

Editorial

The main emphasis of the topics in the present issue concentrates on the Stalinist revolution from above which took place in the 1930's, changing Russia's political culture more radically than the Bolshevik October Revolution had done. Since the Petrinic Reform at the beginning of the 18th century, Russia had lived in the condition of a permanent, continuously deepening internal division. The upper class was divided into sympathizers and opponents who were trying to impose their respective programs regarding the country's opening toward the west. After the revolution of the Decabrists in 1825, a rift also developed between the ruling bureaucracy and the educated classes that led to a far-reaching polarization of the country within the course of two generations, almost anticipating the future civil war.

The rift between "above" and "below", between the Europeanized elites and the social classes who essentially remained attached to the pre-Petrinic world views was no less tragic for the tsarist empire. This is one of the reasons why many authors speak of two different nations inhabiting Russia since the Petrinic change. This cultural rift was additionally deepened by the unresolved agrarian question.

Initially, the Bolshevik revolution seemed to contribute something to the homogenization of the country. The rift between above and below was for the most part dispelled after the dispossession of the propertied classes and the decimation or, rather, the driving out of the elites (the "waraeger", according to the term coined by cultural historian Vladimir Vajdla). The generation-old argument concerning the "proper" developmental path of Russia seemed resolved. As the superior victors of the Russian civil war, the Bolsheviks defeated all their ideological opponents and transformed Russia into an experimental field for the realization of Marxist utopia.

In spite of all these processes in the first Bolshevik decade, the country by no means reached the homogeneity hoped for by the new rulers. It remained divided. The peasantry, being the overwhelming majority of the population, hardly became integrated into the new system. As "small land-owners" (Lenin), the farmers remained relatively unreceptive toward Marxist indoctrination. Yet, also the Party, the only still remaining political subject in the country, was anything but a monolith. It continued the age-old Russian discourse about the "proper" developmental path for the empire, although in a new form. Despite its elation over party discipline, the Party, but especially the Bolshevik elite that followed the nonconformist behavioral pattern of the radical Russian intelligencija of the 19th century, was difficult to bring into line. The artistic avant-garde that interpreted the ideological guidelines of the party leadership very unconventionally, also behaved in a similar nonconformist way back then.

So the Bolsheviks, who regarded the October Revolution as the greatest revolution in the history of mankind, were essentially unable to change the basic pattern of the political culture prevailing since the Petrinic Reform. Only Stalin was to reach this goal.

Similar to the leading authorities of Marxism, Stalin was convinced of the primacy of economics and began his revolution from above by radically changing the production and ownership conditions. In July 1932, he wrote to his closest companions, Molotov and Kaganovich: "Capitalism would not have been able to destroy feudalism without the principle of the sacrosanctity of private property [...]. Socialism will not be able to abandon the capitalist elements [...] if it does not succeed in defending the holiness of societal property".¹

The task of dispossessing more than 100 million farmers, generally seen as unviable, was "overcome" by Stalin as a result of the collectivization of agriculture. For generations, the unresolved agrarian issue had constituted Russia's most dangerous ammunition. Only the Stalinist leadership succeeded in taming the peasantry, in breaking its backbone, and by almost completely dispossessing it, eliminating the peasantry as such. The extremely difficult coexistence of the state and the private economic sector, which had caused an exceptional amount of tensions and conflicts, was now brought to an end. The free play of the economic forces, which had been the embodiment of chaos in the eyes of the orthodox Marxists, was now superseded by state-run dirigisme.

After the Stalinist revolution from above, it was not only successful in putting an end to the economic but also to the political spontaneity, namely by disciplining the Party. Lenin had been dreaming of such a disciplined party since 1902, at which time he had written his programmatic paper: *What is to be done?* Yet, Lenin did not succeed in carrying out this postulate even after the Bolshevik takeover of power. The Bolsheviks remained a debating party. Even the banning of the party factions, which was announced at the 10th Party meeting of the Bolsheviks in the year 1921, was of little use. For years to come, the Party remained shaken by internal disputes also after 1921, and to a still stronger degree than before the proclamation of the banning of the party factions. Only the Stalinist revolution from above fundamentally changed the character of the Party. It stopped being a conglomerate of different tendencies and factions. Open discussions and open critique of the general line, which before could not be banished from the Party in spite of all the bans and disciplinary measures, were no longer possible now. This deprivation of power or, rather, the Party's self-deprivation, was followed by its decapitation at the time of the "great terror" during the years 1936–38.

Similar processes also took place in the realm of culture. Since the beginning of the Stalinist revolution from above, art as well as the humanities and the social

1 Oleg Khlevniuk et al. (Ed.), *Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska 1931–1936*, Moscow 2001, pp. 240 f.

sciences, yes, even some natural science schools, first and foremost served but one goal: the glorification of Stalin and the system he had created. Paradoxically, the literary and artistic school which, back then, stylized the reign of terror into a paradise on earth, was not called “Stalinist fictionalism” but “socialist realism”. This direction in literature decreed at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in the year 1934, which had its parallel in the fine arts as well as in other fields of the arts, constituted an equivalent to the general line of the Party. Deviations were punished most severely, often by death. Therefore the Stalinist leadership succeeded in achieving what, in previous times, tsarist autocracy and, later, Leninist leadership had in vain endeavored to achieve: forcing the overwhelming majority of the intellectuals to adhering to conformist behavior and to participating in erecting a fictitious world, in which real conditions were literally turned upside down. Leninist utopianism, which had dreamed of the “bright future”, was now replaced by the fiction of an already established paradise on earth.

Nevertheless, the nature of Stalinism consisted not only of unlimited optimism but also of equally limitless pessimism, the fear of losing what had been achieved. As the victory of socialism had not yet been achieved on a worldwide scale and the “paradise of the workers” was surrounded by dark capitalist forces striving to destroy it, Soviet citizens had to continuously be prepared for the final battle with the enemy of the classes.

After the decapitation of the Party as a result of the “great terror”, the backbone of the last “subversive” and still relatively autonomous part of Soviet society was broken. The entire Soviet empire now simply consisted of a totalitarian mechanism’s “little wheels”. This was perhaps the greatest caesura in the history of the country, whose desire for freedom could neither be extinguished by the Tsars nor by Lenin. Stalin ridiculed the Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible who had not succeeded in completely liquidating the Bojares, the ruling class of his time. In Stalin’s opinion, this had been hampered by Ivan’s religious faith and by his having been beset by too many scruples. Despite this disparaging remark, Stalin understood himself as the one who continued and completed Ivan’s work, but also that of Lenin.

Stalin wanted to monopolize the history of Russia similarly to the history of the revolution and to portray his own power as the epitome of both lines of historic development. The historic determinism characteristic for Marxism reached a particularly radical distinctness in Stalinism. The Russian proletariat had now presented mankind with a long-yearned-for-savior (despite his Georgian origin, Stalin almost completely identified himself with Russia). The history of mankind had now reached its highest developmental stage. Basically, exploring this historic legitimacy became the main responsibility of nearly all, if not indeed all the scientific branches of the Stalinist epoch, the portrayal of this heaven on earth being the task assigned to the artists.

Did Stalinism constitute a continuation of the Leninist ideas or a break with it? I would now like to pay more in-depth attention to this question, which has

been the subject of controversy in research debates for decades, namely by exemplarily discussing the terror, as it was absolutely constitutive for the two developmental phases of the Bolshevik regime.

Among the greatest problems of the Bolshevik regime erected in 1917 was its lack of legitimacy. The elections for the Constitutional Assembly, which took place several weeks after the Bolshevik coup d'état, ended with a Bolshevik debacle. In this, the only establishment of the time that represented the collective will of the Russian voters was brutally smashed by the Bolsheviks. By that, they renounced a democratic legitimization of their regime and could maintain their absolute power only by violence from then on. The "red terror" now became the probably most important basis of their power system. They attached more importance to the fight against the "internal enemies" than to the struggle with the foreign opponents. Typical for this was the fact that the Extraordinary Commission (Cheka), the most important instrument of the Party on the domestic policy front, was created several months earlier than the Red Army that was to protect the Bolshevik regime against foreign opponents.

Lenin transfigured the "red terror" or, rather, the dictatorship of the proletariat, which he termed the most effective means in the fight against all "capitalist" restoration attempts. In October 1920 he developed the following definition for the dictatorship: "The scientific term 'dictatorship' means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force".²

Official Soviet historiography, which has almost canonized Lenin, tended to relativize Lenin's creed of merciless terror. Particularly after the death of the Soviet state's founder in January 1924, the Lenin cult became an element of Russian state doctrine. Accordingly, Lenin was seen as the embodiment of all conceivable virtues and as the source of inspiration. Even many critical Soviet intellectuals went into raptures at the mentioning of Lenin's name. The fact that the brutalization of Soviet politics and the rise of systematic terror becoming one of the most important pillars of the regime was inseparably connected to the name of Lenin could hardly be reconciled with the transfigured picture of Lenin. The sources, however, speak an unmistakable language. The Cheka, the so-called "sword of the revolution", could count on Lenin's unswerving support. In this context, the Russian exile historian Sergei Mel'gunov, one of the profoundest authorities on the subject, refers to the following statement by the founder of the Bolshevik Party: "Every means is justified in order to reach our revolutionary aims and desires".³ The former Soviet general and Lenin-biographer Dmitrii Vokogonov wrote several years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: "Lenin

2 Lenin, *A Contribution to the History of the Question of the Dictatorship*. In: id., *Collected Works*, vol. 31, Moscow 1965, pp. 340–361, here 351.

3 Sergei Mel'gunov, *Der rote Terror in Russland 1918–1923*, Berlin 1924, p. 340.

was not only the intellectual originator of Bolshevik terror, but beyond that, as politics, he additionally elevated it to the rank of a state doctrine".⁴

The terror of the Bolsheviks was inseparably connected to their utopianism, to their belief that they were fighting to save mankind from the yoke of capitalist exploitation and to erect a classless paradise on earth. Every resistance to their allegedly "science"-based course of direction was seen as irrational. Thus, the Bolsheviks became the victims of their own utopianism. The Russian philosopher Semen Frank terms utopianism classical heresy, an attempt to save the world solely by employing human willpower. As the utopist violated the structure of creation and the nature of man, his undertaking was to be doomed from the onset. This way he would declare war on both, creation as well as human nature, turning from an apparent savior into an embittered enemy of the human species.⁵

Since reality obstinately resisted the radical alteration attempt of the Bolsheviks, more and more social groups were pronounced enemies of the working class and their humanity questioned. Beside the representatives of the former upper class, also the rich farmers, the so-called "Kulaks", were classified in this category. In August 1918, Lenin elaborated: "The Kulaks are the most brutal, callous and savage exploiters [...]. These bloodsuckers have grown rich themselves on the want suffered by the people in the war [...]. These spiders have grown fat [...] at the expense of the starving workers. [...] Death to them!"⁶ When Stalin renewed the so-called socialist offensive against the Russian agrarian population in 1929, he could refer to Lenin in many ways, e.g. on the latter's thesis that the independent farmers (approximately 80 % of the Soviet population) were the last capitalist class of Russia. "Is that thesis correct?", Stalin asked in April 1929, continuing: "Yes, it is absolutely correct. Why is the individual peasantry defined as the last capitalist class? Because of the two main classes of which our society is composed, the peasantry is the class whose economy is based on private property and small commodity production."⁷

All these similarities, however should not lead anyone to overlooking that, as mentioned earlier, the Stalinist revolution from above embodied the continuity as well as the break with Lenin's heritage. In this context, the different attitudes of the two Bolshevik dictators toward agrarian land ownership would first of all have to be mentioned.

Shortly after seizing power, the Bolsheviks began nationalizing almost all of the economic branches in Russia. The abolition of private property constituted one of the most important pillars of the communist war system erected in 1918.

4 Dimitrii Volkogonov, *Lenin*, Berlin 1994, p. 252.

5 Semen Frank, *Eres' utopizma*. In: id., *Po tu storonu pravogo i levogo*. Sbornik statei, Paris 1972, p. 83-106.

6 Lenin, *Comrade Workers, forward to the last, decisive Fight!* In: id., *Works*, vol. 28, Moscow 1965, pp. 53-57, here 55.

7 Josef V. Stalin, *The right Deviation in the C.P.S.U. (B.)*. In: id., *Works*, vol. 12, Moscow 1954, pp. 1-113, here 41.

Only in one realm did the Bolsheviks dampen their striving toward the nationalization of the means of production: in the realm of agrarian land ownership. In the year 1919, when the communist war system fully established itself, approximately 97 percent of usable agrarian land was in the hand of farmers.⁸ This condition was unacceptable to many Bolshevik purists. They considered the nationalization of the land an indispensable part of the new economic system.⁹

During the civil war, the significant groups within the Bolshevik leadership, Lenin included, rejected the demand by the leftists. Of course, they did want to snatch away the farmers' so-called profits, yet not their land. This showed that they were more familiar with the rustic psyche than their leftist critics. They knew that any attempt of putting the results of the Agrarian Reform of October 1917 in question – and this is what the leftist Bolsheviks had in mind – would largely increase the already desperate resistance of the farmers to Bolshevik politics. Therefore, Lenin did not want to touch upon this sensitive issue of agrarian politics. By completely dispossessing the farmers as a result of the collectivization of agriculture, Stalin dismissed Lenin's reservations.

Despite the two Party leaders' different attitudes toward agrarian land ownership, Lenin's as well as Stalin's politics of extreme exploitation of the agrarian population led to unprecedented famines in the country. As a result of the hunger debacle of 1921/22, which Lenin was directly responsible for, five million people died; the famine caused by Stalin in 1932/33 took six million lives.

The respective reactions of the two dictators to these tragedies, however, were completely different. In 1921, the Bolshevik leadership appealed to the entire world, requesting help. Its appeal did not fall on deaf ears: especially, American organizations rushed in to help the starving people of Russia, thus saving countless lives.¹⁰

Such appeals, on the other hand, were out of the question for the Stalinist leadership. The government simply denied that an unprecedented catastrophe had broken out in the Soviet Union. This mirrors one of the most significant traits of the Stalinist system, which did not show themselves in the same measure during the earlier developmental phases of the Soviet regime: fictionalism. This means the creation of a pseudo-reality in which real conditions are literally turned upside down.

In listing the differences between the Leninist and the Stalinist style of power, it needs to, ultimately, be pointed out that the leading oligarchy in the Lenin period itself tolerated considerable freedoms within the ruling Party, in spite of the society subjugated to it having been completely forced into line. Back then,

8 Cf. Helmut Altrichter, *Staat und Revolution in Sowjetrußland 1917–1922/23*, Darmstadt 1981, p. 84.

9 Cf. Richard Pipes, *Die Russische Revolution*, Band 2, Berlin 1992, pp. 571 ff.

10 Cf. Aleksandr V. Kvashonkin et al. (Ed.), *Bol'shevistskoe rukovodstvo. Perepiska 1912–1917*, Moscow 1996, pp. 209–214; Markus Wehner, *Bauernpolitik im proletarischen Staat. Die Bauernfrage als zentrales Problem der sowjetischen Innenpolitik 1921–1928*, Cologne 1998, p. 74.

the Party leadership was not seen as infallible. Even at the time of the regime's toughest tests, such as during the peace talks in Brest-Litovsk, or during the civil war, the expression of opinions deviating from the general line of the Party was essentially not seen as a criminal offense. The following thoughts by the chief editor of the "Izvestija" newspaper, Steklov, of the year 1919 may be cited exemplarily. In one of the meetings of the Central Executive Committee he said that the Soviet power lacked any social basis in the agrarian areas. That the Bolsheviks had deterred the agrarian masses: "Of course, we are trying to convince them that we have freed them both politically and economically, but it isn't working. [...] We practically haven't given anything to the farmers. [...] Terror is reigning everywhere - this is the only thing that keeps us in power".¹¹ Steklov's theses were, of course, strongly opposed; nevertheless, this controversy shows that in Lenin's time, even at the height of the civil war, the Bolshevik Party was still relatively free to discuss anything. There were also Communists who turned away in horror from the violent orgies of the red terror organs at that time. In February 1919, the old Bolshevik Ol'minskii called the red terror in the province the "most arbitrary mass murder conceivable".¹² In a letter to Lenin of March 1919, another Bolshevik critic of the Cheka spoke of a "desperately criminal atmosphere" predominating in the Ukrainian Cheka.¹³

It goes without saying that the Bolshevik Party was essentially spared the red terror that seized the different classes of the Soviet population at the time of the Lenin period. This condition was to change fundamentally only after the assassination of the Leningrad Party chief Sergej Kirov on 1 December 1934. Already on the day of the assassination (!), the Central Executive Committee of the UdSSR effected a change in the law "For the public prosecution in terrorist attacks on Soviet functionaries", which included the following points: "1. The investigative organs are commanded to poste-haste handle the cases of defendants accused of preparing or, rather, executing acts of terror. 2. The court organs are commanded not to delay the execution of death sentences announced as a result of crimes of this category in view of a possible pardon [...]. 3. The organs of the NKVD are ordered to execute the death sentences for criminals belonging to the category mentioned above immediately after they have been pronounced".¹⁴ According to the Sovietologist Robert Conquest, this order "was to become a charter of the terror in the years to come".¹⁵

11 Sergei Kuleshov u. a., *Nashe otechestvo*, Moscow 1991, vol. 2, p. 65.

12 Mel'gunov, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 341.

13 Kvashonkin, *Bol'shevistkoe rukovodstvo*, pp. 80 f.

14 Chruschtschows historische Rede. In: *Ost-Probleme*, no. 25/26, 22 June 1956, pp. 867-897, here 874.

15 Robert Conquest, *Am Anfang starb Genosse Kirov. Säuberungen unter Stalin*, Düsseldorf 1970, p. 67.

In January 1935, court proceedings were carried out against former Party opponents who were considered the initiators of the Kirov assassination. In a circular from the Central Executive Committee they were equated with the same category as the “white guardists”: “They deserve to be treated as white guardists”. The former internal party rivals were thusly classified in the category of class enemies. This meant that the times of mere verbal disputes with the opposition were past. The process of dehumanization, which the Bolsheviks had originally contrived against their respective opponents, was now extended to the Bolsheviks themselves. The public prosecutor general of the UdSSR, Vyshinskii, called many of Lenin’s former companions who had helped found the Soviet state, a “breed of vipers” that “needed to be squashed”.¹⁶

At the Central Executive Committee’s Plenum in March 1937, the member Mikoian of the Stalin clique characterized by some of the representatives of the “Lenin Guard” and his former comrades as follows: “Trotsky, Zinov’ev, and Bukharin represent a new type of humans who actually are no longer humans but monsters and brutes who defend the line of the Party verbally but actually [...] work against the Party subversively.”¹⁷ After one such argumentation, all psychological boundaries of the Stalin clique in its fight against internal Party opponents were removed, and the laws of the unwritten “Bolshevist code of honor”, which forbid the liquidation of domestic Party opponents, were turned upside down.

Formerly, the one-time Party companions now combatted by the Stalinists had themselves supported the thesis that the Kulaks, or the members of the former upper class, were brutes and not humans. Now, they were experiencing firsthand what painful effects such diction could have. After hybris came nemesis.

The main emphasis of the topics in this issue investigates this period of Stalinist mass terror. In his essay, Alexander Vatlin from the Moscow State University, who is among the foremost authorities on the history of the Communist International, deals with the desperate state of the German emigrants, both communists as well as independents, in the Stalinist Soviet Union of the 1930’s. All of them were at the mercy of the Soviet authorities for better or worse. As a rule, they did not receive any assistance from the diplomatic representation of their homeland, particularly once the NS system had been established, as they were seen as ideological opponents. Besides, any call for help by the emigrants directed toward the German Embassy would have additionally incriminated them in the eyes of the Soviet terror organs. Moreover, it would have added fuel to the cases of alleged emigrant secret agent activities fabricated by the Stalinist investigative judges.

The contribution by the Munich historian Juergen Zarusky, who discusses the Stalinist terror justice system of the years 1928–1938, this being the decade dur-

16 Hans-Joachim Lieber/Karl-Heinz Ruffmann (Ed.), *Der Sowjetkommunismus*. Dokumente, Cologne 1963, vol. 1, p. 381.

17 *Voprosy istorii*, (1992) 4–5, p. 21.

ing which the so-called “drastic change” (the collectivization of agriculture) and also the great terror took place that are counted among the most tragic chapters of the entirety of Russian history, also deals with the despotism of the Soviet authorities. Zarusky cleans up with some of the theses by the so-called revisionist school in western Sovietology that lastly attributes the terror measures of the 1930’s to the individual initiative of the local authorities. The documents, which became available following the Russian “archive revolution”, however, speak a different language: “At no time did the Party lose its grip on the political police”, writes Zarusky: regional court proceedings “clearly followed the regulations of the political leadership [...]. The terror finally ended in the same way it had begun – by the resolution of the politburo”.

Zarusky’s findings are essentially confirmed by the Bochum historian Marc Junge in his contribution about the so-called “Kulak operation” at the time of the “great terror”. The author rejects the thesis popular in research about the despotic character of Stalinist terror. In the way it proceeded, the “Kulak operation” was a “bureaucratized process based on [...] a division of labor thoroughly tolerated and supported by the Moscow Center. At no time can one speak of a drastic change toward arbitrariness and uncontrollability”. In the author’s view, the actual crime of the terrorist operations of the years 1937/38 did not consist in the “uncontrolled archaic use of violence or a loss of control over the action but in the specific Stalinist distinctness of cold bureaucratic banality”.

The last contribution to the main emphasis of the topics is devoted to the discourse carried on by some of the groupings of the “first Russian emigration” (after 1918) concerning the character of the totalitarian right-wing and left-wing regimes. The Russian emigrants were witnesses and victims of the first historic attempt of creating a totalitarian utopia. Many of them understood that the events of 1917 were only the first act of a general European break in civilization and tried to warn the public of their respective host countries about the catastrophe that was in the offing. Yet they received very little response. Some years after their flight from Bolshevik Russia, the Russian emigrants became witnesses to the triumph of the totalitarian regimes of right-wing provenience that brought a large part of the European continent under their control at the beginning of the 1940’s. Now, there was conclusive evidence that the catastrophe which had begun in Russia in 1917 had merely been the first act of a collective European tragedy. All of these developments were exhaustively analyzed by the leading thinkers of the Russian exile. Some of their findings, which have hardly been grasped by the western totalitarianism discourse, are being discussed more closely in this contribution.

The issue closes with a current contribution as an addendum to the main emphasis of the topics. It is devoted to a group of states, where a constitutional state system of a western type could not be established after the collapse of “actually existing socialism”. As the Regensburg political scientist Ingmar Bredies shows, political science transformation research is, for the most part,

still marked by a “democracy bias”.¹⁸ As the discipline foremost understands itself as a democracy- and democratization science, the creation of decidedly non-democratic regime types in Eastern Europe has frequently been transfigured. Bredies contrasts this with the reconciliation of institutions of primarily liberal democracies with the functional logic of authoritarianism in the center. Instead of investigating the processes of the creation and the development of a constitution in the context of post-Communist system transformation in respect to its meaning to the institutionalization of democracy, he is concerned with showing in which way constitutions have contributed to the anchoring of a “new” authoritarianism in post-Communist Eastern Europe.

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18 Cf. Holger Albrecht/Rolf Frankenberger, *Autoritarismus Reloaded: Konzeptionelle Anmerkungen zur vergleichenden Analyse politischer Systeme*. In: id. (Ed.), *Autoritarismus Reloaded: Neuere Ansätze und Erkenntnisse der Autokratieforschung*, Baden-Baden 2010, pp. 37–60, here 37.