

## BETWEEN FEAR AND FASCINATION: THE SOVIET UNION IN THE MODERN AGE

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### Abstract

The article deals with the formation of Soviet power, the Soviet Union, the influence of the ideology of Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism on the processes associated with industrialization, national socialism, nationalism, war and peace, humanism and fascism, which were a response to the economic and political domination of the United States and Europe. In the context of comparative analysis, special attention is paid to the phenomenon of Bolshevism as a real challenge of the 20th century. Considering that without the October Revolution and the Civil War in Russia there would be no war ideologies in Europe, without the experience of a multinational empire there would be no ethnic cleansing, without the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II there would be no communist rule in Eastern Europe and etc.

The article also examines the prerequisites for the formation and transformation of the totalitarian political system and regime of the USSR, against which the revival of democracy and market economy began in Europe.

**Keywords:** *war, peace, violence, genocide, Russian Revolution, Bolshevik, Soviet Union, humanity, French Revolution, ideology*

### Introduction

“The history of the Short Twentieth Century,” wrote the British historian Eric Hobsbawm “cannot be understood without the Russian revolution and its direct and indirect effects.” (Hobsbawm 1994, 84). Without the Russian Revolution the West could not have triumphed over Hitler, without it the belief in the free market economy in the European states would not have been shaken and without it the liberation movements in the colonies would have remained silent. The revolution was inevitable; all it took in 1914 was an impetus to explode the social tensions in the tsarist empire. And no party, except Lenin’s Bolsheviks, was prepared to face up to this responsibility and set in motion the great change. “Humanity was waiting for an alternative”, wrote Hobsbawm of the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I (Hobsbawm 1994, 55). “The Russian Revolution or, more precisely, the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, set

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out to give the world this signal. It therefore became an event as central to the history of this century as the French revolution of 1789 was to the nineteenth. Indeed, it is not an accident that the history of the Short Twentieth Century,...., virtually coincides with the lifetime of the state born of the October revolution.” (Hobsbawm 1994, 55). Only beautiful and noble. The Bolsheviks appear and the lights go on everywhere, not only in Russia but also in Europe. “Humanity was waiting for an alternative.” Why has this book actually been counted among the masterpieces of history by some historians? Shouldn’t we have known better in 1995? After the end of the Soviet Union and after the horrors of the 20th century, could one still write about the revolutionaries and their experiments in the mode of progress and ignore the fact that millions were senselessly sacrificed on its altar? Couldn’t one have known before the end of the Soviet Union what burden the Bolshevik experiment imposed on Europe? Now one could be satisfied with the explanation that the unteachable will not become any wiser by reading and want to be right at any price. But you can’t make it that easy. Hobsbawm’s story was not on the fringes, but at the center of the historiography that described the 20th century from the spirit of the 20th century: as a struggle between good and evil, between darkness and brightness, between backwardness and progress (Judt 2012, 102, 393). But a historian who does not also tell of the scores that had to be settled for this struggle robs the century of ideologies of its real signature.

There is no doubt that fascism and National Socialism, nationalism and war were also responses to the economic and political dominance of the USA, which wanted to reorganize Europe after the First World War but then left it to its own devices. But the real challenge of the 20th century was Bolshevism (Tooze 2015; Wolfgang Schivelbusch 2005, 20-22). Without the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War there would have been no war of ideologies in Europe, without the experiences of the multi-ethnic empire there would have been no ethnic cleansing, without the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II there would have been no communist rule in Eastern Europe, without Lenin there would have been no Mao and Pol Pot, without ‘socialism in one country’ there would be no awakening in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, without the Soviet dictatorship and its command economy there would be no renaissance of democracy and the free market in Europe. But without the Soviet Union there would have been no end to the lack of freedom in Europe in 1989, and without the legacy of the multi-ethnic empire there would have been no conflict over the Ukraine. Whatever happened in the Soviet Union did not leave the rest of the world untouched (Koenen 2010; Pons 2014). Between fear and fascination. This could be the headline for a story describing Europe’s relationship with the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

The 20th century has been understood by historians as an age of ideologies and extremes (Hobsbawm 2007, 11-18; Bracher 1985, 11-18; Mazower 2000). “Pluralism by definition was a category mistake”, Tony Judt recalled at that time of ambiguity, a deliberate deception or a tragic delusion (Judt 2012, 197). This is undoubtedly how the contemporaries who had to live in the age of clarity and order felt it. There were good and bad systems and goals that inevitably demanded right and wrong decisions. Politics, as understood and reinforced in recent times by the experience of total war, has been described as all-or-nothing, either-or, life-or-death (Judt 2012, 379).

Life should be nicer; all problems should be solved forever. But the great experiment in social and political transformation did not begin in Germany or England, but in Russia of all places, where there was nothing to be seen of the best of all worlds and where the idea of a beautiful new life tried to assert itself against the reality of the old one with brute force. The Soviet state was weak, its ambitions boundless, and its society defenseless. Bolshevism was a modernization dictatorship that paid little heed to the wishes of the subjects and prevailed against all resistance under belligerent conditions (Scott 1998, 1-8). Without this tragic misunderstanding that one can force what did not come about by itself, there would have been no authoritarian socialism, no communist dictatorship, no mass terror and no fascism in Europe. The October Revolution was an event whose aftermath so changed not only old Russia but also Europe that after 1917 nothing was the same. It was the beginning of the totalitarian temptation to subdue what did not submit.

### **Ideology of Statehood**

Marxism was an ideology that promised freedom and emancipation. It also came to Russia as an idea in the late 19th century. Its appeal there stemmed primarily from the promise that eventually all societies would be what England and Germany already were. But Russia was far from being a modern industrial country; its infrastructure was primitive, factories and industries concentrated in the big cities. Russia was a country of peasants, even in the big cities the villagers remained what they were because there was little that would have enabled them to say goodbye to peasant life. The tsarist state demanded taxes and recruits, submission and loyalty. But he had little to give. In the apartheid society of the late Tsarist Empire, the living quarters of peasants and citizens were strictly separated. It seemed as if the peasants belonged to a foreign nation and lived in another country (Figs 1998, 100-137; Bradley 1985; Johnson 1979; Wynn 1992; Mironov 1994, 54-73). But Marxism promised the end of backwardness, it promised that the course of history would also change Russian life for the better.

But what does the revolutionary get out of history if what he dreams of doesn't happen during his lifetime? And so it was that Marxism in Russia turned into an extreme modernization and industrialization ideology. What had already happened elsewhere had to be achieved at all costs. Nikolai Valentinov, a friend of Lenin, recalled the power that Marxist ideas had in Russia (Valentinov 1953, 50).

Paradoxically, Bolshevism was a reflection of the autocratic ideology of modernization that paid little attention to the wishes of the people and considered it to be all responsible. Ever since Peter I opened the window to the West; all the governments of the Tsarist Empire have been compelled to bring Europe to Russia. Autocracy as the engine of progress, always ahead of the sluggish society - this is how the tsars and their ministers understood their mission: to redeem Russia from self-produced backwardness (Verner 1990, 70-103; Wortman 2000, 3-15; Lieven 1989, 148-154). Europe was the yardstick by which to measure what was yet to come for Russia.

Lenin was undoubtedly the most radical representative of this Russian variant of belief in progress. His belief in the feasibility of the situation came from the experience of backwardness. He couldn't wait for the story to end. The Bolsheviks did not want to

be interpreters and prophets, but executors of history. Lenin's idols were men of action, ascetics, and men of will who did not surrender to the world but fashioned it in their image. If Rakhmetov, the ascetic hero of Chernyshevki's novel "What is to be Done", really lived, Lenin should have won him over. Nothing was impossible in his world because everything seemed possible in isolation. Because if there were no roots and no borders, no thought really had to be tested, there could also be no limitations (Tschernyschewski 1988; Malia 1994, 91-92; Besancon 1981, 117-125, 194-195; Pipes 1992, 228-229). The bad conscience feeds on memory, it is bound. But evil, wrote Hannah Arendt, has no roots. "And since it has no roots, it has no boundaries; it can develop to unimaginable extremes." (Arendt 2009, 77).

Lenin knew no limitations; he had no conscience to bind him. For him, the conceivable was also the feasible. The revolutionary leader had nothing but contempt for the people. When had it ever accomplished anything on its own and why should the Russian peasants of all people be an instrument of progress? For Lenin there was absolutely no doubt that the revolutionary elite had to organize what the people could not do. Workers and peasants had no political consciousness; they did not know what had to be done for their happiness. Only the revolutionaries who acted from higher insight would have this knowledge, because they would have understood what history demanded of them. "Give us an organization of revolutionaries and we will turn Russia" (Lenin 1978, 109-116; Priestland 2009, 109-116).

Lenin hated Russia and its people from the bottom of his heart. He despised nothing more than the indolence of the Oblomovs, the cruelty and ignorance of the peasants, and the primitiveness of Russian life. His Marxism did not breathe the spirit of freedom and emancipation. It was an educational ideology that was incompatible with democracy and pluralism, with ambiguity and diversity, and which was concerned with nothing other than getting rid of the old Russia of 'icons and dark lovers' forever. What mattered was not liberation from dependence and immaturity, but modernization and re-education (Tumarkin 1982). All of Russia was to become a Prussian office, where people would plan and carry out what the revolutionary elite had planned for them. "Our next goal is," Lenin wrote in his pamphlet "State and Revolution" in September 1917, "to organize the entire national economy on the model of the post office" (Lenin 1976, 359; Tumarkin 1983).

Maxim Gorky, who knew Lenin better than many party comrades, wrote of the revolutionary leader that he saw peasants and workers through the eyes of the Russian landowner: as material to be formed, not as people with wants and needs. "Lenin himself, of course, is a man of exceptional strength. For twenty-five years he stood in the front rank of those who fought for the triumph of socialism. He is one of the most prominent and striking figures of international social democracy; a man of talent, he possesses all the qualities of a "leader" and also the lack of morality necessary for this role, as well as an utterly pitiless attitude, worthy of a nobleman, toward the lives of the popular masses. Lenin is a "leader" and a Russian nobleman, not without certain psychological traits of this extinct class, and therefore he considers himself justified in performing with the Russian people a cruel experiment which is doomed to failure beforehand." (Gorky 1972, 88).

“Belated development” is the “characteristic” of Russian history, wrote Leon Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution* (Trotsky 2017, 115). The open, Asian spaces have always been “condemned by nature itself to a long backwardness”. When the Slavs conquered the “desolate plains” in the middle Ages, they found nothing but emptiness. Russia has no legacy and has always imitated what has succeeded in Europe. The Russian rulers appropriated the “material and spiritual achievements of the progressive countries” and adapted them to the conditions of Russia. Trotsky wrote about this that a backward nation also weighs down the achievements it readily acquires from outside by assimilation to its more primitive culture (Trotsky 2017, 24). Russia had to pay a high price for every import: serfdom had to be intensified for the adoption of Western military technology and European culture, because the lifestyle of the elite and the demands of the state could not have been satisfied in any other way.

But even Trotsky could only imagine socialism as a dictatorship that educated the people and turned old people into new ones. At the end of the civil war he wanted to organize the proletariat militarily, workers should be housed in barracks and do forced labor in the service of the new state. Socialism cannot be achieved without coercion, Trotsky declared at the 9th Party Congress in March 1920. People are by nature lazy and try to avoid exertion. Therefore, it is the task of the party to subject workers to military discipline. Not emancipation but training was the order of the day (Aves 1996, 5-38, 12; Trotsky 1981, 371-373; Plaggenborg 1996). The Bolsheviks did not fight social inequality, they bred the new man and, like their predecessors in the Tsarist bureaucracy, they did it by the methods of the old man.

For the German Social Democrats, whose discipline and organizational skills Lenin so admired, Bolshevism was an aberration born of the culture of the Russian Civil War. Karl Kautsky put it frankly: Bolshevism was a despotism that stayed in power through fear and terror because Lenin and Trotsky could only imagine socialism as a slave - owning society (Kolakowski 1988, 63-65; Groh and Brandt 1992, 177-178). In old Europe the Social Democrats no longer spoke of the revolution, because they achieved what they thought was right by other means, but probably also because they could see with their own eyes what was happening in Russia.

The German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein declared in December 1918: “Through all the convulsions and all the thrashing of the reactionary powers, I see the class struggle taking on ever more civilized forms, and it is precisely in this civilizing of the class struggle, of the political and economic struggles of the workers, that I see the best guarantee for the realization of socialism.” (Bernstein 1976, 166). But the Bolsheviks wanted nothing to do with that, because in their world there were no parties, no rule of law, no bourgeois safeguards and no civilized disputes. A merciless war was raging in it, which could only be won by those who commanded weapons and had people at their disposal who knew how to use them (Müller 2013, 96).

By 1917 the tsarist state had collapsed, its army was disbanded, and after three years of civil war Russia was a devastated and devastated country, without industry and the proletariat. Millions had died, been uprooted, starved or driven from the land; workers had become farmers again (Pethybridge 1990, 121-127, 382-388). But what strategy, other than the introduction of a development dictatorship, should the Bolsheviks have adopted to deal with this catastrophe? Bolshevik socialism was socialism in power, a

state-building process driven by an iron fist, authoritarian, militaristic, ruthless and violent (Baberowski 2016, 211-246).

Russia of all places became the experimental field for a social technology that considered itself omnipotent and omnipotent and whose representatives believed they were fulfilling a mission in the service of world history. Anything seemed possible if the revolutionaries only showed determination. Why shouldn't Russia achieve what the Marxists in Europe had long dreamed of? But the reputation that once came from Europe elicited only a faint echo in Russia. On the terrain of the peasant kingdom, European Marxism was transformed into an ideology of modernization and education that left little of the original promises.

In Western Europe, the Communist Parties were organizations of volunteers who had to win elections. However, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was not a party, but an order and the actual instrument of intervention of the new state (Koestler 1986, 138-154; Hoppe 2011, 11-29). It was a creation of the civil war and came from the realization that an unfounded dictatorship would have little chance of surviving. But the rule of the Bolsheviks was on shaky ground. The old elites had been destroyed or driven out of the country, the new state had at best established itself in the big cities, but not in the villages and on the periphery of the empire. Without the Communist Party there would have been no state-building process. It was the actual place of domination.

The new elite served in it, clinging together the multi-ethnic empire, just as the service nobility had held the tsarist empire together. Communists were allowed to carry guns and shop in their own shops, vacationed in state-owned sanatoriums, and were protected from prosecution. Stalin called the Communist Party an "Order of Sword-bearers", chosen ones who held together with an iron fist what seemed to not belong together (Fitzpatrick 1999, 15-39). Louis Fischer recalled that the Communist Party was the most remarkable institution in Soviet Russia. It was reminiscent of a monastic order in the demand for hardness and devotion it made of its members. The traditional nature of their automatic obedience, secrecy and unconditional discipline made them resemble a military caste. It served as a power station, watchdog and invigorating element for the new regime (Koestler u.a. 2005, 209-210).

Only the peasants who poured into the party in their thousands after Lenin's death were not communists. They knew nothing of Marxism and its promises, nothing of theory and mission. But without an ideological and organizational corset, the Communist Party would have remained a collection of people with nothing in common. But such an elite would have been of no use to the revolution. The party was therefore hierarchized and its internal organization tailored to the needs of the rulers and the peasants' commitment to authority. All communists should speak the same language, recite the same creed, and adopt the same proletarian and authoritarian habit. "Whether in Vladivostok or Voronezh, in Stalinsk or Stalinabad, in Rossosh or Pavlovsk," says Malte Rolf, the cultural set of rules was the same everywhere, as was the media with the help of which it was supposed to be enforced (Rolf 2006, 266). A common cultural language establishes solidarity and enables a dialogue between those who rule and those who are ruled in the first place. It was at the party congresses, the plenary sessions of the Central Committee and the sessions of the party cells that the new elite were trained on how to read, speak and party. Even contemporaries marveled at the rituals that preceded the

admission of a communist into the party, at the formulaic and empty language of the officials, at criticism and self-criticism, at the public self-mortification of the communists, at show trials, parades, festivals and banquets. Everywhere and at all times confessions had to be made and reality had to be spoken about in a mode of self-denial (Koestler u.a. 2005, 54-55; Fitzpatrick 1999, 19-21; Erren 2008).

The denial of reality was part of the communist ritual. In the tsarist empire, the elites still complained about backwardness, ignorance and poverty, but in the Soviet world of lies they could no longer be talked about. The invocation of a utopia that made predictions that would never come true offered no alternative but to deny everything that actually happened day in and day out. In the Bolshevik state there could not be unhappy people. Misery and poverty had to be denied, misery praised as a brave new world. After years of repression, most people, even if they felt bad and hurt at being forced to humiliate themselves in front of the new masters, would automatically come out of lies for most people. "Mentally, I was like a frightened little animal," wrote Stepan Podlubny, whose son had found work as a kulak in Moscow, in his diary in October 1934. Frightened me to take even one step that I had not previously considered from a political point of view and with all caution. Every day, no every hour, you are afraid of saying something superfluous when talking to people. All of life is based on a lie. You tell someone something and then you have to remember it, only to repeat the exact same thing in minute detail later in conversation with someone else. Need to know what you said yesterday or a year ago, how you said it, what you said about yourself, about your parents and about your acquaintances. You have to be able to tell all of this skilfully, colorfully and believably, with a special facial expression and completely cold-bloodedly, so that no suspicion arises. I watch people closely; watch the behavior of young people like me. What you do in similar situations. Try to mimic their behavior. Adapt me to life as an animal adapts to its environment when it sees an enemy. All of this requires an inhuman effort; it destroys my willpower and independence. At the same time, it forces me to exercise professional caution and attention. Adding to the difficulties is that there is no one I can consult with except one person, my little mother. Have no heart friends (Hellbeck 1996, 167-168; Lugovskaya 2004, 42).

And so it came about that the communist educational project produced a strict, conservative social discipline that closed itself off to new things and met every desire for change with prohibitions and punishments. Stalinism was an educational dictatorship that punished what would have been perceived as gain in a free society. A burden that weighed heavily on the Soviet Union and only put it at a disadvantage in economic competition with the open societies of the West (Brooks 2000, 54-82; Baberowski 2012a, 213; Baberowski 2012b).

Though the lie cramped hearts and strained social relationships, it also made sense of the absurdity of human existence, training the young communist climbers to learn how the world needed to be seen and understood. And because the future was already fixed, past and present became artifacts that no longer had anything to do with the life experiences of millions. Time was stopped, utopia degenerated into a rigid catalog of ideas showing how communists should imagine the present: as the best of all worlds.

Those who became communists entered a strange world with strangely strange rules and customs that did not exist in civilian life and were unknown to the novices. "The

newcomer to the party,” wrote Arthur Koestler of Bolshevik culture, found himself plunged into a completely alien world (Koestler u. a. 2005, 35). All novices had to give information about their past, reveal their living conditions and make it credible that they deserved to be a member of the party. All communists, no matter where they came from, had to endure this initiation ritual. It gave them access to an order of Ascended and gave them a sense of exclusivity.

Communists knew only one God and they worshiped the same symbols: red flags, canonical texts that everyone knew but few understood, busts and paintings of the revolutionary leader and his loyal disciple Stalin. They cultivated a proletarian habitus, despised religion, bourgeois attitudes and conventions, and subordinated individual interests to those of the collective. Only those who were willing to sacrifice friends and relatives for the common cause, if necessary, could call themselves communists. In the Order of the Chosen the language of revolution had to be spoken. One should recognize the communist functionary by the simplicity of clothing and speech, by the demeanor of modesty. Part of modesty was the submission of the individual to the will of the collective. Anyone who made mistakes deviated from the general line of the party or violated the rules of life had to expose themselves to publicly staged criticism. Above all, however, the Order expected its members to exercise self-criticism when the powerful asked them to (Hoffmann 2003, 57-87; Fitzpatrick 1999, 14-21).

The organization and ideology of Bolshevism were products of the Soviet state-building process, and yet they spread beyond Soviet borders. There, however, the rituals of Soviet communism seemed strangely alien. It is paradoxical: but the communist movement in Europe imitated the hierarchical organization and the authoritarian habitus of the Bolshevik party, although they did not correspond at all to the needs of the European countries. By the end of the 1920s, the strange ritual had become social normality in the communist parties of Europe, although in free societies no one could be forced to submit to lies. “I had eyes that could see,” Arthur Koestler recalled of a visit to the Soviet Union in 1932, but a mind trained to interpret what the eyes saw in prescribed ways (Koestler u.a. 2005, 156; Jakowlew 2004, 34).

Stalin could not imagine democratic societies. He could not understand that German communists had to win elections and campaign for votes. For him there was no difference between the KPD and the Georgian Communist Party. The Communist Parties were part of a large community centered in Moscow. As members of a universal church, they were funded, steered and commanded by the Communist International, and eventually their dependence was so great that they voluntarily submitted to Stalin's whims (Hoppe 2011, 240-241, 358-361). Even before the war, there were communist parties in Germany, France and Italy that were based on the Soviet organizational model and imitated the Bolshevik habitus of ruthlessness. In the pluralistic societies of the West, communists were perceived as members of a church, receiving directives from Moscow, using strange, standardized language, and completely closed to independent thinking. What mattered were not the needs of potential voters, but adherence to the general line drawn up in Moscow. In most European countries, therefore, Bolshevism was not an attractive model, at most a warning. Why were communists still successful in some European countries?



The British historian Tony Judt found an original explanation for this. “The organizational form,” he wrote, “the Gramscian notion of hegemony, the idea that the party must substitute for organized religion, complete with hierarchy, elite, a liturgy and a catechism - goes some way to explaining why organized communism in the Leninist model does so much better in Catholic or Orthodox countries than in Protestant ones.” (Judt 2012, 83). In Protestant cultures there was no interest whatsoever in eschatological questions (Koestler u.a. 2005, 102-103).

And yet, nowhere in Europe have communists been able to win elections and seize power. The Bolshevik system of rule came to East-Central Europe only after the Second World War, through conquest. He imposed his system on the subjugated. It couldn't be otherwise, Stalin once said. Winners impose their order on losers. But how to explain the attractiveness of Bolshevism in the countries of Asia and Africa? There is an unequivocal answer to this: because the Soviet Union's state-building model and the party's hierarchical organization corresponded to the needs of the educational dictatorships that arose in the developing countries. It seems no coincidence that the Bolshevik system celebrated its greatest triumphs where there was little evidence of modernity: in China, Vietnam, Cambodia or Cuba. It was a model for a premodern world that wanted to free itself from the clutches of the past. It promised to overcome backwardness and heterogeneity and to create order. Bolshevism was an anti-colonial state-building model for underdeveloped countries. It proved that even poor countries could become rich and powerful. All their leaders had to do was storm Bolshevik-style fortresses and tear down whatever stood in their way. What was only imitated in Europe was a revelation in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America (Priestland 2014, 231-254; Koenen 2005, 87-98).

### **Bolshevism as a Project of Order**

The 20th century was one of order and mania for feasibility. The British-Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes that modernity should be thought of as a time in which order was consciously perceived as a mode of life. The world is only will and imagination, and therefore it can be ordered and changed at will. As soon as people perceive their environment as a challenge and try to bend it to their will, they become aware of their own destiny as masters. You now know that any order is possible once it has been conceived and there are instruments with which it can be brought into being. The discovery of order is the birth of backwardness. In the first place, it creates the ambivalence that it wants to overcome. We should, Bauman suggests, think of the modern state as a gardener who creates order and beauty and removes weeds: dissidence, heresy, backwardness and strangeness. Soul engineers were optimistic. They believed in progress and education. For them there was no social problem that could not be finally solved through rational planning. The gardener state was the sounding board of utopia. He accomplished what nationalists, racists, and communists had dreamed up (Bauman 1995, 45-46; Scott 1998, 1-8).

The Bolsheviks were conquerors who subjugated empire to order, categorize, and transform it. But they were also masters of improvisation and crisis. For them there was

no problem that could not be solved immediately. Crisis was the way of life of Bolshevism, it was the ground on which the violent interventionist state and the culture of hardening thrived (Schlögel 2003, 94-95; Kindler 2014, 145). Why should the Bolsheviks have listened to orthodox Marxists and waited for the call of history when what they set out to do could be achieved immediately? For this they were admired, all over the world where social engineers dreamed of creating a new world. The Bolsheviks would do the inevitable, destroying the decaying bourgeois order and replacing it with the unconditional will to power to save humanity from decay. The party cells in the factories are “disciplining factions”, wrote business journalist Alfons Goldschmidt, who visited Moscow in 1920. “They should suck up the bad juices, eat them up, and destroy them.” The writer Franz Jung, who was in Moscow at the same time, found there what he missed in his homeland: the “will for equality and community spirit.” He had never experienced such happiness before. That was what I was looking for and why I moved out since childhood: home, the human home (Koenen 2005, 302-307). A machine is the Bolshevik system. Like with giant tentacles, it gradually seizes people and raw materials, it forces people to work, and it will automatically crush those who resist (Koenen 2005, 306).

Ten years later, at the height of the Stalinist revolution, Europeans and Americans came to the Soviet Union to see the new order being created. In the old world, depression and unemployment, decadence and decay reigned supreme, in the new, the pathos of new beginnings. Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, H.G. Wells, Beatrice und Sidney Webb, Lion Feuchtwanger, John Maynard Keynes, George Bernard Shaw - they all, for different reasons, succumbed to the fascination of the Bolshevik religion of feasibility, admired the rule of reason and the relentlessness with which the Soviet rulers freed mankind from the curse of the Profits and redeemed from the anarchy of the market. The crowd did not pray. She sang the Internationale. Hardly anyone, either in the Soviet Union or in Europe, wanted to talk about the cost of this experiment (Furet 1996, 197-208; Bracher 1985, 222-238; Rohrwasser 2000, 121-142; Kiesel 2009, 392-407; Ryklin 2008, 90; Mazower 2000, 186-187; Priestland 2009, 246-250; Raphael 2011, 190; Fischer 1991, 355).

The Soviet Union was the experimental field on which the lives of millions were rearranged. People were assigned to social classes and social ranks. There were now workers and peasants, kulaks and bourgeois, communists and independents, and it depended on attribution which rights one could claim. The new order should be unambiguous and clear, enemies and outsiders should be recognizable. The Bolsheviks divided their subjects into useful and worthless people, tied privilege to social status, and forced everyone to find their feet in the new order. No one could escape the attribution, because survival depended on social status. In this system of social hierarchy, those in power could win friends and followers and identify enemies (Fitzpatrick 1993, 745-770; Alexopoulos 2018, 13-44).

The new order also included the ethnic survey of the empire. The project of creating a socialist state could only get from the center to the periphery through the language and culture of the subjects. The indigenization and ethnicization of the empire gave the regime the means to bring the state into the village, to categorize and mobilize the population. That is why the rulers organized the Soviet Union according to the principle of ethnicity. The Tsarist multi-ethnic empire became an empire of nations, with borders,

capitals, official languages and national myths. National in form, socialist in content - that's what Stalin called the nationalization project. It turned peasants into Russians, Jews, Ukrainians and Kazakhs, and it gave socialism a national face. Marxists had become creators of nations, and the multi-ethnic empire had turned into an empire of nations (Baberowski 2006, 199-213; Martin 2017; Slezkine 1994, 414-452).

And yet the formation of a state was not the end but the beginning of a revolution that was to transform the Soviet Union into a modern industrial state. The Soviet Union was not what it should have been. Their leaders presented claims, but they could not enforce them because they lacked human capital, tools, and opportunities. Without credit, without foreign technology and aid, the Soviet Union would have to remain what it was. Stalin and his followers therefore saw no alternative but to finance industrialization through the export of grain. Only they could not get what they wanted because there were few incentives for the peasants to give the products of their labor to the state. Without coercion they would not be able to do, without the collectivization of agriculture and the subjugation of the peasants they would be powerless. At least Stalin and his supporters in the leadership had no doubts about that. When the dictator went to Siberia in January 1928 to oversee grain procurement and to prepare the comrades for the great leap forward, he was confronted with a humiliating reality. He was told when he arrived in Barnaul that there were no automobiles or roads in the region (Kotkin 2014, 661-723; Hughes 1994, 76-103). We do not know how Stalin might have felt when he, the leader of the world proletariat and father of the peoples, was being pulled through the snow in a sleigh. But we do know that he was determined to stamp out backwardness bluntly and with style. Never again, Stalin proclaimed, should Russia be beaten and humiliated by the European powers. What other nations had accomplished in centuries, the Soviet Union must accomplish in a few years. Either we win, according to Stalin, or we will be crushed (Stalin 1955, 35-36).

The first five-year plan, approved in 1927, gave the world an example of the Bolshevik leaders' determination to build dams, factories and roads in record time, turning deserts into lush landscapes. The Bolshevik project of industrialization was intended not only to modernize the economy and infrastructure, but to change the social map. The old elites should be disempowered; peasants should be turned into workers. In Magnitogorsk in the Urals and in other places of Stalinist industrialization, not only was the wilderness tamed, but the new man was also brought forth: through community experiences and heroic production battles that were to turn farmers into new men and political leaders. What the countries of the West had needed years to produce was to be brought about overnight. Although life in Magnitogorsk was short and dirty, the dam had to be demolished after it was completed. But that didn't matter. "The Magnitogorsk Dam," wrote one propagandist "was a school where people learned to respect Bolshevik miracles." (Kotkin 1995, 92; Scott 1989, 173). Against miracles arguments could not stand. Those who nevertheless dared to object to the ideology of unconditionality were gambling with their lives. In the autumn of 1934, the People's Commissar for Heavy Industry Sergo Ordzhonikidze, in a speech to managers, declared that he would not listen to critics and doubters. Criticism and doubts are a betrayal of the common cause. The Bolsheviks stormed every fortress, through iron will and discipline. "What's stopping you? Bad work." (Gregory and Markevich 2002, 798-799).

Bolshevik belief in world feasibility, governance and planning seemed to move mountains. The anarchy of the market, poverty and unemployment seemed to be gone forever. Not only the Bolshevik leaders believed in this, but also the rising proletarians and peasants, who saw the socialist project of incarnation as the chance of a lifetime. Even in Europe and the US, the Soviet model of command economy was gaining traction. Because in view of the fundamental crisis of the capitalist economic system at the end of the 1920s, there were many reasons that spoke against the model of capitalism and liberal democracy. James Scott, an American worker who immigrated to the Soviet Union in 1932, later recalled the enthusiasm he and his ilk felt at the thought of the Soviet project. Something seemed wrong in America. I began to read a great deal about the Soviet Union and gradually came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had provided answers to some of the questions Americans were asking one another. I decided to go to Russia to work, study, and help build a society that seemed at least a step ahead of America (Scott 1998, 3, 16-17).

At that time, not only communists, but also bourgeois engineers, architects and craftsmen traveled to the Soviet Union to be part of the great effort of will to rebuild an entire country. The will to power, planning and gigantomania exerted an infectious fascination in Europe during the crisis. They inspired not only communists, but also conservatives and fascists. The Bolsheviks got rid of the old, ruthlessly and with an unconditional will to power. They did what was necessary and inevitable, and no one seemed to be able to stop them from doing what they had to do. Never before had those in powers defied all resistance and declared that they would turn the world upside down and rearrange it according to their ideas, no matter what the cost. "Those aspects of Leninism," Tony Judt writes that most irritated traditional Marxists - Lenin's voluntarism and determination to hasten history - were particularly attractive to fascists. The Soviet state was brutal and ruled with an iron fist. In the early days he embodied everything that later fascists admired and missed in the political culture of their own society. The Soviet Union proved that a party could carry out a revolution, seize power in the state and, if necessary, control it by force (Judt 2012, 174-176). It seemed that Soviet socialism was the real answer to the challenges of modernity (Mick 1995).

## **War and Peace**

The 20th century was one of violence, genocide, ethnic cleansing and war. In the Soviet Union between 1914 and 1953 millions of people fell victim to war, terror, hunger, plagues and epidemics. No country in Europe had to pay a higher price in blood for the project of the new order than the Soviet Union. By the time the civil war ended, Russia's infrastructure had been destroyed, its towns and villages devastated, millions of people displaced or traumatized, and the old elite driven out of the country. The Bolsheviks had won because they had unscrupulously and ruthlessly used force. During the years of the civil war they had already taken hostages, burned down unruly farming villages and had their opponents imprisoned in concentration camps. In 1921, the Red troops used poison gas against rebellious peasants in the Tambov governorate and shot tens of thousands of people in the Crimea. Lenin and his followers were people of action who not only talked

about new orders, but also implemented them mercilessly in the face of resistance. Already in the first years after the revolution clergymen and nobles were persecuted and killed, workers' strikes and soldiers' uprisings were suppressed with brutal force. When workers in the Tula armaments factories protested against the miserable living conditions in the spring of 1920, Lenin had the protest suppressed by force. Thousands of workers were shot or taken to concentration camps. A year later the sailors of Kronstadt, the soldier vanguard of the revolution, rose up against the Bolsheviks. Trotsky allowed the rebellion to be drowned in blood (Aves 1996, 39-56; Karsch 2006, 214-222; Avrich 1970; Buldakov 1997, 555-587; Schnell 2012; Nachtigal 2005, 221-246).

Bolshevism changed the Soviet Union beyond recognition. It turned no man's land into industrial landscapes, villages into cities and regions into national republics, and it gave millions of people from the lower classes a perspective of upward mobility. But he also drove the elite out of the country and subdued resistance with an iron fist. The state monopoly on the use of force turned against the citizens, whom it was supposed to protect from one another. For the first time, a government used its superior instruments of power to terrify its own people. The Bolsheviks showed the world what they were capable of and what technological possibilities were available to the state (Baberowski 2015, 70; Popitz 1992, 74-75). More than two million peasants were deprived of their property at the beginning of the 1930s and deported to Siberia, nobles, priests and kulaks were shot, ethnic minorities were expelled from their homes, 680,000 people were killed according to quotas during the Great Terror in 1937 and 1938 alone, several million peasants starved to death, and tens of thousands of communists lost their lives because they were accused of being spies and traitors.

Stalin's technique of rule was based on the staging of crises. Chaos and anarchy, uncertainty and distrust gave him the opportunity to commit his followers to the course of violence and to dissolve state power and do what mattered. The Bolsheviks had always had success with the threat and use of force from above, during the revolution and through the years of the Civil War and the Stalinist Revolution. It is true that there were also different opinions on the use of force in the Bolshevik leadership circles. Lev Kamenev, Nikolai Bukharin and Anatoly Lunacharsky had scruples about using violence against their own, and they would probably have been willing to compromise with political opponents. But even they saw no alternative to subjugating the peasants, because they understood the weak foundations of the communist state. Bukharin may have considered the collectivization of agriculture a mistake, but he had no objections to the use of force to enforce the state's monopoly on the use of force. At least the resistance of the peasants had been broken, and no price could be too high (Daniels 1962; Cohen 1974). But power that must be pointed out is weak. Therefore, Stalinist violence was not a sign of strength but a representation of weakness. Why else would Stalin and his followers have crushed the communist elite if not for fear of losing control and becoming powerless? But the Bolshevik experiment degenerated into despotism, into a conservative educational dictatorship that enslaved workers and peasants and had to compensate for their weakness by creating fear and terror. Under Soviet conditions, the Brave New World project turned into an orgy of violence that the world had never seen before (Baberowski 2012a, 212-368; Teichmann 2016, 254). Whatever the Bolsheviks

set out to do, they could do it because there were no institutions left to prevent them from carrying out the inevitable. The revolution left a tabula rasa where everything seemed possible and everything became possible. The Bolsheviks first gave the world an idea of the overthrow of all values and orders, and they proved that weakness could be compensated for by an iron will, order by force. The red terror, Trotsky wrote, annihilates the bourgeoisie and accelerates the course of history; it is an indispensable instrument for enforcing the inevitable (Traverso 2008, 115).

In Western Europe, the terror generated not only admiration but also fear. After the end of the civil war, news of the bloody excesses also reached Western Europe, through German soldiers who got caught between the fronts on their retreat from the Ukraine in November 1918, through Freikorps officers who fought against the Bolsheviks in the Baltic republics and by the white emigrants who fled to Berlin, Prague and Paris. The Spartacus uprising in January 1919 and the proclamation of the Munich Soviet Republic in April of the same year brought revolution to Germany<sup>1</sup> and with it the fear of Bolshevik fury spread. It was the initial spark for the rise of the fascist and nationalist movements, whose supporters and voters feared uncertainty and chaos (Eschenburg 1995, 111-120; Klemperer 2015, 85-193; Schmolze 1978, 155-156). Fear of Bolshevism seemed to justify every act of violence, and if it had not existed, the fascist movements would have had to invent it, so much did the Red Terror help them gain the recognition of those who were frightened. Hitler and his followers left no doubt about their determination to quell the communist menace by using excessive force and defeating the enemy at their own game. Fascism was a revolution against the revolution, which cannot be imagined without the example of Bolshevism. Without the atrocities of the Russian civil war, without the violent excesses of the Bolsheviks and the crisis of the liberal order in Europe, there would have been no fascism and no National Socialism (Nolte 1968, 14-15; Nolte 1987, 17-18; Wirsching 1999, 513-522; Traverso 2008: 59-65, 265; O'Sullivan 1996; Merz 1995).

Socialism, in its Bolshevik variant, returned to Europe not through revolution but through conquest. And it was not perceived there as a promise, but as an authoritarian, ruthless and violent order that smothered the dream of freedom in the blood of millions. The occupation of Poland and the Baltic republics after the Hitler-Stalin pact, the deportation of enemy collectives and the deaths of millions on the battlefields of World War II were not the work of the National Socialists alone. They are incomprehensible without the Soviet practice of overcoming crises through violence, destroying social order and opening up legal vacuums. Some seem to have forgotten that Hitler and Stalin started the Great War together when they agreed to divide Poland between themselves. The surveying of landscapes, the removal and killing of people who were considered superfluous, the stigmatization of victims - all this was everyday practice in the Soviet Union before the National Socialists began to carry out their work of extermination. When Hitler's armies crossed the borders into the Soviet Union in June 1941, they entered scorched earth and they found what they needed to complete the work of destruction. Stalin had prepared the ground on which the Nazi assassination squads

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<sup>1</sup> On December 18, 1918, Oswald Spengler complained in a letter that the revolution in Bavaria was undermining order, but was also an opportunity to legitimize the counter-revolution (See Schmolze 1978, 155-156).

could operate at will. Bolsheviks and National Socialists were not surprised at each other. At best, they were afraid of each other. Each accomplished what the other expected of him (Baberowski 2009, 1013-1028; Snyder 2010; Gross 2002, 187-224).

World War II was the final act in this game of annihilating violence, in which people were killed because they were not allowed to be part of what those in powers believed to be the best of all worlds. The origin of this violence was the Soviet Union. At best, the ideas were modern; the practice of ordering and destroying was not modern. It took place away from the bourgeois environment in destroyed and devastated landscapes, where everything imaginable was possible and where despotism could spread fear and terror at will. The National Socialists also moved their murder program there (Snyder 2015). The practice of Bolshevik mass terror not only preceded the extermination violence of the National Socialists. She gave her a justification and an example, and she assigned her the place where the mass murder could be carried out (Der Spiegel 2014, 112-117).

The second half of the 20th century was also a century of peace, notwithstanding the Cold War and the nuclear threat that loomed over the European continent like a heavy shadow. For the people of the Soviet Union, the end of Stalinist tyranny was a turning point, a resurrection. For 30 years there had been war, terror and violence without interruption. And now everything should be different. The leaders ended the game with death; they stopped killing each other, renounced terror and despotic tyranny. After everything the subjects had endured in the war against the German conquerors, the regime no longer had any reason to doubt the loyalty of its own people. It made peace with the peasants and broke with the idea that socialism's task was to create definitive orders and new people and to destroy those who resisted (Taubman 2003, 270-324; Baberowski 2012a, 401-437).

Kerstin Holm wrote in May 2014 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that the Russian attitude to life includes knowledge that "the state is fundamentally the enemy of its citizens", over which one has no influence and which is an unavoidable evil, "like the weather, with which one has to come to terms with." (Holm 2014). But you could come to terms with him. Because the project of clarity was sacrificed on the altar of the affluent state and stability, the Stalinist command economy was transformed into a sluggish planned economy in which nothing unforeseen happened anymore (Kotz and Weir 2007, 70-91, 155-192). One could also say that the formation of the Soviet state had come to an end and the rulers could be sure of their power. Only when what is expected of everyone happens of its own accord can the powerful sleep peacefully. Sloth is a sign of strength because the rulers can trust their subjects to do what is asked of them. The Soviet Union turned into an empire of nations governed and administered by national elites, into a conservative consensus dictatorship that could do without violence and terror because loyalty no longer depended at all on social status and political affiliation (Suny 1993, 113-126).

The prosperity of the population was the only yardstick against which the legitimacy of the party leadership was measured. For most people in the Soviet Union, the 1960s and 1970s were seen as a good time after everything that had happened before. Utopia had disappeared, in its place came eternal time, the myth of the Great Patriotic War and

the glorious empire. Most Russians still haven't said goodbye to him. He was the only thing they owned.

### **Conclusion and discussion: the Heritage**

What remained of the great utopia and the great designs? Nothing, almost nothing. What remained were the nations as the constitutional principle of the empire, the communist party and the family associations and clans, which to this day dominate political fortunes in the former republics of the Soviet Union. This system of conservative rule came to Eastern Europe at a time when the shockwaves of terror had already faded. The Soviet Union was no longer the center of world revolution. She no longer wanted any revolution at all, at most peace and stability. Everything should remain as it was. Change and change were negatively connoted, the Soviet empire was presented as "eternal" (Yurchak 2006; Kotkin 2008, 1-30). The Kremlin exported nothing more to East-Central Europe than a deeply conservative social order that had been created to hold together a backward multi-ethnic empire. Only in this way could Soviet socialism establish itself as a foreign import in the countries of East Central Europe. Not even the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan was still in the service of revolutionary expansion; at best, it was an unsuccessful attempt to stabilize conditions on the Soviet Union's Asian periphery. In the 1970s nobody believed in the promises of socialism anymore. And when, ten years later, everything that communists had once believed in was also called into question in the Soviet Union, there were no longer any good reasons for the Kremlin to maintain its dominance in East Central Europe. Gorbachev not only gave up what he and his advisers now perceived as an economic burden. Without the military presence and the orderly hand of the Soviet occupying forces, there would have been no peaceful transition of power in the countries of the Eastern bloc. The Soviet Union entered European reality as a violent project. As a peacemaker, she retired from the stage. Looking back, it is hard to understand why the elites in Western Europe and the USA were afraid of the old gentlemen in the Kremlin (Brown 2000, 156-219, 349-412).

"I'm afraid of freedom, it feels like some drunk guy could show up and burn my dacha at any moment." This is what the writer Svetlana Alexievich heard from a Moscow acquaintance who complained about Gorbachev's reforms (Alexijewitsch 2013, 31). The end of the Soviet Union was not the beginning of democracy and pluralism, but the overture of Putin's order. The present shows more of the old than some believe. The conservative mentality of Soviet socialism spread like a dense net over all societies in East Central Europe and left its mark on the minds of millions. What some see as a return of interwar conservative thinking is in fact a legacy of the Soviet order. One speaks of the empire, of the nation, people and religion, but one means the "eternal" time that gave form to the rhythm of life in the Soviet world. Indeed, the Soviet legacy is present everywhere, not as a utopia or a promise of a bright future, but as a representation of authoritarianism. In that sense, the 20th century was indeed a Soviet century.



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