

Revolutions et réformes: leur influence sur l'histoire de la société

Romuald Wojna

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN SOVIET RUSSIA 1917—1922

The subject of the present article is chronologically qualified by two events of primary importance. It begins with the armed rising in Russia's capital, Petrograd, which initiated the October Revolution, and with the resolutions of the Second Congress of Soviets which accompanied this uprising, and ends with the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This was a period when new forms of social life were created in almost all the fields of life, transforming the Russian state into an organism with a political system differing from those existing at the time and in a way removing it from Europe.

In the 19th century, the great dispute between Occidentalists and Slavophiles concerned mainly Russia's position with regard to Europe and the ways of its development.¹ As another example of Russia's links with Europe one can also recall the reforms introduced by Peter I, and even earlier times. These examples show that Russia was always closely connected with Europe,

¹ Z. Klarnierówna, *Stowianofilstwo w literaturze polskiej lat 1800 do 1848* [*Slavophilism in Polish Literature from 1800 until 1848*], Warszawa 1926; A. Walicki, *Stowianofile i okcydentaliści* [*Slavophiles and Occidentalists*], "Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej," vol. IV, Warszawa 1959, pp. 151—215; *Filozofia i myśl społeczna rosyjska (1825—1861)* [*Russian Philosophy and Social Thought (1825—1861)*], ed. A. Walicki, Warszawa 1961; idem, *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii* [*In the Circle of a Conservative Utopia*], Warszawa 1964.

although its development had its own specific features. Hence its vacillations between a specific isolationism, when the feeling of being different prevailed and the importance of distinctness increased, and its attempts to join the group of leading European powers, a role to which Russia was predestined by its area, its enormous natural and human resources, that is, its tremendous potential possibilities. The Russians had, for a long time, been aware of the existence of these possibilities and tried to make use of them, which inevitably meant an opening to the world. Isolationism had the upper hand when representatives of a system in force felt threatened by new political currents coming from Europe.

The revolutions of 1917 opened Russia to the outside world; the February Revolution proclaimed the idea of Europeization, of transforming the country into a democratic parliamentary republic, while the October Revolution brought the idea of the world unity of the proletariat, of Russia's world mission. October 1917 aroused hopes for a revolution on a European, if not a global, scale; the Soviet system was getting ready to assume the role of a universal socio-political model. The year 1922 terminated this period of opening because of the fear of external danger; it sanctioned the unity of the existing Soviet republics and staked on survival in a hostile, capitalist environment. From that moment, for an indefinite period of time, the Soviet state became the depository of the idea of socialism, the centre of communist ideology, a living example of the practical application of the principles of class struggle, of revolutionary creation and of the construction of a completely new kind of state. Thus, the period from 1917 until 1922 differs fundamentally from the next period which lasted until the outbreak of World War II, and during which, as a result of the final destruction of the Versailles system by Germany, the USSR joined in international changes. Another element by which these two periods in the history of the USSR differ from each other is that until the end of 1922 the preponderant influence on the internal life of the Soviet state had been exercised by Lenin. This fact should not, of course, be exaggerated, but in view of the many negative results brought about by Stalin's accession to power, it cannot be ignored either.

Tsarist Russia was a vast country with equally vast, though unused, possibilities. One of the main tasks of the revolution was to transform the state, to turn it into a leading power. This was to be promoted by profound social and economic changes and the full modernization of the country.

The establishment of the revolutionary Soviet state was the result of an armed coup (the overthrow of the provisional coalition government which pursued a policy of accord between the Centre and the Right) and of the resolutions of the Second Congress of Soviets. The coup was possible because the Bolsheviks had succeeded in uniting the majority of the Left round their programme "to overthrow the provisional bourgeois government" and in rallying the social classes and strata round the ideas of an immediate conclusion of peace (soldiers and people from various walks of life), the liquidation of large land property (peasants), the workers' control over industry and a close observance of an eight-hour working day (workers). The support, even partial, of these classes and strata made it possible to achieve victory, and then to start the work of transformation, of creating forms which had had no parallel in the past.

In this article I will consider several spheres of these activities and transformations: in legislation and the state-judicial work; in the countryside, agriculture and among peasants; with regard to the question of nationalities, in education and culture. All these spheres will be examined against the background of the economy, an element which unites society and its work the most closely.

After the arrest of some of the ministers of the Provisional Government the lawful cabinet factually ceased to exist (on the night of October 25, that is, November 7, 1917, according to the new calendar). The following day the participants in the Second Congress of Soviets set up a new Soviet government. Its composition was as follows: Chairman—Vladimir Ulianov "Lenin", Internal Affairs—Alexey Rykov, Agriculture—Vladimir Milutin, Labour—Alexander Shlapnikov, Army and Navy—Vladimir Ovsieyenko "Antonov", Nicolai Krylenko and Pavel Dybienko, Trade and Industry—Victor Nogin, Education—Anatol Lunacharsky, Finance—Ivan Skvortsov "Stiepanov", Foreign Affairs—Lev Bronstein "Trotsky", Justice—Gregory Oppokov "Lomov",

Supplies—Ivan Teodorovich “Glebov”, Questions of Nationalities—Joseph Djugashvili “Stalin”, Railways—vacant.² The succession of the supreme power was thus assured, even though this was accomplished in a revolutionary way.

The framework of the Soviet statehood was defined in the resolutions of the Second Congress of Soviets. This was just a framework, i.e. the most general legislative settlement which later provided the basis for more detailed laws.

The new authorities issued the principal legal acts. A widely circulated appeal (posters, leaflets, press information) *To Workers, Soldiers and Peasants*³ proclaimed that power in the provinces was being taken over by the soviets; the decree mentioned above set up a revolutionary government accountable to the Congress of Soviets and to their supreme authority, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. The decree *On Land*, adopted on October 26 (November 8), abolished private ownership of land and, in accordance with a peasant claim⁴ which it quoted, mapped out a plan delineating the principal rules of a land reform, its main points being the confiscation of landed estates and the entrusting of the land reform to the peasants.⁵ The decree *On Peace*, adopted the same day, made peaceful policy an integral part of the diplomatic work of the Soviet government.⁶ Every departure from this principle (e.g. the crossing of the Polish ethnic frontier during the war with Poland in 1920), irrespective of how well it was motivated, aroused anxiety, which unfortunately was usually justified. Finally, in an appeal to the provincial soviets, also of October 26 (November 8), the Second Congress set them the duty “of preventing counter-revolutionary activities as well as anti-Jewish and other pogroms.”⁷

² *Dekrety Sovetskoj Vlasti*, vol. I 25 oktjabrja 1917 g.—16 marta 1918 g., Moskva 1957, doc. 14, pp. 20—21 (henceforward referred to as DSV).

³ “Rabocij i Soldat,” Oct. 26 (Nov. 8), 1917, No. 9, the text was penned by Lenin.

⁴ “Izvestija Vserossijskogo Soveta Krestjanskich Deputatov,” Aug. 19 (Sept. 1), 1917, No. 88. Worked out on the basis of 242 “nakazy” (i.e. postulates, a list of demands put forward and approved by local peasant meetings) sent in to the editorial board of this paper.

⁵ DSV, vol. I, doc. 13, pp. 17—20.

⁶ *Ibidem*, doc. 11, pp. 12—16.

⁷ *Ibidem*, doc. 12, pp. 16—17.

These resolutions brought into being the Soviet Republic and the supreme state authorities, and outlined the directions of work in the armed forces, the villages, and among workers as well as in foreign and internal policy. The resolutions became a recognized source of power and their approval was an indispensable condition of all negotiations with organized political and social forces. Participation in the Second Congress and recognition of its resolutions was the foundation of the agreement between the Bolsheviks and the left wing of the Social Revolutionary Party, which for this reason was expelled from the SRP. In December 1917, the expelled members formed their own party, the Left Social Revolutionary Party with a soviet programme and in ideology and phraseology akin to those of the Bolsheviks. Several months later the agreement broke down because of differences over the Brest-Litovsk treaty (the Left Social Revolutionaries determinedly opposed "capitulation to German imperialism") and cooperation came to a dramatic end when the Left Social Revolutionaries rose up against the Bolsheviks in July 1918 and disappeared as a legal force.

This event put an end to the existence of a multi-party system in Soviet Russia. Some frail elements of this system survived for some time to disappear completely after the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (end of December 1922).⁸ At the beginning there were chances of a different development, but they were questionable for even the first Soviet government was only composed of Bolsheviks, and the Communist leaders, especially Lenin, upholding the supremacy of the dictatorship of the proletariat, demanded that the other parties either recognize

⁸ The Fifth Congress of Soviets (July 1918) was attended, with the right to a decisive vote, by: 745 Bolsheviks, 352 Left Social Revolutionaries, 14 representatives of other parties and 10 non-party persons; the Sixth Congress (extraordinary, November 1918) by: 946 Bolsheviks, four Left Social Revolutionaries, 16 representatives of other parties, one person with no party affiliation; the Eighth Congress (December 1920) by: 1567 Bolsheviks, one representative of other parties and 52 people without party affiliation; the Tenth Congress (December 1922) by: 1588 Bolsheviks, one representative of another party and 84 people without party affiliation, cf. A. M. Malaško, *K voprosu ob oformlenii odnopartijnoj sistemy v SSSR*, Minsk 1969, p. 181. The process was equally clearly evident in the provincial, district and even village authorities, *ibidem*, p. 182.

the representative character of the Soviets and the leadership of the Bolshevik party, the party of the ruling class, or withdraw from political activity.⁹ In fact the Soviet multi-party system was different from that established by the Western democracies, since it recognized the dictatorship of the proletariat, the hegemon of the revolution, and assigned the leading role to the party of the working class, i.e. the Bolsheviks (the Mensheviks were said to express the interests of "the most backward working class circles, the workers' aristocracy" and the petty bourgeois elements in towns); other parties willing to participate in government were assigned an auxiliary role or given the possibility of merging with the ruling party. It would therefore be no exaggeration to say that the single party system was in harmony with the general logic of the establishment and development of the Soviet state after the October Revolution, a state which was first and foremost a working class state and which applied in practice the principle of dictatorship. However, since alliance with a part of the peasantry is an integral part of the Bolshevik class strategy, the logic of the formation and development of the Soviet state after October 1917 included the possibility of a peasant party (the Left Social Revolutionary Party), subordinated to the working class party (the Bolsheviks), taking part in government or merging with the Bolsheviks, i.e. disappearing in practice.

The Soviet government, i.e. the Council of People's Commissars, displayed great legislative activity. This was mainly due to the necessity of establishing the legal base for post-revolutionary social relations, when private property was rapidly receding and the social classes and strata were disappearing. The entire legislation of those days was subordinated to the class warfare, and the class attitude to reality and to the law itself was the main criterion, the aim being to satisfy the interests of the working class also in this sphere. The slogan about the workers' interests was constantly bandied about and even the activists at the lowest level used it as an argument in insignificant discussions. The fact that the Bolsheviks sincerely wanted to act in harmony with the

⁹ Cf. R. Wojna, *Lenin i partie drobnomieszczańskiej demokracji w Rosji (1917—1923)* [*Lenin and the Parties of Petty Bourgeois Democracy in Russia (1917—1923)*], "Z pola walki" 1970 No. 1, p. 104.

watchwords invoking the workers' interests, the class warfare and the dictatorship of the proletariat and that they considered them of great importance is proved not only by their legislation, but also by their concrete actions. As an expressive, though little known, example let us recall what happened almost immediately after the withdrawal of the Left Social Revolutionaries from the government, including the People's Commissariat of Justice. As early as June 16, 1918, the Bolsheviks in the Commissariat adopted a resolution *On the Abrogation of All Previous Regulations concerning Revolutionary Tribunals*. On the basis of this resolution, the tribunals were given the right to use all penalties, including capital punishment by a firing squad.¹⁰ The punishments meted out were of a class character as is shown by the fact that their severity depended on the social origin of the accused. According to the official interpretation, the widely imposed fines were to be of the right amount so "that it [the fine] should also play the role of expropriating capital and deprive our active opponents of their main weapon, capital, in their fight against us."¹¹

The needs of the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat were the main axis round which Soviet legislation revolved. Chapter V (point 9) of the first Soviet Constitution adopted by the participants in the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets on July 10, 1918 said: "The main task of the Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, a constitution designed for the present moment, is to establish the dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat and of the poorest peasants in the form of a strong All-Russian Soviet power in order to completely suppress the bourgeoisie, abolish the exploitation of man by man and instil socialism, in which there will be neither class division nor state authority."¹² The Constitution deprived of the right of vote (and in consequence of many other rights) every person employing hired labour for profit, persons living on interest

¹⁰ *Istorija gosudarstva i prava SSSR*, Part II (Sovetskij period), Moskva 1966, p. 107.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 108—109.

¹² DSV, vol. II, 17 marta—10 ijulja 1918 g., Moskva 1959, doc. 293, letter "g", p. 552.

from capital and shares etc., merchants and middlemen in trade, monks, priests and persons performing religious functions, all employees of the former police and the Okhrana as well as members of the reigning dynasty, mentally ill and incapacitated people and persons convicted of self-seeking activities and depravity (for as long as had been established by a court of law).¹³

An important step taken by the new authorities was the establishment of a central organization to fight against counter-revolution, together with a network of provincial centres subordinated to it. On December 7 (20), 1917, the Council of People's Commissars set up the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Fight against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage, generally known as the Cheka. It was headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky.¹⁴ The Commission with its network of provincial offices became, as this was picturesquely described, "the castigating sword of the republic". It was the Cheka, together with other similar organs, e.g. the special tasks units (*chasti osobogo naznacheniya*, ChON) that applied one of the most important measures of a dictatorial state: brute force and revolutionary terror.

A special form of the juridical activity undertaken by the new state was the assumption of welfare functions which had of course also been conducted earlier, but which were now recognized as the duty of the revolutionary state. In the early period of the Soviet state these were extremely extensive functions. This was a result of the juxtaposition, natural at that time, of the bourgeois state, exploiting and oppressing the working people, to the Soviet state, which oppressed the propertied classes and looked after the interests of the working people. The welfare functions were fully justified in view of the extremely difficult conditions then pre-

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 561—562 (Chapter XIII).

¹⁴ *Iz protokola SNK No. 21 o sozdanii VČK, Iz istorii Vserossijskoj Črezvyčajnoj Komissii. Sbornik dokumentov*, Moskva 1958, pp. 78—79; *Lenin i VČK. Sbornik dokumentov (1917—1922)*, Moskva 1975, doc. 17, pp. 36—37. In accordance with a resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (b) of January 23, 1922 (*ibidem*, doc. 513, pp. 549—550), the VČK was abolished in February 1922, and the Central Political Board of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Glavnoe Političeskoe Upravlenie, GPU) was set up.

vailing in Russia owing to the inefficiency of the administration, backwardness, excessive bureaucracy, war damage and chaos in the economy. The state took care of supplies for the working people to the best of its ability, sold them foodstuffs at reduced prices and sometimes distributed food free of charge among the poorest strata of the population. In towns the authorities frequently confiscated the houses and flats of well-to-do persons and housed in them homeless people or people who had been living in extremely bad conditions. State assistance also covered work, clothing, etc. In many towns rents and payments for some services were abolished and special taxes were imposed on the rich.

The spontaneous egalitarianism, so characteristic of all revolutions, found its reflection in many measures adopted by the revolutionary authorities and in many legal regulations. At an early stage revolutions cannot do without egalitarianism which is usually an important element influencing the people's mentality and mobilizing them to action. Egalitarianism was the most pronounced in the countryside, where it merged with the peasants' strivings for a land reform and for the abolition of their perpetual enemy, the big landowners, the feudal class. The Russian peasant, if one may generalize this phenomenon, wanted to have land and to be a citizen. One should not, of course, overestimate the political consciousness of the peasants and the steps taken by them to achieve their aim. First of all, they threw off the economic and social ties binding them and demanded the distribution of all land. Where these demands were met, there were no excesses or murders, even during the period of the greatest agitation in the countryside, in September and October 1917.¹⁵

The revolution in the countryside was accomplished extremely quickly. This applies in particular to European Russia, where the peasantry was assisted by the revolutionary state apparatus in its strife against big landed property. As far as its main principles were concerned, the revolution became a fact in the countryside

¹⁵ R. Wojna, *Walka o ziemię w Rosji w 1917 roku* [*The Fight for Land in Russia in 1917*], Wrocław 1977, p. 216.

as early as the end of January 1918.¹⁶ The peasants themselves took over the confiscation and the division of manor land. An important role was played by the agrarian committees (*ziemiel-niye komitiety*) which had existed since the time of the Provisional Government, and by the village communities (*obshchiny*). The latter deserve a separate profound study, for their rapid development after the February and especially the October Revolution was a specific phenomenon.

Between 1917 and November 1920, 22,848,000 dessiatinas of land (one dessiatina equals 1.09 hectares) were transferred to the rural population in European Russia; the peasants received 21,519,000 dessiatinas, the collective farms (*kolkhozes*) 391,600 and the state farms (*sovkhozes*) 1,049,000.¹⁷ During the ten years between 1917 and 1927 the area of peasant land (excluding forests) in the whole of the USSR increased from 204,400,000 hectares (1917) to 314,700,000 (1927).¹⁸

An important element of the transformations in rural areas was the change in the stratification of the Russian village. An indirect comparison of the agricultural censuses of 1917, 1919 and 1920 (a direct comparison is not possible) shows that the number of the extreme groups (landless peasants or dwarf holders and the largest holdings) decreased to the advantage of medium ones, which were however mainly small.¹⁹

The confiscation of landed estates carried out in 1917 and 1918 and the distribution of land changed the countryside, but the

¹⁶ R. Wojna, *Wieś rosyjska 1918—1920. Przemiany polityczne i społeczne [The Soviet Village 1918—1920. Political and Social Changes]*, Warszawa 1984, p. 42 (For a detailed description of the confiscation of big landed estates see pp. 46—79). Similar conclusions can be drawn from the data contained in S. L. Makarova, *K voprosu o vremeni likvidacii pomeščič'ego zemlevladieniia. Po materialam oprosnyh listov Narkomzema i Mosoblispolkoma*, in: *Oktjabr' i sovetskoe krest'janstvo 1917—1927 gg.*, Moskva 1977, table 1, p. 114.

¹⁷ R. Wojna, *Wieś rosyjska...*, pp. 163—164.

¹⁸ V. P. Danilov, *Pereraspredelenie zemelnogo fonda Rossii v rezultate Velikoj Oktjabr'skoj revolucii*, in: *Leninskij Dekret o zemle v dejstvii. Sbornik statej*, Moskva 1979, table 8, p. 296.

¹⁹ Cf. *Gruppovye itogi Selsko-Hozjajstvennoj perepisi 1920 goda (po gubernijam i rajonomam)*, *Trudy Centralnogo Statističeskogo Upravlenija*, vol. XIV, vyp. 1a, Moskva 1926; *Ekonomičeskoe rassloenie krest'janstva v 1917 i 1919 g.*, *Trudy Centralnogo Statističeskogo Upravlenija*, vol. VI, vyp. 3, Moskva 1922.

civil war blurred this picture for several years. First, in the spring of 1918, came the phase of "class warfare" in the form of the committees of village poor, set up by the decree of June 11, 1918 (*komitet dierievienskoy biednoty*, generally known as *kombiedy*).²⁰ The immediate reason for the establishment of the committees was the difficult pre-harvest period, the results of which, as is usually the case, affected particularly the poorest holdings. In that year, however, in view of the uncertain internal situation, grain became a more valuable product than it had ever been, and consequently the prices were even higher than before. The resulting conflict in the countryside became even more acute following the parcelling of big landed estates. These had to be put under cultivation and to be sown with grain, which the weakest holdings did not have in a sufficient quantity even to survive. Unification of forces, pressure on the more prosperous people for the sake of meeting the elementary needs could be an attractive programme, and politics and class warfare were introduced into the countryside by the Bolshevik party: the *kombiedy* could and did become the party's allies and very frequently became communist cells or their nucleus.

Developing in the very heart of the countryside, the *kombiedy* movement, which was frequently spontaneous, but partly also officially promoted, sounded the final alarm to the Left Social Revolutionaries that their interests in the environment which they regarded as their own domain were in danger. Their dramatic defiance of the Bolsheviks in July had two clear motives: their conviction that the war against German imperialism should be continued and the sense of being threatened by the committees of village poor which were taking away the radical village elements from the Left Social Revolutionary Party and pushing it towards the Right.²¹

The measures adopted by the Bolsheviks and the Soviet authorities were a result of the extremely difficult situation.

²⁰ *Dekret VZsIK i SNK ob organizacii i snabzenii derevenskoj bednoty*, DSV, vol. II, doc. 223, letter "w", pp. 416—419.

²¹ Cf. V. Vladimirova, *Leviye esery v 1917—1918 gg.*, "Proletarskaja revoliucija", 1927, No. 4(63), pp. 113—130; K. Gusev, *Krah partii levyyh eserov*, Moskva 1963, pp. 191—216; L. M. Spirin, *Krah odnoj avantjury (miatez levyyh eserov v Moskve 6—7 ijula 1918 g.)*, Moskva 1971.

The pre-harvest period affected poor peasants as well as the urban population, which was deprived of regular supplies of foodstuffs. The authorities had to feed not only the urban population, but also the armed forces, that is, the Red Army which began to be formed in February 1918. In the opinion of the Bolshevik leaders, strict centralization offered a way out of the difficulties, or rather a certain possibility of averting the worst. This was the reason for the establishment of what was known as a supplies dictatorship, that is, the assignment of special powers to the people's commissar for supplies by virtue of a decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of May 13, 1918.²²

In the late spring of 1918 the situation of Soviet Russia became extremely complicated. A civil war was raging and vast agricultural areas in the Ukraine and the south as well as almost the whole of Siberia were lost to the Bolsheviks. Military matters, the army, the survival of the revolutionary state came to the fore. Special measures had to be applied. This difficult period witnessed the birth of what is known as war communism, the brunt of which was borne by the peasantry. There was no other way out in the opinion of the leaders, for, to make things worse, the weak industry, partly destroyed by the war and disorganized by the lack of raw materials, was working exclusively for military needs, so the maintenance of the state fell on the shoulders of those who could cope with this, that is, the peasants. They constituted the majority of the population, so the authorities held the view that they should bear the bulk of the burdens. What the peasants thought of this, and whether the burdens could not have been eased, be it even slightly, is another matter.

In accordance with their convictions and the needs of the moment, the Bolshevik leaders chose the variant which seemed to promise the best results. A state grain monopoly was established, and compulsory deliveries as well as requisitioning of agricultural products became the rule. In a letter of May 22, 1918, addressed to the workers of Petrograd, Lenin expressed the conviction that "Hunger is spreading not because there is no grain in

²² DSV, vol. II, doc. 153, letter "b", pp. 264—266.

Russia, but because the bourgeoisie and the rich are waging the last decisive battle against the rule of the working masses, against the workers' state and the Soviet power over the most important and the most urgent problem, the problem of grain."²³

Indeed, there was still quite a large amount of grain but as the civil war continued, stocks were dwindling. The intensive extraction of surplus production, often above the capacity of the holdings, deprived the peasants of the incentive to conduct rational farming. The area under cultivation was clearly decreasing: in 1920 it dropped to 60 per cent of the 1913 level and in 1921 to 53 per cent in the Central Agricultural Region (the provinces of Kursk, Orel, Ryazan, Tambov, Tula, Voronezh) and to 52 per cent (in 1920) and 51 per cent (in 1921) in the Central Industrial Region (the provinces of Yaroslav, Kaluga, Kostroma, Moscow, Tver, Vladimir).²⁴ During the civil war these two regions were the agricultural base of the republic. The decrease in the area under cultivation and yields was a dangerous augury of the imminent crisis, of the depletion of agricultural reserves, especially in view of the growing or rather even the dominant naturalization of the agricultural economy.

At the end of 1920 the situation became paradoxical. On the one hand the new system which was getting the upper hand in the fight against counter-revolution had, on the whole, managed to settle its relations with its neighbours, and in the mind of most activists these successes proved the efficacy of the methods used, while on the other hand an enormous new crisis was in the making. It was just then that belief in the effectiveness of the use of force and terror reached its apogee, and Lev Trotsky put forward a compact concept of the militarization of labour.²⁵ In a

²³ Translated from W. I. Lenin, *W sprawie głodu* [Concerning the Famine], in: *Dziela* [Works], vol. XXVII, Warszawa 1954, p. 406.

²⁴ G. S. Gordeev, *Selskoe hozjajstvo v vojne i revolucii*, Moskva—Leningrad 1925, p. 124. This was accompanied by a decrease in yields (*per dessjatina*) in European Russia: in the years 1909—1913 the average yields amounted to 50 poods (0.8 quintals), in 1920 to 35 poods (about 0.6 quintals) and in 1921 to 31 poods (0.5 quintals), *ibidem*, p. 125.

²⁵ L. Trockij, *Perehod k vseobščej trudovoj povinnosti v svjazi s millicionnoj sistemoj* (Tezisy), "Pravda", 17 Dec., 1919, No. 283; *idem*, *O mobilizacii industrial'nogo proletariata, trudovoj povinnosti, militarizacii hozjajstva i primenenii vojskich častej dla hozjajstviennyh nužd* (Tezisy TsK RKP), *Sočinenija*, serija V, vol. XV, pp. 107—114.

book *Terrorism and Communism* he stated unequivocally that the creation of a new society meant coercion, the introduction of a uniform economic plan and the existence of personal power of leaders.²⁶ It was characteristic of Trotsky's opinions that he turned terror and force into absolutes and was deeply convinced that they could solve all economic problems.

The year 1918 witnessed the attempt to collectivize agriculture, an operation which was correlated with the establishment of the committees of village poor. The aim was to set up communes, that is, collective units, which were to lead to an early introduction of full communism. The setting up of these units was forced through not only in villages, but also in towns, and the existing ones were advised to form a joint network from the bottom to the top. In this way a union of communes, that is, the state, was to be created.²⁷ In the villages the communes gained the greatest support among the poorest strata of the population, but in 1918 their number did not even reach a thousand.²⁸ In towns they were a total failure. From this stormy period there remained the names of large territorial units invoking the idea of a state of communes (the Estonian Labour Commune, the Labour Commune of the Volga Germans, the Union of Communes of the Northern District).

Sober-thinking activists did not conceal their criticism of this collectivization urge. It may be as well to quote a short excerpt from the speech made by Vasil Kurayev at a meeting of the Agrarian Section of the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (B) on March 20, 1919. Soviet historiography regards

²⁶ Idem, *Terrorizm i kommunizm*, in: L. Trockiij, *Osnovnyje voprosy revolucii. Terrorizm i kommunizm. Meždu imperalizmom i revoluciej. Novaja ekonomičeskaja politika Sovetskoj Rossii i perspektivy mirovoj revolucii*, Moskva, Petrograd 1923, pp. 158—159.

²⁷ This was the spirit in which the Commissariat for Agriculture of the Union of Communes of the Northern Region formulated its circular letter of August 1918 to the local agricultural departments of the soviets of deputies, *Sbornik instrukcii, pravil i položenii po organizacii selsko-hozjajstvennih kommun*, (Pietrograd) 1918, pp. 3—4. On July 21, 1918, the press published "a model statute of an agricultural work commune", worked out by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture (*Primernij ustav trudovoj zemledelčeskoj kommuny*, "Golos Trudovogo Krestjanstva" 27 July, 1918, No. 177, annex.

²⁸ According to R. Wojna, *Wiś rosyjska...*, table 6, p. 176.

this congress as a turning point in the relations between the authorities and the moderately wealthy peasants. As this is a rather indefinite group, it can be supposed that it comprised the majority of the peasant holdings. Soviet historiography speaks in general terms about the preceding period and does not explain what needed correcting. Kurayev stated frankly: "When socializing work in agriculture and setting the peasant revolution onto the socialist track, we sometimes used absolutely impermissible methods which were harmful to the entire cause. I am in possession of circulars which order the seizure of the entire agricultural inventory stock, its confiscation not only from the kulaks, but from all peasants and which contain the advice that the peasants be forced to switch to collective farming, etc. Such circulars are issued in the provinces. Peasants from a certain province came recently to the department for the socialization of agriculture and said that collective land cultivation was being forcibly introduced in their province."²⁹

The transformations which took place in the Soviet villages after the October Revolution were clear and many-sided. They comprised the abolition of the private ownership of land, nationalization, the disappearance of the feudal class of big landowners, a radical land reform, the appearance of the first collective farms (communes and associations for community work) and the emergence of the kolkhoz peasantry. From 1918 until the spring of 1921 there was no free trade in agricultural products in the countryside. By virtue of the decree *On Land*, adopted at the Second Congress of Soviets, usurious loans and the debts of peasant holdings to the state were annulled, the farmers' drive to leave rural communes, which had been abating since the February Revolution, came to a halt, and the rural communes definitely grew in strength. State farms, the sovkhozes, were set up and some of them were becoming specialized *sui generis* farms.

The changes mentioned here concerned a part of village life, but it was the most important part. Changes were also taking place in the culture and social status of the peasantry. It would

²⁹ VIII Zjazd Komunistycznej Partii (bolszewików) Rosji, Marzec 1919. *Protokoły* [The Eighth Congress of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Russia, March 1919. Minutes], Warszawa 1966, p. 321.

therefore be no exaggeration to say that the life of the peasants changed considerably even though they still lived in extremely difficult conditions. Of decisive importance was the appearance of new prospects, different from those existing in Tsarist Russia. The peasants compared what they had had before with the October changes, not with the period of the Provisional Government, which had in fact been an indistinct and relatively short period. The greatest achievement was that the peasants got rid of the big landowners and received land and agricultural stock from the revolutionary authorities, gains which they were ready to defend to the end.

This was the reason why the communists enjoyed their support during the civil war. The movement of the Whites, the armed counter-revolution, attracted many landowners, and in the areas occupied by them attempts were frequently made to restore the old order or extract from the villages all kinds of compensation for the former owners. This was one of the main reasons, if not the decisive one, for the defeat of the Whites. One cannot rule in defiance of the peasants in a peasant country or take back from them what they have already been given.

The peasants had much to reproach the communists with. Middle-holders and prosperous peasants kept returning to the question of free trade in agricultural products, did not acquiesce in excessive burdens and in the lack of industrial goods, etc. A sharp crisis in the Soviet authorities' relations with the villages developed at the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921, when—as Lenin said in the Comintern forum in 1922—“we came up against a great, the greatest in my opinion, internal crisis of Soviet Russia, which revealed [“caused” would have been a better word—R. W.] the dissatisfaction not only of a large part of the peasantry, but also of the workers. That was the first time in the history of Soviet Russia, and the last I hope, that the feelings of large masses of the peasantry had instinctively, though not consciously, been against us.”¹⁰ However, the measures taken

¹⁰ Translated from W. I. Lenin, *Pięć lat rewolucji rosyjskiej a perspektywy rewolucji światowej. Referat Wygłoszony na IV Kongresie Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej 13 XI 1922* [Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of a World Revolution. Paper read at the

by the Soviet authorities dissipated these unfriendly feelings, and this shows that the reasons for the conflict were unpolitical.

The effectiveness of the measures taken by the Bolsheviks is very significant. It shows that the peasants did not regard the Bolshevik authorities as an enemy but were rather expressing their dissatisfaction and exerting pressure to get something from them. They did not have to force their way through and prove their loyalty in order to move up, as they had had to do in the past and as they still had to in the camp of the Whites; on the contrary, a peasant origin (as long as they were not kulaks) was a sufficient reason for promotion. The alliance of workers and peasants was an official watchword, the government bore the name of the government of workers and peasants, as did the Red Army, the organs of state control and many other institutions. The authorities stimulated education in the countryside to the best of their modest capabilities and tried to help the poorest population financially.

The peasants' dissatisfaction found a reflection in their support for anti-Bolshevik armed movements, e.g. the anarchic movement of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine and of Alexander Antonov in the Tambov region, in the spontaneous uprising in Western Siberia (in 1921). After the proclamation of the principles of the new economic policy, NEP, this support greatly declined. The principal decisions were taken at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (b) in March 1921. The Congress proclaimed the New Economic Policy, abolished the system of compulsory quotas of agricultural products (*Prodravziorstka*) and introduced a tax in kind.⁵¹ Finally, on May 24, 1921, the decree *On Trading* restored free trade throughout the state, in town and country, as had been demanded by the majority of peasants.⁵² Thus, NEP

Fourth Congress of the Communist International on 13 Nov., 1922, in: *Dziela [Works]*, vol. 33, Warszawa 1957, p. 437.

⁵¹ *Rezolucija X svezda RKP(b) 15 marta 1921 g. O zamene razverstki natural'nym nalogom. Rešenija partii i pravitelstva po hozjajstvennym voprosam v pjati tomah*, vol. I, 1917—1928 gody, Moskva 1967, pp. 200—202 (henceforward referred to as RRPKh). On March 24, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee adopted a decree *O zamene prodovolstv ennoj i syr'evoj razverstki naturalnym nalogom*, *ibidem*, pp. 212—214.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 233—234.

owed its birth to the necessity of regulating the policy towards the villages. This one concession was followed by a chain of results.

The introduction of NEP calmed down the countryside and enabled the Soviet state to survive the dreadful period of famine in the years 1921 and 1922. It is difficult to imagine what would have happened if this natural disaster had fallen on the countryside earlier. The restoration of free trade, which set in motion processes ensuring a normal development of the peasant economy, enabled this economy to rise up extremely quickly after the defeat.³³

Economic matters were of course extremely important but matters concerning other spheres of social life also had their weight. It was during the famine that the Orthodox Church in Russia and its hierarchy received the mortal blow. It was then that the authorities liquidated the last attempt by the intelligentsia to play an independent role. I have in mind the case of Patriarch Tikhon and the split in the Orthodox Church as well as the events connected with the All-Russian Social Committee of Help for the Hungry and the later victimization of its activists and people connected with the Committee.³⁴

After the introduction of NEP the situation of the peasantry began to stabilize. The time had come to consume the fruits of the

³³ For a detailed discussion of the famine see R. Wojna, *Skutki społeczne, gospodarcze i polityczne nieurodzajów lat 1921—1922 w republikach radzieckich* [*The Social, Economic and Political Results of the Bad Crops in the Soviet Republics in 1921—1922*], "Studia z dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej," vol. XVIII, 1983, pp. 103—134. Later Soviet literature gives a one-sided picture of the famine and restricts the problem mainly to economic questions, demographic losses, the question of unattended children and the growth of criminality. It ignores the size of American assistance or says very little about it. The most balanced concept has probably been presented by Yury Polakov in his short book *1921-y: pobeda nad golodom*, Moskva 1975. Books of real scholarly value containing substantive information have been published mostly in the United States, among them: H. H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia 1919—1923. The Operations of the American Relief Administration*, New York 1927; F. Golder, L. Hutchinson, *On the Trail of the Russian Famine*, Stanford, California 1927; B. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia 1921—1923*, s.l. 1974.

³⁴ For a detailed presentation of this subject see: M. Geller, *Pervoe predostereżenie—udar hlystom (K istorii vysylki iz Sovetskogo Sojuza dejatelej kultury v 1922 g.)*, "Le Messenger—Vestnik Russkogo Hristjanskogo Dvizenija," No. 127, IV 1978.

revolution. The years 1921 and 1922 were only the beginning, and a very difficult one, a kind of a dramatic prelude to full normalization. It was necessary to overcome hunger, the results of war exhaustion and the relics of war communism, that is, the almost instinctive reaction of some activists to combat difficulties by force, a relatively frequent reaction until the end of 1922, when the activists' distrust of individual peasants began to diminish. Even though some regions were again affected by bad crops, the year 1923 was the first normal year for agriculture in most regions of the USSR.

One of the most important elements of the Russian revolution of 1917 was the demand for equal rights for all nationalities. The nationality problem had harassed the Russian Empire for a long time and the abolition of Tsardom inaugurated the difficult process of solving this question. The Provisional Government did not take any steps in this respect. The full rights of all citizens were of course recognized but already the conflict with the Ukrainians pointed out the accumulated difficulties. Racial and national prejudices, the tradition of the ruling nation, not to mention the Great Russian nationalism, were a reality.

The intention of the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary authorities to come to grips with the problems of nationalities could be seen as soon as the revolution broke out in Petrograd. In its proclamation *To the Workers, Soldiers and Peasants*, the Second Congress of Soviets gave the assurance that the new authorities would give "all the nations inhabiting Russia a genuine right to self-determination".⁴⁵ The first fundamental document regulating nationality relations in a revolutionary way was the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, issued on November 2 (15), 1917.⁴⁶ These rights meant: a) the equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia, b) the right to self-determination up to secession and the establishment of an independent state, c) the liquidation of all national and religious privileges and restrictions, d) the free development of the national minorities and ethnic groups living in Russia.

⁴⁵ V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie Sochinenij*, vol. XXXV, Moskva 1962, pp. 11—12.

⁴⁶ DSV, vol. I, doc. 29, pp. 39—41, text, p. 40.

Spectacular steps were taken, such as for instance the return of objects closely linked with the national identity and tradition of the Ukrainians and Moslems.³⁷ On December 18 (31), 1917, the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree recognizing the independence of Finland,³⁸ and on January 12 (25), 1918, it put under its protection the treasures of Polish culture until the termination of the German occupation of Poland.³⁹ Finally, it was stated in the first part of the Declaration of the Rights of the Working and Exploited People that the Russian Soviet Republic was a federation of national republics.⁴⁰

The fundamental changes which took place as a result of the revolution were clearly reflected in the resolutions of the Third Congress of Soviets (January 1918) and were put together in its resolution of January 15 (28) concerning the main principles of the constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic,⁴¹ which defined the rights of "the Soviet regional republics" (*oblastniye sovietskiye riespubliki*) and their relations with the central authorities. What was the most important, the resolution envisaged the possibility of new state organisms being set up wherever a region had a specific national composition and a specific way of life. The formula was not precise, but it made it possible for national states, Soviet states of course, to be set up by the nations and peoples who had been previously deprived of it. The participants in the Congress defined their attitude to the tasks of the central authorities, stating that the central authorities were only entrusted with the tasks to be carried out on a general scale "without infringing the rights of the individual regions which have joined the federation."

This attitude was diametrically opposed to that of the Whites, who were carrying out the demands of Russian nationalists, without letting any notion of concessions enter their heads. Even when faced with the possibility of a setback, General Anton

³⁷ *Ibidem*, doc. 115, pp. 168—170, doc. 136, pp. 195—196.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, doc. 172, p. 250.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, doc. 229, pp. 343—344.

⁴⁰ The text was adopted by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, *ibidem*, doc. 214, p. 321; the text adopted by the Third Congress of Soviets, 1918, doc. 228, p. 341.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, doc. 235, pp. 350—351.

Denikin did not hesitate to impose Great Russian demands on the Kuban Cossacks. The conflict with the Kuban National Council seriously affected Denikin's Armed Forces of the South of Russia (end of 1919).⁴² One can raise reservations and say that the Bolsheviks did not recognize the ethnic distinctness of the Cossacks either, but a single case is not what I have in mind. The difference was striking; the Whites upheld the idea of "one indivisible" Russia, the Bolsheviks were putting into life the idea of a Russia of many nations with a common, uniform political system, the Soviet system. Both the Whites and the Bolsheviks took cognizance of the accomplished facts, e.g. the secession of Finland and later of the territories of the former Russian part of Poland, and opposed other developments. Hence the Allies' difficulties with the Whites and their efforts to coerce the dictators (Admiral Alexander Kolchak, General Denikin, General Nicolai Yudenich) to recognize the nascent states (of the Ukrainians, the Baltic nations and the Caucasians). General Peter Wrangel acknowledged the right of other nations to set up their own state too belatedly, when he ruled over the Crimea.

The Reds had other troubles. Their close adherence to the theory of class warfare sometimes led them into a blind alley, as was the case with the interpretation of the right to self-determination. The Soviet leaders supported it in theory, with certain minor conditions: e.g. they maintained that the nations had the right to secede, but that the communists had the right to fight for unification (Lenin), that a nation was composed of classes, that the bourgeoisie must not be given the right to determine the fate of the proletariat and that in fact only the proletariat or even only the working class party, the communists, had the right to determine the fate of nations (Stalin, Bukharin).⁴³

Thus the Bolsheviks recognized that the individual peoples had the right to have their own states, but they forejudged the political form of these states. The Whites were not ready to offer

⁴² Cf. R. Wojna, *W ogniu rosyjskiej wojny wewnętrznej 1918—1920* [*In the Conflagration of the Russian Civil War 1918—1920*], Warszawa 1975, pp. 176—179.

⁴³ The Soviet leaders' attitude to this question became the most pronounced during the debates of the Eighth Congress of the RCP(b). Cf. *Vosmoj sezd RKP(b), Protokoly*, Moskva 1959.

anything to these peoples, as a result of which nationality conflicts were intensifying in the territories controlled by them. The Reds had a programme which, even though it was not the best programme and did not fully satisfy all the nations, gave them something concrete: the possibility of a separate ethnic existence, the right to use their own language, to instruct children in schools in their mother tongue. Many activists did not even know if the individual nations needed anything more than their own language and the possibility of economic development.

The Bolsheviks started the revolution fully realizing the importance of the problem of nationalities. Stalin assumed the post of chairman for nationalities in the first Soviet cabinet and the Commissariat for the Affairs of Nationalities was the centre which coordinated, or at least tried to coordinate, all the relevant questions. Within its framework national commissariats were set up: the Polish one as early as November 1917 (the exact date is not known), the Moslem (decree of the Council of People's Commissars of December 17 (30), 1918), the Jewish (decree of January 19 (February 1), 1918), the Byelorussian (January 31 (February 13), 1918),⁴⁴ and others. At first they dealt with all the questions concerning a given nationality; at the end of October 1918, the People's Commissariat for Education took over educational questions.⁴⁵

Thus we see that at the beginning of the revolution the new authorities developed their activities in three directions to solve the question of nationalities: they set up national Soviet states, stimulated economic development (in view of the civil war and the general poverty this was mostly confined to proposals), and spread education.

The establishment of national Soviet states proceeded along two lines: the larger nations, with the help of Soviet Russia, set up their own republics (Ukraine, Byelorussia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) while the other nations living in Russia established autonomous republics, autonomous or national regions,

⁴⁴ DSV, vol. I, doc. 243, p. 367, doc. 247, pp. 370—371, doc. 300, pp. 460—461.

⁴⁵ G. U'janov, *K voprosu ob organizacii prosvescenija nacional'nos-tej nerusskogo jazyka*, "Narodnoe Prosvješenie", May 7, 1921, No. 82, p. 3.

etc. The new authorities also had to face the problems of national minorities.

The civil war and the experiences gained during the period of famine induced the leading activists of the Communist Party to promote the unification of the republics. Another motive promoting this concept was the international situation, the disappearance of hopes for a revolution in Europe, and the need to defend the country against the capitalist environment.⁴¹ The first important step on this road was the establishment on March 12, 1922 of the Federated Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of Transcaucasia, which at the first congress of the Transcaucasian Soviets on December 13, 1922 was turned into the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. In the second half of 1922, a large-scale campaign for unification was carried out in all the Soviet republics.

Mention should be made here of the dispute between Lenin and Stalin over federation versus autonomy. Lenin was decidedly for a federation, for the equal rights of the unifying republics.⁴⁷ Stalin took cognizance of Lenin's demand formally, but later interpreted the rights of the republics in accordance with the principles of autonomy, that is, tried to restrict them. On December 30, 1922, the participants in the First Congress of USSR Soviets adopted an Agreement on the Establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.⁴⁸

History has thus made a specific full circle from one Russian state to another. But such an assertion would be completely false if we ignored the fact that both formally and de facto the new state was not only a Russian state, but also something completely different, and in the years we have been discussing the revolutionaries, internationalists and dissembled Russian chauvinists who aspired at a Russian metamorphosis of the USSR fought to

⁴¹ These motives for the necessity of unification were presented by Stalin in his speech on December 30, 1922, at the First Congress of USSR Soviets, devoted to the establishment of the Soviet Union, "Pravda", Dec. 31, 1922, No. 298.

⁴⁷ Lenin's letter to Lev Kamenev of September 26, 1922, *Obrazovanie Sojuza Soveckih Socialističeskikh Respublik. Sbornik dokumentov*, Moskva 1972, doc. No. 101, pp. 297—298, cf. also W. Suchecki, *Geneza federalizmu radzieckiego [The Genesis of Soviet Federalism]*, Warszawa 1961.

⁴⁸ *Obrazovanie Sojuza SSR...*, doc. No. 168, pp. 381—386.

give it the shape each of them desired. It is in this context that we must view Lenin's endeavours, especially his note of December 6, 1922 to Lev Kamenev and meant for the Political Bureau. It started with the words: "I declare a fight to the last against Great Russian chauvinism."⁴⁹

The nations and peoples inhabiting Russia, the later Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, set up their own autonomous state organisms after the revolution. As early as March 23, 1918, the press published theses concerning the Tatar-Bashkir Soviet Republic, which had been worked out by the Commissariat for Nationalities.⁵⁰ The republic was not set up in 1918, owing to the outbreak of hostilities and it was not until 1919 that the autonomous Bashkiria was established by virtue of the Moscow agreement (March 20) concluded by the Soviet government and Zaki Validov's democratic Bashkir government. The Tatar Autonomous Soviet Republic was established on May 27, 1920.⁵¹ Even earlier, on April 30, 1918, the Fifth National Congress of the Soviets of Turkestan had proclaimed autonomy; on August 26, 1920, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars set up the Kazak (then called Kirghiz) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and on June 24 in the same year the Chuvash Autonomous Region came into being.⁵² The first autonomous unit set up by the central authorities was the Work Commune of the Volga Germans (October 19, 1918, the decree *On German Colonies on the Volga*).⁵³

As regards culture, the post-revolutionary changes among non-Russian peoples followed a pattern similar to that in Russia, but various specific features could be observed among the nomadic peoples. This is why the People's Commissariat for Education applied a formal division of the population into western and eastern nations and peoples. The former group included all Slavs,

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, doc. No. 104, p. 301.

⁵⁰ "Pravda" 23 March 1918, No. 53.

⁵¹ *Istoriya nacional'no-gosudarstvennogo stroitelstva SSSR*, vol. I, *Nacionalno-gosudarstvennoje stroitelstvo v SSSR v perehodnyj period ot kapitalizma k socializmu (1917—1936 gg.)*, Moskva 1968, pp. 234—240.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 240—245.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 233—234.

Germans, Jews and representatives of other European nations, the second group consisted of the Asian peoples and the Gypsies. The western nations had a more developed culture and a higher percentage of literates.⁵⁴

According to Soviet historians, a cultural revolution was started immediately after the revolution, the most urgent task being the elimination of illiteracy, in view of the generally low standards and backwardness (there were more illiterates in the countryside than in towns and more among women than among men). (See Table 1).

Table 1: The Percentage of Literates according to Nationality in 1920 (in brackets the percentage in villages)⁵⁵

Armenians	42.9 (28.6)	Komis :	
Bashkirs	0.9 (0.9)	Permians	15.7 (15.6)
Byelorussians	28.2 (26.0)	Zirians	28.2 (27.5)
Buriats	14.3 (14.3)	Marii	15.0 (14.9)
Chechens	1.4 (1.3)	Mordvinians	14.0 (13.9)
Chuvashes	17.4 (17.2)	Poles	59.9 (41.1)
Circassians	5.0 (4.8)	Russians	33.4 (30.7)
Georgians	45.5 (25.3)	Rumanians and Mol-	
		davians	32.2 (26.1)
Germans	47.4 (44.3)	Tajiks	14.4 (3.1)
Jews	70.4 (62.7)	Tatars	18.9 (17.3)
Kalmucks	4.2 (4.1)	Turkmen	2.9 (0.5)
Karelians	31.8 (31.6)	Udmurts	3.0 (2.9)
Kazaks	2.5 (2.4)	Ukrainians	24.6 (23.3)

In the entire state 30.8 (26.2)

The fight against illiteracy was most closely linked with national education, where the situation was very bad at first: some of the eastern peoples did not even have their own alphabet, there was a general lack of writing implements, schoolbooks

⁵⁴ *Sest' let nacionalnoj politiki Sovetskoj vlasti i Narkomnats, 1917—1923 gg. (Vmesto otčeta)*, Moskva 1924, pp. 10—11.

⁵⁵ According to N. Muhitdinov, *Politiko-prosvetitel'naja rabota v nacional'nom razreze*, "Kommunističeskoe Prosvetšenie" mart—aprel 1925, No. 2 (20), p. 22.

and teachers.⁵¹ An important event was the resolution adopted by the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (b) *On the Current Tasks of the Party concerning the National Question*,⁵⁷ which no longer recommended, as the previous party documents had done, but categorically demanded that instruction should be given in the vernacular. The resolution deprived the Great Russian chauvinists of the possibility of continuing a discussion on the special role of the Russian language.

The fight against illiteracy was conducted in all the republics. Considering the difficult conditions in that period, the first results were quite impressive: in the years 1917—1920, about 2.5 million people were taught to read and write.⁵⁸ Instruction was given in what was called “liquidation points”, and the work was conducted not only by teachers but also by people who volunteered for the work. The decree issued by the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic on December 26, 1919, *On the Elimination of Illiteracy among the Population of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic*, made instruction compulsory and defined who was responsible for the campaign.⁵⁹ The decree was to be put into force by the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Fight against Illiteracy set up by the Council of People’s Commissars on July 19, 1920.⁶⁰ The Commission was to coordinate the efforts of various institutions and ministries. After the introduction of NEP, the fight against illiteracy, like all the other measures undertaken in the sphere of culture and education, was affected by the economy drive, and although the campaign was not halted, its results can hardly be regarded as impressive.

⁵¹ Cf. R. Wojna, *Początki rewolucji kulturalnej na narodowościowych obszarach ZSRR (1917—1927)* [The Beginnings of the Cultural Revolution in the Areas of the USSR Inhabited by Non-Slavic Nationalities (1917—1927)], “Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1984, No. 3, p. 457.

⁵⁷ *Kommunističeskaja Partija Sovetskogo Sojuza v rezolucijah i rešenijah s'ezdov, konferencij i plenumov TsK (1898—1970)*, vol. II, 1917—1924, 8th ed., Moskva 1970, p. 252.

⁵⁸ DSV, vol. VII, 10 dekabnja 1919 g. 31 marta 1920 g., Moskva 1975, doc. 26, pp. 50—51.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. IX, *Ijun'—Ijul' 1920 g.*, Moskva 1978, doc. 117, pp. 239—240.

⁶⁰ V. A. Kuman'ev, *Socializm i vsenarodnaja gramotnost'. Likvidacija massovoj negramotnosti v SSSR*, Moskva 1967, p. 98.

It can be said that during the period in question no essential problems were solved in the sphere of culture, but a great deal was done to ascertain them and new methods of work were elaborated. Work was started on expanding the network of schools (in 1914/15 there were 106,000 schools with 8 million pupils, in 1920/21, there were 118,000 with 10 million pupils).⁴¹ Everything that was done only marked the beginning, for the backwardness was too great. Revolutionary enthusiasm often blinded people to the real possibilities; for instance, the repeatedly announced dates of terminating the fight against illiteracy turned out to be merely utopian.

An important achievement of those years was the commencement of work on the elaboration and introduction of new alphabets for the people which did not have them, and the working out of the first primers in the languages of the various nationalities. Special publishing houses were set up to meet the needs of national schools and publish the classics of national literatures and political books. Politics was introduced into education and closely linked with it, education being regarded as an important link in the spreading of communist ideology. The numbers of political books are very significant in this respect. In 1920, books concerning the communist party and the Soviet system accounted for 93 per cent of the books published in Armenian, 45 per cent in Udmurts, 36 per cent in Yiddish, 80 per cent in Latvian, 83.5 per cent in Lithuanian, 50 per cent in Marii, 50 per cent in Polish, 90 per cent in Tatar, 80 per cent in Chuvash and 41.5 per cent in Estonian.⁴²

In the years 1918—1920, the Commissariat for Nationalities published about 1,500 titles of books and brochures in a total of nearly 20 million copies.⁴³ Work was started on drawing up a wider programme for the development of the peoples living in the north of the country and nomadic tribes, and plans were drafted to create boarding schools and mobile schools for their children.

The changes which took place in Russia could not leave out

⁴¹ *KPSS vo glave kulturnoj revolucii v SSSR*, Moskva 1972, p. 63.

⁴² *Istorija knigi v SSSR 1917—1921*, vol. III, Moskva 1986, p. 49.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

such a special and important sphere of human life as faiths and creeds. The October Revolution made fundamental changes in this respect. The main principles were set down in the *Decree on the Freedom of Conscience and on Orthodox and Religious Associations*, generally known as the decree separating the Orthodox Church from the state and the school from the Church. It was adopted by the Council of People's Commissars on January 20 (February 2) 1918.⁶⁴ By virtue of the decree not only was religion separated from the state and from the school—which had been accomplished a long time before in many democratic countries—but the churches were deprived of legal status and of all property, which was taken over by the state. By virtue of resolutions taken by the central or local authorities, the state could, but was not obliged to, put buildings and objects of cult at the disposal of religious associations.

The decree made the churches, especially the Orthodox Church, dependent on the good will of the authorities. During the years of the civil war both sides found it difficult to show good will, and later the Orthodox Church became the only organized force opposing the revolutionary state. During the period of poor harvests and hunger in the years 1921—1922, the Bolsheviks carried out a successful campaign against the Orthodox hierarchy in Russia. The Orthodox Church split and a group called the Living Orthodox Church, which sought reforms, came into being. Having been accused of hindering help for the hungry (refusal to transfer church treasures to the state for the benefit of the victims of the national disaster) and imprisoned, Patriarch Tikhon gave in and instructed the Kazan bishop, Iosaf, to condemn the clergy who opposed the government.⁶⁵

Let us end with several conclusions. There are a number of reasons why the October Revolution became such a momentous turning point in the history of Russia and the world. The abolition of private property was in itself a great event. A new alternative

⁶⁴ DSV, vol. I, doc. 248, pp. 373—374.

⁶⁵ R., *Sredi cerkovníkov. Kajajušesja tihonovcy*, "Izvestija TsIK", Nov. 22, 1923, No. 267.

in historical development arose. This fact meant the parting of the ways for Russia and Europe for some time and was conducive to the specific Russian isolationism. The abolition of private property transformed that country and changed the principles of its laws. The changes encompassed the smallest units of society. New patterns of values, based on work in a collective, emerged.

Profound changes took place in the social structure. The land-owners and the bourgeoisie disappeared, and the petty bourgeoisie lost much of its significance.

The Soviet state was confronted with the historic task of utilizing the vast reserves of the country. It set out, therefore, to modernize society and the economy. The years 1917—1922 were a beginning; they opened up possibilities and prepared the ground for future even stronger upheavals. An evaluation of future events is impeded by the simultaneous growth of the phenomenon conventionally known as “the cult of personality”, that is, Stalin’s dictatorship, which distorted—if this is not too great, a euphemism—normal development. This phenomenon was only just arising during the period under review.

Incidentally, it is worth adding that although in historical literature the period up to Lenin’s death is often juxtaposed to the period of Stalin’s power, we should not forget that the roots of many processes and phenomena lay in the former period. Stalin merely changed their content and proportions. Force and terror, which are sometimes attributed exclusively to Stalin, were an integral part of the essence of the revolutionary state, namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin made use of them and demanded their application for the good of the Soviet state. At the same time, however, he frequently reiterated that force and terror were only a part, not even the most important one, of the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was Stalin who changed the proportions in this respect and brought these elements into the foreground.

The formation of the Soviet state system bore characteristic class marks, so that we cannot expect identical phenomena in the West and the USSR, even if they have similar names; for instance, the aspiration to increase one’s possessions, which is the main driving force of progress in the West, was regarded as re-

prehensible in Soviet Russia and those who enriched themselves were punished. The word "democracy" had a different meaning in Soviet Russia ; the outlawing of certain defined social strata was not incompatible with the notion of Soviet democracy. The West understands and uses the logic of democracy, the Russian revolution brought in another logic, class logic. This must be taken into account in the understanding of the history of the USSR.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)