the vote. Even more successful was the PSOE (the Spanish Socialist Party), which won almost 30% of the votes cast in Spain as a whole; it ran nearly its entire election campaign to the strains of Morricone's soundtrack to the movie, which would not even open in Spanish cinemas until April 1978.

On the centenary of the Revolution that has defined the twentieth century like no other, it is worth looking at its impact from at least five multi-faceted and complementary perspectives. The first is the revolutionary perspective, which continues to fuel the epic of the birth of the social revolution, of the Soviet Union as the fatherland of socialism, and of the international communist movement as a factor in the struggle for a society of free and equal individuals. Next comes the futurist perspective of a victorious socialism sustained by the technological and military development of the USSR at the midpoint of the past century. The third is the counter-revolutionary perspective of the present stoked by Russian nationalism with the blessing of the Orthodox Church, which commemorates a century without Revolution. Fourth is the melancholy perspective coined by Enzo Traverso as a necessity in remembering the future, recalling class and emancipatory struggles. The last is the perspective of communist memory, of the old spectre that has stalked the world to the sound of *The Internationale* from the Paris Commune through Spain's 15-M Movement and Occupy Wall Street, the real movement that abolishes the present state of things.

The Revolutionary Perspective

And the world changed its foundation.² This is the assertion of *The Internationale*, the anthem of the world's workers, which was dashed off

² Andreu Mayayo and José Manuel Rúa (eds.), *Y el mundo cambió de base: Una mirada histórica a la Revolución Rusa*. (Barcelona: Yulca, 2017).

by Eugène Pottier in the dark days of repression after the Paris Commune (1871), set to music by the Fleming Pierre De Geyter (1888) and then adopted in 1892 by workers' parties and trade unions around the world. It became the soundtrack of the October Revolution and the official anthem of the newborn Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The world changed its foundation and the outcasts of the Earth rose up as major characters in History. In October 1917, nearly a half-century after the Commune, the lyrics of the anthem came to life for the first time and social revolution broke out. It was "the revenge of the serfs"—in the words of Prince Lvov, who served as the head of the Provisional Government after the tsar's abdication and was soon overwhelmed by events—and it was a punishment of the landowners, noble and cleric alike, for their haughty, brutal conduct over centuries of serfdom. In a blinking of the eye, more than three centuries of the Romanov dynasty, whose tsars had ruled the theocracy of the Russian Empire as demigods with the blessing of the Orthodox Church, vanished into thin air.

On November 24, 1917, with news of the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution still fresh in his ears, Antonio Gramsci published an article in the Socialist periodical *Avanti!* in Milan. His title was crystal-clear: "The Revolution against *Das Kapital*". The future communist leader and one of the most lucid renovators of Marxist thought offered a critique of economic determinism, stressing the importance of spiritual and emotional factors. Religious faith moves mountains and political will opens the doors to revolution:

This is the revolution against Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. In Russia, Marx's *Das Kapital* was more the book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat. It stood as the critical demonstration of how events should follow a predetermined course: how in Russia a bourgeoisie had to develop, and a capitalist era had to open, with the setting-up of a Western-type civilisation, before the proletariat could even think in terms of its own revolt, its own class demands, its own revolution. But events have overcome ideologies. Events have exploded the critical schema determining how the history of Russia would unfold according to the canons of historical materialism. The Bolsheviks reject Karl Marx, and their explicit actions and conquests bear witness that the canons of historical materialism are not so rigid as might have been and has been thought.

The minority Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly, handed over all power to the soviets and prepared to defend the Revolution, signing a humiliating peace treaty with the Germans and forging the new Red Army under the steely leadership and discipline of Trotsky to fight off

the enemies of the Revolution (and their many foreign allies). Nonetheless, the Revolution took hold and swept over the country. One of its objectives was to defend the first socialist state in the world. But the October Revolution was international in character too; hence the creation of the international workers' party, the Communist International. Once again, though, revolutionary outbreaks everywhere were violently quashed in bloodshed and a rain of fire, starting with Germany. Only the USSR remained standing as a socialist paradise to be vindicated, one built on a new common economy of collectivisations and cooperatives, mass literacy for children and adults alike, and guaranteed healthcare for all. Lenin defined communism as soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country. In other words, it was the blazing sun within reach of the figures in *The Fourth Estate*.

The revolutionary epic was portrayed to a tee by Sergei Eisenstein in his film *October* (1927), commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, and it would be repeated over fifty years later in a Hollywood version. Directed by Warren Beatty, the Oscar-winning movie *Reds* (1981) was shot on an extraordinary budget of 35 million dollars. While the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party Enrico Berlinguer was responding to events in Poland involving a trade union called Solidarity pitted against the Communist authorities with his remark that "the driving impetus of the October Revolution was now exhausted", US liberals were handing the Academy Award for Best Actor to Warren Beatty for his performance in the role of John Reed, a US hero buried in the Kremlin and the author of the most famous account of the October Revolution: *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919). The movie portrays the radical journalist, a graduate of Harvard University and future founder of the Communist Party USA, through the admiring eyes of the feminist writer Louise Bryant. To the strains of *The Internationale*, the main characters join in the revolutionary euphoria, attending rallies, hawking political leaflets in the street, having sex and swelling the crowds of demonstrators, who breathe life into the characters of *The Fourth Estate* as they march through the streets of Petrograd with determination, in close formation, hoisting a sea of red flags and overtaking a trolley car that is forced to stop. The scene calls to mind Marshall Berman's essay on the disputes (class struggle) among pedestrians in Nevsky Prospekt, witnessed repeatedly in Russian literature.³ Strangely enough, the movie's premiere was to coincide with the opening days of the Reagan presidency. While

³ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988).

the liberal Beatty paid tribute to the Russian Revolution, Reagan abandoned the studio sets of film and TV to lead the triumphant neo-liberal revolution.

Within the revolutionary context, a host of varied perspectives co-exist. The first is that of power. The Stalinist perspective is notable for its obsession with establishing a narrative through graphic rewriting. The aim was not only to eliminate political adversaries physically, as occurred in the famous purges of the 1930s, but also to erase their presence and their memory from the public square, from books and from photographic and motion-picture images. In one well-known case, Leon Trotsky was made to disappear amid the heyday of Stalin's cult of personality, when Stalin was recast as Lenin's preferred friend and, therefore, his successor. Trotsky's fate, however, is by no means the only case of deletions and erasures from the official albums of the CPSU and the Soviet Union. The graphic designer David King did a comprehensive study of the photo manipulation by which anyone who happened to fall out of favour under Stalinism was simply made to vanish. He presented his work in a variety of European cities in the late twentieth century, but Moscow, however, would have to wait until 2013, when the exhibition finally went up at the Gulag History Museum.⁴

Communism also had an anti-colonialist and anti-racist perspective that is worth highlighting. Angela Davis, a student leader and US vice-presidential candidate for the Communist Party ticket with Gus Hall in the elections of 1980 and 1984, always emphasised her status as woman, black and communist. While being a woman and black was plain to see, being a communist is something she learnt from her parents' only white friends, who were communists. Only the communists (and the Jews) were able to accept blacks as their equals. The same thing was to happen in far-away South Africa, where only the Communist Party, which was a major force in the African National Congress, had both white and black members. For over thirty years, the leader of South Africa's communists would be Joe Slovo, a Lithuanian Jew, who was married to Ruth First, a Latvian Jew, assassinated in 1982 by the South African security services. On February 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela gave his first address upon release from prison after serving 27 years behind bars, saying:

I salute the South African Communist Party for its sterling contribution to the struggle for democracy. You have survived 40 years of unrelenting

⁴ David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997). The composer Michael Nyman created a soundtrack for the book, which he entitled *The Fall of Icarus*.

persecution. The memory of great communists like Moses Kotane, Yusuf Dadoo, Bram Fischer and Moses Mabhida will be cherished for generations to come. I salute General Secretary Joe Slovo, one of our finest patriots. We are heartened by the fact that the alliance between ourselves [the ANC] and the [communist] party remains as strong as it always was.

The Futurist Perspective

The emergence of the USSR as a global superpower with the defeat of the Nazis and Fascists was cemented in 1949 after its first test of an atomic bomb and the birth of the People's Republic of China. The USSR threw its support behind the process of decolonisation as a variant of the anti-imperialist struggle and it became a model and a reference point for many countries in the so-called Third World. This is the necessary frame in which to view the USSR's close economic and military collaboration with India and Egypt, where it did not hesitate to assume the financial burden and oversight of the gargantuan construction of the Aswan Dam for the greater glory of Nasser, the new pharaoh of the twentieth century. Nor did the USSR demur in embracing the Cuban revolution, led by a handful of bearded young men who were viewed with some suspicion and a good deal of condescension by the island's own communists until the belligerence of the United States and the geopolitical opportunities discerned by the Soviets turned them into the mainstay of Fidel Castro's support. Castroism, baptised in the new faith of Marxism-Leninism, was to rejuvenate the very heirs of the October Revolution in the USSR itself.

The Cold War turned the war for space into a virtual, technological and ideological war between the United States and the USSR. To coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the Soviets successfully launched Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth, and soon followed with Sputnik 2, whose famous passenger was the dog Laika. The USSR had the atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb and intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of being launched from its own territory and pulverising the United States from coast to coast. The USSR was an invincible power and it was winning the space race. On April 12, 1961, the USSR was also first to put a cosmonaut in space. Yuri Gagarin, a 27-year-old Soviet pilot, orbited the Earth for 108 minutes aboard the Vostok 1 spacecraft. Two years later, it was the turn of Valentina Tereshkova—a woman, and even younger than Gagarin—to travel into space in Vostok 6. While the world admired the Soviets' latest exploits with Gagarin at the forefront, the United States suffered a crushing humiliation at the Bay of Pigs with the defeat of CIA-trained Cuban rebel forces. Against this backdrop, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev held a summit in

Vienna a few weeks later, ushering in a new period of détente, or “peaceful coexistence”, which was to persist over the following decades with the exception of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962.

Unsurprisingly, the Soviets and much of the rest of the world saw socialism as the blazing sun of the future in 1960. That was the year that witnessed the premiere of a futurist tale entitled *In 2017*, which appeared in slide format with texts by V. Strukova and V. Schevchenko and drawings by L. Smekhov. The movie, which was reproduced for a home projector very popular in Soviet households of the period, was a mixture of film and comics aimed at boys and girls, and its 45 slides reflected a fascination more in the technological advances achieved by the centenary of the Revolution than in its social advances, which were perhaps taken for granted in 1960.

The colonisation of space appears from the very start of the film, but so do the drilling and conquest of the subsoil by powerful and prodigious excavators. New underground cities, built partly as result of the ecological destruction of the surface, were the new socialist paradise where the light shone and it was always springtime, thanks to unlimited energy. A gigantic dam closed the Bering Strait, controlling the cold currents and permitting the circulation of high-speed trains between the two continents (Alaska was assumed to have rejoined the victorious Russian civilisation). Every household teemed with robotics, above all in the kitchen, and screens for video-conferencing were installed in sitting rooms to enable permanent direct contact with loved ones.

Nevertheless, it was not a perfect world and there was a need to remain ever vigilant for natural disasters and disasters caused by the enemies of socialism. In this vein, on a small Pacific island, the last bastion of recalcitrant imperialists had taken control of nuclear weapons and had not hesitated even for an instant to detonate them, unleashing enormous typhoons in the Black Sea. Quickly and effectively, breathtaking airborne weather stations were put into operation to control the climate and natural phenomena. Cosmonauts are hailed as the new heroes of peace and socialism. On the centenary of the October Revolution, security was still the top priority of Soviet authorities.⁵

⁵ This curious futurist cartoon came to light again a few years ago when St. Petersburg resident Sergei Pozdnyakov was rummaging through an old family collection, and it was uploaded frame by frame to the Russian social network VKontakte by Pozdnyakov himself. The film depicts a day in the life of Igor Sergeyevich, a young Muscovite who revels daily in the impressive advances of Soviet science.

The Counter-Revolutionary Perspective

By 2017, natural disasters have not lessened amid climate change, nor has the nuclear threat vanished from the face of the Earth, nor does the USSR even still exist. The blazing sun of socialism has been dark for over a quarter-century in Russia and the other fourteen former Soviet republics. Russia today is a child of counter-revolution and the transition to authoritarian capitalism. The national holiday of November 7, established to commemorate the October Revolution, ceased being celebrated in 2005. Since then, the national holiday has been Unity Day, which is held three days earlier, on 4 November; it commemorates the liberation of Moscow from Polish occupation and the beginning of the 300-year dynasty of the Romanovs (1613-1917).

The Fourth of November can also be celebrated in honour of the birthdate of Alexander Kolchak (1874-1920), an admiral and commander of counter-revolutionary forces, who was executed in Irkutsk. The vindication of Kolchak as a hero and martyr of the “White Russians” in various publications culminated in the unveiling of a towering statue of the man in the city where he perished. In 2008, a biopic entitled *The Admiral* opened in cinemas. Directed by Andrei Kravchuk, the film was produced by Russian state television on a budget of twenty million dollars, an astronomical figure for Russian productions, yet it was a box-office success and its ticket sales were twice as high as its costs. The film was an unvarnished vindication of a Russian imperial past stabbed in the back by the Russian Revolution. It is a far cry from the sailor heroes rising up against the bloodthirsty, useless officials of the Battleship Potemkin portrayed by Sergei Eisenstein; now the real hero is the Admiral who hurls his sword into the depths of the sea when faced with the surrender demanded by a laughable Soviet committee. Even more rousing is the epic scene of Kolchak’s exhortation on the snowy Siberian steppes, when the soldiers kneel down before the new tsar as his loyal subjects, while motley Russian flags wave under the scourge of a cold that is—it bears repeating—Siberian. The omnipresent red banners have made way for the tricolour flags (white, blue and red) of the Russian nation.

On October 26, 2017, coinciding with the centenary of the Revolution, Alexei Uchitel’s film *Matilda* opened in Russia, preceded by scandal and by sometimes violent protests staged outside the cinemas hosting preview showings and outside the production company’s offices. The controversial movie, which was shot on a budget of 25 million dollars, tells the story of an affair begun in 1890 between the tsesarevich Nicholas, the Tsar’s heir apparent, and a young Polish woman, Mathilde Kschessinska, a ballerina

at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. Despite the lavishness and modesty employed in the love scenes, the most fundamentalist sectors of the Orthodox Church urged on the demonstrations and complaints of blasphemy because, in their opinion, the film denigrated the figure of the last tsar, Nicholas II, who had been raised to the altars in 2000 as a consequence of his martyrdom and that of the rest of his family at the hands of the Bolsheviks. The love affair between the two young people, who were roughly twenty years old, was taken as an affront to the ultra-orthodox and what they saw as the virtuous and exemplary life of a saint.

On the centenary of the Revolution, the power of the Orthodox Church is not open to question, nor is its collusion with the Kremlin to smother Russian society in a mantle of puritanism. The deep dismay over Matilda's bared breast after a strap of her tutu breaks is the perfect metaphor for political authoritarianism, because it recalls the bared breast in the famous painting by Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, a symbol of the liberal revolution of 1830. The prestigious filmmaker Alexander Sokurov spearheaded a manifesto against the new wave of religious fanaticism being whipped up by ultra-orthodox groups, the worst version of ISIS in Russian society.

The vicissitudes of the official Russian national anthem provide another prime example of today's counter-revolutionary perspective. With the February Revolution, the traditional *God Save the Tsar* was replaced with the French revolutionary anthem *La Marseillaise*. Then the October Revolution brought in *The Internationale*, which remained the official anthem of the USSR until 1943. In the middle of the Great Patriotic War, Stalin ordered a new anthem to unite all the Soviet peoples in their present adversity. Alexander Alexandrov returned to the anthem of the Bolshevik party, which he had composed in 1938, to set to music lyrics written by Sergey Mikhalkov. The result was splendid, Stalin approved the new anthem in 1944 and millions launched into the offensive against the Germans, singing it at the top of their lungs.

The laudatory lyrics to Stalin fell into disuse from 1956 onwards, amid the process of de-Stalinisation that followed the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the reading of General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev's report. In 1970, Sergey Mikhalkov himself received a proposal to write new lyrics for the anthem, which were finally approved in 1977 and would remain in use until the Soviet Union's demise. The new president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, selected *The Patriotic Song* as the new anthem in 1992, but the lack of lyrics sparked numerous protests, chiefly among athletes taking part in international events, where they could not sing along as other competitors could do (except for the Spaniards, whose anthem

also had no lyrics). In 2000, Vladimir Putin went back to the traditional Soviet anthem but with new lyrics by the perennial and obliging Sergey Mikhalkov, which began “Russia, our sacred nation” and ended “Thus it was, so it is and always will be”. Amen.

Returning to the movies, the counter-revolutionary perspective is tempered in relation to the Soviet authorities who made a great victory possible in the Great Patriotic War. A highlight in this respect is *Battle for Sevastopol* (2015) by Sergey Mokritskiy, which is about one of the most revered figures of the Second World War, the sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko, who is credited with 308 kills and was a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt.

With 38%, Stalin is still the most highly rated historical figure among Russians today. He is four percentage points higher than Vladimir Putin and twenty higher than Lenin. While the October Revolution is now on the rubbish heap of History, the victorious authoritarianism of Stalin remains an example to be followed. Unsurprisingly, current Russian authorities have, for the first time, banned screenings of a movie, *The Death of Stalin* (2018), by Scottish filmmaker Armando Iannucci, a satire on the ruling clique of the CPSU over the two days that followed the death of the red tsar. The ban, however, has not prevented the movie’s circulation by Internet throughout the entire country.

The Melancholy Perspective

The implosion of the USSR was as unsettling as the impact of the October Revolution itself, if not more so. The triumph of neo-liberalism was absolute as it imposed its economic, social, political and cultural model on the former countries of the so-called “real socialism”. There was no possibility for socialism with a human face or for social democracy. The most painful privatisation, however, was that of the collective social utopia. Now there was room only for individual utopias in a long, drawn-out present, without past or future, and for a handful of dystopias, one of which was the return of the nation-state. Communism was no longer branded simply as totalitarianism, to be equated with Nazism and Fascism. It was tossed straight onto the rubbish heap of History, along with any sort of emancipatory yearning. A year later, in 1992, Francis Fukuyama declared the end of History and the impossibility of a different, better future, at least not for the majority of a population left impoverished, precarious and ultimately servile.

The movie *Ulysses’ Gaze* (1995) by Theo Angelopoulos, with cinematography by Giorgos Arvantis, follows the story of a new odyssey

through the war-torn Balkans. In one sequence, a gigantic statue of Lenin on a plinth glides down the Danube, employing visual power and evocatively melancholy music to convey the funeral of communism. A host of people kneel on the banks of the river and cross themselves as a defeated and displaced Lenin drifts past, bound for a German collector. Harvey Keitel, who embodies the modern Ulysses, appears in the bow of the boat, at the foot of the statue. A voice asks, “Who is it?” and Keitel as Ulysses responds, “Nobody”.⁶ The defeat is total and absolute. Lenin no longer signals with his arm raised up; only his index finger points to the sky. The past vanishes into thin air, the future eclipsed.

Enzo Traverso is right when he says that the chief problem of the left is not the lack of a future, but rather the lack of a past, the concealment of a deep-rooted emancipatory tradition.⁷ Public policies of memory have shifted the focus of attention onto victims, elbowing aside the vanquished. The victims of war, of a terrorist attack or of ethnic, religious, linguistic or sexual persecution deserve all our empathy and consideration. It becomes much more difficult to stand up for the cause of the vanquished individuals of an emancipatory social project against an adversarial dominant culture that denies or even refutes their very existence. Two perspectives on the past are grounded in a rejection of the present: nostalgia, which espouses a return to the past; and pathological grief, which expresses an infinite and constant sadness over the loss and permanent absence. Traverso, however, introduced the concept of melancholia, not as it is associated with the pathological grief of psychoanalysis, but as a sentiment of rejection toward an unwelcome present and of hope in the possibility of changing that present in order to win the future.

Of the many defeats of the left, two have been especially painful: the Prague Spring (1968) led by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Alexander Dubček, and the governance of Chile by the Popular Unity coalition (1970-1973) led by Salvador Allende. The two experiences are proximate in time, take place against the backdrop of the Cold War, and involve the two major blocs. They also express a will to combine the utmost civil liberties with the utmost social equality, echoing Marx’s call for a society of free and equal individuals. The socialist Salvador Allende paid with his life in an ignominious CIA-backed coup, which stands as a prime example of Operation Condor and its target to

⁶ In Book IX of Homer’s *Odyssey*, we read: “Cyclops, you ask my honourable name? Remember the gift of hospitality you promised me, and I shall tell you. My name is Nobody: mother, father, and friends, everyone calls me Nobody”.

⁷ Enzo Traverso, *Mélancolie de gauche: La forcé d’une tradition cachée (XIX-XXI siècle)* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2016).

eliminate the left from Latin America's Southern Cone. In Europe, the impossibility of reforming real socialism was the cause, in Dubček's opinion, of the USSR's collapse.⁸ For the Soviets, the danger of the Prague Spring lay more in its political reforms than in its economic or social ones. For Dubček, socialism had to safeguard the utmost civil liberties, encourage the utmost personal self-fulfilment and commit to a multi-party political culture without renouncing the leadership role of the Communist Party in the construction of the hegemony, in a Gramscian sense. Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika came twenty years too late. Dubček, who was to lead the Velvet Revolution of 1989 alongside Vaclav Havel, recalled the day of his detention and abduction by Soviet special forces with tears in his eyes. As he was grabbed in the early morning of August 21, 1968, hundreds of people surrounded the offices of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and sang *The Internationale*.

Following Walter Benjamin, Enzo Traverso underscores the importance of funerals and mourning as an essential factor that links a commitment to the struggle with a hope in the blazing sun of the socialist future. Since the earliest silent marches to the Communards' Wall in the Paris cemetery of Père Lachaise in honour of the 147 combatants of the Commune who were gunned down and tossed into an open grave at the foot of the wall on May 28, 1871, the workers' movement and the political left have engaged in mourning as a secular liturgy of hope. Whereas religious believers place their hope in a life to come, the hopes of the revolutionary heirs of the Enlightenment are earthly.

The Italian historian could also pose the funeral of Palmiro Togliatti in 1964 as another paradigmatic example. Swept up in authentic popular emotion, two million people swelled the streets of Rome, especially Piazza San Giovanni. The impact on the art world was extraordinary. Pier Paolo Pasolini included fragments of the funeral in his movie *The Hawks and the Sparrows* (1966). The Sicilian painter Renato Guttuso took eight years to put the finishing brushstrokes on his impressive painting *The Funeral of Togliatti* (1972), which measures 4.40 metres wide by 3.40 metres high and has become known as the Sistine Chapel of communism.⁹ Among a vast profusion of red flags—sixteen to be exact—surrounding the casket where Togliatti, known as "Papa Rosso", lies, Guttuso depicts 140 figures in black and white from every time and place. Notable among them are Enrico Berlinguer, the new General Secretary of the Italian Communist

⁸ *Dubcek: Autobiografía del líder de la Primavera de Praga* (Barcelona: Editorial Prensa Ibérica, 1993). Written in collaboration with Jiri Hochman.

⁹ The work is on display at MAMbo (Bologna Museum of Modern Art). Bologna is the capital of the Emilia Romagna region and of Italian communism.

Party (elected in 1972), and three women: Dolores Ibárruri, known popularly as *La Pasionaria*, Simone de Beauvoir, and Angela Davis. Of course, there is also Nilde Iotti, who was Togliatti's partner, one of the most important leaders in the ICP and the first woman to become Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Italy's lower house.

Twenty years later, the funeral of Enrico Berlinguer would once again bring together the "Communist people" in the streets of Rome and Piazza San Giovanni. This time, unlike Togliatti's funeral, the churches did not close their doors and public television broadcast the displays of profound sorrow presided over by a classic photo of the General Secretary at an election rally for the European Parliament. Berlinguer, who had died in Padua, disliked being referred to as a sad man because, he would reply with a broad, seductive smile, it was simply not true. His gravitas was not sorrowful, but deeply melancholic. To be sure, Berlinguer would have laughed heartily at the Communist victory in the European elections. At last, the party had achieved its longed-for *sorpasso* of the Christian Democrats, even if overtaking them only by a few tenths and only for a short time. As the Spanish saying goes, joy is short-lived in the house of a poor man.

The Communist philosopher Francisco Fernández Buey seconded the observation of his Italian counterpart Mario Tronti that the photo on the book jacket of the memoir by Rossana Rossanda,¹⁰ the historic leader of the Italian Communist Party and a founder of *Il Manifesto*, clearly and intensely conveyed such a melancholy. Buey added:

I share the observation: melancholy, that precious movement of a sensitive soul, runs like a red thread through the pages that Rossanda has dedicated to the ill-fated love and inner conflict that arises from the gap between what she could have done and what she really did, between what she wanted and what was not possible. I would only add to Tronti's observation that, in this case, the lucidity of the analysis that accompanies the image of melancholy does not necessarily evoke in the reader the profound sorrow that the word denotes. To the contrary: a reader of conviction, a reader who is aware of the tragedy of communism in the twentieth century, will be heartened by the close of a book written by a young woman of the past century, by a communist who was ultimately expelled from the party. As she herself said, we too will have learnt that not everything that has failed to work historically was wrong politically.¹¹

¹⁰ Rossana Rossanda, *La ragazza del secolo scorso* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005).

¹¹ Francisco Fernández Buey, "Las memorias de Rossana Rossanda para el libro blanco del comunismo en el siglo XX", in Salvador López Arnal and Jordi Mir García (eds.), *1917: Variaciones sobre la Revolución de Octubre, su historia y sus*

A year after Rossanda's memoir, the same publishing house brought out the memoir of another legendary Italian Communist leader, Pietro Ingrao. Entitled *Volevo la luna* [in English, literally "I Wanted The Moon"], the book jacket featured a photo of Ingrao, Tribune of the Plebs, in the midst of a fiery speech, his fist raised to the level of his face, totally open. Ingrao, who was on the left wing of the Italian Communist Party, remained disconcerted and baffled, unable to find an answer to the historical failure of communism, perhaps because he was asking for the moon or impossible things. In fact, that was the title of the first volume of his autobiography, *Volevo la luna*, prepared in conversation with Nicola Tranfaglia and published in 1990 between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR and, even worse, the disappearance of the formidable Italian Communist Party itself. Certainly, the most lucid personal reflection on the history of the party in the second half of the twentieth century is a book by Lucio Magri, a heterodox communist and another founder of *Il Manifesto*, a monthly review that became a daily newspaper. Magri identified with the tailor of Ulm¹² (12) from a poem written by Bertolt Brecht in 1933, the year of Hitler's rise to the chancellorship and Brecht's departure into exile:

*Said the Tailor to the Bishop:
Believe me, I can fly.
Watch me while I try.
And he stood with things
That looked like wings
On the great church roof.*

*That is quite absurd,
A wicked, foolish lie,
For man will never fly
A man is not a bird,
Said the Bishop to the Tailor.*

*Said the People to the Bishop:
The Tailor is quite dead,
He was a stupid head.
His wings are rumpled
And he lies all crumpled
On the hard church square.*

consecuencias (Barcelona: El Viejo Topo, 2017). Fernández Buey also seconded the statement of his teacher, the renowned philosopher Manuel Sacristán, who averred, "I am a communist, not a Marxist".

¹² Lucio Magri, *Il sarto di Ulm* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2009).

*The bells ring out in praise
That man is not a bird.
It was a wicked, foolish lie,
Mankind will never fly,
Said the Bishop to the People.*

The crash of communism, like the crumpled body of the tailor in Brecht's poem, has been proportional to the challenge of storming the skies. Yet it must also be recalled that communism was one of the most important factors in the struggle for freedom and equality in the twentieth century. A hundred years after the October Revolution, the Soviet Union no longer exists and communism in China is an empty husk of an authoritarian and neo-liberal regime. However, the utopia of a different and better future still haunts the world in the form of the spectre depicted by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). We also recall that Marx himself defined communism as "the real movement which abolishes the present state of things". The tailor smashed into the cobblestones, but the bishop was wrong. Though humans are not birds, they have soared high. They have even reached the moon. Nothing and nobody has been able to place a ceiling on the aspirations of men and women for freedom and equality. The wheel of History never stops turning, and sometimes the world changes its foundations and the "nothings" of today must be everything.

The Communist Perspective

The end of state communism (in the USSR) liberated the Paris Commune from the role that it had performed in official communist historiography. However, the Commune is not part of the tradition of French national republicanism either. As one of the Commune's most well-known figures, Gustave Courbet, proclaimed: "Paris has renounced being the capital of France".

In a thought-provoking new look at the Paris Commune, Kristin Ross argues that the imaginary produced in its wake is neither that of a national republican middle class nor that of a state-run collectivism. Communal luxury, Ross concludes, lay neither in the (French) bourgeois luxury that surrounded it nor in the utilitarian collectivist experiments that followed it and became predominant in the first half of the twentieth century. The Commune was the cradle of the social revolution, of class over nation, and it was a test laboratory for political inventions.

There is little need to spell out in detail how the way people live now under the contemporary form of capitalism—with the collapse of the labour market, the growth of the informal economy, and the undermining of systems of social solidarity throughout the overdeveloped world—bears more than a passing resemblance to the working conditions of the labourers and artisans of the nineteenth century who made the Commune, most of whom spent most of their time not working but *looking for work*. It has become increasingly apparent, particularly after the unravelling of societies like Greece and Spain, that we are not all destined to be immaterial labourers inhabiting a post-modern creative capitalist technoutopia the way some futurologists told us we were ten years ago—and continue desperately to try to tell us even today. The way people live now—working part-time, studying and working at the same time, straddling those two worlds or the gap between the work they were trained to do and the work they find themselves doing in order to get by, or negotiating the huge distances they must commute or migrate across in order to find work—all this suggests to me, and to others as well, that the world of the Communards is in fact much closer to us than is the world of our parents.¹³

Marx wrote that the most important point about the Paris Commune of 1871 was not that the insurgents had a shared blueprint, but rather its own working existence. The spectre that had stalked Europe in 1848 now strolled like a lover for 72 days through the Paris spring of 1871, through a city of two million inhabitants that teemed with associations of all sorts clamouring for social revolution. The shock felt by the ruling classes led to an unprecedented crackdown, with a death toll of over 30,000, the imprisonment of thousands more and 7,000 deported individuals, who would spread the revolutionary spirit around the world.

Undoubtedly, Marx would have liked to witness the Arab Springs of 2011 and the occupation that same year of half the world's public squares by people outraged at the economic, financial and especially political crisis. On October 15, 2011, following the example of the 15-M Movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street, millions of citizens took to the streets in over a thousand cities in ninety countries around the world. The movement, of course, was heterogeneous and of unequal strength, but it was no longer a spectre. Now, as Marx would have said, it had a working existence. In December, in the New York City park known as Liberty Plaza, people from all walks of life showed their support for

¹³ Kristin Ross, *Lujo comunal: El imaginario político de La Comuna de París*. (Madrid: Akal, 2016), 9. [Original title: *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*.]

Occupy Wall Street, defying the dark night of neo-liberalism as they sang a song whose first lines had been penned 140 years earlier even as the death rattles of the Communards echoed in the streets of Paris. The singing protestors were the luminous signs hailed by Marshall Berman,¹⁴ who must also have been singing at the top of his lungs in his adopted city on a night suffused with the future, in the capital of the Universal Republic.

¹⁴ Marshall Berman, "The Signs in the Street: A Response to Perry Anderson", *New Left Review*, I/144, March-April 1984.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FEAR OF REVOLUTION AND ANTI-COMMUNISM

PAOLA LO CASCIO

This chapter seeks to lay out a cultural genealogy of what has been defined as anti-communist thought. Addressing the subject comprehensively in a piece of these characteristics, however, is too great a task. As a result, the following pages will sketch out only a few of the main strands of different schools of thought that have stood in opposition to major revolutionary changes, particularly since the Bolshevik triumph.

The October Revolution acted as a lightning rod for a variety of political cultures that ultimately melted together into the ideological magma of what became known generically as “anti-communism”. Deployed with particularly full force after the Second World War, this powerful school of thought had a conceptual toolkit that remained diverse, even as it exerted its full effectiveness as a political agent. Thus, while the communist movement indelibly marked the course of the entire century, it also triggered an opposing response capable of organising whole sectors of society, pushing for governmental policies, forging international alliances, moving troops and sparking conflicts. In short, anti-communism proved a key actor for any understanding of the development of the twentieth century as a whole.

From one Counter-Revolution to another: the Background

There is a reasonable question to ask here: when were the first steps taken in codifying an anti-revolutionary ideological response that would ultimately mutate into a distinctly anti-communist one? To a certain extent, the roots of anti-communism must be sought out even before the appearance of socialist theories. This is largely because the key original

and perhaps instinctive strand that led to this school of thought pertains to the very concept of Revolution, understood as a sudden and radical change in the balance of political and social forces. In this sense, anti-revolutionary thought emerged amid the first major, wholly revolutionary event of modern times, that is, the French Revolution. While not wishing to delve too far into a matter that is not the specific object of these pages, it is nonetheless necessary to recall the various frontal attacks waged by the thinkers Edmund Burke and Joseph De Maistre.

Burke was resolute in his critique of the dynamic of French events: the problem for him was not so much where the revolutionaries wanted to go, but how they wanted to get there. While accepting some new balances founded on the acceptance of liberal rights, the Irish philosopher repudiated the concept of rupture, which he viewed as politically abstract and pernicious because it entailed the immediate destruction of traditional structures and encouraged the breakdown of society.¹ De Maistre went much further, becoming probably the first to set out the classic paradigm of reactionary ideologies. Perhaps this is precisely the major innovation of the French Catholic thinker: his ability to build a coherent system of values out of a denial, a rejection and, in short, a fear. More specifically, his denial, rejection and fear stemmed from the values and demands put forward by the French revolutionaries. Thus, De Maistre opposed rationality with faith, human rights with fatalism, dangerous individualism with traditionalist communitarianism and respect for traditional hierarchies, and constitutionalism and national sovereignty with the strictest theocracy.² He set out his arguments explicitly, leaving no leeway for interpretation when he added that what would come after the French events would not be “a contrary revolution”, but “the contrary of revolution”.

However, the gradual spread of liberal ideals, the expansion of industrialisation, the powerful changes occurring in many institutional systems, along with a corresponding capture of space and political power by the formerly revolutionary bourgeoisie, combined to situate the demands that had driven the rupture of 1789 within the framework of

¹ This is why Edmund Burke is regarded as the father of conservative liberal thought, but not a counter-revolutionary. See Esteban Pujals, *El Pensamiento Político de Edmund Burke, Introducción a Reflexiones sobre la Revolución Francesa* (Madrid: Ediciones RIALP, 1989). For additional information on De Maistre's influence on Spanish reactionary thought, particularly on Donoso Cortés, see Jesús María Osés Gorraiz, “De Maistre y Donoso Cortés: hermeneutas de lo inefable,” *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 2011, no. 152, 75-114.

² See Jesús María Osés Gorraiz, “Joseph de Maistre: un adversario del Estado moderno,” *Revista de estudios políticos*, 1993, no. 80, 225-246.

stable systemic elements. What threatened the new balance was a fresh dispute, which followed on from the demand for political rights (not merely civil rights) and, above all, from the gaping inequalities generated by the expansion of the factory system of production. The revolutionary danger no longer came from the middle classes and bourgeoisie eager to seize a prominence that had been denied to them under the Ancien Régime; it came now from the exploited and subjugated proletarian masses, who were calling for a completely different sort of political participation, distribution of wealth, and organisation of production. To some extent, the events of 1848—from the democratic revolts to the spread of utopian socialism and the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*—had pointed in this direction: the Revolution would become synonymous with democratic and socialist change of the kind Paris had witnessed in February of that turbulent year.

As a result, the anti-revolutionary paradigm began to change significantly, shifting from anti-liberalism toward explicit anti-socialism and even anti-communism. The examples are legion, starting with Catholic thinkers like the Abbot Antonio Rosmini, who penned a stinging essay on socialism and communism in 1848, in which he defended private property as a natural and inalienable right and directly attacked the “statolatry” of socialist doctrines.³ But anti-revolutionary thinking did not evolve into clearly anti-socialist thinking solely in the Catholic world: in 1848 the French economist Alfred Sudré published a pamphlet entitled *Histoire du communisme; ou, Réfutation historique des Utopies socialistes* [in English, *History of Communism or a Historical Refutation of Socialist Utopias*],⁴ which enjoyed widespread circulation in France and across Europe. Wanting to carry out a heterodox reconstruction, Sudré began his thesis with Platonic propositions and set up a striking alternative narrative. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the book for the purpose of the present pages, however, concerns Sudré’s assessment of the Paris revolution of 1848. Sudré objected not only to the democratic impetus that led to the adoption of universal male suffrage, but also to what he regarded as a genuine aberration: that is, to the attempt by workers to take part in political power in order to exert influence on the social balance.⁵

³ Carlos Hoevel, “Economía e instituciones en el pensamiento de Antonio Rosmini: coincidencias y diferencias con la tradición liberal,” *Revista Europea de Economía Política*, 2009, 6.2, 227.

⁴ Alfred Sudré, *Historia del comunismo o refutación histórica de las utopías socialistas* (Barcelona: n.d., 1856) (foreword by Mañé i Flaquer).

⁵ “The revolution of 1848 has apparently come to sanction the final triumph of democracy in France, given that it has destroyed the last social privilege, namely,

Beyond the theoretical developments of the time and even beyond the ultimate unfolding of events in France, the mobilisations of 1848 marked a turning point, ushering in the organisational momentum of the socialist movement. In other words, socialist demands, which had begun to emerge in the context of a revolt that remained broadly liberal and bourgeois in character, gradually took firm hold and became permanent. Socialist revolution was no longer only an extemporaneous danger at a time of rupture: it became an entire political programme that would organise millions of workers around the world, transforming them into an ever more prominent actor on the political stage and spurring a growing opposition from conservative governments and public opinion.

The shift in the perception of the “dangerousness” of the international socialist movement became very clear during the Paris Commune.⁶ The contrast between the political experiment’s chances of survival and the harshness of the ensuing crackdown offered stark evidence of the change: a real fear swept through every chancellery as a consequence of those few weeks of workers’ government. They feared not only that the contagion might gain momentum and spread elsewhere, but also that the strength of the international labour movement itself was growing and expanding.

For this reason, the anti-revolutionary paradigm changed again and, in more than one case, became linked to a series of concrete measures. Indeed, from both a theoretical and a practical perspective, direct opposition of the sort that had been undertaken up until that point alternated with a new strategy focused on defusing the revolutionary phenomenon through acceptance of the some of the workers’ demands.

In this respect, the spectrum of theoretical responses to defuse revolution covered practically every country and tradition of thought. If we turn first to the Catholics, the encyclical *Quod Apostolici Muneris* of 1878 expressed some concern over the growth of labour organisations after the creation of the First International. However, while the text gave a

the privilege of the electoral roll and of the nobility. Now, with his vote, every citizen can exert influence on the government, he need not doff his hat or tug his forelock beyond the principle that prescribes respect for the majority (...) Never before has there been a more complete revolution nor one that has encountered less resistance; and yet, for some men, it has not yet been radical enough.” Sudré, *Historia del comunismo*.

⁶ For more information on the Paris Commune, see the classic text by Prosper Olivier Lissagaray and Gervasio Ruiz, *Historia de la Comuna de Paris* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971); Nildo Viana, “O significado político da Comuna de Paris,” *Em Debate*, 2011, no. 6, 60-82.

negative characterisation that spoke of “that sect of men”,⁷ it did attest in some degree to the existence of a political reality that would not go away. Some years later, in 1891, Pope Leo XIII published a document that is perhaps the most important in the whole Catholic tradition on the social question and the labour movement: with the encyclical *De Rerum Novarum*,⁸ the Catholic Church proceeded to develop its own theoretical approaches to the long-evaded question. The first step was to acknowledge the enormous inequalities being generated by the capitalist system. In its *pars destruens*, however, the encyclical roundly criticised the class struggle from a moral standpoint, although the fact that the critique was so vigorous contributed to putting the class struggle front and centre. In its *pars construens*, by contrast, the encyclical advocated a system of collaboration among the classes that would be corporate in nature, prescribing restraint on all sides: the capitalists were enjoined to lay aside excessive pressure in the pursuit of gain, while the workers were told to chasten any desire to change the system radically. As is well known, *De Rerum Novarum* would inspire one of the leading political currents of the twentieth century: Christian democracy.

However, the Catholic world was not alone in acknowledging the new state of affairs or in trying to propose alternatives to defuse the revolutionary momentum by means of an approach that would, to some extent, correct the excesses of capitalism. In France, the schools of contractualism and solidarity, coming in the wake of late positivism, put forward the need for a new arrangement between the state and workers to safeguard a minimum of social benefits as an obligation of the authorities for the contribution made by workers to society through their labour.⁹

Even in Great Britain, the birthplace of political liberalism, the Whigs had to adapt their discourse, impelled by the strength of a trade-union movement that would shortly have its own specific political instrument, the Labour Party. The so-called New Liberalism¹⁰—which came to

⁷ This can be consulted in Leo XIII, “Quod Apostolici Muneris (1878),” *La Razón histórica: revista hispanoamericana de historia de las ideas políticas y sociales*, 2012, no. 17, 69-77.

⁸ Silvio Beretta, “Stato ed economia nel discorso sociale della chiesa a cento anni dalla *Rerum novarum*,” *Il Politico*, 1990, 593-617.

⁹ The leading theorist of French solidarity was the sociologist Célestin Charles Alfred Bouglé. See Salvador Juan, *La escuela francesa de socioantropología: entre disciplina científica y compromiso social* (Valencia: PUV, 2014).

¹⁰ The most important theorist was Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse, who distilled his doctrine in Leonard T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

influence important leaders of the Liberal Party, such as Lloyd George himself¹¹—would break new ground by asserting that some rights, such as the right to education, health care or support in periods of unemployment, had to be taken as fundamental rights and that the state had a duty to oversee some benefits to ensure their fulfilment.

Bismarck's Germany, however, was probably the place where the theory was most thoroughly put into practice.¹² This was partly because of the presence of a robust school of social scientific thought known in German as *Kathedersozialismus*, or "academic socialism".¹³ Another reason lay in the fact that the bulk of the labour movement soon moved

¹¹ "The old Liberals in this country used the natural discontent of the people with the poverty and precariousness of the means of subsistence as a motive power to win for them a better, more influential, and more honourable status in the citizenship of their native land. The new Liberalism, while pursuing this great political ideal with unflinching energy, devotes a part of its endeavour also to the removing of the immediate causes of discontent. It is true that men cannot live by bread alone. It is equally true that a man cannot live without bread. [...] It is a recognition of that elemental fact that has promoted legislation like the Old Age Pensions Act. It is but the beginning of things. Poverty is the result of a man's own misconduct or misfortune. [...] In so far as he brings it on himself, the State cannot accomplish much. It can do something, however, to protect him". David Lloyd George, "The New Liberalism" [Speech on social reform delivered at Swansea, October 1, 1908. Lloyd George was the keynote speaker at the meeting of the Welsh Liberal Convention.]

¹² Kaiser Wilhelm himself gave a speech, which was very likely written by Bismarck, in which he said that Germany was introducing compulsory insurance in November 1881: "The cure of social ills must be sought not exclusively in the repression of Social Democratic excesses, but simultaneously in the positive advancement of the welfare of the working classes". Cited in Fernando Álvarez-Uría and Julia, *Sociología, capitalismo y democracia: génesis e institucionalización de la sociología en Occidente* (Madrid: Morata, 2004), 181.

¹³ The most important representative figure in "academic socialism" was the economist Gustav Friedrich von Schmoller (Heilbronn, 1838—Bad Harzburg, 1917). Schmoller, who was a leader of the German historical school of economics, took an historical-descriptive and empirical method to analyse economic policy. He held an important chair at the University of Berlin, from which he exerted a strong influence on German academia in the final years of the nineteenth century. A fierce adversary of the classical, neoclassical and Marxist schools, Schmoller was a member of what some liberal thinkers of the period called "academic socialists" because of his ideas on social reform. After his death, the historicist school and his influence gradually declined. See Yuichi Shionoya (ed.), *The German Historical School: The Historical and Ethical Approach to Economics*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

into institutional politics¹⁴ and became an interlocutor that the authorities regarded as trustworthy. Thus, in the two decades spanning the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany witnessed the enactment of modern legislation regulating old-age and sickness benefits for workers, as well as a whole series of measures to improve housing and working conditions.

In short, on the eve of the Great War, the fear of Revolution appeared to be fenced in and tamed by means of a containment strategy that alternated between repression and the concession of measures to mitigate the most destructive effects of the capitalist system. To some extent, the ruling classes of a world that was in stark decline and crisis (though they were probably unaware of this themselves) had agreed to pay the price for “domesticating” the labour movement by enacting social reforms that would dispel any temptation on the part of the working classes to seize power. With the outbreak of war, however, all the balances of the precarious system were thrown into the air. The Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in Russia signalled that the river might overflow its banks anywhere and at any moment. Fear once again became a dominant force.

The Revolution in Russia: Old and New Responses

The news of events in Russia between February and November 1917 reached the rest of Europe in a communicative context of wartime. At least initially, therefore, the bulk of the attention went to how the turbulent events might affect Russia’s participation in the conflict and how its possible withdrawal could upset the balance of military forces. More generally, the belief in 1917 was that the events unfolding in that large and distant country needed to be framed simply as further examples of wartime upheaval. Ultimately, the Bolshevik “anomalies” would clear up like fog lifting after a storm, once Europe had dealt with its own reorganisation after the cessation of hostilities. In addition, the outbreak of civil war immediately after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk portended a very difficult future for Lenin and his comrades. In fact, very few observers gave the recently created Red Army any real chance of success.

Fear spread far and wide at the end of the Great War, basically for two reasons. First, despite the military efforts of the White Russians and the international powers engaged in anti-Bolshevik coalitions, the Russian communists resisted and kept up the fight on a variety of fronts. Second, the end of the war brought a sense of disorientation, which unleashed a

¹⁴ HEIMANN, Horst Heimann, *Textos sobre el Revisionismo: La actualidad de Eduard Bernstein* (México, Nueva Imagen, 1982).

wave of instability in the most varied of countries, winners and losers alike, and the example of the Russian Revolution spread as an alternative across the length and breadth of the continent. There was a broad catalogue of revolutionary attempts and, more generally, of revolutionary labour mobilisation. Examples include the short-lived Hungarian Socialist Republic of Bela Kun,¹⁵ which emerged out of the disintegration of the Habsburg empire; the Spartacist uprising of Rosa Luxemburg in Germany,¹⁶ against the backdrop of the terminal crisis of the defeated Reich; the Italian mobilisations of the *Biennio Rosso*, or Red Biennium, from 1918 to 1920,¹⁷ which shook the factories and fields of a country in severe crisis despite having been on the winning side in the war; and even the spate of workers' mobilisations in Spain, which began in 1917 and would go on practically uninterrupted until 1923.¹⁸ All these phenomena provide ample proof of the direct influence of events in Russia. Even in the democracies of France, Great Britain and the United States, the immediate post-war years witnessed a spike in social unrest.

And the fear kept spreading. All of the above efforts, regardless of their viability—none ultimately succeeded—conveyed a perception of the threat of a revolutionary contagion the likes of which the world had never seen. The panic also stemmed from the fact that such movements now had a touchstone that was proving surprisingly successful and well on its way to consolidation. In most cases, the practical responses ran counter to liberal democracy itself. In more than one instance, the repression was fierce: the revolutionary experiment of Bela Kun in Hungary ended in bloodshed, followed by a military dictatorship. In Spain, the revolutionary cycle was brought to an end with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. In Italy, the tail-end of the *Biennio Rosso* rocked the foundations of the system so severely that the ruling classes themselves turned to Mussolini and his Blackshirts, which they viewed at first as a perhaps unseemly but effective antidote to the revolutionaries, without grasping the similarly revolutionary (but anti-democratic) potential of his movement. In Germany, the Spartacists were simply crushed, while in the United States,

¹⁵ Jörg Konrad Hoensch and Kim Traynor, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867-1986* (Harlow: Longman, 1988).

¹⁶ Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁷ Giuseppe Maione, *Il biennio rosso: autonomia e spontaneità operaia nel 1919-1920* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1975); Paolo Spriano, *L'occupazione delle fabbriche: settembre 1920* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964).

¹⁸ Eduardo González Calleja, *El Máuser y el sufragio: orden público, subversión y violencia política en la crisis de la Restauración [1917-1931]* (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1999).

under President Wilson, a repressive campaign struck a heavy blow at the labour movement. In France and Great Britain, the elections held after the First World War witnessed crucial advances by the workers' parties. In the French case, the fear of the rise of the left led to the creation of a grand coalition (the *Bloc National*), which was clearly anti-socialist. In the British case, by contrast, the Labour Party entered government for the first time in 1923 after its setback in the elections of 1918.

On the other hand, events in Russia had driven a rift through the international labour movement: between 1919 and 1922, the left wings of the classical socialist parties in practically every country broke away to create new communist parties, which supported the Bolshevik experience and acknowledged the role of the Russian communists as the guide responsible for directing revolutionary strategies worldwide. In other words, the "spectre of communism" that Marx had commended in *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 had taken on a dynamic body with an ability to manoeuvre. It had done so because the First World War had pulverised the political, economic, social and cultural system inherited from the nineteenth century, and the unexpected success of the events in Russia had pointed to a new way forward towards the construction of an alternative built on new foundations. The Bolshevik Revolution had turned into the revolutionary paradigm *par excellence*.

As a result, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a wide variety of political cultures began to forge responses that were not merely anti-revolutionary, but first and foremost anti-Bolshevik. The responses could be divided into those that accepted the end of the entire nineteenth-century world and those that instead sought to cling to the experience of classical liberal democracy.

The first current must include the doctrines of Fascism, especially Italian Fascism¹⁹ and German Nazism, which opposed the Soviet experience with a paradigm that they considered equally revolutionary. Rather than class, they placed nation and race at the centre of a new political and cultural reality, together with an interpretation of social relations that rejected class conflict in favour of what was called corporativism in its different versions. The second current, by contrast, contained Catholic thought and the rump of a once hegemonic liberal thought, which had been left without the conceptual tools it needed to understand the new realities arising from the experience of the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

¹⁹ Emilio Gentile, *El culto del littorio: la sacralización de la política en la Italia fascista*. (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2007).

Significantly, the two currents were to rub shoulders in practical and narrative terms in the Spanish Civil War—possibly the moment during the interwar period when the perception of a potential revolutionary contagion across Europe (embodied by an increase in Soviet power)—was at its strongest.

The demonization of Bolshevism was left to one side in the years of the Second World War: of necessity, wartime demands brought a relaxation of attacks on the Soviet Union. But the respite would prove short-lived: after the end of the war and a brief interlude of ongoing collaboration between the former allies, the Cold War began.

Indeed, during the Cold War, the profile of anti-communism changed a great deal. From offering theory and practice of an anti-revolutionary sort, it turned into a system of control whose purpose was to shore up the status quo established across the so-called “free world”.

Anti-Communism during the Cold War

The ultimate consolidation of the Soviet Union after the Second World War came hand-in-hand with the country's newfound status as a global superpower. In other words, not only did the existence of a major communist country become well established, but also the events of the war had expanded the presence of communism in the world. This was partly the result of the logic of spheres of influence which emanated from the Yalta accords and took final form between 1947 and 1950.²⁰ It was also partly because a number of important processes of emancipation—for example, in China and in parts of Vietnam and Korea—culminated in the construction of regimes that were communist in nature, with relations of differing intensity with the USSR itself. Simply put, if Russia's “communist exoticism” was an important but ultimately only a single exception in the 1930s, millions upon millions of people lived under communist systems around the world by 1950, particularly in Europe and Asia.

For all these reasons, the fear of revolution returned. This time it emerged as a major weapon of one of the two great adversaries in the Cold War and its worldwide allies, globalising and institutionalising the struggle and establishing a clear contrast with what became defined as the “Evil Empire”.²¹ Now more than ever, the confrontation concerned armies,

²⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*. (London: Penguin, 2006).

²¹ Josep Fontana, *Por el bien del imperio: una historia del mundo desde 1945*. (Barcelona: Pasado & Presente, 2013).

governments, security and espionage services and enormously powerful cultural industries.²² The political, military and cultural operation assumed dimensions never before seen and it focused chiefly on two top-priority objectives: to stop the potential advance of communism everywhere in the world (beyond the nations that had been assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence in the Yalta partitions) and to prevent communist forces (in political parties and in trade unions) from gaining firm hold in countries of the so-called “free world” or even more from putting themselves forward as viable governing alternatives.

From a purely narrative standpoint, the aims were soon translated into discursive mechanisms, in the form of clichés, focused on attacking the USSR and communists in other countries. In this context, two particular clichés became typical of external anti-communism. They revolved around two core notions: the first was that the USSR was always preparing for war and was therefore stealing information and fomenting uprisings in the world to achieve political destabilisation. The other regarded the supposed inherent evil of the Soviet system, which repressed its citizens who all wanted to escape. In addition, a whole series of clichés relating to so-called “internal anti-communism” were codified and popularised in order to discredit communist parties and trade unions in a host of countries. Communists in these countries were not only atheists (and therefore less trustworthy), but they also put Soviet interests ahead of the interests of their own peoples (the hackneyed cliché of the internal enemy resurfacing in an updated form) and were infiltrating democratic workers’ organisations such as trade unions.

It is materially impossible to delineate the many aspects of the development of an anti-communism which, over the decades of the Cold War, would become global in terms of its geographical extent and in terms of its ideological, narrative and concrete forms of dissemination and application. However, it is possible to trace its spread, provided that due attention is always given to the diversity of situations, places and circumstances in which anti-communism developed in the second half of the twentieth century. In general, the most intense cycles are concentrated in two periods, defined as the two major waves of anti-communism. The first wave occurred between the late 1940s—when every vestige of anti-Fascist collaboration had been destroyed and the adversarial stances of the US and the Soviet Union were well established at a planetary level—and the mid-1950s, until the process of de-Stalinisation. The second wave then

²² Frances Stonor Saunders, *La guerra fredda culturale: La Cia e il mondo delle lettere e delle arti* (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2004).

came between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1970s, when the long-term effects of the Cuban revolution were felt in various corners of the world and US forces were bogged down in Vietnam.

Examples in the two periods are practically endless and cover very different realities. Certainly, it is worthwhile noting the expulsion of all communist parties from the national unity governments formed in Western Europe just after the war—the French and Italian cases²³ are particularly significant in this respect, because of the strong electoral presence of the respective parties—and the establishment of mechanisms integrated into the structures of NATO in order to remove any chance of these parties coming to power, even peacefully and lawfully.²⁴ The ideological battle, however, was not limited to a Western Europe in reconstruction, where the aim was to bind the region very closely to US interests; it also took place in North and South America. This explains the creation of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in 1948, an organisation based on cooperation but which also consolidated US hegemony in the region and explicitly adopted the anti-communist clichés of the time. The force of anti-communism, however, was even felt within the US itself: the country's small communist party was the subject of outright persecution as witnessed by the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, a couple accused of espionage in 1950 and put to death in the electric chair in 1953. The Rosenbergs were served up as a cautionary tale for American society as a whole. The peak of anti-communist pressure in the US would come with the Republican victory of 1952 and the creation of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was chaired by Joseph McCarthy, a right-wing senator from Wisconsin. The HUAC's activities, which persisted until 1956, included accusations, interrogations, irregular procedures, black lists and even slanders against anyone who came under suspicion of having communist sympathies. The concepts of "sympathy" and "communist" were stretched to unprecedented extremes. As a result, thousands of US citizens were dragged before the committee chaired by the Wisconsin senator, many of them from the world of journalism, culture and film. The witch-hunt was directed at generically "progressive" sectors, reckoned famous people among its victims (figures like Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Gregory Peck, Katherine Hepburn, Kirk Douglas, Burt

²³ For more information on the Italian and French cases, see the recent work by Andrea Guiso, "I Partiti comunisti e la crisi del 1947 in Italia e in Francia: Una riconsiderazione in chiave comparativa," *Ventesimo secolo*, 2007, no. 6.12, 131-168.

²⁴ Giacomo Pacini, "The Origins of "Stay Behind" Organisations, 1943-1956," *Contemporanea*, 2007, no. 10.4, 581-606.

Lancaster, Gene Kelly, Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht were subpoenaed to testify), and would ultimately taint public debate as a whole, shifting starkly in the direction of a hostility toward left-wing sensibilities²⁵ that was hard to reconcile with the country's claim to be the champion of the "free world".²⁶

After 1956, the year of the 20th Congress of the CPSU at which Stalin's crimes were denounced, the first wave began to taper off, though not before further episodes of some gravity such as the illegalisation of the communists in West Germany, who were banned from running again until 1961.²⁷ The two blocs soon initiated a period of détente that would be put to the test in the Cuban missile crisis.

Precisely as a consequence of events in Cuba, however, the narratives and practices of anti-communism intensified again. The consolidation of Fidel Castro's regime triggered what has been defined as communism's second spring insofar as it served as an example for many transformative movements in Latin America throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the wake of the US military experience in Vietnam and the political damage caused to the country's worldwide image, the heightened mobilisation in widely disparate countries across the developed world, and the growing momentum of anti-imperialist struggles, the new scenario looked extremely propitious for communism to make significant headway—especially in Latin America, in developing regions and even in the countries of southern Europe, some of which were going through periods of severe instability or were just emerging from dictatorships.

This is the context in which the second major anti-communist wave unfolded. In developing countries, it took the form of military intervention that might be direct (as in the case of Vietnam) or indirect (as in the case of Angola). In the countries of southern Europe, the forms of intervention were manifold, ranging from the unexplained twists and turns of the strategy of tension in Italy (beyond the fact of US intervention) to explicit or implicit movements to steer the democratic transitions in Portugal, Spain and Greece, which all appeared uncertain and potentially susceptible to an advancement of communism (especially in Portugal, which set off

²⁵ For more information on the field of historiography, see Juan Alberto Bozza, "Navegar en la tormenta: El anticomunismo en la historiografía de los Estados Unidos durante la Guerra Fría," *Sociohistórica*, 2014, 33.

²⁶ Sciltian Gastaldi, *Assalto all'informazione: Il maccartismo e la stampa americana* (Monte Porzio Catone: Effepi Libri, 2006).

²⁷ Hermann Schmitt and Karlheinz Reif, "Del pluralismo polarizado al moderado: El sistema de partidos de Alemania Occidental," *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 1982, no. 27, 65-86.

alarm bells regarding the other two countries). But perhaps the place where the most brutal impact of the new wave of anti-communism was felt (not only in narrative, but also in real and concrete terms) was Latin America. Certainly, the most famous cases are Chile, where the transformative, democratic political experience under President Allende was cut short by a coup, and Argentina, where a starkly anti-insurgent dictatorship plunged the country into bloodshed from 1976 to 1983.²⁸ In reality, however, the anti-communist reaction was visible in a variety of forms across Latin America. Uruguay, Brazil and later Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua all became arenas for a violent anti-communism that persisted practically until the end of the Cold War in a variety of forms, including dictatorships, terrorism and repression.

From the late 1940s until 1989, the fear of revolution and anti-communism were both constant features of the world's political and cultural landscape. They came together in an eclectic political culture that underpinned one of the major adversarial blocs and, at the same time, they gained wide currency as the lifeblood of political practices whose aims were control and preservation. In global terms, they served as a safeguard to maintain the status quo that had emerged from the Cold War, while on the domestic front they provided individual countries with levers to keep the social and economic balances as they were.

Anti-Communism after the Berlin Wall

That night in 1989, when thousands upon thousands of East Berliners swarmed through the checkpoints of a wall that had divided not only a city but probably the entire world, is likely to be the sharpest image of the fall of communism in living memory. The dissolution of the Soviet Union two years later has perhaps achieved less iconic power. Yet while that night involved events that the whole world could watch live in real time and amounted to a near-unanimous death sentence for all that communism had represented, anti-communism surprisingly survived well beyond the two-year period 1989-1991. For another decade or more, a veritable flood of studies, essays and pamphlets, reflecting widely different levels of intellectual

²⁸ Juan Alberto Bozza, "Ciencias sociales y Guerra Fría: Del anticomunismo a la contrainsurgencia," in: VII Jornadas de Sociología de la UNLP December 5-7 in La Plata, Argentina. Argentina en el escenario latinoamericano actual: Debates desde las ciencias sociales. (Universidad Nacional de La Plata Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación. Departamento de Sociología, 2012).

rigour,²⁹ sought to provide conceptual weapons for use in the public debate. Anti-communism became increasingly spent and incongruous, not just because most communist regimes had already fallen, but also because even in democratic contexts, the communist parties changed their names and rejected the Soviet experience either in part or in full. Nonetheless, anti-communism continued to serve as a preferred narrative resource to discredit any form of critique of the prevailing system and the hegemony of neo-liberal economic propositions that had taken hold since the early 1980s. In this context, the ability to call up the errors and horrors of the Soviet system at any time proved to be an unbeatable advantage. In the end, not only did the parties and movements that defined themselves as communist lose their ability to resist and to make proposals, but so did any movement that focused on the rights of workers and the working classes. Once again, the Revolution changed in meaning: now, it claimed to be neo-liberal and perhaps antithetical to all past experiences. The people who are frightened of this new project are certainly not lacking in numbers, but, so far at least, they have lacked the ability or the knowledge necessary to halt a contagion that is truly global.

²⁹ Certainly, the most robust contributions that framed the discussion globally, beyond the use (in many cases, the tremendously perilous use) that was made of them, were Francis Fukuyama, *El fin de la historia y el último hombre* (Barcelona: Planeta-De Agostini, 1995); [in the original English: *The End of History and the Last Man*] and François Furet, *Il passato di un'illusione. L'idea comunista nel XX secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1995).

CHAPTER SIX

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BARRICADES: THE FATE OF SUB-LIEUTENANT SKALOV DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 1917

VICTOR L. JEIFETS AND LAZAR S. JEIFETS

When we talk about the role of individuals in history, we tend to mean the ones who stand at the top of the historical pyramid. Almost always, the most striking developments seem to be the deeds of these major figures, who attracted most of the attention of researchers. However, the actors of the play remain often in the shadow of the historical scene, but those who give terse remarks sometimes stay in the memory of the audience, while the main characters' monologues pass by unnoticed.

But there are other participants in historical events as well, secondary characters who do not control what is happening around them, but upon whose actions and responses a great deal depends. The course of many processes is finally determined by the decision of these minor figures to take one or another side. Isn't this one of the reasons for interest in novels that are not formally related to the genre of historical fiction, in which the real characters act on the periphery of the plot, and we follow the refraction of the events of history through the fates of heroes whose names are not to be found in encyclopaedias and textbooks?

And is it not the influence of their fates (either real, or created by the author's imagination) that largely determines the outcome of the events in the novel? And what occurs in reality? In the public consciousness, the tremendous changes in Russian history are associated both with the famous military leader in the 'Patriotic' War against Napoleon's invasion in 1812, Mikhail Kutuzov, and with the hero of Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* Andrei Bolkonsky. And the same story can be seen in respect to the characters of Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, Podtyolkov and Melekhov, the head of the Anarchist movement in Russia and Ukraine

Nestor Makhno, and the character in Alexey Tolstoy's novel *The Road to Calvary*, Vadim Roshchin.

And how many real people haven't found great writers able to novelise their tragic fates, which have become the destiny of their country? Why are there so few fundamental works by psychologists investigating the breakdown of characters, worldviews, and human lives in the Revolution and Civil War?

It is said that history does not deal in counterfactuals. That is true. Nevertheless, many people are eager to know how would the martyrology of our country's history would have looked if the events of October 1917 had not occurred. What names would be carved in the people's memory, and which ones would have fallen into oblivion? In those momentous times, today's heroes and those unknown characters stood side by side. History rolled the dice, and they came to rest in a particular way on the gambling table. But why not—in the imagination at least—mix them up again, and see how fate might have placed them if things had been different?

From February to October of 1917

The name of Georgy Borisovich Skalov (and his pseudonym Georgy Sinani) is known to all researchers of Latin America in our country, but for years his life was shrouded in mystery. What can one learn about him from a brief and apparently ordinary document—an autobiography, written long ago, in 1933, for a party commission during the "Purges"? It turns out that his account gives us not just an impression of Skalov himself, but of the time in which he lived; and it may make us question the evaluations of his achievements as a politician and a scientist made by Marxist historiographers on him as a politician and a scientist. The thought does not go away: compelled to make such a confession, what must this person have experienced? What guided the censor (or censors?) who scoured the pages of his autobiography with their blue pencil and deleted the fate of Skalov—even though his exploits would have made him the ideal subject of a novel to match *And Quiet Flows the Don* or *The Road to Calvary*? And who was this mysterious censor, deciding the biographies of other people, prominent characters in the Soviet government and the Communist International (the III International, or the Comintern)?

The young sub-lieutenant of the Russian imperial army Georgy Skalov, who, by the hand of destiny, found himself in Petrograd in the violent days of February 1917, was elevated to the heights of the new government by the maelstrom of the Revolution. Among the 22 candidates of the section

of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (unified) proposed to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, his name appeared first.¹ Skalov carried out his duties in the governance of the Soviet together with celebrities of the moment: Socialist-Revolutionaries (*esery*) Alexander Kerensky (the future head of the Provisional Government),² Nikolai Avksentiev, Victor Chernov, the Mensheviks Yuly Martov, Fedor Dan, Nikolai Chkhaidze, *Interdistrictite* Lev Trotsky, and rising stars of the coming revolution—the Bolsheviks Iosif Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, and Alexander Shlyapnikov. After the First Congress of the Soviets Skalov became a member of the first All-Russian Central Executive Committee (CEC) of Soviets and of the Bureau of the Military Department of the All-Russian CEC.³

Skalov's activity in the Petrograd Soviet and the All-Russian CEC was primarily connected with military issues. He was a member of the All-Russian CEC's Commissions on the reorganization of the army, its manning and supply; he was one of the persons responsible for solving soldiers' issues, and also acted as chairman of the commission on military affairs in other localities. A brief survey of Skalov's articles, published in the *Voice of the Soldier*, gives us a faithful idea of his political views: the sub-lieutenant was sure that that "military affairs are in the reliable and strong hands of a man, devoted to the revolution" [Alexander Kerensky]; he placed his "full trust" in the Provisional Government and rejected absolutely the forces acting against it.⁴ He was undoubtedly a firm supporter of the Provisional Government, along with most of the factions of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries; the Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were his political adversaries.

Evaluating the events in the First machine-gun regiment on June 20, when the soldiers showed their disloyalty to the Provisional Government, Skalov wrote:

1 *Golos soldata* (Petrograd), September 13, 1917. According to Skalov, he had no any solid political convictions before the February Revolution; however, he joined the Menshevik faction in the Petrograd Soviet and obtained the documents which testified to his membership since 1916. Georgy Skalov, *Autobiography*, Georgy Borisovich Skalov's Personal File, fund 495, register 65a, file 4569, 33, Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI).

² For Alexander Kerensky's biographical details, see: L. G. Protasov, *Liudi Uchreditelnogo sobraniia: portret v interiere epokhi* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 309.

³ Skalov, *Autobiography*, 33; *Politicheskie deiateli Rossii 1917 goda. Biograficheskii spravochnik* (Moscow: Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 1993), 377.

⁴ *Golos soldata*, May 9, June 14 and 21, July 4, September 26 and 30, 1917.

German spies and counter-revolutionaries, who change their appearance either under the Bolsheviks or under the Anarchists, “with their actions” would plunge the knife into the back of our brothers at the front.⁵

Georgy Skalov's “moments of glory” came at a time when the Provisional Government was facing real danger. Skalov was a permanent member of the “military committees”, acting in the days of crisis, deciding the fate of the revolution. The documents issued by these committees testify to his desire to prevent bloodshed. For example, on June 18 the Committee instructed the demonstrators to ensure the “exclusively peaceful” nature of the demonstration: “no armed soldiers, not a single rifle taken out of the barracks... Those who take up weapons offend democracy”. At the same time, the Commander-in-Chief, General Lavr Kornilov was urged by the Executive Committee to withdraw his troops immediately and to obey its orders. It was declared that

the ransacking of the printing house of “Pravda” newspaper... is a direct consequence of unorganized armed demonstrations. The only guarantee against the repeat of such ugly events is the subordination of troops to the Council, to the orders of the Commander-in-Chief.⁶

Skalov signed many of these appeals or was named in them as one of the persons responsible for the maintenance of the revolutionary order (together with Chkheidze, Boris Bogdanov, Nikolai Sokolov, Socialist-Revolutionary Vasily Filippovsky and others).

Skalov was at the centre of events, albeit in the shadow of better known party leaders. In his memoirs prominent Bolshevik leader Fyodor Raskolnikov⁷ recalled the meeting between Kronstadt sailors and representatives of the “military commission” at the Tauride Palace on July 5: seated at a long table there were the chairman, the Menshevik Mikhail (Mark) Lieber, and other Menshevik party members Vladimir Voitinsky,

⁵ *Golos soldata*, June 21, 1917.

⁶ *Petrogradskii Sovet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov. Protokoly zasedanii Ispolnitelnogo komiteta i biuro I.K.* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1925); *Izvestia* (Petrograd), June 18, 1917; *Golos soldata*, July 6, 1917.

⁷ For Fyodor Raskolnikov's biography, see: Grant Mkrtchevich Adibekov, E. N. Shachnazarova, Kirill Kirillovich Shirinia, *Organizatsionnaia struktura Komintern 1919-1943* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997); Raskolnikov Fedor Fedorovich. Bibliographiskii ukazatel', http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_r/raskolnikov_ff.php. [last accessed: December 22, 2017]; Academic Slovari i entsiklopedii, <http://dic.academic.ru> [last accessed: December 22, 2017].

Bogdanov and Nikolai Sukhanov, “as well as several other young men in officer’s uniform, whose names I did not know.”⁸ The commission gave the Kronstadters a tough ultimatum—that they should disarm immediately or face the consequences. In all the probability, one of the “young people” unknown to Raskolnikov was Georgy Skalov.

However, declarations and appeals to keep the peace could not extinguish the passions, and Skalov acted in full accordance with his principles. As it turned out, it would be these actions that, eighteen years later, will seal his fate at his trial.

On October 24, as duty assistant to the Commissar for the Staff of the Petrogradsky Military District, Skalov signed instructions to send an armoured truck to assist in the closure of the Bolshevik newspaper *Rabochy Put* (Workers’ Path). He addressed “all regimental and relevant committees of parts of Petrograd”, and sounded a dramatic appeal:

At this terrible moment, when the danger of internecine war looms over Petrograd, only the calmness and endurance of all the soldiers of the garrison can prevent bloodshed and save the revolution. At the moment of the opening of the Congress of Soviets, any demonstration will disrupt not only the Congress, but also the Constituent Assembly. Only madmen or those who do not understand the consequences would call a demonstration at this time.⁹

On October 29, some days after the Bolsheviks had seized power and ousted the Provisional Government, Skalov was working in the Inzhenerny Castle, declared by the Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland and Revolution (CSMR) as a gathering place for all military units “recovered from the Bolshevik escapade and wishing to serve the revolution and freedom.”¹⁰ When this attempt at anti-Bolshevik resistance failed, CSMR member Skalov went to the Northern Front in November with the aim of coordinating a joint offensive against the Bolshevik authority in Petrograd, starting from the city of Pskov.¹¹

⁸ Fyodor Fyodorovich Raskolnikov, *O vremeni i o sebe. Vospominaniia pis'ma dokumenty* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1989), 187–188.

⁹ Georgy Borisovich Skalov’s Personal File, 35.

¹⁰ *Velikaia Oktiabrskaiia sotsialisticheskaiia revoliutsiia. Dokumenty i materialy. Oktiabrskoie voozuzhennoie vosstanie v Petrograde* (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR. Institut Istorii, 1957), 331; A. L. Popov, *Oktiabrskii perevorot. Fakty i dokumenty* (Petrograd: 1918), 165.

¹¹ Vasilii Dmitrievich Polikarpov, *Prolog grazhdanskoi voiny v Rossii. Oktiabr’ 1917-fevrali 1918* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 150–151.

Upon his return to the capital, he was appointed by the Mensheviks to serve in the bureau of the Union for the Protection of the Constituent Assembly. Together with other bureau members, he was arrested by Bolsheviks on December 16 and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress.¹² After the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in the early 1918, its defenders were released without trial by the new authorities, and Georgy Skalov immediately continued his anti-Bolshevik odyssey in Mogilev and Samara. While there, he defended the “March position on the inadmissibility of armed struggle against the Soviets”, but the momentum of the struggle drew him further onwards to Izhevsk and Ufa, where cooperation with the Socialist-Menshevik groups of the Constituent Assembly continued.

Those groups sent Skalov to the operational department of the army headquarters of the Committee of the Constituent Assembly members (*KomUch*), an anti-Bolshevik political institution that combined legislative, executive, judicial and military functions in several parts of Russia, mainly in the Volga Region. In the territories controlled by the Committee, democratic freedoms were restored, a red state flag was introduced, an 8-hour working day was established, the activity of factory committees and trade unions was permitted, and workers' conferences and peasant congresses were held. Urban and *zemstvo* self-governments were reinstated, banks and industrial enterprises denationalised, and private trade was revived. Here, in one of the centres of active confrontation with the Soviet authorities, the Menshevik Skalov began the painful rupture with his past and with the struggle to defend the ideals of February. Evaluating his doubts later, Skalov wrote “This does not fit into the logical framework... There was no clear position in my head, but confusion, mess.”¹³

Then there was routine work in the Archives Department, where Skalov came on the recommendation of the Bolshevik David Ryazanov (whom, in June, he helped organise the storage of Marx's manuscripts). But he soon got tired of this humdrum work and in the spring of 1919 he joined the Red Army, where (the paradoxes of turbulent times!) the “politically unverified” former Menshevik was appointed lecturer-propagandist of the Regional Military Committee in Samara, and then at the political department of the Southern group of the Eastern Front.

Skalov's career took a new turn after a meeting with his former colleague from Soviets, the Bolshevik Shalva Eliava (head of the All-

¹² *Nabat revoliutsii* (Petrograd), December 17, 1917.

¹³ Georgy Borisovich Skalov's Personal File, 24-25.

Russian CEC and the People's Commissars' Council of Russia Turkestan Commission), who offered him a job in Turkestan. In November 1919, in Tashkent, Skalov joined the Russian Communist Party (RKP), and became a Bolshevik, after slightly more than two years of political activity—part of which he had devoted to fighting the Bolsheviks, at times by use of arms. These were two years of painful meditation and doubts. Today, we are unlikely to understand all the motives for this radical turn in Skalov's life; but the choice was made, and this new stage of his life began.

On the sands of Turkestan. At the service of Soviet power

Skalov's deeds in Turkestan were remarkable, although in the Russian historiography his name is still overshadowed by those of the Bolshevik military leaders and statesmen Mikhail Frunze, Valerian Kuibyshev, Sergei Gusev and others. On occasions, Skalov simply was not mentioned or his acts were attributed to others, and in fact only recent publications have made it possible to determine his rightful place in the dramatic events of the civil war in Central Asia.¹⁴ In his autobiography Skalov later attributed the assignment of important missions to this recent convert from Menshevism to the shortage of specially trained staff in Turkestan. This appraisal (significantly, written on October 27, 1933, after the party “purification”) seems to be excessively modest: back in 1919, the Bolsheviks had probably been in no position to ask about people's recent pasts. And perhaps there was no need: Skalov's past was well known to many (above all, to Eliava, the head of the Turkestan Commission) and was not considered as anything reprehensible, or an obstacle for his nomination.

In all likelihood, Skalov was appointed on the grounds of his experience and knowledge, his energy, endurance and fearlessness, and his ability to make reasonable compromises.¹⁵ These attributes were especially useful during the suppression of the Cossack uprising in Chimboy, in modern-day Uzbekistan. In the treaty signed with the Soviet authorities in early 1920, the Ural Cossacks and Karakalpaks (who recognised Soviet power), were guaranteed governance in accordance with their customs; they were also promised freedom of conscience, and the rebels were granted amnesty. Skalov, the authorised representative of the Turkestan Commission and the Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan

¹⁴ See, for example, Vladimir L. Genis, *'S Bukharoi nado konchat'... K istorii butaforskikh revoliutsii; dokumental'naia khronika* (Moscow: MNPI, 2001).

¹⁵ Gerasim Kapustin, *Vnizoviyak Amu-Daryi* (Nukus: 1967), 147.

Republic, now had to concentrate on another matter of the utmost importance—"armed support for the rebellious Khiva tribes against the Khiva government". Significantly, Skalov had the right to decide independently on the timing of this operation and authority for the "general leadership of the actions of the Red Army if it crosses the Khiva border".¹⁶ In other words, the decision to attack Khiva (also known as Khoresm) was his responsibility.

Skalov's detachment played a decisive role in eliminating the regime of the leader of the Turkmen tribes, Junaid Khan, who had established dictatorial power in Khiva, while retaining the Khiva khan as a puppet on the throne.

The Soviet power, placing the guiding principle of its national policy the right of each nation to free self-determination, never thought [...] to encroach on the independence of our neighbouring states

said Skalov in his order to the troops.¹⁷

It turned out that the operations of the Red Army replaced the ineffective actions of the so called *Mladokhivintsy*, or Young Khiva. "In all your reports of the glorious Soviet troops", the head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Turkestan Commission Grigory Broydo wrote to Skalov, "we are recording all these victories on the account of the Young Khiva, erasing the participation of Russian troops from all communications".¹⁸

After the overthrow of Junaid Khan, "the Russian representation [became] the de-facto power", and Georgy Skalov entered the Provisional Government of the People's Soviet Republic of Khorezm.¹⁹

Skalov's Central Asian experience was a multifaceted one. At various times he headed the military-political power in the Amudarya department (present-day Karakalpakia), commanded a detachment tasked to putting down the revolt in Verny (described by Dmitry Furmanov in the novel *The Rebellion*), directed the Military Council of the Semirechye, and worked

¹⁶ As cited in *Istoriia kommunisticheskikh organizatsii Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Uzbekistan, 1967), 465; Vladimir L. Genis, "Razgrom Bukharskogo emirate v 1920 godu", *Voprosy Istarii*, 1993, no. 7, 42-44.

¹⁷ As cited in *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsia i grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane. Vol.2. Sentiabr' 1919 – dekabr' 1920* (Alma-Ata: Izd-vo Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1964), 493.

¹⁸ *Nezavisimaa Gazeta* (Moscow), October 14, 1992.

¹⁹ *Istoriia Khorezmskoi Narodnoi Sovetskoi Respubliki (1920–1924). Sbornik dokumentov* (Tashkent: FAN, 1976), 39.

as an authorised representative of the Council of International Propaganda in Xinjiang, the Chinese Turkestan. After the overthrow of the Emir of Bukhara, Skalov was appointed assistant to the plenipotentiary representative of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the representative of the Russian Communist Party and the Comintern, Valerian Kuibyshev, and was in charge of “the political preparation of Sovietisation of Bukhara and the organisation of the Bukhara Communist Party”.²⁰ In the late 1920s he became a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Ferghana Red Army Group and coordinated the struggle against the *Basmachi* movement.

Skalov was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan and was elected by the Turkestan Regional Communist Conference as a delegate at the 10th Congress of the RKP /b/. However, like most of the delegates with military experience, he did not participate in the discussions on the “unity of the party” or about the “anarcho-syndicalist deviation”. During the days of the congress he was in charge of an artillery “dialogue” with the rebels of Kronstadt, for which he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. In the order, his surname was the first to appear.

From the Kronstadt ice he was again sent to the East as head of TurkChK (Turkestan’s Extraordinary Commission, the Bolshevik political police). Among his predecessors were prominent *chekists* Gleb Boki and Jan Peters. In this post, Skalov faced problems which he was powerless to resolve. As recognised in the joint resolution taken by the Executive Bureau of the Central Committee of the CP of Turkestan and the Turkbureau of the CC of the RKP /b/, the local Extraordinary Commission was unable to recruit personnel from the countryside area and was supported only by the urban activists. Consequently, it was extremely difficult, almost impossible “to go beyond the cities”²¹ in order to fight the *Basmachi* movement. Given the significant cultural differences, the task was difficult to solve and required time, but this was precisely what Georgy Skalov did not have.

He did not stay in the role of the “punishing sword of the revolution” for very long. His experience, energy and enthusiasm were in demand in other positions of responsibility: he became secretary of the Semirechensk Regional Committee of the Communist Party, a member of the board of the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture, deputy chairman of the Koshi

²⁰ Georgy Borisovich Skalov’s Personal File, 37.

²¹ As cited in N. Ya. Milshtein, *Pravovoe regulirovanie deiatel’nosti organov bezopasnosti Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: 1974), 59.

Union of Landless Rural Workers and chairman of the Council of the Troops for Special Tasks of Turkestan.

Nor did he escape typhus, the Civil War's most dangerous companion. Skalov fell ill on the way to the Congress of Soviets. Misfortunes never come alone, and after recovering from illness he learned of his expulsion from the party. As the fear of death passed, Skalov was pardoned by Aron Soltz's commission of control over CP militants and was re-instated as a Party militant without any comment.

At the end of 1922, at his own request, Skalov was called to Moscow and was appointed Rector of the Narimanov Institute of Oriental Studies by the decision of Central Committee of the RKP /b/. The new rector impressed all the students and professors:

young, tall, in a long Red Army overcoat, with the Order of the Red Banner on a scarlet silk rosette, wearing a helmet with a star and three rhombuses in his buttonhole (indicating that he was a commander of the army corps).²²

However, Skalov lacked a higher education. Clearly, the RKP /b/'s leadership took into account his other merits, such as his practical knowledge of the East and his remarkable talent as a publicist and analyst. His articles in the *Life of Nationalities* and *New East* about the Khiva revolution, the social nature of *Basmachi* movement, class stratification in Turkestan, and the problems of Soviet Oriental studies, were controversial at the time (Skalov was engaged in public disagreements with Grigory Broydo, his immediate supervisor and Stalin's first deputy in the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, as well as the editor of the *Life of Nationalities*, who had been his rival in the Khiva epic), and remain a subject of debate among scholars today: some researchers consider Skalov to be a pioneer of Russian Eastern studies, while others censure his "uncritical acceptance" of the views of Georgy Safarov, one of the Comintern's specialists in Eastern affairs.

However, Skalov did not have time to transfer his knowledge to students or take part in the organisation of science studies. Already in 1923, because of the "German scare",²³ he was appointed Commissar of

²² V. V. Vishniakova Akimova, *Dva goda v vosstavshem Kitae* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 41.

²³ We refer to the mobilisation of the Red Army in reaction to the Munich Beer Hall Putsch in Germany. For more details, see "Naznachit' revoliutsii v Germanii na 9 noiabria", *Istochnik*, No.5, 1995.

the V division of the Red Army in Polotsk, and after its disbanding he returned to Turkestan to fight against the *Basmachi*.

Under the pseudonym Sinani. At the head of a Latin American Communist Revolution

Very soon Skalov's experience was required elsewhere in the vast and impenetrable East. On the suggestion of the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the RSFSR Mikhail Frunze (who had known him since his days in Turkestan), Skalov was included in a group of Soviet advisers in China who were helping Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat-Sen to form the Kuomintang Party and the Revolutionary National Army. Corps Commander Skalov (now under the pseudonym "Sinani") became head of the Kaifeng Group of Military Advisers and instructor to the Canton Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. After the departure of the Chief Political Adviser to the Kuomintang, Mikhail Borodin, for Moscow, Skalov became political adviser to the Kuomintang government in Canton and also participated in the preparation of the Communist uprising in Nanchang against Chiang Kai-Shek in 1927.

After Skalov's return to the USSR, the ex-rector enrolled at the Eastern Faculty of the Academy of the Red Army. In 1929, however, he resumed active work. As part of the Soviet government's delegation he supervised the examination of the state of defense of the Mongolian People's Republic, the work of the local Extraordinary Commission for public health and education and the formulation of the five-year plan in these areas.²⁴

After this trip, the final part of Skalov's short but extremely full life began. Still in the winter there was a discussion over the possibility of sending him to Mongolia as the Permanent Representative of the Comintern at the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, but this never materialised.²⁵ In August 1930 he was placed at the disposition of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) by decision of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party /b/.²⁶ In September of the

²⁴ Georgy Borisovich Skalov's Personal File, 38-39.

²⁵ Volume 495, register 152, file 98, 34, Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI); *Mongoliia v dokumentakh Komintern (1919-1934). Part II (1930-1934)* (Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, 2012), 8.

²⁶ However, he was still registered on a special list of personnel of the 4th Department of the Red Army General Staff.

same year, the prominent Soviet military man Georgy Skalov entered the building of the headquarters of the world revolution on Okhotny Ryad in Moscow and disappeared for some years; at the same time, a new employee, Georgy Sinani, appeared in the apparatus of the ECCI.

Boris Vasiliev (the head of the Organizational Bureau of the ECCI) and Jan Berzin (the director of the 4th department of the Red Army's General Staff) were instructed to nominate a military instructor to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Sinani had just returned from Mongolia and did not have a job. He came to the attention of Berzin, to whom he had previously submitted a report on the organization of the regular Red Army in China. Berzin, the chief of Soviet military intelligence, was "completely in agreement with the guideline... planned by Comrade Skalov" and proposed to Vasiliev that they should support Skalov's ideas.

But at the last moment the inhabitants of the Soviet CP's Mount Olympus made a different decision. Some years later, Vasiliev explained that he had dismissed Skalov's candidature because of his Menshevik activities in 1917 and 1918. Berzin added to Vasiliev's declaration that, in his own opinion, Sinani was "more of a staff and clerical worker, and in China an operational instructor was required".²⁷ However, the person finally sent to China was Otto Brown, a German Communist who had no military experience at all and did not know Asia, while Sinani (after Vasiliev's talks with the secretary of the ECCI Dmitry Manuilsky) was assigned elsewhere.

Skalov's ex-Menshevik militancy might have been an obstacle for work abroad, but it did not preclude his appointment as instructor, and later on, as the deputy head of the Latin American Lender Secretariat (some time later renamed as the Lender Secretariat of the South and Central America) of the ECCI. He was entrusted with the coordination of the Communist movement throughout the continent (the official head of the secretariat, the Chinese Communist Wang Ming, was probably a nominal figure).

For an objective assessment of the role of Skalov-Sinani in the formation of the Latin American policy of the Third International, we need to study carefully the general situation in the world Communist movement, the atmosphere at the time of his appointment, and, last but not least, the reasons that led the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and the ECCI to choose Skalov for this position.

²⁷ Georgy Borisovich Skalov's Personal File, 3, 8, 112, 113.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s the Comintern's "romantic" period gave way to the "bureaucratic period". Obviously the 1920s were also full of bureaucracy, and the 1930s maintained a certain revolutionary romanticism; but the distinction is very useful in order to understand the essence of the changes that occurred in the Comintern.

The first decade of the Comintern was characterised by an almost total disregard for the citizenship and origin of the ECCI's staff. At different time points, the ECCI had had Swiss, Italian, Bulgarian, Russian, Argentinian, or French Communists dealing with Latin American issues, many of whom had worked in the continent long enough to gain a good understanding of its problems. Ideological disagreements were not an insurmountable obstacle. However, when Zinoviev, and later Nikolai Bukharin were ousted from the ECCI, the situation changed dramatically. The decisions of the 6th World Congress of the Comintern (1928) and the 10th Plenum of the ECCI (1929) represented a turning point that divides the history of the Comintern into two stages. New criteria began to be applied for the selection of staff to be carried out by other criteria, and gradually many of the founders of the Third International—those bright personalities who had defined its policies in the first decade and had been symbols of the Communist movement—disappeared from the leadership and the apparatus.

With reference to Latin America, the new methods of organising the work within the ECCI apparatus were the beginning of a growing confusion inside its staff. The Swiss Communist Jules Humbert-Droz, head of the Latin American Lender Secretariat, was considered an excessively "reconciliatory element" and came in for criticism for his allegedly "right-wing" positions. First he was attached to Sergei Gusev and David Petrovsky as "commissars" to "ensure the proper line in this secretariat"; then, he was "exiled" to Latin America to lead the continental section of the Red International of Labour Unions in Montevideo. For a short time the secretariat was headed by the Bulgarian Stoian Minev (Stepanov). The Frenchman Henri Barbé was another candidate as its head, but it was finally his compatriot André Ferrat who received the appointment. Thus a "troika" was created: the Frenchman Ferrat, the Argentinian Victorio Codovilla and the Russian Sinani. But after Ferrat's request to be allowed to focus on French issues, and the departure of Codovilla to Spain as the head of the ECCI delegation, Sinani took over *de facto* leadership of the secretariat.

His position was quite complicated. Latin American issues had never been among his interests or responsibilities. He spoke fluent English and French, and also was able to communicate in Chinese, but he did not know

Spanish. However, the staff of the secretariat Yuli Rozovsky, August Gural'sky, Stanislav Pestkov'sky and Zinovyi Rabinovich²⁸ had broad experience of work in Latin America and had a good understanding of its specifics. Under his supervision were prominent figures of the Latin American Communist Parties including the Cuban Rubén Martínez Villena, the Brazilian Otavio Brandão and other militants who were well known theorists inside the communist movement.

Within a short time, Skalov knew as much about the situation in Latin America as his colleagues. His responsibilities also included scientific and organizational work in Latin American studies. At that time, a significant proportion of the study of socio-economic and political processes in foreign countries was carried out in the apparatus of the ECCI and in affiliated structures such as the International Lenin's School, the International Agrarian Institute, the Communist University of the Working Peoples of the East, and so on. All of them carried out research work and provided the Comintern with trained personnel to participate in the ECCI's studies of regional problems. Therefore, it was not surprising that, under Skalov's leadership, the secretariat became a centre that coordinated and planned research work: his vast experience as a researcher and publicist helped him to learn the new area of work very quickly.

Sinani headed the Cabinet of South and Caribbean America of the Institute of World Economy and International Politics (IWEIP) and the South American and Caribbean Sector of the Institute for Oriental Studies, and gave lectures at this Institute, at the International Lenin School and at the Sun Yat-sen Communist University of the Toilers of China. The circle of scientists concentrated around the Secretariat included almost all the Soviet researchers on Latin American issues: Pestkov'sky, Gural'sky, Rozovsky, Miroshev'sky, Maurice Haskin, Genrich Yakobson, Leon Khaikis, Iosif Markov and some others. This period can be considered a genuine breakthrough in Soviet Latin American studies, in terms of both the number of researchers and the quality of their work. Skalov had a direct relationship to most of the activities in this area: the topics of publications were proposed by the Lender Secretariat, and some of the articles and books were published under his editorship. And "G. Sinani" himself became the author of numerous works devoted to the urgent problems of the revolutionary movement of the Latin American continent, published in *Communist International*, *World Economy and International Politics*, *The Revolutionary East*, *Agrarian Problems*, and *Colonial*

²⁸ For details of their biographies, see: Lazar Jeifets, Victor Jeifets, *América Latina en la Internacional Comunista, 1919-1943. Diccionario Biográfico*, (Santiago: Ariadna Ediciones, 2015).

Issues.²⁹ In 1934, under Skalov's editorship, the collection *The Problems of the South and the Caribbean of America* appeared, which summarised the experiences of Soviet Latin American studies (the preface noted that "in the Soviet Marxist literature, very little attention has been paid to the problems of South America and the Caribbean"). Skalov attributed the heterogeneity of the collection to the fact that these problems were being explored for the first time: some articles "took questions in their problematic setting, while others operate mostly with semi-solid, particular material."³⁰ The work faithfully reflected the basic ideas prevailing in the minds of Comintern researchers and party functionaries who dealt with problems of Latin America. At the end of one of his articles the editor himself concluded that "maturing class battles" in the countries of South and Caribbean America (SCA) would lead to revolutionary struggles for power, and that in this connection the "Chinese path of the revolution" ("its initial victory in certain regions of the country") has "a good chance to become the path of the revolution in South and Caribbean America as well."³¹

The transfer of the Chinese experience to Latin America remains the main criticism that a number of scientists and Latin American Communist politicians level at Skalov.³² Some speak of the magical effect of China (*Cina*) on his personality and his way of thinking, and also claim that China had determined his choice of pseudonym. However, this is only partly true. When choosing the pseudonym Skalov subconsciously combined both the image of China and the memory of the man with whom fate had made him coincide in 1917: Boris Sinani, one of the leaders of the Committee for the Salvation of the Homeland and the Revolution. And this choice would come back to haunt him: some of his later equated him with Boris Sinani, who had faded into oblivion.

²⁹ See for example: G. Sinani, *Anglo-amerikanskoie sopernichestvo v stranakh Yuzhnoi i Karaibskoi Ameriki. Krizis, fashizm, ugroza voyny* (Moscow: 1934), 65–72; G. Sinani, "Vozmozhnosti dvoievlastiia i opyt Kitaia i Chili", *Kolonialnye problemy. Sbornik vtoroi* (Moscow: 1934), 144–150; G. Sinani, "Voyna v Yuzhnoi Amerike i anglo-amerikanskoie sopernichestvo" (Moscow: 1933); G. Sinani, "Krestianskoie dvizheniie i kompartii Yuzhnoi i Karaibskoi Ameriki", *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, no. 16, (1933); G. Sinani, "Novaia faza revoliutsionnykh sobytii na Kube", *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, no. 28, (1933).

³⁰ G. Sinani, "Foreword", *Problemy Yuzhnoi i Karaibskoi Ameriki*, 3, 6.

³¹ G. Sinani, "Konets kapitalisticheskoi stabilitsatsii, revoliutsionnyi podiyem, sostoianiiie i zadachi kompartii YuKA", *Problemy Yuzhnoi i Karaibskoi Ameriki*, 303.

³² See for example: Boris Iosifovich Koval', *Tragicheskaya geroika XX veka. Sud'ba Luisa Karlosa Prestesa*, (Moscow: Nauka, 2005).

Another part of the truth, perhaps more significant, is that Skalov did not choose his position and did not determine the Comintern's Latin American policy (later named "The Yenan way" by Eudocio Ravines). The Peruvian revolutionary Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre recalled that at the 5th Congress of the Comintern (1924) the organisation's president Grigory Zinoviev considered the situation in Peru to be similar to that of China. At the Expanded Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (1926), the American communist John Pepper spoke of the transformation of Latin America into the China of the Far West in the future, and of Mexico as the Canton of Latin America.³³ Skalov was only conducting the policy, although he significantly influenced the definition of the strategy and tactics of the Third International in the area. Undoubtedly, it was precisely his experience in China that led the party leadership to appoint him to a position in the ECCI. Obviously, the Chinese leader Wang Ming was appointed the nominal leader of the Lender Secretariat for the same reason. But in this case no one cared if Skalov's revolutionary experience was an experience of defeat.

The work at the Lender Secretariat was a serious test of Skalov's organizational talent and abilities. He had to reorganise its apparatus, develop a scheme of interaction with the regional bodies of the ECCI in Montevideo and New York and maintain very complicated relations with the leaders of the South American Bureau, August Gural'sky and Arthur Ewert, who, though disgraced in the Comintern, were still far more famous and experienced figures in the international communist movement than Skalov. The Latin American Lender Secretariat had regular contacts with local Communist parties, was preparing political documents which were later adopted by the governing bodies of the Comintern, and also monitored the staffing policies of the Communist parties. Additionally, the secretariat was also required to decide on the possible transfer of Latin American Communists (mainly re-emigrants) to the Soviet Communist Party, and was engaged in the selection of candidates for the Comintern's educational institutions. So this small apparatus was under intensive pressure with the avalanche of cases, being some of them a matter of principles, while others purely bureaucratic routine. However, according to Vladimir Miroshev'sky (one of the members of the Latin American Lender Secretariat), Skalov was able to create an atmosphere of teamwork and support inside the Secretariat. "Comrade Sinani knows how to

³³ *Shestoi Rashirenniy plenium Ispolkoma Komintern (17 fevralia – 15 marta 1926 g.). Stenograficheskiy otchet* (Moscow-Leningrad: 1927), 134.

organize this work”: this assessment was echoed by the conclusion of the Secretary of the ECCI, Osip Piatnitsky:

We entrusted him with a new business for him—Central and South America. For a very long time we had tried to organise this work with comrades who already were in South and Central America. We did not succeed. He was entrusted with this task, and he has not done badly.³⁴

In a short time, the name of Sinani became widely known and authoritative in the Latin American communist movement. In fact, he became something of an authority. The conference of the Communist Party of Cuba, held after the August revolution which overthrew the dictator Gerardo Machado, elected Sinani as a member of the honorary presidium—together with Stalin, Dmitry Manuilsky, Osip Piatnitsky, some Communist prisoners held by Hitler’s regime (Ernst Thälmann, Georgy Dimitrov, Popov, Tanev, and Torgler) and Hernán Laborde, General Secretary of the Mexican Communist Party—and his name was the fourth on the list.³⁵ Of course, this might be a reflection of the tendency to create small personality cults in certain spheres of life of the VKP /b/ and the Comintern, the logical continuation of the huge cult of Stalin. However, Skalov’s contribution to studying the experience of the Cuban revolution of 1933 and to the practical guidance of the Communist Party’s actions in this difficult and extremely interesting period of its activity testifies to the recognition of his authority.

In 1934, Brazil was at the forefront of the Comintern’s Latin American policy. Luís Carlos Prestes, the commander of the “invincible column”, had established himself as one of the leaders of the *Movimento Tenentista* in the 1920s, and the upper echelons of the world communist party were convinced of his enormous potential as a leader of the revolution under the communist banners. The subject of the alliance of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) with “*prestistas*” was constantly debated in the PCB and was transferred to the Comintern. The ECCI carefully followed the activities of the “knight of hope” (*Caballero da Esperança*), and attempted to influence his ideological evolution. The first PCB member who tried to enlist him was the secretary general, Astrojildo Pereira, but he was not supported by his own party or by the ECCI, and he was soon expelled from PCB. Some years later, the head of the South American Bureau of the Comintern August Guralsky was placed in charge of Prestes’s

³⁴ Georgy Borisovich Skalov’s Personal File, 27-28.

³⁵ Volume 495, register 105, file 70, 74, Russian State Archive for Social and Political History.

“communist education”. Guralsky did not hide his admiration for the Brazilian hero: “Prestes was created from the very best of the revolution: if I were a Brazilian, I would be in his column”.³⁶

As a result of his meetings with Guralsky, Prestes was invited to the USSR to work as an engineer and “to become more familiar with the entire course of the construction of socialism”. From the time Prestes arrived in Moscow in 1931, until the final decision regarding his participation in the upcoming Brazilian revolution was made in the Comintern, Sinani and Guralsky, who had returned from Montevideo, argued constantly with each other on the question of Prestes's role and other issues in the Lender Secretariat. Prestes himself took part in the process. In 1934, the Cabinet of the South and Caribbean America of the Institute of World Economics and World Politics, headed by Skalov, organised a “Debate on *Prestismo*”, one of the most notable events in the history of Latin American studies in the USSR. The Lender Secretariat staff member Vladimir Miroshkevsky presented the main speaker in the following terms:

There is not a single person in the whole world who knows the history of *prestismo* as well as comrade F. For many years comrade Fernández has looked at the world through the eyes of Prestes, and he knows better than anyone else the difficulties of the tortuous path that Prestes had followed. But at the same time, between comrade Fernández and citizen Prestes there is a deep abyss. Prestes was a petty-bourgeois politician, to whom the idea of the hegemony of the proletariat was alien... Comrade Fernández seeks to take his place in the fighting ranks of the Communist avant-garde... Therefore, if some wonderful “time machine” were to transfer Prestes from 1922-1925 to our days, to our ranks and to our meeting, it is likely that much of what Comrade Fernández will report today would seem alien and incomprehensible to him.³⁷

And indeed, who could know Prestes better than Prestes himself, transferred to Moscow by the “time machine” called the Comintern and “miraculously” turned into “Pedro Fernández”?³⁸

³⁶ Prestes was always deeply grateful to his mentor; years later he wrote that “Rustico” (Guralsky) had helped him become “a soldier of a soundly revolutionary detachment—the communist and workers' movement”. Luis Carlos Prestes, “The Choice Made Half a Century Ago”, *Problems of Peace and Socialism*, no. 1, (1973).

³⁷ *Kolonialnye problemy. Sbornik vtoroi* (Moscow: 1934), 228.

³⁸ Later, Marxist scholars found it inappropriate to refer to the “movement of the petty bourgeoisie” by the name of the Secretary General of the Brazilian Communist Party, and replaced the term “*prestismo*” with “*tenentismo*.”

The discussion was the frontier that separated Prestes from the movement that bore his name. The process of evolution of the ex-army official towards the Marxist ideology was completed and gave impetus to the implementation of one of the Comintern's most ambitious and dramatic projects of the 1930s, in which Sinani was fully implicated—the Brazilian uprising of 1935.

On March 11, 1934, the Political Secretariat of the ECCI set up the Permanent Commission for South and Caribbean American affairs. The Commission comprised the Secretary of the ECCI Dmitry Manuisky, the Secretary General of the Red Trade Unions International Profintern Abram Lozovsky (Dridzo), the head of the Organizational Bureau of the ECCI Boris Vasiliev, the head of the Eastern European Lender Secretariat Wilhelm Knorin, and the deputy heads of the Latin American Lender Secretariat August Guralsky and Georgy Sinani. In addition to this official body, an informal “*troika*” (a committee of three members) was formed, in which the secretary of the ECCI Osip Piatnitsky was in charge of finance, and Vasiliev was in charge of military matters. The solution of political issues was entrusted to Sinani—an indication of Georgy Borisovich Skalov's key role in the conception, strategy and tactics of the planned Brazilian revolution.³⁹

Already on March 16, on a tiny scrap of paper, Sinani handed out a plan for top-level matters: the organisation of the study of party-military-Soviet construction in China; selection of candidates for the South American Bureau of the Comintern and of some “foreign comrades for the special training with regard to the country” (the country's name never appeared in these top secret documents); the translation and publication of literature, including military books; organization of country studies; drawing up cost estimates, etc. The deadlines were tight: a month, 3-7 days. For the majority of the items in the plan (seven out of 12), Sinani appointed the man responsible or took personal charge,⁴⁰ and expected the same high standards from others that he demanded from himself. Already on April 25, one of the documents signed by Sinani recorded: “Point 6. To note that comrade Sinani has delayed the issue. Report at the next meeting of the commission”.⁴¹ And the deadline was even more stringent—24 hours.

³⁹ William Waack, *Camaradas. Nos arquivos de Moscú. A história secreta da revolução brasileira de 1935*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993), 56.

⁴⁰ Volume 495, register 79, file 197, 16, 19, Russian State Archive for Social and Political History.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The Cabinet of South and Caribbean America worked in accordance with the “Special Plan for 1934”, which was tasked with a comprehensive study of Brazil, its economy, political structure, armed forces, the national question, the alignment of class forces, and so on. This work was carried out by the Comintern militants who had had experience in Latin America, as well as by Soviet Latin American specialists.⁴²

The mission to prepare the uprising did not relieve the Secretariat of its other duties, the most important of which was the organisation of the Third Conference of the Communist Parties of South and Caribbean America. This meeting has not been planned by the Comintern, but the leaders of the ECCI had postponed the holding of the Seventh World Congress, and most of the Latin American delegates had either already arrived in Moscow or were on their way. On September 8, the Lender Secretariat suggested to the Political Commission of the ECCI that a meeting be organised to debate fundamentally important issues of the development of the communist movement on the continent.⁴³

The conference played an important role in preparing for the “historic turn” carried out by the Seventh Congress. It was the only regional forum that preceded the congress, at which some ideas of the new policy were voiced, though still rather timidly. It was the most representative Latin American forum in the history of the Comintern, and the leadership of the ECCI was well represented: Dmitry Manuilsky, Fritz Heckert and Palmiro Togliatti all attended.

The conference was permeated with the contradictions stemming from the very essence of the “turn” under preparation. No exception was taken to Skalov's statement “not all of what I say is something for which I would be ready to fight to the end”.⁴⁴ But if at the beginning of the report the words

We are facing major revolutionary battles. The idea of storming matures in the minds of the masses. The whole situation speaks for the fact that the growth of the idea of assault will lead to the biggest battles for power in a number of countries in the near future.

were clearly understood by the delegates, what followed a few minutes later clearly stunned those present. They did not immediately realise what

⁴² Ibid., 18.

⁴³ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁴ Volume 495, register 101, file 23, 15-17, Russian State Archive for Social and Political History.

the ideologist of the Latin American Communist movement meant by the words:

The need to merge with the broadest masses, dictated to us by the whole revolutionary situation, may be connected with continuing of this tactic of the united front, *interpreting it as conciliation with petty-bourgeois and bourgeois parties* [our emphasis – V.J., L.J].

And Sinani patiently explained:

This type of application of the tactics of the united front, the struggle for merging with the masses, can lead to a tendency of compromise with our adversaries [...] *and it not only can be, but will inevitably be so* [our emphasis – V.J., L.J]

and called for a struggle against the “sectarianism that prevents us from merging with the masses”.⁴⁵

Many of the points made in Sinani's speech were clearly in tune with the opinion of the Comintern and Bolshevik leadership. The record of his report in the protocol was accompanied by frequent marginal comments by Manuilsky indicating his approval. After the conference, Skalov was included in the commission headed by Otto Kuusinen which was to prepare the ECCI's report to the Seventh Congress. This body included the most prominent figures of the World Communist Party.⁴⁶ To understand the strategy and tactics of the Comintern at the time it is important to note that the ECCI apparatus was simultaneously developing both the action of the People's Front and what was known as the “Yenan Way”—the preparation of armed uprisings. Many of Sinani's ideas were included into the working papers of the Congress, and in the collection “The Communist International before the Seventh World Congress”.

Via Dolorosa

But Sinani's name was not on the list of authors. Georgy Borisovich Skalov worked without respite, but all this frenetic activity was carried out by a man who was already essentially doomed, although he probably did not understand this himself. Or perhaps he did, but he focused so single-mindedly on the grandiose reorganisation of the world that he had no time

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *VII kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala i bor'ba protiv fashizma i voyny. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Izdatel' stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1975).

to stop and think about his own destiny. This was 1934, not yet 1937, when the Stalinist repression reached its peak — but the warning signs were already there for Skalov.

The first alarm bells rang during the party cleansing of 1933. Whether his Menshevik past had suddenly become of greater interest to the commission than before, or if it was just a sign of “good will”, Skalov was asked to provide more details about his life. This was the genesis of the autobiography that today makes up the greater part of his personal file conserved in the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History.

Skalov managed to survive the party cleansing, and the NKVD ignored the recommendation to “pay attention to him”. He was able to continue working for world revolution, but destiny left him very little time.

The dramatic events that preceded the fall and death of Georgy Borisovich Skalov are described in the memoirs of the former leaders of the Communist Parties of Venezuela and Peru, Juan Bautista Fuenmayor and Eudocio Ravines. According to Fuenmayor, Skalov was accused of providing a pistol for the murderer of Sergei Kirov (the head of the Communist Party organization in Leningrad) and of spying for Britain. The party meeting which discussed the personal question of Skalov was held at the hotel *Lux*, where many of the Comintern functionaries were staying, and is described in Ravines's *The Big Lie*.⁴⁷ A comparison of the Peruvian revolutionary's reminiscences with the protocols indicates that he embellished his description, but that in essence the events were accurately portrayed. In fact, the reality may have been even worse than Ravines's account suggests.

After Kirov's murder by Leonid Nikolaev, the whole atmosphere in the USSR and within the Communist Party changed dramatically. The wave of repression fell upon ex-members of party factions and participants in internal party struggles, but in addition numerous old cases were retrieved from the safes and archives and many previous “excessively liberal” decisions were reconsidered. Not even the Comintern emerged unscathed.

Georgy Skalov's past biography turned out to be such a fertile soil for the coming judicial processes, and the organisers of the “Great Terror” could not miss such a good opportunity. Georgy Borisovich was one of the first employees of the ECCI to suffer Stalinist repression. The process by which he would be condemned had not even been planned when the repressive machine began to grind into action, and the accusations made at the party trial were still very different from the ones that he would hear

⁴⁷ Juan Bautista Fuenmayor, *1928–1948. Veinte años en la vida política* (Caracas: 1968), 131; Eudocio Ravines, *La gran estafa* (La Habana: Edilusa, 1960), 117–127.

soon. In form and content, the party investigation differed very little from the NKVD investigation; in fact, all that changed was the method used to obtain information. The accusations were not aimed at Skalov's present attitudes or activities, but principally at his past work.

On January 1, 1935, the Communist Party Committee of the ECCI subjected Skalov to a thorough interrogation. Had he joined Red Army on instructions from the Mensheviks in order to "fight" there? Did he join the RKP /b/ in Tashkent because "there were very few people who knew him there?" Why had he "gone over the top" but had not taken a rifle and become an ordinary soldier? Why had he not made a "printed statement" on leaving the Menshevik Party? Why did he not reported his "active participation in the Menshevik uprising in Izhevsk"? And so on, and so on...

Few found the courage to stand up for the accused. Only the Assessor to the Lender Secretariat, Vladimir Miroshchinsky, himself a Bolshevik from a very young age who had had the experience of clandestine activity during the Russian civil war, stood firmly by him:

It is necessary to look at the yesterday's things from the today's point of view... Some comrades spoke: why did he go to the Cheka to work, why did he try to get onto the Turkestan Commission of the Central Executive Committee? Comrades, let me continue this line. Then, why did he go to the 10th Congress as a delegate, why did he go to Kronstadt, why did he receive the Order of the Red Banner, for what actions?... One cannot raise the question this way.

According to Miroshchinsky, Sinani worked "a great deal" on the problems of South America, "of which everyone knew very little... despite all the tremendous revolutionary significance of this continent", and his approach to the matter was "sympathetic to the party". The head of the Commission, Osip Piatnitsky, was more cautious: the fact that Sinani had been taken was gratifying, and Bolshevik vigilance was a good thing, but "since 1919 Sinani proved his loyalty to the party" and always carried out the assigned work. A similar position was taken by the chairman of the Central Control Commission of the CPSU (Bolsheviks), Aaron Soltz, who also took part in the meeting. But the opinions of even party members were largely ignored.

The subject of special attention was Skalov's conversation with a member of the ECCI, Ludwig Magyar, after the demonstration on November 7, 1934. Recalling the murder of the Yugoslav king Alexander and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou, the Hungarian communist had drawn attention to the fact that the Soviet leaders on the rostrum of the

Mausoleum would be easy target for terrorists. He noted that the Bolshevik leadership was too “concentrated” and too closely connected with Stalin, and that the political assassinations of leaders would have catastrophic consequences for the USSR and for the Communist Party. This exchange of opinions—so full of concern for the safety of the Soviet leaders—had tragic consequences for both participants, although the Party Committee's decision did not quite correspond to the tone of the accusation: “It is necessary to indicate to com. Sinani that in a conversation with Magyar... he showed rotten liberalism and political spinelessness...”.

However, at a Communist Party Committee meeting on March 10, the investigation took a quite different line. Speaking on behalf of the Party commission, the Lender Secretariat member Vladimir Kuchumov referred to Skalov's support for the “Trotsky-Zinoviev's views on issues of the colonial revolution in his books and articles”. Once again, all the members of the commission returned to the past. The defendant asserted that he had laid his biography out in the office of Dmitry Manuilsky in the presence of Boris Vasiliev, and had not concealed anything. But the archive documents suggests that the Chief of the Organisation Department stubbornly failed to recall the details of that conversation, in spite of being renowned for possessing an extraordinary memory; Georgy Skalov mentioned that Valerian Kuibyshev had recommended him as a good organizer and “a man who was well-known”, but the character reference from a prominent Soviet politician did not help his cause.

The accused was attacked fiercely by the ECCI Chief of Staff Georgy Alikhanov:

He always contacts the top, this is a trait of a dodger, an adventurer... Even if he had sincerely revised his views, he should have remained a decent non-partisan. We have to decide that he was wrongly admitted to the Party and that there's no longer any place for him..., to consider it reasonable to expel him from the [Communist] Party.

Alikhanov's accusatory tone went beyond logical comprehension:

This is a man without fundamental preparation who meanwhile is bold enough to present himself as a theorist, and to edit books etc. What is more, his work is slapdash.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Georgy Borisovich Skalov's Personal File, 27.

Did Alikhanov understand what he was saying? As ECCI Chief of Staff, he, of all people, should have known that the Executive Committee offices were hardly teeming with graduates from prestigious universities. Not even the “Leader of the World Revolution” could boast of a brilliant education.

In addition, it is obvious that everything that Skalov said and wrote was in accordance with his position in the Comintern. The majority of the documents leaving the office of the III International were edited and approved at the level of the Lender Secretariat and—very often—at the level of the ECCI’s Political Secretariat. Did Alikhanov’s words mean that all the instructions sent to the Latin American sections in 1930-1934 were “slapdash work”? And if no one was concerned about Skalov’s education when he was appointed rector (meanwhile he had finished a “real” school and one course of the Institute of Railway Engineers), by the moment he reached the ECCI, he already had the studies at the Frunze Military Academy of the Red Army had been under his belt. This would have been more than sufficient preparation for the time.

Finally, the Party Committee decided to expel Sinani for: 1) conducting a conversation with Ludwig Magyar, during which the latter expressed anti-party, counter-revolutionary views, which Sinani reported only after the arrest and Magyar’s expulsion from the party; 2) “especially friendly” relations with the counterrevolutionaries Safarov and Magyar and covering their Menshevik-Trotskyist and right-opportunist views; 3) as a former officer of the Tsarist army, an active Menshevik and a member of staff at the headquarters at the Izhevsk uprising, concealment of his participation in the event until the purge of 1933.

Skalov still sought to ward off the blow. On March 26, after the meeting of the Communist Party Committee, he explained that he “had never concealed from the party that he had left the camp of the counter-revolution”, that he was sent abroad because of his intelligence, and therefore enjoyed trust; he admitted that he had committed a gross error by not mentioning “his counter-revolutionary past”—but he did it only because he acted without hidden intentions. He recalled that he formally been a Menshevik for two years, and that he worked 15 years in the Bolshevik Party: on the Turkestan Front, in the struggle against the Basmachi movement, in the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion and in China; but the reply was that because less than a year had passed since his active counterrevolutionary activity, he could not have become a sincere Bolshevik, but was only acting opportunistically.

And the wheels of the machine continued to turn. On March 29, feeling that the fate of Skalov had been decided, Boris Vasiliev tried to decline his

responsibility by saying that he had nominated Skalov for a mission trip to China as a Menshevik, thus contradicting Georgy Borisovich's statement that he went to work at the ECCI with the knowledge of the Politburo. At the same time, everyone understood: the appointment at such a level could in no circumstances have taken place without the approval of the Organisational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Asked by a member of the ECCI on September 7, 1930 to explain who recommended him, Skalov answered that his mission trip was approved by the Central Committee. And when asked why he had left his previous post (the IV Office of the General Staff of the Red Army), he answered that the decision had been taken by Orgburo. All these documents were available in the case and easy to verify, but no one did so; the members of Commission wrote notes, filed in the same case, and considered the obvious untruth to be something self-evident.

On the same day, March 29, a request from the Staff Department was answered by a certain Yakubovich: for the first time information on Skalov's counter-revolutionary past had been transferred to the Special Department of the NKVD, as well as his personal file and the transcript of the "purge". But the NKVD was not interested in how he had "penetrated the party"; for two years, no materials had been found on his counter-revolutionary activities (nor were any presented at the trial of the "Kremlin case"), although evidence could have been found simply by leafing through the Petrograd newspapers for 1917. And in the corridors of power there were many people who knew him during the period of "Dual Power", among them possibly even Stalin.

Nevertheless, on March 29, while the ECCI was still in correspondence on his case, Skalov was arrested by the NKVD at his apartment in Tverskaia Street, quite near the ECCI headquarters. During the search, the NKVD officials seized Skalov's Order of the Red Banner (N° 2826), some newspapers and books written by Zinoviev and Trotsky as well as "some terrorist tools" (binoculars and military topographic maps of Moscow).⁴⁹

The "Kremlin case" (and Skalov was arrested as part of it) was an alleged conspiracy of military commanders and other people inside the Kremlin with the aim of killing Stalin. The NKVD declared that ex-Bolshevik Lev Kamenev was the ringleader. According to the NKVD, Skalov had been entrusted with heading "a counter-revolutionary group of the ex-White Army officers" including his sister Nadezhda and her husband Lev Voronov (an artist at "Reklamfilm"). The trial lasted three days and the judges had neither the time nor the will to understand the

⁴⁹ Georgy Borisovich Skalov's Personal File, 123.

nuances of the accusations against 30 defendants (the remaining 80 were convicted by the NKVD's Special Conference). In the case of Skalov-Sinani the accusation was of a very general nature: connection with Magyar and other "members of the clandestine counter-revolutionary organization" led by Zinoviev and Kamenev. He pleaded guilty to taking part in some anti-Soviet conversations and of having terrorist intentions against Stalin and was sentenced to 10 years in prison, confiscation of property and loss of rights for three years, and he was also stripped of the Order of the Red Banner. Effectively, the accusation presented no proofs (apart from the previous fatal conversation with Magyar); and later while in the concentration camp, Skalov declared that he had been made to confess under coercion and under the direct threat of being shot made by the NKVD officers. His sister and her husband did not plead guilty and were sentenced to seven and six years' prison respectively.

On the day of the beginning of the trial, July 25, 1935, the Seventh Congress of the Communist International was inaugurated, proclaiming a "historic turn" towards the policy of the Popular Front. Some months later, in November of 1935, the uprising of the Brazilian *Aliança Nacional Libertadora*, led by L. C. Prestes, ended in failure. The attempt to implement the experience of "Chinese-Soviet-military-party cooperation" in Brazil, the country recognized by the Comintern as the "China of Latin America", came to nothing. Sinani, who did so much to organise the uprising, may not even have learnt of its fate.

Georgy Borisovich Skalov spent only two years on the "anti-Bolshevik" side of the barricades: for almost all of his politically conscious life he defended Soviet power. However, when the Bolshevik *Themis* put his life in the balance, it was the first part of his biography that weighed more.

We do not know the precise date of Skalov's death. Most probably he died in one of the concentration camps in 1940. His case, and those of Magyar and Safarov, triggered a wave of repressions within the Comintern. The members of the Party tribunal that tried Skalov—Piatnitsky, Vassiliev, Kun, Alikhanov, Chernomordik and Seregin—were executed in 1937. The Secretary General of the Cuban Communist Party Jorge Vivo, who had energetically criticised Sinani for his "misunderstanding of the Comintern's line in the colonial countries", was expelled from his own party. Vladimir Miroshevsky, one of Skalov's few defenders, was forced out of the Comintern and expelled from the Communist Party (however, he managed to escape the arrest, and was re-admitted to the CP; he died fighting with the Red Army in the Second World War). Like Skalov, many Soviet specialists in Latin America became targets for Stalinist

repressions, and Latin American studies were only re-established in the Soviet Union decades later. As for Skalov, he was not rehabilitated until 1988, more than half a century later, along with some other persons who had been accused of being “counter-revolutionaries”.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ "O tak nazyvaemom kremlevskom dele. Spravka Prokuratury SSSR i KGB SSSR". *Izvestia TsK KPSS*, 7, 1989, 87–93.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

BETWEEN HOPE AND TREPIDATION: THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION IN SPAIN

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The Russian Revolution of October 1917 was the defining historical moment of the twentieth century. Its impact in the international arena, on the policies imposed by national governments, on social and cultural movements, and on the allocation of productive resources in the economy, is unmatched by any other event.

Despite the difficulties in communications, the triumph of the revolutionaries in 1917 was celebrated by millions of workers all over the world who saw in it the possibility of emancipation and an end to their exploitation. For their part, the conservative and reactionary classes were terrified by the new threat posed by communism. With the exception of Britain, in the countries of the West the significance of what had happened took time to sink in; but in an article in the *Everybody Magazine* the American journalist William G. Shepherd defined the new term “Bolshevik” as “everything the world fears”.¹

Seventy-two years later, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the power that communist parties had gained in countries all over the world came to an abrupt end. From the 1950s onwards the crisis of communist thought among Western intellectuals had been evident;² the denunciations

¹ Helen Rappaport, *Atrapados en la revolución rusa, 1917* (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2017), 191.

² For France, see Tony Judt’s *Pasado imperfecto. Los intelectuales franceses, 1944-1956* (Madrid: Taurus, 2007); Raymond Aron, *Memorias. Medio siglo de reflexión política* (Barcelona: RBA, 2013). Fernando Claudin’s *La crisis del movimiento comunista. Tomo I: De la Komintern al Kominform* (Colombes: Ruedo Ibérico, 1970) had a strong impact among Spanish communists. For a later overview, see *El libro negro del comunismo* by Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth.

by dissidents,³ the difficulties the communist parties faced in holding onto power, and their scarce appeal in a world which was already tending towards globalization, in which representative democracy was gaining ground and the dependence on the market was imposing itself as the way to run the economy, had all chipped away at its influence abroad.

One hundred years after the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, modern-day historians stress the failure of the Soviet experience. Books that argue for its success are conspicuous by their absence, and the fascinating analyses by the protagonists of the time such as Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* are now treated as classics of political science and history, but not as blueprints for political action. The truth is that the way in which the events of the revolution are interpreted depends very heavily on the particular moment. During the interwar period, attitudes towards 1917 and its creation, the USSR, combined both hope and terror; in the years of Cold War propaganda, the Soviet Union was a pillar of support or the enemy to defeat; but since 1989, the project has been seen as a failure, an experience that not to be repeated.

Today, Communism is dead. The USSR and most of the states and societies constructed on its model, children of the October Revolution of 1917 which was our source of inspiration, has completely collapsed, leaving behind it a landscape of economic and moral ruin, in such a way that it now appears evident that failure was part of the endeavour from the very beginning.⁴

In this chapter my aim is not to describe what happened in Russia during 1917, but to explore the dissemination and internationalisation of the revolution, specifically in Spain. Plainly, Karl Marx's model for the coming revolution was not created with a country like Russia in mind, however hard later explanations tried to achieve a fit between Marx's precepts and the events of 1917.⁵ According to Marx, the revolution would start in an industrialised country, and although the Russian economy had recorded spectacular growth since 1870, especially in industry, with rates

Jean-Louis Panné. Andrej Packowski, Karel Bartosek and Jean-Louis Margolin, (Madrid: Espasa Calpe / Barcelona: Planeta, 1998).

³ The most important work was Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, 2 vol. (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2005). The first part was published in France in 1973 and the rest in 1975 and 1978.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Años interesantes. Una vida en el siglo XX* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002), 125.

⁵ Juan Pablo Fusi, "El mito de la revolución soviética", *Política Exterior*, vol. V, no. 22, Fall 1991, 122-132.

of 8.8% per year between 1870-1914, it still lagged far behind countries like Great Britain and Germany. Russia was a newcomer to the world of development.

Russia's industrial modernisation was concentrated in sectors such as oil and steel, where in fact it recorded higher growth rates than the United States, Great Britain or Germany. Significantly, the concentration of its industrial proletariat was greater than that in the United States, and the presence of this large urban working-class undoubtedly facilitated the work of the agitators and helped to raise class consciousness. Strikes became increasingly frequent from 1912 onwards, and were met by violent repression by the authorities. Between January 1908 and May 1910 more than 700 workers were killed. In the spring of 1912, a strike in the gold mines of the Lena basin in south-eastern Siberia was suppressed by the troops of the Tsarist army, leaving five hundred dead or wounded.⁶ The situation was complicated further by the lack of unity in the leadership of the labour movement, in which social-revolutionaries, anarchists, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks all competed with each other.

In spite of the increase in the urban working-classes, the vast majority of the workers remained in the backward agrarian sector. Stolypin's ambitious reforms had failed to create a class of well-off farmers on whose support the Tsarist regime could rely. A third of the peasantry owned no land; mechanical traction was practically unknown, more than a third of the farms had no agricultural equipment and more than a quarter had not even a single head of cattle.⁷

Social inequalities ran very deep. From the political point of view, the liberalising measures introduced after the revolution of 1905 were restricted by the "autocratic turn" of 1907 and still more after the beginning of the First World War. The growing authoritarianism of Tsarist rule fuelled resentment against the Tsar himself and his family and against the corrupt environment that surrounded him.

The aims of the revolution of February 1917 were undermined by the situation of widespread famine, the breakdown of the army and the police, and weak leadership in a situation marked by a dynamic of double power: on the one hand the Duma and on the other the Petrograd Soviet, soon to be joined by the Moscow Soviet. It was a popular, spontaneous revolution that gave power to very diverse political forces: conservatives, liberals and

⁶ Robert Gerwarth, *Los vencidos. Por qué la Primera Guerra Mundial no concluyó del todo (1917-1923)* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2017), 50.

⁷ Isaac Deutscher, "La Revolución Soviética", in C.L. Mowat (Ed.), *Historia del Mundo Moderno. XII Los grandes conflictos mundiales 1898-1945* (Cambridge University Press / Barcelona: Editorial Ramón Sopena, 1980), 304.

moderate socialists. Aleksandr Kerensky's solitary and erratic leadership was unable to solve the problems of hunger, land distribution, the decomposition of the police and the armed forces, or the defeats on the battlefields of Europe.

Since the beginning of the war, and above all since the Great Retreat on the western front, discontent among the soldiers had been rising. There had been continuous riots, and forced recruitment had been fiercely opposed in many rural areas. There was also disruption in the cities, with numerous strikes in the textile and metallurgy sectors. In the factory district of Viborg, in Petrograd, riots were frequent and soldiers were increasingly reluctant to fire on the demonstrators.

The war became the fuse that sparked the revolution. For Rosa Luxemburg, it represented the rottenness of bourgeois society: for Lenin, the war had the “unbearable stench of a corpse”; the choice was between chaos and anarchy, or revolution. To quote Trotsky, “imperialist war exacerbated the contradictions and dragged the backward masses out of their immobility”. Hostility to the war spread among the peasants, who had suffered continuous confiscations and mobilisations; in the cities the workers revolted, and indiscipline spread among the soldiers. The scene was set for the entry of the Bolsheviks, with their motto of “Bread, Land and Peace”.

In addition to compulsory military service, imposed in all countries except Britain, the whole population suffered the consequences of the Great War. The conflict bore out more than ever Clausewitz's maxim that war was the “continuation of politics by other means”; and it was not just the product of the contradictions of imperialism at world level, as the Bolsheviks affirmed, but of the internal policies of each of the participating countries. The war brought numerous internal problems to the fore in all the countries involved: in some of them it was presented as a class conflict—as in Russia, where the war became a social catalyst. But elsewhere there were also conflicts inside countries with different national identities, radicalised at a time when borders were being redrawn; ethnic conflicts such as the one between the Turks and the Armenians; anti-Semitism, blaming the Jews for both the revolution and the counterrevolution; and, finally, religious conflicts with a strong anticlerical charge.⁸

The devastation of the war was unprecedented. Between eight and nine million soldiers died, and many more among the civilian populations; the

⁸ Fernando del Rey and Manuel Álvarez Tardío (Eds.), *Políticas del odio. Violencia y crisis en las democracias de entreguerras* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2017), 9-38.

losses were especially numerous in Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Germany. Including the wounded, the casualties rise to more than fifteen million.⁹ In Russia, between 1,700,000 and two million soldiers died (depending on the source consulted), and one and a half million civilians. This situation, together with the inability of the Russian General Staff to defeat the German army on the battlefield, generated intense frustration at home.

Few political parties in Russia questioned the war, and most reiterated the support for the powers that formed the Triple Entente. The only faction to see that the war might become decisive in tipping the balance in their favour were the Bolsheviks. The dynamic of dual power, described by Trotsky and supported by Lenin in the April Theses, opened a political window which the resourceful and aggressive Bolshevik groups exploited in order to seize power in October 1917. Once in power, in order to consolidate their position the Bolsheviks pledged to abandon the war, giving up large areas of land, and then spread revolution to other countries. As the revolutionary government declared:

To the citizens of Russia. The provisional Government has been deposed. The power of the State has passed into the hands of the Military Revolutionary Committee, which is an organ of the Petrograd deputies, workers and soldiers. (...) The objectives for which the people have fought—the immediate proposal of a democratic peace, the suppression of the agrarian property of the landlords, the workers' control of production and the constitution of a Soviet government—are assured.

The Bolshevik triumph was greeted with jubilation in Germany. For their part, the Allied countries underestimated both the viability of the Bolshevik regime and the threat it posed to the European order. Only the British took note of these dangers.

The new revolutionary government faced two challenges: on the one hand, the convening of the constituent assembly, and on the other, the abandonment of the war. In the constituent assembly the Bolsheviks were a minority, and so when they saw that they could not control it, they swiftly dissolved it. The issue of the war caused internal disagreements; but in view of the deterioration of their relations with the Allies the Bolsheviks decided that it was essential to make a separate peace with

⁹ Ricardo Artola, *La I Guerra Mundial. De Lieja a Versalles* (Madrid: Alianza, 2014), 158.

Germany, in spite of their clear lack of any bargaining power.¹⁰ The decision was also influenced by the continued pressure of the German armies and the disintegration of the Russian army.

The peace, with its large-scale territorial concessions, was finalised on March 3, 1918. The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk marked the end of the war; Russia renounced Finland, Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Courland, Ukraine and Bessarabia. The treaty was signed by the German Empire, Bulgaria, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire on the one hand, and revolutionary Russia on the other. “The treaty passed into the annals of history as a classic example of draconian peace and punishment”.¹¹

The period that commenced after the end of the world war was the “era of catastrophes”, to quote Eric Hobsbawm, or the “European Civil War”.¹² The events in Russia made a decisive contribution. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks opened a period of instability marked by the Civil War and the economic policy of “war communism”. This was replaced in the early 1920s by the New Economic Policy, a kind of state capitalism, and the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in late 1922.

In the rest of the countries of Europe a period of intense instability began marked by the end of the empire, with the resulting rearrangement of borders, economic readjustments, and social crisis. The social upheaval was due to the irruption of the masses into the political arena and the possibility that the ideology of the revolutionary left might spread throughout Europe with the symbol of Russia at its head. The new Russia represented a genuine threat to the European democracies throughout the interwar period, and communism became a model for the political participation of the masses.

The old structure of power established throughout the nineteenth century, based on the alliance between the landowners and the emerging business classes and supported by the exclusion of the peasants and urban proletariat now entered a profound crisis. In fact, it succumbed to other models which accepted the active role of the popular sectors and either granted them the right to vote or imposed state/party control in their name.

¹⁰ Richard Pipes, *La Revolución rusa* (Barcelona: Penguin Random House, 2017), 665-666.

¹¹ George Kennan, “La Unión Soviética de 1917 a 1939”, in Mowat (Ed.), *Historia del Mundo Moderno. XII*, 327.

¹² Ernest Nolte, *La guerra civil europea, 1917-1945. Nacionalsocialismo y bolchevismo* (México: FCE, 2011); and Enzo Traverso, *A sangre y fuego. De la guerra civil europea (1914-1945)* (Valencia: PUV, 2009).

A competing model was democracy, but in European countries such as the United Kingdom and France it was badly undermined by what was called the “crisis of parliamentarism”. In France, under the Third Republic, this was a period of intense political unrest. The United States withdrew in on itself in the 1920s, but resurfaced with force with the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as president and the implementation of his New Deal policy.

Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany represented another response to the growing prominence of the masses. Their emergence and development had to do with the discredit of the liberal society, the economic and social instability after the Great War, and the weakness of bourgeois society. Fascism and Nazism focused on an exacerbated nationalism, the omnipotence of the state, elitism, the principle of hierarchy embodied in the *Führerprinzip*, a Manichean conception of the world (friend vs. foe) and the exaltation of violence. Both Fascism and Nazism were anti-Communist, and in Germany an entire theory was concocted to demonstrate the supposed superiority of the Aryan race.

The mobilisation of the popular sectors drew attention to the absence of any legitimate channels of mediation and moderation, the weakness of the institutions, and the breakdown of the traditional patterns of social cohesion. Faced with this crisis and in order to delay the entry of the masses in the political arena, countries such as Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Romania turned to extreme right-wing militarism and authoritarian regimes.

In all these situations, the working classes were key protagonists. The democratic systems sought to integrate them into society; the militaristic right-wing dictatorships repressed them; the Fascists made attempts to accommodate them; and the Communists saw them as the present and the future.

After the triumph of the October Revolution and the end of the hostilities with Germany, the Bolshevik leaders found themselves immersed in a civil war. They saw the extension and internationalisation of the revolution as vital for their own consolidation. For this reason, at a time of intense social crisis, they worked together with workers’ organisations in other countries on a plan to create a favourable climate in which these organisations would take power.

On the very day that Petrograd was taken, the Bolsheviks issued their “Decree of Peace”, which exhorted workers abroad to rise up and give support to the government of the soviets, so that it might “bring to a successful conclusion (...) the cause of the liberation of the exploited working masses from all slavery and exploitation”.

Lenin saw that the period that was now beginning would be highly conflictive. The clash with the bourgeois and imperialist governments was inevitable, and so the formation of the Red Army was necessary:

the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before that end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable. This means that the ruling class, the proletariat, if it has the will to lead, and so that it will be able to do so, must also demonstrate it through its military organisation.¹³

From this moment on, numerous scenarios emerge that bear witness to the attempts of the revolutionary left to conquer power. In Finland there was a civil war between January and May 1918, in which the White Army eventually defeated the Red Guards. The revolution of November 1918 in Germany, sparked by the mutiny of the sailors of Kiel, forced the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II on November 9; the Social Democrats (SPD), with Friedrich Ebert at their head, sought reconciliation and laid the foundations of the Weimar Republic. At this juncture, two revolutionary movements emerged which bore a certain resemblance to the Soviets. The first was Republic of the Bavarian Councils or the Bavarian Soviet Republic, which held power between the end of 1918 and May 1919. In Bavaria a revolutionary administration was established, controlled by workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils which succeeded in deposing King Ludwig III, but they were soon put down by the SPD government and Munich was taken by military force. The second movement was the Spartacist uprising in Berlin between January 5 and 12, 1919.¹⁴ The Spartacus League had the support and sympathy of the communists, although they were also at times critical of it. A general strike was called in Berlin, during which violent confrontations were led by a Council of Workers and Soldiers. During the "bloody week", the leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were arrested and killed. The uprising was finally stifled by the army and the SPD government.

The revolutionary disappointments continued in Hungary, where Bela Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic lasted 133 days. In Italy, the revolutionary strikes in Turin, Piedmont and Lombardy in the *Biennio*

¹³ Quoted in Pipes, *La Revolución*, 661.

¹⁴ Gilberto Badia, *Los espartaquistas*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Editorial Mateu, 1971); and Pierre Broué, *Revolución en Alemania. I. De la guerra a la revolución. Victoria y derrota del 'izquierdismo'* (Barcelona: A. Redondo Editor, 1973).

Rosso all failed, as did the Polish labour movement during the autumn of 1920. So the international expansion that the Bolshevik leaders had regarded as crucial in order for the revolution in Russia to survive finally came to nothing, and the Soviets' isolation was evident. "The revolution had to survive and try to preserve the conquered terrain in conditions that its leaders had considered absolutely incompatible with its survival".¹⁵

The Third International (the Communist International) had been created in March 1919 on the initiative of the Bolsheviks in an attempt to spread the revolution further afield. Its objective was to organise and control the communist parties in all countries, creating a worldwide party to implant the new revolutionary model, and to internationalise the revolution in order to defend Russia. "The ultimate aim of the Communist International is to replace the world capitalist economy by a world system of communism" (Programme of the Third International, VI Congress).

The creation of this organisation not only drew attention to the critical state of the Second International (the Socialist International), but led to the split between the Communist and Socialist parties. This division would prove highly significant, because it weakened the workers' movement and at the same time favoured the rise of Fascism. The strategy of spreading the revolution came to an end. The world labour movement, controlled from Moscow, was unable to understand the dynamics at work in other countries and created an unwieldy and excessively bureaucratised structure, losing its transformative impulse as it did so.

The impact of the October Revolution in Spain

Historically, relations between Spain and Russia have been very limited because of the geographical distance between the two countries. Prior to the Revolution the interests of the Tsars might have coincided with those of the more reactionary Spanish monarchs such as Fernando VII, but it was the cultural references or the chronicles of travellers that most shaped the idea that the Spaniards had of Russia.

The February and October Revolutions made little impact in the West, since it was the World War that was the real concern at that time. The Spanish newspaper *El Socialista* welcomed the changes made in February, but not those of October, which would entail Russia's withdrawal from the war. The anarchist publications (*Tierra y Libertad* and *Solidaridad Obrera*), on the other hand, were enthusiastic about the fall of the Tsarist regime and the arrival of the Bolsheviks in power.

¹⁵ Pierre Broué, *El Partido Bolchevique* (Madrid: Editorial Ayuso, 1973), 196.

The muted reaction to the events in that distant country is reflected in the opinion of Tomás Elorrieta, Professor of Political Law of the University of Salamanca and Member of Parliament in the Cortes, who spoke of “vague, contradictory and confused” news and highlighted the eagerness of the communist regime to exterminate the Russian aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The monarchical newspaper *ABC*, the paper with the most abundant information on the subject, adopted a highly critical stance.¹⁶ The *ABC*’s correspondent Sofía Casanova was present in Petrograd and sent regular reports on the events from the very first moments; in fact, Casanova can be considered as the precursor of the introduction in Spain of the concepts “communist danger” and “red terror”.

The significance of the October Revolution was initially underestimated. There was no way of predicting the instability it would cause in Spain, or the copycat effect it might have on sectors of the labour movement. The growing radicalisation of workers’ organisations was not alien to this,¹⁷ even though both the general strike of 1917 and the wave of strikes among peasants and industrial workers probably had more to do with internal factors such as the end of the period of economic expansion, which led to food riots, or the political crisis derived from the exhaustion of the Restoration.

Along with this radicalisation, there was also a growing fear of an increase in social conflict among the Spanish right. They responded in a truly authoritarian fashion. The presence of Bolshevik refugees, for instance, was an issue that greatly concerned the Spanish authorities. When the Count of Romanones became head of the government in December 1918, he expressed his disapproval of the events in Russia in one of his first speeches and announced the expulsion of the Bolshevik refugees in Barcelona, together with subjects of other countries. Dozens of Russians from different provinces were transferred to the Modelo prison in Barcelona, and in the city’s port the *Manuel Calvo* was made ready to deport the detainees. The journey ended in tragedy in the Aegean, as 71 refugees lost their lives in an accident which was never clarified¹⁸.

¹⁶ Sofía Casanova, *De la Revolución rusa en 1917* (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1917), 34.

¹⁷ Juan Avilés Farré, “El impacto de la Revolución Rusa en España, 1917-1922, in Javier Tusell, Juan Avilés Farré and Rosa M^a Pardo Sanz, *La política exterior de España en el siglo XX* (Madrid: UNED, 2000), 133.

¹⁸ Mikel Aizpuru Murua, “La expulsión de refugiados extranjeros desde España en 1919: exiliados rusos y de otros países”, *Revista de Migraciones & Exilios*, 11, 2010, 107-126.

The expulsions were denounced by *Solidaridad Obrera*, the Madrid Socialist Group, and the liberal newspaper *El Sol*. The latter published an article by Julio Camba that clearly described what was happening:

Then (before the war) nobody believed in the presence of the Russians. Now, on the other hand, everyone looks slightly Russian. The *Manuel Calvo*, which has just left Barcelona, expelled by the government, was carrying Russians from Turkey, Russians from Bulgaria, French Russians, English Russians and even Russian Russians. The word “Russian” has evolved. It used to be a geographical concept. Now it is a political concept (...). People are slightly Russian, or terribly Russian. Every man who protests against *caciquismo* or against the cost of living is immediately branded a Russian.¹⁹

The Right: between the “communist danger” and the “red terror”

As the news of the events in Russia filtered through, the right-wing conservative parties in Germany, France and Britain were forced to take notice, as were their Spanish counterparts. Until then, the enemy to defeat in Spain was the anarchist movement, which had been strengthened by the creation of the National Confederation of Labour (the CNT) in 1910.

The conservative press such as *ABC* linked the existing trade union movement in Andalusia and Catalonia with the Bolsheviks and spread the rumour that Lenin had arrived in Barcelona in January 1919.²⁰ These reports were repeated during the strike at *La Canadiense* in Barcelona between February and March 1919, when the trade union leaders Ángel Pestaña and Salvador Seguí were accused of promoting “communism” following the “Russian model”,²¹ and at the celebration of May 1 in Madrid, the “most impressive” post-war pro-Bolshevik rally organised to date, the crowd chanted “*Viva Rusia!*”²²

¹⁹ *El Sol*, March 23, 1919.

²⁰ *El Sol*, January 16, 1919. Eduardo González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio. Orden público, subversión y violencia política en la crisis de la Restauración* (Madrid: CSIS, 1999), 68.

²¹ “El peligro del sindicalismo”, *ABC*, March 26, 1919; and “Viva Rusia”, *ABC*, May 9, 1919.

²² G.H. Meaker, *La izquierda revolucionaria en España* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978), 276.

The criticisms made by the Spanish right of the developments in Russia followed two main lines which at times overlap.²³ In the first, the emphasis was placed on the “communist danger”, the threat that the events represented; and in the second the emphasis was on the “red terror”, the violence and repression wherever the communists had power or influence.

In an intellectual environment influenced by the publication in 1918 of the first volume of Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, the triumph of communism and the threat it posed to the world seemed to confirm the last act of Western culture: that is, its decadence and barbarism. In conservative circles, the events in Russia were blamed for the social upheaval and the growing atmosphere of conflict.

The concept of “communist danger” was born in late 1918 and then spread rapidly. Within a year, there was already talk of the “red terror”. Both concepts were kept alive until the end of the Cold War, and in Spain they reached their apogee under the Franco dictatorship; but they were already present during the crisis of the Restoration, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in the 1920s and the Second Republic.²⁴ The precursor of the introduction of the two concepts was Sofía Casanova, whose articles mixed anti-Semitic ideas with a defence of social Darwinism.

Casanova describes the Bolshevik regime as “bloodthirsty”, and the Soviet Union as a place where the soldiers became “fugitives”, constituting

furious bands of famished, half-naked soldiers burn and loot the villages, carrying off the booty and women to the woods nearby, where the orgy ends with a quarrel over a sip of alcohol, or the inanimate body of a teenage girl...²⁵

There was no justice: the “red terror” was random:

The terrible order to shoot without previous trial, which extended to many other crimes, leaves inert bodies in the steppes, in the cities, and in the streets of St. Petersburg. The repression of the revolutionary Courts lends itself to abuse, to personal revenge, to crimes that go unpunished.²⁶

²³ See Hugo García, “Historia de un mito político, el “peligro comunista” en el discurso de las derechas españolas (1918-1936)”, *Historia Social*, 51, 2005, 3-20.

²⁴ I thank Roberto Muñoz Bolaños for allowing me to consult his original article “La construcción de la imagen del terror rojo en España”, which I found particularly useful for the writing of this section.

²⁵ “Del ciclo infernal”, *ABC*, March 4, 1918, 3-4.

²⁶ “La era del terror”, *ABC*, January 15, 1918, 3.

All this helped to make the Bolsheviks stronger and to consolidate their power. “Terror” was part of a strategy, not an uncontrolled activity; it was planned and directed by the party and the State; it eliminated their enemies and struck fear in the doubters.

The leftist intellectual Maxim Gorky, author of *The Mother*, was highly critical of the violent methods of the Bolsheviks,²⁷ and had especially forthright views on Lenin, although he later maintained a friendly relationship with Stalin. Because of his denunciation of Bolshevik violence several of his articles were published in *ABC*, thus endorsing Sofia Casanova’s descriptions.

The tone in which the politicians of the governing parties of Spain spoke of the events in Russia became increasingly harsh. They blamed the Bolsheviks for organising an international plot to try to overthrow the monarchy and to impose “social revolution”, to quote the Minister of the Interior, Manuel Burgos Mazo, in 1919. The conservative politician Antonio Goicoechea expressed himself in similar terms, describing Spain as a country particularly vulnerable to “the kinds of actions that have been used in Russia”.

Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship was an anti-communist regime, which had little time for the idea of integrating the masses into the world of politics. On the very day of the *coup d’état*, on 13 September 1923, the leader column of *ABC* had this to say:

The infectious tumour of the old Spanish politics had to be operated upon, and the mortal gangrene that was running throughout the social organism of the country had to be extirpated without contemplations (...) the military dictatorship has saved us for now from bloody revolution and the anarchy.

According to many, Joaquín Costa’s authoritarian ideology of the “Iron Surgeon” was the solution to Spain’s woes. It set in motion a non-democratic model seen by a majority of the Spanish right as the ideal form of governance which, after the brief hiatus of the Second Republic, would remain in place until the 1970s under the Franco regime.

The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera used the “communist plot” to justify the repression of the anarchists, the criticism of the republicanism represented by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and even the struggle against the Rif leader Abd-el-Krim. Support for the dictatorship came from influential intellectuals like Ramiro de Maeztu, who fiercely opposed the events in Russia in the name of defending “civilisation” and “the social order”.

²⁷ Gorky’s book *El terror bolchevique (La Cultura de la Revolución)* was published in Barcelona in 1920 (B. Bauzas publishing house).

The authoritarian regime took out publicly-funded subscriptions for influential members of the military (including General Mola and General Franco) to the *Bulletin de l'Entente Internationale contre la Troisième*, an anti-communist publication directed by a group of Tsarist exiles in Geneva. Its main articles were translated and published in the newsletter *El Somatén*. The General of Division Pedro Bazán Esteban was named General Director of Security, and anti-communist agreements were drawn up with Germany, France and Italy. During the mandate of Emilio Mola as General Director of Security, the Central Board against Communism was created in April 1930 to coordinate anti-communist policies. This policy was continued by Manuel Azaña as Minister of War, when he set up the Office of Communist Investigation within the Armed Forces in order to avoid communist infiltration.²⁸

Around this time, two books in which the “red terror” was the protagonist and written with a Spanish public in mind were published in Madrid: Georg K. Popov’s *The Red Inquisition. The Cheka: the State within the State*, and Sergei P. Melgunov’s *The Red Terror*.²⁹

Popov, a former Russian officer, claimed that the Cheka was a “State within the State”, which used torture and arbitrary arrest and had set up an important foreign network, especially in Germany and France, which operated from embassies and chambers of commerce and had created a system of surveillance and control over Russians living abroad. Melgunov, a doctor in history, had been a social revolutionary; sentenced to death, his penalty was commuted to ten years in prison and he was subsequently stripped of his nationality. Two ideas are present in his denunciation of the Soviet system: first that “terror” was a fundamental element in the consolidation of the power of the Bolsheviks; and second, that this terror had now become the very essence of the system.

With the arrival of the Second Republic in Spain, the denunciations of the entry of communism intensified. *El Debate*, the main Catholic newspaper, spoke of the “invasion of barbarians”; Maeztu presaged in *Ahora* a “horrific civil war”, and Niceto Alcalá Zamora was described as the “Spanish Kerensky” who was clearing the way for Bolshevik chaos. This same accusation was later levelled at Manuel Azaña and Santiago Casares Quiroga.

²⁸ Eduardo González Quiroga and Fernando del Rey Reguillo, *La defensa armada contra la revolución. Una historia de las guardias cívicas en la España del siglo XX* (Madrid: CSIC, 1995), 23.

²⁹ Both were published in Madrid, the first by Aguilar in 1924 and the second by Carro Raggio in 1927.

It would be the monarchists, both Carlists and Alfonsists, who made the most use of the “communist danger” and the “red terror” as political weapons. Publications of *Acción Española*, the anonymous booklet *Judaísmo-Comunismo-Nacionalismo* (1932), and the book *El comunismo en España* by Mauricio Carlavilla and Luis Fernando Saavedra (1932), and Carlavilla’s *El enemigo: Marxismo, anarquismo, masonería* in 1934 supported this position. In the constituent assembly elections, the Spanish Monarchical Union denounced the “barbaric communist offensive”.

The Fascists also insisted on “the communist danger”. *Libertad*, the weekly newspaper of the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalistas* founded in 1931 by Ramiro Ledesma Ramos and Onésimo Redondo repeatedly claimed that “the parliamentary-socialist Republic has the sole purpose of plunging us into the black well of red socialism, where there is no other rule than the Soviet”, and in early 1932 proposed the constitution of “anti-communist militias”.

From 1934 onwards the anti-communist voices grew louder, for two reasons: the growing Bolshevik sympathies of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (the PSOE) whose leader Francisco Largo Caballero was branded the “Spanish Lenin”; and the return to the political scene of former right-wing intellectuals such as Ramiro de Maeztu and politicians such as José Calvo Sotelo.

The events of Asturias in October 1934 were capitalised upon by the right-wing press (*ABC*, *El Debate*, *La Nación* and *Diario de Madrid*) to describe in detail stories about crucified priests, raped nuns and children of civil guards with their eyes torn out by the revolutionaries: “probably not even in Russia, during the great revolution, or in other earlier times have there been acts as terrible, barbaric and bloodthirsty as those that occurred in this revolution”.

During the campaign prior to the legislative elections of 1936, the right wing again used fear, claiming that the Hungarian revolutionary leader Bela Kun was in Barcelona. The Popular Front was branded a “Soviet Trojan horse” receiving instructions from the Comintern.

Between the coming to power of the centre-left coalition in February 1936 and the military uprising of July 18, the accusations of communist infiltration intensified. Criticism focused more on the PSOE than on the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), due to the latter’s limited importance. Calvo Sotelo, head of the extreme right-wing *Bloque Nacional*, endorsed the “communist danger” thesis; in his vehement confrontation with Azaña in the Congress of Deputies on April 15, he called the Popular Front “a Soviet pawn”, and charged that the Socialists were becoming “progressively

Bolshevised”; he repudiated the “bourgeois” Azaña who was leaving Spain to her tragic fate, like Russia and Hungary before her.

After the Civil War and the victory of the rebels, Spain became a pro-Fascist dictatorship until the end of World War II, and Franco’s authoritarian regime remained in power until 1975. One of its hallmarks was anti-communism, fostered by the Cold War context.

The Republicans and an alien revolution

As Ángel Duarte notes,³⁰ in the complex world of Spanish Republicanism the Russian Revolution was an event that took place in a far-off land of which Spain knew next to nothing. Above all, though, it was the revolution’s political project that the Spanish Republicans found alien: it had little to do with the reformist policies that they defended.

The Spanish Republicans had supported the Allies in the World War against the Central Empires. They had approved of the Revolution of February 1917, the abdication of the Tsar, the establishment of a provisional government with similar political proposals, and the continuation of Russian participation in the war. However, the drift towards the October movement was a matter of concern to them, because of the possible consequences of the Bolshevik triumph for the course of the war. There was considerable ignorance of what the revolutionaries’ programme of political and social change entailed. When the news of the assault on the Winter Palace filtered through it was not met with criticism; the revolution was attractive to young Republicans, who saw the revolutionaries as rebels intent on changing the world. In fact, Republican supporters of Lerrox or the Jacobin left, like Marcelino Domingo, expressed enthusiasm for the events in Russia; but these sympathies would soon turn into criticism, disappointment and frustration.

The Republicans observed how the new revolutionary authority, with an increasingly absolute power, represented a danger for liberties. For the great majority of the Republicans, in fact, liberal democracy remained their main objective. Republicanism was a bourgeois movement; most of its members were on the left, like Manuel Azaña, but there are also right-wingers like Niceto Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura. The strikes in Andalusia and Catalonia during the “Bolshevik Triennium” and the

³⁰ Ángel Duarte, “No hay más que futuro. El republicanismo español y el 1917 bolchevique”, in Juan Andrade and Fernando Hernández Sánchez (eds.), *1917. La Revolución rusa cien años después* (Madrid: Akal, 2017), 305-330.

creation of the Communist International showed how far the revolution clashed with their own political proposals.

The Republicans regarded the Weimar Republic in Germany as a satisfactory solution. They rejected the authoritarian military responses of Portugal and Spain and saw the future in the democratic-reformist path that would lead to the creation of the Spanish Second Republic. They opposed the dictatorship, confronted the monarchy for its complicity with Primo de Rivera, and sought agreements with a reformist PSOE to make possible the arrival of democracy. The Pact of San Sebastián sealed the Republican alliance against the dictator and the monarchy.

The exhilarating popular victory of April 14, 1931 was seen by the Republicans as the triumph of political reformism, a mandate to introduce social change in order to avoid revolution. The aim was to succeed where Kerensky had failed: to humanise capitalism through a greater participation of the State in the economy, but not to propose an alternative system; to improve living and working conditions through the implementation of left-wing policies, the sharing out of land ownership and the decentralisation of the powers of the State, but not to make these aspirations contingent on “the rise of the proletariat”. The Bolshevik model was not that of the Republicans.

However, among the Republican ranks there were some who applauded the developments in Russia and the changes that were taking place. Diego Hidalgo, a member of the Radical Republican Party, Minister of War in 1934 and member of the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, was a fervent admirer of the new political institutions like the Soviets and of Russian society and culture in general; returning from a visit to Russia, he described the people’s humble homes and praised their vast culture and their human values.³¹ So the Republicans were a broad church: a movement with a plurality of visions, made up by predominantly bourgeois parties of a clearly reformist nature.

The left in the labyrinth

The triumph of the Russian Revolution was assimilated slowly by the Spanish left.³² Initially it was met with sympathy, and there were certain poorly organised attempts at imitation. The crisis of the Second International,

³¹ Diego Hidalgo, *Un notario español en Rusia* (Madrid: Alianza editorial, 1985) (Published for the first time by Cénitien in 1929).

³² Sebastián Faber, “Es hora de la claridad dogmática. El impacto de la Revolución rusa en la cultura política española”, in Andrade and Hernández Sánchez (eds.), 1917. *La Revolución*, 263-288.

triggered by the vote in favour of war credits in 1914, now intensified; the division of the workers' movement became increasingly evident, and until the creation of the Third International in 1919, there were many moments of hesitation and confusion.

The Spanish Socialists supported the majority of the Second International in the decisions on the position regarding the war, abandoning their previous pacifist stance in favour of the "Anglo-French Entente". A dissident minority (comprising José Verde Montenegro, Antonio García Quejido, Manuel Núñez Arenas, and *Juventudes Socialistas*) opposed the war and supported the resolutions of the Zimmerwald Conference of September 1915 in favour of peace. This left-wing current was also critical of the alliance with the Republicans in the Republican-Socialist Conjunction, an electoral coalition, and of the policies of the trade unions, accusing the General Union of Workers (UGT, the union affiliated with the Socialists) of reformism. The confrontation inside the trade union moment was reflected in the opposing positions in the National Mining Federation between the Basque Facundo Perezagua,³³ who would eventually join the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), and the Asturian Manuel Llana.

Thus the war, the policy of cross-class alliances and trade union strategy were the key issues in the Socialists' internal debates in 1917. The PSOE responded enthusiastically to the February Revolution, but the October Revolution was seen by *El Socialista* with "great sadness", because of the radical nature of its proposals and the real possibility that Russia would sign a separate peace with Germany. The impact on Spanish socialism was by no means unique, since the Revolution sent shockwaves throughout the entire international socialist movement.

The anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists had opposed the Great War and condemned the betrayal of the socialist parties. At the same time they supported the Zimmerwald resolutions and the revolutionary message of the Bolsheviks. The anarcho-syndicalist Manuel Buenacasa and the pro-Bolshevik Joaquín Maurín welcome the October Revolution with optimism and fellow feeling.³⁴ Buenacasa expressed his view at the II Congress of the CNT held in Madrid in December 1919:

We, who are enemies of the State, as we have shown in several of the motions approved by this Congress, understand that the Russian

³³ Norberto Ibáñez and José Antonio Pérez, *Facundo Perezagua. El primer líder obrero en Biskaya (1860-1935)* (Bilbao: Fundación BBK, 2004).

³⁴ Juan Avilés Farré, *La fe que vino de Rusia: La revolución bolchevique y los españoles, 1917-1931* (Madrid: UNED, 1999), 40.

Revolution, because it is a revolution that has overturned the prevailing economic values or, more exactly, because it is a revolution that has given power, the instruments of production and the land to the proletariat, is of interest to us no matter what form it takes and that it is our duty to prevent this revolution, the government of the Soviets, from being strangled by the capitalist states...³⁵

The CNT identified closely with the Bolshevik experience and supported it from the very first moments. During the CNT's Second Congress, Hilario Arlandis and others proposed that the organisation should join the Communist International (CI); but others like Eleuterio Quintanilla rejected the "Russian dictatorship" and rejected the claim that it responded to the ideology of revolutionary syndicalism. For his part, Salvador Seguí was sceptical about the readiness of the Russian working classes for revolution. Finally, a declaration of principles along Bakuninist lines and supporting the First International was approved, and the organisation provisionally joined the Third International, in view of its revolutionary character.

Around this time, Ángel Pestaña travelled to Russia to attend the Second Congress of the CI.³⁶ Pestaña was very critical of much of what he saw: the manipulation of Congress by the Russian Communists, the Bolsheviks' exercise of power (the dictatorship of the proletariat), the role of the Russian police, the Cheka, and the lack of freedom. Along with most of the anarchists, he refused to sign a single document. His report was presented at the National Committee of the CNT in 1922, which decided against joining the Third International and pledged to promote the International Workers' Association, founded in Berlin in 1922.

The CNT was divided between revolutionary syndicalists such as Salvador Seguí and Ángel Pestaña, anarcho-syndicalists such as Manuel Buenacasa and a pro-Bolshevik minority led by Andreu Nin and Joaquín Maurín. After a wave of arrests Nin and Maurín took over the organisation of the movement, and attended the founding Congress of the Profintern in July 1921, coinciding there with the two Spanish Communist parties.

Andreu Nin was a passionate defender of the conquests of the Russian Revolution. In December 1919 he affirmed at the Congress of the CNT:

I am a fanatical supporter of action, of the revolution; I believe in acts more than in distant ideologies and in abstract questions. I admire the

³⁵ Quoted by José Peirats, *Los anarquistas en la crisis política de España* (Madrid: Júcar, 1977).

³⁶ Ángel Pestaña, *Setenta días en Rusia. Lo que yo vi* (Barcelona: Tipografía Cosmos, n.d.).

Russian Revolution because it is a reality. I support the Third International because it is a reality, because over and above ideologies it represents a principle of action, a principle of coexistence of all the revolutionary forces that aspire to the immediate implantation of communism.³⁷

After the arrest of Maurín, Juan Peiró of the anarcho-sindicalist branch of the movement was elected secretary-general. At the Zaragoza Conference of 1922, the agreements of the Madrid Congress were revoked and the membership of the Profintern was terminated. The distancing from Moscow was definitive, although a small group of dissident CNT members went over to the PCE.

The decision to stay out of the organisations controlled by the Communists was based not only on their understanding of politics, but also on events such as the crushing of the Makhnovist revolution and the Kronstadt rebellion of 1921 which challenged the communist dictatorship and sought an anarchist alternative inspired in self-governance. Soon afterwards, in 1923, Emma Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia* was published in the United States, by which time the anarchists had abandoned the Soviet model once and for all.

As for the Spanish socialists, they had shown less interest in the Russian Revolution than the anarchists. There were two main reasons for this: first, the Socialist Republican Conjunction's policy of interclass cooperation, and second, their support of the Allies. In the eyes of the socialists, the October Revolution had jettisoned the hard-won gains of February 1917.

Nonetheless, a group of Socialist militants continued to support the Revolution and began to lobby for the party's inclusion in the Third International. The weekly *Nuestra Palabra*, directed by Mariano García Cortes, praised the Bolsheviks' policies, renounced parliamentary politics and held events, rallies, and demonstrations in favour of the Revolution³⁸.

Gradually the mainstream Socialists began to show more interest in the events in Russia. At the Thirteenth Congress of the UGT in September-October 1918, and at the Eleventh Congress of the PSOE in October 1918, the revolution in Russia was analysed with a certain enthusiasm, in an atmosphere marked by the intensification of social

³⁷ Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *Memoria del Congreso celebrado en el Teatro de la Comedia de Madrid, los días 10 al 18 de diciembre de 1919* (Barcelona: Tipografía Cosmos, 1932), 373-374; see also Andreu Nin, *La revolución rusa* (Barcelona: Fontamara, 1979).

³⁸ Carlos Forcadell, *Parlamentarismo y bolchevización. El movimiento obrero español, 1914-1918* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1978), 250-257.

mobilisation in Spain. But in general the Spanish socialists to-ed and fro-ed on the subject of the Russian Revolution and the Third International, and were never able to settle on a consistent policy.

Between December 1919 and April 1921, the party held three Extraordinary Congresses. At the first one, delegates debated whether the party should stay in the Second International or join the Third. Because of the internal divisions, the decision was postponed; the party remained in the Second International and supported Julián Besteiro's proposal to promote the unification of the two organisations. At the same time an alternative formula to the 21 conditions demanded by the CI was put forward, proposing the autonomy of the PSOE with respect to the tactics of the organisation, the right to review the agreements with the CI, and the need to guarantee the unity of all the socialist organisations. Of course it was unthinkable that the CI would accede to the demands of a small party. For its part, the UGT swiftly made the decision not to join the CI.

Seven months later, in June 1920, the PSOE decided to leave the Second International and join the CI, a provisional agreement while they awaited the reports of Fernando de los Ríos and Daniel Anguiano. Finally, in April 1921, delegates voted on de los Ríos's report and decided to support the reconstruction of the Second International. De los Ríos's report on his trip to Russia had a decisive influence on this decision, since it corroborated the views of the majority of the party. He described the state of misery afflicting the country:

Almost everyone carries a sack on their backs; this image of men, women and young people with a bundle of coarse cloth, jute or hemp, cannot easily be forgotten by those who have visited present-day Russia. In many people, especially women of a certain age unaccustomed to this toil, a gesture of fatigue and pain is often observed that leaves a lasting impression.³⁹

To this he added the lack of freedom and the destruction of the Soviets by the Communist party:

The party's need to preserve power has vitiated the entire structure of the regime, and the factory committees and the economic and political soviets in the village are fully subverted; the war cry of November 1917 of "All power to the soviets" has been replaced by "all power to the Communist party".⁴⁰

³⁹ Fernando de los Ríos, *Mi viaje a la Rusia soviética* (Madrid: Alianza, 1970), 52-53.

⁴⁰ de los Ríos, *Mi viaje*, 199.

De los Ríos concluded that the established political principles such as the dictatorship of the proletariat were not part of socialist culture, and could not be accepted. His report was supported by Pablo Iglesias and finally the Socialists rejected membership of the Communist International, and joined the International Working Union of Socialist Parties.⁴¹

Throughout these debates within the PSOE, voices were heard that sympathised with the Russian Revolution—the *Juventudes Socialistas*, the *Grupo Socialista de Madrid* and the *Escuela Nueva*—though they formed a very heterogeneous group. At the domestic level they favoured the termination of the agreements with the Republicans, whom they saw as the bourgeois left, and they advocated membership of the CI. Their militant, radical discourse clashed with the reformist bent that prevailed in mainstream socialist circles.⁴²

Conflict between the different tendencies was inevitable. At the PSOE's Extraordinary Congress of December 1919, while Julián Besteiro celebrated the reconstruction of the Second International, Daniel Anguiano proposed entry into the CI. In December 1918, the *Juventudes Socialistas* had voted for unconditional membership of the Third International. Within the party, a pro-Third International Group was formed, with Anguiano, Virginia González, Núñez Arenas, and García Cortes among its members.

Many of the younger party members lost patience with the PSOE and on April 15, 1920 founded the Spanish Communist Party (PCE).⁴³ Of the 7,000 affiliates of *Juventudes Socialistas*, only 2,000 joined the new party. At a new Extraordinary Congress, without displacing Pablo Iglesias from the presidency, the *terceristas* (the pro-Third Internationalists) achieved a breakthrough by obtaining a majority in the party leadership, with Daniel Anguiano appointed secretary and Antonio García Quejido vice-president. But they soon suffered a series of defeats; they lost the leadership of the party in Madrid, and the UGT joined the International Federation of Trade Unions of Amsterdam. Finally, after the decisive report by Fernando de los Ríos, any hopes the *terceristas* might still have held rapidly faded away.

⁴¹ Founded on February 27, 1921, it was also known as the *2½ International*. The Union comprised ten socialist parties, including the USPD from Germany, the SFIS from France and the Independent Labour Party from Great Britain.

⁴² Francisco Erice, "El impacto de la Revolución rusa en el movimiento obrero español: el surgimiento del PCE", in Andrade and Hernández Sánchez (eds.), *1917. La Revolución*, 331-356.

⁴³ Rafael Cruz, *El Partido Comunista de España y la II República* (Madrid: Alianza, 1987).

The only course of action that remained open to the *terceristas* was to leave the PSOE and to set up a new communist party: the *Partido Comunista Obrero Español* (the Spanish Communist Workers' Party, PCOE). So the crisis of the PSOE created two new parties, both calling themselves communist, but characterised above all by their weakness, their limited territorial implantation, and their radical political approaches.

As they embarked on their political careers, neither the *Partido Comunista Español* nor the PCOE had many affiliates—between four or five thousand in both cases. The number of militants fell steadily, and when the two groups merged in March 1922, the new Communist Party of Spain (PCE) had about 6,500 members. Indeed, the PCE was the Comintern's weakest section; over the border to the north, the French Communist Party had 200,000 militants in the early 1920s. The PCE was debilitated further by the repression under the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera; forced underground, the party became ever more radical, sectarian and marginal.

According to Juan Andrade, one of the founders of the PCE, in 1927 the party did not exist. The municipal elections of April 12, 1931 did little to increase its electoral importance; the party obtained only one mayor, in the second round of voting, in a small village in the province of Toledo called La Villa de Don Fadrique. In the legislative elections of 1933, the PCE won a seat in Málaga, and in the Popular Front elections of 1936 they won 17 seats, 3.5% of the total. Therefore, its electoral weight was very small; its political influence had risen slightly but remained very limited, unable to make inroads into the Socialists' dominance of the Left, and still in thrall to the dictates of Moscow.⁴⁴

The distinctive features of the PCE under the Second Republic were its growing radicalisation, justified by the need to occupy a political space vacated by the Socialists as they moved to the right, and by the rise of Fascism. The party's activism and propaganda were increasingly effective, but the practical impact of its activity was limited. Membership grew but remained relatively insignificant. The party would have to wait until the Civil War to acquire a more central role, something that it managed thanks to the help of the USSR.

The USSR's presence in Spain rose under the Republic with the establishment of diplomatic relations, although ambassadors were not exchanged until after the outbreak of the Civil War. The image of the USSR was also enhanced by books such as Ramón J. Sender's account of

⁴⁴ Antonio Elorza and Marta Biscarrondo, *Queridos camaradas. La Internacional Comunista y España* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999).

his visit, which described the extension of the “rights of the peoples of Russia”, and improvements in culture and education,⁴⁵ and by the work of the PCE leaders such as Dolores Ibárruri, *La Pasionaria*, and the General Secretary José Díaz, who considered the USSR as the example to follow.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ramón J. Sender, *Madrid – Moscú. Notas de viaje (1933-1934)* (Madrid: 1934, n.p.), 145-146.

⁴⁶ José Díaz, *Tres años de lucha. Por el Frente. Por la libertad. Por la independencia de España* (París: Colección Ebro, 1970).

CHAPTER EIGHT

COMMEMORATING A REVOLUTION IN THE MIDDLE OF WARTIME: THE PSUC AND THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF OCTOBER 1917

LOLA HARANA
AND JOSÉ MANUEL RÚA FERNÁNDEZ

Introduction

On Sunday November 7, 1937, in the midst of a civil war that had already lasted almost 16 months, the Catalan *Committee for the Organization of a Tribute to the USSR* staged a commemorative event to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution at the Olympia Theatre in Barcelona. The tribute honoured the Soviet Union and also the city of Madrid, on the first anniversary of the beginning of the battle for the Spanish capital which was under siege by Franco's troops. The Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* ran the headline "*Catalonia dedicates a great act of homage to the USSR, our sister people, and to Madrid, the city of martyrs*", linking the struggle of the Spanish Republic with the Soviet revolutionary experience.

The interest in commemorating the anniversary of the Russian Revolution at the height of the Spanish Civil War reflected the various views and readings of the political, economic and social transformations that Russia had experienced since 1917. Historical accounts always reflect the climate of the time they are made, and the Catalonia of 1937 was closely linked to the political projects and the military strategies of the main protagonists in the Republican rearguard. For the Socialist Unified Party of Catalonia (PSUC), one of the main parties in Catalonia and the official mouthpiece of Soviet communism, the commemoration of the Russian Revolution was far more than a mere celebration of a past event:

it was a reinterpretation of the Soviet experience from a Republican and anti-Fascist perspective. In saluting the revolution, Catalonia was not just calling it to memory, but was also projecting a vision of it in accord with the interests of the present situation.

For the PSUC, created on July 24, 1936, by the merger of Socialists and Communists in the context of the anti-Fascist struggle, the Spanish Civil War was, more than anything else, a war against Fascism.¹ The objective was not to carry out a socialist revolution, as had been the case of the Bolshevik insurrection and the Russian Civil War, but to defend the political and social achievements of the liberal democracy of the Spanish Republic. Accordingly, the Spanish Civil War was not a revolutionary war in the same sense as its Russian counterpart, but a war in defence of democracy and the popular revolution: an attempt to consolidate the Popular Front's project of an alliance between the workers and the middle classes, and to concentrate all its efforts on military victory. This idea entailed centralizing the military command and planning an economy that was fully focused on winning the war, and leaving aside hyper-revolutionary experiments and other grand schemes. Victory over Franco, then, would not usher in a proletarian revolution, but rather the advancement of a democratic revolution which, once Fascism was defeated, would introduce a set of new social rights for workers within a "new style" democracy.

In our analysis of how the PSUC reinterpreted the events of October 1917, we first contextualize its role and that of the Soviet Union during the Civil War, and seek to explain how this revolutionary state became an international model able to set in motion a series of friendship societies under the umbrella of the International Association of the Friends of the Soviet Union. We then reflect on the importance of commemorative acts as a way of developing a political discourse both *from the perspective* of the present, and *for the purposes* of the present. Finally, we assess in some detail the PSUC's reading of the October Revolution, the political capital the made of it, and the significance of the figure of the Soviet leader Stalin.

¹ For further information Josep Puigsech, "Popular Front, war and internationalism in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, Vol. 37: Issue 1, 2012, 146-164.

The Soviet Union and the Second Republic

After the departure of the Spanish king's emissary Fernando Gómez Contreras from Russia in November 1918, a year after the triumph of the revolution and in the midst of the civil war raging in that country, Spain and the new Soviet state had no relations of any kind. This situation would continue until the proclamation of the Second Republic in Spain, when diplomatic contacts were resumed and a mutual recognition agreement was signed in July 1933, thanks to the efforts of the Spanish Minister of State Fernando de los Ríos.² During its first months in power the new Republican government tried to promote trading links between the two countries, and as early as May 1931 the Spanish Minister of Finance Indalecio Prieto signed an agreement for the purchase of Soviet oil. For their part, the Soviets were interested in Spanish lead, laminated iron and cork.³ As part of the reestablishment of relations between the two countries ambassadors should have been exchanged, but the circumstances of the moment prevented it: the former People's Commissar for Public Instruction Anatoly Lunacharsky died before reaching Madrid, and Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Spain's designated ambassador to Moscow, also failed to take office because of the political crisis in Spain in September 1933, the fall of the government of Manuel Azaña, and the appointment of Alejandro Lerroux as President of the Council of Ministers.

With the coming to power of the new Spanish government, Hispano-Soviet relations frosted over once again, even though Spain supported the entry of the Soviet Union to the League of Nations in September 1934—a diplomatic manoeuvre for which the country was rewarded with semi-permanent place on the League's Council. The entry of the CEDA, a Catholic conservative party, in Lerroux's government and the attempted revolution of October 1934 complicated the situation still further: Madrid saw the long shadow of the Communist International lurking behind the political and social agitation in the country, and Moscow was highly distrustful of the Fascist sympathies of the radical-CEDA government.

² De los Ríos had gained first-hand experience of the Soviet Union on a visit between October and December 1920. He described this trip in *Mi viaje a la Rusia soviética* (Madrid: Imp. de R. Caro Raggio, 1921).

³ These products are listed in an article published in *Izvestia* on May 18, 1932 regarding Soviet purchases in Spain, titled "Sovietskie pokupki v Ispanii". Quoted in Magdalena Garrido Caballero, "Asociación de Amigos de la Unión Soviética (1933-1938)," *Las relaciones entre España y la Unión Soviética a través de las Asociaciones de Amistad en el siglo XX*. [PhD thesis, chapter 5, University of Murcia, 2006].

Accordingly, the repression of the miners' uprising in Asturias unleashed a wave of solidarity in the Soviet Union towards the Spanish revolutionaries; funds were raised for the victims of the reprisals and their families, and temporary homes were found for 123 Spanish exiles who would remain in the Soviet Union until April 1936, when the amnesty decreed by the Popular Front enabled them to return to Spain.⁴

At the political level, in its actions in Spain the Comintern had moved from a policy based on class struggle with the main aim of unmasking the "social-fascists" (the Social Democrats branded as traitors to the working class), to a policy of supporting a single proletariat front that proclaimed the unity of the workers and the Popular Front, based on inter-class alliances in order to stop the advance of Fascism. This change had allowed the Spanish Communist Party, which had been peripheral until that point, to take up a key place inside the political landscape. Indeed, the victory of the Popular Front allowed the resumption of contacts in order to normalize diplomatic relations between the two countries, and Spain formally recognized the Soviet government in March 1936. Bilateral *rapprochement* would culminate in the exchange of ambassadors: Marcel I. Rosenberg arrived in Madrid in July 1936, and Marcelino Pascua took up his post in Moscow in October 1936.⁵ In addition, Vladimir Antonov- Ovseyenko, who had taken part in the storming of the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg on October 25, 1917 (according to the Julian calendar) was appointed consul in Barcelona.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, the Soviet Union was one of the few countries (along with Mexico and, to an extent, France) willing to sell arms to the Spanish Republic,⁶ even though it was a member of the Committee of Non-Intervention. The sale of weapons, paid via the transfer of the Bank of Spain's gold reserves to Moscow,⁷ was accompanied by the arrival in Spain of Soviet advisors—pilots, tank commanders, military

⁴ For further information, see Magdalena Garrido Caballero, "Asociación de Amigos".

⁵ Marcelino Pascua was appointed ambassador to Paris in March 1938 and was succeeded in Moscow by Manuel Martínez Pedrosa y Macías, who would hold the post until March 1939.

⁶ Between October 1936 and September 1937, the Soviet Union sent 23 dispatches of arms to the Republican government.

⁷ On 25 October 1936, 500 tons of gold left the port of Cartagena for the Soviet Union. On the controversy surrounding the use of these reserves, one of the specialists in the area, Pablo Martín Aceña, stated: "*the Russians did their sums ... they did not cheat their partners [...] but they made sure they were paid for all the services rendered; the Spanish Treasury received nothing for free*". Pablo Martín Aceña, *El oro de Moscú y el oro de Berlín* (Madrid: Taurus, 2001), 121.

engineers, gunners and sailors⁸—who provided instruction for 20,000 Republican soldiers,⁹ and by the recruitment and organization of the International Brigades through the Communist International.

Evidently, the Soviet decision to provide aid for Spain was motivated by a geopolitical calculation which sought to contain the expansionism of Nazi Germany and to set up a system of anti-Fascist alliances at international level. After the Munich Agreement of September 1938 this calculation was abandoned and replaced by a policy of *rapprochement* towards Germany, also in the interests of internal security, which would reach its ultimate expression in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 1939. Nevertheless, there is no denying the fact that Soviet aid increased the prestige of the USSR and the sympathies towards its political, economic and social model both in Spain and elsewhere. As David Priestland states, “Soviet arms (however small in number) and Communist organisation and discipline, it seemed, had saved democracy against Fascism”.¹⁰

The PSUC and the Civil War

The Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, or PSUC, founded on July 24, 1936, was the result of a process of convergence within the Catalan Marxist Left that included the Socialist Union of Catalonia, the Catalan Federation of the PSOE (the Spanish socialists), the Communist Party of Catalonia and the Catalan Proletarian Party. It was the clearest expression of the new orientation of the Communist International after its Seventh Congress held in Moscow in July-August 1935, which responded to the rise of Fascism by creating broad anti-Fascist alliances known as popular fronts and uniting the labour movement in defence of parliamentary democracy. The war against Franco’s rebel army and the social revolution in the rearguard created a favourable scenario for the political project of the new party, which embraced the democratic revolution but postponed the socialist revolution; in fact, its membership grew from an initial figure of 6,000 militants to one of 60,000 by the time of the First Party Conference in April 1937. The commitment to the defence of the Republic was reflected by the strong presence of the party at the front, where a third of its new militants were recruited. The PSUC was also a party of

⁸ There were around 3,000 Soviet military in Spain during the Civil War.

⁹ To this figure we should add the three thousand Republican soldiers who received military training in the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ David Priestland. *The Red Flag: Communism and the making of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Book, 2009), chapter 5 “Popular Fronts”, epigraph III.

government, first through its representation in the Central Committee of Antifascist Militias and from September 1936 onwards as an ever-present member of the government of the *Generalitat*.¹¹

The PSUC saw the revolution that began with the outbreak of the Civil War not as a proletarian and socialist revolution, but as a democratic and popular one. An insistence on promoting a socialist revolution would have brought the party into conflict with a series of social sectors (the lower middle-class, traders, professionals and farmers, for example) whose support was essential in order to consolidate the political position of the Popular Front.¹² Military victory and the construction of a “new style” democracy were the priority objectives and obliged the defenders of the Republic to take measures such as building a popular army under a unified command, reorienting industry towards the war effort, and keeping order in the rearguard by concentrating political power in the hands of the *Generalitat*.

Against this background, the armed confrontations on the streets of Barcelona in May 1937 can be seen as the violent expression of the two antagonistic political projects regarding the management of the war and the orientation of the revolution, supported by the two blocs that aspired to take political power in Catalonia: on the one hand the one led by the PSUC, comprising the trade unions General Union of Workers (UGT) and the Smallholders’ Union (Unió de Rabassaires, UR), and also Esquerra Republicana de Catalonia (the Republican Left, ERC) and Acció Catalana Republicana, and on the other the one composed of the anarchist groups the National Confederation of Labour—Iberian Anarchist Federation (CNT-FAI) and the Marxist Unification Labour Party (POUM). Whereas the PSUC bloc conceived the war as a struggle against Fascism and in defence of Republican institutions, the anarchist bloc saw it as an opportunity to further their revolutionary aims and to supplant the legality of the Republic.

In this tense scenario, the role of the Soviet Union should not be forgotten. The Soviet aid to the Republic during the war and the identification of the “socialist motherland” with a successful model that

¹¹ The strength of the PSUC can be judged by the number of ministries headed by party members over the period: Joan Comorera (Economy, Public Services, Supplies, Justice, Employment and Public Works), Miquel Valdés (Employment and Public Works), Rafael Vidiella (Employment and Public Works, Justice and Supplies), Josep Miret i Pons and Miquel Serra i Pàmies (Supplies).

¹² This project brought the party into contact with a wide range of social sectors; for instance, the trade unions *Unió General de Treballadors* (UGT) and *Unió de Rabassaires* (UR) were both led by PSUC militants.

was standing firm against the rest of the European powers aroused genuine admiration among the Catalan population—an admiration which would be capitalised upon by the PSUC, which portrayed itself as the reference point of Moscow's policy in Catalonia.

The USSR as a model

There was a time, however, when no political idea of the twentieth century was comparable to communism (or the October Revolution as its symbol), a time when nothing attracted Western intellectuals and people all around the world more powerfully or emotionally.¹³

Catalonia was no exception. Francesc Layret, Josep Pla, Eugeni Xammar, Antoni Rovira i Virgili, Ferran Valls i Taberner, Carles Pi i Sunyer, Carles Soldevila, Rafael Campalans, Carner-Ribalta and many more Catalan intellectuals were fascinated by the Russian Revolution and its achievements, and their curiosity led many of them to travel to Russia in order to observe the new project at first hand. In the mid-1920s and during the 1930s, publications on the Soviet Union proliferated as intellectuals described what they had seen on their visits.¹⁴ Josep Pla¹⁵ stated that there were many rumours about Russia and that he knew about the country the same as everyone else: that is, nothing at all.¹⁶ Valls i Taberner also travelled to the country of the Soviets and gave his impressions over the course of 1928 in the series “On my return from Russia” in *La Voz de Catalunya*.¹⁷ Rovira i Virgili, who was invited to Russia by the Friends of the Soviet Union in 1938, described his perceptions and experiences in various articles in *La Humanitat* and *Meridià*.¹⁸

¹³ Extract from the 2015 Nobel Literature Prize acceptance speech by Svetlana Alexievich.

¹⁴ For a full list of these travelogues, see: M^a Ángeles Égido León, “Del paraíso soviético al peligro marxista. La Unión Soviética en la España Republicana (1931-1936),” *Historia Contemporánea*, no. 10, 1988, 139-154, and Andreu Mayayo, “El Mite de la URSS en el moviment nacionalista català: Revolució i autodeterminació (1917-1989),” in *Miscel·lània d’Homenatge a Josep Benet* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 1991).

¹⁵ Josep Pla, *Viatge a Rússia* (Barcelona: Destino, 1925).

¹⁶ Quoted in Andreu Mayayo, “El Mite de la URSS”.

¹⁷ These articles are compiled in Ferran Valls Taberner, *Un viatger català a la Rússia de Stalin, 1928* (Barcelona: PPU, 1985).

¹⁸ These articles were later compiled in Antoni Rovira i Virgili, *Viatge a la URSS* (Barcelona: Edicions 62 [Antologia Catalana, 43], 1968), with a preface by Joaquim Molas.

As the embodiment of modernity and of the idea of progress through technology, the Russian experience was of interest to everyone. The application of technology to all facets of production, the deification of science as a means to redress the backwardness of centuries and the achievement of social and economic justice for all peoples were projects that excited many and frightened not a few. The faith in the model's creative and transformative capacity was on display for all to see at the 1937 International Exhibition in Paris, with its celebration of progress and technology as the pillars of modern life. The exhibition's motto, in praise of the defence of peace, seemed to reflect the intentions of these tense, complex years in Europe.

Quantification was the new byword for progress. People counted in order to compare: the publications of the time were filled with statistics, tables, and trends to celebrate the new regime's achievements. The series of articles published in October and November 1937 in *Treball*, the PSUC's newspaper, and in *U.H.P.*, the mouthpiece of the Unified Socialist Youth and the UGT,¹⁹ under the title "Towards the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet Union" are particularly significant. Signed by Marcel Cachin,²⁰ the articles present data and observations to demonstrate the great leap forward towards a "new civilisation"²¹ made by the Soviet Union thanks to the revolution. There was no lack of classical themes, such as agricultural and industrial production²² and the development of educational structures and scientific institutions,²³ and there were also warnings of the dangers facing the revolution and of the *enemies* lining up to undermine it.²⁴

The arguments used by Cachin to defend the accomplishments of the Soviet regime are particularly interesting. To project an air of journalistic objectivity, he gathers together favourable opinions issued by authoritative

¹⁹ In the newspaper *U.H.P.: Órgano del Partido y Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas y Unión General de Trabajadores*, no. 379, October 20, 1937, 2, for these months we found only one article: "En el XX Aniversario de la U.R.S.S.: El Socialismo ha edificado una economía sólida basada en los obreros y en los campesinos" presenting data on the increase in agricultural and industrial production over the past twenty years.

²⁰ Cachin was the first Communist senator appointed in France in 1935. He was director of the French Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanité* from 1918 until his death in 1958.

²¹ The title of one of the articles in this series, signed by Marcel Cachin. *Treball*, no. 399, October 29, 1937, 8.

²² "L'Agricultura soviètica", *Treball*, no. 386, October 14, 1937, 8.

²³ "La instrucció del poble i la ciència", *Treball*, no. 392, October 21, 1937, 8.

²⁴ "La URSS es defensa", *Treball*, no. 404, November 4, 1937, 8.

voices who could hardly be suspected of being Communist sympathisers. For example, on the subject of Soviet breakthroughs in agriculture he quotes the journalist Louis Fisher, whom he defines as “an American writer, not a Communist ... who is highly critical of the Communists, whose ideas he does not share in any way”, but who is nonetheless ready to acknowledge that “the Bolsheviks have made the first important steps towards the modern and scientific organisation of agriculture. All other countries will have to imitate them”.²⁵

We find another example in Cachin’s article on the strong impetus given to teaching and scientific development. In this piece, Cachin explains his strategy: “So that we should not be accused of bias, or of painting an excessively rosy picture to order”.²⁶ He includes the opinions of Victor Boret,²⁷ “Senator, former French Minister of Agriculture and a known enemy of the Soviet Union”, who, despite his negative assessment of the country (“a hellish paradise”) acknowledges that

the government of the Soviets is doing all it can, from the technological point of view, to improve the lives of its citizens. This *deification of science* is palpable at every level in even the smallest acts of Soviet life.²⁸

This allusion to improving the lives of individuals encapsulates what the USSR represented at that time, as a model that might be applied in other contexts. The twenty years since the revolution and the start of the new political regime made it possible to evaluate its path and its achievements. The new system was not a pipedream. If Russia had managed, so could others: “The enemies of the USSR did not succeed. Nor will the enemies of Spain: *no pasarán*”.²⁹

The Friends of the Soviet Union

This organisation was set up during the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the USSR, at a conference in Moscow that brought together several delegations from abroad who were visiting the country. This conference, which later came to be known as the World Congress of Friends of the Soviet Union, was held from 9 to 13 November 1927, and

²⁵ “L’Agricultura ...”, *Ibidem*. Our emphasis.

²⁶ “La instrucció...”, *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Victor Boret travelled to the USSR in 1932 and published his impressions in *Le Paradis infernal (URSS, 1933)* (Paris: Aristide Quillet, 1933).

²⁸ “La instrucció...”, *Treball*, no. 404, November 4, 1937, 8.

²⁹ *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 1. [Special issue].

gave rise to the establishment of sections of Friends of the Soviet Union in many different countries including France, Britain, Germany, and the US—but not in Spain, at that time governed by the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. In fact, the Spanish section would only receive official recognition in April 1933, when the Republic was already two years old.

The founding manifesto of the Spanish section of the Friends of the Soviet Union was signed in Madrid on 11 February, 1933. The reasons for the creation of the association are described as follows:

Everyone is eager to know the truth of what is happening in this country which is currently under construction. On this great page of human History, political passions run high. In our country, no serious effort has yet been made to address the facts objectively and accurately.” Its goals and aims were: “to study, and present in the light of day, without concealment or distortion, the successes, the difficulties, and the problems of this magnificent experience which the construction of a new society represents for the world.”³⁰

The association brought together numerous trade union and political organisations as well as a great many intellectuals such as Ramón J. Sender, Federico García Lorca, Pío Baroja, Ramón María del Valle Inclán (honorary president), Juan Negrín, Victoria Kent, and Luis Lacasa, and also set out to achieve broad social support. The Catalan delegation³¹ (the *Association of Friends of the Soviet Union*, or AUS) was chaired by Antoni M. Sbert, founder member of Esquerra Republicana and Minister of Culture in the *Generalitat* from December 1936 to April 1937, and from June 1937 onwards the minister of Governance and Social Aid. In 1937, Sbert became a member of the association’s National Committee. The association’s headquarters were at Gran Vía de las Corts Catalanes, no. 654, in Barcelona.

The AUS gradually established itself all over the country, but it was not until the outbreak of war that it made its presence felt through the organisation of multiple activities designed to “raise the morale of the combatants and to satisfy their curiosity about the USSR”.³² The commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution was an

³⁰ To consult the *Manifesto* in its entirety, see: *El Catoblepas. Nódulo Materialista – Documentario*: <http://www.nodulo.org/bib/drjo/19330211.htm> (last consulted on 18/05/2016).

³¹ Antoni Rovira i Virgili, *Cartes de l'exili, 1939-1945*. Compilation, transcription and notes: Maria Capdevila (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2002), 40, note 4.

³² Garrido Caballero, “Asociación de Amigos”.

ideal excuse to step up its involvement and, in Catalonia, the Catalan section created the *Committee for the Organisation of a Tribute to the USSR*, which soon set to work organising conferences, collecting signatures, holding exhibitions, and staging theatrical performances. The committee published a manifesto justifying the tribute:

All the democratic peoples of the world feel compelled to acknowledge the USSR. [...] But we Catalans, the direct recipients of the unconditional help from the Soviet Union in our war against international Fascism, feel doubly indebted to the great brother people and wish to express our profound gratitude and our ardent feelings of solidarity and comradeship.³³

Among the activities scheduled to commemorate the October Revolution, the association wanted to publish “a monumental book of signatures, distributed by organisations and institutions in which everyone will wish to print their name”.³⁴ This book would become a voluminous album,³⁵ which compiled articles in praise of the Russian people and their achievements, photographs, and announcements made by companies, factories and shops (many of them bearing the abbreviation E.C. Collectivised Company) as a mark of support. This monumental publication included an interesting dedication by Lluís Companys:

Twenty years ago the Soviet Union rid itself of those institutions and regimes that base their authority on force; it freed the land from ignorance and slavery, liberated its people by rehabilitating the working classes, and became the admirable country that, today, under the guidance of its great leader Stalin, stands generously by our side, so that we, in full independence, can mark out the path of our destinies.

³³ *El Comitè Català Pro-Homenatge a la URSS amb motiu del XXè aniversari de la revolució d'Octubre adreça al Poble el següent Manifest*. [Arxiu CEHI-Pavelló de la República, Universitat de Barcelona, Fons DH, 1 page] signed by: *Acció Catalana, Amics de Mèxic, Amics de la Unió Soviètica, Confederació Nacional del Treball, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, Estat Català, Federació Anarquista Ibèrica, Front de la Joventut, Izquierda Republicana, Joventuts Llibertàries, Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, Partit Federal Ibèric, Unió General de Treballadors, Unió de Rabassaires*. Obviously, for ideological reasons, the POUM did not form part of this Committee.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Associació d'Amics de la Unió Soviètica, Homenatge de Catalunya a la Unió de Repúbliques Socialistes Soviètiques. Amb motiu del XXè aniversari de la seva constitució*. [Àlbum autoritzat per l'Associació d'Amics de la Unió Soviètica]. (Barcelona: Gráf. Delriu, [1937]).

Other tributes celebrating the twentieth anniversary included the edition of a commemorative stamp and the famous poster by Enric Moneny, which have lodged the image of the Revolution in our visual memory: a factory worker with a hammer and a peasant woman with a sickle standing together, looking towards the future next to the motto “Citizens, join the tribute to the USSR”. This image is a version of the huge stainless steel sculpture, 24.5 metres high, made by the artist Vera Mukhina to crown the Soviet pavilion at the International Exhibition of Paris in 1937,³⁶ which stood next to the sober but impressive Spanish pavilion and directly opposite the German pavilion, a prime example of totalitarian architecture.

Commemorating: something more than remembering

The act of commemorating combines memory, recognition, evocation and transformation. It is a desire to celebrate a past event publicly and collectively and to revive this event in the present, with the adaptations necessary to serve present needs.

There are moments that are particularly propitious for the activation of certain memories, and 1937 was one of them. At a time of upheaval marked by the war and by a future filled with uncertainty, the beleaguered Republic sought to establish bridges with the past and looked for references to past achievements. Andreas Huyssen’s statement that “our concerns with memory are a displacement of our fear of the future”³⁷ emphasises the need to look for models and references that explain the present to us, make it more palatable and, if possible, make the path towards the future more inviting.

Sometimes history provides us with coincidences that must be capitalised upon. The date of November 7 allowed a double commemoration: the twenty years of the Russian Revolution and the first year of the heroic defence of Madrid. These coincidences were used to generate a collective imaginary that linked the two events and identified them, in spite of their many differences, with the same struggle against the reactionary forces at home and aggression from abroad.

So commemoration goes far beyond memory. It embodies the human capacity to re-create the past—like *bricoleurs*, to use Lévi-Strauss’s

³⁶ The Exhibition bore the significant name *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*.

³⁷ Andreas Huyssen, “Medios, política y memoria. En busca del tiempo futuro”. *Puentes*, year I, no. 2, December 2000, 13.

term—by selecting, at each particular moment, the resources that we think will best serve our purposes. In this process we make a collective choice between usable and unusable pasts.

The PSUC and October

Inevitably, the October 1917 revolution became a constant reference in the speeches and writings of the leaders of the PSUC. The communiqué issued by the PSUC's Central Committee announcing the commemoration noted that twenty years before "all the peoples of the USSR had taken power by revolutionary means" and that

the proletariat, free of the burden of Tsarist feudalism and their bourgeois exploiters, was now owner of the factories, the mines, the banks, all the material and cultural riches of a huge country; in alliance with the peasants, free now from their enslavement by semi-feudal landowners, they have managed to transform a sixth of the Earth's surface

In the 1930s the Soviet Union had become a "giant beacon lighting the way for all the exploited and oppressed". Precisely, this role as the "defender of the weak and the inspiration of those who yearn for freedom," had made it the best possible ally of the Republican cause, "the most formidable barrier against a murderous Fascism" which "sought to subject all peoples to slavery".³⁸

These continuous references establish parallels between the situation in Russia, especially during the Civil War, and the situation in Spain in 1937. Nevertheless, these parallels are qualified and the differences in the respective historical contexts are acknowledged. That is to say, the situation in Catalonia and Spain was not "revolutionary", in the sense of the Bolsheviks' seizure of political power in 1917; it was a pro-democratic and anti-Fascist revolution which, following the guidelines of the Communist International, would pave the way for a "new style democracy". The PSUC was the organisational expression of the designs of the Communist International not only because of its status as the unified workers' party that supported the ideas of the Popular Front, but also because of its strategy of abandoning insurrectionary tactics and embracing parliamentary conventions. If the anti-Fascist war ended in victory, the new strategy of the International would lead to new political and social gains for workers. To quote the historian Eric Hobsbawm:

³⁸ "En el XX Aniversari de la Revolució Socialista a la URSS", *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 20.

Landlords and capitalists who supported the rebels would lose their property, not as landlords and capitalists, but as traitors. The government would have to plan and take over the economy; not for reasons of ideology but by the logic of war-economies. Consequently, if victorious, “such a democracy of a new type cannot but be the enemy of the conservative spirit [...] it provides a guarantee for the further economic and political conquests of the Spanish working people”.³⁹

The parallelism, then, between the Civil War in Russia which led to the construction of a socialist State and the Civil War in Spain which sought to consolidate the more progressive aspects of liberal democracy against the threat of Fascism was really limited to two specific elements. On the one hand, the fight against foreign powers that threatened national sovereignty:

the Spanish Republic is also involved a life-or-death struggle, like its Soviet brothers before it; and this merciless struggle is now passing through one of its gravest periods. We are fighting against foreign invaders, against a powerful enemy

and on the other hand the struggle against the reactionary forces in Spain, “the indigenous counter-revolution”. Using the PSUC’s terminology of the time, an accurate summary would define the military confrontation as a struggle “for the independence of our land which traitors and renegade generals have sold to the Fascist brigands”.⁴⁰ Just like the Kremlin and the Communist International, the Catalan communists identified another contemporary military conflict as an episode in the international struggle against Fascism and imperialism: the Japanese occupation of China. Their reference to the character of the patriotic struggle against the foreign occupier (“the Fascism that has invaded our homeland”) is also linked to the fight against Japan (an ally of Nazi Germany after the Anti-Comintern Pact of November 25, 1936) in which “the Chinese people are murdered en masse, but like our people they continue to fight for their freedom and national independence”.⁴¹

So the celebrations and commemorations of the Russian Revolution are particularly significant. Without forgetting the activities organised at

³⁹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), 163.

⁴⁰ “En el XX Aniversari de la Revolució Socialista a la URSS”, *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 20.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

the front⁴² and in the rearguard⁴³, the great commemorative event took place on Sunday November 7⁴⁴ at the Olympia Theatre, attended by the President of the *Generalitat*, Lluís Companys. The event also recalled the anniversary of the resistance of the people of Madrid, as “a truly national anniversary, for all lovers of freedom and peace”, and encourages the people to express this feeling in the streets of the city: “Catalan flags, flags of the Republic and the red flag of the Soviet Union must all fly together”.⁴⁵ The link between the Battle of Madrid and the October Revolution is also present in the article by the leader of the Spanish Communist Party, Jesús Hernández, entitled “The USSR and Spain”, which describes how

in the streets of the anti-Fascist capital of Spain the walls of the houses were covered with posters reproducing an article from Pravda about the similarities between the Red Army’s heroic and victorious defence of Petrograd and the situation in Madrid, defended by the Republican militias.

The analogy stretched to the military, with the comparison between the militias of July 1936 and the Red Guard of the Russian Revolution: “The old red guards, so like our July militias and just as heroic, have become the most powerful army on Earth. They are a shining example to our Regular People’s Army”.⁴⁶

Thus, the strategy for victory would be to maintain and strengthen the anti-Fascist alliance—an alliance which, at the political level, could not be restricted to the traditional forces of the Left, and, at the social level, had to reach beyond the working class and the peasants. This strategy required the reinforcement of the Popular Front, understood as the

point of union of all those who want a free and happy world, which must allow us to prevail, even though we face a fearsome enemy, just as our

⁴²“The commemoration in the trenches. The 564th Batallion—a model of discipline, combativeness and enthusiasm—celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the USSR, in Huesca”. *U.H.P.*, no. 399, November 12, 1937, 7.

⁴³ An example is the tribute to Soviet youth organised by the Unified Socialist Youth of Catalonia, with music, poetry and speeches at the offices of CADCI (the association of shop and office workers) on the evening of Sunday November 7. “Gran Festival d’Homenatge a la Joventut Soviètica organitzat per la JSU de C”. *Treball*, no. 405, November 5, 1937, 7.

⁴⁴ According to the Gregorian calendar used in the West (but not in Russia at that time), November 7, 1917 is the date of the start of the revolution.

⁴⁵ “Banderes, el dia 7!”. *Treball*, no. 405, November 5, 1937, 5.

⁴⁶ “L’Exèrcit de la Pau”, *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 9.

brothers of the USSR defeated the counterrevolutionary generals and the foreign invaders.⁴⁷

Victory would depend on the maintenance of the unity of the anti-Fascist front, as the leader of the PSUC and the UGT Víctor Colomé proclaimed in the tribute at the Olympia Theatre:

the most effective homage that can be offered to the Soviet Union and the defenders of Madrid will be the affirmation of the anti-Fascist united front, in which all differences, struggles and, mistrust between us have been overcome;⁴⁸

but its accomplishment also entailed the use of methods that would become notorious during the Moscow Trials, such as the purification of the internal enemy, both real and imaginary:

We will win, because we will relentlessly crush the fifth column and all the agents of the counter-revolution, all the enemies concealed in our midst, the Fascists, the Trotskyist spies, the provocateurs, the speculators and the hoarders.⁴⁹

Stalin, our finest ally

Never was there ever a fuller life, nor one more noble, nor one truer to its ideals

—Marcel Cachin on Stalin

In 1937, the cult of the personality was already deeply rooted in the international communist movement. In a communiqué celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, the Executive Committee of the Communist International paid homage to the Soviet leader as the “friend and guide of millions of workers” ... and went on as follows: “our first thought and our first words are for you, the leader, organiser and inspiration of the victories of socialism in the USSR.” The cult extolled Stalin’s role in the anti-Fascist struggle in a turbulent international panorama in which

⁴⁷ “Amb el Front Popular, vencerem!”, *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 1.

⁴⁸ “El homenaje nacional a Madrid y a la URSS”, *La Vanguardia*, November 9, 1937, 1.

⁴⁹ “En el XX Aniversari de la Revolució Socialista a la URSS”. *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 20.

through the winds and storms, with your steady captain's hand you have steered the glorious ship of socialism safely into port, in spite of the vain efforts of the Fascist pirates intent on sinking it.

It also toed the official Kremlin line on the Stalinist purges:

the Trotskyist-Bukharinist spies have sold out to the Fascists and to the foreign powers seeking to restore capitalism to the USSR. But the hand of the dictatorship of the proletariat has fallen mercilessly upon them, the spreaders of falsehoods, and the enemies of the people.⁵⁰

Within the conceptual universe of the international Communist movement, the name of Stalin conjured up not merely the idea of an exemplary statesman, but an ideological inspiration expressed through political action. In a nutshell, Stalinism as a doctrine was equated with Leninism. Jesus Hernández's words on the lessons that the Soviet experience teaches us are very evocative in this respect:

The concepts of socialism and freedom are not just grand words; they are not theoretical doctrines; they are not vain ambitions. They are the splendid realisation of the defeat of capitalism in your country and of the construction of socialism along the victorious lines of Leninism-Stalinism".⁵¹

The French Communist senator Marcel Cachin reiterated this line of thought when he spoke of the "intimate collaboration" between the leadership team formed by Lenin and Stalin, whom he describes as the "two great leaders of the new masses" and whose "simple and profound humanity"⁵² he praises. In this way a continuity was created between Lenin's role as the instigator of the October Revolution and Stalin as the great helmsman of the socialist homeland, a country in which, to quote the Catalan journalist and writer Salvador Roca i Roca, the degree of material progress achieved "surpasses that of all known countries" and had also been accompanied by spiritual and moral progress, to such an extent that "work in the Soviet Republics is not a punishment; it is a joy, it is a natural

⁵⁰ "El Comitè Executiu de la Internacional Comunista saluda al camarada Stalin". *Treball*, no. 406, November 6, 1937, 8. In the same article we read "*The Fascist bandits have engineered military conflagrations in various parts of the world, but the peoples of the USSR calmly and firmly follow their socialist path because they know that the powerful party of Lenin and Stalin will always lead them forward*".

⁵¹ Jesús Hernández, "La URSS i Espanya". *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 3.

⁵² Marcel Cachin, "Stalin". *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 11.

obligation, a normal, simple act in the physiological life of men.” In this scenario, in which the revolutionary past and the construction of the socialist present went hand in hand, it is no surprise that the journalist (and militant) ends his piece by openly declaring: “Sincerely, I would love to be a citizen of this great progressive homeland created by Lenin and now brought to its perfection by Stalin”.⁵³ Roca also had glowing praise for the country’s new legal system, the Soviet constitution of 1936, which he attributed to the vision of the country’s leader: “the Stalinist Constitution assures each citizen of the USSR a triple right: the right to work, the right to rest and the right to education”.⁵⁴

So the PSUC fell for the siren song coming from Moscow and accepted the Stalinist account uncritically:

The formidable results have been achieved in an unceasing fight against all the enemies of the people, against the counterrevolutionary agents, the spies, Trotskyist and Bukharinist saboteurs, who, helped by Hitler and Japanese Fascist militarism, have striven to subject the peoples from the USSR once again to the yoke of capitalist slavery.⁵⁵

Praise for the political figure of Stalin was not the exclusive domain of the most orthodox Communists (just as the Soviet model aroused the admiration beyond the circle of convinced Marxist-Leninists, as evidenced by the existence of associations such as the Friends of the Soviet Union). The crisis of the liberal democracies and the rise of Fascism in its various forms in Europe created a scenario in which the October Revolution and its subsequent institutionalisation remained a reference point for countless workers and for intellectuals as well. If we add to this international panorama a Civil War at home between ultraconservative forces supported by the Fascist powers and the defenders of democratic legality in the form of the Republic supported by the Soviet Union, it is easy to understand why a Catalan leader like Lluís Companys, in the commemoration of the first anniversary of the defence of Madrid and the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution at the Olympia Theatre,⁵⁶ should have spoken so

⁵³ S. Roca i Roca, “El secret de la URSS. La gran patria progressiva de Lenin i Stalin”. *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 12.

⁵⁴ “En el XX Aniversari de la Revolució Socialista a la URSS”. *Treball*, n° 407, November 7, 1937, 20.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ “Twenty years ago the Soviet Union rid itself of those institutions and regimes that base their authority on force; it freed the country from ignorance and slavery, liberated its people by rehabilitating the working classes”. “El homenaje nacional a Madrid y a la URSS”. *La Vanguardia*, November 9, 1937, 1.

highly of the Soviet Union and its leader: “this admirable country that today, under the guidance of the great leader Stalin, stands generously at our side, so that we, with full independence, can mark out the guidelines of our destinies”.⁵⁷

Any news report referring to the USSR represented an opportunity to glorify the Soviet dictator. The announcement of the visit to Moscow of the secretary of Relations of the Executive Committee of the PSUC, Rafael Vidiella, as a member of the expedition of the Friends of the Soviet Union for the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, is a good example; inevitably enough, after claiming that the Minister of Labour and Public Works of the *Generalitat* “will bring back beneficial and novel teachings from the formidable and incomparable feats in so many aspects achieved by the labourers and peasants of the workers' homeland,” the reporter stresses that all this has been made possible “by the guidance and farsightedness of Stalin since 1924”.⁵⁸

The special issue of *Treball* on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution also included an article by Marcel Cachin, entitled simply *Stalin*, in which the leader of the French Communist Party boldly affirms that “there is currently no single statesman on Earth who has contributed so much as Stalin and his master and friend Lenin to serve the progress of all humanity”. The veneration of the present projects itself on the past, establishing an absolute consistency between all aspects of the great man's life: “no man in his maturity has managed as well as Stalin to bring the conceptions of his youth and his adolescence to fulfilment”. Cachin's final description of the Soviet leader reproduces a quote from the French communist writer Henri Barbusse (“with the head of a scholar, with the face of a worker, and with the dress of a simple soldier”)⁵⁹ and conveys an idea of which many were already fully convinced: that is, that Stalin was the personification of all the qualities of the movement he represented and directed.

Conclusion

As the Spanish Civil War raged on, the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1937 triggered the collective

⁵⁷ Ibidem. As can be seen, Companys's speech is the same as the one reproduced in the “*llibre monumental*” of the Association of the Friends of the Soviet Union, *Homenatge de Catalunya a la Unió de Repúbliques Socialistes Soviètiques. Amb motiu del XXè aniversari de la seva constitució*.

⁵⁸ “Rafael Vidiella a la URSS”. *Treball*, October 29, 1937, 8.

⁵⁹ Marcel Cachin, “Stalin”, *Treball*, no. 407, November 7, 1937, 11.

memory of Republic and provided it with a model in its struggle for survival. This model underwent a profound adaptation to the needs of the present. It was the product of *bricoleurs* who put together a story about the past that could serve as a connection with the present, emphasising certain specific features (the fight against the forces of domestic reactionaries and against the foreign occupier) and discarding others (the socialist nature of the Revolution and the conquest of political power by the Bolshevik party).⁶⁰

One of the features that was exploited to the full in the construction of this story was the image of the Soviet Union itself. To talk about the Soviet Union and the Russian Revolution in 1937 was to talk about a reference point, a model for a large part of international public opinion—not just militant Communists—which admired the USSR for its enthusiastic embrace of modernity through the combination of science and technology, the ideal tools with which to build a new civilisation at the service of the proletariat. The Soviet Union's "deification of science" would spread an idea that was to determine the history of many countries in the twentieth century: that there could be no socialist revolution without industrial revolution.

If, to this vision of the Soviet experience, we add the backdrop of a war in which the USSR was perceived as the main international ally of the Republican cause, the wave of common feeling generated towards Russia and expressed in the activities of the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union and the Committee for the Organisation of a Tribute to the USSR, should not come as a surprise; nor should the adulation of Stalin, for many anti-Fascists the most steadfast ally of the Spanish Republicans.

The October Revolution, the Soviet Union and Stalin thus became interchangeable concepts within a collective imaginary in dire need of reference points at a time of genuine crisis. The Republic's fight against the Fascists required models in which its defenders could see themselves reflected, and the PSUC and the Friends of the Soviet Union were able to offer the model of the October Revolution and its military and material achievements. A model radically reinterpreted from the perspective of the present.

⁶⁰ At this time, the position of the POUM was diametrically opposed to that of the PSUC. The POUM leader Jordi Arquer illustrated the respective ambitions succinctly: "*We wanted a revolutionary war, they wanted an anti-Fascist one; we wanted a workers' government, they wanted a bourgeois republic*". Jordi Arquer, "Objetivo: eliminar el POUM". *Historia 16*, no. 12, 1977, 82-84.

CHAPTER NINE

SO DISTANT AND YET SO CLOSE? THE RESPONSE OF THE LEFT IN THE RIVER PLATE REGION TO THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

JORGE SABORIDO AND MERCEDES SABORIDO

This paper sets out a succinct review of the responses of the political left in Argentina and Uruguay to the upheavals in Russia in 1917. The aim is to depict the domestic situation in each country and to reflect the impact of the Bolshevik triumph on the forces that devoted themselves to organising the working classes on both banks of the River Plate.

Introduction

The economic context

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Argentine Republic and the Eastern Republic of Uruguay differed hugely in terms of area and population. In principle, however, the economies of the two countries shared a common feature: their growth since the late nineteenth century, which had rested on a clear orientation toward agricultural exports.¹ With their extensive fertile lands, both Argentina and Uruguay sought to consolidate their dominant productive structure at a time when the revolution in transport was shrinking distances and enabling exporters to reach new high-consumption markets.² Argentina's principal exports were meat and grain, while Uruguay mainly exported meat, wool and leather. The effects of this orientation towards agricultural exports were reflected

¹ Argentina also produced sugar, wine and yerba mate for domestic consumption.

² The invention of the refrigerator and the later procedure for chilling meats helped to reinforce the countries' export capacity.

in their per capita GDP, since both Argentina and Uruguay ranked among the world's richest 15 countries in 1913.³

The outbreak of the First World War had serious consequences for two economies that were so dependent on the outside world. As the importers of their produce were drawn into the conflict, the effects on Argentina and Uruguay were soon apparent. First, foreign trade suffered because established routes closed and alternative ones had to be found; second, volumes declined, though the prices of exportable products went up; third, imports decreased visibly, with important negative effects on domestic economic activity; fourth, the inflow of external capital was interrupted; fifth, social unrest grew as a consequence of the fall in real wages; and sixth, a tentative development of import-substitution industrialisation emerged, based on limited technological resources. The combination of these factors resulted in a steep drop in GDP in both Argentina and Uruguay.⁴

The political scenario

At the time of the events of 1917 in Russia, Argentina and Uruguay were immersed in a significant process of change. Both countries had remained neutral at the outbreak of the First World War.⁵ In the early years of the new century in Argentina, cracks had begun to appear in the country's "conservative order", which had kept power in the hands of a political class that propped up a regime dominated by landowners. These cracks surfaced because of differences among various sectors of the ruling elite, but they were also a consequence of the new demands of a society whose composition was becoming increasingly complex.⁶ One of the most significant outcomes of the new situation was the enactment of the Sáenz Peña Act (named after the country's president) in 1912, which instituted universal, mandatory male suffrage.⁷ As a consequence of the new law,

³ Argentina was ranked ninth and Uruguay thirteenth—higher even than a country like Sweden. Source: Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: Historical Statistics* (Paris: OECD, 2003).

⁴ For additional information, see Maddison, *The World Economy*.

⁵ The wartime mood in Argentina is reflected in María Inés Tato, *La trinchera austral: La sociedad argentina ante la Primera Guerra Mundial* (Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2017).

⁶ The classic work on the subject is Natalio Botana, *El orden conservador* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1977).

⁷ The controversy over the reasons why the regime granted universal suffrage can be followed in Botana's work.

Hipólito Yrigoyen, leader of the Radical Civic Union (*Unión Cívica Radical* or *UCR*), won the presidency in the elections of 1916. The UCR had emerged as an alternative in the last decade of the nineteenth century with roots among the growing urban middle class and small and medium-sized farm owners.⁸ Yrigoyen's reformist bent, which was more pronounced in the political arena than in the economic one, would be affected by the impact of the outbreak of war and then by the Russian Revolution.

In Uruguay, in the first decade of the new century, the series of civil wars that had dragged on for the best part of a hundred years finally came to an end.⁹ At this time, a political system developed which went beyond the two main competing political parties, the Colorado Party and the National (White) Party, to encompass a struggle between two overarching ideological families: a "solidarity republicanism" (*republicanismo solidarista*, in Spanish), spearheaded by José Batlle y Ordóñez and radical factions of the Colorado Party, and a "liberal conservatism" (*conservadurismo liberal*", in Spanish), led by the more right-wing sectors of the National Party.¹⁰ Batlle's second term as president (1911–15—he had also been in office between 1903 and 1907) saw the state's introduction of a series of social and economic reforms drawn from a platform that was clearly ahead of its time. Although it did not prove possible to implement the entire slate of reforms, the achievements were considerable: social legislation to protect workers, the promotion of industry, state control over the financial sector, progressive tax reform, separation of church and state, and a law on divorce. Not surprisingly, the radical nature of the reforms triggered a reaction from some sectors of society—even from within Batlle's own party, which came to wonder "how far the Communist ideas of *Batllism* would go".¹¹ The apprehensions of these sectors led to a brake on reformist policies during the presidency of Batlle's successor, Feliciano Viera.

⁸ For a thoughtful, balanced history of the UCR, see Ana Virginia Persello, *Historia del radicalismo* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2007).

⁹ A good overview of the history of Uruguay in the second half of the nineteenth century can be found in José Pedro Barrán, *El nacimiento del Uruguay moderno en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX* (Montevideo: Real Académica Uruguaya). Available at: <http://www.rau.edu.uy/uruguay/historia/Uy.hist3.htm> (last accessed May 3, 2018).

¹⁰ Gerardo Caetano, *La República Batllista* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2011).

¹¹ Caetano, *La República Batllista*, 59.

The state of the left

The most institutionalised and influential organisation of the Argentine left was the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista* or *PS*, in Spanish), which had been founded in 1896. Practically from the outset, the party had focused on political activity to drive through social reforms, to the detriment of pursuing the trade-union struggle¹²; it participated willingly in the political system and did not instigate any alternatives of a revolutionary variety.¹³ An early result of the party's successful integration was the election of Alfredo Palacios as a member of Argentina's lower house in 1904, the first socialist to win a seat anywhere in Latin America. The party's newspaper *La Vanguardia*, founded in 1894 by Juan B. Justo, the party's leader in the years of its formation, played a key role in circulating party propaganda and Marxist ideas and in establishing the organisational structure of the party, and even predated the founding of other socialist political organisations.¹⁴ Now part of the mainstream, the party had to pry open the closed circles of its militants and drive forward a growth strategy able to appeal to other sectors of society.¹⁵ But a strategy of this kind faced opposition from sectors of the party's membership who called for a more radical approach, one less mired in "bourgeois politics". The idea that trade-union activism ought to be completely independent of the party, however, placed them at a disadvantage with respect to other workers' organisations.

Anarchism had a firm foothold among the workers, especially in the city of Buenos Aires. Like the Socialist Party, anarchism as a political current enjoyed a long tradition of periodical publications spreading its

¹² Lucas Poy, "El Partido Socialista y las huelgas: una relación incómoda. Un análisis de las posiciones partidarias en los primeros años del siglo XX," *Revista Archivos de Historia del Movimiento Obrero y la Izquierda*, no. 6, 2015. <http://www.archivosrevista.com.ar.ca1.toservers.com/contenido/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Poy.pdf> (last accessed: May 3, 2018).

¹³ Lucas Poy, "Los primeros congresos del Partido Socialista argentino," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe)*, no. 99, 2015, 49. Available at: <https://www.erlacs.org/articles/abstract/10.18352/erlacs.10101/> (last accessed: May 3, 2018).

¹⁴ Ricardo Martínez Mazzola, "El papel de la prensa en la formación del socialismo en la Argentina (1890-1912)," *VII Congreso Nacional de Ciencia Política, SAAP-Universidad Católica de Córdoba*, 2005.

¹⁵ Juan Buonoome, "Fisonomía de un semanario socialista: La Vanguardia, 1894-1905," *Revista Archivos de Historia del Movimiento Obrero y la Izquierda*, no. 6, 2015, 13.

doctrine. It also had a strong libertarian thrust that encouraged the inclusion of a wide range of opinions.¹⁶ Anarchism played a central role in the Argentine workers' movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, lending impetus to the creation of a workers' central union in 1903, known as the FORA (*Federación Obrera Regional Argentina*). The FORA declared its commitment to anarchism at its Fifth Congress in 1905, and at least until the celebration of Argentina's centenary in 1910 when it was the target of a harsh crackdown, it remained the most important working-class organisation.¹⁷

By 1914, revolutionary unionism had become the main expression of the left. As an autonomous current of thought, it had started taking shape in 1906, when a group of militants began to challenge the PS party line which prioritised parliamentary participation over trade unionism activism.¹⁸ Appealing to the ideas of figures like Georges Sorel and Antonio Labriola, the militants were strongly anti-intellectual and anti-parliamentarian and stressed the role of trade unions as drivers of transformative action free of all political ties.¹⁹ In 1915, the trade unionists split with the original FORA, creating a rival FORA independent of anarchist influence. So there were now two central trade-unions: the FORA of the Fifth Congress (anarchist in nature) and the FORA of the Ninth Congress.

In Uruguay, the presence of the left was very limited. Leftists were divided into two main strands: first, adherents of anarchism and its variants, which were very active in the small trade-union movement, and second the Socialist Party, which had been founded in 1910 at the initiative of Emilio Frugoni, one of the leading politicians of the time. The reformist policies pursued under President Batlle led the Socialist Party (whose leader had, in principle, pushed for an alliance with the more progressive wing of the Colorado Party) to take more radical positions

¹⁶ For additional information, see Laura Fernández Cordero, "El periódico anarquista Nuestra Tribuna: Un diálogo transnacional en América Latina," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 74, 1, Sevilla, January-June 2017. Available at: <http://estudiosamericanos.revistas.csic.es/index.php/estudiosamericanos/article/viewFile/709/709> (last accessed: May 3, 2018).

¹⁷ For additional information, see Ronaldo Munck, Ricardo Falcón and Bernardo Galitelli, *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism: Workers, Unions and Politics 1855-1985* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

¹⁸ Alejandro Belkin, "La crítica del sindicalismo revolucionario argentino al parlamentarismo (1905-1912)," *Revista Archivos de Historia del Movimiento Obrero y la Izquierda*, no. 3, 2013, 81.

¹⁹ Laura Caruso, "El gran barco: el sindicalismo revolucionario argentino a través de la obra de Julio Arraga," *Revista Izquierdas*, no. 30, October 2016, 4-5.

than its Argentine counterpart, dismissing the government's social project a mere sop intended to thwart the momentum of the masses. However, disputes had erupted in the leadership between those who were unequivocally in favour of neutrality in the war and those who were inclined to intervene. These disagreements sowed the seeds for the divisions that would later emerge at the time of the Russian Revolution.²⁰

The reception of the Russian Revolution

From the distance of the River Plate, it was hard to find out what was happening in Russia. As a result, the left-wing parties were slow to define their stances. But the delay also served to fire the imaginations of party militants, who thought that a new age was coming into being, that a new society was taking shape, and that its influence might even reach their own shores. Conflicting reports arrived throughout 1917. After the events of October, however, the parties finally mobilised, social unrest surged, and the Russian Revolution became one of the factors fuelling discontent both in Argentina and in Uruguay over the deterioration in the workers' standards of living.

Among Uruguay's socialist leaders, the events in Russia exacerbated pre-existing tensions, which culminated in the later party split. If the chances of a triumphant revolution in Russia were practically zero in the eyes of some leaders, others hailed the Bolsheviks as "the defenders of the radical implementation of the maximum programme of socialism".²¹ Throughout the closing days of 1917 and the opening months of the following year, the pages of the party newspaper, *El Socialista*, debated the various positions. Party members, however, appeared inclined to back the Bolsheviks, even to the point of taking part in rallies in favour of the Russian Revolution alongside the anarchists. At the time, the clearly demarcated positions of support for Lenin and his comrades adopted by the *internationalists*, as they were called, were practically unconditional, while others, who would later become known as the *reconstructionists* expressed reservations over some of the decisions taken by the revolutionaries. The internationalists asserted that "the red wave would reach Uruguay"; one of their core principles was that "the same causes will produce the same effects. If poverty and economic subordination are

²⁰ Gerardo Caetano, "El impacto de la Revolución Rusa en Uruguay (1917-1923)," *Revista Estudios*, no. 37, Universidad de Córdoba, January-June 2017. Available at: <https://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/restudios/article/view/17923/17814mn> (last accessed: May 3, 2018).

²¹ *El Socialista*, January 5, 1918.

international, so the action carried out to bring them down must be international".²² It followed then that if dire conditions had propelled the revolution in Russia, the situation could also be replicated in Uruguay.

For their part, the anarchists were also divided in their reception of the events of October 1917, though optimism was their prevailing mood. Many were prepared to believe that the Revolution was anarchist in nature and they lent their support from the start. Dubbed *anarcho-dictators* by their adversaries, they expressed their views in their newspaper *La Batalla*. By contrast, orthodox anarchists distanced themselves from the events in Russia, refusing to accept a government of any kind. They represented the *anarcho-purist* wing of anarchism and their positions appeared in the periodical *El Hombre*, edited by José Tato Lorenzo. The anarcho-purists were critical of the peace talks instigated by the Bolsheviks on seizing power: "The revolutionaries (...), disregarding the right of peoples to deal with one another and resolve their affairs directly, have committed a crime for which men of advanced ideas will never forgive them".²³

The debate between the two libertarian strands revolved around a core issue: the dictatorship of the proletariat. For the anarcho-dictators, this was viewed as a stage intended to eradicate the counter-revolutionary reaction; for the anarcho-purists, by contrast, it was an unconscionable surrender that violated anarchist principles. The anarcho-dictators joined with the internationalist socialists in activities aimed at supporting the Russian Revolution and held that a revolution of this kind was possible in Latin America in general and in Uruguay in particular.

No sooner had the "imperialist war" begun than the Socialist Party of Argentina took up a position of pro-neutrality apparently in line with a sector of socialism worldwide.²⁴ From 1917 onwards, with the United States' entry into the conflict, the socialists abandoned neutrality and began to support the Allied forces. With the sinking of the Argentine merchant vessel *Monte Protegido*, parliamentary socialists called for the breaking-off of relations with Germany in a speech heavily laced with warmongering.²⁵

²² Celestino Gibelli and Mariano Vedia y Mitre, *La constitución de la República Socialista de los Soviets Rusos* (Montevideo: Maximino García Editor, 1918), 29.

²³ "Nosotros y la situación rusa", *El Hombre*, December 22, 1917.

²⁴ In most countries, reformist socialism took the decision to support the bourgeoisie at home, voting in favour of wartime loans and throwing their support behind entry into the conflict.

²⁵ Daniel Campione, "¿Neutralidad o ruptura? ¿Reforma o Revolución? Investigaciones," in *Razón y Revolución*, no. 6, Autumn 2000, electronic reprint 13.

The Third Extraordinary Congress of the Socialist Party, which was convened that same year, was marked by an internal debate that would foreshadow the party's future schism. The group of parliamentarians, chiefly represented by Juan B. Justo, argued for the need to eschew the neutrality of earlier years and take sides in the conflict. Against them, the internationalists—thus named because of their more leftist position and because they penned the newspaper *La Internacional*—upheld the party's original position of neutrality because the war was, in their view, distant and unrelated to their interests:

The internationalist principles of socialism must be defended. What we socialists of Argentina need to do, therefore, is to work for peace and not to prolong or fuel the war. In the European conflagration, workers are shedding blood for a cause that is not their own, but that of capitalist imperialism.²⁶

The second group—the internationalists—obtained more votes at the party congress. Shortly afterwards, however, the socialist parliamentary representatives voted in favour of the conservatives' proposal to break off relations with Germany as a result of an incident involving the German ambassador, Count Karl-Ludwig Graf von Luxburg.²⁷

This attitude sparked even greater indignation among the membership and prompted calls for a new extraordinary congress. In an attempt to avoid this, the parliamentarians tried to intimidate the grassroots membership by threatening to step down. The very idea of renouncing their seats was unprecedented for most members, who could not conceive of losing their parliamentary representation. As a consequence of these events, a committee was set up to defend the resolutions of the Third Extraordinary Congress and its participants included the future leaders of

²⁶ *Esbozo de Historia del Partido Comunista de la Argentina. (Origen y desarrollo del Partido Comunista y del movimiento obrero y popular argentino). Central Committee of the Communist Party*, (Buenos Aires: Anteo, 1947), Chap. III. 20-21. The book was prepared by the party leadership shortly before the party's twentieth anniversary. As a book, it seeks to organise the story of the party historically. Later, it was sharply castigated, but it remains a typical example of "official history". Jorge Cernadas, Roberto Pittaluga and Horacio Tarcus, "La historiografía del Partido Comunista de la Argentina, un estado de la cuestión", in *El Rodaballo*, Year IV, no. 8, 1998, 31.

²⁷ Karl-Ludwig Graf von Luxburg was German *chargé d'affaires* in Argentina during the period. He was found to have sent secret dispatches by wire, calling Chancellor Pueyrredón an "ass" and an "anglophile" and urging that Argentine vessels be sunk without a trace.

Argentine communism, among them Victorio Codovilla, Rodolfo Ghioldi, Miguel Contreras and Juan Greco. The party leadership requested that the committee be disbanded, but the dissidents who had gathered around the pro-committee faction flatly refused and forced the leadership to convene a new extraordinary congress.

If the February Revolution had been greeted enthusiastically by the Socialist Party in Argentina, the events unfolding in Russia soon stoked fear at the ascent of the “maximalists”. Once the Bolsheviks had secured victory, there were a few days of silence because of the glut of (mostly false) news. Then, in late November, the first official statement appeared in *La Vanguardia* and it was uncompromisingly harsh:

Revolutionary agitation has infected born malcontents against all that was established and normal, and succeeded in diverting the revolution from the logical and sensible progression that it was being given by the defeated provisional government. We see the result: Russia without a government recognised by the other powers or even by the Russian people themselves; the most utter mayhem in the administration of the country.²⁸

In the days that followed, the newspaper printed all the news that made reference to an imminent collapse of the Bolshevik government. The experience was viewed as an anomaly, an unpredictable occurrence, with no chance of lasting. Thus, in the face of criticism, they went so far as to say that the Bolsheviks had staged a coup against a faction of the revolutionary people led by Kerensky, concluding: “Nobody knows better than us that it is not enough to claim you are a socialist, nor even to seem one, in order to truly be one”.²⁹

Because of these conflicts, the leadership of the Socialist Party promptly expelled the internationalists. The newly ousted members resolved to call a congress for January 5-6, 1918, when they met to form the International Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Internacional* or *PSI*). The new party’s founding document laid out a number of key points: a vigorous repudiation and total condemnation of all manifestations of nationalism; contempt for the national anthem, coat of arms and all other patriotic symbols; a rejection of diplomacy, of the budgets for war and the navy, and of any declaration of war. Instead, the PSI supported total military disarmament, the expropriation of land by the state and the expropriation of the railways.

²⁸ *La Vanguardia*, November 23, 1917.

²⁹ *La Vanguardia*, February 14, 1918.

Historians concur that the reasons for the party split lay farther back in time and were related to broad disagreements over the direction in which the leadership was taking the party. From the outset, the leadership of the new party enthusiastically supported the Bolsheviks. In the PSI's official paper *La Internacional*, Russia was hailed as an example of "a people that firmly intends to bring world peace, topple the bourgeoisie and introduce the rule of the socialist proletariat".³⁰ The leader of the PSI was José F. Penelón, who also headed the graphic artists' guild and would go on to a long career in Argentine politics.³¹

The PSI carved out a profile as a left-wing party challenging not only the reformism of the Socialist Party, but also the radicalisation of conflicts occurring in those years, attributing the strife to the anarchists (see below). Doubtless, a contributing factor was the party's lack of heavyweight leaders in the trade unions, which limited their activities in the workplace.

At the time of the creation of the PSI, support for the Russian Revolution was on the rise. The seventh of November became a day of celebration and the writings of Lenin, Zinoviev and other Bolshevik leaders began to appear in print.

The departure of the PSI did not bring an end to infighting over the Russian Revolution within the Socialist Party. At the Fourth Extraordinary Congress held in January 1921, when the party's entry into the Comintern was debated, those in favour of joining carried 40% of the votes cast.

The initial positions of the various Argentine anarchist groups on the events in Russia resembled the positions of the rest of the left, except for the Socialist Party. The anarchists gave their enthusiastic support, and even expressed strong optimism over the prospects of a revolution coming to the River Plate. At first, there were no other options: one was either in favour of the Revolution or against it, and support for the Revolution represented "an act of faith in the future, in justice, in the moral advancement of humanity".³²

Of course, giving this support meant brushing aside some of the core principles of anarchist thought, particularly the major issue noted earlier in

³⁰ Hernán Camarero, *A la conquista de la clase obrera. Los comunistas y el mundo del trabajo en Argentina, 1920-1935* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2007), 173.

³¹ For additional information on Penelón, see: Julio Godio, *El movimiento obrero argentino (1910-1930): socialismo, sindicalismo y comunismo* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1988).

³² These were the words of José Ingenieros, one of the intellectuals who initially embraced the cause of the Revolution. Quoted by Roberto Pittaluga, *Soviets en Buenos Aires, la izquierda de la Argentina ante la revolución en Rusia* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2015), 66.

the case of Uruguayan anarchism: the dictatorship of the proletariat. In subsequent months, however, the prevailing sentiment was summed up by a union leader:

One might dissent from, criticise and even censure the political dictatorship of the Bolsheviki (*sic*) party: but it is not right that we, the workers, should join our voices to the chorus of bourgeois calumnies and slurs. When the effectiveness of another social revolution has been demonstrated in contrast to the one actually being carried out by the Bolsheviks, then will it be the time to challenge them. Not today.³³

With the unfolding of events in Russia, the views of some anarchist sectors gradually shifted. Ultimately, two camps emerged: one group, which followed Bakunin, continued to wave the flag of communist federalism and to question Bolshevik authoritarianism, while the other group maintained its support for Lenin, justifying his exercise of power by arguing that the dictatorship was the starting point for the later pathway to communism. The treatment meted out to anarchists in Russia and the crackdown on the sailors at Kronstadt led some of the critics of the Bolsheviks to conclude, in short, that “the Bolshevik regime is a dictatorship over the proletariat, not of the proletariat”.

Social unrest

There were numerous strikes in Uruguay after the outbreak of the First World War. The most significant event was the *Red Week* of August 1918 in the capital of Montevideo.³⁴ First had come a dockworkers’ strike in late July, followed by a strike among tram workers that flared up into clashes with the police and resulted in one death. The upshot was a call for a general strike, the third in the country’s trade-union history. The general strike began on August 12 and demonstrated the pugnacity of union members, who were mostly anarchists and willing to face off against the forces of order. The general strike went on for five days. Even after it ended, however, the tram workers stayed on strike until mid-September. The violent crackdown was a clear demonstration of the fear among the

³³ Pittaluga, *Soviets en Buenos Aires*.

³⁴ For an account of what happened over these days, see: Pascual Muñoz, “La Semana Roja de Montevideo,” Parts I and II. Available at: <https://es.scribd.com/document/235276078/La-Semana-Roja-de-Montevideo-Primera-Parte-Pascual-Munoz> (last accessed: May 4, 2018).

ruling classes; the example of the Russian Revolution weighed heavily on their minds.

In Argentina, the statistics reflect the increase in strikes and the number of workers taking part in greater detail. The official data show that there were 138 strikes involving 133,000 strikers in 1917, and 196 strikes and 133,000 strikers in 1918. Then, in 1919, the numbers spike to 367 strikes and 309,000 strikers, while the figures for 1920 fall to 206 strikes and 134,000 strikers.³⁵ The numbers of strikes and striking workers had been much lower in the pre-war years.

The unrest was linked directly to the deterioration in the workers' standard of living, but it was also the result of the strengthening of workers' organisations and the heightened expectations that had doubtless been stirred by the Russian Revolution.

The most significant series of social protests took place in January 1919 when the *Tragic Week* swept through the capital of Buenos Aires. The conflict began with a strike in the Vasena metal works, when more than 2,000 workers demanded a pay hike and other improvements in conditions. The situation degenerated into violent clashes, as the owners brought in hired gunmen. Numerous deaths ensued and the clashes spread to other neighbourhoods in the city. Among the workers, there was an important presence of anarchists belonging to the FORA (Fifth Congress), but there were also spontaneous uprisings.³⁶ In addition, conflicts sprang up in Patagonia and in Chaco Santafesino, culminating in a savage crackdown. Within the left, the PSI gave its lukewarm support to the uprisings, while the Socialist Party rejected the "anarchist attempts". For the right, however, the events sowed panic and led to reactions that were not only anti-communist, but also xenophobic and anti-Semitic (many of the strikers were foreigners) and resulted ultimately in the creation in 1920 of the *Patriotic League*, a paramilitary body of shock troops bankrolled by employers, the Church and the army.

The emergence of communist parties in Argentina and Uruguay

The October Revolution had a major impact on both banks of the River Plate, and the creation of the Comintern (Third International) at Lenin's

³⁵ Adolfo Dorfman, *Historia de la industria argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Solar, 1982).

³⁶ One of the most highly regarded texts on the subject is Edgardo Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984).

initiative in March 1919 was also of huge importance for the socialist left. This was especially true after the Second World Congress, which established 21 conditions for admission to the organisation—one of which was that the new communist parties should be formed with no relation to socialist or social democratic parties.

In Argentina, the PSI was one such party. In April 1919, at its Second Congress, the party approved its entry into the Communist International, only a month after its creation: “still retaining the name of the International Socialist Party because it responded to the fulfilment of internationalist duties common to the working class which the Socialist Party had renounced”.³⁷ At the Extraordinary Congress held on December 25 and 26, 1920, the PSI decided to accept the Comintern’s membership conditions and thereby found the Communist Party of Argentina. Its membership formally took effect in August 1921 after a trip to the Soviet Union by Rodolfo Ghioldi, one of the party’s leaders. From its inception and almost throughout the decade of the 1920s, Argentine communism would be anti-capitalist and anti-nationalist. However, the party was careful not to present itself as an anti-national force. In its early years, the party maintained the tenets inherited from socialism, such as the defence of free trade and its ideological framework.

In Uruguay, the problems were different: as noted earlier, there were diverging views within the Socialist Party on how to respond to the Russian Revolution. The differences, however, did not harden into divisions until the party’s debate over whether to accept the conditions imposed by the Comintern. The ensuing dispute resulted in two clearly demarcated positions. The reconstructionists, led by Emilio Frugoni, pushed for the formation of a new international workers’ organisation, distancing themselves from both the “failed” Second International and the Comintern set up by the Bolsheviks. They also raised doubts over several of the points put forward by the new organisation, which compelled member parties to adopt “rules of conduct at odds with the needs and characteristics of our environment and the intimate nature of our organisation”.³⁸ While rejecting any form of reformism, the reconstructionists also questioned the use of violence and above all opposed anti-parliamentarianism. In the words of Frugoni, “to relegate parliamentary action to the background (...) is to decree our paralysation, to doom us to

³⁷ Leonardo Paso, *Historia de los Partidos Políticos en la Argentina. 1900-1930* (Buenos Aires: Directa, 1983), 532.

³⁸ Cited by Fernando López D'Alessandro, *Historia de la Izquierda uruguaya. La fundación del Partido Comunista y la división del anarquismo* (Montevideo: Vintén Editor, 1992), 197.

do nothing either useful or efficient".³⁹ In short, their aim was to participate in an organisation that did not lay down strict and dogmatic conditions like the ones emanating from Moscow.

Against them, the internationalists, also called *terceristas* or proponents of the Third Way, expressed total opposition to any type of agreement that included "traitors" to the working class. They took the view that any attempt at reunification was utopian. It was necessary to start from scratch; and what could be better than to do so by joining an organisation led by the heroes of October? They chided the reconstructionists in no uncertain terms: "In fifty years of parliamentary struggle, the socialists have done no constructive work".⁴⁰

The two positions faced off at the Eighth Socialist Party Congress in September 1920. After arduous discussions, the voting showed a wide majority for the internationalists (1297 votes in favour, with 175 against and 275 abstentions). Even though the outcome appeared to make a split inevitable, it did not happen at once; Frugoni declared that while he did not agree with the party's entry into the Comintern, he was willing to abide by the decision of the majority: "the Party has resolved to go into the Third International and I will go with the Party into the Third International".⁴¹ Indeed, the reconstructionists fielded representatives on the party's governing bodies.

The situation changed dramatically when the 21 conditions established by the Third International finally reached Montevideo in October 1920. The time had come to carry out the will of the Eighth Congress, and the verbal clashes over the ensuing months showed that a party split was inevitable. The situation was clear: for the internationalists, joining the Comintern was a revolutionary position, while anything else was reformism.

Finally, at the Sixth Extraordinary Congress of the Socialist Party held in April 1921, the rift was made final and Uruguay's Communist Party came into being. In terms of numbers, the outcome was again favourable for the new organisation; in the ensuing elections, though a very modest number of votes was cast, the Communist vote Party trebled that of the Socialist Party, which was forced to urgently reorganise.

³⁹ López D'Alessandro, *Historia de la Izquierda*, 199.

⁴⁰ *Justicia*, September 23, 1920.

⁴¹ *Justicia*, September 23, 1920.

Conclusions

In this brief summary, we have compared the attitudes and responses of the leftists in the River Plate region to the Russian Revolution and the events that followed.

- The events of 1917 stirred a wave of sympathy and support of varying shades among the left-wing parties in Argentina and Uruguay. In addition, the deterioration in the economic situation contributed to a rise in social unrest that was accompanied by the hope that a situation similar to the one in Russia could arise in the two countries on the River Plate. We should also add that the support among the left extended to broad swaths of the countries' intellectuals.⁴²

- The triumph of the Bolsheviks sparked controversies which in some cases exacerbated pre-existing tensions.

- From its inception, Argentina's Socialist Party had pushed a reformist strategy that was well adapted to the prevailing political regime. The party's leaders were harsh critics of the Bolsheviks' rise to power, and the party splintered in two because many members rejected what they saw as their leaders' excessive moderation. The emergence of the International Socialist Party was not linked to the events of October, but the new party did support Lenin's triumph and their gradual approximation to communist positions culminated in late 1920 in their acceptance of the 21 conditions imposed by the Third International, including the adoption of the name Communist Party of Argentina.

- The situation in Uruguay was different: the Socialist Party's strategy on the eve of the First World War was conditioned by the reformist policies introduced by President Batlle. As a result, the party took a much more critical stance than its Argentine counterpart towards capitalism and even towards the parliamentary system. Its official position on the Russian Revolution was one of qualified support, although some groups farther to the left advocated applying the lessons of October to the Uruguayan situation. The party broke up in April 1921, as a result of differing positions on the Comintern. After the split, most party leaders and members switched to the Communist Party, while the Socialist Party was forced to reorganise around a much smaller membership.

- On the two banks of the River Plate, anarchist groups were confronted by startling events, which called many of their ideas into question. Specifically, the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat

⁴² On this subject, see: Horacio Tarcus, "El imaginario revolucionario en Argentina," in *El atlas de la Revolución rusa. Historia crítica de la gesta que cambió el mundo* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2017).

collided head-on with libertarian thought. In Argentina, initially, there was unanimous support for the Lenin-led Russian Revolution, only for this support to dwindle as events unfolded, particularly with the arrival of reports of crackdowns against anarchists in Russia. As a result, only one group, the anarcho-Bolsheviks, continued to back the Russian Revolution.

- The position of libertarians in Uruguay was somewhat different. After the Revolution there had been a clash between two groups, one defending the purity of its ideas and questioning authoritarian practices, and the other justifying the sacrifice of some of these principles and continuing to support the Bolsheviks. In this situation, there was no chance of agreement.

CHAPTER TEN

THE FALL OF THE USSR AND ITS AFTERMATH

ANTONI SEGURA I MAS

The collapse of the USSR in December 1991 ushered in a geopolitical change whose effects are still hard to define in their entirety. As Robert Service says, it is perhaps ironic that Gorbachev's attempts to ward off the breakdown of the Soviet communist system actually hastened the crisis of the USSR and its ultimate destruction.¹ This paper will look at the main consequences of this epoch-making event.

The end of the Cold War and the balance of power

In just over two years, from the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 until the formal dissolution of the USSR on December 21, 1991 and Gorbachev's resignation four days later,² international relations and the structure of world power underwent a series of changes that put an end to four decades of Cold War and more than three centuries of the system of balance of power.³ The two-bloc system created after World War II came

¹ Robert Service, *A history of twentieth-century Russia* (London: Penguin, 1998).

² On Gorbachev and his reforms, see Marc Galeotti, *Gorbachev and his Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997); George W. Breslauer *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³ On the three centuries of the system of the balance of power in Europe and its disappearance after the end of the Cold War, see Robert Cooper, "The new liberal imperialism," *The Guardian*, April 7, 2012. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/07/1> (last accessed: May 4, 2018). This essay summarises the author's important contributions to *The Postmodern State and the World Order* (2nd ed.) (London: Demos and The Foreign Policy Centre, 2000) (especially pages 7 to 23). For more recent reflections by Cooper, see "The European Union and the Habsburg Monarchy," Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen/The Institute for Human Sciences: *Tr@nsit online*,

crashing down, and with it a whole way of understanding and analysing the world. Certainly, since 1917, in Europe communism had been a political regime which for many decades, especially during the Stalinist period, had prohibited political dissidence and had virulently repressed any opposition or attempted change (see the examples of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968); but it has also been a beacon of hope for large sectors of the working classes, whether in the fight against Nazism in the 1940s or in the struggle to achieve better working conditions and a higher standard of living in Western Europe. Communism was undoubtedly the greatest challenge that capitalism had ever faced, and it was a reference point that helped the Western proletariat to achieve important social and political gains. To a certain extent, the shadow of the communist threat (from the USSR) underpinned the creation of one of the main social and cultural legacies of Europe, the Welfare State, a symbiosis between capital and labour driven by the European Social Democrats and Christian Democrats in the second half of the twentieth century. So the collapse of the USSR and the end of communism in Eastern Europe paved the way for the political and military hegemony of the US and the increased economic influence (and perhaps an overhasty enlargement) of the European Economic Community (or the European Union, as it became known in 1993).⁴

In short, the end of the Cold War seemed to herald a new world that would leave behind all the misery and grandeur of the twentieth century, perhaps the most tragic and at the same time the most idealistic century of the history of humanity. The century had been witness on the one hand to the emergence of the totalitarian states, the two world wars with their millions of deaths, a relentless stream of victims in the regional wars of Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia, the nuclear threat, the arms race, the brutality of colonialism and the struggles for independence, global epidemics and growing poverty and misery; and, on the other, to the great revolutions of the USSR and China, decolonization and the growing role of independent countries, the creation first of the League of Nations and then of the United Nations, the struggle for civil and human rights, civil

December 10, 2012. Available at <http://www.iwm.at/transit/transit-online/the-european-union-and-the-habsburg-monarchy/> (last accessed: May 4, 2018).

⁴ Some useful reference works on the history of the USSR are Peter Kenez, *A history of the Soviet Union from the beginning to the end* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Martin McCauley, *The Soviet Union: 1917-1991* (2nd ed.) (London; New York: Longman, 1993); Raymond Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (2nd ed.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Rafael Poch-De-Feliu, *La gran transición. Rusia, 1985-2002* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003); Carlos Taibo, *Historia de la Unión Soviética 1917-1991* (Madrid: Alianza, 2010).

freedoms and the fight for gender equality, and huge technological advances.

Undoubtedly, the decade of the 1990s began with a wave of optimism. Germany was reunited in October 1990, and the Baltic republics, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and the rest of Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia gained independence between 1990 and 1991.

The power vacuum and the emergence of new states

Even before the implosion of the USSR, the nascent democratic republics of Eastern Europe, the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia and, in the medium term, the USSR's allies in other regions of the world all felt the effects of this new power void. In the former Soviet republics, it revived conflicts which often dated back the forced movement of populations such as the Chechens, Tatars, Ingush and Kazakhs at the time of the revolution or under Stalin, and the arrival of Russian settlers. It sparked new disputes due to the economic situation or the lack of freedom, or due to the drawing of borders (often arbitrary and inherited from the Stalinist period or even before); or due to the struggle for the right to commercialize the hydrocarbon fuels passing through the pipelines previously owned by the Soviets and which now the newly independent countries, urged on by multinational oil companies, were trying to market without using the Russian distribution networks. The list of conflicts is long: internal wars inside the Russian Federation, in Chechnya (1994-96 and 1999-2009) and in Dagestan (1999-2000, 2010-2012) and in the former Soviet republics such as the declaration of independence and the war of Transnistria in Moldova (1990-92); the Nagorno-Karabakh war (1991-94) between Azerbaijan and Armenia; the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, with the emergence of the independence movements of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003); the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005); from the Orange Revolution to Euromaidan, the separation of the Crimea, the war of Donbass in Ukraine (2004-2014) and the Jeans Revolution in Belarus (2006).

In sum, as Conor O'Clery (2012) writes, in twenty-four hours the collapse of the communist superpower left units of the Soviet army, the navy and the air force stranded in new independent countries. The Russian nationals in the armed forces, and the nuclear weapons, had to be withdrawn from what became termed "the near abroad". Before the implosion, the area of operations of the Soviet Armed Forces comprised 8,650,000 square miles, from the Pacific to Western Europe; afterwards, this area was reduced to 6,600,000 square miles. Moscow lost Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (and the strategic

Baltic Sea ports), Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine in the heart of Europe, the Caucasus states of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan and the Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.⁵

In most countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltic republics, the relinquishment of the dependence on Moscow was followed within two decades by entry into NATO: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999; Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania in 2004; Croatia and Albania in 2009, and Montenegro in 2017. Thus, the disappearance of the USSR not only meant the end of the Warsaw Pact (officially dissolved at a meeting in Prague on July 1, 1991), but within a few years most of the members of the bloc had gone over to the other side. In the same way, many of them entered the EU: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia in 2004; Bulgaria and Romania in 2007; and Croatia in 2013.

In the longer term, the USSR's former allies in other parts of the world also felt the effects of this power void and suffered internal armed clashes or fully-fledged wars. Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria all faced conflicts that were the result of chronic internal and regional disputes, or of the new radical forms of political Islam or the geostrategic aspirations of the neo-cons.

Table 10.1: The end of the USSR and the new independent countries

Country	Independence date	NATO membership	EU membership
Lithuania	11.03.1990	2004	2004
Georgia	09.04.1991	-	-
Estonia	20.08.1991	2004	2004
Latvia	21.08.1991	2004	2004
Ukraine	24.08.1991	-	-
Belarus	25.08.1991	-	-
Moldova	27.08.1991	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	31.08.1991	-	-
Uzbekistan	01.09.1991	-	-
Tajikistan	09.09.1991	-	-
Armenia	21.09.1991	-	-
Azerbaijan	18.10.1991	-	-
Turkmenistan	27.10.1991	-	-
Kazakhstan	16.12.1991	-	-

⁵ Conor O'Clery, *Moscow, December 25th, 1991: The last day of the Soviet Union* (Dublin: Transworld Ireland, 2012).

Table 10.2: The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe

Country	Political transition	NATO membership	EU membership
German Democratic Republic (1)	1989-1990	1955	1957
Czechoslovakia (2)	1989-1990	1999	2004
Hungary	1989-1990	1999	2004
Poland	1989-1991	1999	2004
Romania	1989-1991	2004	2007
Bulgaria	1991	2004	2007
Yugoslavia (3)	1991-2006		
Albania	1992	2009	
<p>(1) Unification with the Federal Republic of Germany took place on October 3, 1990.</p> <p>(2) In 1993 Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia; Slovakia joined NATO in 2004.</p> <p>(3) The breakup of Yugoslavia led to the Balkan War (1991-1995) and the Kosovo War of 1999. In 2006 Montenegro declared its independence from Serbia. Slovenia joined NATO and the EU in 2004. Croatia joined NATO and the EU in 2013. Montenegro joined NATO in 2017.</p>			

United States as the sole superpower

With the disappearance of the USSR, the sworn enemy that had justified the United States' Cold War rhetoric also disappeared, and with it the absolute need for military deterrence. This new situation posed a threat to the arms industry lobby in the US, which was now obliged to formulate a new enemy. The tendentious theories of Samuel P. Huntington published between 1993 and 1996, anticipating an inevitable clash of civilizations, added fuel to the fire.⁶ However, during the 1990s, President Clinton

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, summer 1993, 22-49; *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). In response to Huntington, in 1998 the Iranian President Muhammad Khatami proposed a Dialogue on Civilizations. The idea was picked up by the president of the Spanish government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who at the General Assembly of the United Nations in

intervened in the opposite direction and sought to resolve disputes and conflicts (always in accordance with US interests, with the aim of facilitating the construction of new states in the Middle East and the Balkans or the reinstatement of others such as Somalia). This is what the Canadian politician and academic Michael Ignatieff termed “Empire lite” and, more generally, is known as a policy of “nation-building” or humanitarian interference.⁷ It seemed, then, that the world was progressing towards a state of diffuse multipolarity. With the arrival in the White House of George Bush Jr., and the 9/11 attacks, the neo-cons identify this new absolute enemy with al-Qaeda and, by extension, with Islam. They believe that the United States must consolidate its position as the world’s only major military power. The failures in Afghanistan and Iraq show, however, that the US is able to win the conventional military phase of armed conflicts but is unable to manage the occupation of the defeated countries; this leads to failed states where violence becomes chronic and obliges the dependence of the hegemonic power on regional actors. With the emergence of Putin’s new Russia, this diffuse multipolarity is becoming increasingly uncontrolled.

In the model proposed by Joseph Nye,⁸ in an increasingly globalised world, the US retains military supremacy and the monopoly of the use of force (unipolarity and military unilateralism); but in the economic sphere, it faces competition from other powers such as the EU, Japan, China, Russia and some emerging countries. This situation creates a multipolarity that demands a multilateral approach to economic decision-making. Yet beyond the borders of nation-states and the areas of regional integration (such as the EU, NAFTA, which President Trump is threatening to eliminate, the Union of South American Nations, the Caribbean Community, and so on) there is a third theatre of activity in which a multiplicity of stakeholders with global agendas joint together multi-polar

September 2004 launched the idea of an Alliance of Civilizations, an alliance between the West and the Islamic world to combat terrorism by not exclusively military means, which was supported by the Turkish Prime Minister and a score of other countries. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan took up the idea on behalf of the organisation and created a working group that drew up an action plan in 2005.

⁷ Michael Ignatieff, *Empire lite. Nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003).

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joseph S. Nye and Alexandra Scacco “La gobernabilidad del globalismo,” in *Imperio o gobierno mundial. La Vanguardia Dossier*, no. 3, October/December 2002, 35-40.

networks and challenge the superpower and its allies. These stakeholders range from multinational corporations and large financial entities to drug trafficking cartels or international terrorism organizations. The latter bolster the illegal arms trade—sometimes promoted by the very states that produce these arms—and also feed tax havens.

New wars and new armed conflicts

The end of the Cold War did not of course mean the end of armed conflict. And, beyond the hopes renewed by the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 and the Dayton Agreement of 1995, or the fears in some quarters generated by the disappearance of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, the world has been left with a legacy that has not been easy to manage.

On the one hand, the Cold War was a period of extraordinary antagonism, but this antagonism was regulated and controlled. The two powers never came directly face to face; in fact, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 was the only time when a direct confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union, and nuclear disaster, appeared to be in the offing. Nevertheless, the tension was undeniable, and it came to a head in the processes of decolonization and the ensuing internal conflicts in which one or both of the superpowers were often involved.

The strategy of mutual deterrence applied by the United States and the Soviet Union over more than four decades generated armed conflict in almost every corner of the world. Between 1948 and 1989, US forces were involved in 67 military operations; these include the Berlin airlift and the Berlin Wall crisis (1948-1949 and 1961-1963), the Korean War (1950-1953), the Cuban missile crisis (1962), the Vietnam War (1962-1975) and the incursions into Cambodia and Laos, and the invasions of Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989-1990). The United States also intervened in support actions or armed operations in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Congo-Zaire, Sudan, Lebanon, the Straits of Taiwan and Iran, and on a lesser scale in the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and in the Philippines, the Virgin Islands, Bolivia, Chad, El Salvador/Nicaragua, Saudi Arabia, Somalia/Ethiopia, and the Dominican Republic.⁹ In many of these cases, there was also direct or indirect participation of the USSR or of its ally Cuba.

This atmosphere of confrontation did not just fade away with the end of the Cold War. Many disputes remained unresolved (some of them with a high symbolic charge that predates the Cold War, such as the Palestinian-

⁹ Gore Vidal, *El último imperio* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2001).

Israeli conflict). Monty G. Marshall has compiled a list of 41 wars or armed conflicts with 10,000 or more deaths initiated before or in the same year of the dissolution of the USSR and which continued into the 1990s and beyond.¹⁰

After 1991, the total number of armed conflicts fell rapidly but rose again between 2001 and 2004, due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There was a second increase in 2011 in the form of the social or internal conflicts associated with the Arab revolts and, later, with the emergence of Islamic State and the Syrian Civil War. Taking a broad view, one can conclude that global armed conflict decreased significantly with the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, this reduction has not been accompanied by any sense of increased security. On the contrary, the new types of conflict extend the sensation of vulnerability around the world due to the lack of regulation, and the emergence of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda carrying out indiscriminate attacks in Western countries and elsewhere makes the phenomenon a truly global one. In short, with the end of the Cold War the number of armed conflicts fell, but at the same time, the disappearance of the control exerted by the two superpowers over armed conflicts increases the sensation of insecurity, especially in Western countries, and paves the way for the emergence of xenophobic, racist attitudes and the rise of the extreme right.

Therefore, war persists, though in a different guise. These are the new wars, as Mary Kaldor describes them,¹¹ or new armed conflicts which tend to present the following characteristics:¹²

- They are often de-territorialised conflicts in which the main objective is not to conquer a territory but to cause the greatest

¹⁰ Monty Marshall (Ed.), "Major Episodes of Political Violence 1946-2016," *Global Conflict Trends*, Center for Systemic Peace, (Vienna, VA, 2017).

¹¹ Mary Kaldor, *New and old wars: organised violence in a global era*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); "In Defence of New Wars," *Stability. International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(1): 4, 1-16; available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.at> (last accessed: May 4, 2018); C.M. Chinkin and M. Kaldor, *International law and new wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹² For a detailed analysis of the nature of new armed conflicts see Antoni Segura i Mas, "From Cold War to Asymmetric Conflicts: Players, Values and Characteristics of Wars in the Second Half of 20th Century (1945-2012)," in Paola Lo Cascio, Alberto Pellegrini and Antoni Segura i Mas (Eds.), *Soldiers, Bombs and Rifles: Military History of the 20th Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 89-120.

possible damage to the enemy anywhere and at the lowest cost (for example, the 9/11 attacks).

- The presence of combatants who do not wear uniforms and who mingle with the civilian population; this hinders the action of conventional armies since, as Rupert Smith, former commander of the 1st Armoured Division of the British Army in the 1991 Gulf War, noted in *The Utility of Force* (2006),¹³ in these circumstances the civilian population is at one and the same time a group in need of protection but also a potential enemy providing shelter to combatants and enabling them to continue their activities under the radar.
- The reappearance of ethnic cleansing policies.
- A rise in civilian casualties and a fall in military casualties.
- The use of indiscriminate attacks to increase the social impact of terror.
- An increase in refugees and internally displaced persons.
- The military powers win the conventional part of the conflict, but lose the occupation.
- The privatisation of war:
 - Sub-national military groups take control of certain regions where they impose their law (for example, drug traffickers). The use of child soldiers is frequent.
 - Large military powers contract private security companies (mercenaries) to carry out military and security actions. This avoids military casualties, which have a high political and electoral cost. For example, in 2005, personnel from private security companies in Iraq amounted to between 10,000 and 15,000 troops; by early July 2007, this figure had reached 160,000 and continued to rise after the summer to 180,000—at a time when the total US military presence in Iraq was 160,000.¹⁴
 - Increase of technological means such as drones that carry out military actions without risking the lives of soldiers.

¹³ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 2-10.

¹⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2007.

The instability of the Russian Federation and post-Soviet states

The political transition after the disappearance of the USSR and the emergence of the Russian Federation and the other ex-Soviet republics was fraught with tension. In the republics of Central Asia, the old communist bureaucracy not only survived but clung to power using authoritarian or in some cases clearly totalitarian methods; now converted into fervent nationalists, they repressed any political dissidence and accused it of radical religious terrorism. The most notorious example is that of Islam Karimov, First Secretary of the Communist Party since 1989 and President of the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan since 1990. In the following year, he proclaimed the independence of the republic and held office until the day of his death on 2 September 2016. Karimov established a regime characterized by rampant corruption (under which his elder daughter Gulnara has managed to build up a world-wide commercial empire), torture, and repression which has been accused of systematic violation of human rights by the United Nations. Since the 2001 Afghanistan war, however, Uzbekistan has enjoyed the blessing of the United States, which considers it to be a strategic ally.¹⁵

Equally conflictive was the political transition in some of the European republics and the ex-Soviet Caucasus, which, as indicated above, were immersed in internal conflicts that sometimes spilled over the borders of the new states—for example, the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But, without a doubt, the case of the Russian Federation is the most significant. Under the mandates of Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) the country experienced growing economic and social deterioration; with the "shock measures" imposed by the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury in an attempt to convert the country's planned economy into a market economy, the economic downturn evolved into a

¹⁵ On the ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia, see Mohammad-Reza Djalili and Thierry Kellner, *Géopolitique de la nouvelle Asie centrale. De la fin de l'URSS à l'après-11 septembre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003); Javier Morales, "Asia Central en la política exterior de Rusia," *Revista UNISCI. Discussion Papers* (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), no. 28, January 2012: 35-44; Ahmed Rashid *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008); Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000) and *L'Asie centrale contemporaine* (2nd ed.) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001).

full-blown recession with soaring inflation, 50% falls in production and GDP, rises in unemployment and foreign debt, the dismantling of the health and education services, and widespread poverty. The Russian Federation also progressively lost prominence on the international political scene, exacerbated by internal conflicts such as the first war in Chechnya in 1994-96 and the confrontation with Parliament that led to the institutional crisis of 1993, when Yeltsin dissolved the Congress of the Deputies and the Russian Supreme Soviet which had opposed his neoliberal policies, and was obliged to call in the troops. Yeltsin's policies included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, especially in the energy sector, which allowed an oligarchy of nouveaux riches and mafias to amass huge fortunes and ushered in an era of rampant corruption. During Yeltsin's second term, the political and economic crisis, aggravated by the growing debt, led to the financial crisis of 1998 and the collapse of the rouble. These economic disasters and his own physical decline forced Yeltsin to stand down; he was replaced by his KGB-trained prime minister, Vladimir Putin. Without going into Putin's time in office (spread over two mandates, from 1999 to 2008, and from 2012 to the present) or that of his *alter ego*, Dmitri Medvedev (2008-2012), suffice to say that he has set up a regime that is ostensibly a multiparty system but is strongly presidential and authoritarian, which has silenced and even in some case physically eliminated the opposition and the independent media and has reorganized the economy to the benefit of the most powerful. He has also restored Russian national pride at the expense of the Chechens (during the Second Chechnya War between 1999 and 2009), has marked out the red lines of Russian influence against NATO and the EU (in the Georgian War, 2008, the annexation of the Crimea and intervention in Ukraine in 2014) and has recovered Russia's international role as an antagonist of the United States.¹⁶

¹⁶ On the former Soviet republics, see Martí Anglada, *Quatre vies per a la independència. Estònia, Letònia, Eslovàquia, Eslovènia* (Barcelona: Pòrtic, 2014); Carmen Claudín, "El llarg camí del postsovietisme. Rússia: la transició inconclusa," in DDAA., *1983-2006: nous temps, noves mirades* (Barcelona: dCIDOB, 100, 2007), 33-39 and "¿Qué pasa con los vecinos de Rusia?," *Anuario Internacional CIDOB 2016/7. Claves para interpretar la Agenda Global*. (Barcelona: CIDOB, 2017), 111-117; Ahmed Emami Meibodi and Mohammad Hossein Memarian, "Complexity of Caspian Sea Geopolitics and Purposing a Solution," *International Association for Energy Economics*, 2016; Elena García Guitián "Georgia, 7 de agosto de 2008: la crisis en su contexto," Real Instituto Elcano, *Ari*, no. 96. 2008; Tony Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945*. (London: Heinemann, 2005); Ghia Nodia, "Transcaucasia, tres años después," CIDOB: Anuario Internacional CIDOB 1994, 1995, 477-483; Anna Politkovskaya.

Collateral damage

The story told by the media after the collapse of the USSR was that the Cold War was won by the United States (more specifically, by the neo-cons: the victor was Ronald Reagan, while George Bush Sr. reaped the benefits). In the 1970s, western communist parties had adopted Eurocommunism, a trend that embraced political democracy and rejected Soviet domination, but they were unable to elude the consequences of the collapse of the USSR and by the 1990s had lost almost all their electoral support. The crisis also had lessons for the European social democratic parties which, in view of the discredit of traditional concepts such as equality, solidarity and social justice that had been so abused by the USSR, toned down their remaining left-leaning policies and embraced concepts such as efficiency, competitiveness and equality of opportunity. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc, the communist parties that had monopolized political life since the end of World War II disappeared (though sometimes only in name) although in the Central Asian republics and the Caucasus old political elites were able to cling on to power. In post-Maoist China, after the wake-up call of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, Deng Xiaoping's policy "one country, two systems" under the direction of the Communist Party of China was strengthened.

La deshonra rusa (Barcelona: RBA, 2004); Aldis Purs, *Baltic facades: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since 1945* (London: Reaktion, 2012); Ricardo Martín de la Guardia and Rodrigo González Martín, *Chechenia, el infierno caucásico: historia de un conflicto inacabado* (Simat de la Vallidigna: La Xara Edicions. 2012); E.J. Rodríguez, "Crisis en Ucrania: los orígenes del caos," *Jot Down Magazine/Opinión Global*, March 15, 2015; available at: <http://www.jotdown.es/2015/03/crisis-de-ucrania-los-origenes-del-caos/> (last accessed: May 4, 2018); Carlos Taibo, *El conflicto de Chechenia* (Madrid: Catarata, 2004) and *Rusia frente a Ucrania. Imperios, pueblos, energía* (Madrid: Catarata, 2014).

Table 10.3: Legislative election results (% votes) of the left-wing parties in France and Spain, 1993-2011/12

France						
% Votes second round	1993	1997	2002	2007	2012	
Socialist Party	28.7	38.7	35.3	42.3	40.9	
Communist Party*	4.6	3.7	3.3	2.3	1.1	
(*) In 2012, the PC and the <i>Parti de Gauche</i> stood together as the Left Front.						
Spain						
% Votes	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
PSOE	38.7	37.6	34.7	43.3	44.1	29.1
IU*	9.6	10.5	5.5	5.0	3.8	7.0
(*) <i>Izquierda Unida</i> was a coalition including the old Spanish Communist Party; in 2011 it stood in coalition with the Greens.						

Election results: <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/>

In conclusion, then, some of the consequences identified relate directly and almost exclusively to the disappearance of the USSR. The collapse of the Soviet Union put an end to the Cold War and the balance of power, creating a power void and hastening the emergence of new states in the former Soviet bloc, and leading to the consolidation of the United States as the world's sole superpower. However, in the case of the new wars and new armed conflicts, the instability of the Russian Federation and the former Soviet bloc and the evolution of the Western European communist parties, it is clear that other factors just as important as the disappearance of the USSR were also in play.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LOOKING FOR A NEW PLACE IN HISTORY. THE REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA A CENTURY LATER: 1917-2017

FRANCISCO VEIGA

Over the course of the year 2017, the centenary of the Russian Revolution was celebrated all over the world. The revolution had erupted in February 1917, and in October the second phase, the October Revolution, heralded a radical transformation of the society and the foundation of a socialist state in the largest country in the world. In fact, this great leap into the unknown was intended to trigger a revolution on an international scale, not just to build a new regime confined by the borders of a vanishing empire or nation-state.

This is one of the issues that have not always been satisfactorily explained in the wave of conferences, press articles and interviews that have marked the commemoration of the centenary. The Revolution has been repeatedly described as “Russian”, and therefore “national”; but in fact October 1917 was the first political revolution of the contemporary era to explicitly proclaim its global nature. The focus on the Russian character of the revolution is a consequence of the decades of Soviet propaganda which presented the USSR as a superpower at loggerheads with an adversary of a comparable level of strategic importance—the United States—or with the People's Republic of China, which defended its own national Marxist variant. But it is also the result of many years of analysis focused on a Soviet state which, in the final analysis, was the creation of a failed international revolution (a failure confirmed by the defeat in the war with Poland in August 1920), and the subsequent inability to spread the revolution in the East during the course of that decade.

So the international expansion of the revolution was frustrated early on. And with regard to the Soviet state that emerged, when might we say

that the cycle of revolution came to an end? If we think in terms of the implementation of the major social changes, we might say that the end of the revolution coincided with the death of Stalin—the last great survivor of the seizure of power in October 1917—in the year 1953. By then, the Soviet Union had become a true civilisation in itself, with all its successes and failures and with a characteristic social structure of its own; paradoxically, it had created something similar to a specifically Soviet middle class, linked to the development of a huge administrative and party structure.¹

Like the celebration of the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the centenary of the October Revolution has had many obstacles to overcome. Old classics like John Reed's *Ten days that shook the world* have been reprinted as part of an editorial strategy to maximise sales, but this has not been accompanied by any attempt at a genuine historiographical debate.

In fact, the old mistakes remain fixed in popular memory and culture. An example is the confusion between the dates of the Gregorian and Julian calendars, something that is either ignored or forgotten. The difference between one and another is 13 days. In the Julian calendar in use in Tsarist Russia and even after the February Revolution, October 25, 1917 corresponded to November 7 in the rest of the world, which is governed by the Gregorian calendar. This means that the October Revolution is really the November Revolution. Of course, in 2017, many commemorative conferences were scheduled to be held in October, even in the universities. This is not just an unimportant detail; in the general confusion caused by the mixing of the two calendars it turns out that the “April crisis” of 1917, the first serious clash between the Petrograd Soviet and the provisional government, in fact arose out of the tensions generated by the celebration of May 1, which in the Julian calendar was celebrated on April 18. In another of these centuries-old mystifications, the February Revolution broke out on International Women's Day, March 8, which was February 23 in the Julian calendar. And, once again, the coincidence is not a trivial matter, given that it was the women workers of Petrograd who started the protest—without the support of their male comrades in the revolutionary parties who argued against taking to the streets at that time.

The persistence of these old confusions is due, in part, to the fact that for many years, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, and in many countries (including Spain) the teaching and the analysis of the Russian Revolution was approached from the perspective of historical materialism, which

¹ Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 1972).

largely ignored narrative or analytical detail. However, the celebration of the centenary illustrates how far this theoretical focus on the Russian Revolution has been questioned—especially since 1991, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Put simply, a fair few historians are not sure how to proceed. The re-printing of Reed's book is illustrative: as it is not clear which of the classical analyses written from the perspective of historical materialism deserve our attention, the publisher opted for the story of the famous American correspondent and activist—a safe bet, likely to offend no one.

In contrast, and as the left loses political influence in Europe, the liberal, even postmodern perspective on the Russian Revolution has gone from strength to strength. Propounded mainly by English-speaking authors, it emphasises the story of the structural analysis of the Marxists. It examines the counterfactual story ("what if") in order to suggest that the Russian Revolution, *pace* the historical materialist analysis, was not historically inevitable; nor was it predestined to succeed. This basically pessimistic vision is summed up in the title of Orlando Figes's enormously successful *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution*—a verdict that could hardly be further removed from John Reed's account in *Ten Days That Shook the World* or the vision of the Revolution as an international epic based on the class struggle and the call to arms of Marx's Communist Manifesto: "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains".

The third approach is the one currently being tested in Putin's Russia, which plays the emphasis more on the Civil War that followed the Revolution and tries to strike a delicate balance. According to this view, the two sides, the Reds and the Whites, were both victims; the Revolution affected all Russians (and all the peoples of the old Empire). This acknowledgement aims to achieve a historic reconciliation between all those involved, since the Revolution was part of Russia's national destiny. But the phenomenon is understood not in terms of historical materialism, but in terms of Eurasianism.

The Eurasianist factor

Today there are many solid examples of the argument of shared suffering. The most striking one may be the monument to Admiral Kolchak in Irkutsk in Siberia, the city in which Russia's internationally recognised head of state was executed in 1920. The monument is striking not so much for the restoration of Kolchak's memory as a military and political leader of the White side in the Russian Civil War, as Andrei Kravchuk's film *The*

Admiral, a box office hit in 2008, had already achieved this. Rather, the key to the significance of the monument in post-Soviet Russia is to be found at its base, in the bas-relief dedicated to two twin brothers who fought on different sides and who, at the end of the war, lower their rifles in peace and reconciliation.

The display of symbols of this kind is natural in a society that is trying to come to terms not just with the distant experience of the Revolution, but also with the disappearance of the Soviet regime that occupied most of the twentieth century and turned Russia into a hegemonic superpower. Given the complexity of this task and the evident risk of social fracture, the centenary has been a low-key affair. Other regimes have done the same in similar circumstances: in 2008, the official or academic commemorations in Erdoğan's Turkey of the Revolution of the Young Turks were notably inconspicuous. In Putin's Russia, the centenary of the 1917 Revolution (February and October) generated hardly any of the debate (or the editorial output) that was seen in the West. It is not that the regime feared that the emotional impact of the centenary might unleash a new revolution, as some press accounts forecasted—that odd illusion that one might call the “magical effect of commemoration”. Put simply, the current strategy of the Kremlin and much of the Russian academy consists in replacing the Bolshevik epic with the epic of national destiny. In this scenario, the arguments of the nationalist extreme right represent an attractive and effective tool, though a potentially dangerous one in the medium term.

In Russia, the ideology that seems to be underpinning this transition is a renewed version of Eurasianism. The explanation of its re-emergence is complicated, but illuminating.

In 1921, with the Civil War in its last throes, the core of White exiles in Sofia published a collection of articles grouped together under the title *Exodus to the East* (though the word “исход”, or “iskhod”, could also be translated into English as “exit” or “solution”).² This was the beginning of the Eurasianist movement, which embraced but also eclipsed the more instrumental approaches of nineteenth-century Russian orientalists (the *vostochniki*), who preached Pan-slavism and advocated Russian expansion towards Asia. The writings of *vostochniki* such as Vladimir Lamansky and Konstantin Leontev had already postulated that Russia's destiny lay in the East, both because of its geographical position and because of the need to challenge and overcome the hegemony of the Western world.

² Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism. An Ideology of Empire* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 19-20

The Eurasianism of the 1920s expressed the frustrations of a whole series of young Russian intellectuals forced to leave their country, but who did not recognise the European host culture as their own. This feeling was influenced by the humiliation of the defeat of the Whites and by the desire to understand the new situation of the mother country, and even to keep in contact with it.³ There was a touch of resignation in the face of a *fait accompli*: since Russia had changed for ever, the only option was to accept the new reality of the Soviet Union. In fact, in Paris, one of the Eurasian nuclei where the journal *Evrasiia* was published, and also in Brussels many exiles would eventually espouse Marxism—not because they were opportunist or defectors, but in the belief that the new communist Russia was fulfilling the historical and civilising mission of old Russia, as a Eurasian power. This meant that reconciliation was a possibility, and some of the minor figures of the movement did in fact return.

Even so, Eurasianism was not essentially pro-Bolshevik; it was an intellectual nationalist movement that exalted the Russian essence and tradition rooted in the Asian steppes, and reclaimed the cultural heritage of the peoples who lived there—the Tartars, Mongols and Turkics. As the apocryphal saying goes: “Russia went from the thesis of capitalism and the antithesis of communism to the synthesis of Eurasianism”.

Although some of its “founding fathers” like Petr Savitsky continued to fly the flag for many years, the first Eurasianist generation died out in the early 1930s and the movement was almost completely forgotten. However, it re-emerged sixty years later after the collapse of the Soviet Union—or, more precisely, after the failure of the neoliberal experience of the Yeltsin years. The reasons were not hard to understand. American-style capitalism had not benefited Russia: it had generated recession and poverty, ruining the nascent middle class and debasing still further a country already humiliated by the Soviet Union’s self-destruction. Eurasianism seemed to fulfil an old prophecy, launched during the triumphant early years of the Soviet regime: that one day the Russian people’s true mission—which transcends the old Empire, the Soviet state and the state that succeeded it—would emerge from the darkness. Communism had not been an ideal, but a system of administration; finally, Russia had distanced itself from the West by reuniting with the East and preparing for the advent of the Eurasian era.

The ideologue able to blend the old Eurasianism of the 1920s with the new Russia of the 1990s was the historian and ethnographer Lev Gumilyov, a scholar of the nomadic peoples and theorist of ethnogenesis.

³ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 47.

His affiliation to the Eurasian movement is disputed, despite the long exchange of letters that he maintained with Petr Savitsky in 1956 during the latter's imprisonment in the Soviet Union. But after a lifetime of arrests and intense pressure from the academic authorities under the Soviet regime, Gumilyov became hugely popular under perestroika; he quickly established himself as an unchallenged guru and became known as the "last Eurasian". Before his death in 1992 and his accession to the pantheon of the movement's myths, he had time to publish some studies that were more theoretical than his earlier academic work.

It is rumoured in Russia that Vladimir Putin used to attend a study group on Gumilyov's thought and is well acquainted with his ideas. It is even said that Putin met him.⁴ Whatever the case, in 2000 (without renouncing his Communist Party card or his pride in his past as a KGB officer), the new Russian president appointed Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a former dissident and Slavophile, as an adviser. Putin also reinstated the works of the Slavophile Nikolai Danilevsky (1822-1885) almost as the official doctrine of the regime, with its anti-Western stance—"Danilevsky", said the political scientist Boris Mezhev, "proved that the West is not universal".⁵ Putin complemented this trend by attracting the support of the sectors which his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, had opposed: the ultra-nationalists and the communists, united on the barricades and the defences of the White House during the attempted coup of October 1993. To keep this alliance united and balanced without resorting to national-Bolshevik radicalism (the management of the far right and the "third way" are left to the versatile Aleksandr Dugin), Putin has used Eurasianist arguments more and more openly. On the one hand, he has engaged himself with increasing determination in the great Eastern crises of the turn of the century, with the pacification of Chechnya (now converted into a fundamentalist republic allied to Moscow)—Russian participation in the wars of Georgia (2008) and the Donbass (2014-2015), the annexation of Crimea (2014) and Russian intervention in the war in Syria (2016-2018); and on the other, he has turned Russian policy markedly towards Asia with the project of the Eurasian Economic Union (Евразийский экономический союз, ЕАЭС) which officially came into being on 1 January 2015.

Simplifying slightly, the Eurasianist discourse serves to bridge the historical gap created by the traumatic disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991. The message is that the time line of the history of Russia has been restored; there is no break, no frustration. This interpretation was

⁴ Michel Eltchaninoff, *Dans la tête de Vladimir Poutine* (Arlès: Actes Sud, 2015); Spanish edition: *En la cabeza de Vladimir Putin* (Barcelona: Libbooks, 2016), 114

⁵ Eltchaninoff, *En la cabeza*, 98-102

expressed in a speech by Putin himself on January 21, 2016, the anniversary of Lenin's death, when only a year remained before the centenary of the Revolution of 1917. In this speech the president questioned Lenin's legacy: "There were many such ideas as providing regions with autonomy and others (...) They planted an atomic bomb under the building that is called Russia which later exploded. We did not need a global revolution". He added "Letting your rule be guided by thoughts is right, but only when that idea leads to the right results, not like it did with Vladimir Ilyich. In the end that idea led to the fall of the Soviet Union".⁶ The president of Russia charged Lenin with being the cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union: a very strong accusation made, apparently by coincidence, on the anniversary of the Bolshevik leader's death.

This was the beginning of the reconversion of the historical memory of the Russian Revolution. And it was due, above all, to the evolution of the political phenomenon known as the "Red-Brown alliance", which was born at the very end of the Soviet period, and took on its definitive form in the Donbass War.

The Red-Brown alliance

The emergence of the Russian nationalist far right dates back to the 1980s, before the fall of the Soviet Union, partly as a reaction to the success of *Solidarność* in Poland. The nationalist "stimulus" of the Soviet regime was on the rise in almost all the republics, especially under the leadership of Gorbachev—in some cases, as a consequence of the collapse of the pacts of governability and the balances of power inside the Soviet system. Although the far right had made its appearance in the mid-1980s, right-wing Russian nationalism took a little longer to resurface; and it did so largely as a reaction against the liberal nationalism championed by Boris Yeltsin during the campaigning for the Russian Parliament in the spring of 1990. In fact, this opposition was transformed into a crusade against the "invasion" by foreign economic policies and against the betrayal by the soon-to-be president who had agreed with the other republics to dismantle the USSR and thus cut the ground from under Gorbachev's feet.

⁶ Doug Stanlin, "Vladimir Putin blames Lenin for Soviet collapse," *USA Today*, January 21, 2016. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/01/21/vladimir-putin-blames-lenin-soviet-collapse/79116132/> (last accessed May 16, 2018); "Vladimir Putin accuses Lenin of placing a 'time bomb' under Russia," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/vladimir-putin-accuses-lenin-of-placing-a-time-bomb-under-russia> (last accessed May 16, 2018).

Therefore, the Soviet state came to an end by consensus, in the name of the birth of a new liberal Russia; at the same time Russian nationalism expanded and recruited new support to challenge this model. Oddly, this nationalism was backed by two political tendencies which, in theory at least, were diametrically opposed to each other. The first, obviously, was the right and extreme right, the traditionalist or even neo-Fascists, and the second, perhaps more surprisingly, was a part of the new left, in the form of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (Коммунистическая партия Российской Федерации, КПРФ - KPRF) created in early 1990 (in the former Soviet Union, unlike the rest of the republics, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia had not had its own communist party; Gorbachev opposed the KPRF project because its foundation would have meant that the rest of the republics would have no need of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union).⁷

Nationalism was infiltrating the entire Soviet Union, and Russia in particular. It affected both the new-born right and the old left. It was an infiltration not from the outside but from the inside, inherent to the system itself.

In the new independent republics, nationalism was courted by all the Soviet political institutions. The effects of the disintegration grew throughout 1991, and on the eve of the failed August coup the Communist Party broke up into a myriad of communist, socialist, democratic and nationalist parties and movements. Some of these formations joined together to take on the challenges the country was facing. On February 8 and 9, 1992, the first congress of the Council of the National Patriotic Forces was held, led by the Communist Gennady Zyuganov, a former member of the Politburo of the Socialist Republic of the Russian Federation and Secretary of Ideology. There, the foundations were laid of what would be popularly known as the Red-Brown alliance: red, the colour of the Communists, and brown, the colour of the neo-Nazis. Officially baptised the National Salvation Front, the alliance opposed Yeltsin and his liberal policies, which it presented as a foreign invasion. Hence, right and left rallied around a kind of “sacred union” that was not really new, but a rearrangement of all the fragments of the old Soviet system. The split did not create any great contradictions, because the protagonists were all the products of a shared recent past.

The former generals Albert Makashov and Mikhail Titov and former air force colonel Viktor Alksnis personified the unifying, transversal role

⁷ Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Spanish edition: *El último imperio. Los días finales de la Unión Soviética* (Madrid: Turner, 2015), 61.

that an army in a situation as dramatic as that of the post-Soviet (and now Russian) military can provide, either symbolically or as a political platform. Significantly, the Russian National Army preserves the flags and badges of the Soviet period. Makashov and Alksnis also participated in the late Soviet coup of August 1991; prior to that, Makashov had stood as a nationalist candidate in the Russian presidential elections in June, which Yeltsin had won. For his part, Alksnis was a Latvian airman in the Soviet tradition and also one of the first conspirators in the plot to remove Gorbachev and halt perestroika. A member of the Supreme Soviet, he pronounced a phrase that succinctly defined this new generation of ultras arising within the decomposing USSR: "I am a hawk; I am a reactionary."

Alongside the military there was a whole series of intellectuals converted into ideologists, such as Valentin Rasputin, Alexander Prokhanov and Igor Shafarevich who served as a bridge between the universities, the Union of Writers and the Supreme Soviet. Shafarevich was a renowned mathematician who had worked on the algebraic theory of numbers; he was close to dissident circles and the *Pochvennichestvo*, a movement linked to nineteenth-century Russian populism and Slavophilia. It was, in fact, a current that energetically rejected Europeanisation, Marxism, and liberalism; it opposed Catholicism and Protestantism, and it had anti-Semitic tendencies. Shafarevich put the Orthodox Church at the centre, even suggesting an association between mathematics and religion. Politically he became famous for his book *The Socialist Phenomenon* (published in the United States in 1980) whose origins he situated in Ancient Greece, above all in Plato. Shafarevich thus belonged to the orbit of the dissidents of the Soviet period, and was close to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. When the USSR disintegrated he became a frontline militant and a member of the founding committee of the National Salvation Front with a clearly established right-wing profile and something of a reputation as an anti-Semite. In the early 1990s he was already identified in the West (for example by Walter Laqueur)⁸ as one of the most insightful thinkers on the new nationalist and traditionalist Russian right.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, the far left brought together groups such as the Communist Initiative movement, the Leningrad Initiative Congress, and the United Working People's Front of Moscow. There was also *Trudovasya Rossiya* (Working Russia), the *Soyuz Kommunistov* (SK, Union of the Communists), the Work Party and the Russian Party of the Communists. The powerful *Grazhdanskii Soyuz*, or Civil Union, was formed by three large, influential parties with between

⁸ Walter Laqueur, "From Russia with Hate," *New Republic*, February 5, 1990.

104 and 176 deputies: the National Party of Free Russia, the Democratic Party of Russia and the Russian Union “Renovation”. The National Party of Free Russia included many military men and old *apparatchiki*, while the Democratic Party comprised both white and blue collar workers.⁹

The ideological profile of this convulsive set of parties, groups and movements, which all came together under the generic heading of nationalism and Sovietism, was remarkably varied. The tendencies ranged from the rejection of the Western cultural influence, Pan-Russianism and the national-capitalism of German Sterligov, leader of *Ruskii Sobor*, on the right wing, to the mysterious and ubiquitous *Trudovasya Rossiya*, whose structures and organisational activities were shrouded in secrecy. It was known that its leader was the communist and trade unionist Viktor Anpilov, who in turn was in charge of the Party of Russian Communist Workers (RKRП). *Trudovasya Rossiya* was the lynchpin that kept all the red and brown sectors of the National Salvation Front together, from the communists of SK to the neo-Nazis of *Pamyat*, who participated jointly in the organisation’s actions which often seemed to arise out of nothing.¹⁰ The leaders might come from the old structures of the Soviet State or the Communist Party, or from the media, like the arch nationalist Aleksandr Nevzorod, leader of *Nashi*; but in other cases, such as the neo-Fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader and co-founder of the Liberal Democratic Party, which in the early 1990s was the main opposition party, it was not entirely clear where they had sprung from.

On this basis, a characteristic Russian national-Sovietist political culture was built. One of its purest symbols was perhaps the National-Bolshevik Party, led by the poet and member of the Russian anti-establishment, Eduard Limonov.¹¹ And in 2014 these tensions came to a head with the outbreak of war in Donbass, in Ukraine.

The insurgent Russian units in Donetsk were the product of the Red-Brown alliance born of the disintegration of the Soviet Union twenty-three years earlier. These units recruited members of many different stripes: those nostalgic for the Soviet era, Tsarist sympathisers, neo-Nazis, neo-Fascists, and ultra-nationalists. One combat unit, the Miners' Division, was made up of miners and metal workers; previously, the Kalmius Battalion had also comprised miners. Interestingly, they displayed only nationalist

⁹ Gordon M. Hahn, “Opposition Politics in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, (1994), 305-335; vid. p. 314.

¹⁰ Hahn, “Opposition Politics,” 313.

¹¹ Solomon Volkov, *The magical chorus. A History of Russian Culture From Tolstoy to Solzhenitsyn* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 2009); vid. ch. 13.

symbols—no hammers and sickles or red stars.¹² In contrast, Unit # 404 was made up of internationalist communists. Other units were composed by ex-Soviet nationalities, allies of the Russians: Armenians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Belarusians and Chechens connected to the Kadirov regime. Finally, there were explicitly neo-Fascist or ultra-nationalist brigades, either Russians or connected with related movements abroad: militants from the Russian National Unity party, the special operations group Rusich, the Svarog Battalion, the Russian Orthodox Army, Orthodox Dawn (Bulgarians), the Legion of San Stefan (Hungarians, mostly linked to the nationalist group Jobbik), the Jovan Šević Detachment (Serbian chetniks), the internationalist Eurasianists (mainly French) of Continental Unity, and the National-Bolsheviks of the Zarya Battalion, members of the Other Russia.

The deconstruction of the October Revolution

Faced with this socio-political situation in post-Soviet Russia, amidst growing tensions and international crises, it is understandable that the memory of the 1917 Revolution caused considerable unease. How could one fit together the pieces of this shattered mosaic? Putin's comments on Lenin in January 2016 were not really unexpected or out of context; and above all, they were not the capricious musings of a rogue populist leader. In fact, they expressed an image of the Revolution that had been taking form ever since the demise of the Soviet Union. This is something that a visitor can see at the State Museum of the Political History of Russia, housed today in the luxurious modernist mansion which had belonged to the dancer Matilda Kschessinskaya in Tsarist times and had been the Bolshevik headquarters until July 1917. The collection of press cartoons from the time of the February Revolution, for example, traces the evolution of the figure of Lenin before October: a little-known character in the midst of revolutionary confusion. And the Bolshevik leader has come in for similar treatment since the breakup of the Soviet Union, with the publication in Russia of the previously censored works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vasily Grossman or the essay by Vladimir Soloukhin,¹³ in which the dramatist and poet accuses the Soviet leader of genocide.

¹² “В ДНР формируется Шахтерская дивизия”, *RGRU- Российская Газета*, July 9, 2014, <https://rg.ru/2014/07/09/shahter-site-anons.html> (last accessed: May 16, 2018).

¹³ Vladimir Soloukhin, *Reading Lenin* (Frankfurt am Main: Possev-Verlag, 1989) (in Russian).

However, these first denunciations came from poets, writers, and journalists, not from historians. The real change began in 1993 under Yeltsin's presidency, when the first post-Soviet textbooks on the history of Russia were published against the backdrop of the conflict with the opposition of the National Salvation Front. In those books, the October Revolution, glorified during the 75 years of the Soviet regime, began to be presented as a mere coup d'état planned and executed by a small group of conspirators. In fact, a line of continuity was established between the Bolshevik revolutionaries and the rest of the nineteenth-century revolutionaries, beginning with the Decembrists, presenting them as nefarious and basically unpatriotic: individuals who showed no interest in Russian history and culture and were strongly attracted by Western trends. Lenin himself was presented in this light: he did not believe in God and was bored by the history of Russia.¹⁴ In this context, the whole of the 1917 Revolution came to be a blip, a digression from Russia's natural evolution towards social, political and economic modernisation, one induced from outside or by forces connected with foreign countries and foreign thought.

The denunciation of the figure of Lenin as someone who actually despised the Russian people was heard for the first time in the biography written by Dmitri Volkogonov in 2013.¹⁵ On several occasions the author stresses the importance of Lenin's Jewish origin (in addition to Kalmuko, German and Swedish roots, "and possibly others") in order to suggest repeatedly that the internationalist strategy of the October Revolution was actually a subterfuge to hold onto power, even at the cost of siding with Germany against the old allies of the Entente, and in exchange for Berlin agreeing not to help the White movement. So we are witnessing the return of arguments which were in vogue among the victors of the First World War, and which prompted the international intervention in Russia;¹⁶ and also a recovery of nostalgia for imperial Russia or the White movement in general, which appears not just in this biography but in works that had a huge popular impact, such as Stanislav Govorukhin's film *The Russia That We've Lost* (1992), Andrei Kravchuk's *The Admiral* mentioned above, and in many textbooks. The success of artists like Pavel Ryzenko, whose romantic, melancholy paintings focus on the history of the Russian Empire

¹⁴ Korine Amacher, "Héros ou ennemis de la patrie? Les révolutionnaires russes du XIXe siècle dans les manuels d'histoire de la Russie," in: Korine Amacher, Leonid Heller (dir.), *Le retour des héros: la reconstitution des mythologies nationales à l'heure du postcommunisme* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 2009), 234-236.

¹⁵ Dimitri Volkogonov, *Lenin. A New Biography* (New York: Free Press, 2013).

¹⁶ See for example Volkogonov, *Lenin*, position 637 to 642; position 3979 to 3985.

and especially on the twilight of Tsarism, is also highly significant. The exhibition on how the future of Moscow was imagined in 1914, and the suggestive parallelism made between the murders of Father Gapon and Rasputin¹⁷ are further examples of the desire to recover this past world.

In general, authoritarian characters come in for praise: the Tsar, of course, Admiral Kolchak, and Stalin, as a leader of the Soviet era. Stalin's reputation in particular has grown, as a figure of transition between the pantheon of the protagonists of the Revolution and the transformation of the Soviet State into an increasingly socialist and nationalist regime: through the changes introduced in 1937,¹⁸ the Second World War, and the counterattack against the Nazi invaders that culminated in the destruction of the Third Reich. Indeed, Putin's coming to power has fomented a growing cult of Stalin.¹⁹ The Western media have tended to see this new trend as proof that Putin is a crypto-communist, or is exploiting the figure of Stalin as a means of reviving the Communist Party—especially after the regime's showdown with the West over the Donetsk war and the annexation of Crimea.²⁰ Without dismissing these possibilities, this identification with the communist past may in fact just be part of the political evolution of Russian society since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, these trends have been seen elsewhere as well: in Europe, when the Great Recession of 2008 did so much to erode the political systems of the Western democracies, the far left and the far right converged in a common space which was termed "populism", but which actually a faithful reproduction of the political response to crisis that had characterized post-Soviet Russia since 1991.

Although the division of the opposition parties and the campaign of reprisals against Russia following the annexation of Crimea led to a resurgence of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the whole of the Russian political spectrum was tinged with a nationalism that went a long way towards defining the non-committal and lukewarm interpretations of the Revolution's centenary. Perhaps a picture painted by an unknown artist around 2015 (which soon went viral on the internet), sums up the

¹⁷ "Mysteries of Political Murders: The Gapon and Rasputin Cases" – Exhibition at the State Museum of Political History of Russia (St Petersburg), http://www.polithistory.ru/en/visit_us/view.php?id=1736 (last accessed: May 16, 2018).

¹⁸ Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Amacher, "Héros ou ennemis".

²⁰ Hannah Thorburn, "For Putin, for Stalin," *Foreign Policy*, January 25, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/25/for-putin-for-stalin-russia-propaganda/> (last accessed: May 16, 2018).

final outcome well. The painting depicts a pro-Russian militiaman in Donetsk defending his position, in the company of a White guard from the Russian Civil War. Between them, bread and salt. It will be no real surprise if, one day, the Revolution becomes an inspiration for the Russian far right—once the figures of those who endowed it with a true revolutionary meaning in October 1917 have been consigned to the ash heap of history.

CONCLUSIONS

ONE HUNDRED YEARS LATER: FINAL REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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The revolution of 1917 was, undoubtedly, an event of extraordinary importance in Russian history: amid the huge convulsions caused by a tremendous world conflict, the old Tsarist building collapsed under the weight of internal protests, paving thus the way, a few months later, for the triumph of Lenin and of its followers. Against the predictions of many international observers, the Bolsheviks were able to survive the Civil War and the upheavals which were unleashed throughout the country in the following years—with their whole catalogue of horrors and violence—until they could consolidate their seizure of power and create the first Socialist state of the world.

Nevertheless, the transcendence of 1917 goes far beyond Russian borders. The Russian Revolution is one of the most important historical events of the last century: the “short” 20th century, according to Eric J. Hobsbawm’s famous and appropriate historiographical definition, that can be chronologically delimited between 1914—when the First World War created the spark that, three years later, set fire to the Tsarist Empire—and 1991, when the world saw the final and definitive disintegration of the Soviet Union and the demolition of the international order created in 1945.¹ 20th century can be defined by the Soviet experience, as the state generated by the Revolution emerged as an undisputed and decisive

¹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

protagonist of its highly dramatic political and diplomatic events, such as the rise of European totalitarianism, the Second World War, the Cold War.

In fact, historians agree that, as early as 1917, the October Revolution shocked the planet to hitherto unthinkable levels: when John Reed spoke of “ten days that shook the world”, he wasn’t just forging a lucky headline for his account of Lenin’s seizure of power, but he had a sharp feeling of the explosive potential of what happened in Petrograd.² The shockwave spread from Russia all over the world, triggering hopes, enthusiasm and sympathy on a global scale, as illustrated by Hobsbawm in a passage of his *Age of Extremes*:

In the distant interior of Australia, tough (and largely Irish Catholic) sheep-shearers, with no discernible interest in political theory, cheered the Soviets as a workers' state. In the USA the Finns, long the most strongly socialist of immigrant communities, converted to communism en masse, filling the bleak mining settlements of Minnesota with meetings 'where the mentioning of the name of Lenin made the heart throb... In mystic silence, almost in religious ecstasy, did we admire everything that came from Russia'.³

Besides the enthusiasms unleashed throughout the world, the Revolution was also a powerful catalyst for conservative (or manifestly reactionary) forces that, driven by fear, distrust or simple hatred of the principles enunciated by the Bolsheviks, often defined themselves (and sometimes triumphed) in terms of their radical opposition to Leninist experiment. Indeed, if 20th century was “the century of Revolution”, as some historians argued,⁴ it can also be defined as “the century of Counterrevolution”. More precisely, the century of the rivalry between the principles defended by the supporters of the new political, economic and social narrative formulated from Moscow, and its detractors and enemies, who, in some cases, were willing to do anything to stop what they considered a dangerous subversion of the natural order of things.

For this reason, we could not explain the rise of Fascist movements in the interwar period if we do not take into account the revolutionary ferment that spread in Europe (and not only in Europe) under the influence of the Russian October, and that affected different countries such as, for example, Italy, Hungary, Germany or Spain. The rise of Fascism, and the

² John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007).

³ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 66.

⁴ See for example Josep Fontana, *El siglo de la revolución. Una historia del mundo desde 1914* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2017).

threat it represented for the principles of freedom and equality spread by the French Revolution of 1789, motivated the temporary alliance between Western Liberalism and Soviet Socialism, both heirs of these principles: a “Great Alliance”, as it was known, forged in 1941 and decisive to overwhelmingly crush, four years later, Nazi and Japanese armies.

The victory of 1945 was the most brilliant moment for the state founded by Lenin. Millions of people around the world admired the achievements of the Soviet Union, celebrating its role as the relentless destroyer of Nazi-Fascism, and placing their hopes in an alternative model of development that could put an end to the many defects and contradictions of the bourgeois capitalist order. Although the geopolitical logics of the Cold War frustrated many of these hopes, it is true that—in the new bipolar world order that followed the Second World War—Communism was able to maintain, in different spheres, its powerful attraction ability. Despite the fact that the USSR showed (on many occasions) its most oppressive face in the so-called “Real Socialist” countries, the egalitarian message put forward by Moscow still gathered consistent adhesions and arouse illusions in Western Europe, in Latin America and in the new independent countries in Africa and Asia

In spite of passing through phases of almost direct confrontation (for example during the Korean War), and others characterised by detente and reciprocal openings, the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union that broke out in 1946-47 built a frozen *status quo* which dominated world life in the second half of past century, and contributed importantly to the slow erosion of the “Homeland of Socialism”. The Cold War, in fact, was an unequal conflict in which one of the contenders—the USSR—simply could not compete with its rival, especially in the economic sphere, until their energies reached a stagnation point. The Soviet *Stagnation* that began in the second half of the Sixties was the clearest symptom of its difficulty, a difficulty also reflected in the declining attractiveness of Marxist-Leninist message and in the growing disorientation of its followers.

The crisis in the “Real Socialist” countries, dramatic and evident since the Eighties, occurred in parallel with the rise of the conservative and liberal doctrines (neo-conservative and neo-liberal, to be precise), whose ideological validity seemed to be confirmed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later. In the general euphoria that took over the West since 1989, the fall of the USSR and of its allies was seen as the proof of the definitive success of Western

capitalist model. While some even theorized about the “End of History”,⁵ others were quick to throw Communism, and for extension the whole Soviet experience since the 1917 Revolution, to the dustbin of history. As if more than seventy years of the USSR could be easily forgotten and erased, as if that experience were only an unfortunate parenthesis in human history—and in its supposedly glorious road towards the triumph of liberal democracy—whose knowledge and study were almost unnecessary.

However, all the publications appeared in recent years (especially on occasion of the centenary of 1917) show that, fortunately, studies, interpretations and analysis focused on the Revolution are still an essential subject in contemporary historiography. Russian Revolution was an event of enormous magnitude, whose influence was felt over decades in the most different spheres—as this book underlines in many of its chapters—and that had a decisive impact on the human vicissitudes of last century.

If it is true that, for many men and women, the taking of power by Lenin and the creation of the USSR were a tragedy,⁶ it is also true that they represented a moment in which “the world changed its foundation”.⁷ Studying the Russian Revolution a hundred years later does not mean, of course, glorifying the actions of the Bolsheviks, or remembering them with melancholic nostalgia: it means rather reflecting on contemporary History and, in the end, on ourselves. Because the Russian Revolution is also part of our own history.

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

⁶ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin, 1998).

⁷ Andreu Mayayo and José Manuel Rúa (eds.), *Y el mundo cambió de base. Una mirada histórica a la Revolución Rusa* (Barcelona: Yulca, 2017)

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