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The socialist regime: The intellectual origin of the images

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ABSTRACT

Every phenomenon exists in several dimensions. It has several ontological attributes, so to speak, which provide opportunities for a variety of interpretations. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime could be an example. At the beginning of Soviet history the revolution was seen as the beginning of a worldwide revolution opening an era of liberation for workers all over the world. As the Soviet regime solidified its position, the hope for worldwide revolution faded. In the new context, observers, especially outside Russia, looked at the regime from a different perspective. For them it represented the country's national interests, and its socialist slogans should not be taken at face value. Some believed post-revolutionary Russia was similar to post-revolutionary France and was experiencing its "Thermidor." Others assumed the revolution showed Russia as a "Eurasian" state where all ethnic/religious groups lived in "symbiosis." Finally, some assumed the Soviet regime would lead to the transformation of the human species and the human conquest of cosmos. This transition from one image to another does not mean that one illusion, one "wrong" image, follows another. It also does not mean the very notion of true meaning is meaningless simply because no reality exists as a fixed entity, and one could therefore "construct" any type of reality. It simply means that there are many attributes of the revolution, which are revealed in the course of time.

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1. The image of the Russian Revolution

Through most of the twentieth century, the Russian Revolution was a living event, part of the political and intellectual life of the Soviet regime. But by 1991 the revolution had died as an ongoing process. It received its final coup de grâce on November 7, 2005. For the entire Soviet era, November 7 had

been an official holiday commemorating the Bolshevik Revolution. In 2005, it was replaced by November 4, which memorialized the defeat of the Poles at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Revolution had finally become history—a historical image, a true artifact. We can now approach the Russian Revolution from this vantage point.

It is beyond the scope of this essay, indeed, beyond the scope of a long monograph, to examine how the image of the Russian Revolution changed in Russian thought over a few years. The modest goal here is to outline the major changes in perceptions of the Revolution and of socialism in Russian thought between the late nineteenth century and the late 1920s, and to deal with some related subjects.

It is obvious that the image of the Russian Revolution and socialism—like that of any historical phenomenon—changed in the course of political development. This

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essay also demonstrates something that is less obvious to many. First, most mainstream social scientists and politicians can hardly predict the future. This inability to understand the nature of coming events is not always reducible to a problem intrinsic to the historical process, as some postmodernists might argue. For them, history is “text,” and the interconnection between events is arbitrary. This makes prediction impossible. This assumption could be partly true because it indicates the multiplicity of historical options. However, the creativity of the historical process alone does not explain why social scientists failed to consider the possibility that socialism would rise and then collapse. Well-established mainstream scientists/politicians usually dominate visions of the past, present, and future. Often, they fail to consider seriously the views of those outside the establishment, e.g., academia or the government, especially if those views differ markedly from their own. Indeed, until the Russian Revolution, members of the establishment viewed socialism mostly as a pipe dream, an abstract theory with no chance of materializing. The experiences of the Paris Commune had little impact on their attitudes, despite fears of popular violence. Radical Marxists, who believed socialism could be materialized, were ignored or seen as eccentrics. Indeed, mainstream social scientists and political pundits continued to ignore thinkers who predicted the collapse of the USSR in the last decade of the Soviet regime. There are other, less obvious aspects of the study of the image of the Revolution.

Every historical phenomenon has a multitude, even unlimited number of attributes, revealed over the historical process. From the outset of their rule, Bolsheviks viewed the revolution as the beginning of the worldwide liberation of workers. This image survived until the end of the regime; other features emerged along the way, revealing other attributes of the regime. Some groups—usually called National Bolsheviks—saw the Bolsheviks as a true national power. Others saw them as opening a new era in the history of the human species—human mastery over nature. It would be incorrect to view these changes in the image as shifts from one illusion to another, lapsing into absolute relativism. Rather, they revealed the multiple attributes of the historical phenomenon over time. Indeed, there are many Bolshevik revolutions/Soviet regimes in the historical contexts in which these phenomena are located; each of the theoretically endless multitude of images could be related to practice, events, or, implications of the Revolution and the regime that followed.

2. Socialist regime: the intellectual origin

Perceptions of the Soviet regime in the process of its historical changes depend on the historical origin of the image. This short history thus begins with the term’s origins. The word “socialism” has various meanings in different political doctrines. Most envisaged it as a society of social and political harmony. In the great religious doctrines, such as Christianity, “socialism” also implies solving the ultimate problem—the resurrection of the dead. This dream of the ideal society is as old as human civilization. For most of history, socialism has been mostly a cultural and philosophical abstraction. Many groups have

tried to follow its dictums, to live in a society without private property, but until the Bolshevik revolution no one believed such a society could be constructed worldwide. It is no accident that *Utopia*, the major work of Thomas More (1478–1531, a founder of modern socialism), portrays Utopia as impossible to create,¹ or at least the distant island suggested this. In the nineteenth century, even after the Paris Commune, violent establishment of a society without private property was not perceived as an immediate threat by most of the West European elite. Revolution was not so much the creation of a new society as the rule of the brutal mob—“gorillas,” as Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) put it. Even most social democratic parties in the West regarded the victory of socialism as a distant, semi-Utopian future. The motto of the West European socialist movement was Eduard Bernstein’s (1850–1932) famous slogan: “movement is everything, the goal is nothing.”²

As a philosophy, socialism differed little from More’s *Utopia*. It was a political abstraction *related to, or more precisely, unrelated to* real political life, like “Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” on the façade of French government buildings. For most European socialists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even for those claiming to be Marxists, socialism was not real politics. The Russian elite generally held the same view. Russian authorities had experienced a wave of revolutionary terror since 1866 and during the first Russian Revolution in 1905–1906. Yet socialism was not what they feared most. Acts of violence per se concerned authorities above all, since they endangered the lives of the elite and threatened the collapse of tsardom. In terms of a system that could replace tsardom, violence might prolong or abort anarchy and lead to complete restoration, possibly a constitutional monarchy or the Western-style capitalist democracies members of the imperial elite had witnessed. A prophetic vision emerged of a near-term socialist society, including plans for how it would materialize. Konstantine Leont’ev (1831–1891), a conservative intellectual, envisaged the coming of a socialist society; in his view, a tough disciplinarian regime, not social harmony, would result. In fact, his vision of the future would later be called “totalitarian.”³ Although he was truly a prophetic visionary, the conservative elite hardly understood or took note of his work.

3. Changes in the image: from political abstraction to a plan of action

Most members of the elite in the West and Russia did not believe in the creation of a socialist society, and yet a

¹ More, Thomas; Adams, Robert Martin, *Utopia: a New Translation, Backgrounds, Criticism*. New York: Norton, 1975.

² Bernstein, Eduard, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, New York: Schocken, 1961; Bernstein, Eduard, *Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1969.

³ Leont’ev, Konstantin, *Against the Current; Selections from the Novels, Essays, Notes, and Letters of Konstantin Leontiev*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969; Leont’ev, K., *Vostok, Rossiia i slaviansvo: sbornik statei K. Leont’eva*, Osnabrück: O. Zeller, 1966.

score of intellectuals in both places sketched a plan for such a society. For More, socialism was “Utopian” and could not be materialized in real life. By the nineteenth century, European and later Russian intellectuals adopted it as a political program. For Marx, the most influential, socialist society would emerge from a violent uprising of the worldwide proletariat. A society based on workers’ control over the “means of production” and grassroots rule of the workers—a “dictatorship of the proletariat”—would result. In 1903, a party split gave rise to the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Russian followers of Marx who generally shared the same vision of future society. The Mensheviks believed Russia was too backward to engage in socialist revolution and assumed it should experience a bourgeois revolution first.⁴ The Bolsheviks thought the bourgeoisie was too closely connected with the autocracy to become engaged in revolutionary struggle; instead, the proletariat would launch the bourgeois revolution. In so doing, the proletariat would first destroy tsardom and, in alliance with poor peasants, the capitalist order itself. Mensheviks pointed out that this experiment would fail because if the proletariat emerged victorious, the petty bourgeois peasantry would still surround it. That would doom the socialist revolution to failure. Bolsheviks responded that a proletarian revolution in Russia would trigger worldwide socialist revolutions. The victorious West European proletariat would offer a helping hand to its Russian brothers. Leon Trotsky and Alexander Parvus (1867–1924) elaborated on this theory of “permanent revolution.”⁵

Menshevik and Bolshevik views on the ways a socialist regime should be established in Russia differed, but their views on a future socialist society were identical: a grassroots democracy of the workers, who controlled the means of production. Ethnic minorities should have the right of self-determination, even if this meant the disintegration of the Russian empire. They believed this disintegration had no meaning, and downplayed its significance for several reasons. First, nationalism was a bourgeois ideology that prevented workers from acquiring a “proletarian conscience,” to become a class of their own and forge ahead with worldwide revolution. Second, if the “proletariat had no motherland” and the “proletariat of all countries must unite,” after the collapse of the capitalist order, workers from all ethnic groups would unite in a free confederation that would cleanse itself of bourgeois nationalism. In a socialist order, with the free association of self-governing worker bodies and freedom from the state as an institution outside society, nationalism would play a minimal role. This vision of a future socialist society is clearly stated in Lenin’s *State and Revolution*.⁶ One could question Lenin’s

assumption that socialism would be a stateless, harmonious grassroots democracy of workers. The many historians who challenge his characterization usually emphasize that he and other Bolsheviks entertained totalitarian proclivities early on. They point to his pet idea of a party, a highly centralized bureaucratic machine that was an embryonic totalitarian state. These historians also observe Lenin’s admiration for the use of terror, for instance, the French Revolution.⁷

These statements require clarification. Lenin did regard a highly centralized party as the only way to lead the proletariat to socialist revolution. He believed that without party leadership the workers would only fight for improving their condition in the capitalist system. But he never envisaged a party as an institution that would place itself over the proletariat. Lenin’s positive statements about terror, including the French Revolution, were made in the context of the leftist historians of the revolution. Terror was the weapon of the masses, by which they smashed the ancient, pre-revolutionary regime. Lenin never praised terror against the masses. Moreover, in the body of his work, terror occupied a marginal place. The mistakes of those who thought the Bolsheviks had planned to create the totalitarian regime long before taking power are manifold. First, these historians tried to find continuity in Bolshevism and to place the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Lenin in the same ideological “discourse.” In their view, Marxism or any socialist ideology has a clear *terrorist* message, and the proponents of this ideology were aware of this from the beginning.⁸ The sameness/continuity of the ideological and political paradigms shows the danger of the ideology of the Left with whom these conservative Western historians had been engaged in polemics throughout their academic careers.⁹

The second, more serious problem is that these historians confused two opposite aspects of the Bolsheviks’ activities, and not only Bolsheviks; they confused the self-image/political program with real political implications. In some cases—the Nazis, for example—the ideological paradigms and real political implications were the same. For Lenin and many other Bolsheviks, however, the programs often had nothing in common with political realities. This later led to the emergence of Bolsheviks who were disappointed by the results of their victories. There were no disappointed Nazis. Or, to be precise, Nazis could be disappointed by defeat—by the fact that the “Thousand-Year Reich” was much shorter—but not by the actual results of the Nazi regime.

Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks generally envisaged socialism as a society of social harmony because the

⁴ For a general account of the Menshevik position, see Haimson, Leopold H.; Dallin, David J., *The Mensheviks: From the Revolution of 1917 to the Second World War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974; Ascher, Abraham, *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976.

⁵ Parvus; Lehmann, Karl, *Rossia i revoliutsiia*, St. Petersburg: Izdanie N. Glagoleva, 1907; Trotsky, Leon, *The Permanent Revolution, and Results and Prospects*, New York: Merit Publishers, 1969.

⁶ Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich, *State and Revolution*, New York: International Publishers, 1932.

⁷ Pipes, Richard, *The Russian Revolution*, New York: Knopf, 1990; Service, Robert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998; Parry, Albert, *Terrorism: From Robespierre to Arafat*, New York: Vanguard Press, 1976.

⁸ Courtois, Stephanie; Kramer, Mark; *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

⁹ Malia, Martin E., *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, New York: Free Press; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994.

“means of production” would be in the hands of the toilers—workers and poor peasants. The major point of this society was the end of exploitation and suffering of the populace. This image of a self-controlled, self-organized socialist society had two apparent sources. First was populist tradition that regarded the future socialist society, at least in Russia, as similar to the Russian peasant commune, idealized, of course. Second was Marxist tradition: Marx, when he envisaged the socialist society, had looked at the Paris Commune, itself based on tradition back to self-governing urban communities of the late Middle Ages.

4. The February Revolution

While it seems that all Russian oppositionists, regardless of political persuasion, had worked for the end of the regime, the actual collapse of tsardom was a great surprise for the vast majority. In fact, Lenin wrote on the eve of the February Revolution that he, the representative of the older generation, would not live long enough to see the new revolutionary wave.

The collapse of the tsarist regime did not lead to increased fear of socialism in Russia. For the vast majority of conservative and liberal intellectuals, even liberal socialists such as Mensheviks, socialism, especially in Russia, was a pipe dream. For most Russian Leftist parties, a democratic capitalist society was Russia's future, and, of course, victory in the war was the immediate task. Lenin and a few of his followers were of course exceptions. The Provisional Government did not take their plans seriously, a major reason they were able to go back to Russia. At the beginning of the post-tsarist era, both the political/intellectual elite and the masses had been in a state of exaltation and believed that all problems of society would be solved just because autocracy had been replaced by the Provisional Government.¹⁰ This belief that all parties would be united for a common cause—the defeat of Germany—and that all plans for violent, if needed, socialist transformation of the society could be safely ignored, as in More's *Utopia*, led to permission for Lenin and other Bolsheviks to return to Russia. Even Lenin's April Theses, which clearly outlined the Bolshevik plan for a new socialist revolution, did not alarm the Provisional Government. Lenin was not only not feared but barely taken into account by Russian or Western observers or public. His marginality could be seen by the following fact. The erudite *London Times* had provided a detailed description of life in Russia, including a description of major crimes. But it did not mention Lenin at all until his own rise to power in 1917, and then only rather briefly.

As time progressed, the original excitement of the February Revolution disappeared, and fear of political instability increased among all political segments of

Russian society, from Mensheviks to conservative politicians and intellectuals. Bolsheviks emerged more and more as a people of concern. But even then they were hardly seen as a threat because of their plans to create a socialist society, still a pipe dream. Rather, they were seen as a threat because they were associated by the majority with instability. The problem was not so much what could be called class struggle but anarchy, in which, to outside observers, Bolsheviks played a crucial role. They were seen not as symbols of the totalitarian state but as symbols, even agents, of anarchy. They were also seen as hirelings of the Germans, unprincipled adventurers bought by the Germans and ready to transform Russia into a German colony.

The Bolsheviks had a different idea. They flatly rejected the notion that the situation in the country was anarchy, directed against any state regardless of political color. They saw around them nothing but the manifestation of class struggle, the attacks of Russian workers and peasants against the capitalists, the landlords and the government behind them. While increasing numbers of their enemies demanded a strong dictatorship as the only way to stop anarchy, Bolsheviks proclaimed that giving the power to the people would solve all the problems of society.

5. Bolshevik victory

In October/November 1917, the Bolsheviks took power, and this event certainly influenced their perception of themselves and that of the other players. It is appropriate here to provide a short sketch as to what degree the Bolsheviks' victory was inevitable¹¹ and the nature of the regime. This will help account for the changes in images of the regime in the future.

During the Soviet regime not only Soviet and East European satellite historians,¹² but quite a few Westerners tended to emphasize the inevitability of the Bolshevik victory, and often related it with the country's political culture deeply imbedded in historical tradition.¹³ Those on the political left usually saw the revolution as the masses' inevitable quest for justice. It was proclaimed as just the beginning of the worldwide process of the liberation of the oppressed. Those on the right in Western, especially American academia, saw Bolshevism, together with fascism, Nazism, and similar political trends, as a sign that political liberty, Western democratic capitalism, was on its deathbed and totalitarian regimes would most likely engulf humanity. Western liberalism was a fleeting phenomenon,

¹⁰ For a general account of the February/March Revolution, see *Katkov, George, Russia, 1917: The February Revolution*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967. *Richard, Abraham, Alexander Kerensky: The first Love of the Revolution*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. *Hasegawa, Tsuyoshi, The February Revolution, Petrograd, 1917*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981.

¹¹ On the analysis of the various interpretations of the Bolshevik Revolution, see: *Billington, James H., "Six Views of the Russian Revolution," World Politics, 1966 18 (3), pp. 452–473.*

¹² *Kuczynski, Jürgen, "Die Allgemeine Krise des Kapitalismus und die Oktoberrevolution," Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte, 1977 (3), pp. 43–46. Ganelin, Rafail Sholomovich, "Tvorcheskii put' A. Ia. Avrekha," Istoriiia SSSR 1990 (4) pp. 102–112. Hagen, Manfred, "Erweiterung des Gebäudes? Sowjetische Historiker Über die Epoche, 1895–1917," Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, 1987 35 (3), pp. 390–404.*

¹³ See for example: *Gemet, Kristian, "The Bolshevik Order and Russian Tradition," Nordic Journal of Soviet and East European Studies, 1986, 3 (1), pp. 21–44.*

and the totalitarian regime was the mainstream. Even when they saw such a strong anti-Communist leader as Ronald Reagan, they were not at all sure the West would prevail.

The collapse of the Soviet regime and the USSR led to the reevaluation of Bolshevism as a political trend. If previously stress was on the inevitability of Bolshevism, impersonal aspects of the movement, and the strength of the Soviet system, the new trend in historiography has a different interpretation of events. The stress is on the accidental nature of the movement, how easily the Bolsheviks could have been defeated and replaced by other regimes, or how the historical process had led inevitably to their downfall.¹⁴

How should one approach such theories that seem to exclude each other? To understand the nature of the Bolshevik movement and the regime it created, it is useful to place “Bolshevism” into several layers or aspects. It is clear that the Bolshevik victory as a movement was not predestined, and the fact that Bolsheviks had been marginalized, even ignored by a broad segment of the Russian political elite was not accidental. It was not due to inability to see the Bolsheviks as the only people who truly understood the historical process. Bolsheviks were quite a small group, and even by fall 1917 when their influence had increased, they could have been easily destroyed or marginalized by the historical process. It was not accidental that Lenin, with his deep understanding of the ease with this could happen, wrote to his comrades that they should strike in this very propitious moment. “Delay in starting of the uprising is tantamount to death,” he stated bluntly. One might say that the Bolshevik victory was the less viable option for Russia after the end of the tsarist regime, or at least not among the most likely scenarios.

The most likely scenario would have been the disintegration of the Russian empire, with some parts being incorporated in the colonial empires of the victorious powers in WW I, somewhat like the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ Russia's fate might have been similar to that of the Austrian–Hungarian empire and, of course, the USSR in the future. It was also quite unlikely that Western capitalist democracy would survive in this truncated Russian state, and right-wing dictatorship would most be likely in charge. This regime would mostly remain what one could see in the territories occupied by the Whites.

While the Bolsheviks' victory and especially their success in the Civil War were hardly predestined, it would be equally wrong to see them and their future activities as absolutely unrelated to life in Russia, something imposed on helpless society because of the artificial Marxist paradigm. In fact, the Bolsheviks had done something quite similar to their enemies.

Aleksandr Kolchak (1874–1920), Anton Denikin (1872–1947), and Peter Wrangel (1878–1928) were among those who might have run Russia if Bolshevism had been defeated. Certainly they would not be carbon copies of the Bolsheviks; they would, at least in words, assert the importance of private property as an institution. Still, structurally, they would have had much in common with the Bolsheviks. They would employ terror, albeit with less ferocity. Quite a few had engaged in confiscation of foodstuffs and regulating the economy during the Civil War and most likely would shun *laissez faire*, at least in its pure form, in case of victory.

6. Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War

When the Bolsheviks came to power, they found society in a crisis that had started long before and finally led to institutionalization of the reign of terror. While officially the Red Terror was launched against the enemies of the regime—political parties, particular social groups, and common criminals—it had much broader implications. It sped up the general bureaucratic ossification of society and increased the regulating/controlling aspect of the state in all of life. This led the Bolsheviks to reevaluate their vision of themselves. Despite the obvious differences between the claimed democratic nature of the Soviet state and the realities of the terror, Lenin continued to proclaim that the regime was democratic and represented the will of the majority of the toilers. As to repression of the masses, in any revolution, some of those who had benefited could be misled and act against the power that actually represented them. In this situation the regime had no option but to strike even against groups that could benefit from its policy.

While Lenin and other Bolsheviks tried to connect the practice of the regime and original postulates of the system, that the regime was democratic, they were increasingly unable to do so. Indeed, as time progressed, the ossification of the regime and the political slogans became more and more contradictory, and, at that point, possibly already in Civil War times, the Orwellian bureaucratization of Bolshevik ideology took place. Actually, two ideologies emerged. One was the official ideology, the self-image of the regime that had been publicly displayed until the very end. This image maintained that the Soviet regime was fully democratic; it was not only the rule of the people, but much more advanced than Western capitalist democracy. This self-image had been needed for the regime to legitimize itself through and by the Marxist paradigm. And through this image, the regime connected itself, at least from the ideological view, with the democratic traditions of the eighteenth century.

The other ideology could be called “functional.” It was the ideology that reflected the real essence of the regime—the increasing emphasis on the power of the elite and, by the end of the Civil War, on the increasing power of the state. These two ideologies, Marxist and “functional,” had not always been in conflict. During the first years of the regime, for example, official ideology promulgated that facilitating worldwide revolution was one of the regime's major goals. But this proclamation was increasingly became

¹⁴ Golubev, Aleksandr Vladimirovich, “Rossiia, Vek XX,” *Otechestvennaia Istoriiia*, 1997 (5): 80–92.

¹⁵ Russia's fate could well have been similar to that of the Ottoman Empire. See: Marian, Kent, Ed., *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Winchester, Mass.: Allen & Unwin, 1984. McCarthy, Justin, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, London: Arnold, 2001. Macfie, A. L., *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1923*, White Plains, NY: Longman, 1998.

the way to justify expansion of the Soviet state. Here Marxist paradigms and imperial *raison d'état* nicely complemented each other.

7. The birth of National Bolshevism

Thus, despite the increasing terror and ossification of the regime, the Soviet authorities continued to proclaim until the very end that they represented the majority of the common folk. Terror was mostly directed against political parties hostile to the regime and “exploiters,” i.e., capitalists and landlords. And, of course, the sword of the state had smitten the agents of foreign powers. Thus, the Soviet regime was not born of the bones of the people but represented the broadest segments of the toiling masses.

The enemies of the Bolsheviks saw the regime differently. All parties were surprised by their victory and even more so by their tenacity in keeping power. They believed the Bolsheviks would not survive for long, and regarded them as a minority that had imposed its power over the majority. The different political parties also had different views as to who these minorities were. For monarchists, Bolsheviks were the representatives of the minorities, mostly Jews, who took power to benefit themselves.¹⁶ For liberals, Bolsheviks were radical fanatics whose goal was to change Russia according to unworkable political theories, and who engaged in this policy regardless of the suffering of the people and economic collapse of the state. Mensheviks assumed socialism could not be built up at that time in backward Russia. They were in solidarity with liberals who regarded Bolsheviks as Utopians who ruined the country. They also believed Bolshevik policy would lead to collapse and a counter-revolutionary bourgeois regime.¹⁷

Thus, for all these groups, the crime of the Bolsheviks was that they had emerged as a power that had placed itself above the people, either the entire Russian people—this was the case with monarchists and liberals—or the proletariat. Still, the dictatorial nature of Bolshevism was actually not a curse but a blessing: their legitimization. Indeed, some of the Bolsheviks' enemies noted early on that the Bolsheviks' absolute power and broad application of terror could “normalize” Russian society by stopping the increasing anarchy and disintegration of the state.

The spreading anarchy and disintegration of the Russian state was a great blow to patriotic members of the Russian elite. Quite a few monarchists and conservative liberals proclaimed that the Bolsheviks were responsible for all these calamities. Their destructive propaganda had transformed the God-fearing, tsar-loving Russians who

had created one of the greatest global empires into a mob that had destroyed the state. Still, a considerable number of the Bolsheviks' original enemies, including numbers of officers of the old army, among others, started to see the populace as senseless brutes, vicious animals who did not care about the state and whose major occupation was looting, murder, rape, and drunken orgies. In this theory, Bolsheviks should not be blamed for the destruction; they simply followed the populace's brutal instincts. When the Bolsheviks started the terror in which the populace suffered, these intellectuals had no compassion for the masses and even started grudgingly to accept Bolshevik methods.

One such intellectual, Iurii Got'e, wrote in his diary that he saw the people hardly as noble citizens who took the problems of the motherland close to the heart, but as “gorillas”—the term most likely from Taine.¹⁸ This sort of criminal could only engage in excesses, so Got'e had no compassion for the populace who suffered under the iron rule of the Bolsheviks. While “gorillas”—the masses—were disgusting for Got'e, the Bolsheviks were, of course, not much better; and he did not believe they would be able to restore the order and stability of society. Actually, he saw no force that could save Russia: it was doomed to be a colony of the Germans. As a Russian patriot, Got'e made this confession to himself with a broken heart. But he did not see a force that could save the country, and he preferred Germany to the outrages of the populace and Bolsheviks. In fact, for Got'e there was not much difference between the two.

Other members of the Russian anti-Bolshevik elite saw the Bolsheviks and the populace as different forces, and the fact that the Bolsheviks had placed themselves above the populace was generally praised based on several assumptions. First, they believed that by launching terror, the Bolsheviks had brought some modicum of stability into society, slowing down the wave of anarchy. Second, and most important, they saw in Bolshevik repression an essential way of installing discipline in the Red Army, which they regarded as the Russian national army. In their view, the Red Army had done much more to recreate the Russian state than had the Whites. This view began to be espoused by numerous officers of the old army, who started to serve the Red, and even by members of the political/military elite who did not join the Bolsheviks.

Nikolai Ustrialov (1890–1937), one of the future founders of “National Bolshevism,” started to appreciate the Bolsheviks' political virility while he was still serving under Admiral Kolchak, the White ruler of Siberia and major pretender to replace the Bolsheviks. Such views also seem to have spread among the rank and file of the White officers who watched the powerlessness of the White forces and the policy of the foreign powers who, under the pretext of fighting Bolsheviks, wanted to weaken Russia as a state. In one episode, remembered later by a participant, two White officers who lived underground met at Red Square in Moscow, where they watched the parade of Red troops. One told the other that

¹⁶ Jews had indeed played a considerable role in the Russian revolution. See Schapiro, Leonard, “Role of the Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 1961 40 (94), pp. 148–167. Shevyrin, Viktor, et al.; Weinberg, Robert, Editors; Budnitski Oleg, Introd.; “From the History and Mythology of the Revolution: Why the Jews?, A Roundtable Discussion”, *Russian Studies in History*, 2004 43 (2), pp. 3–76.

¹⁷ On the Mensheviks' attitude in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution: Liebich, André Liebich, *From the Other Shore: Russian Social Democracy after 1921*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

¹⁸ Got'e, Iu V, *Time of Troubles: The Diary of Iurii Vladimirovich Got'e: Moscow, July 8, 1917 to July 23, 1922*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

they (White) had won. His companion responded that he did not understand because he saw not White but Red troops. Still, his friend insisted the White had won. He pointed out that the very nature of the White cause was the creation of a powerfully disciplined army and preserving Russia “united and indivisible.” And precisely this had been achieved by the Red.¹⁹

8. NEP transformation and the image of imminent restoration

During the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War, most of the enemies of the regime believed it would be destroyed as a result of a sudden breakdown, such as defeat on the front or an uprising the Bolsheviks could not to put down. The regime was often seen as extremely fragile and ready to collapse at any moment. Quite a few Bolsheviks themselves held this view and were convinced that unless they were supported by the European proletariat engaged in worldwide revolution, they would hardly survive. Their ambition was thus to make a mark on global history and send an inspiring message to future generations, as had been done by the Paris Commune and the French Revolution.

By 1921, with the Civil War at an end and the Bolsheviks unexpectedly surviving despite all odds, without the backing of worldwide revolution, the image of the regime and its possible demise started to change. The new approach did not exclude the scenario of the regime’s abrupt end. The regime, in the views of some observers, could collapse as a result of war; the victory in the Civil War was just luck and they would not survive an encounter with the much stronger West. An open counter-revolutionary coup was also regarded as a possibility. Both scenarios were regarded seriously by Bolsheviks and their enemies alike. While these scenarios from the old revolutionary era were still circulating, they were increasingly replaced by another scenario of the regime’s collapse and the regime as such. This new vision of the regime implied that it was not as fragile as thought. And while being knocked down by openly counter-revolutionary forces were not excluded, the end of the regime most likely would come by internal evolution.

The belief that the regime had the seeds of destruction in itself was substantiated by a new economic policy that slackened government control over economic life. While various historical/political/social paradigms were employed to describe NEP Russia, the analogy with Thermidorian France was seen as the most appropriate. Trotsky was among those who employed such an analogy with much enthusiasm.

By the early 1920s, when Lenin became ill, and especially after his death in 1924, Trotsky was more and more pushed aside by the triumvirate of Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), Grigory Zinov’ev (1883–1936), and Lev Kamenev (1883–1936). It started to seem more and more, as the majority of émigrés proclaimed, that the party was in the process of bureaucratic

degeneration or had already done so. In this theory, the party became alienated from the masses, and the bureaucracy lorded over the rank and file. The development of the NEP, which provided room for small business and corrupted bureaucracy, provided Trotsky and his followers with additional arguments to see the regime as actually foreign to the masses. In Trotsky’s view, the Soviet regime was approaching or already lapsed into “Thermidor.”

The Thermidor model—at least in the Trotskyist view—gave a bleak vision of the Soviet regime. According to this model, the regime was ended or about to be so as the regime of the workers and poor peasants: “revolution was betrayed.”²⁰ This view of the Soviet regime as absolutely foreign to the Russian populace, repressive and destructive for the economy and society, continued to be popular among most émigrés. Mensheviks were eager to accept Trotskyists’ description of the regime and accept their ideas that it was moving to the end, through slow evolution or violently. Mensheviks, however, still assumed that socialism was a viable ideology and the Soviet regime had some positive aspects. Conservative liberals like Petr B. Struve (1870–1944) and other conservative liberals had specific views of the Soviet regime and its end. For them, socialism was a dangerous Utopia and Bolsheviks who served their own ideology had no connection with Russia.²¹ Therefore, Struve offered the regime no hope for evolution and a slow move to “Thermidor.” In his view, the regime could not evolve but should collapse, and like the Mensheviks he believed this collapse was at hand.

Monarchists were equally convinced that the Bolshevik regime was absolutely foreign to the people; the only difference from Struve’s approach was their belief that Mensheviks and even liberals were responsible for Russia’s present-day suffering. The monarchists also believed that the Bolsheviks were not so much Utopian visionaries or corrupted power-hungry outcasts as Jews and other minorities. The Soviet rule was not so much the power of Utopians who wanted to spread their ideas all over the world, or of unprincipled institutional criminals who wanted power and the benefits of power, but of Jews who had taken power to benefit their kin. Removing the Bolsheviks would not necessarily benefit Russia, for power could be taken by worldwide Jewry or by Russians who directly or indirectly followed their bidding. Only a legitimate monarchy would save Russia. And monarchist groups scattered all over the world looked for an appropriate and legitimate pretender to the throne.

²⁰ This vision of the Soviet regime as having “betrayed” the goals of the Bolshevik Revolution and become the oppressive regime that lorded over the masses became quite popular. It was quite popular among the Western Left and survived to the present. Raskolnikov, Fedor, “Lettre ouverte a Staline,” *Contrat Social*, 1965 9 (5), 313–320. Gilmozzi, M., “L’Eredita di Trozky alle radici del conflitto Cino-Sovietico,” *Civitas* 1964, 15 (4–5), pp. 11–23.

²¹ For the best account of Struve’s life and thinking in Revolutionary Russia, see Pipes, Richard, *Struve: Liberal on the Right, 1905–1944*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980. See also: Utechin, S.V., “Struve,” *Russian Review*, 1981 40 (2), pp. 158–162. Plotnikov, Nikolai, Swiderski, E.M., translators, “Revolution and the Counter-Revolution: The Conflict Over Meaning Between P.B. Struve and S. L. Frank in 1922,” *Studies in East European Thought*, 1994 46 (3), pp. 187–196.

¹⁹ For an account of the episode, see: Shlapentokh, Dmitry, “Can Russia Rise Again?” in *Democracy*, edited by Frankel Paul, Ellen; Miller, Fred D., Jr., and Paul, Jeffrey, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

9. National Bolsheviks as true conscience of the regime

Thus, by the 1920s, the majority of émigrés regarded the Bolsheviks as a power foreign to Russia, who not only oppressed the Russian people but brutally destroyed the state and economy. By the late 1920s, Trotskyists had joined in vilifying the regime. Mainstream Bolsheviks continued to regard the regime as totally democratic. Thus, the official ideology of the regime continued to emphasize concern with the worldwide proletariat and “worldwide revolution,” and emphasized that the capitalist world had just entered a period of “temporal stabilization.” At the same time, the political reality of the regime increasingly implied that the Bolsheviks were becoming concerned with strengthening the Russian state. Consequently, nationalism became more visible in official, or at least semi-official discourse.

While nationalism became increasingly accepted in Soviet official discourse by the 1920s, socialism was emphasized, and statism as ideology was downplayed by official ideologists. Nationalism was a sort of subconscious libido of these ideologists and was handled with caution, at least in the 1920s. It was National Bolsheviks who elaborated this hidden but real ideology.

The National Bolsheviks had emerged from members of the non-Bolshevik elite who had already engaged in Civil War and saw in the Bolsheviks a force that reunified the state and brought a modicum of order. They also believed that the deeds of the Bolsheviks—quite nationalistic, imperial by implication—were much more important than their official ideological proclamations. Socialism and nationalism were not sworn enemies as seen before, but complementary. The idea that socialism and nationalism could easily be blended was definitely not just a product of Bolshevik Russia. National Bolshevism could be found in other countries in the post-World War I era and was not necessarily connected with racism, as German National Socialism would be in the future.²²

The National Bolsheviks of the 1920s were direct or indirect heirs of these earlier variations of the National Bolshevism of the Civil War period. They were stimulated in their views of Soviet Russia not just by developments in the USSR, but also in their personal experience. The feeling that the Allies had betrayed the Whites and the misery of emigrant life pushed them to be skeptical in regard to Western capitalist democracies. They also felt that monarchists and even liberals lacked workable plans: they not only could not prevent the revolution, but did not, or at least did not want to understand, that pre-revolutionary

Russia was gone and every new regime would need to take Soviet realities into account. The National Bolsheviks usually called themselves “post-revolutionaries” who would take into account the Soviet experience.

National Bolsheviks shared an ideological core, praising the Bolsheviks for resurrecting the Russian state and reasserting Russian nationalism, often in messianic form. Still, there was a substantial difference dividing them into two groups. The first group believed that Russia was a Western country and that the Western experience was in general universally applicable. The other group believed that Russia had its own way of development; Russia could and should interact with the West, not as a pupil or even partner, but as a leader.

Ustrialov was possibly one of the best-known National Bolsheviks of the Westernized variation.²³ Ustrialov had started to develop his National Bolshevik ideas during the Civil War, and they took full shape afterward. By that time, he had concluded that with all the calamities, the revolution had been, in general, a positive phenomenon. Revolution had replaced the weak elite by the strong and had created a stronger Russian state. At the same time, Ustrialov, at least in the 1920s, could not accept Bolshevism in its totality, especially the policy of total state control over economic development. Also at this time, Ustrialov supported NEP and believed it should go much farther in economic liberation. Private property, including over land, should be finally institutionalized. Similar ideas were shared by the groups of émigré intellectuals known as the “Change Landmark” movement, with which Ustrialov was affiliated. All of them saw Bolsheviks as an essential force that would lead to a strong, European-style authoritarian state.

Much more interesting were the émigrés who regarded Russia as absolutely different from the West, the Eurasianists in particular.²⁴ The importance of Eurasianism is

²² National Bolshevism, for example, was well known in Germany, with Ernst Niekisch. See: Buchheim, Hans, “Ernst Niekischs Ideologie des Widerstands,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1957 5 (4), pp. 334–361. Dupeux, Louis, “Pseudo-‘travailleur’ contre prétendu ‘état bourgeois’: l’interprétation de l’hitlerisme par Ernst Niekisch en 1934–35,” *Revue d’Allemagne*, 1984 16 (3), pp. 434–449. Pittwald, Michael, “Zur Entwicklung Völkischen Denkens in der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung der National Revolutionär Ernst Niekisch,” *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 1996 32 (1), pp. 3–22.

²³ Oberländer, Erwin, “National-Bolschewistische Tendenzen in der Russischen Intelligenz,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 1968, 16 (2), pp. 194–211. Agursky, Mikhail, “Defeat as Victory and the Living Death: The Case of Ustrialov,” *History of European Ideas*, 1984 5 (2), pp. 165–180. Tamas, Krausz, “A Nacional-Bolshevizmus alapvetése: Történeti adalékok egy rendszerváltás ideológiai hátteréhez,” *Multunk*, 1994 39 (1–2), pp. 51–80. Onegina, Svetlana Viktorovna, “Porevoliutsionnye politicheskie dvizheniia Rossiiskoi emigratsii v 20–30-E Gody: k istorii ideologii,” *Otechestvennaia Istorii*, 1998 (4), pp. 87–99. Romanovski, Viacheslav Konstantinovich, “Nikolai Vasil’evich Ustrialov,” *Otechestvennaia Istorii*, 2002 (4), pp. 79–99. Bystriantseva, Liudmila Anatol’evna, “Mirovozzrenie i obshchestvenno-politicheskaia deiatel’nost’ N. V. Ustrialova (1889–1937),” *Noviaia Noveishaia i Istorii*, 2000 (5), pp. 162–190.

²⁴ Despite the fact that Eurasianism had fascinated quite a few European intellectuals shortly after its birth and its original interest among the émigré community later, upon the decline of the movement, Western scholars had lost interest in the movement; and the publications on Eurasianism were few. Only a handful of articles, for example, had been published for almost 20 years, from the 1960s to the middle of the 1980s, e.g., the time of Gorbachev’s “perestroika.” For examples of these early publications, see: Riasanovsky, Nicholas V., “Prince N. S. Trubetskoy’s ‘Europe and Mankind,’” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 1964, 12 (2), pp. 207–220. Nivat, Georges, “Du ‘Panmongolisme’ au mouvement eurasiatique,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* (France) 1966 7 (3), pp. 460–478. Luks, Leonid, “Die Ideologie der Eurasier im zeitgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang,” West Germany: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 1986 34 (3), pp. 374–395.

underscored by the fact that it is the only émigré theory that survived to the post-Soviet period. Moreover, it continued to play an important role in post-Soviet cultural/political life. It became popular in Yeltsin's era.²⁵ Interest in historical or "classical" Eurasianism remains in the present.²⁶

²⁵ It was this renewed popularity of Eurasianism among the Russian public that had led to publications on Eurasianism among Western and Russian scholars. See, for example: [Gorizontov](#), Leonid Efremovich, "Evraziistvo, 1921–1931 GG: vzgliad iznutri," *Slavianovedenie*, 1992 (4), pp. 86–104. [Robinson](#), Mikhail Andreevich and [Petrovski](#), Leonid Petrovich, "N. N. Durnovo in. s. Trubetskoi: problema Evraziistva v kontekste 'dela Slavistov,' materialam OGPU-NKVD," *Slavianovedenie*, 1992 (4), pp. 68–82. [Robinson](#), M. A. "Pis'mo P.N. Savitskogo F. I. Uspenskomu," *Slavianovedenie*, 1992 (4), pp. 83–85. [D'iakov](#), Vladimir Anatol'evich, "O nauchom sodержanii i politicheskikh interpretatsiakh istoriosofii Evraziistva," *Slavianovedenie*, 1993 (5), pp. 101–*Revue des Etudes Slaves*, 1994, 66 (1), 73–86. [Perkhin](#), V. V. "Literaturnye Spory M. Gor'kogo (1935–36); k. kharakteristike kriticheskogo metoda," *Vestnik Sankt Peterburgskogo Universiteta, Serii 2, Istorii, Iazykoznanie, Literaturovedenie*, 1993 (4), pp. 50–57. [Kaznina](#), Ol'ga Anatol'evna, "N. S. Trubetskoi i krizis Evraziistva," *Slavianovedenie*, 1995 (4), pp. 89–95. [Hauchard](#), Claire, "L. P. Karsavin et le Mouvement Eurasien," *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, 1996 68 (3), pp. 357–365. [Dimitrova](#), Petia, "Russkaia kul'turna cherez vzgliad Evraziitsev," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1997 25 (2–3), pp. 205–223. [Málišhev](#), Mijail and [Manola](#), Sepúlveda Garza, "Euroasiatismo: Reveses de la Fortuna de una Teoria Enterrada y Resucitada," *Estudios de Asia y Africa*, 1997, 32 (3), pp. 559–573. [Shlapentokh](#), Dmitry V., "Eurasianism: Past and Present," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 1997 30 (2), pp. 129–151. [Gogokhiia](#), E. A. "Evraziiskaia mysl' ob istokakh Russkoi revoliutsii," *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta, Serii 8, Istorii*: 1998, (5), pp. 54–66. [Dimitrova](#), Petia, "Georgi Florovski i Evraziiskata sublazun," *Istoricheski Pregled*: 1998, 54 (3–4), pp. 61–76. [Voráček](#), Emil, "Vznik Eurasijstvi: úvod do problematiky," *Slovenské Historické Studie*: 1997, 23, pp. 35–51. [Voráček](#), E. "Vývoj 'vrcholného' Eurasijstvi a jeho dobová reflexe," *Slovenské Historické Studie*, 1999, 25, pp. 151–188. [Paradowski](#), Ryszard, [Wysocka](#), Liliana, and [Morren](#), Douglas, translators, "The Eurasian Idea and Leo Gumilev's Scientific Ideology," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 1999 41 (1), pp. 19–32.

²⁶ [Slawomir](#), [Mazurek](#), [Torr](#), [Guy R.](#), translators, "Russian Eurasianism: Historiography and Ideology," *Studies in East European Thought*, 2002, 54 (1–2), pp. 105–123. [Shnirel'man](#), Viktor Aleksandrovich, "Russkie, nerusskie i Evraziiskii federalizm: Evraziitsy i ikh opponenty v 1920-E Gody," *Slavianovedenie*: 2002 (4), pp. 3–20. [Bocharova](#), Zola Sergeevna, "Contemporary Historiography on the Russian émigré community in the 1920s and the 1930s," *Russian Studies in History*, 2002, 41 (1), pp. 66–91. [Onegina](#), Svetlana Viktorovna, "Postrevolutionary Political Movements in the Russian Expatriate Community in the 1920s and the 1930s (Toward a History of Ideology)," *Russian Studies in History*, 2002 41 (1), pp. 38–65. [Voráček](#), E., "Vzestupy a pady Eurasijstvi," *Slovenský Prehľad*, 2001 87 (4), pp. 451–482. [Laruelle](#), Marlène, "Les Ideologies de la 'Troisième voie' dans les Annees 1920: le Mouvement Eurasiste Russe," *Vingtième Siècle*, 2001, (70), pp. 31–46. [Shnirelman](#), Viktor, "The Fate of Empires and Eurasian Federalism; a Discussion Between the Eurasianists and Their Opponents in the 1920s," *Inner Asia: Great Britain* 2001, 3 (2), pp. 153–173. [Laruelle](#), M. "Le Neo-Eurasisme Russe: l'Empire Apres l'Empire?," *Cahiers du Monde Russ*, 2001 42 (1), pp. 71–94. [Shnirelman](#), V.; [Panani](#), [Sergei](#); [Humphrey](#), [Caroline](#), translators, "Lev Gumilev: His Pretensions as Founder of Ethnology and His Eurasian Theories," *Inner Asia: Britain* 2001 3 (1), pp. 1–18. [Von Hagen](#), Mark, "From Russia to Soviet Union to Eurasia: a View from New York Ten Years After the End of the Soviet Union," *Österreichische Osthefte* 2002, 44 (1–2), pp. 43–60. [Sergeeva](#), Ol'ga Alekseevna, "Tsvivilizatsionnaia konsepsiia, 'Evraziitsev' i kritika imi Sovetskoi modeli ustroenia obschestva," *Vostok*: 2001 (6), pp. 56–74. [Smith](#), Alexandra, "Between Art and Politics: Tsvetaeva's Story, 'The Chinaman' and Its Link with the Eurasian Movement in the 1920s–30s," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 2001 28 (3), pp. 269–285. [Bekker](#), Roman, "Mezhdn revoliutsionnym konservativizmom i totalitarizmom". Dilemmy otsenki mezhdvoennogo Evraziistva, *Slavianovedenie*, 2001 (5), pp. 14–27. [Rusnak](#), Svetlana H.B., "N. V. Ustrialov i Evraziitsy," *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, 2001

Eurasianism emerged in the early 1920s when a small group of Russian émigrés, mostly quite young, published their manifesto *Turn to the East*. The brochure attracted immediate attention, and the influence of Eurasianism grew. Originally Eurasianism was popular among the ex-officers of the defeated Whites—whose minds started to be framed in Eurasianist directions already during the Civil War—who joined the movement. Later its influence spread among broader segments of the émigré community and reached its peak by the late 1920s.

Eurasianists, similar to other National Bolsheviks, assumed that despite all its horrors, the Bolshevik Revolution was a positive phenomenon, or at least one with quite a few positive aspects. The major Bolshevik achievement was that they had not just restored the Russian state but revealed its "Eurasian" nature, cleansing it from the late perversions of the Imperial period, from Peter the Great to the February/March Revolution. The point of this Eurasian nature of Russia was that Russia was a state of all ethnic groups of the Russian empire, including non-Slavic groups. The Eurasianists actually elaborated on the specificity of the Soviet state. On the one hand, it could be seen as a sort of replica of the pre-revolutionary Russian empire. On the other hand, it was not merely the same state but in many ways different, and the prominent role of the minorities was one of its essential aspects. And the Eurasianists' assumption that Soviet Nationalism was not just a carbon copy of Russian nationalism of the past but a phenomenon mostly due to the role of minorities was not groundless.

The Eurasianists' view of the Soviet regime as a "Eurasian" state was placed in the context of their idiosyncratic vision of Russian history, the origin of the Russian state and the Mongol Empire. Regardless of philosophical views, all Russian historians regarded the Mongol invasions and yoke as one of the most tragic/destructive periods in Russian history. For Eurasianists Mongols were a positive force. They had unified Eurasia and laid the foundation of a state where all ethnic groups not just lived in peace but actually influenced each other. More so, the Mongols forged the quasi-cultural, even quasi-ethnic unity—the Eurasian nation. This nation became the framework of the Russian state, the successor of the Mongol Empire. And the Moscowite state, more than other political/social organizations, embodied Eurasian principles.

The reign of Peter the Great had been a watershed in Russian/Eurasian statehood. Eurasianists were quite critical of the Petrine reforms. Here they, of course, were

73 (2–3), pp. 317–335. [Laruelle](#), M., "Histoire d'une usurpation intellectuelle: L. N. Gumilev, 'Le dernier des Eurasistes'? Analyse des oppositions entre L. N. Gumilev et P.N. Savickij," *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, 2001 73 (2–3), pp. 449–459. [Laruelle](#), M., "Lev Nikolaevic Gumilev (1912–1992): Biologisme et Eurasisme dans la Pensee Russe," *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, France: 2000, 72 (1–2), pp. 163–189. [Mehlich](#), Julia, "Die philosophisch-theologische Begründung des Eurasismus bei L. P. Karsavin," *Studies in East European Thought*, 2000 52 (1–2), pp. 73–117. [Luks](#), Leonid, "Der 'Dritte Weg' der 'Neo-Eurasischen' Zeitschrift Elementy: Zurück ins Dritte Reich?" *Studies in East European Thought*, Netherlands: 2000 52 (1–2), pp. 49–71. [Vinkovetsky](#), Ilya, "Classical Eurasianism and its Legacy," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 2000: 34 (2) pp. 125–139.

hardly unique; Slavophiles did the same.²⁷ But they brought a new aspect to the context of Petrine Russia. Peter had discarded the essential aspects of Eurasianism, a Moscow kingdom that emphasized equality and mutual intermingling of the ethnic groups and cultures of the Russian state.

Instead of internationalism and integrationism, Peter and the emperors who followed him emphasized Russian nationalism, which alienated the non-Russian residents of the empire. The imperial elite had other problems as well. Instead of seeing the ethnic minorities of the empire, including non-Slavs, as their brothers, they proclaimed Pan-Slavism, which emphasized the attachments of Slavs who lived outside the Russian Empire. This was the wrong approach, because these Slavs had nothing to do with the people of Russia/Eurasia. Not blood, not even a common language, but common culture forged by a common history/space was most important.

The imperial elite also became saturated by Western culture and alienated from the masses who still lived according to Eurasian tradition. It was this cultural tension between the Westernized elite and Russian masses that had led to revolution. As a result, the masses had won and re-created the culture that was the real essence of Russian/Eurasia. Here, the Russians ruled not as lords but as part of a family that included all the other people of Eurasia.

It was not just internationalism and integrationism that had provided the justification of the Soviet regime. The regime revealed another aspect of Russia/Eurasia, the specific Eurasian ways of ruling the country. Here Eurasianism elaborated on the ideology starting to form among the Soviet elite. As stated above, in the beginning of Soviet rule, the elite declared that they ruled Russia in the most democratic way, and they preached the same until the very end. Still, as time progressed, they started to develop an ideology that reconciled their alleged attachment to democracy and despotic rule. They asserted that, of course, they had acted in the interest of the masses and listened to their voices, and so could be seen as representatives of the masses, democratic in their very nature. But this attachment to true democracy did not mean the masses should directly engage in running the state. This approach became a sort of “functional” ideology of the regime, and the Eurasianists elaborated on it. They pointed out that Russia/Eurasia should be ruled according to “demotia,” and elaborated on how this principle should be different from that of capitalist Western democracies.

Eurasianists pointed out that Western democracy was not actually the rule of the people because the populace was brainwashed by the elite, and the elite simply followed the interests of the proprietors. This also implied that the populace could not understand its own goal. The true interests of the populace could be understood only by the appropriate elite, who were “idiocratic.” This “idiocracy” implied that the elite should be above the personal interests of its members or the masses,

narrowly understood and try to materialize the sublime ideology. And it was this ideology and practice, Eurasianists implied, that addressed the basic needs of the people.

Eurasianists actually had few issues with the Soviet regime. The only problem was that instead of Orthodoxy, which was to be the spiritual backbone of Russia/Eurasia, the Bolsheviks preached Marxism, the foreign Western teaching. And it was not accidental that the enemies of Eurasianists regarded them as Bolsheviks with Orthodoxy instead of Marxism as ideology.

10. Bolshevism as the transformation of the human species

Both brands of National Bolshevism believed that the Bolshevik Revolution had strengthened the Russian state. They believed this stronger state would increase Russia's influence, possibly making Russia a leading nation. And this was definitely the belief of those Russian intellectuals who envisaged much more ambitious plans for the regime than those that could be imagined by the most ambitious Russian Nationalists of the past. This group saw the Soviet regime as a breakthrough in the history of humanity that would lead to transformation of the human species. They preached what was usually called “Russian Cosmism.” “Cosmism” usually implied placing the development of humanity in the broad context of the development of life and evolution of the entire cosmos.²⁸ Russian Cosmists often saw humanity as a geological/cosmic force. This idea emerged in West European, mostly French thought and was later elaborated on by Russian thinker Nikolai Fedorov (1828–1903), who believed that humanity could not only master the blind forces of nature but even rule over the cosmos.

Some Russian intellectuals, both those who emigrated and those who lived in the USSR, thought the Soviet system with a centralized economy and worship of technological process had created the model for all humanity. They believed that Sovietized humanity would be able to transform itself and become the true master of the cosmos. Some of these intellectuals, such as N. A. Setnistkii, a follower of Fedorov, even thought the Soviet Union could open an era of the resurrection of the dead. Similar ideas were elaborated on by Vladimir Vernadsky (1863–1945), who believed that humanity was a geological, and to some degree a cosmic force.

11. Conclusion

The first and most apparent conclusion from our study is that there is no unified image of the regime; those who lived inside and outside Soviet Russia changed their views over time. Second, there is a certain uniformity in the development of both Soviet and émigré thought. The émigré intellectuals, despite their physical locations

²⁷ On the image of Peter in Russian historiography, see: Szvák, Gyula, “Vítak i Péter reformjairól az Orosz Történetírásban,” *Világtörténet*, 1999 (Fall–Winter), pp. 3–27.

²⁸ On Russian cosmism, see Helleman, Wendy E., ed., *The Russian Idea: in Search of a New Identity*, Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2004; and Hagemester, Michael, “Technology as Esoteric Cosmology in Early Soviet Literature,” *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, editor, Rosenthal, B. G., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

outside Russia, often reflected the intellectual processes inside Russia. Moreover, the émigrés could spell out and work out what otherwise was just kitchen talk for trusted friends inside Russia.

Third, the study reveals what could be called the illusion of inevitability. The enemies of socialist doctrine had long believed that the socialist regime was a sheer Utopian idea and did not even count on the possibility that the Bolsheviks were close to taking power. When they did so, they believed that the Bolsheviks, a historical aberration, would collapse in the near future. On solidification of their power, however, the Bolsheviks believed that history worked for them and their power would spread globally—indeed, it would be eternal.

The fourth, possibly most important conclusion of the study, is the “endless,” indefinite meaning of the revolution as a historical phenomenon. It implies that each historical phenomenon is not a single, well-defined, fixed fact but endless numbers of facts that reveal themselves in the course of the development of the historical process.

In order to understand this notion, look again briefly at the changes of the images of revolution. In 1917–1918, revolution was seen as the beginning of the era of global transformation. It was either a pathway to liberation of the toilers—actually of all humanity—and this was the view of the Left—or a great catastrophe for the revolution's enemies. In the 1920s, Eurasianists, who, in many ways, spoke for the Russian elite inside the USSR, believed the Bolshevik Revolution had laid the foundation of a new unity, the “Eurasian”-Soviet people. And this was the essential meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution.

For the ideologists of the 1930s–1940s, inside and outside Russia, the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution is in the creation of a global empire. Finally, in the earlier periods of the Soviet regime, some intellectuals assumed that the meaning of the revolution was in opening the era of conquering of the cosmos and transformation of humanity as a species. This was especially true of those who observed the Soviet program of exploration of the cosmos during Khrushchev's time.

Whether all or any of these visions of the revolution are wrong and the history of these images is just a move from one illusion to another, the answer is likely “No.” Those who saw different meanings in the revolution saw in it real faculties, real facets of its being. And the historical process has plainly uncovered many, actually infinite, aspects of the revolution, and induced formulation of the revolution as a historical phenomenon from a different angle. Thus, the different interpretations of the revolution, in fact, of any historical phenomenon, do not just place it in a different context but actually reveal the multiplicity of the real ontological being. And this would be so until the end of interest in this historical phenomenon in intellectual discourse. Only when interest in the phenomenon disappeared, it underwent what could be called an “absolute death,” its complete irrelevance to the historical process.

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