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**Lesser-Known Aspects
of the Russian Historical Experience**

1st edition

FFLCH/USP
São Paulo (Brazil)
2025

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Printed in Brazil

Catálogo na Publicação (CIP)
Serviço de Biblioteca e Documentação
Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo
Charles Pereira Campos – CRB-8/8057

L638 Lesser – Known aspects of the Russian historical experience / Editors: Angelo Segrillo, César Albuquerque, Daniel Aarão Reis. – São Paulo (Brazil): FFLCH/USP, 2025.
76 p.

ISBN 978-85-7506-515-0

1. Russian Revolutions. 2. Orthodox Religion – Russia – Ukraine.
3. Pós Perestroika. 4. Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeevich 1931- 1991 -
Democracy. I. Segrillo, Angelo, *editor*. II. Albuquerque, César, *editor*.
III. Reis, Daniel Aarão, *editor*.

CDD 947.085

Text design and edition: Laboratório de Estudos da Ásia (USP)
Cover: Laboratório de Estudos da Ásia (USP).

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LESSER-KNOWN ASPECTS OF THE RUSSIAN HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

A book sponsored by:

Laboratório de Estudos da Ásia (LEA)
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São Paulo – Brazil
2025

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Foreword

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

The book contains essays by LEA researchers on lesser-known or less-studied aspects of the Russian historical experience.

Angelo Segrillo examines the intersection of religious and political disputes between Russia and Ukraine.

Daniel Aarão Reis studies Julius Martov, the important Menshevik theoretician who was overshadowed by Lenin, the Bolshevik, in the history of revolutionary movements in Russia.

César Albuquerque analyzes Mikhail Gorbachev's thought and action in the less-studied periods of his life, *i.e.*, before and after Perestroika.

We hope you enjoy the reading.

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https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-01062023-112248/publico/2023_CesarAugustoRodriguesDeAlbuquerque_VCorr.pdf

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***Orthodox Religion in Russia and Ukraine:
Religious and Political Disputes from a Historical Point of View***¹

Angelo Segrillo²

The war between Russia and Ukraine — which began in 2022 but originated in the 2014 Ukrainian crisis — in addition to its obvious military aspects, was accompanied by conflicts of political, economic, ethnic and cultural dimensions, including fierce disputes between the Orthodox churches of both countries.

After the end of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation inherited and maintained its largest religious institution as the *Russian Orthodox Church* led by the Patriarch of Moscow (RUSSKAYA..., 2023). In post-Soviet Ukraine, the situation turned out to be more complex. In the 1990s, in addition to the *Ukrainian Orthodox Church*, which was linked to the Moscow Patriarchate (as in Soviet times), two other Orthodox Churches emerged (or resurfaced, according to them): the *Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate* and the *Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church* (PRAVOSLAVNA..., 2023). These two “native” Ukrainian Churches were recognized neither by the Moscow Patriarchate nor by the other Orthodox Churches. However, following the 2014 crisis between Russia and Ukraine, largely due to the efforts of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, was gradually convinced to grant autocephaly (ecclesial independence) to these “native” churches of Ukraine if they unified. So it was done. On December 15, 2018, the two Churches were reunited and the new *Orthodox Church of Ukraine* was created. On January 6, 2019, Bartholomew I officially granted this Orthodox Church of Ukraine the *tomos* [“decree”] of autocephaly

¹ This is an adapted translation into English of Angelo Segrillo’s article “A Questão da Religião Ortodoxa na Rússia e na Ucrânia: disputas religiosas e políticas de um ponto de vista histórico” originally published in *Varia Historia* (Journal of the Graduate Program in History of the University of Minas Gerais), vol. 40, 2024. We thank Ely Bergo de Carvalho, the editor-in-chief of *Varia Historia*, for the permission to publish this translation.

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(ECUMENICAL..., 2019).

This autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was not recognized by the Moscow Patriarchate, which continued to insist that the only legitimate Orthodox Church in the country was the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. Tension between these churches grew in proportion to the political disputes between the two countries. When the Russian military invaded Ukraine in 2022 and Cyril, the Patriarch of Moscow, made several statements in support of Russian soldiers, the Ukrainian state took measures against leaders and members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, accusing them of acting as a kind of religious “fifth column” of Russia inside Ukraine (RUSSKAYA..., 2022a; OTDEL..., 2022; REUTERS, 2022; RUSSKAYA... 2022; PREZYDENT..., 2022). An emblematic case of this intersection between religious and political problems was that of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves (the most famous in the country, considered a World Heritage Site by UNESCO). In March 2023, the Ukrainian government withdrew the right of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (linked to the Moscow Patriarchate) to use the site, igniting protests and sit-ins from representatives of this denomination (PIVOVAROV, 2023, min. 1:35).

This article investigates the historical context of how such religious controversies arose and how they became intertwined with political disputes between the two countries in the past and today.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: POLITICS, RELIGION AND THE ETHNO-NATIONAL QUESTION

Orthodox Christianity arose from religious disputes during the period of decline of the Roman Empire. Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire by Emperor Constantine’s so-called Edict of Milan in 313 AD and became the official religion of the empire with Emperor Theodosius’ Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD. All of this happened at a time when the decline and disintegration of the Roman Empire as a unified entity had already begun. Diocletian in 286 had divided the empire into western (Latin-influenced) and eastern (Greek-influenced) parts. Constantine moved his capital to the city of Byzantium (renamed Constantinople). The Western Roman Empire fell at the end of the 5th century, but the Eastern Roman Empire remained active for another ten centuries.

This tilt of the political axis to the East had religious consequences that would lead to the Great Schism of 1054. Until this time, the Christian Church was organized in the so-called Pentarchy of the five great Patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem

(with the first in the West and the others in the East). Rome — among other things, because it had been the first capital of the Empire and had (supposedly) been evangelized by the most important of the apostles, Peter — was considered *primus inter pares*. Regardless of the doctrinal disputes of the first centuries of the Christian faith, unease grew between the patriarch of Rome and the Eastern patriarchs. The latter accused the Roman patriarch of interpreting his condition of *primus inter pares* in terms of supremacy instead of primacy. Furthermore, they accused Rome of generating unjustified doctrinal innovations (such as the *Filioque*) that were not included in the original teachings of the apostolic Church. The definitive break occurred in the Great Schism of 1054, when the patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople excommunicated each other. Since then, the Orthodox Churches of the East say they are closer to the original doctrines of Christianity and see the Latin Church as distorting this original Christianity.

With the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453, a new development took place among the Orthodox Churches: the growth in importance of the Russian Orthodox Church and the gestation in it of the doctrine of the “Third Rome.” That is to say that after the falls of Rome and Byzantium, Moscow was predestined to be the (religious and political) center of true Christianity.³ In 1589, the Patriarch of Constantinople ecclesiastically recognized the existence of the Patriarchate of Moscow which, from then on, would grow in importance within the community of Orthodox patriarchates. In fact, in 1686, in a controversial and later disputed act, Patriarch Dionysius IV of Constantinople accepted the transfer of his Metropolitanate of Kiev to the ecclesial jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, thus beginning the process of submission of the “Ukrainian” Orthodox to Moscow.⁴

REDISCOVERING *RUS*'

At this point, it is necessary to move from the religious sphere to the political sphere to understand subsequent developments. We need to define in

³ There came a time when the Ottomans conquered every country with an official Orthodox religion, except Russia. This would further reinforce the theory of the Third Rome, given that, at the time, only in Russia could the Orthodox Church make decisions without needing the sultan’s approval.

⁴ For descriptions of these events from the point of view of the different patriarchates involved, see the “History of Orthodox Christianity” as narrated on the official websites of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (available respectively at OIKOUMENIKÓ... , 2023; RUSSKAYA..., 2023 and PRAVOSLAVNA ..., 2023).

historical terms what should be understood as “Russia” and “Ukraine” over time.

Much of the confusion in this field originates from the fact that these two countries and peoples have a common origin in the Kievan state (or *Rus'*) that existed approximately between the 9th and 12th centuries. *Rus'* was a loose confederation of city-states with allegiance to the *Velikiy Knyaz* (literally “Grand Prince”) of Kiev. At that time there was no differentiation yet between Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, which formed the branch of Eastern Slavs in the region. In the 13th to 15th centuries the entire region fell under Mongol rule, and slowly began the differentiation of the original Slavic inhabitants of *Rus'* into the three branches of the so-called *Great Russians* (current Russians), *Little Russians* (current Ukrainians), and *White Russians* (current Belarusians). When the Mongols were expelled, the political fates of Russians and Ukrainians became very different. From the 16th century onward, Russians managed to form an independent state of their own (and a large tsarist empire) based in Moscow. The Ukrainians were unable to form their own independent state, remaining scattered across regions of different empires (Russian Empire, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Habsburg Empire, and Ottoman Empire). Ukrainians only acquired a stable independent state at the end of 1991, with the disintegration of the USSR and the formation of current Ukraine.⁵ This fact is the basis for statements made by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Ukraine “never had stable traditions of real statehood” (PUTIN, 2022, § 44).

In response to Putin’s “accusation,” Ukrainian historians point out that the state from which Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians originated was called the Kievan state precisely because it was founded on what is now Ukrainian territory. They also argue that the short existence of a nation is not a valid reason to disqualify its rights. Moscow was a peripheral settlement, initially mentioned only from the 12th century onward and would only acquire central importance in the post-*Rus'* period of Mongol rule over the region. Thus, according to this version, “Ukrainian” state traditions were older than those of the Moscow state that would emerge later. Furthermore (and besides the state experiences of the Ukrainian People’s Republic in 1918-1920 and present-day Ukraine from 1992 onward), Ukrainian historians consider that the communities organized in the 17th-century Cossack Hetmanate constituted a *de facto* state despite their uncertain legal and diplomatic status (BBC..., 2021).

⁵ It is important to note that in the confusing civil war period that followed the outbreak of the 1917 Russian Revolution, an ephemeral *Ukrainian People's Republic* (with its capital in Kiev) was proclaimed and existed from 1918 to 1920. It was defeated and absorbed by the Bolsheviks.

Ukrainian historians emphasize that, regardless of state traditions, the Ukrainian *nation* is ancient. This (controversial) point merits an excursus in order to understand the intricate peculiarities of Russia and Ukraine as *multinational states*.

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE AS MULTINATIONAL STATES

The fact that Russia and Ukraine are multinational states makes the relationship between these countries/peoples more complex and subtle. Unlike the nation-states of the West, where an individual's nationality is determined by *jus soli* ("right of the soil", i.e., place of birth), in these Slavic multinational states, an individual's nationality has nothing to do with the place where he/she is born but is determined by *jus sanguinis* ("right of blood"), that is, by the nationality of one's parents. This perpetuates ethnic differences by creating a state with many different *nations* within it. Both Russia and Ukraine are home to more than a hundred different *natsional'nosti* ("nationalities," ethnic groups). The fact that there are different *nations* living within the same country creates, on the one hand, great cultural diversity, but, on the other hand, it generates potential for conflict. After all, each nationality (nation) requires at least cultural autonomy (the right to have schools, laws and speak in their own language, etc.), but this can also lead to demands for political autonomy.

To understand the complexity of the situation of a state with several nations (nationalities) within itself, it is illustrative to examine the results of the last three presidential elections in Ukraine. Viktor Yanukovich, a Ukrainian citizen who holds Russian nationality (ethnicity) was elected in 2010; Petro Poroshenko, a Ukrainian citizen who holds Ukrainian nationality, was elected in 2014; Volodymyr Zelensky, a Ukrainian citizen who holds Jewish nationality, was elected in 2019. The issue of nationality (ethnicity) is so important that in the USSR — and until 1997 in the Russian Federation — an individual's *natsional'nost'* ("nationality") was stated explicitly in one's Identity Card (*passport*).

Furthermore, there is the problem of dual loyalty. Where will a person's greatest loyalty lie? Will he/she be more loyal to his/her country of citizenship or to the nation (nationality) to which he/she belongs? This, for example, was a dilemma for Ukrainian citizens who held Russian nationality (ethnicity) after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Would one's loyalty lie with the country of one's citizenship (Ukraine) or with the nation (Russian nationality) to which he/she belonged? In real life, this response has varied from person to person in Ukraine.

This issue of multinational states and the diverse demands of their constituent nations (nationalities, ethnicities) is fundamental to understanding

how complicated political, religious and ethnic relations are between “Russians” and “Ukrainians.”⁶

In the last official general Ukrainian census (2001), ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians comprised, respectively, 77.8% and 17.3% of the population (DERZHAVNYY..., 2023).⁷ However, their spatial distribution is not homogeneous, with ethnic Russians concentrated more in the east and south of the country. Furthermore, the widespread use of the Russian language as a kind of *lingua franca* for a long time (as well as the historical cultural links with Russia within the USSR) made possible (as we mentioned earlier) occasions when the elected president of the country was a Ukrainian citizen who held Russian nationality (ethnicity).

Throughout the 1990s and until 2014, relations between ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians in Ukraine were relatively good, with many mixed marriages, etc. In 2014, President Viktor Yanukovich (a Ukrainian citizen who holds Russian nationality/ethnicity) was deposed in the so-called Maidan Revolution. This split the country. The majority of Ukrainian citizens who held Ukrainian nationality/ethnicity tended to agree that the president had made serious mistakes (notably in moving away from an agreement with the European Union in favor of closer links with Russia). However, many of the Ukrainian citizens who held Russian nationality/ethnicity did not accept the overthrow of President Yanukovich. Two provinces (Donetsk and Lugansk, with many ethnic Russians) rebelled against the new central government and Crimea (also mostly ethnic-Russian) was annexed by Russia. From then on, the country found itself in a civil war situation with the central government seeking to regain control of Crimea and the two rebel provinces. In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine with its armies, arguing that it was acting to help “compatriots” (Putin, 2022). As per our previous explanations, it is clear that these compatriots do not refer to people born in Russia but rather to those members of the Russian nation born in Ukraine who rebelled against the country’s central government (*i.e.* Ukrainian citizens who hold Russian nationality/ethnicity).

In fact, the situation is more complex than that. In a 2021 historical

⁶ In the Russian language, for example, there are two words that mean “Russian”: *russkii* and *rossiyanin*. *Russkii* is the ethnic Russian (whose parent is an ethnic Russian). *Rossiyanin* is anyone born in Russia. For example, a Chechen is a *rossiyanin*, but not *russkii*.

⁷ The 2001 census was the only general census carried out in post-Soviet Ukraine to date. The next general census was planned to be held in 2010, but it was postponed to 2020. With the confusion of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it was postponed to 2023. However, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this new general census was postponed until after the end of the war on a date that is not yet defined.

article, Putin insisted that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians formed a single ethnic family (he was referring to their common origin in *Rus'*). He emphasized that attempts to artificially separate them into different peoples were an action by foreigners to divide the nation (PUTIN, 2021).

It is important to note that Putin is not alone in this type of statement. Not only do several Russian historians echo this view — that Ukrainians do not form a nation separate from Russians — but religious leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church also express such views. The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Cyril, argued this thesis in several religious messages (e.g., RUSSKAYA..., 2022; RUSSKAYA..., 2022a; OTDEL..., 2022).

RETRACING THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION

After covering the essential historical background — particularly the ethno-national complexities of multinational states, which are crucial for understanding religious issues in their context — we can now delve more deeply into the key points of the religious disputes between the Orthodox Churches in Russia and Ukraine over time. We can point out six historical processes that proved to be turning points in this escalation of tension: 1) The separation between Rome and the Eastern Patriarchates; 2) The rise of Moscow as the “Third Rome” after the conquest of Constantinople; 3) The annexation of the (ecclesial) Metropolitanate of Kiev by the Moscow Patriarchate in the 17th century; 4) The situation of the Orthodox Church in Russia and Ukraine after the end of the USSR in the early 1990s; 5) The autocephaly granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019 and the controversies arising from there; 6) The situation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Let’s tackle these issues one by one.

The Great Schism of 1054 — with the Orthodox Churches moving away from the Church of Rome — was the big bang that gave rise to many of these controversies. A key characteristic often emphasized in the literature, and important to highlight in this process (as it will likely influence subsequent disputes), is that while the Church of Rome actively fought for power — including political power — against secular states across different periods, the Orthodox Church generally maintained a cooperative relationship with the state. This situation is defined in the doctrine of the Orthodox Church by the concept of *symphonia*, where spiritual and temporal powers act harmoniously, without infringing on each other’s space, for the (spiritual and material) good of the (original) Empire. This understanding was even codified in Byzantium by Emperor Justinian (in his Sixth Novel) and in Russia in some seminal documents of the Orthodox Church, such as the

Stoglav (“Book of One Hundred Chapters,” with guidelines coming from the 1551 Council of the Russian Orthodox Church) and (in the post-Soviet period, in 2000) the *Fundamentals of the Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church* (JUSTINIAN, THE NOVELS OF JUSTINIAN, VI; STOGLAV..., 1890; RUSSKAYA..., 2008).

To explain this difference in the spiritual/secular power relationship in the Church of Rome and in Orthodox churches, instead of using the usual “Orientalist” explanations (in the *Saidian* sense of the term, suggesting that Eastern religions are inherently more “servile” to the temporal power than the Western Latin Church), it is more productive to explore socio-historical explanatory pathways such as those proposed by Nicolai Petro (SAID, 1978). Petro explains these different approaches as a result of the different contexts and tasks that those Churches had to face. The Roman Pope, from early on, found himself in a world in political collapse and had to ensure the preservation of his Church in the face of several competing temporal powers. In Byzantium, however, the Church found itself facing a unified and relatively stable state power with which it was advantageous to exchange mutual benefits (PETRO, 2018, p. 218). In other words, the issue of *power* is fundamental. To ensure its power, one Church had to confront the state(s). For the other Church, power was more easily obtained by collaborating with the state. Even in regard to the Russian Orthodox Church — which is currently accused of being “servile” to the Putin government (and which has indeed historically gone through times in which the state actually dominated it, as in the Soviet period or when Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate in 1721 replacing it with a *Most Holy Governing Synod* monitored by a lay *Chief Procurator*) — nuances must be observed. In the Russian Federation, the Orthodox Church is not dominated by force or is so limited that it has no other option than to collaborate with the government. The Orthodox Church (or, at least, its current leadership) seems to share with Putin a series of (conservative) values that make collaboration advantageous for both sides. As Petro (2018, p. 226) put it, currently the Russian Orthodox Church gives moral support to state policies not because it has to, but because it wants to.

THE THIRD ROME

The next step toward the current situation between Russia and Ukraine was the growth in importance of the Russian Orthodox Church among Orthodox Churches around the world. It is important to note that, in this sense, Moscow took a qualitative leap in relation to Kiev (that is, in relation to the previous Kievan state or *Rus*’). The Kievan state was officially Christianized (that is, Christianity became its official religion) in 988 AD by

order of Prince Vladimir the Great. However, the (ecclesial) Metropolitanate of Kiev (*i.e.* the Church of *Rus'* under the command of the *Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus'*) never received autocephaly at the time, remaining under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Moscow (whose importance in the region grew during the time of Mongol rule in the 13th-15th centuries), after the expulsion of the Mongols in the 15th century and the beginning of the construction of the tsarist empire in the 16th century, sought to wrest its ecclesiastical independence from Constantinople. Even before receiving its official autocephaly from the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1589, already since 1448 (when Metropolitan Jonah was elected without the participation of Constantinople and subsequently changed his title from *Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus'* to *Metropolitan of Moscow and All Rus'*) the Russian Church acted as *de facto* autocephalous. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, the view that Moscow was destined to be the "Third Rome," (the main center of Orthodoxy from then on) grew within the Russian Church.⁸ This would lead not only to tensions with the Patriarch of Constantinople but also to "imperial" attitudes toward the Church in Ukraine.

As aforementioned, the Metropolitanate of Kiev (the ecclesial center of the former Kievan state and still the ecclesial headquarters of the Church in the Ukrainian regions now dispersed across different empires and states) was subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople when Moscow was already acting as autocephalous in practice. In the 15th and 16th centuries Moscow's attempts to interfere in the Metropolitanate of Kiev intensified (often justified by the fact that part of the Metropolitanate of Kiev was on Polish lands, where the attempts to reunify the Orthodox Church with the Roman Church posed a problem). The boiling point came with the election of Gedeon Chetvertinsky as Metropolitan of Kiev in 1685 by appointment from Moscow, without approval from Constantinople. After many disputes, in 1686 Patriarch Dionysius IV of Constantinople accepted the transfer of his Metropolitanate of Kiev to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate.

This act was controversial and highly criticized in Constantinople. So much so that Dionysius IV would be overthrown the following year.⁹

⁸ The first clear formulator of the doctrine of the Third Rome is considered to be the monk Philotheus of Pskov, in his letter to Mikhail Gregorievich at the end of 1523 or beginning of 1524, in which he mentioned that "two Romes have fallen, the third stands, and there will be no fourth" (FILOFEY..., 1524).

⁹ To notice how complicated the situation was, suffice to mention that the (ecclesiastical) Metropolitanate of Kiev, whose jurisdiction covered the territories of the original ancient *Rus'*, now encompassed territories in different countries

To understand Constantinople's agreement with the transfer of the Metropolitanate of Kiev to the jurisdiction of Moscow, it is necessary to note the subtlety of Moscow-Constantinople ecclesiastical relations. The literature emphasizes the competition between the old Patriarchate of Constantinople (the new *primus inter pares*, after the "departure" of Rome) and the new rising star of the "Third Rome," but it is important to highlight that the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in certain aspects created new (and, at times, clandestine) links between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the new Patriarchate of Moscow, since in the former Christianity was held hostage to the new Muslim rulers while in the latter the strength of its close Church-state relationship could be an element for a possible reconquest of Christianity's positions in several regions (including potentially in Constantinople itself). Thus, it is important to draw attention to collaborative channels (often secret, since they were prohibited by the new Ottoman government in Constantinople) between the two Orthodox Churches. It is in this dubious context of competition/cooperation that the subsequent disputes in Constantinople for and against the annexation of the Metropolitanate of Kiev by Moscow must be seen.

The annexation of the Metropolitanate of Kiev by Moscow is a clear example of this seesaw for and against Moscow in Constantinople. In 1686, Patriarch Dionysius IV agreed (confirmed by a Council in Constantinople in the same year) to have the Metropolitan of Kiev appointed by Moscow, on condition that Moscow not infringe on the rights of the Metropolitan of Kiev and respect Constantinople's status as the Mother Church of Kiev (ECUMENICAL..., 2018). This act was so controversial that the following year (1687), a Council in Constantinople deposed Dionysius IV and declared his action regarding passing the appointment of the Metropolitan of Kiev to the Patriarchate of Moscow illegal. Since then, the prevailing official position in the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has been that the actions of Dionysius IV and the Council of 1686 in empowering the Moscow Patriarchate to appoint the Metropolitan of Kiev were invalid, especially

(some in conflict and with different religions, such as the Russian Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) since the Ukrainians were now spread across different countries after the end of the Kievan state and Mongol rule. One of the arguments against handing control of the Metropolitanate of Kiev to Moscow was that this could alienate the Metropolitanate's faithful who found themselves under Poland's rule. The situation would become even more complicated with the attempts at (re)union between the Orthodox Churches and Rome (especially the Union of Florence in 1439 and the Union of Brest in 1595). These attempts led to dissension in Orthodox Christianity as a whole, with the Metropolitanate of Kiev divided into its eastern part (linked to Russia) and its western part (linked to Poland-Lithuania).

given that the very conditions stipulated in that permission (maintaining the rights of the Metropolitan of Kiev, the form of his election by his ecclesiastical jurisdiction, etc.) would subsequently not be obeyed. In particular, Tsar Peter the Great abolished the appointment of the Metropolitan of Kiev and reduced his position to Archbishop of one of the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church. In a session on October 11, 2018, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople officially revoked the decision of the Council of 1686, stating that it had given the Patriarch of Moscow only the right to appoint the Metropolitan of Kiev, elected by the Metropolitan congregation itself, with the condition that he should mention the Ecumenical Patriarch as First Hierarch in all religious services and proclaim its canonical dependence on the Mother Church of Constantinople (UKRAINS'KA..., 2018).

THE THIRD ROME: CHURCH UNDER THE STATE?

After the Metropolitanate of Kiev came under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, the fate of this religious conglomerate through time was marked by the discussion of the Church's relationship with the state. The most current view in Western literature is that the Russian Orthodox Church over time fell under the rule of the state (despite its ideological discourse about the harmonious *symphonia* between Church and state, each in its own sphere). This is because Peter the Great unilaterally abolished the Patriarchate in 1721 and replaced it with the *Most Holy Governing Synod* (a collegial body composed of religious representatives, but monitored by a lay *Chief Procurator*). From then on the Church was closely monitored by the state. This control increased exponentially in the Soviet period. In it, after an initial phase of open struggle between Church and state, a *modus vivendi* was achieved in which the Church acted less freely than in the Tsarist period, under total capitulation to the parameters set by the communist atheist government. The docility of the leadership of the Orthodox Church toward the regime in the Soviet Union was such that an alternative Russian Church emerged abroad and declared that it was the one that maintained the real historical traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church, since the official Soviet Church had sold itself spiritually and materially to the state. This new Orthodox Church was the *Russian Orthodox Church Abroad*, created in the early 1920s by bishops who were in exile abroad.¹⁰

The situation would change with the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.

¹⁰ The *Russian Orthodox Church Abroad* reunited with the Russian Orthodox Church after the end of the Soviet Union in 2007.

From then on, the new Russian Federation, despite being constitutionally a secular state, proclaiming religious freedom, was, in practice, open to special collaboration with the Orthodox Church. With the economic depression of the 1990s, which accompanied the systemic transition from socialism to capitalism in Russia, religion was an attractive form of spiritual consolation in times of material poverty. This aspect did not go unnoticed by politicians, many of whom (starting with Yeltsin himself and, later, Putin) were willing to collaborate with and help the Orthodox Church. An exemplary case of this partnership in the 1990s was the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Demolished by the Soviets in 1931 (in its place they built the largest open-air swimming pool in the world), it was rebuilt throughout the 1990s by the Orthodox Church with the help of donations “from the people.” Many ordinary people indeed donated money, but politicians also got involved. The powerful mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, coordinated the collection of “voluntary” contributions from companies in the city for the project (SMITH, 1997). One hand washed the other. Collaboration was mutually beneficial for the Church and politicians, who saw their capital with the electorate grow.

It is this type of relationship that developed throughout the 1990s and later (with some qualitative differences) under Putin. In the 1990s, under Yeltsin, the state, despite in practice collaborating with the Church, still maintained, in its ideological and formal plane, the discourse of the separation of Church and state. Under Putin (especially in his latest presidential terms), a qualitative difference gradually took hold. The deepening of the discourse of moral conservatism (defense of the family, against LGBTQ, etc.) coming from both Putin and the Orthodox Church brought the two sides closer together and Church-state collaboration began to subtly evolve, become closer and more formalized, sometimes blurring the legal boundary of Church-state separation.¹¹

END OF THE USSR AND A NEW RELIGIOUS POST-SOVIET WORLD

¹¹ Article 14 of the 1993 Constitution still remains valid today. It states that “the Russian Federation shall be a secular State;” “No religion may be established as the state religion or as obligatory;” and that “Religious associations shall be separate from the state and shall be equal before the law;” but (somewhat symbolically) during the 2020 constitutional reform, the new article 67.1. para. 2 stipulates that “The Russian Federation [...] preserves] the memory of ancestors who transmitted to us the ideals and faith in God [...]” (ROSSIYSKAYA..., 2020).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union created a new reality (but with remnants of old problems repressed over many years) both on a secular and religious level.

On a secular level, the USSR dissolved into 15 independent countries with their own (and sometimes conflicting) aspirations. In particular, Russia and Ukraine, with a past that included a lot of approximation/attraction and repulsion, now had to find a *modus vivendi* to overcome historical disputes prior to the Soviet period. These disputes included border demarcation. The most obvious case was that of the Crimean peninsula, which had belonged to Russia until 1954 and where most of the Russian warm-water navy was located, a problem which was resolved in the 1990's with an agreement for Russia to keep its fleet there in exchange for payment for leasing the land.

If on a political level relations between the two countries were relatively good in the 1990s with Yeltsin as president, on a religious level problems soon (re)appeared. In the Russian Federation, the Russian Orthodox Church continued its position as the dominant Church without much dispute. In Ukraine, the question of whether the Orthodox should continue under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate as in Soviet times soon became controversial. In addition to the parishes linked to the Moscow Patriarchate (which continued to function as in the past, especially since, as we have seen, there are a large number of ethnic Russians in Ukraine), two Orthodox Churches resurfaced that in the past had challenged the annexation of the Metropolitanate of Kiev by Moscow: the *Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate* and the *Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church*. Both claimed to be successors of the ancient *Metropolitanate of Kiev and All Rus'* before it was annexed (illegally according to them) by Moscow in the 17th century.

Consequently, Ukraine in the early 1990s had three different Orthodox churches competing with each other. This is a canonically anomalous situation: in the Orthodox world, traditionally no more than one Church is recognized as having jurisdiction over the same country. Thus, the three had problems being recognized by other patriarchates. Beginning with the 2014 Maidan Revolution crisis, these religious tensions rose along with political tensions between Ukraine and Russia. Ethnically Ukrainian presidents of Ukraine (that is, all except the ethnically Russian Viktor Yanukovich) had already made political contacts with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, seeking canonical recognition for an autochthonous Ukrainian Church. After the 2014 crisis, President Petro Poroshenko intensified such efforts and managed to get Patriarch Bartholomew to propose a “Solomonic” solution to the problem of the dispersion of Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. Firstly, on October 11, 2018, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople officially

revoked the decision of the Council of 1686 that had passed the right to appoint the Metropolitan of Kiev to Moscow (UKRAINS'KA..., 2018). It was then arranged that the two autochthonous Ukrainian Churches (the *Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate* and the *Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church*) would dissolve so that a new unified Church could be formed that would be canonically recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. So it was done. On December 15, 2018, a Unification Council was held, consecrating the dissolution of the two Ukrainian Churches and the creation, on their basis, of the new *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*, with Epiphanius I as leader of the Church (Metropolitan). On January 6, 2019, Bartholomew I officially granted this Orthodox Church of Ukraine the *tomos* ["decree"] of autocephaly (ECUMENICAL..., 2019).¹²

These actions by the Ukrainian side caused an immediate reaction from the Russian side. The Moscow Patriarchate condemned and rejected the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Patriarch of Constantinople, stating that the only legitimate Orthodox Church in Ukraine was the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. On September 14, 2018 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided not to participate in any further events convened or directed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and on October 15 of the same year banned any of its priests from participating in the sacraments of the said Patriarchate (RUSSKAYA..., 2018, 2018a and 2018b). A "war climate" had developed between the two Patriarchates.

And this climate became literally warlike with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. With the constant bombings and deaths of Ukrainians by Russian soldiers and their weapons, in Ukraine there was an outcry regarding the position of the Russian Orthodox Church and its arm in the country (the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate). Ukrainians demanded condemnation of the killing of their countrymen in an invasion of this sovereign country. However, these Russia-related religious organizations refused to condemn these actions.

The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Cyril, after a period of silence on the issue, took Russia's side in the conflict. On several occasions, he spoke to ask for peace between the two peoples, but he defended Russia in three main ways: 1) he delegitimized the possibility of autonomous existence of the Ukrainian people by saying that Russians and

¹² This unification of the two Ukrainian Churches in 2018 was not free from controversy and internal dissension. In the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate, internal splits were more visible, the main case being that of Filaret (its Patriarch from 1995 to 2018) who ended up not accepting the final result of the dissolution of his Church.

Ukrainians are very closely related peoples and that their separation was artificially stimulated by foreign agents and internal enemies; 2) he defended the task of Russian soldiers and said that their actions (according to him in “self-defense” of the ethnic Russian minority in Ukraine) would be spiritually rewarded by God; 3) he continued his longstanding defense of Putin’s policies in general (now including actions in Ukraine) (RUSSKAYA..., 2022; RUSSKAYA..., 2022a; OTDEL..., 2022; REUTERS, 2022).

This position of the Moscow Patriarchate was criticized both by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. Both criticized the Patriarch of Moscow’s silence or omission regarding the magnitude of the suffering caused to Ukrainians by the Russians and also his “unchristian” attitude of siding with the aggressors.

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, clearly expressed that it was not possible to bless those who kill their brothers (referring to the prayers that the Patriarch of Moscow, Cyril, had offered to Russian soldiers). He said that one of the problems was the instrumentalization of religion by people who, in fact, had no faith (a criticism of Russian politicians). He also condemned the ethnic vision that the Patriarch of Moscow had of the conflict in Ukraine, dividing Ukrainian citizens against each other, recalling that the Orthodox Church granted autocephaly per state and did not divide countries — especially multinational ones — in terms of their ethnicities. He insisted that it was not possible for the Patriarch of Moscow to ignore those being bombed based on such criteria. He argued that dialogue and reconciliation were necessary, not support for just one side (OIKOUMENIKÓ..., 2022; OIKOUMENIKÓ..., 2022a; DUKHOVNIY..., 2022; VARTHOLOMAÍOS..., 2022; ORTHODOX..., 2023).

For its part, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine also strongly criticized the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church, and in particular the attitude of the Patriarch of Moscow toward the war. Its Holy Synod, at its meeting on July 27, 2022, approved a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in which it described the horrors of the war in Ukraine, the silence of the Patriarch of Moscow in relation to them, his support for the attitudes of the Russian government and called for the dismissal of Cyril as Patriarch of Moscow for his attitudes that they considered schismatic (PRAVOSLAVNA..., 2022). The highest leader of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epiphanius, accused the Patriarch of Moscow, in his choice between good and evil, of having chosen the side of the Antichrist by placing himself on the side of the invaders (MYTROPOLYT..., 2022). He said that Cyril should fear God and not Putin (EPIFANIY, 2023). For him, the divine call of his Church at that time was to put an end to the evil that was

happening to Ukraine (EPIFANIY, 2022). In other words, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine once again placed itself in close connection with the state to resist and survive an invasion of the country.

The Ukrainian government also took sides in the country's religious dispute (although officially on secular technical grounds). By decree 820/2022 (dated Jan. 12, 2022), the President of Ukraine, Zelensky, provided for the creation of sanctions for religious organizations affiliated with decision-making centers in the Russian Federation that were acting in accordance with the interests of the aggressor country (PREZYDENT..., 2022). This action aimed at resolving the problem of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. This is a complex situation because, following the start of the invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in an official resolution dated May 27, 2022, announced that it had made changes to its charter affirming its autonomy and independence from Moscow (UKRAYINS'KA..., 2022). The head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Onufriy, condemned the Russian invasion of 2022 and stated that his Church had broken ties with Moscow (UKRAYINS'KA..., 2023). Although divisions actually occurred in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church after the invasion of the country, the government accused the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of continuing to be *de facto* linked to the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate.

As we saw, Ukraine's internal ethnic divisions constitute an additional complication to the country's political and religious problems with Russia, which is also a multinational country with its own ethnic problems, as exemplified in the case of the Chechen wars.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we see that the Orthodox religious disputes between Ukraine and Russia, to be understood in their entirety, cannot be examined in strictly religious terms. Political elements, derived from the historical developments between the two countries, are fundamental to properly understanding the causes and drivers of the various turning points in their evolution.

Understanding the political element is important for the study of religious disputes in general, regardless of specific religions, but it becomes especially important in the case of the Orthodox Church given that the close relationship between Church and state is at the heart of its philosophy (the *symphonia* theory of the Church-state relationship). Due to this close relationship, historical developments in the state directly affect the Church and are taken into account by it. Both the "creation" (autocephaly) of the Moscow Patriarchate (in the 16th century) and the creation of the Orthodox

Church of Ukraine (in the 21st century) had strong participation from local rulers, who actively insisted on (one could arguably even say “wrested”) autocephaly for these Churches. The 2022 Ukrainian War demonstrated that the Orthodox Churches (both in Russia and Ukraine) were quite aligned with their governments and vice versa, in a true symbiosis in which the interests of the state and the Church largely coincide and reinforce each other. The theory of *symphonia* between Church and state reveals itself not only as a driving principle of the relationship, but also as an *explanatory* element of it.

However, we must go further and note a subtle difference in the political relationship between Church and state of the Russian Orthodox Church on the one hand and, on the other hand, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople together with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. This difference concerns the division between civic nationalism (based on *jus soli*) and ethnic nationalism (based on *jus sanguinis*) in the formation of states (and, by extension, in the Church’s relationship with them).

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine) today has a conception of the Church/state relationship that can metaphorically be described as based on *civic nationalism*. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, has emphasized that the Ecumenical Church can only grant autocephaly on the basis of one Church (and only one Church) per country. It flatly condemns the concept of *ethnic nationalism* in the religious field by prohibiting the creation of different Churches (within the same country) to individually serve each of the nationalities (ethnicities) that make up multinational states, such as Russia and Ukraine, for example (OIKOUMENIKÓ ..., 2022a). Likewise, in Ukraine it is important to note the subtle terminological difference between the change from the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church (which was linked to the Moscow Patriarchate) to the new Orthodox Church *of Ukraine* (created in 2018 to serve all Orthodox people born in Ukraine, regardless of their ethnicity).

On the other hand, the Moscow Patriarchate, in the context of the Ukrainian War, has emphasized aspects of *ethnic nationalism* by supporting the right of Russian soldiers to defend ethnic Russians inside Ukraine (even though they are Ukrainian citizens). Its defense of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (linked to the Moscow Patriarchate) as the only legitimate one in Ukraine, in practice, means the preponderance of the Russian ethnic element even within the borders of Ukraine. It is important to remember the symbolic detail that the official name of the Russian Orthodox Church in the original language is *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov'*, in which the word *russkaya* is the feminine form of *russkii* which (as previously mentioned) denotes the “ethnic Russian” (the child of an ethnic Russian parent) and not the word *rossiiskaya* (related to *rossiyanin*, which denotes anyone born in Russia,

regardless of whether they are ethnic Russians or not).

This differentiation between civic nationalism (*jus soli*) and ethnic nationalism (*jus sanguinis*) is fundamental to understanding the current conflict in Ukraine in both its religious and political aspects. Defenders of the Russian Church/state rely on ethnic nationalism to defend the rights of members of their nation, even if they are born in another country (in this case, ethnic Russians in Ukraine). Defenders of civic nationalism — among them the current Ecumenical Patriarch and, more contradictorily, several members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, since Ukraine is also a multinational state with historical traditions of *jus sanguinis* — tend to emphasize the autocephaly of Churches in purely state and non-ethnic terms (which is also reflected in their relations with the state at present).

In terms of future prospects, it is likely that such Church-state interaction will continue, with political events affecting the strictly religious framework — a dimension that could become even more vital for the Ukrainian side, since a possible non-survival of the Ukrainian state would likely have serious consequences for the *modus vivendi* of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

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*The Russian Revolutions and the Democratic Hypothesis:
The Trajectory of Julius Martov*

Daniel Aarão Reis*

Introduction

The association between authoritarian traditions and Soviet socialism has become commonplace. The centuries-old authoritarianism of the Tsarist autocracy is said to have predetermined the fate of socialism in Russia. When asked about the tortuous paths of Russian social democracy, Rosa Luxemburg allegedly said: *Das ist Russland* (“This is Russia”). Many other observers have said the same about the authoritarianism of Soviet socialism: “*Das ist Russland.*”

The Bolshevik revolutionaries and Soviet historiography, or historiography inspired by the international communist movement, defended the existence of a Soviet democracy, which Lenin even characterized as “a thousand times more democratic” than the political regimes in Europe and the United States.¹ However, the accumulation of evidence (the Gulag, political terror and the abolition of democratic freedoms) weakened the arguments in favor of “Soviet democracy,” reinforcing the critical assessments that, from the outset, pointed to the authoritarian “fate” of the Russian revolutions and Soviet socialism.

This article questions this commonplace view. And it aims to show — by examining the trajectory of a Russian Jewish revolutionary, Yuli Osipovich Tserderbaum/Julius Martov — the opportunities missed amid possible combinations of revolution, socialism, freedom and democracy in Russia.

Our basic theoretical references refer to Italian microhistory (G. Levi, 2019; C. Ginzburg, 1976 and 1986) and the hypothesis that, from individual trajectories, we can uncover broader political and cultural horizons. This article will try to identify with reference to J. Martov’s trajectory critical moments when the opportunities for building a socialist democracy in Russia were missed.

Limitations of space force us to deal rather sketchily with the issues

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¹ Cf. V. Lenin, 2023.

at stake, but this will not, I believe, prevent us from demonstrating that the Russian revolutions were not foredoomed to authoritarian paths.

The article is divided according to the following arrangement: 1. Formative years: freedom, revolution, socialism and democracy; 2. The tests of history: the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party and the 1905 revolution; 3. From the counter-revolutionary period to the Great War and the 1917 revolutions; 4. The triumph and consolidation of authoritarian socialism (1917-1921); 5. The last struggles and J. Martov's legacy (1921-1923).

1. Formative years: freedom, revolution, socialism and democracy

Yuli Osipovitch Tserderbaum (Юлий Осипович Цедербаум), the Julius Martov,² was the son and grandson of Russian Jewish businessmen and publicists. He was born in Constantinople, then the capital of the Ottoman Empire, on November 12, 1873. His father and grandfather were attached to liberal and enlightened traditions: the *Haskalah*. This cultural movement encouraged the integration of Jews into Russian society from an assimilationist perspective and valued secular education without denying the traditions of the Jewish people.³ Due to the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774), the family moved to Odessa and later to St. Petersburg.

Expectations of Jewish assimilation in Russia were frustrated by the discriminatory policies of Tsar Alexander III (1881-1894), which consolidated a mandatory Jewish settlement zone and created an environment favorable to *progroms*.⁴ The Tserderbaum family, due to their social position, escaped the most brutal effects of the persecutions, but witnessed massacres and humiliation imposed on the Jewish people. The young Yuli and his siblings, throughout their school careers, suffered embarrassment and witnessed anti-Semitic actions. These circumstances, combined with an upbringing open to liberal and revolutionary authors, contributed to forging feelings and convictions in favor of freedom and opposition to and revolt against the despotism of the Tsarist order.⁵

²The pseudonym referred to the month of March (in Russian: март), which the young Yuli considered to be revolutionary.

³The *Haskalah* was an Enlightenment movement that emerged in the 18th century in central Europe among Yiddish-speaking Jews

⁴In Russian *Черта оседлости* (in English: *Pale of settlement*): a portion of land to the west and southwest of the Russian Empire where Jews were allowed to settle. Only with special permission could a Jew live elsewhere.

⁵Among foreign authors, F. Schiller, V. Hugo and the debates on the French Revolution were particularly appreciated. Among the Russians, A. Herzen, M.

In the fall of 1891, Martov entered the University of St. Petersburg and joined revolutionary circles in a rapid transition to Marxism, which was spreading in the intellectual circles of the big Russian cities as an alternative to the tradition of the revolutionary narodniks.⁶ In February 1892, he was arrested for the first time, accused of distributing revolutionary pamphlets. Released in May, he resumed his revolutionary activities, which led to another arrest in December of the same year, expulsion from the university and deportation to Vilnius (Russian Lithuania) in the summer of 1893.

Between 1893 and 1895, Martov continued his revolutionary work in Vilnius, now with circles of Jewish workers. His first publication appeared at that time in co-authorship with A. Krammer: *Об агитации/On agitation* (Martov, 1894). The authors opposed the propagandistic and bookish tradition of the Marxist pamphlets disseminated in Russia and proposed an approach related to the concrete conditions in which workers lived, encouraging them to fight for their immediate interests, without prejudice to addressing more general issues.

At the end of 1895, on his return to St. Petersburg, J. Martov and V. Lenin met and participated in the formation of the *League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class* with the aim of bringing together the revolutionary intelligentsia, inspired by Marxism, and the working class, which was starting large-scale social movements. With Martov and Kremer's text, the League gained some prominence, but soon afterwards the main leaders were arrested, including Martov, who was arrested (third arrest) in January 1896, tried and sentenced to three years in Turukhansk, Siberia.

During his years in exile in Siberia, despite the precariousness of communications, Martov participated in the struggles against political tendencies opposed to Marxism. From afar, he followed the formation of the *General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia* — generally called The Bund — in 1897, and the founding congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in 1898.⁷ In exile political and emotional affinities with V. Lenin and A. Potresov were consolidated. When their exile was over, at V. Lenin's suggestion, they decided to go abroad and safely organize a periodical capable of circulating underground and linking together the various Marxist groups that existed in Russia to re-found the Social Democratic party.

Saltykov-Shchedrin and other authors from the narodnik tradition. Cf. L. Dan, 1987.

⁶The main agency then for the fomenting of Marxism in Russia was the group *Emancipation of Labor* (Освобождение Труда), founded by Russian exiles G. Plekhanov, P. Axelrod and V. Zassulitch in Geneva in 1883.

⁷It was a stillborn experiment, because the police arrested the political leaders involved and dissolved the organization.

In Siberian exile, J. Martov had acquired a handicap. Tuberculosis would impair his speech for life and eventually lead to his death. This was in addition to another handicap, a lame leg due to a badly healed childhood fracture, which caused him to limp. However, his family upbringing, his early political struggles, the hardships of prison and exile and his courage in the face of repression and misfortune had made him a determined man. Some basic references such as revolution, freedom, the democratic republic and socialism would accompany him for the rest of his life.⁸

2. The tests of history: the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) and the 1905 revolution

The *Spark* (*Искра*), a clandestine publication with the aim of coordinating revolutionary work in Russia, began circulating in December 1900. Until April 1902, it was printed in Munich, Germany; then in London until March 1903; and afterward in Geneva. It was edited by V. Lenin, J. Martov, A. Potresov and V. Zassulitch from Munich and G. Plekhanov and P. Axelrod from Geneva. In October 1902, L. Trotsky joined from Russia in London.

Later, differences and disagreements would erupt between them, but retrospective determinism should be avoided. Between 1900 and 1903, it is important to highlight the strong bonds of cohesion and an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie that united the group.⁹ The common struggle against the Tsarist regime and the harsh circumstances of exile contributed to this. In addition, they all agreed with the program of revolution formulated by G. Plekhanov and supported by the International Social Democracy. Considering the agrarian and *backward* character of Russia, two stages were envisaged: in the first, the overthrow of tsarism and the establishment of a democratic republic, under bourgeois hegemony. In the second, the possibility of a socialist revolution. It was up to the socialists to form the Social Democratic Party, organize the working class and, under no circumstances, participate in bourgeois governments. As for the party, given the conditions of the Russian Empire, it had to be centralized and clandestine.

The editors of *Iskra* also forged their political and emotional bonds in the fight against other Russian revolutionary tendencies, whether or not they were inspired by Marxism and its international expressions.

There were nuances, but general agreement prevailed on the issues

⁸Not excluding, as will be seen, a number of theoretical zigzags, since there are no linear biographies. (P. Bourdieu, 1996)

⁹I. Martov, 1902 and L. Dan, 1987

considered essential. The Congress to re-found the RSDLP took place between July 17 and August 10, 1903.¹⁰ Once the Program was approved, disagreement arose over the Party's statutes.¹¹ V. Lenin stressed the importance of organic centralization and full dedication to the revolution for a militant to be admitted as a full member. J. Martov extended the criterion to all those who acted under the guidance and supervision of the Party, while ensuring the autonomy of the local committees from the central leadership. There were other discrepancies, but on these two points there was no agreement. The differences were put to vote, resulting in the victory of Martov. However, with regard to the organization and composition of the political leadership, in the face of new disagreements, V. Lenin's positions prevailed, since the so-called *economists* and the Bund supporters, who had previously voted with Martov, had by then left the congress.

The atmosphere degenerated into accusations and denunciations of a personal nature, giving rise to the denominations that would go down in history: the Bolsheviks (большевики), led by Lenin, and the Mensheviks (меньшевики), led by Martov.¹² The latter, in protest, withdrew from the Party's leadership bodies.

The polemics continued at the Second Congress of the *League of Russian Revolutionary Social-Democracy Abroad*, which brought together exiled revolutionary leaders in Geneva in October 1903. Martov accused Lenin of subjecting the Party to a kind of state of siege/*осадное положение* (Martov, 1904). The following month, a turnaround by G. Plekhanov, who abandoned his alliance with Lenin and co-opted Martov into the leadership of *Iskra*, further radicalized tempers. It was Lenin's turn to leave the Party's leadership bodies.

Thus, split and weakened, the newly founded Social Democratic Party was surprised by the 1905 revolution — a second historical test for J. Martov's conceptions.¹³

The revolution surprised the world and the Russian revolutionaries themselves. It was the result of a combination of circumstances. The Russo-Japanese War (February 1904 to September 1905) played a decisive role,

¹⁰The Congress began in Brussels but, for security reasons, moved to London where it concluded its work. 26 organizations and 57 delegates took part in it.

¹¹In March 1902, V. Lenin published a book: *What is to be done?* (Что делать?), in which he advocated a centralized party made up of full-time militants, the professional revolutionaries.

¹²For details of the debates, disagreements and votes, see R. Service, 1985; P.A.Абрамович, 1923; and I. Getzler, 1967 and 1994. For the history of the Mensheviks, see L.H. Haimson, 1974, 1955 and 1987 (with S. Galili and R.W. Garcia)

¹³For the debates among Marxists on the 1905 revolution, see V. Strada, 1984.

deepening social and political contradictions and sparking protests (even as early as in 1904) from the middle strata of society and some sectors of the bourgeoisie. The intransigence of the Tsarist autocracy, made explicit in the massacre of the demonstration on January 9, 1905 (“Bloody Sunday”), added fuel to the fire, sparking unprecedented waves of economic and political strikes. At the same time, social movements began in the countryside, demanding the distribution of land, and demonstrations were held by soldiers and sailors (*e.g.*, the Battleship Potemkin mutiny in June 1905).

Peace with Japan (September 1905), the October Manifesto — in which the Tsar announced the convocation of a parliament (Duma) — and the guarantee of basic freedoms, softened the contradictions, but they did not stop the social movements. In the cities, a novel form of organization appeared: the workers’ councils/soviets. There was an attempt of a new general strike in October and, finally, the defeat of the insurrection in Moscow in December. The revolution would continue to agitate Russia until the beginning of 1907, but by the end of 1905 it was clear it had been defeated.

Arriving in St. Petersburg in October 1905, Martov formulated assessments and positions on the major issues raised by the war and the revolution.

As for the war, from the outset he strongly condemned it, assuming internationalist positions. Socialists should not take sides in an imperialist rapacious war. With regard to power, he criticized the participation of socialists in possible democratic governments and also those who imagined taking advantage of favorable opportunities to attempt a revolutionary insurrection led by the proletariat. It was up to socialists to encourage the struggle and organization of the working class, but under no circumstances to try to “seize” central power. He would invoke the ideas of Karl Marx, who warned socialists to avoid coming to power without social and historical preconditions. In this case, they would be overthrown by counterrevolution or, worse still, be forced to implement the policies of rival classes. However, Martov was sympathetic to the emergence of the soviets. They should be encouraged as expressions of workers’ self-organization. With regard to the countryside, he advocated the municipalization of agrarian reform, with an emphasis on the self-organization of local agrarian committees.

He always defended the participation of socialists in institutions open to popular vote, no matter how great the restrictions imposed by the autocracy. As a result, and unlike many others, he was in favor of participating in the Duma elections held in 1906.

In this set of evaluations and proposals, his differences with Lenin matured, except for the common condemnation of the war from an internationalist perspective.

In opposition to the seduction of the revolutionary seizure of central power, Martov defended the need to strengthen the self-organized movements (soviets) of the working class, but within the framework of a democratic republic, necessarily hegemonized by bourgeois liberalism, according to the program approved by the 1903 Congress. Socialism had to accumulate forces, without following the bourgeoisie or participating in a government with it, but without prematurely trying to “seize power.” These proposals, in the context of the revolutionary upheaval of 1905, seemed hesitant to many. On the contrary, even though he constantly expressed his doubts — like any sophisticated intellectual, Martov was always *doubtful* — they consolidated democratic orientations, defined as questions of principle.

3. *From the counter-revolutionary period to the Great War and the 1917 revolutions*

The period of counter-revolution that lasted until 1912 was difficult for the revolutionaries.

Under pressure from the Socialist International and the social bases in Russia in favor of reunification, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks held the Fourth and Fifth Congresses in Stockholm (1906) and London (1907).¹⁴

However, in practice, the two tendencies maintained their own dynamics. Martov vainly defended a model of organization inspired by the experience of the German Social Democrats under the so-called *exceptional laws* (1878-1890), combining legal and illegal forms of struggle and organization.

In 1907-1908, the scandal of the “expropriations” (robberies) came to light. The International and the Mensheviks condemned them. The Bolsheviks practiced them, but lacked the courage to defend them in public. It was then that Martov proposed a new split with the Bolsheviks, without success. In 1910, a new reunification meeting failed, but a public split was avoided, which did not stop Martov from writing a text critical of the Bolsheviks, accusing them of *destroying* the party. (Martov, 1911)

In 1912, the split seemed to consolidate again. The Bolsheviks held an exclusive conference in Prague in January. In Vienna, in August, several Menshevik or near-Menshevik leaders met in the so-called *August bloc*. However, such splits still met with a lot of resistance in Russia.¹⁵

¹⁴In 1905, the Bolsheviks (in London in April) and the Mensheviks (in Geneva, in April-May) held separate general meetings. The Bolshevik one was called the Third Congress of the RSDLP.

¹⁵Until mid-1917, many regional and local Social Democratic organizations resisted

V. Lenin and L. Trotsky, considering the experience of 1905, deepened their critique of the revolutionary vocation of the bourgeoisie. Lenin spoke of an *uninterrupted revolution*; Trotsky, of a *permanent revolution*. Both admitted that the proletariat and its party would take power without intermediate stages. These ideas, as will be seen, would later play a decisive role. Martov remained faithful to the Program approved in 1903, attributing Lenin's and Trotsky's proposals to *narodnik and anarchist deviations*.

In the first half of 1914, strike movements grew in number, (M. Ferro, 1967) invigorating the spirits of the revolutionaries and of Martov, who had returned to Russia, benefiting from the amnesty decreed in 1913. However, World War I, which began in August 1914, caught him by surprise on a trip to Europe, forcing him to return to exile in Geneva.

Faced with the war, the Russian revolutionaries, as everywhere else in the world, were divided into tendencies. The strongest, contrary to the resolutions of the Socialist International, adhered to patriotic injunctions within the framework of the *Holy Union: the defensivists*. A minority, including V. Lenin, called for civil war and the overthrow of their own governments: the *defeatists*. They accused the *defensivists* of treason. Martov, as in 1905, condemned the war in the name of socialist internationalism and ethical and moral values, but did not agree with the *defeatists*. He did not attribute adherence to the war to the betrayal of the Social Democrats, but to the patriotism anchored in the grassroots. It was necessary to understand the phenomenon, fight it and rebuild the Socialist International in the context of the struggle for an immediate peace, without annexations and indemnities, conceived as the antechamber of the socialist revolution. (J. Martov 1917) The leaders opposed to the war met in Zimmerwald (1915) and Kienthal (1916). There were also other meetings of socialists from neutral countries and the *Entente*, but they had no impact on the development of the conflict.

February

The news of the uprising in Petrograd and the overthrow of Tsarism surprised the Russian revolutionaries once again. They wanted to return to Russia, but the journey through the *Entente* countries was blocked. Martov suggested they transit through Germany, in an agreement brokered by the Swiss Socialists with the approval of the leadership of the Petrograd Soviet.

There was an agreement with the Germans and the Swiss, but the

leadership of the soviets in Russia did not respond to the telegrams sent by Martov from Geneva. V. Lenin and the Bolsheviks gave up waiting and embarked at the risk of being accused — as they would later be — of collaborating with Germany. Martov hesitated. He looked for alternatives, but ended up going through Germany as well, wasting precious time.

When he arrived on May 9, 1917, the vast majority of the Mensheviks, led by F. Dan and I. Tseretelli, had already joined the coalition government, hegemonized by the bourgeois liberals, against J. Martov's proposals. There was no agreement on the war either. According to Martov, either *the revolution would kill the war or the war would kill the revolution*. (J. Martov, 1918) But the majority of Mensheviks had become *revolutionary defensivists*. They argued that, after the revolution, the war had changed its character and could only be ended by a general agreement, which was unfeasible because the big states (Germany, France and England) did not seem interested in an immediate peace. In the minority, Martov formed a specific fraction: the *Internationalist Mensheviks*.

At the beginning of July, he condemned the failed popular uprising as premature, but he also opposed the restoration of the death penalty, the repressive wave against the Bolsheviks and the infamous campaign against Lenin, accused of being an agent of German imperialism.

From then until October, skeptical of bourgeois liberalism, he began to advocate the seizure of power by a coalition of all the socialist parties (*revolutionary democracy*) on the basis of a program that included an immediate universal armistice and the formation of a Constituent Assembly to establish a democratic republic.

He bravely presented these proposals at a congress called by the Mensheviks in August 1917, winning supporters but not a majority. He seemed destined to *always be in the minority*.¹⁶

Against the coup by General L. Kornilov at the end of August, he took part with the internationalist Mensheviks in the popular front around the soviets.

At the September Conference, called by the government, he fought again on several fronts: against the resumption of the coalition with the bourgeoisie, proposed by Kerensky; against the zigzags of the Bolsheviks and their sectarianism by withdrawing from the Conference;¹⁷ and also against

¹⁶At various times, until his death in 1923, Martov would say of himself with bitter pride, tinged with self-irony: *I will always be in the minority!*

¹⁷At the Sixth Congress, held at the end of July 1917, the Bolsheviks, led by V. Lenin, skeptical of the revolutionary dynamics of the soviets, adopted the proposal to hand over power to the factory committees, organizations already hegemonized by the

the lukewarmness of the Mensheviks. He insisted on the opportunity for a coalition government of the socialists, excluding the liberals. The Constituent Assembly was the only institution capable of establishing a democratic republic, a fundamental step to the revolutionary stage he believed was underway.

In the Council of the Republic, on the eve of the October uprising, he pushed for an immediate agrarian reform by a majority, distributing land to peasant families without compensation to the owners. And he advocated an ultimatum to the Entente Allies: if they did not agree to immediate peace negotiations, Russia would unilaterally suspend the fighting on the various eastern fronts.

It was too late.

October

The October uprising took place in a context of extreme radicalization. After the defeat of L. Kornilov's coup, the Bolsheviks, taking up the proposal to transfer all power to the soviets, won the majority of the Petrograd and Moscow soviets, as well as important soldiers' and sailors' soviets. According to general expectations, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, scheduled for October 25, approved the transfer of all power to the soviets. At the same time, in the countryside, peasant movements had been unfolding since August, seizing private land holdings. On the military fronts, desertions were becoming commonplace and the authority of military commanders was declining vertically.

Among the Bolsheviks, there was fear of a new counter-revolutionary coup attempt and worry about the demoralization of the popular masses, exhausted by the war, food shortages and the prospect of inclement winter weather ahead. At the meetings of the Bolshevik Central Committee, V. Lenin insisted on the need for the Bolsheviks to anticipate the Congress, as the favorable circumstances to take power could change. However, among the Bolsheviks themselves, there were doubts about the possibility or viability of such insurrection. (Cf. A. Rabinovitch, 2004 and J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, 1934)

The Revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, led by L. Trotsky, finally unleashed the insurrection. It took power, presenting the *fait accompli* to the congress of soviets. It was a coup, no doubt. But it was also the expression of a profound process of social radicalization.

Moreover, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies approved revolutionary decrees on peace and war that corresponded to the interests of the broad masses. In the following days, more decrees (on workers' control and the right of non-Russian nations to secede) confirmed the revolutionary and popular character of the October uprising.

Coup or revolution? Coup and revolution? The double character of October (M. Ferro, 1967) would give rise to endless polemics.¹⁸

The uprising faced opposition from most socialist leaders, a sentiment shared by a number of Bolsheviks. They feared that victory would be short-lived or that the outbreak of a destructive civil war or a German offensive might erase the gains of the power takeover. Thus, important leaders of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries/SRs, Mensheviks and other tendencies denounced the insurrection as a coup and withdrew from the Congress.

Fearing the worst, L. Martov, on behalf of the internationalist Mensheviks, took up the proposal of a coalition government of all the socialist parties. And he suggested the formation of a representative commission to establish a common government, excluding the liberals, and creating the best conditions to rule out the possibility of a catastrophic civil war.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

Thus encouraged, Martov proposed that the Congress adjourn, pending the results of the Commission's work. The proposal was rejected, amid cheers and booing. Bewildered and indignant, after some hesitation, Martov declared that he too was leaving the Congress along with his political fraction.¹⁹ Then came L. Trotsky's historic and insulting speech, directing all those who were withdrawing to the *dustbin of history*.

4. *On the march toward the consolidation of authoritarian socialism (1917-1921).*

Once the work of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was over, it was a question of what direction the revolution would take.

¹⁸For the Russian revolutions, see M. Ferro, op. cit., E.H. Carr, 1950-1953 and W.H. Chamberlin, 1935.

¹⁹Cf. B. Nicolaevski, 1987. For the October uprising, cf. J. Reed, 2017 and L. Bryant, 1918 and A. Rabinovitch, op. cit. For the civil war period, cf. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, 1936; and D. Aarão Reis, 2017.

A period of transition opened up, marked by oscillations and lasting until July 1918, when the civil war began.²⁰ In order to broaden the composition of the government, negotiations began between the socialist parties, mediated by the railway workers' union and the Left Revolutionary Socialists.²¹

The talks began on October 29. Martov voiced two concerns: avoiding the involvement of socialists in the civil war that was looming and persuading the Bolsheviks to accept a coalition government with all the socialist parties. The majority demanded that the Bolsheviks suspend repressive measures against opposition leaders, including the release of prisoners and the guarantee of free demonstrations on the streets and in the press. The Bolsheviks hesitated. On November 3, Martov issued an ultimatum: either the political terror stopped or the negotiations would be broken off.

While almost all the oppositionists underestimated the Bolsheviks' ability to hold on to power and leaned towards a policy of force in relation to the government, Martov, the left SRs, the railway union leaders and some Bolshevik leaders, such as L. Kamenev, tried to find a compromise that would have minimum conditions of acceptance by everyone.

Martov emphasized that, if necessary, he would oppose the government but would not take part in any armed movement against the Bolsheviks. While it was true that the Bolsheviks had adopted mistaken and authoritarian positions, the fact was that they had the support of the broadest and most radicalized popular layers of workers, soldiers and peasants. To rise up against them would be to clash with the most conscious and active sectors of the working class. This was a step he was not prepared to take and he would not back down from it until the end of his days.

The talks finally broke down in early November, sparking a crisis among the Bolsheviks themselves, which was soon resolved under the leadership of V. Lenin and L. Trotsky.²² The government was strengthened, however, by the entry of the left-wing SRs into the Council of People's Commissars at the end of that month.

Expectations of conciliation between socialists now turned to the

²⁰For the transition period, see A. Rabinotitch, 2007. For the plurality of civil wars, see D. Aarão Reis, 2021 and 2022.

²¹The Left SRs, a fraction of the revolutionary Socialist Party, emerged in the course of 1917 and became a real political party. It had a strong rural base and among the soldiers, encouraged the agrarian revolution and did not withdraw from the Second Congress of Soviets.

²²Five members of the Bolshevik Central Committee and four members of the Council of People's Commissars resigned in protest.

Constituent Assembly. The elections, unprecedented in Russia and largely democratic, were held in November. More than 90% of the votes went to the socialist parties, with the Bolsheviks receiving a significant 25% of the votes, with a good turnout, especially in the big cities and among the soldiers, but still a minority vote. The Mensheviks received comparatively few votes, evincing the exhaustion of their credibility after participating in successive governments that had frustrated the expectations of the working classes.

Defeated, they met in a conference in the first week of December 1917, when Martov's main theses were finally approved. It was now up to him, under very unfavorable conditions, to lead what remained of the Mensheviks.

His bet was that, through the Constituent Assembly, the idea of a socialist coalition government could be relaunched and, above all, the foundation of a democratic republic could be laid, paving the way, in time, for the construction of a democratic socialist alternative.

But the Constituent Assembly was closed down by the Bolsheviks on the very day it convened. From then on, Martov led a series of *rearguard battles*.

Contrary to what V. Lenin said, citing the experience of the Paris Commune and celebrating the soviets as more democratic institutions, Martov argued that the latter did not have a universal character and only the most active militants of the popular movements took part in it. On the other hand, the comparison with the Paris Commune was inappropriate, since there was universal suffrage and wide freedom of expression and demonstration, which no longer existed in revolutionary Russia, where a political police force had been re-established, opposition newspapers were closed down and arbitrary arrests took place.

On the national question, Martov denounced the Bolshevik armed expedition to Ukraine in January 1918, which disregarded the right of secession granted to non-Russian nations by the November revolutionary decree. In March, together with the Left SRs, he fought the Brest-Litovsk agreements, which ignored the revolutionary commitments to peace without annexations and indemnities, and was removed from the plenum of the Soviet Congress that was examining the issue. The following month, he opposed the expeditions of the so-called *iron detachments*, sent into the countryside to force the peasants to hand over their surpluses. As usual, he sharply criticized arbitrary arrests, summary trials and political terror.

According to him, Soviet socialism was turning into a political dictatorship, a kind of *barracks socialism*, in which the soviets became a chamber for ratifying policies decided in other instances, and the plenums were being emptied out in favor of executive committees.

Even so, Martov refused to take the path of armed confrontation

against the Bolsheviks, because he saw them as an expression of the most militant and organized layers of the Russian proletariat. On the other hand, he clearly saw the growth of the counter-revolutionary *white* opposition, which he considered much more harmful than the Bolshevik regime.

The Mensheviks continued to survive, although they were always harassed by the political police. In May 1918, they managed to hold a pan-Russian meeting, confirmed Martov's leadership and his theses in favor of *loyal* combat within the Soviet structures. But the party was shrinking, losing militants to the radical opposition to the regime or to the Bolsheviks, not to mention those who simply gave up on remaining in such an unequal fight.

The civil wars, which began in July 1918, radicalized and consolidated this picture.²³

In August, after the attempt on Lenin's life, when the remnants of the alternative parties were dissolved in practice, Martov was even arrested, but only for a short time.

In November of that year, however, at the proposal of V. Lenin, the Mensheviks were once again legally recognized as an opposition party. A new conference, under the leadership of Martov, was convened and reaffirmed that, under any circumstances, they would side with Bolsheviks against the counter-revolutionary forces. They would, however, maintain their criticism of police arbitrariness and also of the statist and dirigiste economic policy of *war communism*.

The victory of the German Revolution in November 1918 renewed hopes among the Mensheviks. If the German socialists triumphed, another horizon would open up for the Russian Revolution. The formation of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany /USPD in 1917 showed broad affinities with the Mensheviks, above all in the sense of an international tendency that would position itself as an alternative to the traditional Social Democrats and the Bolsheviks.

However, the radicalization of the civil wars in 1919 led to a notable increase in *war communism* and political repression, trapping the Mensheviks and other non-Bolshevik socialists in an extremely unstable condition because of arrests, newspaper closures, threats and harassment of all kinds. Even under these conditions, Martov maintained his position of *fighting from within, avoiding armed confrontation with the government*.

In July 1919, he participated in the formulation of an alternative political and economic program. Some of his basic references would later be

²³For an excellent study of the civil war, cf. E. Mawdsley, 2005

used in the framework of the so-called New Economic Policy/NEP.²⁴ As a delegate elected by the Moscow Soviet, he took part in the Seventh All-Russia Congress Of Soviets in December 1919, where he defended the self-determination of non-Russian nations, denounced the emptying of the soviets and the system of bureaucratic-military dictatorship ruled by a communist minority.

On the occasion of the Russo-Polish war, in the final phase of the civil wars, he criticized the Bolsheviks' plans to export the socialist revolution by arms to Poland and the West. In this case, he also criticized the war as a factor that encouraged dictatorships and economic statism. Resolutions to this effect were approved at a final conference held by the Mensheviks in August 1920, but without results, as almost all the participants were arrested afterward.

J. Martov's health worsened in the second half of 1920. In September, he was given permission to undergo treatment in Berlin and attend the USPD congress in Halle. He would never return to Russia.

5. Last fights and J. Martov's legacies (1921-1923)

The month after arriving in Germany, and despite his poor health, Martov took part in the USPD Congress. At stake was whether or not to join the Third Communist International. The Bolsheviks sent G. Zinoviev, a leader devoid of original ideas, but an excellent speaker. With no voice to speak of, Martov's text was read by A. Stein. (J. Martov, 1920)

The debate revealed two alternatives: join the Communist International with a critical vision or invest in the formation of another International, equidistant from traditional social democracy and the Bolsheviks. Martov did not accept K. Kautsky's radical criticism that any regime would be better than the one in Russia. He did not reject common action with the Bolsheviks, admitted their tremendous revolutionary will and stood by the Soviet regime against the onslaught of counter-revolutionary forces. However, consistently with everything he had done and said in Russia, he denounced the Bolsheviks' repressive and statist policies, while recognizing their social and political bases, which were well grounded in the urban proletariat, despite the exhaustion caused by the shortages and the hardships imposed by the civil wars.

The position of adherence to the Communist International prevailed along similar lines to those defended by O. Bauer, according to whom Soviet

²⁴The text was allegedly requested by I. Larin, a former Menshevik who had joined the Bolshevik government.

socialism was what could be had in Russia, as if echoing the old stigma formulated by Rosa Luxemburg: *Das ist Russland*. It was a question of gradually changing the regime, in alliance with it, critically integrating into the international forums proposed by the Bolsheviks.

It was a decisive defeat for the idea of organizing an alternative between the existing Internationals. It is true that the minority defeated in Halle and other parties and groupings still tried to form an alternative International based in Vienna in 1921, the *International Working Union of Socialist Parties*. There was even a meeting between representatives of the three internationals in Berlin in April 1922. However, over time, the polarization between the traditional Socialist International and the new Communist International defeated the other alternatives.

In Berlin, in early 1921, Martov and a group of comrades founded a new periodical, the *Socialist Courier* (Социалистический Вестник). It was published for 40 years successively in Berlin, Paris and New York. It laid out and defended Martov's positions while he lived: for internationalist democratic socialism, for the restoration in Russia of a regime of freedoms and rights, for an alliance with the peasants, respecting their rights and interests; against any kind of war and against the political terror and statist gigantism undertaken by the Bolsheviks. At the same time, it denounced the dangers of a counter-revolutionary restoration. In addition to external threats, Martov feared the rise and victory of Bonapartist tendencies which, from within the Soviet state, could defeat the revolutionary experience in Russia. (J. Martov, 1922)²⁵ In 1921, Martov spent four months in hospital, battling illness. He was hospitalized again in November 1922 and died on April 4, 1923. Less than a year later, his great friend and rival, V. Lenin, died, sharing some of the basic anguish that had haunted Martov.

Still in 1923, two last texts by Martov were published: an essay on the history of Russian Social Democracy (J. Martov 1923) and, in particular, a reflection on world Bolshevism (J. Martov, 1923a). In the first, the author analyzed the revolutionary trajectory of Russian Social Democracy, substantiating the Menshevik options. In the second, he tried to assess in depth the paradox of the emergence of Bolshevism as the leadership of the world revolution and the disastrous effects this phenomenon would have on the future of the association between socialism and democracy.

These were his final battles.

J. Martov's Legacy

²⁵For J. Martov's last fights, see also A. Liebich, 1986

Few revolutionaries of the 20th century have been as detested and reviled as J. Martov, especially by the international communist movement. *Reformist* was the mildest criticism he received. *Vacillating*, the most common. The *Hamlet of the revolution*, always in doubt about the paths to be taken. *Incoherent* and *incapable* of understanding the historical process underway; *doctrinaire* and *lacking in willpower*.²⁶ Even his best biographer, while not denying his virtues, pointed him out as a *failure*.²⁷

To a large extent, this devaluation has affected the memory and critical fortune of his life and work, which have not attracted the interest they deserve.

Let's examine the main controversies and issues that marked his career.

With regard to the differences raised by the debate *on party organization*, which led to the split of 1903, his positions were in fact accepted by the majority of the Second Congress of the RSDLP, even though his political current went down in history as *minoritarian/Menshevik*. Moreover, they would later be taken up by the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP in 1906 and V. Lenin himself would clarify that the party of professional revolutionaries was a circumstantial position, imposed by very specific conditions. It should be remembered that the vast majority of Russian Social Democratic organizations, until shortly before October 1917, refused to split. Unlike many others, J. Martov always defended a party that was centralized, but not *centralist*, open to debate and the autonomy of grassroots organizations, flexible and open in the characterization of its militancy.

With regard to *the Program and the revolutionary stages*, Martov always maintained his criticism of the historical *leaps* advocated by revolutionary socialists and anarchists and incorporated by L. Trotsky and V. Lenin. For him, historical acrobatics would lead to a colossal political disaster. The idea of a *democratic republic* as a breeding ground for socialist consciousness seemed to him to be a solid principle. And he stuck to it.

When World War I broke out, he clearly condemned the conflict, based on political, ethical and moral principles. He did not accept the simplistic view of "betrayal" (V. Lenin) and later advocated the organization of a new Socialist International.

In the struggles of 1917, he never wavered on matters of principle: the fight for a *democratic republic, non-participation* in governments hegemonized by bourgeois liberals, the decision to *end the tragedy of war*. It

²⁶Cf. I. Getzler, 1967

²⁷Cf. *idem, idem*.

was precisely in defending these positions that he distanced himself from the majority of Mensheviks, participating in the formation of the Internationalist Mensheviks. However, he was not doctrinaire, since, after the July crisis, he began to advocate a government made up of all the socialist parties, a *socialist coalition* government: the overwhelming vote for the socialists in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917 demonstrated the viability of this proposal. Between February and October, he simultaneously fought the Menshevik and SR *tailism* and Bolshevik *sectarianism*.

After October, he continued to fight for the coalition of socialists. He took part in talks in this direction after the victorious insurrection, and was hopeful that it could be victorious in the context of the Constituent Assembly. When the Bolsheviks forcibly closed it down, he was not inflexible, and continued the struggle for an expanded government within the soviets, despite the democratic limitations of the soviets under Bolshevik political dictatorship.

He fought tirelessly for the democratization of the soviets, against the political police, terror and the death penalty. He did not regard these issues as minor. For him, they were questions of principle.

Nor was he at all doctrinaire in his fight against the dictatorial power of the Bolsheviks. He rudely criticized them, but distinguished them from the *White* restorationist counter-revolution, defending a *loyal* struggle within the Soviet structures, in the expectation that he could, in the near future, win the majority and make his ideas and positions prevail democratically. He had the same orientation internationally. He rejected the Socialist International, which was committed to nationalist patriotism, and also the Communist International, which had already become an arm of the Soviet state.

From the point of view of economic policy, he criticized the gigantic statism of the Soviet state and the repression of the peasants during wartime communism. Together with several comrades, he formulated alternative proposals, limiting state intervention to sectors considered strategic within the framework of a radical democratization of the soviets. As mentioned, the Bolsheviks took advantage of these economic ideas in the so-called New Economic Policy, the NEP, from 1921 onward, but ignored the proposals to restore democratic freedoms.

At no point did he stop looking for options. His choices were rarely victorious. But he fought for them with all his vigor. He was not doctrinaire, but was principled and did not change his orientation opportunistically. He articulated politics and ethical and moral principles in a way that was rarely done in his time, before or since.

Yes, he lost because his proposals for democratic socialism lost. And the victorious socialist alternative — Bolshevism — produced, as he

predicted, a historic disaster, with ruinous consequences throughout the 20th century and beyond.²⁸

But he set basic benchmarks, linking socialism, internationalism, freedom and democracy, and these will have to be considered if and when socialism returns to the agenda.

When and if that happens, J. Martov will be remembered with attention, deference and respect.

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²⁸Cf. Р.А. Абрамович, 1923

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Gorbachev Before and After Perestroika

César Albuquerque¹

The life and activities of Mikhail Gorbachev during Perestroika — when he was at the height of his political power — have been well documented and researched.² However, his life (and especially his thought) before and after Perestroika are not so well known and written about. This is what we will try to illuminate here by describing how Gorbachev formed his ideas in the years before Perestroika and how he changed them after the demise of the Soviet Union.

This chapter is based on reflections developed in the doctoral dissertation I defended at the University of São Paulo in 2022. In my dissertation, I developed a systematic, in-depth analysis of the evolution of Gorbachev's thought before, during and after Perestroika.³

Gorbachev before Perestroika

Born on March 2, 1931, Mikhail Gorbachev was the first General Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the first supreme leader of the USSR who had not yet been born during the October Revolution of 1917. He also did not live under the leadership of Vladimir Ulyanov Lenin, especially during the periods of the Civil War (1917-1921) and the New Economic Policy (1921-1928). His childhood and youth were already developed under the leadership of Josef Stalin, who consolidated the pillars of the regime that Gorbachev would lead years later. In other words, Gorbachev did not experience the initial fury of revolutionary ideals, nor the experiences of the USSR in its early years. On the contrary, his trajectory of personal and political development took place in a relatively consolidated regime, whose

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² See, for example: GORBACHEV, 1996; GORBACHEV, 2016b; BROWN, 1996; LEWIN, 1988; SEGRILLO, 2000b.

³ See ALBUQUERQUE, C. A. R. *Gorbachev Como Pensador: a evolução das ideias do ex-líder soviético antes e depois do fim da URSS* ["Gorbachev as a Thinker: The Evolution of the Former Soviet Leader's Thought before and after the End of the USSR"]. Doctoral Dissertation – University of São Paulo. São Paulo: FFLCH/USP, 2022. Available at

https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-01062023-112248/publico/2023_CesarAugustoRodriguesDeAlbuquerque_VCcorr.pdf

population (and their expectations) were changing significantly.

Gorbachev's birthplace also appears to have had an impact on his personal and political trajectory. He was born in a small village in the Stavropol region of the Russian Caucasus, one of the main agricultural regions of the USSR. The agricultural regions were particularly affected by the policies implemented by Stalin during the first Five-Year Plans. To achieve the ambitious goals set by the regime in a short time, the collectivization of agricultural lands deviated from the official strategy, which envisaged the voluntary enticing of peasants into the new system. Lenin had advocated collectivization, but he argued that the transition to the new model should occur gradually, convincing the peasants of the advantages of this system. Under Stalin, however, the peasants were forced, directly or indirectly, to join the large, collectivized farms as a result of arbitrary policies and decisions adopted by the regime.⁴

Having experienced these transformations, Gorbachev recalled in his memoirs the serious production and supply crisis that the countryside went through during that period. He states that in his village, about a third of the population died of hunger in 1933, including three of his paternal uncles. Although he acknowledged that adverse weather conditions contributed to the poor harvest that year, the former Soviet leader also stated that "mass collectivization undermined the old way of life, destroying the traditional pattern of cultivation and livelihood in the countryside".⁵

Gorbachev also described the experience of living in the Caucasus as a first lesson in tolerance and "international education." That's because different peoples and nationalities live there, and over the centuries they have learned to live together in a relatively harmonious and cooperative way, prioritizing agreement over conflict as a survival strategy.⁶ Hedrick Smith, for example, believes that the atmosphere of tolerance and harmony between the traditional and the revolutionary had a profound impact on Gorbachev's development. Such experiences help to understand his preference for more moderate and conciliatory positions.⁷

At the age of 10, Gorbachev experienced what he described as one of his most traumatic experiences: World War II, or, as it is known in Russian historiography, the Great Patriotic War. In 1941, after the start of Operation Barbarossa and the Nazi invasion of its territory, the Soviet army entered the conflict. Later that year, his father, Sergei Gorbachev, was sent to the front, leaving young Mikhail with the responsibility of helping to support the

⁴ See NOVE, 1986, pp. 152-154.

⁵ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 27.

⁶ GORBACHEV, 2016b, p. 28.

⁷ SMITH, 1990, p. 32.

family. As a result, he dropped out of school and began working in the fields.

In August 1942, the territory where Gorbachev lived was occupied by German troops. In his memoirs, he describes the hardships he experienced at that time, especially regarding the persecution suffered by his family due to his grandfather's position in the local communist leadership and his family's participation in the *front*.⁸ The liberation of the territory by Soviet troops in January 1943, although celebrated, did not represent the end of problems for the local population. The trail of destruction left by the conflict would exact a high price. In 1944, famine once again struck the region, while the supply of consumer goods and basic items became even scarcer.

After graduating from high school, Gorbachev made an "unusual" decision for a young peasant at the time. He applied to the most important academic institution in the country, the Moscow State University M. V. Lomonosov (MGU). No less surprising was the major he chose: Law. This career was not very popular among young people at the time. Given the limitations and restrictions imposed on the "rule of law" in the USSR, judicial institutions did not enjoy high prestige among the population. Careers involving law, prosecutors and the judiciary did not enjoy much credibility.⁹ Gorbachev was admitted to MGU in 1950, during the Stalin era, when universities were still under stricter control and intense political surveillance.

The period in which he carried out his university studies in Moscow was essential to Gorbachev's development and had a strong impact on his future choices. He stated that "without those five years of study, there would have been no Gorbachev, the politician."¹⁰ During his studies, he joined the university's communist youth league (*Komsomol*) organization, quickly rising through its ranks. While many of his contemporaries recognized his autonomy and courage at the time, others identified him with the limits imposed by the official ideology.¹¹ Gorbachev recognized that under no circumstance could he be considered a dissident at that time but described situations in which his more questioning stance caused discomfort among colleagues and professors.¹²

Many friendships made during this period accompanied Gorbachev in his future life. It was at Moscow State University, for example, that he met his wife, Raisa Gorbachev. There, he also spent time with the Czech Zdenek Mlynar, who a few years later would become one of the great reformist

⁸ GORBACHEV, 1996, pp. 30-31.

⁹ SMITH, 1990, pp. 42-43.

¹⁰ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 55.

¹¹ See: SMITH, 1990, pp. 48-49; BROWN, 1996, p. 29.

¹² See: GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 46.

leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the “Prague Spring” in 1968. The former Soviet leader claims that, as students, neither could be classified as dissidents, since they did not directly express critical opinions of the regime. Nevertheless, both later stated that even at that time they discussed numerous times the chronic problems of the two socialist countries.¹³

While still at Moscow State University, Gorbachev experienced another important historical event that would mark the future of his country: the death of Stalin, in 1953. Although they had lived through difficult times under Stalin’s leadership, Gorbachev and his family did not reject him when he passed away. On the contrary, they shared in many ways the positive image of the larger-than-life socialist leader and received the news of his death with sadness and concern. According to Gorbachev, there was a widespread feeling of loss of a great leader, who was credited with much of the country’s achievements in its path to industrialization and development.¹⁴ This idealized view of the deceased leader began to be questioned more strongly after the disclosure of the denunciations made by Nikita Khrushchev during the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. Even so, Gorbachev reported that in the first months following Stalin’s death, a change in the country’s political and social atmosphere was noticeable.¹⁵

By completing his degree at the country’s top university, Gorbachev added an important component to his resume that would distinguish him from his future colleagues in the upper echelons of the CPSU. As Archie Brown pointed out, Gorbachev’s university degree and studies provided him with both an advantage and a disadvantage in his rise within the party. On the one hand, they reinforced his credentials as a qualified technical officer. On the other, they signaled to his superiors and colleagues that he could take a more independent line of analysis and thought — which could be a risk.¹⁶

Gorbachev returned to the Caucasus in 1955, the same year he began his political career. At that time, Nikita Khrushchev was promoting the first major attempt to reform the Soviet system, implementing changes in the country’s political and economic structure. Gorbachev had barely begun his political career when he followed Khrushchev’s denunciations of Stalin’s crimes during the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. As previously highlighted, the accusations by the then General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee shook the entire population politically and

¹³ Some of these discussions are mentioned in: GORBACHEV, 1996, pp. 41-55; and GORBACHEV, 2002, pp. 13-27.

¹⁴ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 47.

¹⁵ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 48.

¹⁶ BROWN, 1996, pp. 29-30.

psychologically. Even so, Gorbachev claims to have admired Khrushchev's courage and understood the need for broader changes throughout the system.¹⁷ Such experiences led authors such as Hedrick Smith to consider Gorbachev as a typical member of the "Khrushchev Generation": a group formed by young reformist leaders who supported the post-Stalinist transformations of the 1950s and 1960s. Years later, they also formed the main support base for Perestroika.¹⁸

Although gradual, Gorbachev's political rise was relatively fast. In 1970, he was chosen for the post of First Secretary of the Stavropol Region CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Regional Committee, the main political position in the local sphere of the Soviet regime. It is also from this period that we have access to Gorbachev's first articles, speeches and public statements. The range (and depth) of topics addressed by him publicly during this period was still limited, reflecting the limits of his position.

During the years he was a local leader, his focus was on the main economic sector in his region: agriculture. Most of his public statements on the subject were in line with the regime's official discourse. Even so, it is worth highlighting his criticism of what he considered a caste of overly controlling and bureaucratic leaders. According to him, these authorities were insecure managers who did not trust their subordinates and feared changes to the status quo. On the contrary, he argued that managers should coordinate production processes, guiding the execution of work and encouraging workers' initiative and creativity.¹⁹ Although still in the early stages, there is shown preoccupation with the connection between producers — workers and managers — and the product of their work.

Ideologically, Gorbachev defended the regime's political line. For him, ideological education was a fundamental element in correcting distortions and immaturity among Soviet youth.²⁰ He also stated that Marxist-Leninist education was a response to the threats of bourgeois imperialism, which sought to corrupt young people with its selfish ideology.²¹ Democracy appears as an inseparable element of socialism. And, in this scenario, the CPSU played a central role as the driving force of socialist democracy, responsible for its cohesion and representation.²²

Even so, Gorbachev recognized the need for progress in consolidating this political model. The main challenge was to increase

¹⁷ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 61.

¹⁸ SMITH, 1990, pp. 54-56.

¹⁹ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 97.

²⁰ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 39.

²¹ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 138-139.

²² GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 112-113.

workers' participation in the management of political, social and productive life of society.²³ To address this issue, he rejected more radical or even reformist measures at that time. On the contrary, he advocated as a solution the improvement or strengthening of the instruments already existing in the system. As an example, he reiterated the need to democratize and strengthen the activities developed by the Soviets, especially at the local level (companies, farms, etc.). He also considered it essential to have closer ties between leaders and the population, to better understand their demands and desires. To this end, Gorbachev defended the importance of critically analyzing the complaints submitted by the people and of acting more actively in the daily lives of workers.²⁴ There was no mention of changes in the political or representative system of the USSR.

According to this view, the flaws identified in the Soviet regime originated from the actions of individual agents and not from intrinsic deficiencies of the system. Even when criticisms were directed at bodies or collectives, they were not directed at the structure or organizational nature of the regime itself. Certainly this moderation was justified by the need to comply with the rules of the game imposed by the regime, especially those aimed at the general public. Gorbachev's positions at the time — even his occasional criticisms — signal that he acted within the limits of the system. He recognized that it was through these experiences that he gradually became aware of the difficulties and limitations of the regime in its various spheres of action. Perhaps for this reason, he described the period in which he oversaw the CPSU in Stavropol as his personal “little Perestroika.”²⁵

In 1978, Gorbachev was chosen to occupy a position as a Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, marking his transition to the Soviet central political elite. He was put in charge of the agricultural sector. His arrival at the top echelon of the regime was the result of a combination of several factors, such as his political alignment with the official discourse, his image as a young and proactive leader, and the important relationships Gorbachev had cultivated with prominent figures in the political scene of the USSR. As a local leader, he publicly defended the pillars and achievements of Soviet agrarian policy. However, his experience leading an important food-producing region enabled him to formulate a more critical diagnosis of the rural reality of the USSR.

It was precisely his assessment of the problems of the country's agricultural policies and the proposals for their improvement that gave him the green light to move to the Moscow power center. These issues were

²³ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 113.

²⁴ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 108.

²⁵ GORBACHEV, 2016b, p. 163.

addressed in a report prepared by Gorbachev and presented to members of the Politburo and the Central Committee shortly before his moving to the capital of the USSR. In this document — which was classified and technical in nature — he encouraged debate about agricultural development and the formulation of new policies in this sphere. While on the one hand he was aware of the limits imposed by the regime, on the other hand he also avoided making it a mere propaganda document.

Many of the topics addressed by Gorbachev in this report were incorporated years later into the scope of Perestroika. He mentioned, for example, the need to restore the terms of exchange between town and country, between industry and farms. This could be achieved by increasing the prices paid by the state to agricultural producers.²⁶ For him, this financial imbalance made it impossible for peasants to operate based on operational cost accounting and financial self-sufficiency. Prices of grain should be calculated based on the social costs of production, plus a minimum surplus of profitability that would ensure the expansion of production.²⁷

Criticism also targeted planning agencies that, lacking technical and scientific basis, drew up “plans [that] do not always have an objective basis and are often unrealistic.”²⁸ Gorbachev even advocated replacing administrative methods of resource allocation with more rationalized planning that would guarantee greater autonomy and scope for local leaders to act.²⁹ Terms such as autonomy, efficiency, flexibility and freedom emerged as fundamental characteristics of socialist economic management. At the same time, he emphasized the need to improve the provision of services and basic infrastructure available to the rural population. Such policies functioned as mechanisms for attracting and retaining labor in the countryside, another challenge faced by the Soviet agricultural sector. He also questioned the quantity and quality of the technology received by most farms, which he considered insufficient and often outdated.³⁰

Gorbachev’s rise through party ranks in Moscow was even faster than his original local rise. By 1980, he was a full member of the Politburo, the highest decision center of Soviet power. Two years later, he was tasked with designing and implementing a major food production expansion program aimed at reducing supply bottlenecks in the USSR. Even at that time, he emphasized the importance of personal plots held by peasants, which should be encouraged and integrated into the dynamics of socialized

²⁶ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 181-182.

²⁷ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 184-185.

²⁸ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 185-186.

²⁹ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 199.

³⁰ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 195.

production.³¹ Although he still maintained his belief in the superiority of the collectivized system, Gorbachev denied arguments — very common among analysts of the capitalist bloc — that the personal plots were more productive and profitable because of their quasi-private nature.³²

It was also at this time that Gorbachev, aligned with the policies defined during the 26th Congress of the CPSU in 1981, began to defend the need for a transition to a model of intensive development and the acceleration of technical and scientific progress. He maintained his belief in central planning but argued that it should be less rigid and emphasize coordination and general guidance of the system instead of micromanagement.³³ Once again, principles such as financial autonomy, self-sufficiency and management based on cost accounting appeared as essential for the success of collective farms, state farms and other productive structures of the Soviet agro-industrial complex. For the Soviet leader, “profitability, profits, credit and other economic levers” were “important factors in improving production efficiency.”³⁴

In a clear sign of transformation, Gorbachev gradually distanced himself from the diagnosis that overcoming Soviet problems could be achieved by correcting individual attitudes. In the economic sphere, it seemed to become increasingly clear to him that this challenge depended on a reformulation of the management system and the policy of incentives for workers, even without breaking with the central pillars of the system (centralized planning, social ownership of the means of production, etc.).³⁵

Since his arrival in Moscow, Gorbachev had sought advice from a growing number of experts, including economists Abel Aganbegyan, Stanislav Shatalin and Leonid Abalkin, as well as sociologists Vladimir Tikhonov and Tatyana Zaslavskaya. The future Soviet leader’s reflections expressed throughout his rise in the party elite, especially between 1980 and 1985, present some central elements that would be later developed during Perestroika. Although embryonic, they indicate that the construction of Gorbachev’s reformist ideas was already taking shape before his coming to supreme power in the Kremlin in 1985, in line with the experience and evolution of his career.

During this period, Gorbachev started realizing the diagnosis of economic slowdown and reinforcing that the development and increase in socialist growth rates depended on the efficient use of *money-commodity*

³¹ GORBACHEV, 1982, p. 8.

³² GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 345.

³³ GORBACHEV, 1982, p. 12.

³⁴ GORBACHEV, 1982, p. 13.

³⁵ GORBACHEV, 1982, p. 11.

relations.³⁶ This expression was used as a euphemism for the need to introduce mechanisms typical of market economies into the Soviet system. However, he pointed to the need to adapt tools such as “price, cost, profit and credit” to the “basic principles and benefits of socialism, such as the planned nature of our economy, the priority of social objectives in economic development and the possibility of conscious optimization for profound qualitative changes in production for the benefit of society.”³⁷

Gorbachev began to openly advocate the need for a *perestroika* (literally, “reconstruction” in Russian) of the mechanisms of economic management. At the same time, he argued that the improvement of economic and social conditions in the country was directly linked to the strengthening of socialist democracy. This, in turn, depended on *glasnost*’ (often translated as “transparency”) in all spheres of social and political life, considered as an “effective means of dealing with bureaucratic distortions” and with the potential to “increase the initiative of the workers”.³⁸ According to him, the new generations of the Soviet population, born under established socialism and with their fundamental needs met, had great expectations of a system that promised to fully satisfy their material and spiritual needs.³⁹

Gorbachev’s rise in the party hierarchy also gradually expanded his field of action and, consequently, the range of topics addressed in his public statements. In 1983, for example, he was tasked by General Secretary Yuri Andropov to prepare a speech in honor of the 113th anniversary of Vladimir Lenin’s birth. On this occasion, Gorbachev was able to reflect not only on the economic sphere, but also address aspects of the political and ideological dimensions. The document he produced did not break with the regime’s ideological *mainstream* but offered some interesting elements for understanding Gorbachev’s thinking at the time.⁴⁰

Gorbachev defined Leninism as the modern version of Marxism, which had defeated all other similar and opposite views. He argued that Marxism-Leninism was not a set of dogmatic elements, with ready-made formulas for achieving predetermined goals. On the contrary, the great merit of this ideology was to provide a dialectical method of reflection and analysis of concrete situations, adapting strategies to the conditions of the moment.⁴¹ For Gorbachev, Lenin had left as a legacy the “most accurate consideration of the assumptions of objective economic laws, of planning and cost accounting,

³⁶ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 2, p. 81.

³⁷ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 2, p. 82.

³⁸ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 2, p. 95.

³⁹ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol. 2, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁰ GORBACHEV, 1987, pp. 25-32.

⁴¹ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 383.

of the skillful use of commodity-money relations, and of material and moral incentives.”⁴²

Some of Gorbachev's statements seem to distance themselves from the image that the regime had previously constructed of its main revolutionary leader. This new approach to Leninist thought had quite clear objectives. Under Andropov's leadership, Gorbachev began to coordinate economic experiments that can be considered a “trial run” for Perestroika. To combat criticism from more conservative sectors, the future General Secretary sought to legitimize his actions by linking them to the regime's main ideological pillars. To this end, Gorbachev sought refuge in Lenin's reflections in his post-revolutionary period, especially his final writings (1923-1924) during the New Economic Policy (NEP) period.⁴³

In this sense, Gorbachev argued that Leninist democratic centralism was the inspiration for the measures adopted, which were aimed at improving the economic system, changing planning mechanisms and increasing economic and administrative autonomy at the local level.⁴⁴ Even so, he assured that the leadership remained vigilant regarding possible ideological setbacks, making it clear that “any attacks on [socialist] principles” would be met with “the most resolute rejection”.⁴⁵

Another topic that began to be part of his public statements on the eve of his coming to supreme power was foreign policy. Since arriving in Moscow, Gorbachev had intensified his international trips, including to countries in the capitalist bloc, such as Italy and Canada. These trips directly influenced his perceptions about the nature and limits of the socioeconomic model in force in the USSR. Years later, he stated that his international experiences gave him a greater awareness of the importance of democratic values, a human factor necessary for the consolidation of socialism and which were not present in the model adopted in his country.⁴⁶

In late 1984, replacing the ailing leader Chernenko, Gorbachev led the Soviet delegation on an official visit to the United Kingdom. His interactions with the British leadership earned him praise from one of the leading exponents of neoliberalism (and anti-communism) at the time, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In a speech to members of the British Parliament, he criticized the worsening political tensions resulting from the Cold War and defended the need to reduce atomic arsenals. He also argued in favor of establishing cooperative relations between countries, despite their

⁴² GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 385.

⁴³ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. 148.

⁴⁴ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, pp. 390-391.

⁴⁵ GORBACHEV, 1987-1990, vol 1, p. 386.

⁴⁶ GORBACHEV, 2002. pp. 49-50.

different ideological choices. To this end, a New Political Thinking (*Novoye Politicheskoye Myshleniye* in Russian) focused on the main needs of mankind was necessary.⁴⁷ To a large extent, this did not represent a break with the official discourse — something that only actually occurred with the realization of these words in practice from 1985 onward.

Gorbachev after Perestroika

When he left the Kremlin on Christmas Day 1991, the ideas Gorbachev publicly defended were quite different from those he had expressed before his appointment as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU in March 1985. Before the dissolution of the USSR, Gorbachev had already become a defender of a political model that closely resembled Western democracies. He described the Soviet system in force until the early 1980s as totalitarian even before leaving his post as the country's top leader.⁴⁸ In the economy, the cautionary approach to “money-commodity relations” was abandoned in favor of a discourse openly in favor of the transition to an economy that was, in essence, guided by market principles.⁴⁹

The departure from power also changed the focus of Gorbachev's reflections in the post-Perestroika period. We no longer find speeches by a political leader in power, defending his positions and negotiating with other actors how to implement his policies. Many of his statements, especially throughout the 1990s, were focused on defending the image of the reforms he had led and his performance as a leader. And in this difficult task, he sought to oppose the political and economic processes led by his successor, Boris Yeltsin.

In the economic sphere, Gorbachev wanted to distance himself from the label of exponent of neoliberalism that was attributed to him by many of his critics and supporters inside and outside Russia. His close relationship with neoliberal icons such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan throughout the second half of the 1980s contributed to this ideological association. But it was perhaps the combination of his concessions to the most radical proposals for the transition to a market economy between 1990 and 1991 and the dismantling of the Soviet economic system itself that strengthened this image of the last Soviet leader.

To distance himself from this depiction, Gorbachev harshly criticized the process of economic reforms led by the new Russian President

⁴⁷ GORBACHEV, 1987, p. 43.

⁴⁸ GORBACHEV, 1990, p. 1.

⁴⁹ See: ALBUQUERQUE, 2022, pp. 74-163.

Boris Yeltsin, attacking monetarist policies, widespread privatization, and neoliberal prescriptions.⁵⁰ According to him, this process aimed to “duplicate Western models, eliminate all the complex and valuable experience of the Soviet experiment, and denounce all of this as a harmful legacy”.⁵¹ In other words, an attempt to impose Western models, without considering the particularities and specificities of the Russian reality. More than that, he considered that these measures sought to solve Russia’s problems at the expense of the achievements and social rights acquired throughout the Soviet experience.⁵² These guidelines were the opposite of what Gorbachev defended during Perestroika. Hence, his diagnosis that the so-called “shock therapy” of the 1990’s under Yeltsin was a rupture and not continuity in relation to the reformist process of Perestroika.

Regarding the Perestroika reforms he had implemented, Gorbachev acknowledged that, in 1985, he had not full understanding of the challenges to be faced, nor was he clear about the measures needed to correct the functioning of the Soviet system.⁵³ However, he does not see the lack of a prior, structured plan for Perestroika as a negative factor or as an explanation for the Soviet decline. On the contrary, the measures adopted were intended to make the structure more flexible and encourage the autonomy of agents — proposals that were incompatible with the previous rigid, top-down system.⁵⁴ In this sense, he seems to agree with the view of part of the historiography that argues that the Soviet leader did not initially intend to break with the foundations of the socialist model, but rather to improve it. From this perspective, it was only during the reforms that Gorbachev realized the magnitude of the problems and the obstacles he would be facing. As a result, improvement gave way to a set of measures that aimed at increasingly more profound transformations in the system.

Even after the Perestroika economic transition in Russia, Gorbachev continued to support maintaining strategic industrial sectors under state control, such as energy and railways.⁵⁵ On several occasions, he criticized the dehydration of the social protection system and the provision of public services by the state, especially when these were threatened by Yeltsin’s neoliberal policies.⁵⁶ Overall, the ideas expressed by the last Soviet leader

⁵⁰ GORBACHEV, 1993 p. 425.

⁵¹ GORBACHEV, 2002, p. 181.

⁵² GORBACHEV, 2000, pp. 44-45.

⁵³ See: GORBACHEV, 1988, p. 95; GORBACHEV, 2016a, p. 413; GORBACHEV, 2006, p. 11.

⁵⁴ GORBACHEV, 2002, p. 9.

⁵⁵ GORBACHEV, 2005a.

⁵⁶ GORBACHEV, 2006. p. 134.

during this period do not indicate that he had become a defender of the free market and a minimal state. On the contrary, his discourse seems aligned with the consolidation of a regulated market economy, a model like that defended by several social democratic or center-left governments in the West. Gorbachev emphasized, for example, that “the future of human society will not be defined in terms of capitalism versus socialism,” but rather in the construction of a new model that “must be a synthesis of what is common and unites people, countries and nations, rather than what divides them”.⁵⁷ In the Soviet case, he further argues that the regime, especially during the Stalinist period, had moved away “from what Marx and Lenin saw as the purest form of democracy, converting itself into a true bureaucratic dictatorship.”⁵⁸

Gorbachev also reinforced his critical discourse regarding the rise of social inequalities. He considered this process to be a consequence of deviations resulting from the belief in the free market as the ideal mechanism for reconciling individual and social interests.⁵⁹ Another element that gained prominence in his reflections was environmental issues, which appeared to be inseparable from changes in the economic system, since the relentless pursuit of profit was highlighted as one of the main causes of environmental problems.⁶⁰ Gorbachev actively participated in the Rio-92 conference and, the following year, he participated in the founding of Green Cross International, an organization focused on debating and promoting actions related to the environment and sustainable development.

Regarding his ideological affiliation, Gorbachev acknowledged that he had gone through a gradual and almost unconscious process of distancing himself from the socialist assumptions that guided the Soviet regime when he came to power. His conceptions dialogued with the experiences built throughout his political career and with the challenges posed by Perestroika. He also believes that between 1988 and 1989 his alignment with social democracy — a platform that he began to defend in the post-Soviet period — was already underway.⁶¹ Interestingly, he also stated that throughout his leadership he sought to rescue the original ideals that guided the revolutionaries of October 1917, which, according to him, were “to overcome the alienation of the people from government and property, to give power to the people (and free them from the bureaucratic echelons), to implement

⁵⁷ GORBACHEV, 1995 pp 59-60.

⁵⁸ GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 18.

⁵⁹ GORBACHEV, 2006, p. 24.

⁶⁰ GORBACHEV, 2000, p 49.

⁶¹ See: GORBACHEV, 2002, p. 79.

democracy and to establish true social justice.”⁶²

While he was harshly critical of communism in its Soviet form — which he said was a utopia that had had its day — Gorbachev also rejected radical liberalism, which he attributed to a rather selfish nature.⁶³ For him, socialism and liberalism had common origins, the humanist values of the Enlightenment, and were therefore reconcilable. The solution did not lie in choosing between the extremes of this debate, between selfish individualism or authoritarian collectivism. On the contrary, he advocated the construction of a synthetic model, capable of placing the human being as the ultimate goal and not as a mere instrument of progress.⁶⁴

This model would be a humanist socialism, in which class interests are replaced by interests common to all humanity. Values such as social justice and solidarity are reaffirmed and equated with principles of the liberal tradition, such as freedom of expression and civil equality — which, according to him, had lost ground in the scope of real socialism.⁶⁵ Gorbachev argued that he was not moving away from socialist principles, but rather restoring them in the face of the distortion of these ideals by the Soviet experience.⁶⁶ The break with essential assumptions of Marxism-Leninism, such as class struggle, historical materialism and the view of communism as the final stage of society’s development, is clear. Other elements, however, remain, such as the preference for the dialectical method and the ideas of infrastructure and superstructure — albeit under new guises — for understanding social organization and its development process.⁶⁷ Gorbachev’s socialism also incorporates other fundamental issues, such as environmental protection and the defense of a model of mutual security in international relations.

Despite the political defeats he suffered, especially in the final years of Perestroika, Gorbachev continued to be politically active in the independent Russian Federation from 1991 onward. He ran in the 1996 presidential election — obtaining only 0.5% of the vote — and led the formation of at least two parties between the 1990s and 2000s, both of which were social democratic in nature. Although his influence on domestic politics was greatly reduced, he remained an important voice in the defense of the strengthening of democracy in post-Soviet Russia. In addition, he sought to actively participate in debates about the main political and economic

⁶² GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 56.

⁶³ GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 286.

⁶⁴ GORBACHEV, 2000, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁵ GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 59.

⁶⁶ GORBACHEV, 1993 p. 398.

⁶⁷ GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 218.

processes experienced by his country and the world.

Gorbachev assured that democratization and the advancement of political freedom in society were at the heart of the reforms he led, although we cannot find evidence of this in his speeches prior to 1985.⁶⁸ He emphasizes that democracy cannot be limited to an electoral method, but rather understood as a concept that unites practices and values. According to him, this political model means the prevalence of “stable political institutions, based on the primacy of law and justice, and rooted in the traditions of nations and in public conscience”.⁶⁹ However, even though all democratic regimes share the same guiding principles and values of liberal democracy, Gorbachev considered it necessary to adapt the democratic experience to the reality and specificities of different populations. From this perspective, Gorbachev argued that democracy was not a dogmatic system and that the model in force in the West should not be seen as a prefabricated, unique and universal recipe.

This need to adapt the model to different historical and social realities, however, did not constitute a safe conduct for the distortion of the democratic essence. In this sense, he opposed the “sovereign democracy” proposed by the Russian leadership in the 2000s. Through it, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s allies intended to increase restrictions on popular demonstrations, surveillance of NGOs and organized civil society, and state control over the media, under the pretext of reducing internal and external interference in the electoral process. Gorbachev agreed with the diagnosis of the political setbacks that occurred during Yeltsin’s government, especially with the strengthening of the oligarchies that controlled the country’s political system. However, the former Soviet leader considered “sovereign democracy” equivalent to the experiences of “popular and socialist democracy” in the second half of the 20th century, which in his view had distorted and completely distanced itself from fundamental democratic values.⁷⁰

In the 1990s, Gorbachev considered that the main threat to the consolidation of democracy in Russia was the President (Yeltsin) himself. Relations between the two had deteriorated during Perestroika, with Yeltsin’s rise as leader of a more radical wing in favor of reforms. In the first years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new president faced strong resistance from the central legislature, still controlled by the communist majority, in approving and implementing political and economic reforms. In 1993, Yeltsin decided, without constitutional support, to dissolve parliament,

⁶⁸ GORBACHEV, 1996, p. xxv.

⁶⁹ GORBACHEV, 1995 pp. 44-45.

⁷⁰ GORBACHEV, 2006b.

which in response voted to impeach him. The outcome of this institutional crisis came after Yeltsin had the parliament building bombarded, formalized the dissolution of the legislature, created a new bicameral parliament, and adopted a new constitution.

In this scenario, Gorbachev accused the then Russian president of hindering the development of democracy in Russia because Yeltsin considered the political model to be a burden. The new government had moved in the opposite direction to that taken by Perestroika, restoring authoritarian and bureaucratic practices. This had even resulted in allegations of human rights violations in Russia, signaling setbacks in relation to the achievements made in the previous decade. As a result, he stated that “a bureaucratic-oligarchic regime took shape and, under the guise of democratic phraseology, imposed a neoliberal course of so-called reforms on our society”.⁷¹

Gorbachev was in direct opposition to Yeltsin throughout his term, but his position in relation to Putin varied considerably over the years. Although Putin’s first terms in office showed clear signs of authoritarian regression, the impact of the deterioration in the relationship between Gorbachev and Yeltsin seems to have undermined the impartiality of the assessment of the last leader of the USSR. He was not only much more lenient with Putin’s actions, but also justified many of his more radical measures as necessary to confront the negative legacy left by Yeltsin. In this sense, Gorbachev aligned himself with the sentiment of a large part of the Russian population, who saw the assertive actions of Putin in the early 2000s as positive.

In the early 2000s, Gorbachev reaffirmed his belief in the consolidation of Russian democracy, rejecting frequent accusations, especially in the West, that Putin’s government represented a shift towards authoritarianism.⁷² He stressed that the main risk to the consolidation of Russian democracy was not a conspiracy on the left or any threat of a return to the Soviet past. The obstacle to Russia’s future, in his view, was the attacks by sectors on the right of the political spectrum, which sought to impose a radical reform agenda and increasingly dominate the state.⁷³ Putin was often described by Gorbachev as responsible for the process of stabilization and recovery of the country, putting it back on the path of gradual reforms.

Throughout Putin’s second presidential term, Gorbachev continued to defend the government’s achievements, but also warned of the need to “continue democratic transformations, because without them it is impossible

⁷¹ GORBACHEV, 2000, p. 36.

⁷² GORBACHEV, 2006. p. 119.

⁷³ GORBACHEV, 2006. p. 134.

to bring Russia onto the path of dynamic development.”⁷⁴ Although the president was spared, Gorbachev began to openly criticize his party and some allies for their conduct of domestic policies. Still, he saw the election of Dmitri Medvedev to succeed Putin in 2008 as a positive development.

Opposition gradually made itself felt on the eve of the 2012 presidential election, when Gorbachev publicly criticized Putin and Medvedev for setting the agenda for the presidential succession alone.⁷⁵ He criticized what he called “the dyarchy” between the two which seemed to control the political scene and decide the country’s direction without consulting the population. The former Soviet leader also believed that Putin seemed to think that democracy was an obstacle in his path. Furthermore, Gorbachev expressed his fear that the pair of leaders might have begun to see that the only way to lead a country as complex as Russia was through authoritarianism.⁷⁶

During this period, Gorbachev supported the large popular demonstrations that took to the streets of major Russian cities in late 2011, demanding the annulment of that year’s parliamentary elections, criticizing electoral fraud and demanding greater democratic guarantees. He believed that most of the protesters were from the “glasnost generation”, that is, young people who had grown up during the years of Perestroika. He argued that these young people had experienced the process of political and economic openness, having had the opportunity to develop expectations and demands for greater freedom and public participation.⁷⁷ Gorbachev declared that Putin should resign as prime minister and, later, give up his candidacy for president.⁷⁸ Dissatisfied with his victory in the March 2012 elections, the former Soviet leader declared that Putin felt like “God’s right-hand man” and that he suffered from an excess of self-confidence — a defect similar to the one he identified in himself during the years of Perestroika.⁷⁹

Although Gorbachev became critical of Putin’s actions on the domestic front, the same did not occur in relation to foreign policy. As soon as the 1990s, Gorbachev accused the Western powers of wanting to take advantage of the crisis Russia was experiencing during Yeltsin’s government.⁸⁰ In this context, he was particularly critical of NATO member

⁷⁴ GORBACHEV, 2005c.

⁷⁵ HANRAHAN, 2009.

⁷⁶ LEVY, 2010.

⁷⁷ HALPIN, 2012.

⁷⁸ ELDER, 2012.

⁷⁹ WHALE, 2014.

⁸⁰ GORBACHEV, 1996 p. 675.

countries, accusing them of establishing a siege on Russia and acting to divide and segregate the continent.⁸¹ The very existence of this organization was questioned: for Gorbachev, it would only make sense if its members broke with the logic of war and military coercion, converting it into a structure of political cooperation — something that did not seem to be on the organization's agenda.⁸²

Under Putin, Gorbachev began to question the change in stance of the Western powers, which during the previous decade had supported Yeltsin's government despite his authoritarian displays, but which were now turning against the new Russian leader. For him, this change was driven by geopolitical interests. Given the Russian recovery and stabilization achieved since the turn of the century, the Western powers intended to keep Moscow in a lesser position on the global stage.⁸³

Contrary to the expectations of several analysts and international actors, Gorbachev aligned himself with Russian foreign policy at highly controversial moments, such as the intervention in Georgia in 2008, the Syrian War in 2011 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.⁸⁴ On all these occasions, he reaffirmed the official discourse that Russia acted as a peacemaking force, protecting ethnic minorities from the oppressive actions of other nationalities. The former Soviet leader understood that Russian foreign policy was a response to the hostilities posed by Western powers. The growing tone of criticism of the United States and Western Europe signaled Gorbachev's dissatisfaction with the lack of reciprocity in the rapprochement he had initiated during Perestroika, preventing some of the main objectives of his foreign policy from materializing.

Support for Russian foreign policy, however, did not represent a change in Gorbachev's understanding of the coordination of the international system. In fact, his disenchantment with the Western stance seemed to stem from the expectations he created regarding greater cooperation as a consequence of the changes brought about by Perestroika. Even so, the former Soviet leader maintained his discourse in defense of forums for dialogue and joint decision-making in international relations, which would allow the construction of relations based on cooperation and mutual respect. He continued to defend the central role of international organizations and regimes in regulating the new world order. But he considered that although many of these attributions had already been formally delegated to several of

⁸¹ GORBACHEV, 1993 p. 363.

⁸² GORBACHEV, 1997, p. 259.

⁸³ See: GORBACHEV, 2006. p. 127; YAKUB, 2007.

⁸⁴ See: GORBACHEV, 2008; GORBACHEV, 2016a, p. 399; GORBACHEV, 2016a, p. 404.

these organizations, they lacked the power to enforce international law and collective decisions.⁸⁵

Gorbachev's own intellectual Perestroika

This brief analytical exercise tracing the trajectory of the ideas expressed by Mikhail Gorbachev before and after Perestroika allows us to identify interesting aspects of the evolution of his thought. His speeches prior to 1985 indicate that the leader, upon assuming the post of General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU, was far from holding a radical position, ready to break with the regime's foundations. Even so, it is possible to observe between the 1970s and 1980s a deepening in his diagnosis of the problems faced by the USSR and the need for changes in the functioning of the socialist system. Many of the proposals that guided the first reformist measures were already being developed and reflected upon before his coming to supreme power in 1985. The solution, however, seemed to lie not in transformation, but rather in improving the Soviet model, correcting deviations and reinforcing its potential.

By comparing his statements prior to Perestroika and his speeches and texts after the end of the Soviet Union, it is possible to see the impact on his thinking of the dynamics of the reforms and the political processes experienced by the leader while he was in power. Gorbachev, who left the presidency of the USSR on Christmas Day 1991, distanced himself further from the ideological framework that had guided the regime until the early 1980s. However, while he publicly declared his incompatibility with several assumptions of communism, he also rejected the label of neoliberal, beginning to construct his own vision of socialism with a humanist, democratic and modern character.

Politically, he was close to the model of democracy in force in the major Western powers, but he recognized the need to adapt it to the historical and social realities of each people. In economics, he condemned some of the pillars of the Soviet system that he helped to deconstruct, but he also rejected the blind adoption of the neoliberal and monetarist model. In this respect, his preference for a regulated economic model reinforces his identification with the assumptions of social democracy and, as in other spheres, demonstrates his preference for conciliatory and moderate approaches.

Gorbachev's death in August 2022 also brought an end to his political and intellectual activity, which had continued until the end of the second decade of the 21st century. Even so, the trajectory of his ideas remains a rich

⁸⁵ GORBACHEV, 2000, pp. 228-229.

field to be explored by researchers seeking to understand the main historical processes that marked the end of the 20th century and gave rise to the foundations of the world in which we live today.

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