

**Angelo Segrillo (ed.)**

**Camilo Domingues**

**César Albuquerque**

**Daniel Aarão Reis**

**Politics and Society  
In Russia**

1<sup>st</sup> edition

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**Laboratório de Estudos da Ásia (LEA)**  
**Departamento de História - FFLCH**  
Universidade de São Paulo  
Av. Professor Lineu Prestes, 338  
CEP: 05508-900 São Paulo – SP  
Tel: (55) (11) 30913760  
e-mail: laboratoriodeestudosdaasia@usp.br  
Brazil

# **POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN RUSSIA**

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## Foreword

This is the ninth book published under the auspices of the Center for Asian Studies (*Laboratório de Estudos da Ásia - LEA*) of the University of São Paulo, the sixth one in English for an international audience.

The book contains essays by LEA researchers on politics and society in Russia in different historical contexts.

**Angelo Segrillo** discusses Lenin's political conceptions and presents the first complete translation into English of Peter the Great's original 1722 Table of Ranks.

**Daniel Aarão Reis** continues his series of essays on the cycles of revolutions (1905-1921) that marked the birth of the Soviet Union.

**César Albuquerque** discusses change and continuity along the evolution of Mikhail Gorbachev's thinking before, during and after Perestroika.

**Camilo Domingues** analyzes the relationship between Alexander Herzen's and August von Haxthausen's views of the Russian peasant commune (*mir*) and how it affected their thought and political positions.

We hope you enjoy the reading.

## About the authors

**Angelo Segrillo** is an Associate Professor of History at the University of São Paulo. He holds a Bachelor's degree from Missouri State University, an M.A. from the Moscow Pushkin Institute and a Ph.D. from Universidade Federal Fluminense. He is the author of *The Decline of the Soviet Union: An Analysis of the Causes* and *Russia: Europe or Asia?*, available online respectively at <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelosegrillobookthedeclineofthesovietunion.pdf> and <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelosegrillobookrussiaeuropeorasia.pdf>

**Daniel Aarão Reis** is Professor of Contemporary History at Universidade Federal Fluminense and a CNPq 1A researcher. He is the author of the following books: “A revolução faltou ao encontro”; “1968, a paixão de uma utopia”; “Ditadura e democracia no Brasil”; “Luis Carlos Prestes, um revolucionário entre dois mundos” and “A revolução que mudou o mundo/Rússia, 1917”. His areas of specialization are the socialist revolutions in the 20th century (especially the history of the Russian revolutions and Soviet socialism) and the post- 1945 history of the Brazilian Left.

**César Albuquerque** ([rascalbuquerque@gmail.com](mailto:rascalbuquerque@gmail.com)) is a Ph.D. candidate in History at the University of São Paulo. His doctoral dissertation analyzes the evolution of Mikhail Gorbachev's thought before and after the dissolution of the USSR. His master's thesis, titled (in Portuguese) “Perestroika Unfolding: An Analysis of the Evolution of Gorbachev's Political and Economic Ideas (1984-1991)”, is available online at [http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/trabalhos/pesquisadoresdolea/dissertacaodemestrado\\_cesaralbuquerque.pdf](http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/trabalhos/pesquisadoresdolea/dissertacaodemestrado_cesaralbuquerque.pdf)  
ResearchGate profile: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cesar\\_Albuquerque2](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cesar_Albuquerque2) ORCID: 0000-0003-3140-7703

**Camilo Domingues** ([camilodomingues@hotmail.com](mailto:camilodomingues@hotmail.com)) holds a Ph.D. in History from Universidade Federal Fluminense. He is the author of two academic theses on the Russian author Nikolay Chernyshevsky. In English translation, his master's thesis is titled “Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky and the Russian Intelligentsia: Philosophy and Ethics in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century” and his doctoral dissertation “Chernyshevsky's What Is to Be Done?: The History of the Novel and the Genre”, available at <http://www.historia.uff.br/stricto/td/1937.pdf> and [http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/camilodomingues\\_tesedoutorado\\_oquefazer\\_2020.pdf](http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/camilodomingues_tesedoutorado_oquefazer_2020.pdf)

*A Note on the Expression “Worker-Peasant Alliance” in Lenin’s Works*  
Angelo Segrillo<sup>1</sup>

In academic and political circles, the expression “worker-peasant alliance” became a technical term to denote the strategy advocated by Lenin which consisted in having the proletariat join forces with the peasantry in order to further revolutionary goals in the bourgeois democratic revolution. Likewise in the Russian language the standard equivalent expression is *raboche-krest’yanskaya smychka*. The word *smychka* is peculiar in Russian. It is used in certain situations to denote a “joining together” or “merger.” The word normally used to translate “alliance” into Russian is *soyuz* (literally, “union”).

This introduction is to make the reader who is unfamiliar with the Russian language understand the origins of a philological search I had to pursue when I delved deeper into these semantic details. The concept of the worker-peasant alliance is essential in Leninist terms and I wondered when Lenin first used this expression. Surprisingly, I could not get the answer from the secondary literature I consulted. Most authors write about the theme but I found none who indicated the very first time when Lenin used the expression *raboche-krest’yanskaya smychka*. Therefore, using the (post-)modern electronic means currently available, I used a search engine to scan the entire electronic version of the fifth edition of Lenin’s *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (his Complete Works in Russian).<sup>2</sup> That should have been “a piece of cake” because — as I mentioned earlier — the word *smychka* is not so common and if I just searched for its root letters (as in *smychk*, for example) I would be able to catch all its possible variants. Little did I know it would take me quite a while to find one such expression! I scanned the 19th-century works by Lenin and I found nothing. I went past the Revolution of 1905, the Lena

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo Segrillo is an Associate Professor of History at the University of São Paulo and author of “The Decline of the Soviet Union: An Analysis of the Causes” and “Russia: Europe or Asia? The Question of Russia’s Identity in the Discussions between Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists and an Analysis of the Consequences in Present-Day Russia”, available online at <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelosegrillobookthedeclineofthesovietunion.pdf> <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelosegrillobookrussiaeuropeorasia.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5th ed. Moscow: Politizdat, 1967-1975. 55 vols. Available online at [http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/L/LENIN\\_Vladimir\\_Il'ich/\\_Lenin\\_V.I.\\_PSS5\\_.html](http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/L/LENIN_Vladimir_Il'ich/_Lenin_V.I._PSS5_.html)

The English edition of Lenin’s works can be seen in Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970. 45 vols. Available online at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/index.htm>

River Massacre of 1912, the beginning of World War I, and even the 1917 Russian Revolution, and still found nothing!!

I was beginning to think that the worker-peasant alliance (or rather the *raboche-krest'yanskaya smychka*) was a figment of my imagination when late at night I finally discovered the first point in time when Lenin used the word *smychka* to denote the worker-peasant alliance. It was during the first year of the New Economic Policy (NEP). In several of his reports to the Ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (December 23-28, 1921) he used the expression *smychka* to advocate a policy of alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, especially in the new challenging conditions of the NEP.<sup>3</sup> From then on, he would use this expression more often while also continuing to use *soyuz* and other more common words to denote the worker-peasant alliance. Curiously — due to the context of the NEP — most of the times when he used *smychka* he was referring to the need of an *economic* coming together of the two classes, since agriculture was of the essence to finance the rebuilding of the urban environment after the devastation of the civil war.<sup>4</sup>

One should also note that, although Lenin finally used the word *smychka* for the first time in 1921, never in his books and articles did he literally use the full expression *raboche-krest'yanskaya smychka* (the standard Russian phrase for “worker-peasant alliance”). *Raboche-krest'yanskaya smychka* is an *a posteriori* set phrase, which became the standard only after Lenin died and became the object of a public cult. It even sounds funny in English to say that Lenin never in his life wrote the phrase “worker-peasant alliance,” although that is exactly what he did (or didn't do) in Russian (if we take *Raboche-krest'yanskaya smychka* to be the Russian counterpart to this English standard expression).

Of course, Lenin's proposal of a worker-peasant alliance was not a figment of my imagination, and Lenin had already written about this concept before 1921 using other expressions. Thus, in order to find out when Lenin first established this concept formally, I searched his Complete Works in Russian again using all possible synonyms and similar words for “alliance” in the original language. I finally found the first time Lenin formalized the concept of a “joining together” of the proletariat and the peasantry for revolutionary purposes. It was in his pamphlet *K Derevenskoi Bednote* (“To

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<sup>3</sup> Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5th ed. Moscow: Politizdat, 1967-1975, vol. 44, pp. 310, 322, 487 and 488. Cf. Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 33, pp. 160 and 171.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5th ed. Moscow: Politizdat, 1967-1975, vol. 44 (pp. 310, 322, 487 and 488) and vol. 45 (pp. 73, 75, 76, 77, 81, 92, 98, 412 and 415).

the Rural Poor”), published in May 1903.<sup>5</sup> There he used the Russian word *soyuz* (“union”) for “alliance”. Before the NEP, this was the word he mostly used to describe his strategy.

This intrigued me. Lenin’s strategy about the peasants was very well known and established. After his death, the word *smychka*, in spite of being more uncommon, became the standard in the field. Since the fiercest debates about this specific political strategy happened in its initial period around the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1903 and the Revolution of 1905, I thought the standard name for it came from this time. But we saw it came much later, after the 1917 Revolution and the ensuing civil war. Why?

After much musing and research about this question, I reached the conclusion that the problem was not why Lenin used the word *smychka* so late, but rather *why the more uncommon word smychka was adopted* as the standard — also late, by the way.

I believe it is a phenomenon similar to what happened to the expression “permanent revolution” in Marxist parlance.

The term “permanent revolution” was used by Karl Marx. His famous *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League (of March 1850)* stated that:

While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible [...] it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far — not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world — that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers [...] Their battle-cry must be: *The*

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<sup>5</sup> Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5th ed. Moscow: Politizdat, 1967-1975, vol. 7, p. 172. Cf. Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 6, pp. 401-402. After formalizing the concept in words in the pamphlet “To The Rural Poor,” Lenin went for a comprehensive explanation of his proposed strategy linking the proletariat and the peasantry in a revolutionary path in his book *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 9, pp. 15-140.

*Permanent Revolution! [Die Revolution in Permanenz!]*<sup>6</sup>

Trotsky picked up on this term from Marx and built his own theory of permanent revolution. Against the Mensheviks, Lenin also developed a conception that the proletariat should not wait passively until the bourgeoisie completed the democratic revolution, but ought rather to push for a speedier process in this direction simultaneously creating the best conditions for further steps toward socialism in the future. This aspect of Lenin's strategy has some commonalities with aspects of Trotsky's theory. Official Soviet Leninists, however, discarded the possibility of using the Trotskyitely loaded term "permanent revolution" [*permanentnaya revolyutsiya*] to describe these aspects of Lenin's theory dubbing them "uninterrupted revolution" [*nepreryvnaya revolyutsiya*] instead. Lenin himself had used the term in his article "Social-Democracy's Attitude Towards the Peasant Movement" of September 1905.

[...] from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way.<sup>7</sup>

I believe a similar phenomenon to the "permanent/uninterrupted revolution" pair happened to *smychka* (or its full expression *rabochekrest'yanskaya smychka*) as the standard term to designate Lenin's "urban-rural" revolutionary strategy instead of the more common word *soyuz*. In two

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich. *Marx-Engels Werke* (MEW). Berlin: Dietz, 1961-1971. 41 vols. Ansprache der Zentralbehörde an den Bund vom März 1850, vol. 7, pp. 245-248 and 254. Available online at <https://marx-wirklich-studieren.net/marx-engels-werke-als-pdf-zum-download/>

<sup>7</sup> Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 9, pp. 236-237. E. H. Carr remarked that, as far as he knew, this was the only time Lenin mentioned the expression "uninterrupted revolution." In reality, Lenin used it a second time in his "Concluding Remarks on the Report on the Attitude Towards Bourgeois Parties" at the Fifth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in May 1907. Carr, Edward Hallett. *A History of Soviet Russia: The Bolshevik Revolution, Volume I*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985, p. 56. Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5th ed. Moscow: Politizdat, 1967-1975, vol. 15, p. 345. Cf. Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 12, p. 470.

texts — from 1908 and 1909, in which he used the term *soyuz* in the Russian original — Lenin clearly (and rather arguably, by the way) indicated that the idea of having an alliance (*soyuz*) between the proletariat and the peasantry for the democratic revolution came from Karl Kautsky, who was relaying conceptions emanating from Karl Marx himself.

In the pamphlet *The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907* (written in November-December 1907 and published and apprehended in 1908), Lenin stated that:

[...] the [Menshevik land] municipalisation programme obviously reflects the erroneous tactical line of Menshevism in the Russian bourgeois revolution, namely, a failure to understand that only “an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry” [союз пролетарията и крестьянства\*That is how Kautsky expressed it in the second edition of his pamphlet “Social Revolution”.] can ensure the victory of this revolution, a failure to understand the leading role the proletariat plays in the bourgeois revolution, a striving to push the proletariat aside, to adapt it to a half-way outcome of the revolution, to convert it from a leader into an auxiliary (actually into a drudge and servant) of the liberal bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup>

In the paragraph above, the asterisk stands for a footnote by Lenin himself stating that “alliance [*soyuz*] between the proletariat and the peasantry [...] is how Karl Kautsky put it in the second edition of his pamphlet *Social Revolution*.”

In his 1909 article *The Aim of the Proletarian Struggle In Our Revolution* (published in March-April in *Sotsial-Democrat*), Lenin explained in detail how, in his view, the concept of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry in the democratic revolution had been previously expounded by Karl Kautsky who, in turn, operated on ideas emanating from Karl Marx.

We may point out that, in advocating the idea of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry in the Russian bourgeois revolution [in his pamphlet

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<sup>8</sup> Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 13, p. 428.

*The Driving Forces and Prospects of the Russian Revolution*], Kautsky is not proposing anything “new”, but is entirely following in the footsteps of Marx and Engels. In 1848, Marx wrote in *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*: “The big bourgeoisie,” i.e., the German bourgeoisie after March 18, 1848 — “anti-revolutionary from the very outset, concluded a defensive and offensive alliance with reaction out of fear of the people, that is to say, the workers and the democratic, bourgeoisie” (see Volume III of Marx’s Collected Works published by Mehring; so far only two volumes have appeared in Russian). “The German revolution of 1848,” wrote Marx on July 29, 1848, “is a mere travesty of the French Revolution of 1789.... The French bourgeoisie of 1789 did not abandon its allies, the peasants, for a moment.... The German bourgeoisie of 1848 is betraying the peasants without the slightest compunction....” Here in relation to a bourgeois revolution Marx is clearly contraposing the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie allied with reaction to the working class allied with the democratic bourgeoisie, i.e., primarily the peasantry.<sup>9</sup>

It would be an interesting discussion to check how accurately Lenin was describing the original positions by Kautsky and Marx, but the point I want to draw attention to is the fact that Lenin had clearly stated that his controversial strategy of the *soyuz* (alliance) between the proletariat and the peasantry had its roots in two heavy-weight champions of Marxism, starting with Kautsky. Until WWI, Lenin had Kautsky in high regard as one of the brightest Marxists alive. That is why he drew Kautsky into the picture as a way of having his weight (and Marx’s!) behind him and his strategy of worker-peasant alliance (*soyuz*).

However, after the beginning of WWI, and especially after the 1917 Revolution, Kautsky was seen as a renegade by Lenin and the Soviets because of his criticism of the Bolshevik Revolution. Therefore, the idea of having the same terminology to describe Lenin’s and Kautsky’s strategies became anathema. Since the word *soyuz* was used many times (by Lenin himself!) to describe Kautsky’s conception, another name had to be found to

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<sup>9</sup> Lenin, V.I. *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970, vol. 15, p. 377.

be attached to Lenin's specific view of the situation. Consciously or unconsciously, therefore, the word *smychka* started being used more and more often to refer to Lenin's specific strategy until it became the standard.

In spite of some of these terms having (supposedly) emanated from Karl Marx himself, Soviet orthodoxy clearly demarcated Trotsky's "permanent revolution" from Lenin's "uninterrupted revolution" and, likewise, adopted a new (more uncommon) word (*smychka*) to differentiate Lenin's "urban-rural" strategy from Kautsky's.

Words matter...

One final *word*. I would like to end this note with a controversial thesis. In (historical) practice, I believe Lenin's worker-peasant alliance strategy was more successful *after* the October Revolution *than before*. Before the revolution the Bolsheviks were not very successful in attracting peasants to the party. As became clear from the vote count in the election for the Constituent Assembly in 1917, the peasants felt closer to the SRs (Socialist Revolutionaries) than to the Bolsheviks. Until then, Bolshevik ideology had never really deeply penetrated the countryside. However, the worker-peasant alliance, and Lenin's policies toward the peasantry in general, weighed in and were essential in the aftermath of the revolution, especially during the civil war period. *Contra* Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin had land distributed in usufruct among the Russian peasants with the Decree on Land and ensuing legislation. This was fundamental to keep the peasants more or less aligned with the Bolsheviks during the civil war. Most peasants held grudges against the Reds during the civil war because of their grain requisitioning (*prodrasverstka*) policy, but preferred them to the Whites because the monarchist counterrevolutionaries planned to return land to their former "lawful" big owners. This may have been the deciding factor in the difficult survival of the Bolsheviks during the three years of the civil war.

Later the worker-peasant alliance policy was one of the factors contributing to the integration of the peasantry to revolutionary strategies in Third World countries (e.g., Cuba) and especially in China and Vietnam, with Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Semantic/translation nuances like the ones described in this article are important for the correct understanding not only of the meaning of the concepts being discussed but also of the historical context involved. For example, by the time this piece of writing was being completed, I happened to have a discussion with fellow Brazilian scholars Enderson de Jesus Pinto, Daniel Aarão Reis and Vicente Ferraro Jr. about the controversy whether the Bolsheviks' coming to power in October 1917 represented a coup d'état or a revolution. This is a valid discussion today but "linguistically" it did not represent a burning question for revolutionaries at that time. Then the Bolsheviks themselves had no qualms about using the word "coup" (in Russian, *perevorot*) to describe their takeover of power

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in October 1917. See, for example, Stalin's article entitled *Oktyabr'skii Perevorot* ("The October Coup"; one of the few writings by the Georgian Bolshevik in which he praised Trotsky, by the way) published in *Pravda* (n. 241, page 2) on November 6, 1918. Or note John Reed using the word "coup d'état" several times to describe the Bolshevik takeover of power in his seminal eye-witness book about the 1917 revolution. (Reed, John. *Ten Days that Shook the World*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919, pp. XVI and XIX) One of the explanations for this apparent idiosyncrasy is that these are authors writing "at the heat of the moment" without enough hindsight to know whether the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917 would really represent a "structural" revolution with time. Besides, "coups" and revolutionary takeovers did not have then such negative, "antidemocratic" connotations as they have today. Finally, it is important to note that the word *perevorot* — which in the expression *gosudarstvennyi perevorot* literally means "coup d'état" — in Russian has other collateral meanings such as "overturn", "upheaval." This makes the title of Stalin's article cited above a little more dubious and less shocking than its literal translation in English (something like "The October Takeover of Power" in today's parlance).

*The Concept of Permanent Revolution in Trotsky's and Lenin's Writings*<sup>1</sup>  
Angelo Segrillo<sup>2</sup>

A fascinating aspect of the 1917 Russian Revolution was the relationship between Lenin and Trotsky. Comrades during the Revolution and political rivals before it, the development of the theoretical disputes between the two constitutes matter for endless discussions and controversies. At the heart of the problem is the question of the permanent revolution. This concept is usually associated more directly with Trotsky, but it also found a niche in the Leninist theoretical heritage due to the eventual time compression between the (bourgeois democratic) February Revolution and the (socialist) October Revolution. For example, the entry *Permanennaya Revolyutsiya* (“Permanent Revolution”) of the *Sovetskaya Istoricheskaya Entsiklopediya* (“Soviet Historical Encyclopedia”) reads:

The idea of the permanent revolution was first conceived by Marx and Engels in the [...] Communist Manifesto and in the Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League [of March 1850 ... Lenin] developed it in the theory of the “growing over” [*pererastaniye*] of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution [...] in 1905 (“Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution,” “Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry,” “Social-Democracy’s Attitude Towards the Peasant Movement”). The ideas developed by Lenin in 1905 formed the foundation according to which in 1915 he reached the conclusion about the possibility of the victory of socialism in one country

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<sup>1</sup> This is an adapted translation into English of Angelo Segrillo’s article “O Conceito de Revolução Permanente em Trotski e Lenin” originally published in *Tempos Históricos*, vol. 5/6, pp. 239-254, 2003/2004. We thank the editors of *Tempos Históricos* for the kind permission to publish the translation in this book.

<sup>2</sup> Angelo Segrillo is an Associate Professor of History at the University of São Paulo and author of “The Decline of the Soviet Union: An Analysis of the Causes” and “Russia: Europe or Asia? The Question of Russia’s Identity in the Discussions between Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists and an Analysis of the Consequences in Present-Day Russia”, available online at <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelo-segrillo-book-the-decline-of-the-soviet-union.pdf> and <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelo-segrillo-book-russia-europe-or-asia.pdf>

[in the article “On the Slogan for a United States of Europe”]. The Marxist-Leninist theory of the permanent revolution was crudely distorted by Parvus and Trotsky, who, in 1905, created the so-called “permanent revolution” theory, on the basis of which was the Menshevik denial of the revolutionary possibilities of the peasantry. According to Trotsky, the proletariat alone, without allies and at once, could overthrow the autocracy and take power in its hands [...] Lenin indicated that Trotsky’s theory was semi-Menshevik, since it “has borrowed from the Bolsheviki their call for a decisive proletarian revolutionary struggle and for the conquest of political power by the proletariat, while from the Mensheviks it has borrowed ‘repudiation’ of the peasantry’s role.” (SIS, vol. 11, p. 43-44)

Marx’s original idea to which the entry refers is contained in the following paragraph of the Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League (of March 1850), which explains what the strategy of the Communists in Germany should be:

While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible [...] it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far — not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world — that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers [...] Their battle-cry must be: The Permanent Revolution! [*Die Revolution in Permanenz!*]. (Marx & Engels, 1961-1971, vol. 7, pp. 245-248 and 254)

Trotsky took this passage from Marx as an initial platform and described his theory of permanent revolution applied to Russian conditions as

follows:

The permanent revolution, in the sense which Marx attached to this concept, means a revolution which [...] can end only in the complete liquidation of class society. [...] it is necessary to distinguish three lines of thought that are united in this theory. First, it embraces the problem of the transition from the democratic revolution to the socialist [...] The second aspect of the “permanent” theory has to do with the socialist revolution as such. For an indefinitely long time and in constant internal struggle, all social relations undergo transformation. Society keeps on changing its skin. Each stage of transformation stems directly from the preceding. This process necessarily retains a political character, that is, it develops through collisions between various groups in the society which is in transformation. Outbreaks of civil war and foreign wars alternate with periods of “peaceful” reform. Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such. The international character of the socialist revolution, which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of the permanent revolution, flows from the present state of the economy and the social structure of humanity. Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle. The socialist revolution begins on national foundations — but it cannot be completed within these foundations. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the

successes achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions. The way out for it lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite temporary declines and ebbs. (Trotsky, 1972, pp. 40-44)

This excerpt is from the 1930s, but Trotsky had sketched the fundamentals of his theory of permanent revolution by 1906 in a series of essays, especially "Results and Prospects." In them, he insisted on the thesis that the incipient Russian bourgeoisie, squeezed between the Russian state and foreign capital, was too weak to carry out its own bourgeois democratic revolution and, therefore, the proletariat would be obliged to participate in the accomplishment of these democratic tasks. (Trotsky, 1979, pp. 27-28 and 58) And, once this was done, the proletariat would be forced, on account of the revolutionary situation itself, to carry the revolution forward to the socialist stage. (ibid., pp. 72-75, where examples are given of how the implementation by a revolutionary party of measures such as the 8-hour workday or unemployment benefits would lead to lock-outs by employers, which in turn would force a consistently socialist party, instead of retreating, to confiscate these companies, which in itself would mean a process of nationalization or socialization) The sharpening of the class struggle on account of this transition to the struggle for socialism would lead to a tremendous reaction by the classes dissatisfied with the workers' power. The reaction would be such that the young Russian proletariat would need the help of the proletariat of the most advanced countries to withstand pressure from not only all Russian counterrevolutionary classes but also from the international bourgeoisie, which would try to stifle the nascent Soviet power. Hence the need for the revolution to spread to the advanced countries. (ibid., p. 117)

As Stalin (1946-1951, vol. 8, p. 19) pointed out, the main reason for intellectual disagreement between Trotsky and Lenin (1972-1976, vol. 15, p. 371; Ibid., vol. 21, p. 419) at the time referred not so much to the "permanent" and "international" character of the revolution as to the role of the peasantry. Lenin advocated a worker-peasant alliance (under the hegemony of the proletariat) to carry on and complete the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia (despite the weakness of the country's bourgeoisie). In turn, according to Trotsky (1979, pp. 61-62) the peasantry had never had a policy of its own, was hesitant and constituted an unreliable

ally for the proletariat — at most, it could be a subordinate partner (providing some ministers, for example) in a government of total proletarian hegemony. This is because, according to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, the workers' government would be forced to move swiftly from the bourgeois democratic phase to the socialist phase of revolution and, therefore, any advantages that the peasantry (as a petty-bourgeois class) could aim for in the bourgeois democratic phase of the revolution (for example, expropriation of land from big land owners and its redistribution among small peasants) would vanish as soon as one moved to the socialist phase (when land would not be private property anymore). (Trotsky, 1979, pp. 70-71 and 102-103)

It is not that Lenin (1972-1976, vol. 9, pp. 136 and 236-237) was not aware of the possible vacillations (in the bourgeois democratic stage of the revolution) and even reactionary attitude (in the socialist stage) of the peasantry. On the contrary, he often pointed this out in his writings. However, Vladimir Ilyich seemed to believe that the bourgeois democratic phase of the revolution might be longer than Trotsky envisaged in his theory of permanent revolution. In other words, there was more time and space in the Leninian conception for the progressive/revolutionary possibilities of the peasantry to be fully explored in the bourgeois democratic phase of the revolution, before going on to the socialist phase in which the peasantry (small landholders) would probably turn against the proletarian government, which would then be able to rely solely on the support of the rural proletariat. (Ibid.)

Herein lies the heart of the problem that I want to analyze in this essay. The question of a more pronounced "stagism" in Lenin's thinking in comparison to Trotsky's in the pre-1917 period. Obviously the term "stagism" is used here in relative terms. Stagism, in its generic sense, refers to the conception that a backward capitalist country must go through a long period under a bourgeois regime in order to create the pre-conditions for future socialization and only then can the transition to the socialist revolution (with full socialization of the means of production) be realized. The Mensheviks, for example, believed that Russia needed to develop her capitalism first (under the rule of the bourgeoisie) before attempting the leap into socialism.

It is clear that neither Trotsky nor Lenin can be accused of "stagism" in the sense described above. Trotsky, with his theory of permanent revolution since 1905-1906, could even be accused of an overly "anarchist" view of the immediate transition from the bourgeois democratic to the socialist phase. Lenin (1972-1976, vol. 9, p. 103; Ibid., Vol. 12, pp. 457-458), in turn, defended the leadership of the proletariat, both in the bourgeois-democratic phase and (obviously) in the socialist phase, with the possibility of a "growing over" (*pererastanie*) of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. However,

before World War I, Lenin (1972-1976, vol. 12, p. 457) seemed to mainly perceive the revolution in Russia as having an eminently bourgeois character so that it would be premature to speak, in advance, of a “jump” into socialism. With the First World War, the internationalization of the conflict, the increasing intertwining of (bellicose and peaceful) relations between countries and the possibility of the spreading of revolutionary situations in various parts of Europe, Lenin (1972-1976, vol. 21, pp. 347, 381 and 418) developed the impression that a revolutionary situation in Russia could lead to the detonation of a socialist revolution in Europe. Finally, in 1917, the extreme acceleration of events in Russia with the outburst of the February Revolution and the situation of dual power (provisional government-Soviets) led Vladimir Ilyich to land in Russia with his “April Theses” and other writings that many observers understood as a call for the immediate transition from the bourgeois democratic phase to the socialist phase of the revolution.

Several authors mention a turning-point in Lenin’s thinking during World War I and link it to different causes. For example, Michael Löwy (1970) mentions that Lenin’s careful re-reading of Hegel (especially of his *Science of Logic*) during WWI helped him overcome the “Kautskyism” (orthodox, deterministic Marxism) and stagism still present in his thinking and reach more dialectical conclusions in his *April Theses*.<sup>3</sup> Neil Harding identified the motor of this turning-point in Lenin’s study of imperialism and international finance capital. According to him, Lenin’s politics changed after 1914. Until then Lenin had devoted comparatively little attention to the development of international affairs. His analysis of international finance capital and imperialism were the basis for his strategy and tactics of the socialist revolution in 1917. It had been Lenin’s view until 1914 that the revolution in Russia would be democratic. The war led to his study of imperialism, which led him to believe that imperialism was the highest and last stage of capitalism and the stepping stone to a socialist revolution in the sense that on the world level the situation was ripe for a socialist revolution. (Harding, 1983, vol. 2, pp. 4-6, 145)

This development of Lenin’s strategic thinking was not seen in this way by official Soviet historiography. According to it, Lenin’s conception of an “uninterrupted” or “permanent” revolution (in the sense of the relatively rapid transformation of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist one) did not come as a result of WWI or the acceleration of events in 1917, but had already been formulated by Lenin in 1905. To prove this, Stalin, (1946-1951, vols. 6 and 8) in his *The Foundations of Leninism* and *Questions of Leninism*, quoted the following two 1905 passages by Lenin (from *Social-Democracy’s Attitude Towards the Peasant Movement* and *Two Tactics of*

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin B. Anderson (1995) has laid out similar arguments.

*Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*):

[...] from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way [...] Without falling into adventurism or going against our conscience in matters of science, without striving for cheap popularity we can and do assert only one thing: we shall bend every effort to help the entire peasantry achieve the democratic revolution, in order thereby to make it easier for us, the party of the proletariat, to pass on as quickly as possible to the new and higher task — the socialist revolution. (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol.9, pp. 236-237)

and

The proletariat must carry the democratic revolution to completion, allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush the autocracy's resistance by force and paralyse the bourgeoisie's instability. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, allying to itself the mass of the semiproletarian elements of the population, so as to crush the bourgeoisie's resistance by force and paralyse the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 9, p. 100)

These two quotations, especially the first one (“We stand for uninterrupted revolution”) seem to indicate that Lenin, as early as 1905, was not behind Trotsky in terms of the “revolution permanent” advocated by Marx (especially when one adds similar extracts from April 1906 in Lenin's pamphlet *Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Worker's Party*; Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 10, pp. 191-192)

However, the situation is not so simple.

At a purely exegetical level, I did not find in Lenin's Collected Works any other passage between 1907 and 1914 that came close to such a categorical statement using the word (or concept) *permanentnaya* (“permanent”) or *nepreryvnaya* (“uninterrupted”) qualifying the possible

Russian revolution as envisaged by Lenin.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, perhaps reflecting the mood brought about by the ebbing of the revolution in this period, one can find a series of quotations from Lenin in which he clearly says that the Russian revolution had an eminently bourgeois character and that immediately leaping into socialism was not the order of the day. For example, at the Fifth Congress of the RSDLP in 1907, Lenin (1972-1976, vol. 12, pp. 457-458), while criticizing the Menshevik conception that “the proletariat could not and should not go further than bourgeoisie in the [Russian] bourgeois revolution,” stated that:

The Bolsheviks held the opposite view. They maintained unequivocally that in its social and economic content our revolution was a bourgeois revolution. This means that the aims of the revolution that is now taking place in Russia do not exceed the bounds of bourgeois society. Even the fullest possible victory of the present revolution — in other words, the achievement of the most democratic republic possible, and the confiscation of all landed estates by the peasantry — would not in any way affect the foundations of the bourgeois social system. Private ownership of the means of production (or private farming on the land, irrespective of its juridical owner) and commodity economy will remain [...] All this should be absolutely beyond doubt to any Marxist. But from this it does not at all follow that the bourgeoisie is the motive force or leader in the revolution [...] Only the proletariat is capable of consummating the revolution, that is, of achieving a complete victory [...] But this victory can be achieved only provided the proletariat succeeds in getting a large section of the peasantry to follow its lead. The victory of the

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<sup>4</sup> Lenin never used the expression *permanentnaya revolyutsiya* (“permanent revolution”) to refer to his own conception of revolution and used the term *nepreryvnaya revolyutsiya* (“uninterrupted revolution”) only twice in all of his writings: in the above-mentioned passage from his article *Social-Democracy’s Attitude Towards the Peasant Movement* (of September 1905) and in his “Concluding Remarks on the Report on the Attitude Towards Bourgeois Parties” at the Fifth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in May 1907. (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 9, pp. 236-237 and vol. 12, p. 470)

present [bourgeois] revolution in Russia is possible only as the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Many other unequivocal comments about the bourgeois character of the Russian revolution, with statements about the temerity of making predictions about the possibility of an immediate transition to the socialist revolution, were made by Lenin in other years until 1914 (see, for example, quotations from 1908, 1910 and 1911, respectively, in Lenin, 1972-1976 vol. 15, pp. 331-332; *Ibid.*, vol. 17, p. 128; *Ibid.*, vol. 17, p. 128).

Especially surprising is to note that, in the same 1905 book (“Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution”, cited above by Stalin) in which Lenin had written about a transition from the democratic to the socialist revolution in Russia, there is a passage with apparently the opposite sense, closer in meaning to the quotations listed in the paragraph above. Approving the resolution on the tasks of a revolutionary provisional government adopted by the Bolsheviks at their Third Congress, he stated:

[... The] resolution, by making implementation of the minimum programme the provisional revolutionary government’s task, eliminates the absurd and semi-anarchist ideas of giving immediate effect to the maximum programme, and the conquest of power for a socialist revolution. The degree of Russia’s economic development (an objective condition), and the degree of class consciousness and organisation of the broad masses of the proletariat (a subjective condition inseparably bound up with the objective condition) make the immediate and complete emancipation of the working class impossible. Only the most ignorant people can close their eyes to the bourgeois nature of the democratic revolution which is now taking place [...] Replying to the anarchists’ objections that we are putting off the socialist revolution, we say: we are not putting it off, but are taking the first step towards it in the only possible way, along the only correct path, namely, the path of a democratic republic. (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 9, pp. 28-29)

How to understand this apparent contradiction? In a few — very few — occasions, Lenin says that he stands for the “uninterrupted” revolution

until the achievement of the socialist phase. And in many others (between 1907 and 1914) he declares that the Russian revolution has an unequivocally bourgeois character and that the notion of an immediate “leap” into the socialist phase denotes “semi-anarchist” thinking.

Cynical critics might regard this as evidence of Lenin’s chameleonic behavior and his tactical ability to adapt theory to changing practice. I prefer to advance another hypothesis. It has to do with Lenin’s and Trotsky’s different perspectives on the concept of “permanent revolution.”

As for Trotsky, the situation is clear. Since 1906, with the publication of his book *Our Revolution* — a collection of articles he wrote between 1904 and 1906, including the seminal *Results and Prospects* — he had committed to a radical theory of permanent revolution in which the revolution, in order to be effective, had to swiftly pass from its bourgeois phase to a socialist phase, in addition to spreading internationally. The unambiguous character of this conception would open Trotsky’s flank to later attacks in the 1920s: if the revolution was not spreading across the world in the 1920s, then what was left for the Bolsheviks to do?

Lenin, with his more practical, more down-to-earth character, more in tune with the organizational needs of the revolutionary struggle, seemed to maintain a more cautious attitude than the intellectually impetuous Trotsky. Without ruling out the possibility of an “uninterrupted” revolution, he seemed to keep it as one of the possible paths that the revolution could take, but not the only one. Everything would depend on the historical context and the class struggle. It is no wonder that the two most direct quotes from Lenin for the “uninterrupted” revolution are from 1905, the year when the revolt in Russia was on the rise and when everything seemed possible. Then, with the ebbing of the revolution in 1906-1912, more “moderate” evaluations of the revolutionary possibilities in the country followed. Gone were the statements about the “uninterrupted” character of the process; abundant were sober reflections on the eminently bourgeois character of that phase of the Russian historical development.

In other words, for Lenin, the “uninterrupted” (or not) character of the revolution, or the pace of the rapprochement between its democratic and socialist phases, could not be fixed a priori and would depend on a correct assessment of the balance of forces of the class struggle in the country at different times. This is clear even in the most unequivocal quotation from Lenin above in favor of the “uninterrupted” revolution. If we expand it back and forth in the original text — in order to better understand the context of 1905 Lenin was referring to (the possibility that, once the democratic tasks are solved, the peasantry will become anti-revolutionary) — we have:

Class antagonism between the rural proletariat and

the peasant bourgeoisie is unavoidable, and we disclose it in advance, explain it, and prepare for the struggle on the basis of that antagonism. One of the immediate causes of such a struggle may very likely be provided by the question: to whom shall the confiscated land be given, and how? We do not gloss over that question, nor do we promise equalitarian distribution, “socialisation”, etc. What we do say is that this is a question we shall fight out later on, fight again, on a new field and with other allies. There, we shall certainly be with the rural proletariat, with the entire working class, against the peasant bourgeoisie. In practice this may mean the transfer of the land to the class of petty peasant proprietors — wherever big estates based on bondage and feudal servitude still prevail, and there are as yet no material conditions for large-scale socialist production; it may mean nationalisation — given complete victory of the democratic revolution — or the big capitalist estates being transferred to workers’ associations, for from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way. If we do not now and immediately promise all sorts of “socialisation”, that is because we know the actual conditions for that task to be accomplished, and we do not gloss over the new class struggle burgeoning within the peasantry, but reveal that struggle. At first we support the peasantry *en masse* against the landlords, support it to the hilt and with all means, including confiscation, and then (it would be better to say, at the same time) we support the proletariat against the peasantry *en masse*. To try to calculate *now* what the combination of forces will be within the peasantry “on the day after” the revolution (the democratic revolution) is empty utopianism. Without falling into adventurism or going against our conscience in matters of science, without striving for cheap popularity we can

and do assert *only one thing*: we shall bend every effort to help the entire peasantry achieve the democratic revolution, *in order thereby to make it easier* for us, the party of the proletariat, to pass on as quickly as possible to the new and higher task — the socialist revolution. (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 9, pp. 236-237)

In the passage above, it is clear that Lenin a priori promised neither “socialization” (his quotation marks) nor guessing in advance what, in reality, the “combination of forces” and the dynamics of “the day after” the democratic revolution would be. He did promise a continuous (“uninterrupted”) struggle so that the revolution, according to the relative strength of the proletariat, could proceed as fast as possible to socialism.

In other words, whereas Trotsky “beforehand” affirmed that the revolution had to be permanent and international (or it would not be a socialist revolution), Lenin left the door open for the occurrence of other historical possibilities. And, above all, Vladimir Ilyich advocated constant analysis of the changing revolutionary reality for the formulation of proletarian strategies, instead of relying on a priori schemes of the future paths of the class struggle.

This analysis led Lenin to maintain a low profile in terms of the possibilities of an uninterrupted revolution in Russia in the period of the ebbing of the revolution between 1907 and 1912. However, the outbreak of the First World War, the internationalization of the conflict, his new analysis of imperialism and the intensification of conditions in Russia due to these factors, led Lenin to more strongly entertain a path still relatively “natural” within the classical ideas of Marxism: the outbreak of a revolution in Russia as a signal for the outbreak of the socialist revolution in the advanced countries of the West.

This idea — widespread among Marxists of all shades at the time (including Bolsheviks) — was also not new for Lenin. For example, he declared at the Fourth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1906:

I would formulate this proposition as follows: the Russian revolution can achieve victory by its own efforts, but it cannot possibly hold and consolidate its gains by its own strength. It cannot do this unless there is a socialist revolution in the West. Without this condition restoration is inevitable [...] Our democratic republic has no other reserve than the

socialist proletariat in the West [...] Russia in the twentieth century, accomplishing her bourgeois revolution, is surrounded by countries in which the socialist proletariat stands fully prepared on the eve of the final battle with the bourgeoisie. If such relatively insignificant events as the tsar's promise of freedom in Russia on October 17 gave the powerful impetus it did to the proletarian movement in Western Europe, if a telegram from St. Petersburg announcing the issue of the notorious Constitutional Manifesto was sufficient to make the Austrian workers pour into the streets [...] you can imagine what the international socialist proletariat will do when it receives news from Russia, not of promises of freedom, but of its actual achievement, and the complete victory [...] (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 10, pp. 280-281)

Lenin glimpsed the situation in these terms in 1906. However, during the period of World War I he wrote several articles claiming to have detected greater possibility of a democratic revolution in Russia that could serve as a trigger for the socialist revolution in the West. In a series of writings in 1914-1915 ("The Draft Resolution Proposed by the Left Wing at Zimmerwald," "The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis," "On the Two Lines in the Revolution"), he stated:

The imperialist war is ushering in the era of the social revolution [...] in the face of the revolutionary crisis in Russia, which is being accelerated by [military] defeat [...] our Party will preserve the slogan of "transform the imperialist war into a civil war", i.e., the slogan of the socialist revolution in the West [...] the [Russian] proletariat must wage a ruthless struggle against chauvinism, a struggle in alliance with the European proletariat for the socialist revolution in Europe [...] Herein lies the objective foundation of the full possibility of victory for the democratic revolution in Russia. There is no need here for us to prove that the objective conditions in Western Europe are ripe for a socialist revolution; this was admitted before the war by all influential socialists in all advanced countries.

(Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 21, pp. 347, 381 and 418-419)

In other words, in a series of writings during the war — but before 1917 — Lenin seemed quite optimistic about the possibilities of a (democratic) revolution in Russia, but he tended to see it as a possible trigger for the socialist revolution in Europe.

It was in 1917, with the extreme acceleration of political events in Russia (February revolution, provisional government/Soviets dual power, etc.) that Lenin began to unequivocally see the real probability of an uninterrupted revolution.

A common perception is that this change was actualized with Lenin's "April Theses." In them, as well as in his speech upon arrival in Russia (in the Finland railway station in Petrograd) on April 3, 1917, Lenin supposedly proposed the transition of the revolution from its bourgeois democratic phase to the socialist phase. In fact, it wasn't quite like that. Let us review Lenin's words in the *April Theses*:

2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution — which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie — to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants [...]

3) No support for the Provisional Government [...]

[4)...] The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government [...]

5) Not a parliamentary republic, [...] but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies [...]

8) It is not our *immediate* task to "introduce" socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the *control* of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies [...] (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 24, pp. 22-24)

Thus, the second stage of the (democratic) revolution to which Lenin referred did not imply the immediate introduction of socialism, but rather meant that the control and hegemony of the revolutionary process should

pass exclusively to the proletariat (in the form of Soviets) instead of being shared with the bourgeoisie of a provisional government.

One of the reasons that lead the current author to believe that Lenin's position on the possibility of an "uninterrupted" revolution was not so unequivocal, (as far back as 1905) as the comments by Stalin and the Soviet Historical Encyclopedia cited above suggest, is the fact that there was resistance to Lenin's *April Theses* within the Bolshevik party itself. Kamenev wrote an article against it and some Bolsheviks even accused Lenin of "Trotskyism" by trying to force the leap from one stage of revolution to the other.<sup>5</sup> Lenin responded to these criticisms in his *Letters on Tactics*:

*"As for Comrade Lenin's general scheme," writes Comrade Kamenev, "it appears to us unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution."*

There are two big mistakes here.

First. The question of "completion" of the bourgeois democratic revolution is stated wrongly [...]

Indeed, reality shows us both the passing of power into the hands of the bourgeoisie (a "completed" bourgeois democratic revolution of the usual type) and, side by side with the real government, the existence of a parallel government which represents the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the

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<sup>5</sup> Deutscher, 1968, p. 278. The fact that Lenin's position in the 1917 "April Theses" was accused of "Trotskyism" within the Bolshevik party itself, certain statements by Stalin (1946-1951, vol. 8, p. 20; *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 101: "*Some comrades believe, it seems, that Lenin [...] arrived at the idea of the growing over of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into the socialist revolution, that is to say, the idea of permanent revolution, after the imperialist war [...], that up to that time he had thought that the revolution in Russia would remain within the bourgeois framework [...] It is said that this assertion has even penetrated into our Communist press*"), and the absence of references to "uninterrupted revolution" by Lenin in the period 1907-1913 reinforce the impression that Lenin's 1905 references to the uninterrupted revolution did not mean that a "permanent revolution" approach (in the sense of a swift or immediate transition from the bourgeois democratic phase to the socialist) was a central feature of Lenin's thinking and Bolshevism in the pre-war period. Clues about this are provided by some passages in Lenin's pamphlet "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky." (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 28, pp. 299-300).

proletariat and the peasantry”. This “second government” has itself ceded the power to the bourgeoisie, has chained itself to the bourgeois government. Is this reality covered by Comrade Kamenev’s old Bolshevik formula, which says that “the bourgeois-democratic revolution is not completed”? It is not. The formula is obsolete. It is no good at all. It is dead. And it is no use trying to revive it [...]

The Bolshevik slogans and ideas on the whole have been confirmed by history; but concretely things have worked out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected [...]

The “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” has already become a reality [...]

This brings me to the second mistake in Comrade Kamenev’s argument quoted above. He criticises me, saying that my scheme “builds” on “the immediate transformation of this [bourgeois-democratic] revolution into a socialist revolution”. This is incorrect. I not only do not “build” on the “immediate transformation” of our revolution into a socialist one, but I actually warn against it, when in Thesis No. 8, I state: “It is not our immediate task to ‘introduce’ socialism.”

[...] I “build” only on this, [...] I am deeply convinced that the Soviets will make the independent activity of the masses a reality more quickly and effectively than will a parliamentary republic [...] They will more effectively, more practically and more correctly decide what steps can be taken towards socialism and how these steps should be taken. Control over a bank, the merging of all banks into one, is not yet socialism, but it is a step towards socialism. Today such steps are being taken in Germany by the Junkers and the bourgeoisie against the people. Tomorrow the Soviet will be able to take these steps more effectively for the benefit of the people if the whole state power is in its hands. (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 24, pp. 44, 50 e 52-54)

Thus, even in the *April Theses*, Lenin had a cautious view of the “transition to socialism,” advocating an incessant search in that direction, but without closed a priori conceptions about it and with constant analyses of concrete reality.<sup>6</sup>

*Theory and (historical) practice must go together.* This seems to be the gist of Lenin’s analysis of revolution.

Historical practice would dictate the development of the Russian revolution and Lenin’s appraisal therefrom. With the acceleration of revolutionary events and the dynamics of the October Revolution itself, it became clear that this was a revolution of a socialist character. This was made explicit in one of Lenin’s writings in the aftermath of the revolution (“The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government,” of April 1918) in which he explained

[...] the radical distinction in this respect between previous bourgeois revolutions and the present socialist revolution.

In bourgeois revolutions, the principal task of the mass of working people was to fulfil the negative or destructive work of abolishing feudalism, monarchy and medievalism [...]

In every socialist revolution, however — and consequently in the socialist revolution in Russia which we began on October 25, 1917 — the principal task of the proletariat, and of the poor peasants which it leads, is the positive or constructive work of setting up an extremely intricate and delicate system of new organisational relationships extending to the planned production and distribution of the goods required for the existence of tens of millions of people [...] The principal difficulty lies in the economic sphere, namely, the introduction of the strictest and universal accounting and control of the production and distribution of goods, raising the productivity of labour and *socialising production in practice.* (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 27, p. 238-241)

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<sup>6</sup> Remember Lenin’s famous dictum “that which constitutes the very gist, the living soul, of Marxism — a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.” (Lenin, 1972-1976, vol. 31, p. 166)

Historical practice determined Lenin's political analyses. In the opinion of the current author, it was also decisive in the relationship between Lenin and Trotsky in 1917. Theoretical opponents in the period 1904-1916, the course of events in 1917 would eventually bring them closer together in both practical and theoretical terms. On the one hand, Trotsky (1979a, p. 12) became convinced of the superiority of Lenin's organizational conceptions about the role of a revolutionary political party (and would join the Bolsheviks). On the other hand, the historical dynamics of 1917, with the acceleration of revolutionary events, the rapid transformation of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist one, the rapid rise to exclusive power by the party of the revolutionary proletariat (and equally rapid exclusion of the peasant parties) seemed to follow a pattern previously emphasized much more by Trotsky ("permanent revolution") than by Lenin.

In 1917, historical practice ended up uniting the two communist intellectual giants. Trotsky bowed to Lenin's organizational/party conceptions, and Lenin, since his return to Russia in April 1917, did not shy away from adopting tactical/strategic proposals that resembled conceptions traditionally associated with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

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***The Russian Revolutions:  
The Authoritarian Cycle, 1918-1921 – The Foundations of Soviet Socialism***  
Daniel Aarão Reis<sup>1</sup>

*Introduction*

I start from the belief that the Russian revolutions should be studied in an integrated manner, especially taking their social contexts into account.<sup>2</sup> These revolutions occurred in 1905, in 1917 (February and October), during the civil wars (1918-1921), and finally the Kronstadt Revolution in 1921.

The first three revolutions are part of a first cycle — *the democratic cycle* (1905-1917).<sup>3</sup>

A second cycle — the *authoritarian cycle* — was affirmed in the context of the civil wars, between 1918 and 1921, during which a new revolution occurred, whose victory was confirmed with the crushing of the insurrection of the sailors in Kronstadt in March 1921, a defeated fifth revolution, the final act of the civil wars.

I argue that the authoritarian cycle laid the historical foundations of Soviet socialism, which remained until its final break-up in 1991, despite the reformist attempts of the New Economic Policy/NEP in the 1920s, de-Stalinization in the 1950s, and perestroika/glasnost in the 1980s. In other words, the cradle of Soviet socialism was not the October revolution, as the canonic interpretation preaches, but the process of a new revolution which occurred during the civil wars (1918-1921).

This article deals with the *authoritarian cycle*.

The text is divided into five sections: 1. The interregnum (Oct. 1917 to May-July 1918); 2 The civil wars (1918-1921), including the Kronstadt revolution; 3. The revolutionary dictatorship and war communism; 4. The revolution and international relations: from internationalism to national communism. 5. The metamorphoses of Soviet socialism.

*1. The interregnum: October 1917 – July 1918<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Professor of Contemporary History, Universidade Federal Fluminense. I would like to thank the agencies which funded the research which resulted in this article: CNPq, FAPERJ, and the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R.G. Suny, 1990 and 1994

<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. Aarão Reis, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Until January 1918, when the calendar changed, dates will be given according to the Julian calendar in force in Russia (thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar adopted in Europe, its dependencies and colonies, and in the Americas).

There is a well-established canon: the October revolution was a victory exclusively led by the Bolsheviks which became the cradle of Soviet socialism. While it is true that the Bolsheviks played a decisive role in October, they neither won it by themselves, nor were they the main actors.

The victors were the large social movements unleashed by the February revolution: soldiers and sailors who demanded peace; workers favorable to control over production; peasants who demanded all the land, without paying any sort of indemnity, to be distributed by agrarian committees; and non-Russian nations, in a struggle for national independence.

On 26 October 1917, or shortly afterwards, these demands were met in revolutionary decrees passed by the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (Decree on Peace and Decree on Land): the self-determination of peoples, including the right of the non-Russian peoples to secede, was recognized on 2 November 1917 and worker control was established in law on 14 November of the same year.<sup>5</sup> Without underestimating their relevance, these decrees did nothing more than make actual realities official. Moreover, the calling of elections for the Constituent Assembly, a historical demand of the political tendencies which struggled against Czarist autocracy, was maintained for 12 November.<sup>6</sup> Coherently, the revolutionary government, the Council of People's Commissars/CPC,<sup>7</sup> called itself *provisional*, following the tradition begun in February.

Almost none of this pleased V. Lenin and his most loyal followers.<sup>8</sup> They bowed to the will of the majorities. They did not *make* the revolution, as many of their adepts and many of their enemies would say afterwards. Undoubtedly they led it, but to express the will of social movements and submitted themselves to this will, not rarely against their will. Undoubtedly they began to govern, but under the pressure of the self-organized social movements in committees, soviets, national assemblies, etc. That's why there was a "triumphal march of the soviets", expanding the revolutionary order,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, 1934, pp 283 and following and 308 and following, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> In relation to the Constituent Assembly, cf. O.H. Radkey, 1950 and O. Anweiler, 1974

<sup>7</sup> In Russian: Совет Народных Комиссаров/Совнарком - Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov/Sovnarkom.

<sup>8</sup> The Bolsheviks, as is well known, were not a monolithic party, cf. A. Rabinovitch, 2004. However, after October V. Lenin stood out as the leader most decided in employing centralist and repressive policies. Cf. A. Rabinovitch, 2007 and I.N. Steinberg, 2016; S.A. Smith, 1983. For the trajectory of V. Lenin, cf. R. Service, vols 2 and 3, 1985; D. Volkogonov, 1995 and V. Lenin 1962-1965, vols. 26-31; and 1978.

almost without opposition, throughout the territory of the former Russian empire not occupied by the Germans. It is also for this reason that victory was “easier than lifting a pen” (V. Lenin).<sup>9</sup>

The history of the period from October 1917 to July 1918, between the victory of the insurrection and the beginning of the civil wars, was the history of how these demands, converted into *legal rights*, were gradually ignored, attacked, or revoked, in a tortuous and contradictory process full of zigzags, for which reason it is proper to give this period the name of *interregnum*, an interval of time in which a government that was the fruit of a radically democratic process became a revolutionary dictatorship, forged and consolidated during the civil wars.<sup>10</sup>

How did the interregnum unfold?

From the political point of view, an error of historical evaluation was committed by the socialist parties and groups which withdrew from the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, denouncing the coup perpetrated by the Bolsheviks who had triggered the insurrection without consulting the soviets in advance.<sup>11</sup> They remained on the sidelines or in opposition while the month of November witnessed the failure of the negotiations unanimously approved by the congress, favorable to a plural socialist government and bringing together the set of recognized socialist tendencies under the banner of *democracy*.<sup>12</sup> Shortly afterwards, within the context of the Second Congress of Peasants’ Deputies, and with their basic demands having been accepted, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries joined the government, gaining positions in the CPC and an important

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<sup>9</sup> For the revolutions of 1917 considered from a social angle, cf. D. Aarão Reis, 2017; E. Acton et alii, 1997; M. Ferro, 2011; D. Mandel, 1984; R. Medvedev, 1997

<sup>10</sup> In relation to the first months of the Bolshevik government, cf. A. Rabinovitch, op. cit., 2007

<sup>11</sup> Almost all the socialist parties and groups withdrew from the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, not participating in and excluding themselves from election to the Central Executive Committee/CEC and to the CPC. Important in this regard, amongst others, were the Right SRs and the Mensheviks, from the right and left (internationalists). This was discussed in D. Aarão Reis, 2021. For the study of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, cf. J. Baynac, 1979; in relation to the Mensheviks, cf. V. Brovkin, 1987, S. Cohen, 1990; F. I. Dan and I.G. Tsereteli, 2010; I. Getzler, 1967 and L.H. Haimson, 1974

<sup>12</sup> In Russian: демократия/demokratiya. Various Bolshevik leaders, in protest at the end of negotiations for a plural socialist government, resigned from the government and the Central Committee of the party, including, V. Nogin, A. Rykov, V. Miliutin, Y. Larin, A. Shliapnikov, cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, 1934, p. 202. A little while later, however, they rejoined.

presence in the Central Executive Committee/CEC<sup>13</sup> and in other state agencies. However, while power sharing lasted, the Bolsheviks did not lose their preeminence, maintaining control of the central government and its fundamental apparatus. Furthermore, even this association lasted only a few months. As is known, the Left SRs withdrew from the government in protest at the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March/1918), declaring themselves in open opposition to the Bolsheviks after the May/June 1918 decrees which revoked the rights of peasants to land.<sup>14</sup>

In not recognizing the government in October (SRs and Mensheviks) or leaving it (the Left SRs), the assessment of the socialist adversaries was that after being isolated the Bolsheviks would not be able to remain in power.<sup>15</sup> Despite evidence to the contrary, badly informed or replacing information with desires, many political actors maintained this assessment until the end of the civil wars. The Bolsheviks benefited from this, gaining room for maneuver to strengthen their centralized and, a short while later, exclusive power.

However, the interregnum was not marked by linear development; there were advances and setbacks, zigzags, an intertwining of democratizing and centralist tendencies.

Confirming the strength of radical democratic tendencies, victorious in October, in the elections for the Constituent Assembly,<sup>16</sup> the socialist parties won an overwhelming victory. The Socialist Revolutionaries received the most votes, but the Bolsheviks got important support in the large cities and from soldiers and sailors. Among the 703 deputies elected, 380 were connected to the SRs of the center and the right (299 Russians and 81 Ukrainians), 39 to the Left SRs (who formed an independent fraction); 168 to the Bolsheviks; 18 to the Mensheviks; 4 to other socialist parties; 15 to the

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<sup>13</sup> Всероссийский Центральный Исполнительный Комитет/ВЦИК - Vserossiyskii Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet/VTSIK. The Left SRs maintained a hegemony in the Peasant Section of VTsIK throughout the Interregnum.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. I.N. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, 2016

<sup>15</sup> The Bolsheviks, including their own leaders (Lenin and Trotsky) also doubted the survival of the revolutionary government if an international revolution did not erupt in Europe, in particular in Germany. The same skepticism, with other motivations and interests, would be cultivated by the right in Russia and in the most important capitalist countries.

<sup>16</sup> In Russian: Всероссийское Учредительное Собрание/Vserossiyskoye Uchreditel'noye Sobraniye. The elections were held between 12 and 14 November 1917. The vote was universal, equal, secret, and direct. Men, women, and soldiers could vote from the age of 20 (soldiers from 18). Seats were distributed in accordance with the proportional system and parties were voted for (closed list). Cf. O. Anweiler, 1974, p. 261, note 1.

Kadets; 2 to other conservative groups and 77 to Non-Russian party formations. In the number of votes, the results per party, were the following: SRs from the center, right, and left: 20,690,742; Bolsheviks: 9,844,637; Mensheviks: 1,364,826; other socialist parties: 601,707; Kadets: 1,986,601; other conservative parties: 1,262,418; Non-Russian party formations: 2,620,967 votes.<sup>17</sup>

In another movement, the death penalty was revoked, abolished by the February Revolution, but reestablished by the provisional government in July 1917. Substantial powers were attributed to factory committees in the legislation on worker control, as well as the soldiers' and sailors' committees in the armed forces.<sup>18</sup> The rights of peasants and their autonomous organizations to land were recognized, unleashing an ultimate wave of expropriations in the provinces that had not yet been touched by the agrarian revolution.<sup>19</sup>

*At the same time*, however, to control the growing disorganization of the production and distribution of goods, centralized agencies of power were created, brought under the control of the People's Commissariat for Food Supplies with full powers to combat the "rural bourgeoisie who concealed speculative stocks".<sup>20</sup>

On 1 December 1917, the Supreme Council of the National Economy was created with centralist proposals, whose statizing dynamics were actually often determined by the initiative of workers themselves.<sup>21</sup> The new body incorporated and subordinated the factory committees, which were transformed into economic and administrative agencies.

This process characterized the interregnum period. Committees of

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. O. Anweiler, citing data collected by O.H. Radkey, op. cit., 1950, p. 262. Other authors offer different numbers but preserve the same order of grandeur.

<sup>18</sup> Decree dated 16 December 1917. Amongst other measures, it determined the election of committees of soldiers and the abolition of ranks, titles, greetings, and decorations, levelling uniformized men as "soldiers of the revolutionary army". Cf. R.A. Wade, 1991, p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> The Second Congress of Peasants' Deputies, with 800 delegates, was held between 26 November and 12 December 1917. The majority aligned with the Left SRs which, afterwards, took *manu militari* the installations of the CEC elected in May 1917 and expelled the Right SRs delegates found there. Cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, op. cit., pp. 209ff.

<sup>20</sup> Народный Комиссариат Продовольствия/Наркомпрод - Narodnyi Komissariat Prodovol'stviya/Narkomprod ["People's Commissariat for Food Supplies"].

<sup>21</sup> Высший Совет Народного Хозяйства/ВСНХ - Vysshiiy Sovet Narodnogo Khozyaystva/VSNKh ["Supreme Council of the National Economy"]. A day earlier, a state monopoly was established over the production of agricultural machinery and tools. Cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, op. cit., p. 336.

workers, soldiers, and peasants, which had actually made the revolution, were gradually transformed into state structures, under a centralized and hierarchical command, and with functions increasingly dominated by administrative concerns. With the functions of managing production and disciplining workers, trade unions became predominant from January 1918 onward.<sup>22</sup>

Centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratized, the structures of power at the base of society were still called *soviets*, and the prestige of the name would assure their permanence, but from the point of view of their political functions and their organizational autonomy, they shrank, subordinated and directed from top down.<sup>23</sup>

Repression also gained consistency and momentum with the banishment of liberal oppositions, the closure of many newspapers, the establishment of censorship and, in particular, the reorganization of the political police, dissolved by the February revolution and re-established as the *Tcheka*,<sup>24</sup> called *extraordinary*, but which in the future, with other names, became an indispensable element to the revolutionary dictatorship.

Next, the Constitution Assembly was dissolved, an act perpetrated by the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs, then still allied to Bolsheviks. It was feared that the Assembly would become an alternative power to the Soviet structures. Amongst other reasons, the weak resistance to the arbitrary act was due to the fact that the main demands of social movements had already been met by the recently installed new government, which for this reason had obtained great prestige.<sup>25</sup>

Another aspect of the centralization process occurred with the

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<sup>22</sup> A decree signed on 25 December 1917, dealing with the “rights and duties” of Soviet organizations, determined that the revolutionary military committees would be abolished and the local Soviets obliged to obey the laws and decrees of central or superior institutions. Cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, 1934, p. 280.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Rabinovitch, 2007, part 3, pp 213-309

<sup>24</sup> Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией и саботажем/ВЧК - Vserossiyskaya chrezvychaynaya komissiya po bor'be s kontrrevolyutsiyey i sabotazhem/Tcheka [“All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage”]. The Tcheka, in its initial phase, attacked above all the liberals and the Kadet party. Cf. for the history of liberals, W.G. Rosenberg, 1974

<sup>25</sup> Also questioned, and rightly so, was the representativity of the Assembly, since the lists defined by the parties, in particular the list of the SRs, did not reflect the alteration in the correlation of forces registered since the Kornilov coup at the end of August 1917. The Assembly was closed on the early morning of 6 January 1918, at the end of the first and only session of the Constituent Assembly. Cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, op. cit., 1934, chpt. VII.

creation of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on 15 January 1918. Based on rigid standards of discipline, recruitment based on volunteering was quickly abandoned for being inefficient and obligatory military service was established, imposed in June 1918,<sup>26</sup> incorporating former officers and noncommissioned officers from the Czarist army.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the new soldiers had to swear to "fulfil the orders of the commanders appointed by the government".<sup>28</sup> In the new army, there was nothing similar to the soldiers' and sailors' committees, vital in assuring the victory of the revolution.

The move to political centralization and dictatorship, however, faced resistance within the organizations and even in the soviet congresses held during that period. No less than three All-Russian congresses of Soviets were held, in January, March, and July, to discuss respectively, the closing of the Constituent Assembly, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the new Revolutionary Constitution. The same occurred within the scope of trade union congresses and in the debates about land socialization in February 1918, amongst others. Although declining, there still remained alive in soviet organizations the characteristics of the popular and plural parliament, open to contradictory debate and divided votes. Even among Bolsheviks, there were divergences, leading to the formation of critical tendencies.<sup>29</sup>

However, this resistance was gradually overcome. From top down, executive committees replaced plenaries. At the top, the CEC was transformed into an agency limited to confirming the decrees of the CPC. The ascendancy of the Bolshevik party over political structures was transformed into automatic subordination, a process that was accentuated when the Left SRs abandoned the government in March 1918, in protest against the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Bolshevik party itself, previously full of contradictory debates, gradually gave in to the concentration of power.<sup>30</sup>

The democratic conquests established in October would soon be

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<sup>26</sup> Decree of 9 June 1918. Cf. D. Footman, 1961, p. 141.

<sup>27</sup> Of the approximately 130,000 officers from the Czarist army, around 40,000 served in or were coerced to serve in the new army, assisted and controlled by political commissars. At the beginning of the civil wars they represented around three-quarters of officers, falling to one third by the end of 1921. Cf. W.H. Chamberlin, 1935, vol. 2, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> For the oath, cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, *op. cit.*, pp. 568ff.

<sup>29</sup> In relation to the debates about the peace of Brest-Litovsk, the Bolsheviks who opposed the terms of the treaty formed a left-wing current, preaching, like the Left SRs, "revolutionary war", armed resistance which could take the form of guerilla war. Cf. E. H. Carr, vol. 3, Chapter 21

<sup>30</sup> In the VII Congress of the Party, in March 1918, the 46 delegates were, quite strictly, limited to the "old guard". The "October harvest", as Lenin referred to the new recruits, was not even consulted. Cf. R. Service, 1985, vol. 2, pp 326-335.

questioned in practice or simply revoked.

The peace agreement signed with Germany broke with the promises formulated in October and with the principles shared by the Bolsheviks. It was a “separate” peace which included annexations and compensations, an “obscene” peace, as L. Trotsky himself recognized. It was argued that the population was willing to do everything to avoid a new war, but there were many controversies about the treaty.

Worker control over production was weakened with the subordination of factory committees to state institutions and to trade unions.<sup>31</sup>

The right of non-Russian nations to independence was ignored with the invasion of the Ukraine, and it was argued that the Ukrainian assembly, the *Rada*, was under bourgeois hegemony and did not represent the interests and the will of the popular masses.<sup>32</sup>

Most importantly, the rights of peasants to possess and manage land was revoked, rupturing in the same movement the broad alliance between workers and peasants formed in October/December 1917 and which had been the foundation of the fulminating victory of the revolution. The abandonment of the alliance was marked by the approval of decrees in May and June 1918 which established a widespread process of compulsory grain requisitions, to be carried out by *iron detachments* organized by the People’s Commissariat for Food Supplies /Narkomprod,<sup>33</sup> in the name of poor peasants, whose committees were encouraged and called to the fight against the “rural bourgeoisie”. The Left SRs, which by then had left the government, called for a political struggle against the government.

The contradictions became accentuated within the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, summoned at the beginning of July 1918, amongst other reasons to confirm the grain requisitions policy and approve the first revolutionary constitution.

The Left SRs denounced the breaching of the alliance between peasants and workers, the grain requisitions, and also the representativity of the delegates to the congress, alleging scandalous frauds in their

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<sup>31</sup> For the study of the rise and decline of worker control, cf. M. Brinton, 1975; D. Mandel, 1984 and S.A. Smith, 1983.

<sup>32</sup> On 4 December 1917, the Sovnarkom formulated an ultimatum to the Ukrainians, shortly afterwards followed by the invasion of the country by military units under Bolshevik command. Cf. E. Mawdsley, 2008, pp. 16ff.

<sup>33</sup> The decrees were issued respectively on 13 May and 11 June 1918. The so-called *Prodarmia* (“Food Requisitioning Army”) would act in the name of the committees of poor peasants, the комбеды/kombedy, and against the кулаки/kulaks, called rich peasants or even the rural bourgeoisie. Cf. R.A. Wade, 1991, pp 153-155 and 169-171. In relation to the vicissitudes of the alliance between workers and peasants, cf. S. Grosskopf, 1976; R. Linhart, 1983; A. Retish, 2008

accreditation, which had guaranteed a Bolshevik majority.

Next, they attempted a political coup. Strictly speaking, it was not a matter of forcing out the Bolsheviks and “taking power”. The idea was to force them to change orientation, suspending decrees against the peasants and returning to the war with Germany. With this aim, they killed the German ambassador in Moscow, imagining that this would lead to the breaking off of relations and war. However, the Bolsheviks managed to control the situation, making the Left SRs illegal, arresting their delegates to the Congress of Soviets and reinforcing the monopoly of power.<sup>34</sup> The frustrated coup and its aftermath radicalized the contradictions between the socialists, heating up the radicalization which led to war between them.

The civil wars, already sketched out since October 1917, spread rapidly.

## 2. *The Civil Wars: 1918-1921*

What is of interest here is not the presentation of a military history of the civil wars, but rather just to characterize the main contenders, their objectives, and the type and scope of the armed conflicts.<sup>35</sup>

Before continuing, two observations should be made about the chronological frameworks and the polarizations evidenced.

There are controversies about the chronological frameworks.

Some argue that the wars began soon after the victory of the October insurrection, because then Cossack troops under the command of General A. Kaledin in the Don region had announced that they did not recognize the revolutionary government. Ataman Dutov, the Cossack leader in Orenburg, did the same, threw himself into the fight and was rapidly defeated.<sup>36</sup>

However, the armed struggle aimed at constructing an alternative power, characteristic of a civil war, only began later. The invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, sent by the CPC in February 1918 is perhaps a more appropriate date. However, due to the Brest -Litovsk agreement hostilities were interrupted, to recommence later.

It thus seems more adequate to take July 1918 to mark the beginning

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. A. Rabinovitch, 2007, part III, pp 213-309. The author characterized the actions of the Left SRs as “political suicide”.

<sup>35</sup> For the civil wars, cf. A.S. Bubnov, 1928-1930; D. Bullock, 2008; J. Bunyan, 1936; V. P. Butt and alii, 1996; E. Dune, 1993; O. Figes, 1989 and 1990; N. Kakurin, 1925-1926; E. Mawdsley, 1987 and Iu. Poliakov, 1992; L. Trotsky, 1978; Yakovlev, E. 2018

<sup>36</sup> On the frontier regions of the Czarist Empire were 13 Cossack regions, with relative autonomy and the capacity to elect their own leaders, the *atamans*. The largest was located on the Don. The others were spread out, reaching the extreme east of the Empire. Cf. E. H. Carr, 1974, Chapter 10, pp. 321ff.

of the civil wars, following the frustrated attempted coup by the Left SRs to pressurize the Bolsheviks to return to the war against Germany. After that the conflicts would intertwine until they were ended with the crushing of the Kronstadt revolution in March 1921.

There are also controversies in relation to this. Some suggest that armed conflicts continued, in the form of guerilla warfare carried out by peasants (*the green guerillas*), until 1922 (or until 1926, if the resistance in Siberia is considered).<sup>37</sup> Others prefer to use 1922, when the problems coming from the Great Hunger were neutralized. However, the term *civil war*, as has been mentioned, refers to armed conflicts between contenders aiming at winning power, irrespective of their political or military force. Without denying their relevance, this was not the case of the *green guerrillas*,<sup>38</sup> nor of the Great Hunger, undoubtedly the consequence of the chaos caused by the Civil Wars, but which did not witness any military clashes.

The second observation is related to the plurality of the civil wars.

Unlike the other canon, defended by the Bolsheviks and by the communist historiography and also by a large part of the historiography formulated outside Russia, there was not *a* civil war, but various civil wars. While the main studies about the subject mention the various armed conflicts which devastated Russia between 1918 and 1921, paradoxically, the period was named after the main confrontation: the civil war between the *Reds* and the *Whites*,<sup>39</sup> in other words, among the troops under the command of the CPC and those which were under the command of the generals of the former Czarist army, perhaps oversimplifying a very complex process.<sup>40</sup>

From this perspective, other armed conflicts are hidden, or at the very least underestimated, with their distinct quality and their impacts and results disappearing in the subsequent history of the revolution. Here, we are

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. D. Smele, 2015

<sup>38</sup> It is not a matter of underestimating the relevance of the *green guerillas*, in particular the largest of them, led by A. Antonov in the province of Tambov, between 1920 and 1922. Only to highlight that, to the contrary of the other conflicts alluded to above, and despite their relative force, they never had a perspective of placing themselves as *alternatives of power*. For the insurrection led by A. Antonov, cf. O. H. Radkey, 1976; E.C. Landis, 2008; V. Danilov and T. Shanin, 1994 and S.A. Esikov and L.G. Protosov, 1992 and V.V. Samoshkin, 1994

<sup>39</sup> Since the French revolution, the color white had been associated with royalty and, in general, counter-revolution.

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted the Bolsheviks and Whites invested heavily in a memory which privileged the polarization in which they were the protagonists. With this they intended to hide the reality and relevance of the other wars, advancing themselves as the only contenders, a proposition which does not resist the analysis of the evidence.

referring to the armed conflicts of *Reds X Reds*, in other words, between distinct socialist parties; *Reds and Whites X Blacks*, or Bolsheviks and counter-revolutionaries against anarchists; *Red and White Russians X Non-Russians*, in other words Russians, independent of their political perspective, against the nationalist aspirations of the non-Russian peoples. Finally, the March 1921 *Kronstadt Insurrection* should be mentioned, assessed here as the final act in the civil wars. Although it was rapidly crushed, it was much more than a revolt, since it proposed a new conception of an alliance of classes and political power.

We will briefly examine now how these civil wars unfolded.

### *Act I: Reds X Reds*

The contradictions between the various types of socialists had been evidenced during 1917, becoming aggravated until they reached a critical point on the occasion of the October insurrection. The abandonment of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies by various socialist groups, the failure of negotiations aimed at the formation of a plural socialist government, and the closing of the Constituent Assembly permanently excluded moderate socialist tendencies from the political game, notably the so-called Right SRs who then began to articulate an armed confrontation against the government.

However, the armed struggle of *Reds X Reds* only erupted following the Left SRs coup, as mentioned above, in the context of rural conflicts which gained intensity.<sup>41</sup> Also in July, under the leadership of B. Savinkov, the SRs took the cities of Yaroslav, Rybinsk, and Muron, but they were forced to retreat afterward. In other actions, they killed M. Uritsky, a Bolshevik leader, and seriously injured Lenin himself, at the end of August 1918. After this the actions moved to the Volga region, where in the city of Samara, an alliance between the Right and Left SRs even formed a government, involving deputies elected to the Constituent Assembly,<sup>42</sup> and created a small army. They were assisted by the *Czech Legion* which rebelled in May 1918 against the Bolsheviks, coming to control an important part of the Trans-Siberian Railway.<sup>43</sup> At a certain moment, there was an attempt to expand the

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<sup>41</sup> According of official data, there were 245 peasant revolts against Bolshevik power in the Summer of 1918. In 1919, entire regions came under the control of armed peasant movements. Cf. N. Werth, 1992, p. 162.

<sup>42</sup> The so-called Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly, the Комуч (Комитет Учредительного Собрания/Комитет Учредительного Собрания).

<sup>43</sup> The so-called Czech Legion was formed by around 30,000 armed men. These Czechs and Slovaks had fought with the Russians against the Austrians. After the

alliance. A meeting was held in Ufa, Siberia, where a provisional government of Mensheviks, SRs and Kadets was formed, dissolved shortly afterward by Admiral A. Kolchak, leader of the white counter-revolution in Siberia.

At the end of 1918, the non-Bolshevik socialists, caught between the Bolsheviks and the *Whites*, were defeated politically and militarily, no longer having a relevant role.

### *Act II: Reds X Whites*

The *White* armies, led by Czarist generals, including the heads of the Cossacks, were supported by the Allied powers, discontent with the withdrawal of Russia from the war and the losses coming from the policies adopted by the CPC. General A. Kaledin, *ataman* or head of the Don Cossacks, was joined a little later by General M. Alexeiev, former commander in chief of the Russian armies who, together with Generals A. Denikin and L. Kornilov, organized the so-called *voluntary army*, in the Southwest of Russia, with its capital in Novocherkassk. Logistically supported by England, France, and the US, at their best moment the *Whites* reached Voronej in September 1919, but they were unable to resist the Red counter-offensive which pushed them back to the Crimea, where under the command of Baron P. Wrangel they fought until November 1920, when they were definitely liquidated.<sup>44</sup> Much before this, almost all the foreign armies reembarked for their countries of origin.<sup>45</sup>

The White armies also threatened in the East, from Siberia under the command of Admiral A. Kolchak. A large offensive was launched in the

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Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, they negotiated their departure for France, along the Trans-Siberian railway. However, along the way conflicts with local Soviets caused the rebellion of the Czechs. Later negotiations allowed them to continue their journey to Vladivostok, where they embarked for France. Cf. W.H. Chamberlin, *op. cit.*, 1935, vol. 2, Chapter XX, pp. 1-24; and E. Mawdsley, 1987, pp. 46-49.

<sup>44</sup> The British marked a presence in the South of the Caucasus and also landed in the north, in Murmansk, in March 1918, and with French support in Arkhangelsk. In the far east, in Vladivostok, around 70,000 Japanese soldiers and a small US army landed, but they did not play a relevant military role in the civil wars. For the foreign interventions, cf. note 14 and E.H. Carr, vol. 3, chapters 21-26, 1974; E. Acton and alii, Part VIII, pp. 659-656; G. Buchanan, 1923; I.V. Domin, 1995. And also A. Knox, 1921; C. Lazarski, 1992 and L.N. Nejinski, 1991

<sup>45</sup> In France and the United Kingdom there were protests and strikes against the intervention in Russia. Another factor which contributed to the withdrawal, in addition to the military defeat of the whites, was the difficulty, among the great powers of reaching an understanding about the future of Russia.

Volga in March 1919, but it was defeated.<sup>46</sup> Also important was a final offensive aimed at taking Petrograd, commanded by General N. Iudenitch, supported by the French and English, equally defeated in October 1919.

### *Act III: Reds X Blacks*

In the context of the Czarist Empire, anarchists had been pioneers since 1905 in the defense of the soviets as organizations aimed at structuring an alternative revolutionary power. Since April 1917, when the Bolsheviks adopted this orientation, affinities had tied them and the anarchists together. However, during the period we can call the *interregnum*, the contradictions between both were growing, since the anarchists did not accept the authoritarian tendencies of the Bolsheviks and the CPC. During the civil wars there were anarchists who adhered to the Bolsheviks, seen as the only real alternative to the *Whites*, however the majority, loyal to their convictions, remained in *critical opposition*. Sometimes tolerated, sometimes intimidated, sometimes repressed, they remained on the margins of the law, increasingly tighter, until the Kronstadt insurrection, the crushing of which made any type of alliance or agreement between *Blacks* and *Reds* impossible. Ukrainian anarchists were obliged to deal with the zigzags of a difficult and contradictory alliance. Led by N. Makhno, they organized an important political and military force, fighting against the Whites, with tactic or formal agreements with the Bolsheviks, notably the struggle against General Wrangel in 1920. However, after decisively contributing to the defeat of the counter-revolution, they would be ordered to surrender their weapons by the Bolsheviks. Refusing to do this, they were overwhelmed, and the survivors left for exile.<sup>47</sup>

### *Act IV: Russians X Non-Russians*

Between February and October 1917, the struggles of the non-Russian nations continued with impressive vigor. Oppressed within the framework of the Czarist Empire, known as the prison of peoples, these nations took advantage of the dissolution of the Empire to self-organize and demand their rights to autonomy and independence. Although under the

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<sup>46</sup> The White armies wanted to reach Moscow, which had become the Soviet capital shortly after Brest-Litovsk, on 12 March 1918. In the context of the counter-offensive which defeated A. Kolchak, he was captured and shot in February 1920. In relation to A. Kolchak, cf. S.V. Drovkov, 1994.

<sup>47</sup> For a study of anarchist participation in the civil wars period, cf. P. Archinov, 1976; A. Berkman and A. Goldman, 2011; N. Makhno, 1988; C.F. Vestiuk; Volin, 1969

provisional government led by A. Kerensky, the independence of Poland had been recognized, this was a symbolic measure since the territory of “Russian Poland” was occupied by the Germans, but it opened horizons for nationalist struggles.

As mentioned, shortly after the October insurrection, the right of non-Russian nationals to secede and to national independence was established. However, at the end of December 1917, the CPC issued an ultimatum demanding the submission of Ukrainians to the coming military expedition, sent to prevent by violence the independence of Ukraine, proclaimed by a nationalist government.

In relation to Finland, which already enjoyed autonomous status, the Bolsheviks recognized its independence at the end of 1917. With the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, at the imposition of the Germans, they had to accept the independence of the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), and Ukraine, as well as the loss of Bessarabia, annexed to Romania, and Kars and Batum, incorporated by the Ottoman Empire. In the Caucasus and among the Islamic peoples of Central Asia, pro-autonomy and even pro-independence proposals were formulated, which the CPC could do little about in the short term, as it was occupied with consolidating a centralized government, along the Petrograd-Moscow axis

In Finland there was a civil war, opposing socialist revolutionaries to the Finish *Whites*. The CPC supported the revolutionaries, but could do little for them and they were slaughtered by their enemies.<sup>48</sup> In Ukraine and in the Baltic countries, until the end of World War I, there was a façade of independence, mediated by the “German peace”.

However, these arrangements were reversed by the German revolution in November 1918, when there was a complete inversion in the correlation of forces.<sup>49</sup>

The CPC maintained *nolens volens* the recognition of the independence of Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states.<sup>50</sup> However, the same

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<sup>48</sup> In March 1919, the Bolsheviks encouraged the formation of a new International, the Communist International, or the Third International, in opposition to the Socialist International. Founded in Moscow in March of that year, it held its second congress in the same city in July 1920. However, apart from proclamations, its role in the civil wars was irrelevant.

<sup>49</sup> In November 1918, the German revolution overthrew the Kaiser and proclaimed the Republic, constituting a government formed by the different wings of social democracy.

<sup>50</sup> The independence of Finland would be approved by the CPC at the end of December 1917. After this from January to May 1918, there would be a civil war, ending with the massacre of the social democrats by the Finnish conservative forces, supported by Germany.

policy was not adopted in relation to the Ukraine, the peoples of the Caucasus (Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis), or the Muslim peoples of Central Asia. The right to the self-determination of peoples and the related right to secession established in the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR), passed on 10 July 1918, was not revoked. However, the Bolsheviks, inspired by J.V. Stalin, People's Commissar for Nationalities, formulated a peculiar interpretation of these rights. They were to be recognized only for workers and their organizations, the Soviets, and not the bourgeoisie and their assemblies.<sup>51</sup>

In the Ukraine, above all in the eastern part, in the cities of the Caucasus, and in those of Central Asia, the majority of the urban population did not consist of natives, but of Russians or people from other nationalities who did not want to separate from Russia and its government which met their social and political demands. Organized in urban soviets, they defended ties with Moscow. They did this with arms in their hands, helping the Red Army to defeat the pro-independence proposals, accused of being “bourgeois” and “counter-revolutionaries”. It was thus possible for the Bolsheviks to defeat the nationalist movements separately, although considerable margins of autonomy were recognized which did not exist in the times of Czarism (cultivating their own language, autonomy in the fields of education, culture, local justice, etc.).<sup>52</sup>

On the other side of the conflict, the *Whites*, defending a “single and indivisible Russia”, were also implacable with the non-Russian nations, refusing to admit the independence of the non-Russian peoples. At determined moments, this orientation led them to political suicide, when they refused an alliance with nationalist movements against the Bolsheviks.<sup>53</sup>

A final war based on the national question would still break out between Poland, restored as a national state and Soviet Russia. With French support and linked with Ukrainian nationalists, the Polish troops led by J. Pilsudski, attacked Ukraine in April 1920. In the following month they took Kiev and seemed destined to achieve great victories. However, the Russians

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<sup>51</sup> This orientation was approved by the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets, held in January 1918, cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, op. cit., p. 394

<sup>52</sup> Although the statistics are uncertain, there is a consensus that the non-Russian nations formed around 50% of the population of the Czarist Empire. With the exceptions of Ukraine, the most populous (around 38 million inhabitants compared with 78 million Russians) and the smaller Belorussia (a few million inhabitants), the dozens of other peoples had reduced populations. For the contradictions between the Bolsheviks over the national question, cf. M. Lewin, 2007, chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>53</sup> At critical moments for the Bolsheviks, the *Whites* rejected an alliance with the Poles and the Finns who demanded as counterpart the recognition of their national independence.

successfully counter-attacked and invaded Poland. There was then a certain euphoria, and the possibility of *exporting* the revolution towards the West was imagined, reaching Germany itself. The proposal was too voluntaristic and did not work. Defeated at the gates of Warsaw, the Reds had to retreat and negotiate peace, which was signed in Riga on 18 March 1921.<sup>54</sup>

*Act V: The Kronstadt revolution, March 1921*

In the final phase of the civil wars, the dissatisfaction of the population with the Bolsheviks and the CPC government grew.

Peasants rebelled against obligatory military recruitment and compulsory requisitions. *Green* guerrillas multiplied, so-called because they took refuge in dense woods or forests. They opposed the *Whites* and *Reds* simultaneously, accusing both of arbitrary measures and all sorts of exactions. Among the most important was the peasant insurrection led by A. Antonov in Tambov province in Central Russia between 1921 and 1922, which was only crushed with the use of the elite troops of the Red Army.<sup>55</sup>

In the factories workers also complained about working conditions and the precarious supply of basic goods. Strikes began to be held at the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921, in Moscow and Petrograd, sometimes led by the remnants of the Mensheviks and SRs.

It was in this context that the Kronstadt Revolution erupted in March 1921. The sailors there had played a fundamental role in 1917 and in the October insurrection in particular. During the civil wars their libertarian tendencies did not fit well with the political dictatorship of the CPC, but they had remained loyal to the Bolsheviks, seen in the conditions as the best interpreters of the revolution.

After the end of the civil war, the sailors came to consider the need for radical changes in political power. In the context of the harsh conditions in which people lived in the cities and the countryside, and in the occurrence of various strikes in Petrograd, they rebelled, proposing a set of measures on 28 February 1921: solidarity with the strikers in Petrograd; freedom of expression for all political currents; immediate release of all political prisoners; formation of an independent commission to investigate the forced labor camps; an election to renew the soviets based on the secret vote,

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<sup>54</sup> The proposal for the export of the revolution would be defended by V. Lenin, though it was opposed by L. Trotsky and J.V. Stalin, amongst others. The idea would be implemented years later at the end of the Second World War, when the Soviet armies occupied almost all of Central Europe, exporting the Soviet model, imposed on the people living there. For the Russo-Polish War, cf. E. Carr, *op. cit.*, vol. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Note 38.

controlled by plural institutions independent of the government; equal rations for all with the end of privileges of any nature, except for those occupied in unhealthy work; suppression of armed requisitions; complete freedom for peasants and artisans who did not employ hired labor to do what they wanted with the production of their labor.<sup>56</sup>

Despite being called on to surrender, the sailors refused to do this. Starting on 7 March the Bolsheviks bombarded the base. The final assault happened on 17 March. Among the defenders around 600 were killed, one thousand injured, and 2500 captured. The attackers also registered heavy losses: around 1,000 men, among dead and injured. However, the majority of the rebel leadership managed to escape into exile.

Kronstadt was a libertarian and democratic revolution. In it were expressed the final echoes of the democratic cycle of Russian revolutions, beginning in 1905, reopened between February and October 1917 and concluded in October 1917, despite the authoritarian marks of the victorious insurrection. During the *interregnum*, between October 1917 and July 1918, anti-authoritarian tendencies remained alive, defended by the Left SRs, anarchists, and internationalist Mensheviks, faced with the advance of centralist and dictatorial orientations.<sup>57</sup> They practically ceased to exist during the civil wars, when a revolution within the revolution established another type of regime, the dictatorship of the party-state. Kronstadt attempted to reverse this history but was unsuccessful. The dice were cast for the future of Soviet socialism.

During the civil wars, the revolutionary democratic tendencies established in 1917 were reversed. The rights established in October were revoked. The worker-peasant alliance was ruptured and the soviets and committees of workers, soldiers/sailors, and peasants shrank to near irrelevance. Furthermore, the importance of alternative socialist proposals to the Bolsheviks almost disappeared. Where possible the independence of non-Russian nations was denied.

A revolution in the revolution, this was the scope of the civil wars, evidenced by the construction of the revolutionary dictatorship, war communism, and by the *nationalization* of a revolution which in its origins had intended to be international.

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<sup>56</sup> For studies on the Kronstadt Revolution, cf. D. Aarão Reis, 2017; P. Avruch, 1967 and 1975; Cf. N. Werth, 1992, p. 167; Naumov, V.P. and A.A. Kosakovskii, 1997; Iu. Shchetinov, 1995. For the history of the Russian navy and the participation of the sailors in the revolution, cf. K. Nazarenko, 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. I. Steinberg and Volin. For the complex relations between Bolsheviks and other socialist alternatives, cf. V. Serge, 2001.

### 3. *The construction of the revolutionary dictatorship and war communism*

During the period we call the *interregnum*, and above all during the civil wars, from the second half of 1918 onward, there occurred the process of the construction of the revolutionary dictatorship.

Rewarded by the military circumstances and the results of their policies, especially the policy referring to peasants, but also the dynamic of urban workers and the actions of their enemies, without any previously defined planning, the revolutionary government and the Bolsheviks took decisions which ended in the formation of what is usually called *war communism*.

In relation to agriculture and the peasants, following the decrees of May and June 1918,<sup>58</sup> which broke the alliance established in October 1917, a process of the compulsory surplus grain requisition began which encountered generalized resistance. The greatest — and objective — issue was that the government needed to feed the cities and the army and had little if anything to offer the peasants in exchange for their products.

The Bolsheviks imagined they could count on the support of the so-called *poor peasants, the bedniaki*: these would help the armed detachments sent from the cities, denouncing where the rich peasants, the *kulaks*, had hidden stocks of food. In exchange, they would receive part of these and other material stimuli. This was a Bolshevik conception: in an initial stage, accept a broad alliance with the peasants to defeat Czarism (achieved in October). At a second stage, from the perspective of the construction of socialism and collective production units, a split was to be engendered between the peasants, privileging the poor peasants and the proletariat of the countryside, the *batraki*, who, due to their living and working conditions were better suited to and more interested in achieving socialist objectives.

This theory did not function in practice. The agrarian revolution, carried out by agrarian committees, without achieving a full equality of conditions, reduced inequalities in a notable manner, as well as having constructed unprecedented levels of solidarity among those working on the land. As a result, the number of medium peasants — the *seredniaki* — grew in an exponential form, the large majority of whom were not willing to collaborate with government policies.

However, the Bolsheviks insisted on laws encouraging land collectivization. At a certain moment towards the end of 1918, Lenin even said that it would be possible to implement socialism in the countryside. In February 1919, the Supreme Council of the National Economy, in a new

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Note 29.

decree, issued detailed legislation about the collective Soviet farms, to be administrated by officials nominated by and responsible to the People's Commissariat for Agriculture, the *Narkomzem*.<sup>59</sup> The free trade in cereals was criminalized and coercion was established as a method.<sup>60</sup>

As if this was not enough, the policy of forced conscription into the ranks of the Red Army also impacted peasants, while the principle of voluntary service was rapidly abandoned.

Requisitions and conscription were two scourges inflicted on the peasants during the civil wars. They were *squeezed* and *crushed* by the *white terror* and the *red terror*, and by the devastations inherent to military confrontations.<sup>61</sup>

In the cities, as mentioned above, the agencies of centralization were created in 1917, such as the Supreme Council of the National Economy. However, the statization of industries acquired a rapid and unplanned dynamic, frequently imposed by the workers themselves, who preferred state administration, among other reasons because private owners not rarely sabotaged factories and/or abandoned managerial positions. Thus, at the end of the first half of 1918, all the most important industrial sectors were already statized and managed in a centralized form, including transport, and the metallurgical, electric, chemical, textile, and paper industries<sup>62</sup>. At the end of 1919, around 90 state trusts linked the industrial units, submitted to central direction, whose officials were in turn responsible to the Supreme Council of the National Economy. The circumstances and the urgencies of the ongoing wars propelled the process even further in November 1920, taking advantage of legislation determining that all companies with more than five workers (when mechanized) or more than 10 workers (when non-mechanized) were statized.<sup>63</sup>

Factory committees, local soviets, and trade unions were converted into bodies limited to the tasks of controlling, encouraging, and disciplining

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. E. Carr, vol. 2, p. 159ff. *Narkomzem*: Народный Комиссариат Земледелия/Narodnyi Komissariat Zemledeliya.

<sup>60</sup> In the Ninth Congress of the Bolshevik Party and the Eighth Congress of Soviets in 1920, coercion would be admitted as "inevitable". In the Congress of the Soviets, Lenin even said that "our fundamental mission is to impose state pressure to increase production in the countryside". Cf. E. Carr, op. cit., p. 182ff.

<sup>61</sup> It should not be forgotten that the *Whites*, where they could, not only did not recognize the conquests of the agrarian revolution, but also expropriated what they could from peasant families.

<sup>62</sup> It should be emphasized that even before the October Revolution, the so-called war effort had imposed a high level of centralized management of transport and industrial production.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. E. Carr, op. cit. p. 186; and also, A. Nove, 1990; Kaufman, A. 1953

workers. Central directions prevailed and in every factory the so-called *specialists*<sup>64</sup> prevailed, who were given far-reaching powers. In March 1920, the Ninth Congress of the Bolshevik party established these orientations, despite the protests of union leaders and some political leaders.<sup>65</sup>

Supporters of centralism alleged that the historic conquests of the workers under capitalism, such as the right to strike and to establish collective labor contracts, no longer made sense when defending the worker state and the socialist revolution. The labor force had ceased to be a commodity, since in the new conditions, labor was converted into a *service*. To give an example, *shock workers*, the *udarniki*, who were the best paid, were encouraged in all industries, where task-based pay was introduced.

In 1920, when the civil wars were coming to an end, a debate began about the militarization of labor. Soldiers would be now summoned to the war against hunger and for the development of socialist society. Factory directors would become a type of *officer corps*, and the government would gain the right to direct the labor force to wherever was a priority, according to the needs that it determined. The proposal, defended amongst others by L. Trotsky and M. Bukharin, attracted great opposition from worker leaders and was ultimately defeated in the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik party, in March 1921.<sup>66</sup>

The failure of agrarian policy and the general ruin caused by the civil wars caused an acute crisis of supply in the cities: of food and fuel. Cold and hunger began to prowl urban centers, leading to a flight to the countryside, where the very precarious conditions of supply were less bad than in the cities. To a great extent, the working class, a fundamental protagonist in the October revolution was dispersed.<sup>67</sup> The larger the city, the greater the losses. Petrograd lost 57.5% of its population, Moscow, 44.5%,

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<sup>64</sup> Generally speaking, engineers or technicians, when not former owners of companies. Among the unions, led by M. Tanski, discontent was rife with the recommendations of “absolute submission” and “unconditional and strict unity of the will which directs work”. Cf. E. Carr, *op. cit.*, p. 188. The debate about *specialists* was also expressed in the army, where the so-called *military opposition* questioned the preeminence of former officers from the Czarist army to the detriment of revolutionary activist non-commissioned officers, soldiers, or sailors.

<sup>65</sup> The so-called Democratic Centralism tendency even formed an opposition which was heavily defeated in the Ninth Congress, in March 1920.

<sup>66</sup> The Workers’ Opposition, a minority tendency, was then formed, but did not manage to prevent the implementation of policies which drastically limited the freedom of the workers and subjected them to laws and decrees formulated by the state.

<sup>67</sup> This subject had already been raised in March 1918, on the occasion of the Seventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party.

while provincial capitals lost on average a little more than one third of occupied labor.<sup>68</sup>

The disorganization of agricultural and industrial production and transport, and the need, imposed by the civil wars, to direct the mass of those available to the army and war industries exacerbated and radicalized price control policies, the monopolization of the offer of products and rationing which had been on the agenda since the October revolution and even before. There was a moment, at the end of 1919, when there were around 20 categories with differentiated access to consumption goods, but the government's efforts were far from satisfying the basic needs of people, since it was estimated that more than half of consumption came from the informal *parallel* market, where prices were up to 50 times higher than those established by the government.<sup>69</sup>

Uncontrolled inflation practically made the circulation of currency unfeasible. Taxes were not collected and the country no longer had a budget. A barter market came into effect in the context of a return to the natural economy. Virtue was made out of necessity, and it was argued that the "future communist society presupposed the end of money... and the suppression of currency was the condition for the development of a socialist economy".<sup>70</sup> In a voluntaristic spasm, Russia had jumped over the stage of capitalism, reaching socialist society in the form of *war communism*.

In an attempt to try to meet the very many types of needs, the *extraordinary commissions* multiplied which were superimposed with dubious efficiency. The political police, the *Tcheka*, one of the first, were given increasingly expanded powers to investigate, judge, and punish. Recent studies estimate that the Red Terror, unleashed in July 1918, had eliminated around 500,000 people by the end of the civil wars<sup>71</sup> in a context of accentuated repression, including an initial network of prison camps for common and political prisoners.

*War communism* was gradually abandoned after the X Congress of the Bolshevik Party in March 1921. Within the context of the New Economic Policy (NEP) the rights of peasants were recognized again, private commerce was regulated, the currency was restored, budgets balanced, and margins of

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. E. Carr, p. 206. Equally it should be noted that there was a large migration of more combative worker activists to trade union and political leadership positions and to the Red Army.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. E. Carr, op. cit., pp. 254-255.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. E. Carr, op. cit., p. 258ff.

<sup>71</sup> The White Terror would have an equivalent number of victims. In relation to terror — white and red —, cf. A.L.Litvin, 1993 and I. Ram'kovskii, 2018 and Iu.Fel'shtingskii, 1991.

freedom were opened for entrepreneurial activity and cultural debate.

However, important and decisive political aspects remained unaltered and actually were reinforced: the undisputed preeminence of the Party, its fusion with the state, the subordination of peasants, the centralization of government and the economy, the statization of strategic sectors and the definitive marginalization of alternative parties within the framework of a political dictatorship.<sup>72</sup> Also remaining unaltered, as positive values, were the exalting and epic images of the civil wars, the exercise of the Red Terror, the militarization of politics, coercion as a necessary method, and the celebration of communist voluntarism. In this sense, for many the NEP was only a tactical retreat, an expedient imposed by adverse circumstances. Since these had been overcome, the legacies of war communism could be updated and reused once again.<sup>73</sup>

#### *4. The revolution and international relations: from internationalism to national communism*

At the end of the nineteenth century, among socialists of distinct tendencies, particularly among Marxists, there was a strong conviction that the revolution in the main capitalist countries would assume an international character. There was no conception of a hypothesis of a social revolution becoming victorious in the national framework of a determined country, wherever it was.

The Bolsheviks shared these references. When the decision was taken to lead the October insurrection, the Russian Revolution was imagined as a prologue of an international and European revolution. An objective, historic coincidence was recognized between the Russian Revolution and the international revolution. If the latter did not occur, the Russian revolutionaries would be defeated.

This conviction remained unaltered during the first phase of the period we call the *interregnum*. However, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918, created doubts and opposition among Russian socialists and among the Bolsheviks themselves. Accepting its terms was seen as

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<sup>72</sup> The Tenth party Congress, at the same time that it approved the first references which later would become known as the NEP, took drastic decisions in the sense of party centralization (the prohibition of internal tendencies and fractions) and political dictatorship.

<sup>73</sup> There are controversies about the position of V. Lenin: was the NEP a retreat or a tactical expedient? Or a *in nuce* formulation of a new strategy? Cf. M. Lewin. Whatever the reason, it is undeniable that the view of the NEP as a temporary retreat was always very popular among Party activists.

corresponding to the abandonment of essential principles. However, in its defense it was alleged that what was in question was the actual survival of the revolution. The issue caused controversies and continues to do so. However, something unexpected happened, unthinkable before the revolution: the hypothesis of the non-coincidence between the immediate interests of the victorious Russian Revolution and the international revolution still being gestated. Would it be possible to encourage the international revolution and, *at the same time*, defend the victorious? In Brest-Litovsk the knot was cut in benefit of the defense and salvation of the victorious revolution.

Shortly afterwards, in August 1918, this orientation would be reiterated. Threatened by distinct oppositions and in particular by the *Red* alternatives on the Volga, and also by the landing of foreign troops in the north, south, and extreme east, the Revolutionary government signed three secret agreements with Germany in Berlin. It promised to pay compensation and recognize the independence of the Baltic states, against a German counter-promise not to invade Russia or support any alternative force to the Bolsheviks in Russian territory, which allowed the transfer of troops who were decisive in the crushing of the Komuch socialist government established in Samara.

The victory of the German revolution in November 1918 seemed to restore the meeting of the international revolution and the Russian revolution. However, the expectation that the German revolution would assume a socialist nature soon vanished. The Russian model would not be repeated. Similarly, other revolutionary experiences, in Hungary and Bavaria, in 1919, and in the north of Italy in 1920, were also rapidly neutralized.

Would the Russian Revolution remain isolated?

1919 was critical for the Bolsheviks. Harassed by the *white* armies, coming from the South, Siberia, and the Northwest, and which were logistically supported by the French and English above all, the revolutionary government tottered. It was a year of total isolation. The foundation of the Communist International in March 1919 was nothing more than a symbolic act, without effective results. At the same time, in the context of the civil wars the defense of socialism was affirmed as the defense of the *socialist fatherland*<sup>74</sup> a slogan which mixed nationalism and internationalism in an expression which sounded strange, but which had real content: the revolutionary government fought simultaneously for socialism, in other words, the defeat of the *whites*, and for Russia, in other words, against the foreign invaders, whose strength although magnified by propaganda, was real and threatening. More than a few from various groups and orientations

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<sup>74</sup> In Russian: социалистическое отечество/sotsialisticheskoye otechestvo - socialist fatherland.

gathered around the Red army, not exactly interested in socialism, but in *saving* Russia.<sup>75</sup>

In 1920, having defeated the main alternative forces, the flame of international revolution was briefly relit. The Polish government, encouraged and supported by the French, unleashed a military offensive against the Ukraine in May. However, in June a Soviet counter-offensive brought the Russian troops close to Warsaw.

The Soviet invasion of Poland raised another unforeseen question: would it be possible to *export* a social revolution by arms? The Bolsheviks made their bet... and lost. The result was the Peace of Riga in March 1921, ending the conflict.

On the same occasion, in July 1920, the Second Congress of the Third International was held in Moscow. The euphoria with the victories of the Red Army in Poland soon faded. Hopes for an international revolution remained alive, though now without any set time. To achieve it, the Third International was organized as a general staff, unified and centralized. National communist parties were not to be the mere tentacles of an *octopus* located in Moscow, however they incorporated methods of organization and revolutionary conceptions which were largely under Soviet hegemony. In its proclamations, the International stated that Soviet Russia would be the fundamental axis through which international revolution would be achieved. Defending it was thus defending international revolution. A notable inversion. It was no longer the Russian Revolution which depended on international revolution, rather the latter had come to depend on the Soviet state.

A similar pattern would be used in relation to the Asiatic peoples, considered colonial or semi-colonial. The question was discussed by the International. On the one hand, Lenin defended the idea that in agrarian societies revolutions occurred under bourgeois hegemony, but if there was an international revolution, the countries of Asia and Africa could move to socialism without having to pass through capitalism. However, M.N. Roy, an Indian delegate, argued that communists should mainly support the struggles of peasants for land. Considering the connections between local bourgeoisie, large farm owners, and foreign capital, these struggles could acquire a socialist dynamic. As the dreams of an immediate revolution in Europe did not materialize, resulting in the isolation of the Russian revolution, the idea of revolutions in the east, weakening European imperialism, could be

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<sup>75</sup> For the importance of foreign intervention and the Bolshevik effort to emphasize its decisive nature, cf. E. H. Carr, op. cit, vol. 3, chapters 21-26; I.V. Domin, 1995; S.V. Drovkov, 1994; D. Foglesong, 1995; L.N. Nejiniskii, 1991; R.G. Suny, 2001; I. Tseretelli, 1919; D. Wright, 2017.

encouraging.

Lenin and Roy's theses were approved as they were not incompatible. On 1 September 1920, the Congress of the Peoples of the East was held in Baku. With the presence of almost two thousand delegates, coming from various countries, and with intense revolutionary fervor, a clear connection was established between the Russian revolution and Asian revolutions.

However, as in Europe, the question very quickly arose: negotiate with nationalist governments with non-socialist (or indeed anti-socialist) orientations or unreservedly encourage peasant social movements? When these orientations were excluded, which allies would be considered preferential? It was not without anguish on the part of many Bolsheviks, nor without bitterness on the part of Asian revolutionaries, that it was found that the nascent Soviet state would not hesitate to put its immediate interests as the decisive criteria to guide its options, even if the small communist parties formed following the Baku Congress could be harmed. Also affirmed in the East was the debatable equation that the revolution in Asia depended more on the Soviet state than the contrary.

As a result, in a very short period of time an international revolution in purpose and hope became a national revolution, although international perspectives were not abandoned. However, they came to be instrumentalized according to the interests of the Soviet revolution, considered the foundation stone of the revolutionary movement on a world scale.

### *5. The metamorphoses of Soviet socialism*

The democratic revolutions in Russia (1905 and 1917, culminated in October 1917), were inspired by a clear internationalist orientation. Despite the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, the radical democratic and internationalist dynamic was much stronger than the pretensions of any political party. The demands of the social movements who achieved the revolution were juridically imposed between October and November 1917.

However, insidious processes of various kinds soon began to corrode the democratic substance and the internationalist proposals of that revolution. Initially, during a period we call the *Interregnum* (October 1917 to July 1918), in the middle of debates and controversies, this substance and these proposals, already declining, were maintained, though facing increasing difficulties.

However, it was during the civil wars, with their demands and devastations, that a centralized dictatorial political regime was constructed, annihilating democracy. The crushing of the Konstadt insurrection in March 1921 consolidated this process. At the same time the threats to and the

isolation of the revolution led the revolutionary government, not without hesitation, to choose orientations which privileged, before and above anything else, national interests and the survival of the Soviet state.

In the future, reforms of distinct orientations would not alter these historical foundations of Soviet socialism.

A democratic and international revolution was thus transformed into an authoritarian and nationalist revolution. Socialism, an internationalist and radically democratic project, adopted authoritarian and nationalist orientations, indelibly affecting socialism in Russia and throughout the world during the twentieth century. These metamorphoses originated and became established during the civil wars which for this reason can be considered the cradle and the genesis of Soviet socialism.

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*Continuity and Change in Gorbachev's Thought  
during Soviet and Post-Soviet Times*

César Albuquerque<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years after the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), historians still seek to understand the processes that culminated in the fall of the socialist superpower. Much of the analysis is dedicated to the period of Perestroika (1985-1991), the set of reforms implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev after he became General Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Most of the work published since the Soviet collapse has focused on the search for the causes that led to the need for reforms in the system, as well as the paths taken by the Soviet leadership in its execution. Gorbachev's role in this process is usually analyzed from the point of view of his performance as a political leader at the time. Few studies are dedicated to systematic analysis of Gorbachev's thought, whose views are often reduced to the decisions and measures adopted by his government.

Attributing the transformations that took place in the USSR only to the wishes or decisions of the last General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU is quite reductionist, ignoring the complexity of the Soviet regime and society at that time. However, disregarding the importance of Gorbachev and his ideas in driving these changes would be no less mistaken. Although debates about the need for reforms in the Soviet system had been on the agenda since the 1950's with Nikita Khrushchev, it was only after Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 that they were radically pursued to the end.

This essay intends to advance this debate by analyzing the evolution of Gorbachev's ideas during his ascension in the CPSU hierarchy, his performance as the top leader of the USSR and his reflections after the Soviet decline. By means of the analysis of his speeches, publications, and interventions, we intend to identify continuity and change in his thinking in four main dimensions: ideological, economic, political and international relations. Thus, we intend to contribute to the understanding of the ideas of this important reformist leader.

*Gorbachev on ideology*

Critics and supporters of the former Soviet leader associate him with various positions in the ideological spectrum, ranging from conservative communism to liberalism. Some even claim that Gorbachev had already

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<sup>1</sup> César Albuquerque (rasecalbuquerque@gmail.com) is a Ph.D. candidate in History at the University of São Paulo. His dissertation analyzes the evolution of Mikhail Gorbachev's thought before and after the dissolution of the USSR.

abandoned communist ideals *before* his rise to power in 1985. Others believe that it was precisely his delay in breaking with the regime's dogmas that prevented him from pursuing more radical reforms. Passionate debates and political disputes aside, we will investigate Gorbachev's own words for evidence of his trajectory in the ideological dimension.

As we turn to Gorbachev's speeches and publications during the initial phase of his rise in the hierarchy of the CPSU, it does not seem that we encounter a dissident or revisionist. In the 1960s and the 1970s, Gorbachev held several positions as a party cadre in his native region, Stavropol, until he reached the position of First Secretary of the regional committee (*kraikom*), the most important in the local sphere. During this period, his manifestations were very much in line with the official discourse, reaffirming the jargon and ideological dogmas of the regime.

Gorbachev often emphasized, for example, the importance of communist education and the teaching of Marxist-Leninist theory for youth. Such training was seen as a necessary response to the threats of bourgeois imperialism, which sought to corrupt young people with its selfish ideology in the dispute between the systems:

Of all the tasks of communist youth education, the main one is the formation of a Marxist-Leninist worldview and communist morality. Party organizations must ensure that Komsomol members, all boys and girls, creatively dominate revolutionary theory, develop class consciousness and cultivate a communist attitude towards work and socialist property. They must do everything to support and develop in young people the desire to independently understand the phenomena of social life, so that each young person understands the laws of the development of society and can understand the complexities of the modern political situation.<sup>2</sup>

Gorbachev also sought to reaffirm the validity of the ideals that guided the Bolsheviks in 1917, particularly praising the figure of Lenin, always remembered for his bold and revolutionary profile. Mirroring the party line, ideological education should be a fundamental element in the correction of distortions and the development of new generations for the construction of socialism, consolidating the USSR on the path it had taken since the revolution.

Although one cannot speak of an ideological rupture, the first signs of

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<sup>2</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 35

significant changes in Gorbachev's positions came in the early 1980s, when he became part of the central core of the party elite in Moscow. In this regard, the speech he elaborated for Lenin's 113<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1983 stands out. In it, Gorbachev upheld the ideals and teachings traditionally attributed to the revolutionary leader but sought to present a less dogmatic vision of Lenin. Therewith he sought to legitimize, within the limits of the system, the reformist experiments that were being implemented under the leadership of Yuri Andropov.

Years later Gorbachev himself acknowledged that the preparation for this speech played a fundamental role in his formation and in the design of the measures he would adopt from 1985 onward. He then came in close contact and reflected upon Lenin's last, more reformist writings.<sup>3</sup> While reaffirming the vitality of Marxist theories in the contemporary world, Gorbachev sought to emphasize that Leninism was configured as Marxism in its modern version, adapting the original theory to the objective reality of its time.

In this sense, Gorbachev directed his criticisms to those who considered Marxism-Leninism as a set of dogmatic elements, with ready-made recipes to achieve its objectives. He claimed that the great merit of this theory was to provide a dialectical method of thinking and analyzing the concrete situations of reality.<sup>4</sup> If before Lenin's teachings seemed to justify the paths chosen by the regime throughout its consolidation period, now the ideals of the same leader emerged as the basis for the changes that were being generated by the new leaders.

Even after being chosen to occupy the general secretariat of the CC of the CPSU, the changes in Gorbachev's discourse in relation to ideology occurred very gradually. During the first years of Perestroika, the Soviet leader reinforced the need to value the initiative of the masses to overcome old practices and dogmatism. This did not mean, however, a break with socialism or the ideological choice adopted by the regime, whose advantages, achievements, and possibilities were constantly reiterated.

A symbolic moment in the trajectory of Gorbachev's thought on ideology can be identified in his speech during the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1987. As he had done some years before, but now even more sharply, he sought to legitimize the reformist measures adopted by referring to Lenin, described as a pragmatic leader. Gorbachev drew a parallel between Perestroika and the New Economic Policy (NEP) period, a strategy adopted by the first Soviet leader for the

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<sup>3</sup> GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 1, p. 383.

country's recovery after the end of the Russian Civil War (1918-1921).<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the positions he had taken during the reforms were far from representing a dissident movement, since they intended to reestablish the ideals that guided the October revolutionaries:

In our time, the Leninist answer to the question posed by life, by revolutionary activity, the question about the correlation of the theoretical "model" of the road to socialism and the actual practice of socialist construction is very timely. Marxism-Leninism as a creative doctrine is not a mixed bag of ready-made recipes and doctrinal prescriptions. Alien to short-sighted dogmatism, Marxist-Leninist doctrine ensures the interaction of renewed theoretical thinking with practice, with the course of the revolutionary struggle.<sup>6</sup>

If Perestroika came to reestablish the Soviet course in the path of revolutionary ideals, it was clear that something had diverted it from its original course. For Gorbachev, the Stalinist period was responsible for such distortion, leading the regime to adopt arbitrary measures that violated socialist legality and resulted not only in the repression of the 1930s but also in the ruling and dogmatic model that took shape and endured.<sup>7</sup>

The harsh criticisms directed at Stalin marked a new stage in the way in which the Soviet regime dealt with this delicate historical period. If during the Khrushchev years the denunciation of the crimes committed by Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956 marked the beginning of the period of "de-Stalinization" of the regime, Leonid Brezhnev's leadership had taken care to attenuate the criticisms of the former leader and reverse radical reformist measures. From 1987 onward, the Soviet leadership again condemned, even more emphatically, the errors and crimes of Stalinism and initiated a process of rehabilitation of unjustly condemned Soviet citizens. The rescue of historical truth appeared as a necessary part of the advance of Perestroika, since that was the source of the vital problems faced by the Soviet system, especially in relation to democratization, legality, bureaucratization, and transparency.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1988 and 1989, the radicalization of Gorbachev's speeches and criticism of the functioning of the Soviet system was notable not only in

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<sup>5</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987b, pp. 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987b, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987b, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987b, p. 32.

words but also in the measures adopted. Officially, Gorbachev denied that Perestroika meant a movement away from socialist ideals and principles.<sup>9</sup> However, the ideas and proposals that he came to defend seemed to increasingly distance themselves from the model traditionally understood as socialist, by calling into question the system's pillars such as forms of property, the adoption of a state-regulated market and political-electoral reforms. As Gorbachev himself would later recognize, his views came increasingly closer to those advocated by social democracy.<sup>10</sup>

From 1990 onward, the distancing from the official Soviet pre-Perestroika ideology became clear and explicit. In the report presented to the delegates of the XXVIII Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev declared himself in favor of a new conception of socialism, one that would be more adequate to the reality that society was going through. This new vision had as its fundamental pillars democracy and the valorization of the human being, resulting in what he defined as a humanist and democratic socialism. Such a change, according to him, did not represent an abandonment of socialist social theory, but a return to its dialectical and pragmatic origins:

It is known that the content of the social theory developed by Marx, Engels and Lenin was formed from the analysis of the realities of the 19th century, and for Lenin also from the first decades of the 20th century. Since then, the world has changed dramatically, including under the influence of Marxist thought itself, the October Revolution, the international revolutionary and democratic movement. We have been trying for decades to find answers to all situations in quotations from the classics, forgetting that they themselves — the classics — oblige us to consider the historical conditioning of any theory, mocking those who tried to transform Marxism into a kind of sacred writing. Life itself made us think about it and really appreciate the meaning of the fundamental laws of Marxist dialectics. First of all, a specific examination of the particular situation is necessary. It is only on this basis that conclusions can be drawn for policy.<sup>11</sup>

With the end of the USSR and his consequent exit from power,

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<sup>9</sup> GORBACHEV, 1989, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> GORBACHEV, 2002, p. 79

<sup>11</sup> INSTITUT TEORII I ISTORII SOTSIALIZMA TsK KPSS, 1991, p. 88.

Gorbachev seemed to have felt more comfortable in dealing with his ideological positions, not only in the present moment but also in retrospect. In his first speeches after leaving the Kremlin, Gorbachev maintained the defense of the validity of socialism as a social theory which remained as a guide for the formulation of new social, political, and economic systems. However, expressly recognizing his distancing from the orthodox Marxist view, he argued that true socialism was linked to values such as justice, solidarity, and equality, with the interests of humanity overlapping with class interests. Socialism was possible only if built on a strictly democratic basis.<sup>12</sup>

While in the post-Soviet times he seemed comfortable with recognizing his affinity with social democracy — which had inspired him to create two social democratic political parties in Russia between the 1990s and 2000s — Gorbachev rejected the accusations that he had become an exponent of neoliberalism. In the years that he was at the head of the USSR, his approach to leaders such as American President Ronald Regan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher seemed to corroborate this view. But Gorbachev disagreed that the collapse of the USSR meant the victory of neoliberalism, the Western model and the “end of history”, as many in the West claimed. On the contrary, capitalism itself had not been unharmed by the Cold War years and had to give in and adapt to a new reality imposed by the pressure of the ideals upheld by the socialist movement.<sup>13</sup>

But it is perhaps in his criticism of the reforms experienced by Russia in the 1990s that Gorbachev’s distance from neoliberalism was most evident. During this period, he became one of the main voices against the radicalism of shock therapy, as the measures adopted by the Yeltsin government to introduce the country into the global capitalist system became known. Gorbachev believed that Russia was able to offer the world new ways to overcome the dilemmas of the exhaustion of the capitalist and socialist models in force in the 20th century. However, Moscow was pursuing an opposite trajectory at that time, adopting neoliberal and monetarist reforms, which further aggravated the situation in the country:

Following the precepts of the International Monetary Fund, efforts are being made to adjust everything to the requirements of the IMF, to duplicate Western models and to eliminate all complex and valuable experience, the Soviet experiment, and to denounce all of this as a harmful heritage. This is an error on both the philosophical and the political level, which leads to a

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<sup>12</sup> GORBACHEV, 1993, p. 396.

<sup>13</sup> GORBACHEV, 1993, p. 33.

conflict with society, because it conflicts with the mentality, culture and needs of our people. Liberal ideologues demonstrate a nihilistic attitude towards the past, whereas, in fact, the past should be used, including the part of it linked to socialist values.<sup>14</sup>

By comparing the words of the young leader of Stavropol to the reflections of his post-Soviet aged counterpart, it is possible to identify a profound change in Gorbachev's ideological vision. Despite the limitations imposed by the regime on those who intended to rise politically inside the system, Gorbachev recognizes that for a long time there was not a great distance between his ideas and the official ideology of the regime.<sup>15</sup> The changes in his perception, which would result in this detachment, were built up through his practical experience at the various levels of the Soviet political system. Although his various critics labeled him as a radical exponent on the left or on the right, Gorbachev seems to have taken a moderate path of gradual build-up of his ideals.

### *Gorbachev on politics*

In line with his ideological evolution, it is possible to identify a similar path in Gorbachev's relation to politics and democracy. As we turn to Gorbachev's texts and speeches during the 1960s and 1970s, we can see a fine tuning of his official discourse, often emphasizing the advantages of socialist democracy. Such model was described as a workers' conquest, while the criticisms, especially coming from the West, appear as an ideological effort by imperialism to distort and minimize the achievements of the socialist state.<sup>16</sup>

The consistent search for the path to the development of socialist democracy in the present conditions stems from the fact that democracy under socialism cannot be something vague and indefinite, as it seems to ordinary men and anarchist elements. Socialist democracy is characterized by order and organization, as well as centralized state leadership on a national scale, without which the system of socialist democracy cannot function normally [...]

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<sup>14</sup> GORBACHEV, 2002, p. 181.

<sup>15</sup> GORBACHEV, 2016b, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 151.

The violation of the dialectic of democratic centralism is related to the emergence of political and social distortions, to the manifestation of disparities in the development of the social and economic spheres of society.<sup>17</sup>

At that stage, there was no criticism of the electoral model or even of the functioning of the country's political-party structure. On the contrary, he argued that the success of socialist democracy depended on maintaining order and the organization of the regime under centralized leadership. Even so, in some speeches Gorbachev recognized the opportunity to improve the Soviet political system, especially regarding the expansion of popular participation in the mechanisms of government and management. But here an eventual distancing from the popular strata was not linked to any intrinsic characteristics of the system, but rather to failures in the performance of managers, local leaders, and other individual agents.

For Gorbachev, the increase in the participation of the population should occur in all spheres of social life, including the soviets, Komsomol, trade unions, and the production structures themselves. The responsibility for the success of this task rests on the shoulders of the local leaders, who according to him should approach the everyday reality of the population, listening to their demands and understanding their needs. Without proposing legal changes in the functioning of the collegiate bodies or in the mechanism for choosing those leaders, Gorbachev valued the letters sent by citizens to the organs of the party and the State as an instrument of interaction with society which deserved greater attention on the part of officials.<sup>18</sup>

Later, Gorbachev revealed that his positive view of the model known as socialist democracy was gradually altered not only by experience as he ascended in his political career within the USSR, but also from his first trips abroad. He highlights, for example, the impact of his tour of Czechoslovakia shortly after the intervention of the Red Army in response to the Prague Spring mobilizations in 1968. Although Gorbachev still believed that the Soviet onslaught was justified by the need to preserve socialism worldwide. However, the negative reaction of the citizens of that country to the presence of Russian soldiers there made him doubt that the model was capturing the real desires of the population.<sup>19</sup>

During Perestroika, the defense of the need to deepen democracy assumed an increasingly central role. One of the main slogans of the reforms

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<sup>17</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 1, p. 114.

<sup>18</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 1, pp. 102-103.

<sup>19</sup> GORBACHEV, 2002, p. 6.

at the time was “more socialism, more democracy.” At first the intended democratization was still remarkably close to the traditional pillars of socialist democracy. The new leadership defended the reinforcement in the organization and attributions of the existing participatory structures, such as the Soviets, the CPSU, the trade unions and the Komsomol. Perhaps the main novelty was the greater emphasis given to the need for transparency in the regime’s discussions and decisions, accompanied by the gradual relaxation of censorship mechanisms and the expansion of freedom of expression, including in the press. Even so, Gorbachev maintained his belief in the leadership of the CPSU and was opposed to the need to adopt a multiparty system.<sup>20</sup>

From 1987 onward, Gorbachev began to identify in bureaucratic resistance the main obstacle to the advance of Perestroika. The fight against conservative forces in the party and in the state gave politics a centrality equivalent to, or even greater than, the economic dimension in the reforms. Realizing that only cadre replacement — with the promotion of leaders in favor of change — would not be enough, Gorbachev gradually radicalized his proposals. During the XIX Conference of the CPSU, held at the end of 1988, he drew the contours of electoral and institutional reforms that would profoundly alter the functioning of the country’s political system. Even so, after approval of the changes and the election of the new Congress of People’s Deputies, which included independent members, the leader did not seem convinced of the need to adopt a multi-party model:

The elections confirm again that socialist democracy and our system of popular power offer enormous possibilities for the expression of opinions and interests. We can conclude that it is necessary to follow this path, and not look for others, getting involved in political speculations sometimes suggested in the press. We must abandon abstract models, such as the thesis of multipartism. Democracy does not depend on the existence of many parties; it is determined by the role of the people in society.<sup>21</sup>

Such a view, however, did not withstand the turbulence of the final years of Perestroika. Since 1990 political forces increasingly took on the format of parallel associations, dividing reformists and conservatives. Even among these groups, different views and factions changed. In this scenario,

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<sup>20</sup> GORBACHEV, 1989, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> GORBACHEV, 1989, p. 106.

the CPSU was constantly identified as a stronghold of forces opposing the advance of reforms or even advocating the return of the pre-Perestroika system. Hence, therefore, in his speeches Gorbachev began to emphasize the need for separation between party and state structures, which were in a symbiotic relationship for almost the entire Soviet period.

Finally, in March 1990, Gorbachev obtained the approval of a law that cancelled Article 6 of the Constitution of the USSR, which in practice ended the political monopoly of the CPSU. The formation of political parties and movements came to be seen by the then Soviet leader as a natural consequence of the country's democratization process, a reality to which the CPSU should adapt in order to compete for a leading role in the process.<sup>22</sup> From then on, the democratic format defended by the leader became increasingly closer to the model adopted by the main Western powers. At the same time, his view of socialist democracy had changed profoundly to the point of publicly classifying the Stalin-influenced model of the Soviet Union as totalitarian.<sup>23</sup>

In the post-Soviet period, Gorbachev remained a voice in defense of the strengthening of democracy in Russia. Throughout the 1990s, he became one of the main critics of the then Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, whom he considered to be quite authoritarian. As early as 1993, the shelling of the Russian parliament at Yeltsin's behest, and the approval of the new constitution, which gave greater powers to the president, seemed to confirm the diagnosis of the former Soviet leader.

Maintaining his belief in the representative system and the multi-party model, Gorbachev remained active on the political scene in Russia, running in the 1995 presidential election and organizing the formation of two parties, both with a social democratic orientation. It is worth mentioning that for him democracy cannot be understood as a dogmatic system. In the same way, he rejected the claim that the Western model could be considered as both unique and universal. Democracy cannot be imposed, but, on the contrary, it would only flourish if it were the product of the will of each people, adapting to the reality and specificities of the individual countries. He also disagreed that such a view could result in the creation of extravagant political regimes, since everyone would share the same guiding values and principles.<sup>24</sup>

A good example of what he meant is that while advocating the adaptation of the democratic regime to the particularities of each country and society, Gorbachev was opposed to the consolidation of the so-called

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<sup>22</sup> KOMMUNISTICHESKAYA PARTIYA SOVETSKOGO SOYUZA, 1990, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> GORBACHEV, 1990a, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> GORBACHEV, 2006b, pp. 111-112.

“sovereign democracy” (*suverennaya demokratiya*) in Russia under the government of Vladimir Putin. This model, advocated by presidential adviser Vladislav Surkov, foresaw the introduction of regulatory measures in the electoral system and the media to avoid manipulation and interference by internal and external groups that in the previous decade had supposedly highjacked the political direction of the country. Although he agreed with the diagnosis about the deviations during the Yeltsin period, Gorbachev joined the chorus of international analysts who saw the proposal as a new authoritarian onslaught by the Kremlin elite:

Evidently, democracy must grow on its own soil in each country and have its own national characteristics. But there are general principles. The restrictions that may be necessary in situations that threaten the very existence of the state and people’s lives must be considered temporary, rather than permanent as the theorists of “sovereign” or “managed” democracy do. Such definitions distort the essence of democracy — just as the expressions “socialist” or “popular” democracies do.<sup>25</sup>

As in the ideological dimension, Gorbachev’s political vision and his notion of what characterized a system as democratic also changed along his trajectory, in response to the experiences he had during his career. Understanding the limitations of the political system experienced in his country, he gradually distanced himself from it while taking a cautious position in relation to idealized foreign models. In the end, Gorbachev became one of the main voices in favor of democracy in Russia, aware that success depended more on its content (popular participation, political awareness, etc.) than on its formal structure.

#### *Gorbachev on economics and reforms*

The economic dimension in Gorbachev’s thinking is perhaps the one that has most puzzled analysts and the public since his rise to power. After all, the economic reforms that culminated in the dismantling of the planned Soviet economy and its transition to a market economy were implemented during the period when he was at the head of the Kremlin. If, for some, Gorbachev intended from the beginning to transform the USSR into a capitalist country, others accused him of having remained attached to the old

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<sup>25</sup> GORBACHEV, 2006a.

system for too long. An examination of his public utterances can help us understand the nature and speed of these transformations.

During his time at Stavropol's CPSU *kraikom*, his speeches hardly addressed the overall organization or functioning of the Soviet economic system. Although his work involved direct contact with Moscow leaders in search of resources and investments for their region, regional officials like him publicly said little about this sensitive topic. However, dealing with the daily difficulties and challenges faced by the industrial, agricultural and services sectors installed in his region, Gorbachev became familiar with the bottlenecks of the system.

Interestingly, it was precisely his critical diagnosis of economic functioning, especially in the rural sector, that propelled his entry into the Moscow party elite. It is worth remembering that Stavropol is in the Caucasus region, one of the main agricultural regions in the country. In 1978, Gorbachev was invited to present a report to the CC of the PCUS in which he addressed the main problems and possible solutions for agrarian policy in the USSR. Since it is not a widely publicized document, he was able to write it in a remarkably more realistic and assertive tone, although the criticisms were always accompanied by mitigating comments that could not characterize the text as dissident or heretical.

In the report, Gorbachev listed a series of measures that would later be taken up during Perestroika. He defended, for example, the need to remedy exchange relations between city and countryside, between industry and farms. This would happen through the increase in prices paid by the state to agricultural producers for commodities, which had been outdated for more than a decade. Low prices put collective and state farms in constant deficit, which prevented them from functioning based on cost accounting and financial self-sufficiency — two concepts that would gain more and more space in the Soviet economic debate in the following years.<sup>26</sup>

Gorbachev also highlighted the need to expand investments in inputs, equipment, training of workers and development of new agricultural technologies. The improvement in production conditions should be accompanied by a considerable increase in the supply of services and in the basic infrastructure offered to the rural population, seen as a fundamental mechanism for attracting and maintaining the declining labor force in the countryside. He even criticized the lack of technical-scientific knowledge of the planning authorities for considering the specificities of each region in the formulation of plans and pricing policy.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, he concluded his report by pointing out the urgency of

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<sup>26</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 184-185.

<sup>27</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 185-186.

improving the mechanisms for planning and economic management, enhancing the evaluation indicators, and providing material and moral stimuli to producers. Without fully rejecting with the planning model, he advocated the replacement of administrative methods of resource allocation by more rational planning, which would guarantee greater autonomy and leeway for local leaders to act:

The beginning of the work of the management bodies at the central level allows us to take advantage of the possibilities of our socialist economic system, to consider national interests, to concentrate resources in the major directions, to resolve urgent issues in a timely manner and to eliminate imbalances.

In our opinion, it is necessary to give more independence to companies and associations in solving various production and financial problems. Management along the lines of the organs of the central bodies must, in the first place, aim to find effective forms of planning and economic incentives that create a greater interest on the part of collective and state farms in increasing production and improving product quality.

The improvement of agricultural production planning, the purchase price system, capital investments, financing and incentives to work will make it possible to strengthen cost accounting, ensuring greater growth in agricultural production and increasing its efficiency.<sup>28</sup>

Months after presenting this report, Gorbachev took over the secretariat of the CC of the CPSU for agriculture, moving with his family to Moscow. From then on, Gorbachev began his rise in the elite of Soviet power, which also expanded his sphere of action and the nature of the themes dealt with in his public utterances. In the early 1980s, the need for changes in the economic system had already attracted the attention of the central nucleus of the CPSU and was beginning to appear gradually in the speeches of the main leaders. With the death of Brezhnev and the choice of Andropov to succeed him in the General Secretariat of the CC of the CPSU, the reformist proposals went from discourse to practice, putting Gorbachev in charge of the economic experiments that had been carried out in 1983 and 1984.

At that moment, Gorbachev reinforced his discourse in favor of the use of objective economic laws, anchored in the principles of self-sufficiency

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<sup>28</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 1, pp. 199-200.

and cost accounting. He became bolder by bringing to debate the need for the efficient use of money-commodity relations, a euphemism for referring to market structures in the allocation of resources. Aware that he was dealing with sensitive issues, he sought to demonstrate that such ideas did not deviate from, but rather were inherent to the proper functioning of the socialist system. As we saw earlier, the reference to Lenin's more pragmatic profile also contributed to the validation and ideological legitimation of the new proposals:

Lenin's theoretical legacy is an invaluable resource in the Party's work to improve the developed socialist society. Lenin's provisions on more accurate consideration of the assumptions of objective economic laws, on planning and cost accounting, the skillful use of commodity-money relations and material and moral incentives today serve as a reliable compass in the party's activities in the management of national economy. The Leninist approach to the development of economic problems and the solution of practical problems of economic and cultural development is a wonderful school for our cadres.<sup>29</sup>

As soon as he became General Secretary, Gorbachev intensified his campaign for economic changes. Initially, the proposals were in line with what had already been built in previous years: the need to accelerate technical-scientific progress and the transition to an intensive development model, based on self-sufficiency and cost accounting of productive structures. There was also a concern to give planning a more indicative, less directive character. The economic experiments of the Andropov period were expanded to various sectors of the economy, seeking to make production relations in the country more flexible.

But the advance of the reforms came up against the already mentioned resistance of the state-party bureaucracy, which offered obstacles to the reformulation of the excessively centralized system. In view of the results that were well below the defined goals, Gorbachev chose to intensify and deepen the measures adopted. What had started as an "improvement of socialism" was increasingly moving toward shaking the pillars of the old system. References to traditional jargon became less frequent, while market structures were gaining ground in the discourses and policies adopted:

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<sup>29</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 1, p. 385.

The time has come to overcome prejudice against money/market relations, the disregard, in practice, for the planned direction of the economy. The denial of the importance of its active influence on the increase in the interest of workers and on the efficiency of production weakens economic self-management, raises other undesirable consequences. On the contrary, the normal and healthy functioning of money/market relations on a socialist basis can create a situation and management conditions in which the results depend entirely on the quality of work of the community, the skill and initiative of the leaders.<sup>30</sup>

In his bestselling book “Perestroika: New thinking for our country and the world,” published in 1987, Gorbachev used the word “market,” instead of the traditional communist jargon “commodity-money relations.”<sup>31</sup> From that moment on, the consolidation of a “socialist market” or “market socialism” took center stage in the speeches of the Soviet leader, who sought thereby to demonstrate ideological compatibility with the socialist world-view.

At the same time, new measures were taken to make production relations more flexible, such as the law on self-employment, the restructuring of state-owned companies, the creation of cooperatives (including the possibility of hiring employees) and authorization to form joint ventures with foreign companies. Such changes displeased the more conservative sectors, which accused the leadership of abandoning socialist principles. Gorbachev rejected these accusations:

It has also been said that we are abandoning socialist principles and ideals, that self-management, leasing, enterprising and corporativism are equivalent to the refusal of socialism in the economy, although, in fact, it is precisely through these ways that we intend to take advantage of the enormous potential of socialist property and socialist production relations, overcoming alienation and making the citizen the true owners of production.<sup>32</sup>

In the final years of Perestroika, the move toward the transition to a market economy seemed inevitable. In rural areas, the land leasing had been authorized, while in the cities, plans for the leasing and even privatization of

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<sup>30</sup> GORBACHEV, 1986, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> GORBACHEV, 1988b, p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> GORBACHEV, 1989, p. 45.

state-owned companies was advancing. Still, Gorbachev continued to deny that his policies meant a break with the socialist choice, although, as we saw earlier, the view of what socialism meant to him had already changed significantly. He favored the formation of a mixed economic model, combining different forms of ownership in a market infrastructure.<sup>33</sup> Gorbachev stated, however, that he did not believe that the market alone would solve the country's problems, defending the state's action by intervening as a regulatory agent, reconciling individual interests with collective ones — a proposal that parallels his approach to social democratic ideals.<sup>34</sup>

After leaving the Kremlin, Gorbachev dedicated himself to defending Perestroika, rejecting accusations that his reforms were responsible for the collapse of the system and the country. At the same time he became one of the main critics of the radical reforms implemented by Yeltsin in the 1990s. The former Soviet leader did not see the so-called shock therapy as a continuation of Perestroika, but rather as a break with it. His criticisms of neoliberal and monetarist prescriptions, as well as the privatization process conducted at that time, were accompanied by the characterization of Perestroika as a moderate process, thought out from an evolutionary perspective, which intended to gradually modify the country's political system.<sup>35</sup>

Gorbachev thus consolidated his adhesion to the social democratic movement. For him, socialism and capitalism in isolation were unable to meet social and individual needs fully. The exhaustion of these models was at the origin of the great crises that broke out at the end of the 20th century. If, on the one hand, the market proved to be a more efficient mechanism for allocating resources, on the other hand it was also responsible for the deepening of social problems, such as the growth of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. According to him, this was because the market alone did not generate an agenda of social policies and objectives, the strong point of the socialist experience.<sup>36</sup>

In this sense, he recalled that despite problems of supply and quality, socialism guaranteed basic conditions of subsistence, social protection, and stability for the population at large. The solution, therefore, was neither the minimal state proposed by the neoliberals nor a return to the planned and authoritarian model of real socialism, but rather the consolidation of a market regulated by the state, which would combine the advantages of planning with

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<sup>33</sup> INSTITUT TEORII I ISTORII SOTSIALIZMA TsK KPSS, 1991, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> GORBACHEV, 1990a, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> GORBACHEV, 1993, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 47.

mercantile flexibility.<sup>37</sup> Gorbachev was also in favor of maintaining state control over strategic sectors, such as energy, railways, and hydrocarbons, especially during the debates arising after the arrest of so-called “oligarchs” under the Putin government.<sup>38</sup>

From this brief overview of seminal texts and speeches, we realize that Gorbachev’s views on the functioning of the Soviet economy were gradually evolving, as he interacted with the system and realized its bottlenecks. Still, on several occasions during and after Perestroika, he stated that he had no real idea of the size of the challenge that the reforms would face when he moved into the Kremlin. Although he had a central role in the introduction of market mechanisms in the USSR, it would be wrong to consider him a liberal reformer who believed in the free market and minimal state. On the contrary, his ideas came closer and closer to the tenets of social democracy and Keynesianism.

### *Gorbachev on International Relations*

The foreign policy pursued by Gorbachev after 1985, more than a simple change in the relationship of the USSR with other nations, brought about a real revolution in international relations. Throughout Perestroika, the Cold War tensions that marked the second half of the 20th century gradually eased, largely thanks to the initiative of the Soviet government. A review of Gorbachev’s speeches and writings in this period helps us understand how his ideas about international relations evolved.

As a local leader, references to international issues were not frequent in Gorbachev's speeches. The formulation of foreign policy was a sensitive topic for the Soviet regime and was linked to ideology and propaganda. In this sense, when he approached this theme, Gorbachev demonstrated alignment with the official view, according to which bourgeois imperialism was seen as aggressive, while the USSR and its allies shared pacifist ideals, although they had to provide a defensive posture against the threats of the North. Americans and other capitalist powers:

On the other hand, it must be considered that the worldview of young people is taking shape in a climate of intensification of class struggle in the international arena, an intensification of the confrontation between two ideologies — socialist and bourgeois. A distinctive feature of imperialism’s ideological strategy is the

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<sup>37</sup> GORBACHEV, 2000, pp. 48-50.

<sup>38</sup> GORBACHEV, 2005.

disarmament of young people's ideology, the desire to weaken their revolutionary enthusiasm, their class conscience, to oppose them to the older generations, to sow skepticism and apoliticism, admiration for bourgeois habits and morals foreign to socialist society.<sup>39</sup>

Travel abroad played a central role in Gorbachev's reflections on the topic. His travels to the allied nations of Eastern Europe and even his meetings with leaders of communist parties in Western Europe, many of whom adopted a position of relative autonomy in relation to the USSR, led the young leader to question the strangeness between reality and official discourse.<sup>40</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Gorbachev's arrival in Moscow in the late 1970s also represented an expansion of the themes addressed and a projection of his public manifestations. In 1984, just before assuming power in Moscow, Gorbachev led a Soviet delegation to the United Kingdom. On that occasion, he had his first contact with someone who would be one of his greatest interlocutors and with whom he would maintain a close relationship, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He also made an important speech in the British parliament, in which he jettisoned the traditional Soviet anti-imperialistic jargon and adopted instead a moderate approach favorable to cooperation:

Our aim is to solve together — since no one can do it alone — the most important problems that are essentially common to us. These are: avoiding war; stopping the arms race and proceeding to disarmament; resolving existing conflicts and crises and preventing potential ones; creating resources and an international atmosphere to solve problems [...]; and tackling global issues such as hunger and disease, protection of the environment and the production of energy and raw materials.<sup>41</sup>

It is possible to note, therefore, that new themes were entering the Soviet foreign policy agenda. The criticism of the political tensions resulting from the Cold War is accompanied by the defense of the reduction of atomic arsenals and the possibility of establishing cooperative relations between

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<sup>39</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 138-139.

<sup>40</sup> GORBACHEV, 2002. pp. 49-50.

<sup>41</sup> GORBACHEV, 1987a, p. 42.

countries, despite their different ideological and political choices. It is worth remembering that, although symbolic, this speech did not in itself represent an innovation, since over the previous decades, the two opposing blocs in the Cold War had already had moments of rapprochement, as during the detente period, but they had not lasted long.

Aware of the suspicions that dominated international relations, Gorbachev implemented practical measures after he became General Secretary. He initiated military denuclearization and the establishment of relations guided by cooperation and coexistence and adopted measures that intended to demonstrate in practice his intentions, such as the unilateral moratorium on atomic tests and explosions by the USSR. Years later, Gorbachev recognized that, in addition to the security issue, the new foreign policy stance also served economic interests by reducing the large sums destined for the military sector, which were a burden on the Soviet budget.<sup>42</sup>

During the XXVII Congress of the CPSU in 1986, Gorbachev managed to put his ideas as the horizon of the official foreign policy of the regime, which started to seek the end of the arms race, the denuclearization of the military forces and mutually beneficial cooperation with capitalist countries. The changes also affected relations with other socialist nations. Vis-à-vis Eastern European allies, the General Secretary defended the establishment of more interdependent and egalitarian relations between countries, reducing the rigidity with which Moscow controlled political and economic exchanges with most of these countries.<sup>43</sup> As for China, whose diplomatic relations have been weakened since the 1950s, Gorbachev hinted at a rapprochement, even citing the possibility of exchanging experiences with Beijing about the economic reforms that had been adopted by the eastern country since the end of the previous decade.<sup>44</sup>

As with the economic system and domestic politics, the gradual radicalization of Gorbachev's criticisms of the status quo prior to Perestroika would also affect foreign policy. In this sense, during the XIX Conference of the CPSU, in 1988, he would recognize that the old model, built during the Stalinist period, had also distorted the course of Soviet foreign policy, leading the country toward a scenario of confrontation and tension:

[...] drawing lessons from the past, we are forced to recognize that command-administrative methods have also not spared foreign policy. It even happened that the most important decisions were made by a restricted

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<sup>42</sup> GORGACHEV, 1993, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> GORBACHEV, 1986, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> GORBACHEV, 1986, p. 101.

circle of people, without collective analysis and examination [...] This generated inadequate reactions to international events and the policies of other states, and even wrong decisions.<sup>45</sup>

In pragmatic terms, the new foreign policy implemented led to an effective reduction in tensions and to the improvement of diplomatic relations, especially between Moscow and Washington. Several summits were held between the leaders of the two countries, resulting in the signing of agreements and treaties, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) in 1987, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) in 1991. But it was perhaps during the process of deconstructing communist regimes in Eastern Europe, beginning in 1989, that the new Soviet foreign policy underwent its greatest test.

In previous decades, popular mobilizations critical of regimes in Eastern Europe had been severely repressed, sometimes with the intervention of Soviet troops, as in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). In the face of a new wave of protests, conservative sectors in the USSR and the Eastern European countries themselves were pressing Moscow to use the Red Army again. However, Gorbachev opted for not intervening militarily, which in practice determined the fall of those regimes. Accused of having abandoned his allies and allowed the defeat of socialism abroad, he himself questioned the nature and legitimacy of those regimes, while reinforcing his belief in self-determination:

Profound changes are taking place in Eastern Europe. When they say it is a “failure of socialism,” we ask another question — Which socialism? The one that was, in fact, part of Stalin’s authoritarian-bureaucratic system which we refuse to accept? [...] Yes, there is the question where those countries are heading in their socioeconomic development. But it is a question of choice by the people themselves. We have acted and will act strictly guided by the principle of freedom of choice, which has become an indispensable condition for the progress and survival of all modern civilization.<sup>46</sup>

Faced with this new reality, Gorbachev argued that Europe should take

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<sup>45</sup> INSTITUT TEORII I ISTORII SOTSIALIZMA TsK KPSS, 1991, p. 83.

<sup>46</sup> INSTITUT TEORII I ISTORII SOTSIALIZMA TsK KPSS, 1991, p. 83.

advantage of the fall of the “Iron Curtain” to advance a process of integration of the continent, the formation of a common European home, of which the USSR could be a member. Even with the reduction of tensions and the end of the Cold War, he pointed out that new problems were emerging on the global scale, such as the strengthening of nationalist movements, the growth of social inequality, environmental problems, and economic selfishness. All of this required a new form of interaction between countries on the international stage, guided free debate and joint efforts.<sup>47</sup>

After leaving the Kremlin, Gorbachev kept his defense of forums for dialogue and joint decision-making in international relations, which would allow for the construction of relations based on cooperation and mutual respect. In this sense, he reinforced the role of international organizations and regimes, but considered that although many of these tasks were already delegated to several of these bodies, they lacked the strength to enforce international law and collective decisions.<sup>48</sup> Thus, he highlighted the need for changes in these bodies, to expand their internal democracy and their legitimacy, following the example of the reform of the UN Security Council.

The globalization process would also be a recurring theme in Gorbachev’s speeches and publications in the post-Perestroika period. As an advocate for advancing interdependence and cooperation on the international arena, he claimed that this process had opened positive opportunities, but also pointed out that globalization had brought about an economic opening that favored the great powers and widened inequalities between countries.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, he considered it essential that global politics and economics move away from hegemonic or unipolar claims, especially on the part of the Americans, and opt for a more just and balanced model.<sup>50</sup>

Gorbachev also repeatedly criticized those who saw the end of the Cold War and the Soviet decline as a simple victory by the West. According to him, the initiative in these processes had been taken by the Soviets and the consequences significantly affected the capitalist world. For Gorbachev, the Western powers, especially the United States, seemed to want to take advantage of the crisis experienced by Russia in the 1990s. The antagonistic mentality still had not been overcome, which was revealed in the maintenance of a policy based on the use of force and old prejudices. In that sense, he criticized the process of dissolving Yugoslavia and the expansion of NATO, a movement considered hostile to Russia.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> GORBACHEV, 2006b, p. 24.

<sup>48</sup> GORBACHEV, 2003, p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> GORBACHEV, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> GORBACHEV, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 675.

From the 2000s onward, under the leadership of Putin, it is possible to perceive a fine tuning of the last Soviet leader in relation to the foreign policy adopted by the Kremlin. Contrary to domestic politics, in which Gorbachev's support for Putin was gradually deconstructed, at the international level he mostly defended Russian initiatives. Gorbachev questioned the change in attitude of the Western powers, which during the 1990s supported the Yeltsin government even in the face of his authoritarian outbursts, but who now turned against Putin. According to him, this was the result of geopolitical interests, which intended to keep Russia confined to a minor role on the global stage:

Today, Russia is often criticized, accused of repressing the media and reversing democracy. However, few people pay attention to this fact: when the country's foundations were rocked during Yeltsin's tenure in office, the West applauded. And this, despite the 1993 shelling of the Parliament building, the "elections without choice" in 1996, the bureaucratic-oligarchic control over the media, the total restriction on freedom of expression in the regions, the difficult situation of most of the population.

Criticism intensified when Russia started to rise again. And this criticism — sometimes justified, but often hasty and unacceptably harsh — is accompanied by far-reaching generalizations. They say that Russia is inherently incapable of dominating democratic principles and procedures, of creating a civil society, of abandoning "imperial ambitions" and, therefore, of getting closer to the West.

I cannot agree with this reasoning. This is the usual propaganda. But, in fact, Russia belongs to the group of countries where the democratic transition takes place.<sup>52</sup>

In practical terms, Gorbachev aligned himself with Russian foreign policy at very controversial times. In 2008, he defended Russia's intervention in Georgia because of South Ossetia, a territory marked by ethnic conflicts and which had been under Tbilisi's jurisdiction since the end of the USSR.<sup>53</sup> Later, he also favored Russian action in the Syrian War in support of the Bashar al-Assad government, and in protection of the Russian ethnic

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<sup>52</sup> GORBACHEV, 2006c.

<sup>53</sup> GORBACHEV, 2008b.

minority in Ukrainian territory, especially in the Donbass and Crimea regions.<sup>54</sup>

Gorbachev's assent to Russian foreign policy was met with surprise by a large part of the foreign public, accustomed to his pacifist and diplomatic role in international relations when he was at the head of the Kremlin. However, if we look closely at the positions of the former Soviet leader, we note that he remained quite consistent: although he maintained his discourse in favor of cooperation, Gorbachev considered that the Western powers had not yet overcome the dichotomy of the previous period and held Russia as an enemy. A constructive relationship between the parties would take place only when both sides put aside the typical Cold War mentality, focusing on opportunities for collaboration and mutually beneficial exchanges.

### *Between continuity and change*

This brief overview of Mikhail Gorbachev's different positions before, during and after Perestroika allows us to identify crucial elements of continuity and change in his thinking as one of the most influential political actors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the four dimensions presented, it is possible to verify the gradual evolution of his ideas based on the experiences he had in his political trajectory.

A closer look at Gorbachev's texts and speeches in the 1960s and 1970s does not reveal remarkable features of dissonance or clearly foreshadow his future reformist discourse, but on the contrary reveals an alignment with the official ideology and the assumptions of the Soviet regime. Given the nature of the regime, a local leader was not expected to be free to directly criticize the pillars of the system independently. Still, the views of the young Gorbachev help us understand his rise to the central core of Soviet power.

At the same time, it was his rather assertive and critical stance within the limits of the system that caught the attention of the central authorities and led him to Moscow. Gorbachev's experience and experiments in the local sphere, which he himself defined as his "little Perestroika," acquainted him with the day-to-day grassroots challenges faced by the system. Moreover, his travels abroad put him in contact with other realities, expanding his vision and reflection on sensitive issues such as foreign policy, ideology, democracy and economics.

It is not right to say that the Gorbachev who took over the General Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1985 was a fierce critic of the Soviet system. His positions, in line with his decisions, indicated that

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<sup>54</sup> GORBACHEV, 2016a, pp. 399-404.

the Soviet leader maintained the belief in the fundamental values and assumptions of the system, although he was aware of the need for changes in the functioning of the political and economic management model. Such conception was not something absolutely original, given the discussions about the need for reforms within the system that had taken place in the 1950s (under Khrushchev), 1960s (under Kosygin) and in the 1980s (with Andropov's economic experiments).

The unfolding of Perestroika should not be confused with the evolution of Gorbachev's thinking. Even in an authoritarian regime, the decisions and policies adopted are not the result of individual work, but rather constitute a product of negotiations and debate between different political forces. In the case of the political and economic reforms of Perestroika, these forces responded to disputes and stimuli which came from both inside and outside the USSR, since the international arena both influenced and responded to the reformist movement led by Gorbachev.

Gorbachev's positions after leaving the Kremlin partly confirm what has been said so far. Even after the end of the USSR, Gorbachev did not definitively break with socialism, much less became an exponent of neoliberalism. On the contrary, Gorbachev consolidated himself as a politician and thinker with a social-democratic worldview, looking for an intermediate path between the models that opposed each other throughout the 20th century. He also maintained his defense of democracy but did not see it as a unique and pre-conceived model, emphasizing the need to adapt it to the social and historical realities and specificities of each country.

Mikhail Gorbachev was and remains a crucial figure in the development of the processes that marked the end of the 20th century and the transition to a new world order. Seeing the former Soviet leader as a thinker in his own right is not a common approach in our present historiography, but is heuristically justified. The analysis of the evolution of his ideas *per se* can provide important insights to better understand the larger political, economic and social processes experienced by the USSR in its last years.

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## Haxthausen and Herzen on the Russian Rural Commune (1847-1854)

Camilo Domingues\*

‘We waited until the arrival of a German to be recommended to Europe. Should we not be ashamed?’<sup>1</sup> With this remark Herzen instigated the Russian readers in the introduction of his *From the Other Shore*.<sup>2</sup> The German he referred to was August von Haxthausen, the author of *Studien über die inneren Zustände, das Volksleben, und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands* (1847-1852). Herzen underscored in several works that Haxthausen had been the first to bring to light the Russian rural commune. The French historian Jules Michelet claimed that Haxthausen did to the ‘Russia of the people’ (‘the real Russia’) what Christopher Columbus did to America.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding Herzen’s and Michelet’s remarks, Haxthausen had not been the first to identify and describe the Russian rural commune. According to Stephen Frederick Starr, around thirty foreign travelers had already published reports on Russia before Haxthausen’s own journey to the country.<sup>4</sup> Ezequiel Adamovsky adds that among these at least three had briefly recorded the existence of the communal institution: Adrien-César Égron, in his *Vie d’Alexandre I* (1826); Baron Alfred Renouard de Bussierre, *Voyage en Russie* (1831); and Baron Prosper de Barante, *Notes sur la Russie* (written between 1835 and 1840).<sup>5</sup> The two volumes of Ivan N. Boltin’s *Primechaniya na istoriyu drevniya i nyneshniya Rossii* (1788) had also been circulating since the 18th century in Russia. In spite of these precedent works, Starr and Adamovsky testified to the fact that Haxthausen was the first to carry out a study on the Russian commune that was both detailed and capable of bringing it into the sphere of the European thought.

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\* Camilo Domingues is a LEA researcher. He is a postdoctoral fellow in the Graduate Program in History at the Fluminense Federal University, under the supervision of Professor Daniel Aarão Reis Filho. E-mail: camilodomingues@hotmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, Moscow, 1954-1966, Vol. 6, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Second edition (in Russian), published in 1858 in London. It was firstly published in 1850 (in German) as *Vom anderen Ufer*. Ibid., p. 486-487.

<sup>3</sup> Jules Michelet, *Les Légendes Démocratiques du Nord*, Paris, 1895, pp. 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Frederick Starr, ‘Introduction’, in August von Haxthausen, *Studies on the interior of Russia*, Chicago, 1972, p. xxii.

<sup>5</sup> Ezequiel Adamovsky, ‘Russia as the land of communism in the nineteenth century?’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, Vol. 45, N° 3-4 (2004), p. 498. Astolphe de Custine’s controversial work, *La Russie en 1839*, was still in press.

Haxthausen's *Studien* highlighted and systematized the basic elements of the Russian rural commune, such as its patriarchal organization, common ownership and equal distribution of land, democratic institutions of deliberation and administration, as well as its proto-republican character. Herzen, who met the German author in the same year of his arrival in Russia in 1843, was impressed by the extent of his knowledge about the Slavic communes. The *Studien* became a pivotal reference for him as soon as the first two volumes were published in 1847. He forged his own understanding of the Russian communal organization through them, despite his criticisms of the work's historical and political content, and of its author's conservative outlook. As argued by Franco Venturi and Andrzej Walicki, Herzen's comprehension of the commune, derived from Haxthausen's work, was crucial for the development of his ideas on Russian socialism and populism.<sup>6</sup>

The publication of the third and final volume of the *Studien* in 1852, in which Haxthausen praised the government of Tsar Nicholas I, aroused Herzen's brief but harsh discontent with it. However, just two years later, he wrote that Russians owed their knowledge of the Russian commune to Haxthausen's work. It was a peremptory and definitive confirmation of the place it held in Russian and European social thought.

This essay aims to identify the role of Haxthausen's *Studien* in fostering Herzen's thought about the Russian rural commune between 1847 and 1854. This period surrounds the publication of Haxthausen's three volumes and of Herzen's main articles on the Russian commune. It is also the period when the Russian thinker most often interacted with the observations and ideas proposed by the German's work. As a conclusion, we propose that there was a clear relationship between Herzen's ideas on the Russian rural commune and those of Haxthausen's, but that the scope of both authors' works on the subject was not limited to this reciprocal relationship. Certainly, they both shared common knowledge — often from the same source — about the history of the state and serfdom in Russia. However, each of them also enjoyed access to exclusive sources, which allowed for divergence in their approach. Above all, their personal experiences were not the same. That is why we will initially provide short biographical sketches of both authors in order to understand what their lives can tell us about their theoretical and political choices.

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<sup>6</sup> Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, New York, 1960, pp. 63-89; Andrzej Walicki, *The Flow of Ideas Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance*, Frankfurt am Main, 2015, pp. 251-273. See also Henri Granjar, 'Alexandre Herzen à la croisée des chemins (1842-1846)', *Revue des études slaves*, Vol. 35, N° 1-4 (1958), pp. 57-76.

## Haxthausen and his interest in the Russian rural commune

August von Haxthausen was born in his family's estate in Westphalia in 1792.<sup>7</sup> He was the youngest son of a noble Catholic and conservative family. In 1807, after the Napoleonic invasion, Jérôme Bonaparte became king of Westphalia. The Haxthausen brothers opposed the innovations of the Napoleonic Code (such as the liberation of the serfs and payment of tribute to the new king), finding in the German romanticism movement a way to fight against these measures. Haxthausen and two of his sisters were close to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and, in the spirit of the Romantic Movement, studied and collected tales and traditional folk songs. Even during the liberation wars in 1814, Haxthausen collected tales from the soldiery. The peasants' resistance to the French occupation and their willingness to fight against it, which preceded that of German nobility itself, made his romantic commitment to peasant traditions even stronger.<sup>8</sup>

Haxthausen joined the University of Göttingen in 1815. He wrote for student magazines and actively participated in nationalist groups dedicated to the study of traditional German art and culture. One of those magazines, *Die Wünschelruthe* ('The Magic Wand') was sponsored by an ardently nationalist freemasonry society, *Die poetische Schustergild*. Haxthausen also devoted himself to the study of laws and became acquainted with the works of Edmund Burke and Friedrich Savigny. He came to the understanding that only a legislation spontaneously originated from social experience was legitimate. He favored fieldwork, archival research and statistics over theoretical speculations. As a consequence of his own interpretation of historical jurisprudence, a kind of organic theory of society, Haxthausen argued that legislative changes should arise from local experiences and demands. They should neither be imported from abroad nor imposed artificially. Such a view was also a sign of resistance against the imposition of the Napoleonic Code on Westphalia.

After he completed his studies in 1818, Haxthausen devoted himself to writing articles in conservative journals in defense of the Catholic religion and of the restoration of traditional patriarchal values. He was an ardent opponent of Enlightenment ideas, criticized the deification of reason and the

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, this biographical sketch follows Stephen Frederick Starr, 'August von Haxthausen and Russia', *Slavonic and East European Review*, N° 44 (July 1968), pp. 462-78; and also Starr, op. cit., 1972, pp. vii-xlii.

<sup>8</sup> See also Ezequiel Adamovsky, 'Russia as a Space of Hope: Nineteenth-century French Challenges to the Liberal Image of Russia', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 33. N° 4 (2003), pp. 411-449.

attempt to legislate formalistically, non-organically over society. According to him, the new liberal generation wanted to artificially impose a new social organization contrary to traditional religious and cultural principles. Only the peasants had kept themselves away from these ideas and preserved the moral Christian values. Thus Haxthausen advocated the need for the nobility to turn to the people.

In 1829, he published the results of his study on the 'Agrarian Constitution of Paderborn and Corvey' after conducting an extensive research on the social and economic conditions of the region where he was born.<sup>9</sup> This text was a turning point in the young Westphalian's career. The Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm IV took notice of his work, honored him with the *Geheimer Regierungsrath* title and invited him to carry out broader research throughout the Prussian territory. His task was to propose legislative changes for the reform of the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (1795) while protecting the peasant traditions.<sup>10</sup> He was supposed to manage fieldwork and analyze local land laws.

Haxthausen's survey lasted throughout the 1830s and faced resistance from parliamentarians, bureaucrats and landlords. His lack of political experience, his traditionalist approach and his concern with the ethnological and cultural aspects of the communities and regions he studied did not please the nobility and the government. Opposition to his work reached a final impasse in 1840 due both to his slowness in finishing it and to his intrusion on religious and political issues. For instance, politicians loathed his opposition to the constitutional movement in Prussia. Finally, parliamentarians withdrew their support for the continuation of his research. In 1842, he petitioned the resumption of his work directly to Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who however did not authorize the request. Haxthausen was formally discharged on May 1842 with a generous pension.

While carrying out his fieldwork, Haxthausen noted that a traditional type of Slavic communal organization survived in some regions. In such places, the traditional Germanic rural communes, *Gemeinden*, were preserved even after the liberation of the serfs that followed the introduction of the Napoleonic Code. According to Haxthausen, the communal organization was

a republic with a completely developed, self-contained constitution, of which an absolutely essential component is

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<sup>9</sup> August von Haxthausen, *Über die Agrarverfassung in den Fürstenthümern Paderborn und Corvey und deren Conflicte in der gegenwärtigen Zeit*, Berlin, 1829.

<sup>10</sup> T. K. Dennison and A. W. Carus, 'The Invention of the Russian Rural Commune: Haxthausen and the Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 46, N° 3 (September 2003), pp. 561-582.

that the individual *Genosse* (commune member) clearly does not own the authentic and true right of property in the field he cultivates, but only a possession of usufruct kind, within certain limits. Only the corporation, the commune, is the true owner. The commune members enjoy their shares as in a cooperative. [...] To each commune member a share of the communal assets [...], his share of gardens, arable fields, and meadows is allocated for a series of years, to work and to use. When that period of years is up, all his shares revert home to the commune, and new shares are measured out and allocated by lot.<sup>11</sup>

Haxthausen regarded the communal organization as having been organically developed, without state or bureaucracy interference. Its own survival was a proof of the possibility and legitimacy of an organic agrarian legislation in accordance with communal traditions. However, without the support of the Crown, Haxthausen could not continue his inquiry. Then, not by chance, the Russian Empire emerged as his new research field, in which he could resume his work and findings.<sup>12</sup>

On April 2 (14), 1842, Nicholas I published the decree on the serfs of the nobility, *obiazannye krest'iane*. According to the *ukaz*, the so-called private peasants could enjoy restricted freedom and work on land placed at their disposal (although it remained property of the nobility and the contractual agreement was at the noble's discretion). Albeit not far-reaching, Haxthausen considered the measure a possibility for improving the peasants' living conditions without disturbing the traditional communal organization. He published an enthusiastic article in the *Preussische Staatsanzeiger* on May 7, 1842, followed by reprintings in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*,<sup>13</sup> *Journal des Débats* and *The Times*. A copy of the article reached Tsar Nicholas I, who promptly sent a letter to its author inviting him to visit Russia.<sup>14</sup> Haxthausen

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<sup>11</sup> August von Haxthausen, *Über den Ursprung und die Grundlagen der Verfassung in den ehemals slavischen Ländern Deutschlands im Allgemeinen und dem Herzogthum Pommern im Besondern*, Berlin, 1842, pp. 24-25. Quoted by Dennison and Carus, *ibid.*, p. 566.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 565.

<sup>13</sup> In this newspaper the article was entitled "Der kaiserlich russische Ukas vom 2 (14) April 1842" and was published on May 13, 1842. Quoted by Dennison and Carus, *ibid.*, p. 567.

<sup>14</sup> Count Peter von Meyendorff, Russian ambassador to Prussia, probably intervened with the tsar. Meyendorff was an old friend of Haxthausen's and had not so long ago invited him to study the rural commune in Russia. The Minister of State

left Berlin in early March 1843, in search of an oasis of tradition, aristocratic patriarchy and religiosity in Russia.

As stated by Dennison and Carus, Haxthausen found in Russian lands the materialization of his previously conceived ideas about the rural commune: 'he found there just what rumour or hearsay had informed him still existed in the uplands of Trier — the original collective ownership of all property, and the regular redistribution of arable land among community members'.<sup>15</sup> Besides his predisposition to look at what he wanted to see, Haxthausen would have limitations on what he could see, since his travel plan had been prepared by the Russian government and the traveler was supposed to be accompanied by a representative of the Court and an interpreter (he spoke no Russian). Although he carried not a few letters of recommendation to provincial members of the nobility and bureaucracy, some of his sources in the journey were in advance constrained by censorship orders.<sup>16</sup>

On the Russian side, the main interest in Haxthausen's journey to the Empire was to promote the country to Western European audiences, especially in view of the negative report the French Astolphe de Custine was expected to publish after his own travel to Russia in 1839.<sup>17</sup> The agreement to publish the report of Haxthausen's journey simultaneously in German and French had been signed even before its beginning, with a privileged guarantee of not being censored by the tsar. Finally, as supposed by Count Meyendorff, perhaps Haxthausen's work could also point to viable ways to end serfdom in Russia.

After his arrival, Haxthausen spent a short time in St. Petersburg, leaving in April for his travel around the country. He traveled through European Russia, the Caucasus and the Crimea, returning to Moscow in late October. He remained there all winter, coming back to Berlin in April 1844. He spent approximately six months in the provinces, and another six months stationed in Moscow, where he attended local aristocratic and intellectual

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Domains, Count Pavel D. Kiselev, also worked to make Haxthausen's travel to Russia possible, as well as the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (Starr, op. cit., 1972, pp. xvii-xviii).

<sup>15</sup> Dennison and Carus, op. cit., p. 567.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Russian Chief of Police, Count Alexander von Benckendorff, despite having granted Haxthausen access to statistics and memos on the agrarian legislation and administration of the Empire, monitored the traveler's steps. 15 years after the end of his survey, Haxthausen was still watched by his Russian hosts (Starr, op. cit., 1972, pp. xviii-xix).

<sup>17</sup> Astolphe de Custine, *La Russie en 1839*, 4 vols., Paris, 1843. Before 1843, Marquis de Custine had already published some excerpts from the material of his future book.

salons, especially those of the Slavophile circles. He met, among other Russian intellectuals, the young Konstantin S. Aksakov, Herzen, the historian Mikhail P. Pogodin, as well as the philosopher Pyotr I. Chaadayev. Back in Berlin, Haxthausen took three years to publish the first two volumes of his *Studien über die inneren Zustände, das Volksleben, und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands*, published in German only in 1847 (the third and final volume came to light in 1852).<sup>18</sup>

In his *Studien*, Haxthausen argued that the Slavic peoples of Serbia, Bulgaria and Russia shared a form of social organization that, although very similar to the European *Gemeinde*, had unique features: the *Commune*. Among those features, he underscored the absence of state interference in its constitution, the patriarchal organization and communal land ownership.

Despite the Russian aristocracy and nobility having adopted the manners of the Western civilization, the rural commune was kept away from this influence, leaving its traditional forms of organization untouched. Until the Petrine reforms, Haxthausen looked at the Russian commune as ‘a well-organized free republic’.<sup>19</sup> According to him, Russia’s origins go back to a particular patriarchal state, based on the centrality of the family:

The family is the national microcosm: in it reigns a perfect equality of rights; so long as it remains united, the father is the head of the family, on his death the eldest son succeeds, and has the entire disposal of all the property, and assigns arbitrarily the part which reverts to each member. The Commune is the family enlarged. The land belongs to the family or commune; each individual has only a claim to usufruct, to which all persons born in the Commune have an equal right. The land therefore is equally divided among

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<sup>18</sup> August von Haxthausen, *Studien über die inneren Zustände, das Volksleben, und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands*, vols. I e II, Hannover, 1847; vol. III, Berlin, 1852. French edition: *Études sur la situation intérieure, la vie nationale et les institutions rurales de la Russie*, vols. I e II, Hannover, 1848; vol. III, Berlin, 1853. English abridged editions: *The Russian Empire, Its People, Institutions and Resources*, 2 vols., London, 1856; and *Studies on the interior of Russia*, Chicago, 1972. Some excerpts were firstly translated into Russian by Nikolai Chernyshevsky in the 7<sup>th</sup> issue, 1857, of the *Sovremennik, The Contemporary*. The first volume was completely translated into Russian only in 1869: *Issledovaniia vnutrennikh otoshenii narodnoi zhizni i v osobennosti sel'skikh uchrezhdenii Rossii*, Moscow, 1869 (translated by L. I. Ragozin). The 1856 English abridged edition is used in this essay.

<sup>19</sup> Haxthausen, 1856, vol. 1, p. 109.

all who live upon it, to be temporarily occupied by them.<sup>20</sup>

Haxthausen stated that the communal family microcosm, with no hierarchical relationship other than the patriarchal one, reproduced itself in all layers of Russian society. Then in the same way as the father for the family, or the *starosta* (the elder) for the commune, the tsar was the unquestioned leader of the nation. His power accepted neither control nor limits, except those originated from a divine force. Haxthausen concluded, therefore, that despite the fact that on the international stage the Russian tsar was a monarch like other nations' sovereigns, on the domestic stage his role went beyond that of a monarch. He was the father of the Russian nation and people, who respectfully and devoutly called him *batiushka*, just as the sons called the household heads, and the peasants designated the elder of each commune.

Haxthausen also designated the Russian rural commune as *Mir*. For him, although its meaning was similar to the Germanic *Gemeinde*, or to the Latin *Communitas*, the concepts they embrace were not equivalent. In addition to denoting the idea of a social group living in the same place and under the same jurisdiction, the word *Mir* added a sacred meaning to the traditional concept of rural commune. *Mir* encompassed the idea of the commune and the World, or what Haxthausen designated by the Greek word *Cosmos*.<sup>21</sup> The peasant, or *muzhik*, being part of the *Mir*, reproduced and celebrated the patriarchal and hierarchical relations of that (*micro*-)cosmos. And despite the existence of a traditional and unquestionable hierarchical line formed by father – *starosta* – landlord – tsar – divinity, Haxthausen believed that complete equality prevailed among the peasants.<sup>22</sup>

For the Westphalian traveler, 'the principle of the communal institutions prevails throughout the Empire, being based upon the fundamental character of the Slavonic race, and having grown naturally out of the individuality of the Russian people'.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, although he himself advocated the end of serfdom in Russia, Haxthausen argued that it should happen without jeopardizing the organic communal organization and without any interference from an enlightened but artificial bureaucracy: 'Here, if anywhere, we would

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 229. See also Adamovsky, op. cit., 2004, pp. 497-519.

<sup>22</sup> The equality among the peasants within the communal organization did not cancel out its power of control over each individual. According to Haxthausen, 'everywhere we meet the despotic power of the Communes in Russia, – all submit to it' (Haxthausen, op. cit., 1856, vol. 1, p. 210). See also: Starr, op. cit., 1968, p. 472.

<sup>23</sup> Haxthausen, op. cit., 1856, vol. 2, p. 233.

warn against too much unnecessary government'.<sup>24</sup>

Generally, the communal microcosm of the Russian and Slavic peoples was organized in an equal way through periodic distributions of land among married men, widowers or widows. The principle, according to Haxthausen's observations, was that the entire land belonged to the commune and each married man had the right to an equal part of the arable land and prairies (divided in accordance with differences in soil fertility, geographical position, land value and extension of the lot). Upon a peasant's death, his plot of land was returned to the commune to be redistributed in the next period. Depending on the region or landowner, the areas of pasture and forests could be divided or maintained as common use areas. The land distribution among the peasants took place in assemblies open to all its members and disputes never happened.<sup>25</sup>

A corollary of the family and communal structure of the Russian peasantry, which was both patriarchal and egalitarian, was the absence of a proletariat. Since each individual was linked to the rural commune, and since he was assigned a parcel of land, there could not be individuals without any means of subsistence. 'A man may lose or squander all he possesses, but his children do not inherit his poverty: they still retain their claim upon the land, by a right not derived from him, but from their birth as members of the Commune'.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if there was no proletariat, there would be no

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 119-120. Most of the remarks on the organization of the Russian rural commune refers to the province of Yaroslavl. They can be found in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the first volume of the 1856 English abridged edition of Haxthausen's *Studien* (chapters 5, 6 and 7 in the 1847 German edition). These chapters, despite presenting important details about the communal organization, make up only a small part of the whole work. Haxthausen also described different forms of communal organization in other Russian provinces. For instance, there were regions in which the division of land was enacted by the landlord and not by the commune (Kazan); others in which the majority of the peasants were free and did not have to pay *obrok* (Tambov and Saratov); or where a system of temporary land parceling (*polovnichestvo*) was held (Vologda); and still provinces in which important trade fairs, as well as urban and industrial centers had already emerged (Kharkov and the city of Ivanovo, the "Russian Manchester"). Thus, Haxthausen's *Studien*, taken as a whole, proposes a more dynamic and complex panorama than that suggested by Tracy Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom*, Cambridge, 2011; or by Dennison and Carus, op. cit., 2003, pp. 561-582. Notwithstanding, these two authors point out important empirical deficiencies in Haxthausen's work. They demonstrate, for example, based on documentation from the Yaroslavl region, that there were numerous administrative and judicial disputes motivated by the division of land among the peasants at the time, contrary to what Haxthausen stated in his *Studien*.

<sup>26</sup> Haxthausen, op. cit., 1856, vol. 1, p. 124.

struggles against wealth and property. According to Haxthausen, the European socialist utopia, which he related to Saint-Simon's ideas, was already a reality in Russia and was embedded in the peasant social organization. He adds that there were advantages to the Russian communal organization over Saint-Simonianism. While the last doctrine was anarchic, 'unchristian, untrue, and atheistical', the Russian commune was a proof that a Christian monarchy could coexist with a social state.

Russia has thus nothing to fear from the revolutionary tendencies which threaten the rest of Europe. Its own internal healthy organization protects it against pauperism, and the doctrines of communism and socialism. In the other modern states, pauperism and proletarianism are the festering sores to which the present condition of society has given birth. Can they be healed? The communistic doctors propose, as a preliminary step, the destruction of the present organization, as new buildings can be best erected upon a *tabula rasa*. But death never produces life. One thing however is certain, if these people succeed in carrying on their schemes, the result will be not a political but a social revolution, a war against all property, and complete anarchy. Will new states then be constituted, and upon what basis, moral and social? Who can raise the veil of the future? And what course will Russia then take?<sup>27</sup>

The nobility, on the other hand, as stated by Haxthausen, did not belong to the same Slavic race as the peasants. It was just a very small class before the reign of Peter I. Haxthausen objected to artificial or non-organic legislation and bureaucratic methods, such as Peter I's *Tabel' o rangakh* (1722). According to him, the *Table of Ranks* favored an anonymous, bureaucratic urban nobility which was independent from the Sovereign and based solely on merit at the expense of the traditional landowning nobility. Such an artificial and quite often foreign nobility did not relate to the peasantry and was estranged from the communal tradition, so that the endeavor to modernize the Empire was based on civilizing principles alien to the Russian people.<sup>28</sup>

Moscow's industrialization process was also the result of political measures that did not take into account aspects of the local economy and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 132, 135. Author's italics.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-112.

culture. According to Haxthausen, the accelerated industrialization of Moscow, among other problems, raised city wages and depressed agricultural prices, including land rent. Thus, without being able to survive on wage labor, the peasants could find no other way out but serfdom. At the same time, there was a manufacturing system within the rural communes based on its communal organization, which formed a national industrial association not opposed to customs and agrarian laws. According to Haxthausen, this *organic* industrialization should be privileged over Moscow's accelerated but artificial industrialization. Only the communal manufacturing association (or *artel*) could make the development of the national industry possible without neither competing with agriculture nor pressuring wages and prices in the meantime. It alone could lead to the end of serfdom while preserving traditional communal institutions and preventing the formation of an impoverished and potentially insurgent proletariat.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as Haxthausen stated, the socialistic Saint-Simon's dream for all Europe had already come true in Russian provinces.

Haxthausen considered the Orthodox Church to be the crux of the integration of all segments and institutions of Russian society. On the other hand, the Church was responsible for Russia's cultural and political distance from the rest of European nations. Ultimately, the Orthodox religion prevented Russia from participating in the historical events that merged the European nations around a single German-Latin-Roman Christian identity, such as the Crusades and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Therefore, Russia had refrained from sharing the same practices and values of European civilization. According to Haxthausen, in Western Europe,

The Church itself became the guardian of civilization, the teacher of the sciences; her unity gave uniformity to all efforts in that direction; all the peoples whom the Western Patriarchate embraced were alike affected and influenced by it. [...] It received Christianity from the Eastern Church at a time when the latter, if not entirely fallen away from the Western Church, at all events assumes a hostile attitude toward it. Russia therefore kept apart from the rest of

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Haxthausen defended the need for industrialization in Russia, as long as there was a seasonal rotation between agricultural and industrial activities in the provinces. The relationship between industrial serfs and their masters should be regulated on a legal basis in order to protect the communal organization and to avoid the emergence of a revolutionary proletariat. For him, 'how to dissolve and re-model serfage, without exciting a great social revolution, is the important question of the day' (Ibid., p. 112).

Despite its distance from the Roman Church and the Western civilization, the Orthodox religion had not penetrated Russian territory less than Catholicism had done on Europe. According to Haxthausen, nationalism and religiosity were the two fundamental principles – or *feelings* – constituting the Russian character.

Nevertheless, Haxthausen also identified some threats to Russian Orthodoxy, both from within the institution, the schismatic old believers, as well as from the outside, the countless sects criticizing the official Church's liturgy. These sects did not accept the fact that, in order to Christianize the heathens at the beginning of its spreading in the old Rus', the Orthodox Church made what they called *sensualist* concessions in its worship. Those alleged distortions had brought about Church's moral ruin and its neglect to the true religious asceticism or to 'the pure spiritual essence of Christianity'.<sup>31</sup>

Haxthausen was concerned with the radicalism of these modern sects, which was rapidly spreading and endangering the hegemony of national Orthodoxy. According to him, both schismatics and sectarians posed a risk of a religious revolution within Orthodoxy, and of a social and political revolution throughout the Empire, since the Church was fully subordinated to the state. As a conservative Catholic, Haxthausen feared the eruption of Protestant-style religious reform in Russia. Thus, against this threat, he recommended the deepening of Orthodox theological studies and the strengthening of ecclesiastical institutions, just as the Roman Catholic Church had done in the 16th century.<sup>32</sup> Only in this way the Orthodox Church could survive and Russia could succeed in its divine mission of spreading Christianity throughout the world. 'Russia, by her power, extent, and position between Europe and Asia, by her already acquired and still to be acquired European civilization, alone renders it possible for this culture, and in its train Christianity, slowly but permanently to penetrate into the interior of Asia'.<sup>33</sup>

But, according to Haxthausen, Russia's only partial integration to Western Europe was due not exclusively to its adherence to the Orthodox Church. Some particular events in its history, such as the struggle against the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, the Orthodox Church should approach the Roman Church in order to protect both the Christianity and the Empire. As noted by Starr, it was a proposal similar to those Chaadayev had advanced in his philosophical letters. Starr, op. cit., 1968, p. 475.

<sup>33</sup> Haxthausen, op. cit., 1856, vol. 2, p. 255.

Polovtsian invasions in the 12th century, and also the Mongol invasion in the middle of the 13th century (that lasted until 1480) contributed to its isolation. Russia was prevented from entering the fraternity of European nations due to its own geographical position, as the country is an intermediary between Europe and Asia. Being engaged in containing the hordes from the east, they kept themselves far away from the civilization of the west.

Finally, another reason for the distance between Russia and the Western civilization was its lack of a civil society. Haxthausen believed that a 'class of citizens' had been responsible for introducing the spirit of corporation and the bourgeois ethos in the West. However, he also believed that the character of the Slavic peoples was averse to the formation of such a class. The Russian national character tended to neglect the spirit of corporation in favor of the spirit of association.

The corporations were exclusivist in their activity and affiliation, and consisted of free artisans and proletarianized individuals without any other means for their livelihood. The associations, on the contrary, had open and voluntary affiliation, and consisted of individuals from the same commune. The industrial commune (*artel*) was the best example: manufacturing production was organized by families specialized in a particular product, without losing sight of the principles of communal ownership. Such an organization prevented both the formation of a dispossessed class and a class of free artisans. Thus, being deprived of this lower class of citizens, Russia could not form a civil society, which Haxthausen regarded as fundamental to promote the country's progress toward civilization.

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Haxthausen's *Studien* achieved great success in Europe. The work pleased a variety of readers, from conservatives (e.g., Nicholas I) to revolutionaries like Mikhail Bakunin. Even after the publication of its third and last volume in German (1852) and in French (1853), Haxthausen kept himself in contact with members of the Russian elite and worked on Russian state issues. As of 1847, he hosted and corresponded with German and Russian officials interested in merging the Orthodox and Roman Churches, the so-called *Petruswerk* society.

In the meantime, he became perhaps the most influential foreigner taking part in the discussion and elaboration of the terms of the Emancipation Act of 1861. He established indirect contact with Tsar Alexander II through connections he maintained with Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna and with high-level officials. He unquestionably contributed to the final decision on the liberation of the serfs in Russia. At the invitation of Elena Pavlovna, Haxthausen also participated in the 'Karlovka project' in 1857, an

experimental initiative for the liberation of the serfs at the Grand Duchess' property in Karlovka, province of Poltava. Haxthausen was the mind behind the project, and expressed his ideas on the emancipation of the serfs through memoranda to Elena Pavlona. At the end of June 1857, the third of his memoranda, in which he expressed his concern at the slow pace of the emancipation, fell into the hands of the tsar. Haxthausen warned that there were rumors that the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini, along with other British revolutionaries, was hopeful for social revolution in Russia. Alexander II, quite alarmed by his memorandum, acted so that the process of emancipation of the serfs hastened its pace.

Even after the Emancipation Act of 1861, Haxthausen went on working on the Alexandrian reforms. In 1865, for instance, he concluded a study on the feasibility of a constitutional reform that would not endanger the monarchy. His great political interest in keeping his relationship with the Russian Empire stemmed from his belief that it still preserved a reservoir of traditionalism and religiosity for Western Europe. At the same time, he believed that Russia provided a model of social organization free from risks of revolutionary outbursts. Haxthausen, who perhaps had never forgotten Napoleon's assault on his family's rights and property in 1807, made of his work in Russia a barricade to prevent a new French Revolution.

### **Haxthausen's concept of the Russian rural commune in Herzen's work**

Haxthausen visited Moscow for the first time between May 2 (14) and May 12 (24), 1843. The day after his departure to Yaroslavl, Alexander Herzen recorded his meeting with him in his diary:

Baron Haxthausen and Kosegarten<sup>34</sup> are travelers from Prussia who are engaged in the research of Slavic tribes and especially in the life and situation of the peasants in Europe. I had occasion to speak with Haxthausen. I was surprised by his clear view on the life of our peasants, the power of the landlords, the zemstvo police and administration in general. He considers the communal life [*obshchinnost'*] as an important element that has survived from ancient times, and that in some way it needs to be developed in accordance with the requirements of the time, etc. He does not consider individual liberation with or without land useful, [as] it

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Wilhelm Kosegarten was a German economist and political scientist, who accompanied Haxthausen on his travel to Russia.

opposes a single and weak family to all the terrible oppression of the zemstvo police, *das Beamtenwesen ist gräßlich in Rußland*.<sup>35</sup>

Soon after, Herzen criticized Haxthausen's interest in establishing a rule, or a kind of 'algebraic formula', whose knowledge could point to a general understanding of the relationship between peasants and landlords. According to Herzen, considering the feasibility of such a formula was an 'absurd'. There were so many variables in the relationship between the peasant and the landlord in Russia, that it was impossible to reduce them to a general rule. After all, there was the 'miserable and random chance'. Clearly, such comments written by Herzen demonstrated that he had doubts about Haxthausen's ideas from the very beginning, although he sincerely looked up to his understanding of the Russian commune. Through his reaction against Haxthausen's attempt to elaborate theoretical models based on his observations, Herzen had in fact expressed his own aversion to theoretical and philosophical generalizations, a behavior quite in line with his contemporary criticism of Hegelian thought.

Four years later, on his first (and no return) trip to Western Europe, Herzen began to write his *Letters from France and Italy*. Meanwhile he wrote other letters apart from that selection. Some of them were sent 'To the Moscow friends'. In the letter dated August 2, 1848, for instance, Herzen commented on Haxthausen's work. He gladly informed his friends that the image of Russia was changing in Europe:

The hatred of Russian politics is great, but Russians are beginning to deserve more and more recognition and respect. They do not mistake us with the government. [Carl] Vogt himself said it, among other things, in the Frankf[urt] Assembly — the naturalist Vogt from Giessen, I know him a little; Haxthausen's books, the exemplars of Russian travelers — all this awakens a new concept. They stop looking at us from the point of view of the whip, snow and postal service [*pochtovaia ezda*]. We are considered to be socialists by tradition.<sup>36</sup>

The rejoicing tone in his letter to his Moscow friends shows that Herzen accepted – and included himself in – the representation Haxthausen

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<sup>35</sup> Written in German. It means: 'the civil service is awful in Russia'. Herzen, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 281. My italics.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 23, p. 90.

elaborated of Russians being socialists by tradition.

On July 30, 1850, Herzen again referred to his agreement with Haxthausen's *Studien* in a letter sent to his friend and poet Georg Herwegh. Herzen wrote about the penchant of the Slavs and Russians for imitating and embracing foreign standards. According to him, it was due to the very history of the Russian and Slavic peoples. In Russia, the attempt to implement the standards of the Western civilization from above had been simultaneous with the oppression of the people by the government. Since the beginning of the Saint Petersburg period Russians lived under the constant aegis of transition; therefrom their absorbing character. However, Herzen believed that, despite its transiency, their character also preserved the vigor and youth of the Russian race, which could ultimately lead them to communism:

I don't know why you speak of my patriotism. I know the Slavic race more than you do. [...] Like Haxthausen, I see the immense possibility of development and the vigorous youth of the race. As Fallmerayer,<sup>37</sup> I see that a war, a fight to the death with Russia is imminent and that old Europe will succumb. Custine spoke about it, Donoso Cortés<sup>38</sup> is convinced of it. [...] Russia] might as well evolve into the most complete communism just like she threw herself into Europeanism with Peter the Great.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the similarity between his conception and that of Haxthausen's on the vigor, freshness and the possibility of further development of the Slavic race, Herzen reached a conclusion avoided by his counterpart. In extolling the communal character of the Russian peasantry, Haxthausen was interested in what he saw as the superiority of an egalitarian society founded on religious, patriarchal and nationalistic values. He was particularly interested in the conservative character of the Russian commune and how this organization could free Russia from the formation of a proletariat and from a French-style social and political revolution.

Herzen was interested in just the opposite: how the young and vigorous spirit of the Slavic race could propel Russia beyond its conservative role as Europe's gendarme. Since he witnessed the failure of the 1848 revolutions,

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<sup>37</sup> Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer was a German traveler and historian. He was known for his staunch anti-Slavism and anti-Russianism.

<sup>38</sup> Juan Donoso Cortés was a Spanish politician and diplomat. He was an important European exponent of conservative and counterrevolutionary currents in 1848 and 1849.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., vol. 24, p. 127.

Herzen attributed to Russia, which was still unscathed in the scene of European uprisings, the mission of bringing Europe to communism. For both thinkers, the Russian commune was associated with a communist tradition, or rather a *communitarian* one, as seen by Haxthausen. However, while for the latter the communal tradition corresponded to the denial of the modern communist threat, for Herzen, it corresponded to its corroboration, or to the negation of the previous negation, in the best style of Hegelian dialectics.

On September 17, 1852, Herzen sent a letter to Maria Kasparovna Reichel, a close family friend, in which he stated that the third volume of Haxthausen's *Studien*, published that year, was 'profoundly interesting'.<sup>40</sup> However, two months later, on November 21, he wrote to Carl Vogt in order to inform him that 'now I have jotted down a fairly extensive note against Haxthausen and serfdom'.<sup>41</sup> On December 31, in a new correspondence to Maria Reichel, Herzen restated that he had written 'another long letter "*Sur le servage en Russie*", in which I lashed out against Haxthausen'.<sup>42</sup> So the last two letters expressed a contradictory tendency that remained in Herzen's next writings and comments on Haxthausen. On the one hand, the Russian author appreciated the contributions of the latter to the understanding of the rural commune and, on the other hand, he criticized — and, at times, lashed out against — the traveler and his reactionary and conservative positions.

In *Letters from France and Italy*, written between the years 1847 and 1851,<sup>43</sup> Herzen also dealt with the same subject of Haxthausen's *Studien*.<sup>44</sup>

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40 Ibid., p. 340.

41 Ibid., p. 363.

42 Ibid., p. 378.

43 *Letters from France and Italy* constitutes a set of correspondences in which Herzen reported the events that occurred in Europe between 1847 and 1851 to his Russian addressees. They are divided into four cycles: 'Letters from the Avenue Marigny' (four letters from Paris dated May 12 thru September 15, 1847), 'Letters from the Via del Corso' (four letters from Rome and Naples from December 1847 to March 3, 1848), 'Again in Paris' (three letters dated June 10, 1848 thru June 1, 1849) and a final group of three letters (from Nice, dated July 10, 1850 thru December 31, 1851), followed by an appendix, the 'Letter to C. Ribeyrolles, editor of the newspaper *L'Homme*' (from London, dated February 7, 1854). These letters — in part or as a whole — have been published in several editions since 1847. The first edition comprising the four cycles was published (in Russian) at the end of 1854 (dated 1855) in London. A second edition in Russian appeared in London in 1858, and is used in Herzen's *Sobranie Sochinenii* (and in this essay). So the letters here are identified with the same numbering as in Herzen, op. cit., vol. 5, pp. 7-224. See also: Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions of Europe in Classical Russian Travel Writing*, Netherlands, 2005, pp. 167-196; Lorena L. Miranda, *Identidade Nacional Russa na Literatura de Viagem de Dostoiévski e Herzen*, master's thesis, São Paulo,

Right from the first letter ('Letters from the Avenue Marigny', Paris, May 12, 1847), the author leads the readers through a long digression about Russia's relationship with the Western European civilization. In the meantime, while describing his passage through the Pskov province on his way to Paris, Herzen shares his impressions about the peasants of this region. According to him, they were more savage than those in the Moscow region, as they had not even begun their journey from patriarchy to civilization. They ignored the historical events of the last century and mechanically repeated their common work and destiny. But despite being historically kept away from the Western civilizational path, or thanks to it, Herzen still pinned his hopes for the development of Russia and all Europe on the peasants.

Herzen wrote once again about the condition of Russian peasants in the fifth letter ('Letters from the Via del Corso', Rome, December 1847). He narrated his crossing of the Provence region, when he left France toward Italy. He was dazzled by the natural landscape around Avignon, Nice and the Mediterranean Sea. However, he encountered high fences in the region, emblems of the boundaries between the properties. In front of one of them, which was made of stone, he lamented that that vision 'offends the eyes and hurts the Slavic soul', because it represented the perpetuation of private property. In Russia, on the contrary, the 'impudent audacity of property rights' did not prevail:

There is no Russian village in Europe. The village commune in Europe has only a police meaning. What do these scattered houses, fencing off each other, have in common? Everything in them is individual; they are united only by their common boundaries. What can there be in common between hungry workers, whom the commune provides *le droit de glaner*,<sup>45</sup> and wealthy landowners [*domokhozyaeva*]? Long live, gentlemen, the Russian village – its future is great.<sup>46</sup>

As Herzen himself said, he became a Russian in Western Europe. He recognized and valued the peculiarities of his people, and insistently related them to the communal organization. For Haxthausen, the *muzhik*, his family,

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2014, pp. 52-59.

<sup>44</sup> Derek Offord suggests that *Letters from France and Italy* were also a response to Custine's *La Russie en 1839* (published in 1843). Offord, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> Written in French. It means 'the right to glean', that is, the right to gather the corn left behind after the harvest.

<sup>46</sup> Herzen, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 74. My italics.

his Russian traditions and commune led him to a wished otherness. But for Herzen, on the contrary, the peasants of the Provence region – the Western Other – conducted him to his own people. Thus, despite the differences in the perception and reports of both travelers, the concept of the Russian rural commune they built while traveling in Russia or in Provence was quite similar. When faced with the high stone fences of the rural estates in Provence, Herzen saw the same as Haxthausen did in the less garnished Russian provinces: the communal property. It was the key to Russia's great future, according to Herzen, and to the prevention of a social revolution, according to Haxthausen.

After arriving in Italy, Herzen added, in his sixth letter ('Letters from the Via del Corso', Rome, February 4, 1848), that the Italians had saved themselves from the German discipline and from the French artificial state model thanks to their vocation to a certain subtle disorder, *besporiadchnost neulovimaia*. So the disorganized, careless, somewhat anarchic character of the Italian people had saved them from foreign pressure from France and Prussia. For Herzen, France had always acted through forced liberation. The Napoleonic invasion of the Italian peninsula — even though the French officials transformed the fragmented Italian nations into small republics, extinguished feudal rights, and granted some freedom of expression — had deteriorated the peninsula as a whole. Thus he stated that Republicans like Napoleon could never be able to free people from feudalism. Although it looked like liberation, it was in fact a new phase of slavery.

The Italian people was able to resist Napoleon in the long term because they did not reify the state, which they regarded as only an external form, and not as an abstract and ultimate goal as for the French. Herzen associated the Italian kind of instinctive political thought with a natural or organic concept of the state. Thus the similarity between Haxthausen's and Herzen's organic theory of society and state becomes evident. No less striking is that they both embraced it, to a certain extent, in reaction to an accomplished invasion — in the case of the former — or to an attempted invasion by Napoleon — in the case of the latter. In fact, Herzen's praise for Italians was a harsh criticism of the French not-so-republican policy of forced and artificial liberation.

However, the content of the sixth letter was not limited to the theoretical and political question of the state. According to Herzen, the only authentic force that could transform it were the peasants, both in Italy and in Russia.

The peasant of central Italy resembles as little a crushed rabble as the Russian peasant private property. Nowhere have I seen, except in Italy and in Russia, poverty and hard work so unscathingly spare the noble and courageous features of man. Such peoples have a secret idea, or rather

not an idea, but an *untapped force* [*nepochataia sila*], incomprehensible to them for the time being, which will make it possible to endure the most overwhelming misfortunes, even serfdom.<sup>47</sup>

Italian and Russian peasants shared a form of self-government legitimized by their social organization and unbureaucratic laxity, which preserved them from French and German non-organic political pressures. They shared an organic force of resistance much to the taste of Haxthausen's historical jurisprudence, by means of which the author justified his aversion to French constitutionalism. In turn, for Herzen, it was an untapped social force, which provided peasants of both countries with resilience against serfdom.

In the eleventh letter ('Again in Paris', June 1, 1849), Herzen turned to the theoretical question of the relationship between freedom and political administration in an ideal republic, in comparison with a monarchy. According to him, the state loses its importance as the freedom of the individual, the commune (*obshchina*), the city and the province increases. The role of the central government in a republic tends to decline if people and institutions can enjoy more freedom. But the opposite happens in a monarchy, which tends to take charge of tasks otherwise left to the free activity of individuals and entities of civil society. In a monarchy, only the Sovereign embodies the moral being and only he is totally free. Consequently, the government is concentrated in him and cannot coincide with the people. In a republic, on the contrary, every person embodies morality and, therefore, is free and capable of self-organizing.

Administration in the republic means *volost* government, the people's office, the chancellery of public affairs, the registry of people's will, police routine, [...] We know how our peasants organize themselves in the commune [*obshchina*], how the workers run their *artels*, not a single one of their business reaches the police, because everything is done simply, without red tape, protocols, bureaucrats, district officials. [...] Let us agree once and for all that the republic is the inevitable beginning of the liberation of peoples, it is the first step, without which there can be no second.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 103. Author's italics.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 182-184. My italics.

Herzen was certainly reacting to the French legislative elections of May 1849, in which, although the radical republicans (The Mountain) won 180 seats, the monarchists (Party of Order) had reached the impressive number of 450 seats. The conquests of 1848 and the second French republic were at risk. For this reason, the discussion between monarchy and republic was imperative at that time and Herzen, therefore, brought to bear the peasant question again.

In the last letter of the cycle 'Again in Paris', Herzen marked the political differences between his perspectives and those of Haxthausen's on the Russian rural commune. For Herzen, the egalitarian communal organization, the institutions of self-government, the *mir* and the *artel* pointed to a republican future. They constituted the first and inevitable step toward the end of serfdom, the freedom of peoples and individual free will. According to Herzen, it was necessary to build a new society, without the religious, authoritarian and exclusive power of the monarchy.

Haxthausen, on the contrary, called for the preservation of the patriarchal and despotic principles both in the monarchy and in the commune, by the legitimization of their religious, hierarchical and national values. But their approaches shared a common feature: they both advocated the social and institutional strengthening of the Russian rural commune. However, from a political point of view, their perspectives did not meet: while the 'Haxthausenian' commune pointed to the monarchy, the 'Herzenian' commune pointed to the republic.

Herzen published a series of articles devoted to a more in-depth analysis of the Russian rural commune. The series consists of the article '*La Russie*', the '*Lettre d'un Russe à Mazzini*', the brochure *Du Développement des Idées Révolutionnaires en Russie*, the open letter to Jules Michelet entitled '*Le Peuple Russe et le Socialisme*', the collection of articles 'Russian Serfdom' and the collection of letters '*La Russie et le Vieux Monde*'.<sup>49</sup>

The article '*La Russie*' (1849) was originally a letter to Herwegh. In it, Herzen listed the main subjects he would deal with in the other works: his frustration at the defeat of the 1848 European revolutions; the Russian communal organization as an alternative to modern European socialism; the contributions of Western travelers to the understanding of Russian society; the historical formation of the Russian Empire and serfdom; the role of Russian literature since the 18th century; and comparisons between the

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<sup>49</sup> The works are listed in chronological order, according to the publication date of their first authorized edition (in the corresponding language). The Russian editions of the works mentioned were either published after the first non-Russian editions or only after Herzen's death. All the editions cited here refer to Herzen, *Sobranie Sochinenii*.

achievements of the Western civilization and the Russian communal traditions (mostly favoring the latter). *‘La Russie’* was written almost entirely before March 1, 1849, although dated August 25. It is a small inventory of Russian history in relation to the Western civilization.

Having read Haxthausen’s *Studien*, one is tempted to believe that *‘La Russie’* is nothing more than an extensive summary of the work of the ‘phlegmatic Westphalian agronomist’, as Herzen refers to him. Their works are very similar in matters related to the Russian peasantry and rural commune, despite the counterpoints advanced by Herzen. In the beginning of *‘La Russie’*, Herzen describes Custine’s and Haxthausen’s books on Russia. According to him, Custine had ‘neglected the Russian people’s way of life’. The author of *La Russie en 1839* had mistaken the Russian Court, Saint Petersburg, official Russia — ‘the world of facades’, according to the Frenchman — for the Russian people. Herzen regarded Custine’s voluminous work only as a courtier satire.

On the other hand, Haxthausen’s *Studien* made a strong impression on Herzen. Despite knowing that its author was an extremely religious conservative, the Russian thinker regarded him as ‘the most benevolent observer in the world’, or as the first traveler who had dedicated himself to studying ‘the mores of Russian peasants in depth’. Haxthausen ‘says, in fact, that the rural commune is everything in Russia. According to the Baron’s opinion, it is the key to Russia’s past and the germ of its future, the life-giving monad of the Russian state’.<sup>50</sup>

Herzen pointed out that, although he broadly agreed with Haxthausen’s remarks, he did not believe that the rural commune was everything in Russia. It had a negative side, which was also identified, but little explored, by Haxthausen: the rural commune had completely absorbed the individuality of the *muzhik*. Therefore, according to Herzen, the most important feature in the rural commune was not the institution itself, but one he had already described in his *Letters from France and Italy*,

I am speaking of that inner force, not fully aware of itself, which so marvelously sustained the Russian people under the yoke of the Mongol hordes and the German bureaucracy, under the Eastern knout<sup>51</sup> of a Tartar and under the Western stick of a caporal;<sup>52</sup> I am speaking of that

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 161-162.

<sup>51</sup> The word ‘knout’ (*knut* – *кнут*, in Russian) refers to a whip of Tatar origin used to inflict corporal punishment.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Caporal’, or ‘Corporal’, in English, is the designation of the lowest rank in the army. Herzen, ironically, referred to Napoleon, whose nickname was *‘Le Petit*

inner force, with the help of which the open and beautiful physiognomy and the lively intelligence of the Russian peasant have been preserved, in spite of the degrading discipline of serfdom.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, Herzen agreed with the baron of Westphalia that the Russian rural commune had existed since immemorial times, that it shared some features with those of other Slavic tribes, that it constituted a social and moral unit, based on common property and the periodic division of the land. Both believed that such features prevented the formation of a rural proletariat in Russia. For Herzen, the rural commune was like a mother who, while protecting her children, demanded passive obedience from them. It made them slow to respond to external stimuli. However — as Haxthausen had also pointed out — that natural and somewhat wild way of life of the Russian peasants ‘corresponds better to the ideal dreamed of by Europe, than the way of living of the civilized German-Roman world; what for the West is still only a hope, toward which its efforts are directed, is the very fact from which we begin’.<sup>54</sup> He referred to its communal socialism, whose similarity with the Saint-Simonian socialistic model had already been identified by Haxthausen.

Three points deserve to be highlighted, regarding the main differences in the approaches of Haxthausen’s *Studien* and Herzen’s article ‘*La Russie*’. The first concerns the features of the rural commune and the precariousness of the peasant. Haxthausen shared the liberal opinion that the rural commune prevented the economic development of the countryside in Russia — an argument accepted by Herzen. For the former, however, it was a limitation inherent to the communal organization. The commune was not able to generate demands on agricultural production, since the peasant had the usufruct right to the land assured from the beginning. From a strictly liberal economic point of view, such a ‘privilege’ resulted in a productive disadvantage for the commune *vis a vis* the societies where private property prevailed, mainly because these societies can impose productive demands on the rural – and dispossessed – proletariat. Without land ownership, without usufruct rights and without the necessary means of work, the proletariat was more susceptible to the liberal economic demands, given that their own survival depended on meeting them. Therefore, Haxthausen believed that the Russian communal organization hindered labor productivity and technical development of agriculture.

According to Herzen, however, the social outputs of the different

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*Caporal*’.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

economic models were not so different from each other:

[...] amateur agronomists forget that, in the Western property system, the improvement of agriculture leaves most of the population without a piece of bread. I do not believe that the growing fortunes of a few farmers and the progress of agriculture as art can be considered — even in sheer agricultural terms — just compensation for the horrible situation of the starving proletariat.<sup>55</sup>

Secondly, there was a difference in their perspectives in relation to the peasants' religiosity. Both agreed that, although religion occupied a prominent place in the communal organization, the *muzhik's* religiosity was loose, often threatened by his superstitious behavior. Only the schismatics were fully religious. However, while Haxthausen had seen such peculiarities as a risk or threat to Christianity, Herzen interpreted them as an expression of the *muzhik's* resistance against Christianity. For the latter, the Russian people's indifference to religion denoted their aversion to fanaticism, Catholicism — a 'malignant affection' — and to the 'austere, cold and hopeless faith' of Protestantism.<sup>56</sup>

Thirdly, a point also related to religion. Like Chaadayev, among the few historical contributions of the Russian Empire to the Western civilization, Haxthausen identified the fact that it had blocked the advance of the Mongol hordes into Western Europe. At the same time, however, the Empire's very efforts to resist the Mongols had prevented Russia from reconciling with Roman Christianity. Thus, according to Haxthausen, the Orthodox Church should also be seen as a sign of the Empire's backwardness.

Herzen also believed that resistance to the Byzantine and Mongolian threats moulded the character of the Russian state. However, he underscored the fact that resistance against invaders had led to a process of military and administrative centralization of the Russian Empire rather than to its Christianization. As a result, 'with each step the Muscovite tsars took in the path of despotism, the authority of the People weakened'.<sup>57</sup> Thus the main consequences of the resistance to the Mongol invasion, according to Herzen, had been neither the adoption of the Orthodox faith nor the containment of the so-called Asian barbarism, but rather Muscovite centralization, despotism and the gradual strengthening of serfdom.

The '*Lettre d'un Russe à Mazzini*' (1850) is a continuation of the article

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 174-175.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

'*La Russie*'. In fact, Herzen came back to the point in which he concluded the previous letter. In this new one, Herzen denounced Nicholas I's request to the Turkish Empire to extradite Polish rebels from the 1830 November Uprising who had also fought in the Hungarian Revolution in 1848. According to him, the tsar's request was an absurd. It concealed an even greater threat from Russia to Turkey, or the former's 'eternal and fatal tendency that pushes the Slavo-Russians towards Byzantium',<sup>58</sup> a dream that had been nurtured since Peter I and especially during the reign of Catherine II. Herzen denounced that the Russian Empire, the largest organized Slavic state, dominant among the other Slavic nations, threatened and suppressed its fellow Slavs instead of seeking to build a real Slavic federation.

Herzen held the Tsars Peter I and Catherine II responsible for expanding serfdom in Russia. According to him, the Romanov dynasty had increased and consecrated serfdom. The dynasty had legalized the abuses of the nobility against peasants and had disseminated corruption. 'Unhappy Russian peasants, what has been done for you since the beginning of the eighteenth century? Was it not Voltaire's friend, Catherine II, the mother of the country, who introduced serfdom in Little Russia, who transformed the Ukrainian Cossacks into serfs?'<sup>59</sup> Thus the Russian author highlighted once more the relationship between tsarist autocratic centralization and the gradual expansion of serfdom in Russia. Unlike Haxthausen, Herzen argued that the commune was not tied to the nobility or to the tsar by a natural, sacred and ascending reproduction of patriarchal and hierarchical relations. On the contrary, the nobility and the royal family were not only detached from the people, but also united against them, as the tie that held them together was 'the domination they exert, for common profit, over the peasantry. Monstrous complicity!'<sup>60</sup>

In 1851, Herzen published a collection of articles in the form of a brochure that would be one of his best known works: *Du Développement des Idées Révolutionnaires en Russie*. The work brings to the fore two fundamental milestones in the studies about Russia in Western Europe: it was the first to restore the historic importance of the Decembrist Revolt among European intellectuals, who until then had overlooked it.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, it was

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Herzen's historical account of the Decembrist Revolt became better known in Western Europe through the publicity Jules Michelet gave it in his '*Les Martyrs de la Russie*', published for the first time (in English) in December 1851 in London. On January 21, 1854, "*Les Martyrs...*" was republished as a chapter of his work *Les Légendes Démocratiques du Nord*. Michel Cadot, "Introduction", in Jules Michelet,

the first to present to Western readers a history of Russian literature and literary criticism from the end of the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century (with emphasis on the works by Nikolai Polevoy, Mikhail Lermontov, Alexander Pushkin, Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolai Gogol).<sup>62</sup>

In its introduction, Herzen restated the importance of tradition in the Russian communal organization and the a-historical character of the Russian peasant: 'It is an intermediate existence between geology and history, it is a formation, which has a character, a way of being, a physiology — but not a biography'.<sup>63</sup> The author sanctioned Haxthausen's interpretation that the character of the Russian peasants, due to their liveliness, resembled rather the Mediterranean character than that of the peoples of the north. According to Herzen, in opposition to the Baltic and Germanic tribes, the Russian 'Slavo-Mediterranean' type was not fitted to social stability, fixed morality or positive rules. On the contrary, 'we aspire to a social order more in accordance with our nature'.<sup>64</sup> He underscored his ideological distance from Haxthausen by affirming that the vague aspirations of the Slavic peoples should meet the revolutionary aspirations of the masses in Europe to destroy their common enemy, 'the old feudal, monarchical building'.

Herzen stressed that serfdom in Russia did not result from her people's natural development, but that it was gradually and imperceptibly developed by monarchs. Before that, the Russian people 'were freer than the peoples of the feudal West'.<sup>65</sup> In 1597, Boris Godunov ended the peasants' right to move from one estate to another around St. George's Day. By the 1710 census, peasants were effectively tied to their masters in Russia. Finally, Catherine II took the last decisive step by decreeing the confiscation of convent lands and imposing serfdom on Ukrainian Cossacks.<sup>66</sup>

What is striking is that Haxthausen uses this same sequence of monarchs, Boris Godunov – Peter I – Catherine II, to historicize the development of serfdom in Russia.<sup>67</sup> For Herzen, especially the second half of this sequence had traumatized the Russian people, who had a historical aversion for the Romanov dynasty. The Romanovs had increased their misfortune, spread serfdom, imposed forced conscription, extended the length of military service, and neglected the corruption of officials and nobles

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*Les Légendes Démocratiques du Nord*, Paris, 1968, pp. xv-xx.

<sup>62</sup> Fifth chapter of *Du développement...*, "La Littérature et l'Opinion Publique après le 14 Décembre 1825". Herzen, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 79-100.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-49.

<sup>67</sup> Haxthausen, op. cit., 1856, vol. 2, pp. 397-398.

that further impoverished them. ‘The idea of great autocracy is the idea of great slavery’.<sup>68</sup>

In the third chapter, “*Pierre I*”, Herzen turned to the sectarian movements. Like Haxthausen, he attributed to the sectarians a more solid faith than that of the vast majority of peasants, who were devoted to the Orthodox Church. The sectarian communities were more developed and cohesive and, albeit being persecuted, their movement was growing in Russia. Then, as Haxthausen, Herzen raised the possibility that a strong social movement would emerge from one of the schismatic communities and would be capable of igniting the peasants’ mood up to the revolutionary ideas of Western Europe.

In the sixth chapter, ‘*Panslavisme Moscovite et Européisme Russe*’, Herzen turned again to religion, but this time reversing Haxthausen’s assessment of the role of the Orthodox Church in the development of the Russian commune. According to the latter, Orthodoxy was the religious doctrine that ensured the cohesion and harmony of the communal microcosm. For Herzen, on the contrary, ‘it [the Eastern Church] has blessed and sanctioned all measures taken against the freedom of the people. It taught Byzantine despotism to the tsars, prescribed blind obedience to the people, even when they were tied to the glebe and enserfed’.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, in the epilogue, Herzen deals with the similarity between the Russian communal organization and the Saint-Simonian socialistic model. He goes even further than Haxthausen did, and states that the Russian commune was the materialization of the fourierist project: ‘the phalanstery is nothing more than a Russian commune and a barrack of workers, a military colony on a civilian base, an industrious regiment’. He restated that the Russians had already accomplished, to some extent, the future dreamed of by the Western communists. Thereafter, ‘the future of Russia has never been more closely united to the future of Europe’.<sup>70</sup>

Herzen’s open letter to the French historian Jules Michelet, ‘*Le Peuple Russe et le Socialisme – Lettre à Monsieur J. Michelet, professeur au Collège de France*’ (1851), was a critical response to a series of articles published by Michelet in *L’Événement* in Paris between August 28 and September 17, 1851.<sup>71</sup> Michelet’s articles consisted of a historical overview of the 1830

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<sup>68</sup> Herzen, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 62.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 123-124. The final appendix of *Du développement...*, entitled ‘*Sur la Commune Rurale en Russie*’ is no more than a reprint of passages from the article ‘*La Russie*’, already commented on above. Thus, there is no need to analyze it here.

<sup>71</sup> On November 26, 1851, Michelet’s articles were republished in the form of a brochure entitled *Kosciuszko*. The brochure was also published in Polish (1851) and in

November Uprising and a short biography of Tadeusz Kościuszko, the Polish political and military leader. Michelet defended Kościuszko and Polish sovereignty against the Russian Empire, and strongly criticized the latter for its action against Poland. Drawing on his interpretation of Adam Mickiewicz's, Custine's, Haxthausen's and Herzen's works, Michelet stated that 'Russia does not exist'<sup>72</sup> and that Russian communism brought 'deadly force, unproductiveness, idleness, sterility'.<sup>73</sup> Michelet postulated that 'Russia is the cholera',<sup>74</sup> as Mickiewicz and François-René de Chateaubriand had already done in the past.

Therefore, Herzen's open letter consisted of a resentful, albeit respectful, replica to Michelet.<sup>75</sup> In '*Le Peuple Russe et le Socialisme*', Herzen emphatically condensed passages from texts already published by him, such as the article '*La Russie*', and the brochure *Du Développement...* (especially its fifth chapter "*La Littérature et l'Opinion Publique...*"). Herzen stated, in a revengeful tone, that 'the Russian people, Sir, exist, they live, they are not even old, they are very young',<sup>76</sup> and added that only this people could revivify the revolutionary hopes of old Europe.

Herzen drew attention to the need to distinguish the Russian government from the people. According to him, such confusion — committed not only by Michelet — was the cause of the general prejudice of European intellectuals against Russia. It prevented them from recognizing in the

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English (1853), until it was included as the first chapter of Michelet's *Les Légendes Démocratiques du Nord* in 1854. Cadot, op. cit., 1968, pp. xlix-liv.

<sup>72</sup> Michelet, op. cit., 1895, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 46. For more details on the relationship between Herzen and Michelet, see also: Zygmunt Lubicz-Zaleski, 'La légende de Kosciuszko : Mickiewicz et Michelet', *Revue des études slaves*, Vol. 6, N°. 1-2 (1926), pp. 99-105; Robin Kemball, 'Herzen, Michelet et les "Légendes démocratiques du Nord"', *Études de Lettres*, N°. 4 (1988), pp. 3-19; André Ropert, 'Michelet et la Russie. Pologne et Russie : un texte de 1851', *Revue Russe*, N°. 6 (1994), pp. 89-96; and Michel Cadot, 'Herzen et Michelet', *Revue des études slaves*, Vol. 78, N°. 2-3 (2007), pp. 177-185.

<sup>75</sup> Herzen could expect the content of his works to be to some extent endorsed by his friend Michelet, preventing him from publishing such harsh comments on Russia. According to Herzen's letters dated June 19 and 21, 1851, he and Michelet had met for the first time on July 17, 1851 and, three days later, the Frenchman visited him in his Paris apartment. Afterwards Herzen wrote that Michelet 'is very satisfied with the brochure'. He probably referred to *Du Développement...* However, it is possible that Herzen's work came into Michelet's hands only too late, when he was already finishing his *Kosciuszko*. See Herzen, op. cit., vol. 24, pp. 184, 187; Cadot, op. cit., 1968, pp. xv-xvi; Cadot, op. cit., 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Herzen, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 272.

Russian people — the peasants — and in their organization, a fresh and potentially revolutionary force. The peasant was not to be confused with the imperial government or the Russian nobility. In fact, the peasant was suspicious of them. Communal life was his refuge from the arbitrariness of the autocracy. By resisting it, the commune had been able to maintain its basic features and its democratic organization for centuries. ‘The communal organism resisted, although severely affected, the encroachments of power; it was fortunately preserved until the development of socialism in Europe’.<sup>77</sup>

The encounter of the Russian communal organization with socialist ideas from Europe would represent the historical intertwining of these two parts of the world. Such understanding, which Herzen had already developed since his *Letters from France and Italy*, allowed him to launch against Michelet the most emblematic sentence of his replica ‘The man of future Russia is the *muzhik*, just as the man of regenerated France will be the worker [*l’ouvrier*]’.<sup>78</sup>

At the end of his open letter, Herzen took up an excerpt from *Kosciuszko*, in which Michelet stated that ‘until 1847, Russia, the real Russia, the Russia of the people [*la Russie populaire*], was little better known than America before Christopher Columbus. [...] He [Haxthausen] discovered Russia’.<sup>79</sup> Herzen agreed and asked himself: ‘Who is to blame?’ Then he replied that it was the fault of the Russian intelligentsia, who were fearful and pusillanimous, and did not dare to denounce or raise their voice against tsarism even when they were outside the Russian borders.

On December 20, 1852, Herzen signed a series of three articles entitled ‘Russian Serfdom’, which was published for the first time a year later (in English) in the British newspaper *The Leader*. It was a pamphlet against Russian serfdom and in defense of the emancipation of serfs with the granting of land. Two events gave rise to these articles. In May 1852, the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, was published in London. The novel had a great impact in Europe, especially in England, and consolidated the anti-slavery position of the British liberal intellectuals.

In 1852, the third and last volume of Haxthausen’s *Studien* was also published and read by Herzen in September of that year, as indicated by his correspondence. In that last volume, Haxthausen gathered his general comments on the communal organization, the nobility, the Russian administration and military forces, and on religion. He dedicated the fifth chapter, ‘*Ueber den weltgeschichtlichen Beruf Rußlands*’, and the seventh, ‘*Ueber die Krongüter Rußlands und deren Administration*’, to the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>79</sup> Michelet, op. cit., 1895, pp. 28-29.

presentation of a brief history of the Russian Empire and the development of serfdom. Haxthausen showed appreciation for Russian military conquests, for the fulfillment of the sacred mission of spreading Christianity among the Asian peoples, and highlighted the progress of the Empire under the tsars Peter I, Catherine II and Nicholas I. According to him, the autocracy had strengthened after 1848 and the people were even more united with the tsar.<sup>80</sup> He regarded Nicholas I as a peaceful monarch, who had inherited mostly military obligations from his ancestors: '[...] Emperor Nicholas only exerted himself to pacify, organize, and cultivate the country, carrying on merely defensive wars'.<sup>81</sup> He noted that the tsars, in general, interfered in the communes only with the aim of introducing Christianity and Western civilization to them.

As he turned to the analysis of the State serfs, Haxthausen considered that the government had been striving to improve their living conditions, without ever interfering with the freedom of the peasants.<sup>82</sup> Finally, he praised the administrative measures implemented by Count Kiselev, who had been Minister of State Domains since 1838, and who had personally taken care of his travel to Russia. According to Haxthausen, Kiselev had also strived to improve the level of the moral and technical education of peasants, and to strengthen self-government in communal institutions: 'he desired to avoid all coercive measures, and confine his reforms to affording the peasants his personal protection and care, and to the amelioration of their condition by instruction, encouragement, and assistance, according to the measure of their capacity'.<sup>83</sup>

Certainly, Herzen could not remain indifferent to Haxthausen's comments, which seemed to describe a situation he regarded as different from that which was really occurring in the Russian government and commune. Furthermore, Haxthausen's apparent adherence to the measures taken by the Russian government infuriated him to the point that he registered in the letters to Vogt and Reichel in late 1852, that he wanted to curse the baron from Westphalia. Thus, taking advantage of the great popularity of Stowe's novel and the anti-slavery sensibility it had aroused across Europe, Herzen denounced both Russian serfdom — the 'white slavery' — and Haxthausen's conservatism and adherence to the tsarist regime. The Russian author was interested in connecting the anti-slavery mood of the old continent to the issue of the emancipation of serfs in Russia.

Once again, Herzen listed the beneficial features of the Russian rural

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<sup>80</sup> Haxthausen, *op. cit.*, 1856, vol. 2, p. 272.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 394, 403.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 416-417.

commune, characterized the development of serfdom as an erratic state policy since Boris Godunov's reign, denounced the sale of serfs that occurred under the nose of Nicholas I, and presented the state political and economic dilemmas relating to the emancipation of serfs. In the last part of the text, he turned to the promised lashing out against Haxthausen, whom he refers to as the 'absolutist demagogue'. Herzen countered Haxthausen's understanding that a patriarchal relationship prevailed between nobles and peasants:

This author [Haxthausen], who has unfortunately marred his interesting work by an indescribably frantic passion for royalism, knows too well the organization of the Russian commune not to have known that the power of the seigneur is an excrescence upon the commune into which it has entered as an element altogether foreign, parasitical, and destitute of normal basis. He succeeds as little in explaining, by a pretended patriarchalism the seigneurial prerogatives, as in justifying the oppressive despotism of Petersburg by the *sublimity of obedience*, a passion which this enlightened German calls the distinguishing virtue of the Russian people.<sup>84</sup>

According to Herzen, if the Russian government had established any patriarchal relationship, it was with the nobility, not with the peasants. Tsarism was a 'terrorist dictatorship, a caesarism carried *ad absurdum*'.<sup>85</sup> Haxthausen, in trying to prove the opposite, that is, that the tsarist regime was necessary, national and close to the people, was just trying to provide a rationale for autocracy by means of Hegel's 'accursed philosophy', according to which everything that is real is — or must be — rational. Herzen criticized him for leaving the real causes of despotism and serfdom out of his analysis.

Herzen needed to expose and stress Haxthausen's conservative and monarchist character, as well as to denounce his consent to the Russian tsarist regime, so that European readers, for whom the Westphalian traveler was the greatest Western authority on Russia, could see that 'The mask must be torn from these slaveholders of the North'.<sup>86</sup> However, regardless how fierce Herzen's first — and only — public execration of Haxthausen was, it did not change his assessment of the importance of the latter's work for the 'discovery' of the Russian commune.

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<sup>84</sup> Herzen, op. cit., vol. 12, p. 24. Author's italics.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 26. Written in Latin. Author's italics.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

Finally, in 1854, shortly after the beginning of the Crimean War (1853-1856), *‘La Russie et le Vieux Monde’* was published. The text brought together three letters, dated 2 January, 17 and 20 February 1854, addressed to William James Linton, editor of the *The English Republic*. Therein Herzen summarized ideas presented in his previous works about the inseparability of Europe’s and Russia’s futures. He proposed that only the young, fresh and ‘untapped force’ of the Russian people could save the exhausted Old World. By uniting their forces, they could achieve the dream of socialism, which Europe longed for and came by only rudimentarily in the Russian peasant commune.

Herzen underscored Haxthausen’s conservative character, referring to him as a ‘Catholic, Prussian, agronomist and monarchist so radical that he considers the King of Prussia too liberal and Emperor Nicholas too much of a philanthropist!’. In spite of these words, Herzen added that ‘the facts related by us are given *in extenso* by him’.<sup>87</sup> This is one of the last — if not the last — times when Haxthausen’s views were examined in detail by Herzen. He acknowledged that, despite their political and ideological disagreements, the German baron’s work was the main source of his knowledge of the Russian rural commune.

Herzen’s private correspondence reserved a last, respectful mention of the Westphalian traveler. In a letter to his son, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, dated December 2, 1858, Herzen warned him that, in order to understand the history of Russian serfdom, it was necessary to read his *Du Développement...* and Haxthausen’s chapters on that subject.<sup>88</sup>

## Final Remarks

When leaving Berlin toward the Russian Empire in the spring of 1843, August von Haxthausen carried with him not only the interest and curiosity of a traveler and explorer, but also great willingness to corroborate previous

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 155. Written in Latin. Author’s italics.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., vol. 26, p. 229. In other brief passages, Herzen further underscored the importance of Haxthausen’s works. For instance, in his article ‘*Russkie Nemtsy i Nemetskie Russkie*’, published in *Kolokol*, on October 1, 1859, he wrote that the baron was the only one among Old Europeans who understood the Russian rural commune; the same in his article ‘*Nouvelle phase de la littérature russe*’, published in the Belgian *La Cloche*, on May 25, 1864; and also in the article ‘*K Kontsu Goda*’, dated December 1, 1865, in *Kolokol*. In another article in *Kolokol*, dated December 1, 1866, ‘*Poriadok Torzhestvuet!*’, Herzen restated that ‘Haxthausen was indeed one of the first to tell the Western world about the Russian rural commune and its deeply autonomous and social principles’; the same, finally, in his ‘*Prolegomena*’, published on January 1, 1868.

conceptions and discoveries. The French invasion of Westphalia, followed by the forced implementation of the Napoleonic Code therein, led him to actively participate in the national reaction movement, which was influenced by German romanticism.

The end of some of the privileges of the nobility, the emancipation of serfs and the introduction of economic liberalism emerged as real threats to the social cohesion of the old Germanic societies. As the peasant gained greater independence, traditional, rigidly hierarchical and patriarchal relations weakened, calling into question the traditional rule of the nobility. At the same time, the gradual dissolution of the old economic and social organization pointed to the emergence of a new social class whose needs could only be met in the clash with the propertied classes: the proletariat.

Haxthausen's immediate understanding of these liberal transformations tended toward a perception of a threatening social breakdown. As he was born and lived in a Catholic and conservative social circle, he made his professional choices and developed his intellectual skills in a potentially reactionary atmosphere. Following a trend within Catholic romanticism, he came to believe that peasant and religious traditions were the strongest bulwark against foreign invasion. In fact, it was the peasant resistance against the local rule of Napoleon's brother — prior to the nationalist reaction of the nobility itself — that inspired his theoretical and political engagements. He befriended people who would become renowned for their efforts to study and make known the culture of the common folk, such as the Grimm brothers. He collected folk tales in the midst of the war of liberation. In Göttingen, he founded and contributed to student magazines expressing similar romantic and nationalist views. He became a member of Masonic lodges. And then, thanks to one of his works on the 'Agrarian Constitution of Paderborn and Corvey', he was brought up to the Court by Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm IV.

Thus, even before starting his fieldwork in different regions of Germany, Haxthausen had already formed the theoretical framework that would guide his future observations. Above all, his interpretation of Burke's and Savigny's works on historical jurisprudence guided his resistance to constitutionalism. In the 1830s, in the course of his statistical, legislative and cultural surveys, he reinforced his impressions about the features of the traditional Slavic rural commune. According to his observations, it preserved forms of communal property, democratic deliberations, egalitarian land distribution, and patriarchal social organization. Religion was the tie that united the peasants and legitimized the hierarchy between them, the nobility and the Crown. To some extent, this model of 'Haxthausenian' communal organization was already formed on his mind before he was invited to Russia.

Once he was inside the borders of the Tsarist Empire, his *in loco* observations would be supplemented by statistical data provided by the regime's bureaucracy and his conversations with Russian nobles and intellectuals. Haxthausen traveled approximately six months through the Russian provinces and stayed another six months in the Moscow salons. It was in these latter spaces that he may have formulated his general understanding of the history of Russia, her institutions and people. There he may also have had access to the main native theoretical formulations on the Slavic and Russian peoples and on the 'mission' of the Empire. It would not be surprising if his own formulations on the traditions of the Slavic commune found an echo in Slavophile circles, to which he was certainly introduced.

The Moscow Haxthausen knew was intellectually thriving, with a variety of ideas and theories emanating from its great university. In addition, the traveler met important representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, such as Pogodin, Chaadayev, Aksakov and Herzen himself. Only by expanding Haxthausen's wandering from the province to the Muscovite social life one can understand how, from his local observations, he achieved his general comments on Russian history and society. It is unlikely that a peasant would have reported to him that the process of serfdom in Russia had worsened in 1597 with an *ukaz* decreed by Boris Godunov, despite the fact that lamentation was found in folk songs about freedom lost around St. George's Day.

When Herzen met Haxthausen, he had also come a long way in his intellectual and political development. He had praised, and then, criticized Hegel's work, and was close to the ideas of socialist thinkers in Western Europe. He had already his own understanding of the Russian commune, based either on the traditional and romantic view of the Slavophiles, or on his own experiences and observations. Then what happened in May 1843 was the encounter of an experienced conservative with a revolutionary in the making. However, the political and ideological differences between the two did not prevent the appreciation and appropriation of Haxthausen's work by Herzen.

They shared much understanding in common about the Russian rural commune. According to Herzen, it was a traditional Slavic institution, patriarchal and democratically organized, which had resisted Mongol invasion and German bureaucracy. It also contained within it an *untapped force*, which was capable of leading not only itself, but all of Europe toward socialism. Haxthausen, starting from basically the same premises, concluded that the communal organization could prevent Russia from both the arising of a proletariat and a social uprising. For him, the commune could also be the mainstay for the spread of Christianity throughout Asia.

Regarding their disagreements, we point out Herzen's non-acceptance of Haxthausen's view that the peasants' patriarchal relationships among

themselves extended to their relations with the landlords and the tsar; his criticism of the interpretation that serfdom had developed in an organic way, since for him the tsarist regime had decisively acted to establish it; his criticism of the communal organization itself, in which he also identified a despotic character, mainly because of the way it absorbed, or suppressed, the individuality of the peasant; and, finally, his interpretation that the Orthodox religion rather than being a lynchpin for social cohesion in the commune, was only instrumentally or laxly practiced by the peasants.

Such disagreements — despite Herzen's lashing out against Haxthausen in his 1853 article 'Russian Serfdom' — were not serious enough to negate the thread that connected the Russian publicist's ideas about the Russian commune to Haxthausen's *Studien*. In fact, from the second half of the 1850s onward, we notice a moderating inflection in both of their positions. Haxthausen held back his aversion to liberalism and constitutionalism and actively participated in the drafting of the Emancipation Act of 1861. In turn, Herzen, who was an ardent defender of the emancipation of serfs with land, did not agree with extreme radical Russian intellectuals who endorsed violence to compensate for the frustrations brought about by the Act of 1861. In the 1860s, moving toward critical conciliation with Haxthausen, Herzen often reaffirmed that Haxthausen had been the pioneer in bringing the Russian rural commune to European audiences. Finally, he recommended his brochure *Du Développement...* alongside with the phlegmatic Westphalian agronomist's *Studien* to his own son as seminal works to understand Russian serfdom.

However, the assumed debt of Herzen's work on the Russian rural commune to Haxthausen's *Studien* does not exhaust the whole set of works to which they both had access. Firstly, it must not be forgotten that they both had other historical and theoretical sources in common, such as the works of Pogodin and Chaadayev, for instance. Secondly, Haxthausen was not the only foreign traveler to Russia whose work Herzen had read. He also knew Custine's *La Russie en 1839*, as well as Mickiewicz's courses on the Slavic people, *Les Slaves – Cours professé au Collège de France* (1849), among others. Thirdly, Herzen also had access to works by Russian thinkers dealing with the rural commune, such as Nikolai Turgenev's *La Russie et les Russes* (1847), which he quotes in 'Russian Serfdom', and Ludwig Tengoborskii's *Essai sur les forces productives de la Russie* (1852-1855), cited in '*Le Peuple Russe et le Socialisme*'. Lastly, one should not believe that Herzen's entire approach to the Russian rural commune was restricted to the influence of Haxthausen's observations and work. Herzen's concerns evidently encompassed his interest in the emancipation of serfs and social revolution. Nevertheless, it also comprised questions about the role of women in the rural commune, the relationship between the individual and the state, and the

discussion of the different perspectives Russia and the United States offered for the development of the Old Continent.

*A First Complete Translation into English of Peter the Great's Original Table of Ranks: Observations on the Occurrence of a Black Hole in the Translation of Russian Historical Documents*

Angelo Segrillo<sup>1</sup>

There is a black hole in the translation of historical documents into English. The famous Table of Ranks was promulgated by Peter the Great in 1722. Almost three centuries later, we still do not have a complete English translation of this original document.<sup>2</sup>

What is written in the paragraph above may seem surprising to readers familiar with Russian history. How is it that the Table has not been translated if we can find it in English in the corresponding entry of Wikipedia, for example (not to speak of numerous other encyclopedias and regular books)? Well, look more carefully. The Table of Ranks you have seen in English on the internet or in books until now are all either abridged versions or versions which are “mixed” ones, that is, not the “pure” original, but versions in which only some of the original ranks established by Peter are mingled with additional ones inserted by later czars.

This mysterious omission can be better clarified by explaining the origins of the present text. The purpose of this article is to present for the first time a translation into English of the *complete*, original (1722) Table of Ranks — the one Peter himself signed. However, the origin of the article leads farther away, to Brazil. Being a Brazilian historian with an educational background both from the U.S. (undergraduate) and Russia (master's degree), I noticed that the original Table of Ranks had not been translated into Portuguese. No surprise there, since Slavic Studies are not highly developed in Brazil. Therefore, I prepared such a translation into Portuguese in a collaborative work.<sup>3</sup> My surprise came when I noticed that in most Western languages, including English, the same omission still exists. At first I was incredulous. After conducting a fairly extensive survey of internet sites, I confirmed my above-mentioned diagnosis: all translations are either

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo Segrillo is an Associate Professor of history at the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil).

<sup>2</sup> This translation was first presented as a working paper in 2016 (LEA Working Paper Series, no. 1, Nov. 2016). I would like to thank Mikhail Taitis for his invaluable technical help along this research project and Evgeniya Gribova for introducing him to me.

<sup>3</sup> Angelo Segrillo, Camilo Domingues & Vicente Ferraro Jr., *Rússia, Ontem e Hoje: ensaios de pesquisadores do LEA sobre a história da Rússia* (Sao Paulo: FFLCH-USP, 2016), pp. 139-149. Available online at [http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/russiaoh\\_lea.pdf](http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/russiaoh_lea.pdf)

partial/abridged or mixed with later additions (not the “pure” original). Then I started a deeper, more serious search in specialized books and conducted an inquiry among selected history professors. I thought I had finally found the missing link in the essay by a specialist, Charles E. Timberlake, in an excellent book edited by M.L. Bush. In his chapter on “The Middle Classes in Tsarist Russia,” Timberlake literally stated that “a translation of the original Table of Ranks is in B. Dmytryshin, *Imperial Russia: A Source Book 1700-1917* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Hinsdale, 1974), pp. 17-19.”<sup>4</sup> I went to check Dmytryshin’s work certain that my search had ended. Not only was Timberlake a specialist, but Basil Dmytryshin is a renowned author and one of the best translators of Russian primary sources. What I read astonished me. On the pages indicated there was only an abridged version of the 1722 Table of Ranks!<sup>5</sup>

That was the moment when I began to understand the origins of the black hole. First of all, I tried to understand why Dmytryshin, with his superb command of the language and of the original sources, would not put the complete Table there in English. Of course, his sourcebook was not supposed to be a verbatim translation of all documents — it would take up too much space — but a book with a selection of the most important parts of each document indicating the lacunae by means of the usual ellipses. Therefore, the item with Peter’s decree and the Table itself was also abridged. However, I have to fault Dmytryshin’s otherwise wonderful book with one problematic weakness: he should have inserted the ellipses inside the Table itself in the places where he was omitting some ranks. This type of carelessness may have been the origin of much misunderstanding about the Table of Ranks. When a skilled specialist like Timberlake thinks (or states) that what is in Dmytryshin’s sourcebook is the original Table, it has a ripple effect further down the road when it reaches the general, non-Russian speaking readers. Since for many decades (until very recently) it was difficult to access the official original of this document — which is the *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire), the 133-volume collection available only in a few places in Russia and the world — these authoritative translations (such as Dmytryshin’s) were the basis from which most English-speaking readers departed. For some reason, these basic translated texts began a pattern of shortening the Table down to

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Timberlake, “The Middle Classes in Tsarist Russia,” In *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe Since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification*, ed. M.L. Bush (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 89, footnote 5.

<sup>5</sup> In 2003, Jerzy Lukowski wrote: “I am unaware of any complete translation of the Table of Ranks into English.” Today, more than a decade later, we are forced to reach the same conclusion. Jerzy Lukowski, *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 196, endnote 36.

the essentials (that is, to the main ranks which have survived onto later ages) and of trimming the ranks that were accessory or were revoked/replaced later. While the original, Russian-speaking translators who were able to read the official text of the 1722 Table of Ranks were well aware of the complete version, the subsequent non-Russian speaking general public was not and took these abridged versions as the real thing. This ripple effect was leveraged in our internet age with its high turn-over of information. Not being able to be checked against the original source, the abridged versions of the Table of Ranks became the currency in the business. “A lie told a thousand times becomes the truth.” In our internet age, an inaccuracy repeated a thousand times becomes the standard.<sup>6</sup>

I encountered a similar (“internet leverage”) phenomenon in Russia as well. In that country, the 1722 Table of Ranks is easily found in its original, complete format on the internet. When I started my investigations, I chose an authoritative internet source to begin with — that of the History Department of Moscow State University. They published an online version of the 1722 decree by Peter the Great (available at <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/EText/tabel.htm>). For practical purposes, this is a very reliable resource and I used it intensively. At one point I came across a doubtful spot. In class 5 of the “Navy” column of their Table of Ranks, there was a strangely long military rank: “*обер сарваер от строения карабельнаго интендант цейх мейстер обер штер крикс комисар*”. Since there was no comma inside this expression — commas separate the ranks in the Table of Ranks — it read as one rank. But anyone who knows some technical Russian would immediately notice that it is possible to distinguish three or four separate military ranks in this word scramble. I thought that maybe it was a typo of the Moscow State University site. Therefore, I checked other Russian internet sites; the expression was written

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<sup>6</sup> I cited Dmytryshin’s book above because it was the first major authoritative Western source I came across along this pattern of “abridged” versions of the 1722 Table of Ranks being (rather carelessly) presented as if they were the complete one. But several others can be found with the same problem. See, for example, the 1722 Table of Ranks presented in Bucknell’s virtual exhibit of Russian historical documents at <http://www.bucknell.edu/arts-and-sciences-college-of/academic-departments-and-programs/russian-studies/resources/russian-history/table-of-ranks.html> or the one in Frank W. Thackeray & John E. Findling, eds., *Events that Formed the Modern World: From the European Renaissance through the War on Terror* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), vol. 1, p. 25. In this regard, the other major English-language sourcebook of Russian history next to Dmytryshin’s, *i.e.* George Vernadsky’s, was a little more careful. It also presented only a shortened version of the 1722 original table, *but expressly warned it was not a complete translation*. See George Vernadsky, ed., *A Source Book For Russian History from Early Times to 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 343-344.

the same way (without commas) in all of them. I was already blaming Peter's proverbially poor literacy skills for the spelling mistake in his own decree when I decided to check again in the original *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* ("Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire").<sup>7</sup> To my surprise, in this official primary source there is no ambiguity. The commas are there and these are four different ranks, not one. Another big surprise, similar to the one I had in the U.S! How is it that most of the Russian internet sites which carry the *complete*, original Table of Ranks have the same error? I believe the same phenomenon of "internet leverage" I witnessed in the U.S. was at work here. Once an authoritative site (such as the Moscow State University History Department site) makes a typo while compiling the Table of Ranks from the original primary source (the *Polnoe Sobranie...*), all the other internet sites — which do not have easy access to the official primary source — begin copying from this authoritative site trusting they are making a faithful copy of the original. And since the internet quickly disseminates other copies from these copies exponentially, soon we again have the situation of "a typo repeated a thousand times, becomes... the standard."

As I mentioned, the purpose of this piece is simply to present a first complete English version of the original 1722 Table of Ranks by Peter the Great in order to dispel the widespread misconceptions about what it even looks like — for example, it does not have four columns as normally presented, but seven. However, I think a few words about how we got to these discrepancies are in order because I feel we are dealing with some new methodological challenges in this internet age.

The question is. Why did this happen? The "internet leverage" phenomenon is key to explain the two specific situations about the Table of Ranks that I encountered in the U.S. and Russia and described above. But this phenomenon alone does not explain why the original Table of Ranks has never yet been translated into English in full. After all, the U.S.A. was the leading Western specialist in translating Russian documents in the twentieth

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<sup>7</sup> A grammar or spelling mistake in the Table of Ranks decree would not be out of the question. In his youth, Peter was known to be hyperactive and overcurious — I suspect that if he lived nowadays he would be classified as an ADHD case... — but not especially well endowed with literacy skills. His spelling mistakes persisted into adulthood. Actually, some of the wording in the Table of Ranks decree could arguably be classified as inconsistent and literarily poor. That being said, we should make some allowance for the fact that the Russian language was in a transitional state at the time, away from the influence of Church Slavonic toward becoming an independent literary language. Suffice it to say that the first major systematic grammars of this new "modern" Russian language — Vasily Adodurov's and Mikhail Lomonosov's — were only published years after the promulgation of the Table of Ranks decree (respectively in 1731 and 1755).

century. Remember the Cold War and how so many of the Russian documents were translated in full not only in journals and books at large, but also by specialized organizations set up just for this purpose (like the USSR division of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, for example)? With this background as the main Western center for translation of Russian primary sources in the twentieth century, how is it that this very important, seminal document of Russian history was never translated in full into English?

The answer, I believe, is contained in the question. As said, the U.S. was the main Western translator in the twentieth century, that is, of *Soviet* documents. The Cold War, and the confrontation with Soviet communism in general, provided a tremendous stimulus to “know the enemy from inside.” In this period, the U.S. government actively prioritized the Soviet Union as the main focus of its international attention and the result was a torrent of detailed knowledge and translation from that region. But the situation was different in other centuries. Up to the nineteenth century, the U.S. was not the major *locus* of Eastern Studies (including Russian studies); at that time countries like Germany and France were ahead of the U.S. in terms of Russian studies (and Oriental Studies in general). Consequently, we cannot transfer the leadership role the U.S. had in Russian (Soviet) studies in the twentieth century to the czarist times. Thus, this U.S. gap of information about an eighteenth century Russian document becomes less of a mystery.

Perhaps symptomatic of the fact that the U.S. trailed Germany in Russian (and Oriental) studies in the previous centuries is the fact that although in most Western languages there is not yet a complete translation of the original Table of Ranks, one exception is German. In the eighteenth century there was a complete translation of the original Table of Ranks into German. It was published in a so-called Magazine for New History and Geography.<sup>8</sup>

These episodes with the Table of Ranks in English should draw attention to some of the dangers of the super-speed of information transmission in our internet age which may also be leveraging the transmission of *misinformation*. Just like we had to introduce circuit-breakers in stock markets for the cases when high-speed electronic trading simply goes awry, in the historical field we should temper our free flow of high-speed internet information with periodic “back to the primary source” circuit-breakers.

Not being a revivalist, I am glad to notice that, in the case of the Table of Ranks, the internet itself may also help this “back to the primary source” movement. We know that the primary source for the Table of Ranks is the

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<sup>8</sup> Anton Frierich Büsching, ed., *Magazin für die Neue Historie und Geographie* (Halle: Curt, 1773), vol. 7, pp. 349-355.

*Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire), which for decades was not easily accessible. However, there is good News. Recently, the Russian National Library (*Rossiiskaya Natsional'naya Biblioteka*) did the wonderful work of digitizing all of the 133 volumes of the *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, making them available online to researchers at [http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law\\_r/search.php](http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php)

Thus, below is the first complete translation into English of the original (1722) Table of Ranks by Peter the Great. Compare it with the Tables you have seen in English so far. They are different because either the other Tables are abridged (usually deleting the ranks which were later abolished by other czars) or mixed with later additions to the original Table by other czars. But don't trust my word that you are now reading the real thing. Compare this to the original Table as seen in the *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*! Back to the primary sources!

## Peter the Great's Original (1722) Table of Ranks

Class	Military Service				Civil Service	Court Service
	Army	Guards	Artillery	Navy		
1	Field Marshal General			General Admiral	Chancellor	
2	General of Cavalry or General of Infantry; Stadtholder		General Master of Field Artillery	Admiral	Actual Privy Counselor	Grand Marshal
3	Lieutenant General; Knight of the Order of St. Andrew; War Commissary General		Lieutenant General	Vice-Admiral; War Commissary General	Procurator- General	Grand Master of the Stables
4	Major General	Colonel	Major General; Major General of Fortifications	Rear Admiral; Grand Master of Artillery	President of College or Government Office; Privy Counselor; Senior Procurator	Grand Master of the Court; Grand Chamberlain
5	War Commissary Brigadier; Provisions Master General	Lieutenant Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel of Artillery	Commodore; Captain of Kronshlot Port; Senior Shipbuilding Supervisor; Intendant; Master of Artillery; War Commissary Commodore	Master of Heraldry; General Master of Requests; Grand Master of Ceremonies; Chief Forest Warden; Collegiate Vice- President; General Chief of Police; Director of Construction; Director General of the Posts; Archiater	Master of the Court; Grand Master of the Court and of the Stables; Privy Cabinet Secretary; Grand Master of the Court of Her Majesty the Empress; Grand Cup Bearer

6	Colonel; Treasurer; Grand Provisions Master; Senior Commissary; Adjutant General; Procurator; Quartermaster Lieutenant General	Major	Lieutenant Colonel of Artillery; Engineer Lieutenant Colonel; Senior Commissary	Captain 1 <sup>st</sup> rank; Captain of other Ports; Shipbuilding Supervisor; Procurator; Intendant of Saint Petersburg's Shipyard; Treasurer; Grand Provisions Master; Senior Commissary	Civil College Procurator; President of High Court of Appeals; Privy Counselor of the Chancery of the College of Foreign Affairs; Senior Secretary of the Senate; State Commissary; Senior Government Treasurer in Residence; Collegiate Counselor	Master of the Stables; Actual Chamberlain; Marshal of the Court; Grand Master of the Hunt; First Physician;
7	Lieutenant Colonel; Auditor General; Provisions Master Lieutenant General; Wagonmaster General; Senior Provost General; Adjutant General to Field Marshal General; Comptroller	Captain	Major; Engineer Lieutenant Colonel; Senior Comptroller	Captain 2 <sup>nd</sup> rank; Comptroller	Vice- President of High Court of Appeals; Senior Secretary of Colleges of War, Admiralty and Foreign Affairs; Senate Superintendent; Chief Government Inspector; Procurator of High Court of Appeals; Master of Ceremonies	Master of the Court of Her Majesty the Empress; Personal Physician to Her Majesty the Empress
8	Major; Adjutant General to Full General; Auditor Lieutenant General; Senior Quartermaster; Chief Inspector;	Lieutenant Captain	Engineer Major; Captain; Master of the Stables; Chief Armorer; Comptroller	Captain 3 <sup>rd</sup> rank; Ship Master; Paymaster; Chief Inspector	Under- Stadtholder in Residence; Economy Intendant; Government Counselor	Titular Chamberlain; Master of the Court and of the Stables; Court Intendant;

	Paymaster				in governorates; Senior Director of Customs and Excise in Residence; Senior Judge in Residence; President of City Council in Residence; Collegiate Senior Commissary; Collegiate Assessor; Grand Provisions Master in Residence; Senior Secretary of other Colleges; Senate Secretary; Grand Master of Mines; Grand Warden of the Mint; Grand Master of the Mint; Court Counselor; Forest Warden; Voevoda	
9	Captain; Flugel Adjutant to Field Marshal General or to Full General; Adjutant to Lieutenant General; Grand Provisions	Lieutenant	Lieutenant Captain; Engineer Captain; Senior Auditor; Quartermaster; Commissary of Gunpowder / Saltpeter Factories	Lieutenant Captain; Master of the Galleys	Titular Counselor; Secretary of Colleges of War, Admiralty and Foreign Affairs; Senior	Court Master of the Hunt; Court Master of Ceremonies; Grand Kitchen Master;

	Master; General-Staff Quartermaster; Senior Auditor; Field Postmaster; Provost General				Government Treasurer in Governorates; Chief of Police in Residence; Permanent City Council Burgomaster in Residence; Provincial Judge; Professor of the Academies; Doctor from any faculty in State Service; Archivist at both State Archives; Senate Translator and Senate Clerk; Treasurer of the Mint; Assessor to High Court of Appeals in Residence; Collector of Customs at ports	Chamber Junker
10	Lieutenant Captain	Second Lieutenant	Lieutenant; Engineer Lieutenant Captain; Auditor; Armorer; Comptroller; Grand Wagonmaster; Masters' Captain	Lieutenant	Secretary of other Colleges; Burgomaster of Governorat e Boards; Translator of Colleges of War, Admiralty and Foreign Affairs; Clerk of same Colleges;	

					Senior Economy Commissary in Governorates; Senior Commissary in Governorates; Assessor of Governorate High Court of Appeals; Senior Government Treasurer; Master of Mines; Senior Assayer	
11				Ship Secretary		
12	Lieutenant	Ensign	Second Lieutenant; Engineer Lieutenant; Transportation Officer; Wagonmaster	Second Lieutenant; Skipper 1 <sup>st</sup> rank	Secretary of High Court of Appeals, of Chancery or of Governorates; Collegiate High Government Treasurer; City Councilman in Residence; Master of the Mint; Master of the Forest; Foundry Administrator; Mine Surveyor	Court Junker; Court Physician
13	Second Lieutenant; Flugel Adjutant to Lieutenant General		Bayonet Junker; Engineer Second Lieutenant		Provincial Secretary; Mechanicus; Postmaster in Saint Petersburg or Riga; Collegiate Translator and Collegiate	

					Clerk; Senate Registrar	
14	Ensign; Fligel Adjutant to Major General or Brigadier; Staff Furir		Engineer Ensign	Ship Commissary; Skipper 2 <sup>nd</sup> rank; Gunner	Collegiate Commissary; Inspector of High Court of Appeals or Governorate; Provincial High Government Treasurer; District Commissary; Assessor of Provincial Courts; Collegiate Archivist, Collegiate Registrar and Collegiate Accountant; District Government Treasurer; Postmaster in Moscow and other noble cities where there are governors; Collegiate Junker	Court Ecclesiarch; Master of the Court Pages; Secretary of the Court; Court Librarian; Antiquarian; Court High Government Treasurer; Court Auditor; Court Quartermaster; Court Apothecary; Castellan; Court Master of Artillery; Office Courier; Cup Bearer; Kitchen Master; Master of the Cellar; Drillmaster; Court Barber

Source: *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (“Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire”), 1<sup>st</sup> series, vol. 6, pp. 486-489, law number 3890. Available online at [http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law\\_r/search.php](http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php) (law number 3890).