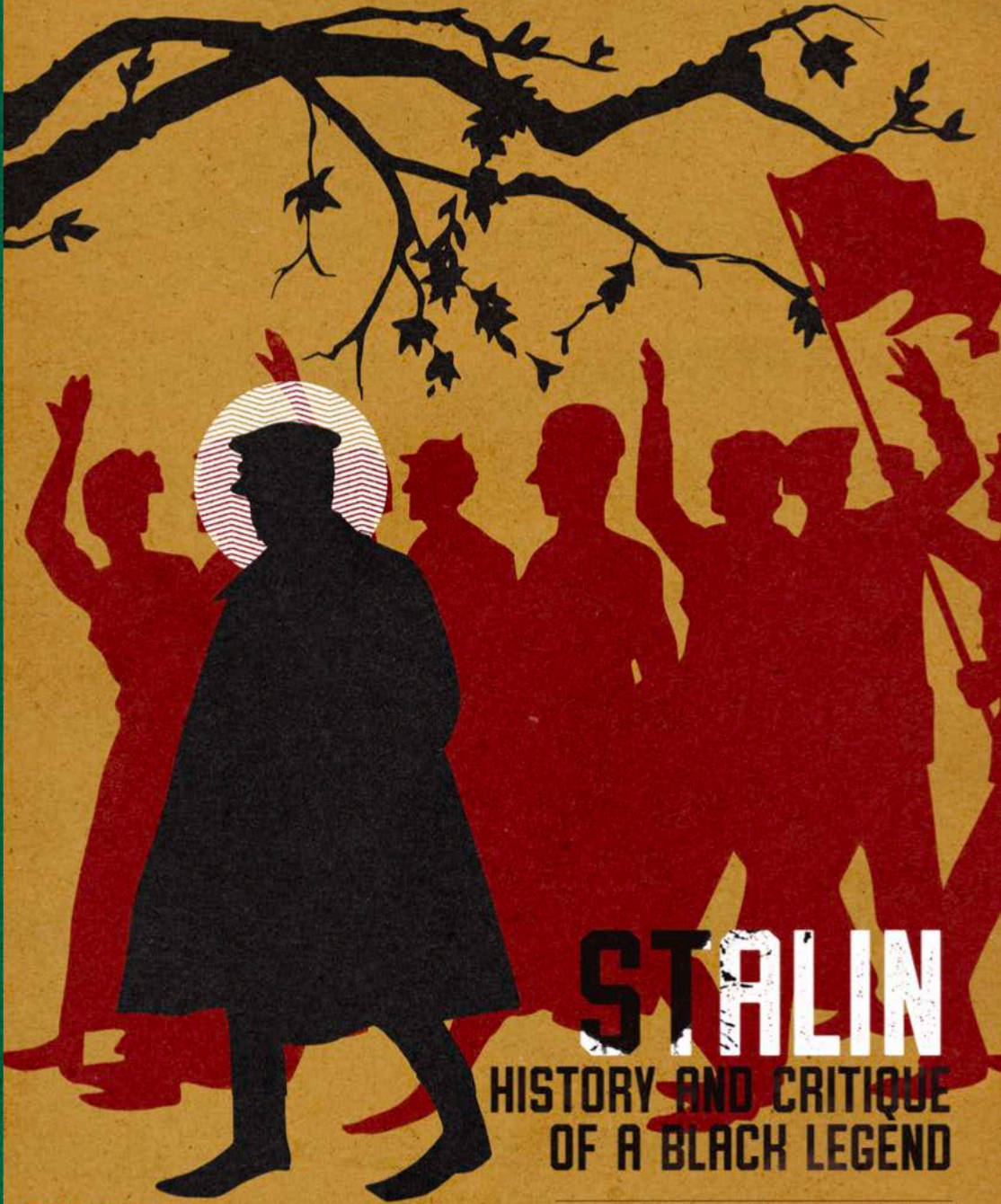


THE AUTHORIZED ENGLISH TRANSLATION



STALIN

HISTORY AND CRITIQUE
OF A BLACK LEGEND

DOMENICO
LOSURDO

TRANSLATED & INTRODUCED BY
SALVATORE ENGEL-DI MAURO
& HENRY HAHAMÄKI

"Domenico Losurdo's *Stalin: History and Critique of a Black Legend* recaptures the distorted personal and political narrative proffered by western historians for over 75 years. This magisterial work convincingly counters the biased distortions of both establishment and left historians through a balanced historiographic and philosophical exegesis of Stalin's complex life and leadership, as well as his contributions to socialism and the defeat of fascism. Losurdo's heretical counter-hegemonic history authentically counters the mythical, demonic figure of Stalin into a true-to-life biography of the most significant political figure of the 20th century. Fifteen years after its publication in Italian, Henry Hakamäki and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro's superb translation brings Losurdo's compelling corrective of Stalin to English readers."

Immanuel Ness, Author of *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of the Global Working Class*

"In this intrepid and rigorous study, Domenico Losurdo takes on the myth of the monster by shedding much-needed light on the monstrous situation in which Joseph Stalin found himself: that of building the world's first socialist state under conditions of incessant imperialist assault, civil war, subversive plots, fascist invasion, and the risks of nuclear annihilation. Losurdo's dialectical assessment of the commendable as well as the deplorable decisions made by Soviet leadership, given the circumstances, provides the reader with an extraordinary opportunity to learn practical and difficult lessons from concrete history. This book is thus an essential antidote to the terrifying tales whose purpose is to produce fear-induced ignorance, and thus benighted ideological alignment against 'the monster.'"

Gabriel Rockhill, Founding Director of the Critical Theory Workshop/*Atelier de Théorie Critique*, Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University





STALIN

HISTORY AND CRITIQUE OF A BLACK LEGEND

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STALIN

HISTORY AND CRITIQUE OF A BLACK LEGEND

Domenico Losurdo

AFTERWORD

Luciano Canfora

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY
HENRY HAKAMÄKI AND SALVATORE ENGEL-DI MAURO



Five years after Mimmo's sudden passing, one of his strongest intentions comes true: the translation into English of his most heartfelt and controversial book on the figure of Stalin. The Losurdo family, myself and my mother Ute Brielmayer, who was Mimmo's lifelong companion and tireless translator of a large part of his works into German, can only express deep gratitude to the publishing house Iskra Books and to Henry Hakamäki and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro for their competent, rigorous, and balanced translation.

With the hope that this book may contribute to the dissemination of Mimmo's thoughts, ideas, and categories, inspiring the path of other young scholars.

FEDERICO LOSURDO
JULY 2023

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FOREWORD

HENRY HAKAMÄKI AND SALVATORE ENGEL-DI MAURO

Born in the olive-grove endowed town of Sannicandro di Bari in 1941, the political philosopher and prolific scholar Domenico Losurdo departed our world in 2018 when a tumor took his life. With more than fifty books published since the early 1980s, he had been in the midst of completing what may have been a triptych on the history and future of communism.

The first volume, published in Italian in 2017 and not yet available in English, was a critical reassessment and rethinking of the history of Western Marxism, its failures, fragmentation, derailments, and possible futures (*Il Marxismo Occidentale: Come Nacque, Come Morì, Come Può Rinascere*) [Western Marxism: How It Was Born, How it Died, How It Can Be Reborn].¹ In that volume, he exposed the politically self-neutralizing Eurocentrism underlying Western Marxist dismissals of or animosity towards Marxist successes in the East.

What would have been the sequel was published posthumously in 2021 (*La Questione Comunista: Storia e Futuro di un'Idea*) [The Question of Communism: History and Future of an Idea].² In that work, Western Marxism still featured as part of the analysis but as just one among diverse currents. He traced communism's evolution in comparison with different variants of socialism, including the more recent ecologically-mindful versions. But his lens was much wider, studying communist movements as part of a totality of communist politics transformed by and bringing about shifts in global social tendencies.

As Giorgio Grimaldi mentions in his Preface to *La Questione Co-*

1 At time of writing, an English translation is nearing publication (1804 Books, USA). Original Italian edition published by Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2017.

2 Original Italian edition published by Carocci Editore, Roma, 2021.

munista, Losurdo had already started publishing to some extent on the third theme on the prospects for communism as a movement and future society. It was centered on the People's Republic of China. Losurdo's work in that direction can be argued to be present already in his 2005 volume comparing the Russian and Chinese Revolutions (*Fuga dalla Storia? La Rivoluzione Russa e la Rivoluzione Cinese Oggi*) [Escape from History? The Russian and Chinese Revolutions Today]. But his trajectory relative to the above-mentioned, implicit triptych was evident in an article that appeared in *International Critical Thought* in 2017. There, Losurdo acknowledged the great strides made in the People's Republic of China and saw the Deng reforms as being in continuity with the aims of the preceding Mao government and with the historical progress made by communist movements in general ("Has China Turned to Capitalism?—Reflections on the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism").³ The tumor that shortened his life deprived us of much needed intellectual and political incisiveness and clarity in this moment of potentially grave danger to the People's Republic of China from the intensifying belligerence of imperial countries headed by the United States. At the same time, there is great confusion and parochial thinking among Western leftists over the situation in the People's Republic of China and the world more generally.

Losurdo would have doubtless contributed valuable insights to help us wade through the present challenges. A staunch and unflinching Marxist, he never tired of exposing the fatal flaws in all currents of liberal thought, the ideological bulwark of capitalism (see his *Liberalism: A Counter-History*). Likewise, he has been among the few within liberal democracies to demolish the prevailing disinformation on socialist states, including within the Western left. These two of the varied aspects of his lifetime's work have made him a controversial figure in leftist circles, including communist ones, in core capitalist countries. This has been particularly so regarding Losurdo's perceived or alleged support for Stalin, a historical figure frequently used by most Western leftists as a litmus test for faithfulness to democratic principles or as a way to silence critical support or even any serious discussion about socialist states. These matters comprise to a large

3 In *International Critical Thought* 7 (1): pp. 15-31 (2017).

degree what motivates this translation, since Losurdo's assessment of Stalin is yet to be widely available in English.

We are also animated by a concern that Losurdo's great achievements will be reduced in the Anglophone worlds to a matter of where one stands relative to the Stalin question. Losurdo's work and political activism spans such a large range of themes (e.g., Western Marxism, Gramsci, Lukács, Heidegger, Hegel, Nietzsche, imperialism, liberalism, revolution, class struggle, peace, racism) and provides such an inordinate magnitude of insights for a single intellectual that any dismissiveness towards his work would be unconscionable.

Still, the prevalent rejection of or dismissiveness about Stalin as a historical figure merits closer and critical inspection, which is what Losurdo's *Stalin* provides. We encourage readers to make up their own mind on Losurdo's take on Stalin, rather than uncritically accept received notions. In fact, it is precisely the now widespread caricatures of Stalin as personified evil—rife in liberal democracies and uncritically accepted by most Western leftists—that Losurdo shows to be more related to contingent ruling class preoccupations than actual evidence. Even pointing out such problems with conventional representations of Stalin brought a shower of accusations of 'Stalinism' or 'neo-Stalinism' upon Losurdo, who made it clear that *Stalin* is not a rehabilitation but a contribution to contextualizing and ending the demonization of Stalin, who was even praised by Gandhi in 1946. We would also add, to build on Losurdo's historical analysis of representations of Stalin, that W.E.B. Du Bois was among the many calling Stalin a great man in an obituary in *The National Guardian*.⁴ Losurdo's work on the historical representations of Stalin, as well as other works like it, is perhaps more vital today than it ever has been. With the passage of time, we become further removed from the contemporary voices challenging the construction of what has become the hegemonic view of Stalin. These counter-hegemonic narratives have effectively been swept under the rug by the ruling ideological overlords and the media apparatuses they maintain and sustain, smothering any and all alternative and more constructive narratives. The hegemonic view has been embraced by the anti-communist liberal/conservative axis, and

4 Du Bois, (1953).

their constructed mythological “Stalin” is weaponized consistently to bolster the anti-communism and fascism we see globally.

Excessive detention and punishment is always compared to ‘Stalin’s Gulags,’ despite the contemporary United States having the largest prison population in world history, its practices of extraordinary rendition, and operating torture facilities worldwide for “threats to the State” in lieu of holding a trial. Enforced hunger as a tactic of terror is always compared to the ‘Holodomor’ despite scholars as fervent in their anti-communism as Kotkin conceding that the famine in question was not intentional or engineered, or that actual engineered and “genocidal famines had been carried out numerous times by the likes of the British government, who, lest we forget, willfully condemned 3 million Bengalis to starvation in 1943-1944.” The suppression of political opposition is always compared to ‘Stalin’s Totalitarianism,’ whereas a more relevant contemporary example might be the current Ukrainian government outlawing not only the Communist Party of Ukraine, but dozens of other parties that are left-wing, left-adjacent, or simply not in favor of the post-2014 political regime in place. The list of projections for the historical horrors of liberal democratic regimes goes on.

Not only is the temporality of Losurdo’s work critical, but his committed historical materialist approach to history is no less crucial. Without maintaining this principled analytical framework, there is a tendency to judge past actions on either utopian grounds or through the lens of present conditions. This is no less true in the case of the Stalin administration, who faced pressures and challenges few today can appreciate without a deep understanding of the material conditions under which they were forced to operate. The outcomes and deeds are incomprehensible without appraising the conditions that led to them. Losurdo does us the service of contextualizing these material conditions and orienting the Stalin administration’s actions and decisions in relation to them, as well as in relation to similar events outside of the world’s first socialist experiment. Far from a hagiography, Losurdo’s *Stalin* provides a tool for breaking free of that hegemonic narrative we have all been inundated with, and for combatting lazy anti-communist tropes that utilize the name ‘Stalin’ as a byword for all things evil in the world. This reductive approach does

not allow any grasp of what happened and why and does nothing to help build strategies to avoid or pre-empt future harmful outcomes. Critical engagement here is then of utmost necessity. Losurdo's work opens a constructive way to re-evaluate those 29 years, under the Stalin government, which shaped not only the USSR's contradictory forms of development (for better and worse), but also the subsequent socialist revolutions that succeeded elsewhere in the world. A lot is at stake. The currently hegemonic narrative impedes the capacity to learn from what went wrong, to recognize what went well, and therefore hampers our collective ability to prepare better for the chaos and horrors that capitalist states will stoke or directly inflict on future revolutions.

One may remain critical of, if not inimical to Stalin or what he stood for, but that need not translate into yielding even more to ruling class ideology and denying the struggles for a better society and the consequent impressive and lasting achievements of millions of people under Stalin's formal leadership in the USSR. Among such achievements were the steady improvements in living standards for all, in such forms as effective sanitation infrastructure for the majority, secure jobs, guaranteed housing, the eventual defeat of the threat of famine, and, on the environmental side, the unprecedented and massive expansion of ecological protection areas, successful long-term afforestation and soil conservation, effective and increased biodiversity conservation, and much else. To erase all that would be as justifiable as erasing all the mistakes and terrible outcomes from the Stalin administration and the external mass-murderous attacks on the USSR by capitalist regimes, whether liberal democratic, fascist, or monarchist. Losurdo teaches us, among other things, that historical contextualization and coeval comparisons are crucial to testing one's political philosophy and principles, to deepening our knowledge of socialist history, and at the same time a key to dismantling bourgeois ideologies. Lamentably, many of his works remain untranslated and this effort will hopefully stimulate the translation of further works of that committed, deep, and forward-thinking scholar.

TRANSLATORS' NOTE



This text has been carefully translated from the original Italian, with references made to, and debts owed to, other existing English translations: by David Ferreira (from the Portuguese edition), and Antonio Antón Fernández (from the Spanish edition).

In an effort to remain faithful to the original work, we have, throughout the text, maintained Losurdo's notation system, as well as the in-text citations and reference list style, with only minor alteration for ease of translation and accessibility, where applicable.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Quotations have been checked as far as possible against existing original texts in the case of English sources, or against “official” or widely accepted translations in other cases. Where grammatical, spelling, and stylistic choices differ, original formatting has been preserved in the quotations.

In Losurdo’s original text the many citations were included as endnotes at the rear of the text. For ease of reference, and to encourage further exploration of the sources, we’ve chosen to include them here as footnotes.

In addition to the citations, any comments are Losurdo’s own, except for occasional editorial notes to aid understanding, in the form of footnotes or square-bracketed inserts which will be prefaced by “**Ed. Note.**”



INTRODUCTION

THE TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF THE IMAGE OF STALIN

FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE KHRUSHCHEV REPORT

Huge demonstrations of grief accompanied Stalin's death: during his final moments, "millions of people crowded into the center of Moscow to pay their last respects" to the dying leader. On March 5, 1953, "millions of citizens felt his death as a personal loss."¹ The same reaction occurred in the most remote corners of the immense country, for example in a "small village" which, as soon as it was informed of the event, fell into a spontaneous and communal mourning.² The "general dismay" spread well beyond the borders of the USSR: "Men and women wept in the streets of Budapest and Prague."³

Thousands of kilometers from the socialist camp, even in Israel there was a widespread outpouring of condolence: "All the members of the Mapam wept without exception," and it was the party to which "all the initial leaders" and "almost all the fighters" belonged. Grief was intertwined with dismay: "The sun has set," the newspaper of the kibbutz movement, *al Hamishmar*, headlined. These feelings were for some time shared by leading figures of the state and military apparatus: "Ninety officers of those who had participated in the war of 1948, the great War of Independence of the Jews, joined a clandestine armed pro-Soviet [as well as pro-Stalinist] and revolutionary organization. Of these, eleven later became generals and one a minister, and

1 Medvedev (1977), p. 705; Zubkova (2003), captions affixed to the photos 19-20.

2 Thurston (1996), pp. xiii-xiv.

3 Fejtő (1971), p. 31.

are still honored as fathers of the homeland of Israel.”⁴

In the West, it was not only the leaders and militants of the communist parties linked to the Soviet Union who paid tribute to the deceased leader. One historian (Isaac Deutscher), who was also a fervent admirer of Trotsky, wrote an obituary full of accolades:

Within three decades, the face of the Soviet Union was completely transformed. The crux of the historical action of Stalinism is this: it had found Russia working the land with wooden ploughs, and leaves it master of the atomic bomb. It raised Russia to the status of the second industrial power in the world, and it was not just a matter of pure and simple material progress and organization - such a result could not have been achieved without a vast cultural revolution, in the course of which an entire country was sent to school to impart unto it an extensive education.

In his conclusion, although conditioned and partly disfigured by the Asiatic and despotic legacy of tsarist Russia, in Stalin’s USSR “the socialist ideal had its innate, compact integrity.”

In this historical balance sheet, there was no longer any place for the fierce accusations made by Trotsky against the late leader. What was the point of condemning Stalin as a traitor to the ideal of world revolution, and as a capitulating theorist of socialism in one country, at a time when the new social order was expanding in Europe and Asia and the revolution was breaking out of “its national shell”⁵ Laughed at by Trotsky as “a minor provincial man transferred as a joke of history to the plane of great world events,”⁶ by 1950 Stalin had risen, in the eyes of an illustrious philosopher (Alexandre Kojève), to the incarnation of the Hegelian world-spirit and had thereby been called to unify and direct humanity, resorting if necessary to energetic methods and combining in his action both wisdom and tyranny.⁷

Outside communist circles, or the pro-communist left, despite the raging Cold War and the dragging out of the hot war in Korea, Stalin’s death prompted obituaries in the West that were, on the whole, “respectful” or “balanced.” At that time he “was still seen as a relatively benign dictator, as a statesman even, and in popular consciousness an affectionate memory lingered of ‘Uncle Joe,’ the great war leader who had led his people to victory over Hitler and

4 Nirenstein (1997).

5 Deutscher (1972a), pp. 167-9.

6 Trotsky (1962), p. 170.

7 Kojève (1954).

helped save Europe from Nazi barbarism.”⁸ The ideas, impressions, and emotions of the years of the Grand Alliance against the Third Reich and its allies had not yet disappeared, when—as Deutscher recalled in 1948—“foreign statesmen and generals were impressed by Stalin’s extraordinary grasp of the technical details of his gigantic war machine.”⁹

Among the personalities who were favorably affected was one who, in his time, had indeed promoted military intervention against the country that emerged from the October Revolution, Winston Churchill, who had repeatedly said about Stalin: “I like that man.”¹⁰ At the Tehran Conference, in November 1943, the British statesman had greeted his Soviet colleague as “Stalin the Great”: he was the worthy heir of Peter the Great; he had saved his country by enabling it to defeat the invaders.¹¹ Fascinated as well was Averell Harriman, U.S. ambassador to Moscow between 1943 and 1946, who always drew a very flattering portrait of the Soviet leader on the military level: “I found him better informed than Roosevelt, more realistic than Churchill, in some ways the most effective of the war leaders.”¹² In 1944 Alcide De Gasperi¹³ expressed himself in even more emphatic terms, celebrating the “immense, historical, enduring merit of the armies organized by the genius of Joseph Stalin.” Nor were the recognitions of the eminent Italian politician limited to the purely military level:

When I saw that Hitler and Mussolini persecuted people for their race, and invented this terrible anti-Jewish legislation we know, and at the same time saw how the Russians, composed of 160 different ethnicities, sought to fuse them together, overcoming the differences between Asia and Europe, this attempt, this effort towards the unification of human society, let me say: this is Christian, this is eminently universalist in the sense of Catholicism.¹⁴

No less strong and no less widespread was the prestige Stalin had enjoyed and continued to enjoy among the great intellectuals. Harold J. Laski, who was a prestigious exponent of the English Labour Party,

8 Roberts (2006), p. 3.

9 Deutscher (1969), p. 522.

10 Roberts (2006), p. 273.

11 In Fontaine (2005), p. 66; reference is made to a book by Averell Harriman and Elie Abel.

12 In Thomas (1988), p. 78.

13 **Ed. Note:** Alcide De Gasperi (1881 - 1954) was prime minister of Italy over several successive coalition governments from 1945 - 1953.

14 De Gasperi (1956), pp. 15-6.

conversing in the fall of 1945 with Norberto Bobbio, had declared himself an “admirer of the Soviet Union” and its leader, whom he called “*très sage*” [very wise].¹⁵ In that same year, Hannah Arendt wrote that the country led by Stalin had distinguished itself for “its entirely new and successful approach to nationality conflicts, its new form of organizing different peoples on the basis of national equality”; it was a sort of model, something to which every political and national movement should give its utmost attention.”¹⁶

In turn, writing shortly before and shortly after the end of the Second World War, Benedetto Croce had acknowledged Stalin’s merit of having promoted freedom not only on an international level, thanks to his contribution to the fight against Nazi-fascism, but also in his own country.¹⁷ Yes, directing the USSR was “a man of gifted political genius,” who carried out an overall positive historical function. Compared to pre-revolutionary Russia, “Sovietism was a progress towards freedom,” just as, “in relation to the feudal regime” even an absolute monarchy was “a progress towards freedom and allowed the further and greater progress that followed.” The liberal philosopher’s doubts focused on the future of the Soviet Union, but by contrast they made Stalin’s greatness stand out even more: he had taken Lenin’s place, so that one genius had been followed by another; but from here on what successors did “Providence” reserve for the USSR?¹⁸

Those who, as the crisis of the Grand Alliance unfolded, had begun to compare Stalin’s Soviet Union with Hitler’s Germany, were harshly rebuked by Thomas Mann. What characterized the Third Reich was the “racial megalomania” of the self-styled “master race,” who had implemented a “diabolical policy of depopulation,” and even before that was the eradication of culture of the conquered. Hitler had thus adhered to Nietzsche’s maxim: “if one wants slaves, then one is a fool if one educates them to be masters.” Directly opposite was the orientation of “Russian socialism” which, by massively spreading education and culture, had shown that it did not want “slaves,” but “thinking people” and therefore, to be in spite of everything on the “path towards freedom.” It was, then, unacceptable to compare the two regimes. On the contrary, those who argued in this way could

15 Bobbio (1997), p. 89.

16 Arendt (1986b), p. 99.

17 **Ed. Note:** Benedetto Croce (1866 -1952) was an Italian idealist philosopher, historian, and politician.

18 Croce (1993), vol. 2, pp. 33-4 and 178.

be suspected of complicity with fascism, which they also claimed to want to condemn:

To place Russian communism and Nazi-fascism on the same moral plane, in that both would be totalitarian, is superficial at best, fascism at worst. Whoever insists on this equation may well consider himself a democrat, in truth and in the bottom of his heart he is in fact already a fascist, and certainly only in a hypocritical and insincere way will he fight fascism, while reserving all his hatred for communism.¹⁹

Of course, the Cold War had then broken out and, by publishing her book on totalitarianism, Arendt went on to accomplish in 1951 precisely that which had been denounced by Mann. However, almost at the same time, Kojève had pointed to Stalin as the protagonist of a decidedly progressive historical turning point of planetary dimensions. That is to say, in the West itself, the new truth, or rather the new ideological motive of the equal struggle against the different manifestations of totalitarianism was struggling to assert itself.

In 1948 Laski had in some way reinforced the point of view he had expressed three years earlier: to define the USSR he had taken up a category used by another leading exponent of the British Labour Party, Beatrice Webb, who had already spoken in 1931, and had continued to speak during the Second World War and shortly before her death, of a “new civilization.” Yes—Laski had reiterated—with the formidable impulse given to the social promotion of classes that had been exploited and oppressed for so long, and with the introduction in factories and workplaces of new relationships no longer based on the sovereign power of the owners of the means of production, the country led by Stalin had emerged as the “pioneer of a new civilization.” Of course, both sides were quick to point out that the “new civilization” that was emerging still bore the weight of “barbaric Russia.” It expressed itself in despotic forms, but—Laski emphasized in particular—in order to formulate a correct judgment on the Soviet Union it was necessary not to lose sight of an essential fact: “Its leaders came to power in a country accustomed only to bloody tyranny” and were forced to govern in a situation characterized by a more or less permanent “state of siege” and by a “potential or ongoing war.” Moreover, in situations of acute crisis, England and the United States had also limited traditional freedoms more or less as drastically.²⁰

19 Mann (1986a), pp. 271 and 278-9; Mann (1986b), pp. 311-2.

20 Webb (1982-85), vol. 4, pp. 242 and 490 (diary notes of March 15, 1931

Referring to the admiration expressed by Laski towards Stalin and the country he led, Bobbio would write much later: “immediately after Hitler’s defeat, to which the Soviets had made a decisive contribution at the battle of Stalingrad, [Laski’s statement] did not make any particular impression.” In reality, for the British Labour intellectual, the recognition paid to the USSR and its leader went far beyond the military level. On the other hand, was the position of the aforementioned philosopher from Turin very different at that time? In 1954, he published an essay which ascribed to the merits of the Soviet Union (and the socialist states) of having “initiated a new phase of civil progress in politically backward countries, introducing traditionally democratic institutions of formal democracy, such as universal suffrage and elected offices, and of substantial democracy, such as the collectivization of the means of production”; it was then a matter of pouring “a drop of [liberal] oil into the machinery of the already accomplished revolution.”²¹ As can be seen, it was far from a negative judgment of the country still mourning the death of Stalin.

In 1954, the legacy of liberal socialism was still alive in Bobbio. While strongly emphasizing the inalienable value of freedom and democracy, during the years of the war in Spain, Carlo Rosselli had negatively contrasted the liberal countries (“The government of England is for Franco, it starves Bilbao”) with the Soviet Union, which was committed to helping the Spanish Republic, which had been attacked by Nazi-fascism.²² Nor was it just about international politics. To a world characterized by the “era of fascism, imperialist wars and capitalist decadence,” Carlo Rosselli had contrasted the example of a country which, although still far from the goal of a mature democratic socialism, had nevertheless left capitalism behind and represented “a capital of precious experiences” for anyone committed to building a better society: “Today, with the gigantic Russian experience [...] we have an immense amount of positive material. We all know what it means to have socialist revolution and socialist organization of the means of production.”²³

In conclusion, throughout a period of history, in circles that went far beyond the communist movement, the country led by Stalin and Stalin himself could enjoy sympathetic interest, esteem and

and December 6, 1942); Laski (1948), pp. 39-42 and *passim*.

21 Bobbio (1997), p. 89; Bobbio (1977), pp. 164 and 280.

22 Rosselli (1988), pp. 358, 362 and 367.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 301, 304-6 and 381.

sometimes even admiration. Of course, there had been the serious disappointment caused by the pact with Nazi Germany, but Stalingrad had then taken care of that. This is why in 1953, and in the years immediately following, the homage paid to the deceased leader that had united the socialist camp seemed at times to bring together the communist movement, despite previous divisions, and ended up somehow finding an echo in the liberal West itself, which was also engaged in a Cold War waged by both sides with no holds barred. It is no coincidence that in the speech that officially opened the Cold War at Fulton, Churchill said: "I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my wartime comrade, Marshal Stalin."²⁴ There is no doubt that with the escalation of the Cold War, tones were gradually hardening. Yet, still in 1952, a great English historian who had worked in the service of the Foreign Office, namely Arnold Toynbee, was able to compare the Soviet leader to "a man of genius: Peter the Great"; yes, "the tyrannical course of technological westernization followed by Stalin ended up being justified, like Peter's, by the evidence of the battlefield." Indeed, it continued to be justified even beyond the defeat inflicted on the Third Reich: after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Russia again found itself "having to make a forced march to bring itself up to par with a Western technology" that had again "lightning-fast distanced it."²⁵

FOR AN ALL-ROUND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

And so, perhaps even more than the Cold War, it is another historical event that imprints a radical turning point on the history of Stalin's image: Churchill's speech of March 5, 1946, plays a less relevant role than another speech, the one delivered ten years later, on February 25, 1956, to be exact, by Nikita Khrushchev, on the occasion of the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

For more than three decades, this report, which portrayed a morbidly bloody, vain, and intellectually mediocre or even ridiculous dictator, pleased almost everyone. It allowed the new ruling group in power in the USSR to present itself as the sole repository of revo-

24 Churchill (1974), p. 7290.

25 Toynbee (1992), pp. 18-20.

lutionary legitimacy within the country, the socialist camp and the international communist movement, which saw Moscow as its center. Strengthened in its old convictions and with new arguments at its disposal to conduct the Cold War, the West also had reasons to be satisfied (even enthusiastic). In the United States, Sovietology had tended to develop around the CIA and other military and intelligence agencies, after the removal of elements suspected of harboring sympathies for the country that had emerged from the October Revolution.²⁶ A process of transformation had begun to take place in the United States. In 1949, the president of the American Historical Association declared: "One cannot afford to be unorthodox... [a] plurality of aims and values" is no longer allowed. It is necessary to accept "a large measure of regimentation... [since] total war, whether it be hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The historian is no freer from this obligation than the physicist."²⁷ All this does not dissipate in 1956, but now a more or less militarized Sovietology can enjoy the comfort coming from within the communist world itself.

It is true that more than communism as such, the *Khrushchev Report* put a single personality in a state of accusation, but in those years it was opportune, even from the point of view of Washington and its allies, not to widen the target too much and concentrate the fire on Stalin's country. With the signing of the "Balkan Pact" in 1953 with Türkiye and Greece, Yugoslavia became a sort of external member of NATO, and about twenty years later China also stipulated with the US a de facto alliance against the Soviet Union. It is this superpower that is to be isolated and is pressured to proceed to an increasingly radical "de-Stalinization," until it is deprived of any form of identity and self-esteem and resigned to capitulation and final dissolution.

Finally, thanks to the "revelations" coming from Moscow, the great intellectuals could easily forget or erase the interest, the sympathy, and even the admiration with which they had looked at the Stalinist USSR. In particular, those "revelations" gave comfort to intellectuals who had Trotsky as their point of reference. For a long time, it had been Trotsky himself who, in the eyes of the enemies of the Soviet Union, embodied the infamy of communism and represented in a privileged way the "exterminator," or rather the "Jewish exterminator" (*infra*, ch. 5, § 15); even in 1933, when he had al-

26 Gleason (1995), p. 121.

27 Cohen (1986), p. 13.

ready been in exile for some years, in the eyes of Spengler, Trotsky continued to represent the “*Bolschewistischer Massenmörder*” [Bolshevist mass-murderer].²⁸ Beginning with the turning point of the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR, it was only Stalin and his closest collaborators who were confined to the museum of horrors. Above all, by exerting its influence far beyond the circle of Trotskyists, the *Khrushchev Report* had a consolatory function for the circles of a certain Marxist left, who thus felt exempt from the painful obligation to rethink the Master’s theory and the history of the effects it actually had. Far from disappearing, national identities played an increasingly important role in the conflicts that would lead to the splitting and eventual collapse of the socialist camp. There was no sign of overcoming money or the market, which, if anything, tended to expand with economic development. Yes, all this was indisputable, but the fault was... Stalin and “Stalinism”! And so, there was no reason to question the hopes or certainties that had accompanied the Bolshevik revolution and referred back to Marx.

Although starting from opposing positions, these political-ideological currents produced their image of Stalin out of colossal, arbitrary abstractions. On the left, they proceeded to the virtual erasure from the history of Bolshevism, and even more so from the history of Marxism, of the man who, longer than any other leader, had exercised power in the country resulting from the revolution prepared and conducted by referring to the ideas of Marx and Engels. In turn, the anti-communists casually glossed over both the history of tsarist Russia and the Second Thirty Years’ War,²⁹ in the context of which the contradictory and tragic development of Soviet Russia and Stalin’s three decades is placed. And so, each of the different political-ideological currents took their cue from Khrushchev’s speech to cultivate their own mythology, whether it was the purity of the West or the purity of Marxism and Bolshevism. Stalinism was the horrible term of comparison that allowed each of the antagonists to celebrate, through opposition, their own infinite moral and intellectual superiority.

Founded on very different abstractions, these readings have nevertheless ended up producing some methodological convergence. In investigating it and without paying much attention to the objective

28 Spengler (1933), p. 86, note 1.

29 **Ed Note:** This term is Losurdo’s preferred periodization for the years of 1914 - 1945.

situation, they made terror descend from the initiative of a single personality or a narrow ruling class, determined to assert its absolute power by any means. Starting from this assumption, if Stalin could be compared to another great political personality, it could only be Hitler; consequently, for the purpose of understanding the Stalinist USSR the only possible comparison was with Nazi Germany. This is a motif that already appeared in Trotsky at the end of the 1930s, who repeatedly used the category of “totalitarian dictatorship” and, within this genus, distinguished, on the one hand, the “Stalinist” species and, on the other, the “fascist” (and above all Hitlerian) species,³⁰ using an approach that would later become common sense during the Cold War and in today’s dominant ideology.

Is this way of arguing persuasive, or is it better to resort to an all-round comparative approach, without losing sight of the history of Russia as a whole or of the Western countries involved in the Second Thirty Years’ War? It is true that in this way a comparison is made between countries and leaders with very different characteristics; but is this diversity to be placed exclusively on the account of ideologies, or does the objective situation also play an important role, that is, the geopolitical position and the history behind each of the countries involved in the Second Thirty Years’ War? When we speak of Stalin, our thoughts immediately turn to the personalization of power, to the *concentrationary universe*,³¹ to the deportation of entire ethnic groups; but do these phenomena and practices refer only to Nazi Germany, as well as to the USSR, or do they manifest themselves in different ways, according to the greater or lesser acuteness of the state of exception and its more or less prolonged duration, in other countries as well, including those with a more consolidated liberal tradition? Certainly, it is necessary not to lose sight of the role of ideologies;

30 Trotsky (1988), p. 1285.

31 **Ed. Note:** This term, used throughout the text, refers to an academic concept first used by the Trotskyist, then anti-communist, David Rousset in his 1946 work, *L’Univers concentrationnaire*. In recent academic work, it is used to express a “whole system of terror and systematic dehumanisation.” (Silverman, 2022) Rousset’s original idea was to equate Nazi concentration camps and carceral structures in the USSR under Stalin. The concept has since been generalised to indicate the potential for horrors from the everyday workings of bureaucratic and technocratic structures that characterize ‘modernity.’ This updated reconceptualisation tends to erase the role of capitalism in a similar way as Rousset’s original concept and, as Losurdo will go on to show, often intentionally or unintentionally ignores the other historical precursors and contemporary analogous examples found in ‘liberal democratic’ states.

but can the ideology to which Stalin refers really be compared to that which inspired Hitler, or does comparative analysis in this field, conducted without prejudice, end up producing completely unexpected results? In spite of the theorists of “purity,” a political movement, a political regime cannot be judged by relying on the excellence of the ideals it claims to be inspired by: in the evaluation of these same ideals, we cannot overlook the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the “history of effects” produced by them; but should this approach be applied to the whole field or only to the movement that started from Lenin or Marx?

These questions appear superfluous and even misleading to those who remove the problem of the changing image of Stalin from the belief that Khrushchev would finally bring to light the truth previously concealed. However, a historian who wanted to identify 1956 as the year of the final and ultimate revelation would be demonstrating a total lack of methodological understanding and would casually overlook the conflicts and interests that stimulated the campaign of de-Stalinization and its methods, and even before had stimulated the Sovietology of the Cold War. The radical contrast between the different images of Stalin should push the historian not to absolutize one of them, but to problematize all of them.

HOW TO CAST A GOD INTO HELL: THE KHRUSHCHEV REPORT

A “HUGE, GRIM, WHIMSICAL, MORBID, HUMAN MONSTER”

If we analyze today the document titled *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences*, read by Khrushchev in a closed session of the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and which then became famous as the *Secret Speech*, one characteristic immediately catches the eye: we are in the presence of an indictment that aims to liquidate Stalin in every aspect. Accordingly, he was responsible for horrendous crimes and was a despicable individual both morally and intellectually. Besides being ruthless, the dictator was also laughable: he knew the country and the agricultural situation “only from films”; films that, moreover, “beautified” reality to the point of making it unrecognizable.¹ More than by a logic of politics or *Realpolitik*, the bloody repression he unleashed was dictated by personal whim and by a pathological *libido dominandi* [Ed. Note: lust for power]. Thus emerged the portrait—as Deutscher smugly observed in June 1956, dazzled by Khrushchev’s “revelations,” and forgetting the respectful and at times admiring portrait of Stalin he had drawn three years earlier—of a “huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster.”² The ruthless despot had been so unscrupulous that he was suspected of plotting the assassination of Kirov, the man who was—or who seemed to be—his best friend, in order to be able to accuse his real, potential, or imaginary opponents of this crime and liquidate them one by one.³ Nor had the ruthless repression fallen only on individ-

1 Khrushchev (1958), pp. 223-4.

2 Deutscher (1972b), p. 20.

3 Khrushchev (1958), pp. 121-2.

uals and political groups. No, it had involved “mass deportations of entire populations,” arbitrarily accused and condemned *en bloc* for connivance with the enemy. But had Stalin at least contributed to saving his country and the world from the horror of the Third Reich? On the contrary—Khrushchev urged—the Great Patriotic War had been won in spite of the dictator’s madness: it was only thanks to his lack of foresight, his obstinacy, the blind trust he had placed in Hitler that the Third Reich troops had initially succeeded in breaking deep into Soviet territory, sowing death and destruction on an enormous scale.

Yes, because of Stalin, the Soviet Union arrived unprepared and defenseless at the tragic appointment: “we started to modernize our military equipment only on the eve of the war [...]. At the outbreak of the war we did not even have sufficient numbers of rifles to arm the mobilized manpower.” As if all this were not enough, “after our severe initial disasters and defeats at the front,” the man responsible for all this had abandoned himself to discouragement and even apathy. Overcome by the feeling of defeat: “Lenin left us a great legacy and we’ve lost it.” Unable to react, “for a long time [Stalin] actually did not direct military operations and ceased to do anything whatsoever.”⁴ True, after some time had passed, finally bowing to the insistence of the other members of the Political Bureau, he had returned to his post. If only he had not! At the time when it faced a mortal threat, the man who had despotically ruled the Soviet Union had been such an incompetent dictator that he didn’t know “the basics of conducting battle operations.” It is an accusation on which the *Secret Speech* strongly insists: “We should note that Stalin planned operations on a globe. Yes, comrades, he used to take a globe and trace the front line on it.”⁵ In spite of everything, the war had ended favorably; and, nevertheless, the dictator’s bloodthirsty paranoia had further escalated. At this point one can consider the complete portrait of the “morbid, human monster” that emerges, according to Deutscher’s observation, from the *Secret Speech*.

Only three years had passed since the demonstrations of condolence caused by Stalin’s death, and his popularity was still so strong and persistent that, at least in the USSR, the campaign launched by Khrushchev initially met with “a good deal of resistance”:

4 Ibid., pp. 164-5 and 172.

5 Ibid., pp. 176 and 178.

On 5 March 1956 students in Tbilisi went out into the streets to lay flowers at the monument to Stalin on the third anniversary of his death. Their gesture in honor of Stalin turned into a protest against the decisions of the XXth Party Congress. The demonstrations and meetings continued for five days, and on the evening of 9 March tanks were brought into the city to restore order.⁶

Perhaps this explains the characteristics of the text we are examining. There was a bitter political struggle going on in the USSR, and in the socialist camp, and the caricatured portrait of Stalin served excellently to delegitimize the “Stalinists” who might overshadow the new leader. The “cult of personality,” which until that moment had reigned, did not allow more nuanced judgments: it was necessary to cast a god into hell. A few decades earlier, in the course of another political battle of different characteristics, but no less bitter, Trotsky had also drawn a portrait of Stalin aimed not only at condemning him politically and morally, but also at ridiculing him on a personal level: he was a “minor provincial,” an individual characterized from the beginning by an irremediable mediocrity and clumsiness, who regularly gave proof of incompetence in the political, military and ideological spheres, who never managed to overcome his “peasant coarseness.” Of course, in 1913 he had published an essay of undeniable theoretical value (*Marxism and the National Question*), but the real author was Lenin, while the petitioner should be included in the category of “usurpers” of the “intellectual rights” of the great revolutionary.

There is no shortage of overlap between the two portraits. Khrushchev insinuated that the real instigator of the assassination of Kirov had been Stalin, while Trotsky accused (or suspected) Stalin of having hastened Lenin’s death, due to the former’s “Mongolian ferocity.”⁷ The *Secret Speech* blames Stalin for his cowardly flight from his responsibilities at the beginning of Hitler’s aggression, but already on September 2, 1939, well in advance of Operation Barbarossa, Trotsky had written that the “new aristocracy” in power in Moscow was characterized by, among other things, “its inability to wage war”; the “ruling caste” in the Soviet Union was destined to assume the attitude proper to “all doomed regimes: ‘after us the deluge.’”⁸

To what extent do these two portraits, which are largely convergent, resist historical investigation? We should begin by analyzing the *Secret Speech* which, made official by the Congress of the Communist

6 Zubkova (2003), p. 223.

7 Trotsky (1962), pp. 170,175-6 and 446-7.

8 Trotsky (1988), pp. 1259 and 1262-3.

Party and by the highest executives of the ruling party, immediately imposed itself as the revelation of a long repressed but now indisputable truth.

THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR AND
THE "INVENTIONS" OF KHRUSHCHEV

Starting from Stalingrad and the defeat inflicted on the Third Reich (a power that had seemed invincible), Stalin had acquired enormous prestige throughout the world. And, not surprisingly, Khrushchev dwells particularly on this point. He describes in catastrophic terms the military unpreparedness of the Soviet Union, whose army, in some cases, had lacked even the most elementary armaments. Directly opposite is the picture that emerges from a study that seems to come from *Bundeswehr* circles, making extensive use of its military archives. It speaks of the "multiple superiorities of the Red Army in tanks, aircraft, and artillery"; furthermore, "the industrial capacity of the USSR had increased to an extent where it was able to equip the Soviet armed forces 'with a truly inconceivable amount of armaments.'" It grew at an increasingly fast pace as Operation Barbarossa approached. In 1940, the Soviet Union produced 358 tanks of the most advanced type, far superior to those available to other armies, but in the first half of the following year, it produced 1,503.⁹ The documents from the Russian archives show that, at least in the two years immediately preceding the aggression of the Third Reich, Stalin was literally obsessed with the problem of the "quantitative increase" and the "qualitative improvement of the entire military apparatus." Some figures speak for themselves: if in the first five-year plan the allocations for defense amounted to 5.4% of total state expenditures, in 1941 they rose to 43.4%; "in September 1939, on Stalin's orders the Politburo took the decision to build by 1941 nine new factories for the production of aircraft." At the time of Hitler's invasion, "the industry had produced 2,700 modern aircraft and 4,300 tanks."¹⁰ Judging by these figures, it cannot be said that the USSR arrived unprepared for its tragic appointment with war.

In fact, a decade ago an American historian dealt a severe blow to

9 Hoffmann (1995), pp. 59 and 21.

10 Volkogonov (1989), pp. 500-4.

the myth of the Soviet leader's collapse and escape from his responsibilities immediately after the beginning of the Nazi invasion: "However shaken he was, Stalin had eleven hours of meetings with party, state, and military leaders on the day of the attack, and he received visitors almost continuously for the next several days."¹¹ We now have at our disposal the register of visitors to Stalin's office in the Kremlin, discovered in the early nineties: it turns out that from the hours immediately following the attack, the Soviet leader engaged in a dense amount of meetings and initiatives to organize the resistance. These were days and nights characterized by "activity" that was "strenuous," nevertheless conducted in an orderly manner. In any case, "the whole episode [narrated by Khrushchev] is a complete fabrication... [this] story is false."¹² In reality, from the very beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Stalin not only made the most demanding decisions, giving orders for the movement of the population and industrial plants away from the front line area, but "retained minute control over everything, from the size and shape of bayonets to the *Pravda* headlines and who wrote the articles."¹³ There is no trace of either panic or hysteria. Let us read Dimitrov's diary note and testimony: "At 7:00 a.m. I was urgently summoned to the Kremlin. Germany has attacked the USSR. The war has begun [...]. Striking calmness, resoluteness, confidence of Stalin and all the others." Even more striking is the clarity of ideas. It was not only a matter of proceeding to the "general mobilization of our forces." It was also necessary to define the political framework. Yes, "only the Communists can defeat the fascists," putting an end to the seemingly irresistible rise of the Third Reich, but one must not lose sight of the real nature of the conflict: "The [communist] parties in the localities are mounting a movement in defense of the USSR. The issue of socialist revolution is not to be raised. The Sov[iet] people are waging a patriotic war against fascist Germany. It is a matter of routing fascism, which has enslaved a number of peoples and is bent on enslaving still more."¹⁴

The political strategy that would preside over the Great Patriotic War was well outlined. Already a few months earlier, Stalin had stressed that the expansionism of the Third Reich was carried out "under the banner of subjugation, [with the aim] of the submission

11 Knight (1997), p. 132.

12 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), pp. 269-70.

13 Montefiore (2007), p. 416.

14 Dimitrov (2002), pp. 320-1.

of other peoples.” These peoples must respond with just wars of resistance and national liberation (*infra*, ch. 5, § 3). On the other hand, to those who scholastically counterposed patriotism and internationalism, the Communist International had already provided a response once again before Hitler’s aggression, as is clear from Dimitrov’s diary entry of May 12, 1941:

We will have to develop the idea of combining a healthy, properly understood nationalism with proletarian internationalism. Proletarian internationalism should be grounded in such a nationalism in the individual countries [...]. Between nationalism properly understood and proletarian internationalism there can be no contradictions. Rootless cosmopolitanism that denies national feelings and the notion of a homeland has nothing in common with proletarian internationalism.¹⁵

Far from being an improvised and desperate reaction to the situation created by the unleashing of Operation Barbarossa, the strategy of the Great Patriotic War expressed a long-matured and general theoretical orientation: internationalism and the international cause of the emancipation of peoples were advancing concretely on the wave of wars of national liberation, made necessary by Hitler’s claim to resume and radicalize the colonial tradition, subjugating and enslaving first the supposedly servile races of Eastern Europe. These are the reasons taken up in the speeches and declarations pronounced by Stalin in the course of the war: they constituted “significant milestones in the clarification of Soviet military strategy and of its political objectives and played an important role in strengthening popular morale”;¹⁶ and they also assumed an international importance. Regarding a radio appeal of July 3, 1941, Goebbels observed with annoyance that it “drew enormous admiration in England and the United States.”¹⁷

A SERIES OF DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS AND OPERATION BARBAROSSA

Even on the level of actual military conduct, the *Secret Speech* lost all credibility. According to Khrushchev, heedless of the “warnings” that came to him from many quarters about the imminence of the in-

15 Ibid., p. 314.

16 Roberts (2006), p. 7.

17 Goebbels (1992), p. 1620 (diary entry of July 5, 1941).

vasion, Stalin rushes into disaster. What to say about this accusation? At the same time, even information coming from a friendly country can turn out to be wrong: for example, on June 17, 1942 Franklin Delano Roosevelt warned Stalin about an imminent Japanese attack, which then did not occur.¹⁸ Furthermore, on the eve of Hitler's aggression, the USSR was forced to contend with gigantic diversionary and disinformation maneuvers. The Third Reich made a massive effort to make people believe that the massing of troops in the east was only meant to camouflage the imminent leap across the Channel, and this seemed all the more credible after the conquest of the island of Crete. "All state and military apparatuses are mobilized," Goebbels smugly noted in his diary (May 31, 1941), to stage the "first great wave of camouflage" of Operation Barbarossa. Thus, "14 divisions are transported westward";¹⁹ moreover, all troops deployed on the western front are put on high alert.²⁰ About two weeks later, the Berlin edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* published an article that pointed to the occupation of Crete as a model for the planned showdown with England: a few hours later the newspaper was seized in order to give the impression that a secret of great importance had been clumsily betrayed. Three days later (June 14) Goebbels notes in his diary: The English radios are already declaring our deployment against Russia a bluff, behind which we seek to hide our preparations for the invasion [of England.]²¹ In addition to this campaign of misinformation, Germany added another: rumors were circulated that the military deployment in the East was intended to put pressure on the USSR, possibly with the use of an ultimatum, so that Stalin would agree to redefine the clauses of the German-Soviet pact and commit himself to exporting in greater quantities the grain, oil and coal that the Third Reich needed in a war that was not about to end. The aim was to make people believe that the crisis could be solved with new negotiations and some additional concessions from Moscow.²² This was the conclusion reached in Great Britain by the army intelligence services and the military leadership, which still on May 22 warned the War Cabinet: "Hitler has not finally decided whether to obtain

18 In Butler (2005), pp. 71-2.

19 Goebbels (1992), p. 1590.

20 Wolkow (2003), p. 111.

21 Goebbels (1992), pp. 1594-5 and 1597.

22 Besymenski (2003), pp. 422-5.

his wishes [the USSR] by persuasion or force of arms.”²³ On June 14, Goebbels noted in his diary with satisfaction: “They still generally believe that it is a bluff, or an attempt at blackmail.”²⁴

Nor should we underestimate the disinformation campaign staged on the opposite side and begun two years earlier: in November 1939, the French press published a fictitious speech (supposedly delivered before the Politburo on August 19 of that same year) in which Stalin is said to have outlined a plan to weaken Europe, stimulating a fratricidal war within it, in order to then Sovietize it. There are no doubts: it was a fake, aimed at breaking the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and directing the expansionist fury of the Third Reich towards the East.²⁵ According to a widespread historiographical legend, on the eve of Hitler’s aggression, the London government repeatedly and disinterestedly warned Stalin, who, however, as a good dictator, would trust only his Berlin counterpart. In fact, while on the one hand Great Britain communicated information to Moscow about Operation Barbarossa, on the other hand it spread rumors about an imminent attack by the USSR against Germany or the territories occupied by it.²⁶ It was clear and understandable that the British had an interest in accelerating the conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union or making it inevitable.

Then the event of Rudolf Hess’ mysterious flight to England intervened, clearly motivated by the hope of reconstituting the unity of the West in the fight against Bolshevism, thus giving concrete form to the program enunciated in *Mein Kampf* of alliance and solidarity of the Germanic peoples in their civilizing mission. Soviet agents abroad informed the Kremlin that the Nazi regime’s second in command had taken this initiative in full agreement with the Führer.²⁷ Prominent figures in the Third Reich continued until the end to support the thesis that Hess had acted on Hitler’s encouragement. The latter, in any case, felt the need to immediately send Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to Rome in order to dispel any suspicion in Mussolini that Germany was plotting a separate peace with Great Britain.²⁸ Obviously, the concern aroused in Moscow by

23 Costello (1991), pp. 438-9.

24 Goebbels (1992), p. 1599.

25 Roberts (2006), p. 35.

26 Wolkow (2003), p. 110.

27 Costello (1991), pp. 436-7.

28 Kershaw (2001), pp. 581 and 576-7.

this *coup de théâtre* is even greater, especially since the attitude of the British government further fueled it: it did not exploit the “capture of the deputy Führer” to “ma[k]e maximum propaganda capital out of Hess’ capture, something Hitler and Goebbels both expected and feared”; on the contrary, the interrogation of Hess—reported from London to Stalin by Ambassador Ivan Maisky—was entrusted to an appeasement policy advocate. While leaving the door open to an Anglo-Soviet rapprochement, Her Majesty’s secret services undertook to propagate the rumors, which by now were spreading, of an imminent separate peace between London and Berlin; all this in order to increase the pressure on the Soviet Union (which perhaps would have tried to prevent such dreaded strengthening of the alliance between Great Britain and the Third Reich with a pre-emptive attack by the Red Army against the Wehrmacht) and to raise the bargaining power of England.²⁹

It is easy to understand the Kremlin’s caution and mistrust: the danger of a repeat of Munich on a much larger and more tragic scale was lurking. It can also be assumed that the second disinformation campaign staged by the Third Reich played a role. According at least to the transcript found in the archives of the CPSU³⁰, even though the short-term involvement of the USSR in the conflict was taken for granted, in his speech to the graduating students of the Military Academy on May 5, 1941, Stalin had pointed out that, historically, Germany had achieved victory when it was engaged on one front only, while it had suffered defeat when it was forced to fight simultaneously in the East and in the West.³¹ Here, Stalin may have underestimated the seriousness with which Hitler was prepared to attack the USSR. On the other hand, he well knew that a hasty total mobilization would provide the Third Reich on a silver platter with a justification for war, as had happened at the outbreak of World War I. There is, however, one fixed point: although moving with circumspection in a very tangled situation, the Soviet leader proceeded with “acceleration of his preparations for war.” In fact, “between May and June, 800,000 reservists were called up, in mid-May, 28 divisions were deployed in the western districts of the Soviet Union,” while the work of fortifying the borders and camouflaging the most sensitive military targets proceeded at a rapid pace. “On the night of June 21-

29 Ibid., pp. 585-7; Ferro (2008), p. 115 (regarding Maisky).

30 Ed. Note: Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

31 Besymenski (2003), pp. 380-6 (and especially p. 384).

22 this vast force was put on alert and warned to expect a surprise attack by the Germans.³²

In order to discredit Stalin, Khrushchev insisted on the spectacular initial victories of the invading army, but glossed over the predictions made at the time in the West. After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and the entry of the Wehrmacht into Prague, Lord Halifax had continued to reject the idea of a rapprochement between England and the USSR by resorting to this argument: it made no sense to ally with a country whose armed forces were “insignificant.” On the eve of Operation Barbarossa, or at the time of its unleashing, British intelligence had calculated that the Soviet Union would be “liquidated in 8-10 weeks”; in turn, the advisors of the American Secretary of State (Henry L. Stimson) had predicted on 23 June that everything would be concluded in a period of time between one and three months.³³ Moreover, the meteoric breakthrough of the Wehrmacht—a distinguished scholar of military history observes today—can be easily explained by geography:

The 1,800 mile breadth of that front, and the scarcity of natural obstacles, offered the attacker immense scope for infiltration and manoeuvre. Despite the great size of the Red army, the ratio of force to space was so low that the German mechanized forces could easily find openings for indirect advance onto their opponent’s rear. At the same time the widely spaced cities where road and railways converged provided the attacker with alternative objectives that he could exploit to confuse the defending armies as to his direction, and impale them on the ‘horns of a dilemma’ in trying to meet his thrusts.³⁴

THE RAPID UNRAVELING OF THE BLITZKRIEG

One should not be dazzled by appearances: on closer inspection, the Third Reich’s plan to renew in the East the triumphant Blitzkrieg achieved in the West began to prove problematic in the first weeks of the gigantic conflict.³⁵ In this regard, the diaries of Joseph Goebbels are illuminating. On the immediate eve of the aggression, he underlined the irresistibility of the imminent German attack, “certainly the most powerful that history has ever known”; no one could

32 Roberts (2006), pp. 66-9.

33 Iron (2008), p. 64; Benes (1954), p. 151; Gardner (1993), pp. 92-3.

34 Liddel Hart (2007), pp. 414-5.

35 Ibid., pp. 417-8.

argue with the “most powerful display in world history.”³⁶ And so: “We have before a triumphal march unprecedented [...]. I consider the military strength of the Russians very low, possibly even lower than the Führer does. If there was ever an action with an assured outcome, it is this.”³⁷ In reality, Hitler’s self-assurance was not inferior; a few months earlier, with a Bulgarian diplomat, he had referred to the Soviet army as “no more than a joke.”³⁸

However, right from the start, the invaders ran into unpleasant surprises: “On June 25, during the first assault on Moscow, anti-air defense proved so effective that from then on the Luftwaffe was forced to limit itself to reduced-range night attacks.”³⁹ Ten days of war were enough for the certainties of the eve of the conflict to fall into crisis. On July 2, Goebbels wrote in his diary: “Overall, the fight is very hard and stubbornly. In no way can we speak of a rout. The red regime has mobilized its people.”⁴⁰ Events pressed on and the mood of the Nazi leaders changed radically, as emerges again from Goebbels’ diary.

July 24: We cannot doubt the fact that the Bolshevik regime, which has existed for almost a quarter century, has left deep scars on the peoples of the Soviet Union [...]. We should therefore clearly emphasize the hardness of the battle being waged in the east to the German people. The nation should be told that this operation is very difficult, but we can overcome it and get through.⁴¹

August 1: The headquarters of the Führer [...] is also openly admitting that it has erred a little in the assessment of Soviet military strength. The Bolsheviks are displaying more resistance than we had assumed; in particular, they have more material means at their disposal than we believed.⁴²

August 19: Privately, the Führer is very irritated with himself for having been deceived so much about the potential of the Bolsheviks by reports from [German agents in] the Soviet Union. In particular, his underestimation of the enemy’s armored infantry and air force has created many problems. He has suffered a lot. This is a serious crisis [...]. The campaigns we had carried out until now were almost walks [...]. The Führer had no reason to be concerned about the west [...]. In our German rigor and objectivity we have always overestimated the enemy, with the exception in this case of the Bolsheviks.⁴³

36 Goebbels (1992), pp. 1601 and 1609.

37 Ibid., pp. 1601-2.

38 Fest (1973), p. 878.

39 Iron (2008), p. 189.

40 Goebbels (1992), p. 1619.

41 Ibid., pp. 1639-40.

42 Ibid., p. 1645.

43 Ibid., pp. 1656-8.

September 16: We calculated the potential of the Bolsheviks in a completely erroneous way.⁴⁴

Military strategy scholars point to the unforeseen difficulties in the Soviet Union immediately encountered by a mighty, experienced war machine surrounded by the myth of invincibility.⁴⁵ It is “particularly significant for the success of the Eastern War Battle of Smolensk, in the second half of July 1941 (hitherto overshadowed by other events in investigations).”⁴⁶ The observation is by a distinguished German historian, who then reports these eloquent diary notes written by General Fedor von Bock on July 20 and 26:

The enemy wants to recapture Smolensk at any cost and is constantly bringing in new forces. The hypothesis expressed somewhere that the enemy acts without a plan is not confirmed by the facts [...]. It can be seen that the Russians have completed a new compact deployment of forces around the front which I had built at the fore. In many places they seek to go on the offensive. Surprising for an adversary who has suffered such blows; he must possess an incredible amount of material, in fact our troops even now complain of the strong effect of the enemy artillery.

Even more uneasy and indeed decidedly pessimistic is Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of counterintelligence, who, speaking with General von Bock on July 17, comments, “I see only black upon black.”⁴⁷

Not only was the Soviet army not in disarray even in the first days and weeks of the attack and on the contrary it put up “tenacious resistance,” but it was well directed, as revealed among other things by Stalin’s “determination to stop the German advance at the point that was decisive for him.” The results of this shrewd military guidance are also revealed at the diplomatic level: It is precisely because it was “impressed by the stubborn clash in the Smolensk area” that Japan, which was present there with observers, decided to reject the request of the Third Reich to participate in the war against the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ The analysis of the proudly anti-communist German historian is fully confirmed by Russian scholars in the wake of the *Khrushchev Report* who distinguished themselves as champions of the fight

44 Ibid., pp. 1665-6.

45 Liddel Hart (2007), pp. 417-8.

46 Hillgruber (1991), p. 354.

47 Ibid., pp. 358-60.

48 Ibid., pp. 372 and 369.

against “Stalinism”: “The [German] Blitzkrieg plans had already been wrecked by mid-July.”⁴⁹ In this context, the homage paid by Churchill and F. D. Roosevelt to the “splendid defense” of the Soviet army on August 14, 1941 does not appear merely formal.⁵⁰ Even outside diplomatic and government circles, in Great Britain—a diary entry by Beatrice Webb informs us—ordinary citizens and even those with conservative leanings show “lively interest in the surprising courage, initiative and magnificent equipment of the Red armed Forces—the one and only sovereign state that has been able to stand up to the almost mythical might of Hitler’s Germany.”⁵¹ In Germany itself, as early as three weeks after the start of Operation Barbarossa, rumors began to circulate that radically cast doubt on the triumphalist line of the regime. This is what emerges from the diary of an eminent German intellectual of Jewish origin: apparently, in the East “we were suffering tremendous losses, had underestimated the Russians’ power of resistance [...] in terms of troops and also of armaments they were inexhaustible.”⁵²

Long read as an expression of military-political ignorance or even blind trust in the Third Reich, Stalin’s extremely cautious conduct in the weeks leading up to the outbreak of hostilities now appears in a completely different light: “The relatively open concentration of Wehrmacht forces along the Soviet border, the violations of Soviet airspace and numerous other provocations had only a single purpose: to draw the main forces of the Red Army as close to the border as possible. Hitler wanted to win the war in one gigantic battle.” Even valiant generals felt attracted by the trap and, in anticipation of the enemy’s irruption, pressed for a massive movement of troops to the frontier. Later, having seen the strategic plans of the architects of Operation Barbarossa, Marshal Georgy K. Zhukov recognized the wisdom of the line adopted by Stalin: “Hitler’s command was counting on us bringing our main forces up to the border with the intention of surrounding and destroying them.”⁵³

In fact, in the months leading up to the invasion of the USSR, discussing with his generals, the Führer observed, “Problem of Russian space. The infinite range of space requires the concentration

49 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), p. 252.

50 In Butler (2005), p. 41.

51 Webb (1982-85), vol. 4, p. 472 (journal entry of 8 August 1941).

52 Klemperer (1996), vol. 1, p. 647 (journal entry of 13 July 1941).

53 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), pp. 259-60.

at decisive points.”⁵⁴ Later, when Operation Barbarossa had already begun, he further clarified his thoughts in a conversation: “In the history of the world there have only been three battles of annihilation so far: Cannae, Sedan and Tannenberg. We can be proud of the fact that two of them were fought victoriously by German armies.” However, for Germany, the third and greatest decisive battle of encirclement and annihilation coveted by Hitler was increasingly elusive. A week later, Hitler is forced to acknowledge that Operation Barbarossa had seriously underestimated the enemy: “the Russian military preparation must be considered fantastic.”⁵⁵ Transparent here is the gambler’s desire to justify the failure of his predictions. And, however, the already mentioned English scholar of military strategy comes to a similar conclusion: the reason for the defeat of the French lies “not in quantity or quality of equipment, but in their theory”; moreover, the army’s overly advanced deployment acts ruinously, “largely coasting away its strategic flexibility”; a similar error was also committed by Poland, “buttressed by national pride and military over-confidence.” None of this occurs in the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

More important than the individual battles is the overall picture: “The Stalinist system succeeded in mobilizing the vast majority of the population and almost all of the resources”; in particular, “extraordinary” was the “ability of the Soviets,” in a situation as difficult as the one created in the first months of the war, “to evacuate and then reconvert a considerable number of industries for military production.” Yes, “set up two days after the German invasion, the Committee for evacuation succeeded in moving 1,500 large industrial companies to the east, at the end of titanic operations of great logistical complexity.”⁵⁷ This process of evacuation, however, had not always been easy. Moreover, this process of dislocation had already begun in the weeks or months preceding Hitler’s aggression (*infra*, ch. 7, § 3), further confirming the fanciful nature of the accusation launched by Khrushchev.

There is more. The Soviet ruling group had in some way guessed the modalities of the war, which was looming on the horizon, already at the moment in which it had promoted the industrialization of the

54 Hitler (1965), p. 1682 (statement of 30 March 1941).

55 Hitler (1989), p. 70 (conversation of 10 September 1941) and Hitler (1980), p. 61 (conversation of 17-18 September 1941).

56 Liddel Hart (2007), pp. 404, 400, and 392.

57 Werth (2007a), pp. 352 and 359-60.

country: with a radical change from the previous situation, it had identified “a focal point in Asiatic Russia,” far away and sheltered from the presumptive aggressors.⁵⁸ In fact, Stalin had insisted on this repeatedly and vigorously.

On January 31, 1931, he called for the “creating [of] new, technically well-equipped industries in the Urals, in Siberia, in Kazakhstan.” A few years later, a report pronounced on January 26, 1934, at the XVIIth Congress of the CPSU had self-assuredly called attention to the powerful industrial development that had taken place in Central Asia, in Kazakhstan, in Buryat-Mongolia, in Tataria, in Bashkiria, in the Urals, in Eastern and Western Siberia, in the Far East, etc.”⁵⁹ The implications of all this had not escaped Trotsky, who a few years later, in analyzing the dangers of war and the degree of preparedness of the Soviet Union and in emphasizing the results achieved by the “planned economy” in the “military” sphere, had observed: “the industrialization of the outlying regions, especially Siberia, has given a wholly new value to the steppe and forest spaces.”⁶⁰ Only now did the great spaces take on their full value and make the blitzkrieg strategy traditionally desired and prepared for by the German General Staff more problematic than ever.

It was precisely in the area of the industrial apparatus built up in anticipation of the war that the Third Reich was forced to record its bitterest surprises, as emerges from two of Hitler’s comments.

November 29, 1941: “How can such a primitive people manage such technical achievements in such a short time?”⁶¹

August 26, 1942: “With regard to Russia, it is incontestable that Stalin has raised living standards. The Russian people were not being starved [at the time of the start of Operation Barbarossa]. Overall, we must recognize that: workshops of the scale of the *Hermann Goering Werke* have been built where two years ago there were only unknown villages. We are discovering railway lines that are not on the maps.”⁶²

At this point, I would like to give the floor to three very different scholars (one Russian and the other two Westerners). The first, who at one time directed the Soviet Institute of Military History and

58 Tucker (1990), pp. 97-8.

59 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 67 and 274.

60 Trotsky (1988), p. 930; Trotsky, 1968, p. 207.

61 From an interview with Fritz Todt, reported in Irving (2001), p. 550.

62 Hitler (1980), p. 366 (conversation on August 26, 1942).

who shared the militant anti-Stalinism of the Gorbachev years, seems inspired by the intention to resume and radicalize the indictment of the *Khrushchev Report*. And yet, from the very results of his research he feels compelled to formulate a much more nuanced judgment: without being a specialist and much less the genius depicted by official propaganda, already in the years preceding the outbreak of war, Stalin was intensely concerned with the problems of defense, the defense industry and the war economy as a whole. Yes, on a strictly military level, only through trial and error, including serious examples of the latter, and “thanks to the hard practice of everyday military life,” did he “gradually learn the principles of strategy.”⁶³ In other areas, however, his thinking turns out to be “more developed than that of many Soviet military leaders.” Thanks also to his long practice of managing political power, Stalin never loses sight of the central role of the war economy, and he contributes to strengthening the resistance of the USSR by transferring the war industries inward: “it is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of this endeavor.”⁶⁴ Finally, the Soviet leader paid great attention to the political-moral dimension of war. In this field he “had ideas quite out of the ordinary,” as evidenced by the “courageous and far-sighted” decision, made despite the skepticism of his collaborators, to carry out the military parade celebrating the anniversary of the October Revolution on November 7, 1941, in a Moscow besieged and pressed by the Nazi enemy. In summary, it can be said that compared to the career military and the circle of his collaborators in general, “Stalin testifies to a more universal thought.”⁶⁵ And it is a thought—one can add—that does not neglect even the most minute aspects of the life and morale of the soldiers: having been informed of the fact that they had run out of cigarettes, thanks also to his ability to handle “a Herculean workload,” “he made time during the battle of Stalingrad to telephone Akaki Mgeladze, Party boss of Abkhazia, where the tobacco was grown: ‘Our soldiers have nothing to smoke! Tobacco’s absolutely necessary at the front!’”⁶⁶

The two Western authors go even further in their positive appreciation of Stalin as a military leader. If Khrushchev insists on the overwhelming initial successes of the Wehrmacht, the first of the

63 Volkogonov (1989), pp. 501 and 570.

64 Ibid., pp. 501, 641 and 570-2.

65 Ibid., pp. 597, 644 and 641.

66 Montefiore (2007), p. 503.

two scholars I refer to here expresses this same fact in very different language: it is not surprising that “the greatest invasion in military history” achieved initial successes; and therefore the Red Army’s recovery after the devastating blows of the German invasion in June 1941 was “the greatest feat of arms the world had ever seen.”⁶⁷ The second scholar, a professor at a U.S. military academy, starting from an understanding of the conflict from a long-term perspective and from the attention paid to the rear as well as to the front and to the economic and political dimension as well as to the more properly military dimension of the war, speaks of Stalin as a “great strategist,” indeed as the “first true strategist of the twentieth century.”⁶⁸ It is an overall judgment that also finds full agreement with the other Western scholar cited here, whose basic thesis, summarized in the cover flap of his book, identifies Stalin as the “greatest military leader of the twentieth century.” One can obviously discuss or nuance such flattering judgments; but the fact remains that, at least as far as the subject of war is concerned, the portrait drawn by Khrushchev has lost all credibility.

All the more so since, at the time of the ordeal, the USSR revealed itself to be very well prepared also from another essential point of view. Let us return to Goebbels who, in explaining the unforeseen difficulties of Operation Barbarossa, refers not only to the enemy’s war potential, but also to another factor:

For our confidants and our spies it was almost impossible to penetrate inside the Soviet Union. They could not acquire a precise vision. The Bolsheviks have worked directly to deceive us. Of a number of weapons they possessed, especially heavy weapons, we were unable to learn anything clearly. Exactly the opposite occurred in France, where we knew practically everything and could not have been surprised at all.⁶⁹

THE LACK OF “COMMON SENSE” AND THE “MASS DEPORTATIONS OF ENTIRE POPULATIONS”

In 1913, Stalin wrote a book that established him as a theorist on the national question. Immediately, after the October Revolution, he served as commissioner of nationalities and gained the respect of di-

67 Roberts (2006), pp. 81 and 4.

68 Schneider (1994), pp. 278-9 and 232.

69 Goebbels (1992), p. 1656 (diary entry of August 19, 1941).

verse figures such as Arendt and De Gasperi for his work in this role. His reflections on the national question had finally led to an essay on linguistics, committed to demonstrating that, far from disappearing following the overthrow of the political power of a particular social class, the language of a nation has a remarkable stability, just as the nation that expresses itself through it enjoys considerable stability. This essay, too, had helped solidify Stalin's reputation as a theorist of the national question. Still, in 1965, even in a context of harsh condemnation, Louis Althusser attributed to Stalin the merit of having opposed the "madness" that pretended "making strenuous efforts to prove language a superstructure": thanks to these "simple pages"—the French philosopher concluded—"we could see that there were limits to the use of the class criterion."⁷⁰ The desecration-liquidation in which Khrushchev engaged in 1956 therefore made a point of targeting, in order to ridicule, Stalin's reputation as a theorist and politician who had devoted particular attention to the national question. In condemning "the mass deportations of entire nations," the *Secret Speech* declares:

No Marxist-Leninist, no man of common sense can grasp how it is possible to make whole nations responsible for inimical activity, including women, children, old people, Communists and Komsomols [members of the *Young Communist League*], to use mass repression against them, and to expose them to misery and suffering for the hostile acts of individual persons or groups of persons.⁷¹

It is indisputable that collective punishment and deportation imposed on populations suspected of little patriotic loyalty is horrific. Unfortunately, far from referring to the madness of a single individual, this practice deeply characterizes the Second Thirty Years' War, starting with tsarist Russia which, although allied with the liberal West, during the First World War experienced "a wave of deportations" of "unknown dimensions in Europe," involving about a million people (mainly of Jewish or Germanic origin).⁷² On a smaller scale, but all the more significant, is the extent to which Americans of Japanese origin were deported and imprisoned in concentration camps during the Second World War (*infra*, ch. 4, § 7).

In addition to the purpose of removing a potential fifth column, the expulsion and deportation of entire populations was promoted as

70 Althusser (1967), p. 6.

71 Khrushchev (1958), p. 187.

72 Graziosi (2007), pp. 70-1.

a methodology of remaking or redefining political geography. During the first half of the twentieth century, this practice raged on a planetary level, from the Middle East, where the Jews who had just escaped the “final solution” forced the Arabs and Palestinians to flee, to Asia, in the jewel of the British Empire, where the partition between India and Pakistan led to the “the world’s greatest forced migration of the century.”⁷³ Still, on the Asian continent, it is worth taking a look at what happened in a region administered by a personality, or in the name of a personality (the 14th Dalai Lama), later destined to win the Nobel Peace Prize and become synonymous with non-violence: “In July 1949 all the Han residents [of different generations] in Lhasa had been expelled from Tibet” in order to “counter the possibility of ‘fifth column’ activity” as well as make the demographic composition more homogeneous.⁷⁴

We are dealing with a practice not only implemented in the most diverse geographic and political-cultural areas, but in those decades also explicitly advocated for and theorized by important figures. In 1938, David Ben Gurion, the future founding father of Israel, declared, “I support compulsory transfer [of the Palestinian Arabs]. I don’t see anything immoral in it.”⁷⁵ Indeed, he would consistently adhere to and enact that program ten years later.

But here it is necessary to focus attention primarily on Central and Eastern Europe, where a tragedy occurred that has been removed from memory, but is among the greatest of the twentieth century. In all, some sixteen and a half million Germans were forced to leave their homes, and two and a half million did not survive the gigantic ethnic cleansing or counter-cleansing operation.⁷⁶ In this case, it is possible to make a direct comparison between Stalin on the one hand and Western and pro-Western statesmen on the other. What attitude did the latter take in such circumstances? We always analyze this first from a historiography that cannot be suspected of indulgence towards the Soviet Union:

It was the British government that from 1942 pushed for a general transfer of population from the East German territories and the Sudetenland [...]. Farther than anyone else was Undersecretary of State Sergeant, who called for an investigation ‘whether Britain should not encourage the transfer of Germans from

73 Towers (2000), p. 617.

74 Grunfeld (1996), p. 107.

75 In Pappe (2008), p. 3.

76 MacDonogh (2007), p. 1.

East Prussia and Upper Silesia to Siberia.⁷⁷

Speaking in the House of Commons on December 15, 1944 on the planned “transference of several millions” Germans, Churchill clarified his thoughts thus:

For expulsion is the method which, so far as we have been able to see, will be the most satisfactory and lasting. There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble, as has been the case in Alsace-Lorraine. A clean sweep will be made. I am not alarmed by the prospect of the disentanglement of populations, nor even by these large transfereces, which are more possible in modern conditions than they ever were before.⁷⁸

The deportation plans were then adhered to in June 1943 by F. D. Roosevelt; “almost at the same time Stalin consented to Beneš’s pressure for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia to be restored.”⁷⁹ A U.S. historian then believes that from this he must draw this conclusion:

In the end, there was virtually no difference between noncommunist and communist politicians on the issue of the expulsions of Germans in postwar Czechoslovakia or Poland. When it came to the issue of the forced deportation of the Germans, Benes and Gottwald, Mikolajczyk and Bierut, Stalin and Churchill all danced to the same tune.⁸⁰

This conclusion alone would be enough to refute the black-and-white contrast implied by the Khrushchev’s *Secret Speech*. In reality, at least with regard to the Germans in Eastern Europe, it was not Stalin who took the initiative in the “mass deportations of entire populations”; the responsibilities were not distributed equally. The same American historian previously quoted acknowledges this. In Czechoslovakia, Jan Masaryk expressed the conviction that “the German possesses no soul, and the words that he understands best are the salvos of a machine gun.” This attitude was far from isolated: “Even the Czech Catholic Church made its voice heard. Monsignor Bohumil Stasek, canon of Vysehrad, declared: ‘Once in a thousand years the time has come to settle the accounts with the Germans, who are evil and to whom the commandment to love thy neighbor

77 Hillgruber (1991), p. 439.

78 Churchill (1974), p. 7069.

79 Hillgruber (1991), p. 439.

80 Naimark (2002), p. 134.

therefore does not apply.”⁸¹ Under these circumstances, a German witness recalls, “Often we had to appeal to the Russians to help us against the Czechs, which they often did, when it wasn’t a matter of hunting down women.”⁸² But there is more. Let us again turn to the words of the American historian: “At the former Nazi camp at Theresienstadt (Teresin), the interned Germans worried openly about what would happen to them if the local Russian commandant did not protect them against the Czechs.” A secret Soviet report sent to Moscow to the Central Committee of the Communist Party reported on the pleas addressed to the Soviet troops to stay: “‘If the Red Army leaves, we are finished!’ We now see the manifestations of hatred for the Germans. They [the Czechs] don’t kill them, but torment them like livestock. The Czechs look at them like cattle.” In fact, continues the historian, “the horrible treatment at the hands of the Czechs led to despair and hopelessness. According to Czech statistics, in 1946 alone 5,558 Germans committed suicide.”⁸³ Something similar happened in Poland. In conclusion:

The Germans considered Soviet military personnel much more humane and responsible than the native Czechs or Poles. Russians occasionally fed hungry German children, while the Czechs let them starve. Soviet troops would occasionally give the weary Germans a ride on their vehicles during their long treks out of the country, while Czechs looked on with contempt or indifference.⁸⁴

The U.S. historian speaks of “Czechs” or “Poles” in general, but not quite correctly, as is evident from his own account:

The Czechoslovak communists—and other communists as well—found themselves in a difficult position when it came to the question of expelling the Germans. During the war, the communists’ position, articulated by Georgi Dimitrov in Moscow, was that those Germans responsible for the war and its crimes should be tried and sentenced, while the German workers and peasants should be re-educated.⁸⁵

“In fact, in Czechoslovakia it was the Communists who put an end to the persecution of the few remaining ethnic minorities after they seized power in February 1948.”⁸⁶

81 Ibid., p. 136.

82 Ibid., pp. 137-8.

83 Ibid., p. 139.

84 Ibid., p. 138.

85 Ibid., p. 133.

86 Deák (2002), p. 48.

Contrary to Khrushchev's insinuations, in comparison to bourgeois leaders of Western and Central-Eastern Europe, at least in this case it was Stalin and the communist movement he led that proved to be less lacking in "common sense."

This does not happen by chance. While at the end of the war, F.D. Roosevelt declares to be "more bloodthirsty than ever towards the Germans" for the atrocities committed by them and even goes so far as to entertain, for some time, the idea of "castration" of such a perverse people. Stalin's attitude is quite different: immediately after the unleashing of Operation Barbarossa, he declares that the Soviet resistance can count on the support of "all the best men in Germany" and even of the "the German people which is enslaved by the Hitlerite misrulers."⁸⁷ Particularly solemn is the stance taken in August 1942:

It would be ludicrous to identify Hitler's clique with the German people, with the German state. The experience of history indicates that Hitlers come and go, but the German people and the German state remain. The strength of the Red Army lies, finally, in the fact that it does not and cannot feel racial hatred for other peoples, including the German people; that it has been trained in the spirit of equality of all peoples and races, in the spirit of respect for the rights of other peoples.⁸⁸

Even an inflexible anti-communist such as Ernst Nolte is forced to recognize that the attitude taken by the Soviet Union towards the German people does not present those racist overtones, sometimes found in Western powers.⁸⁹ To conclude on this point, if not equally distributed, the lack of "common sense" was widespread among the political leaders of the twentieth century.

Up to this point I have dealt with deportations caused by war and the danger of war, or rather by the remaking and redefinition of political geography. At least until the 1940s, in the United States deportations continued to rage from urban centers that wanted to be, as the signs placed at their entrances warned, for whites only. In addition to African Americans, Mexicans, reclassified as non-white according to a 1930 census, are also affected: "thousands of workers and their families, including many Americans of Mexican origin" are deported to Mexico. The measures of expulsion and deportation from cities intended to be "only for whites" or "only for Caucasians"

87 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, pp. 238 and 241.

88 Ibid., pp. 266-7.

89 See Losurdo (1996), ch. 4, § 2 (for Nolte) and ch. 4, § 5 (for F. D. Roosevelt and the "castration" of Germans).

do not even spare Jews.⁹⁰

The *Secret Speech* portrays Stalin as a tyrant so lacking in a sense of reality that, in taking collective measures against certain ethnic groups, he did not hesitate to strike at the innocent and at his own party comrades. It makes one think of the story of the German exiles (mostly declared enemies of Hitler) who, immediately after the outbreak of war with Germany, are locked up *en bloc* in French concentration camps (*infra*, ch. 4, § 7). But there is no point in seeking an effort at comparative analysis in Khrushchev's speech.

The *Speech* aims at upending two motifs, which up to that moment were widespread not only in official propaganda but also in international publicity and public opinion: the great leader who had contributed in a decisive way to the annihilation of the Third Reich is thus transformed into a ruinous amateur who can hardly orient himself on the world map; the eminent theorist of the national question in this very field proves to be devoid of the most elementary "common sense." The recognitions paid to Stalin up to that moment are all put on the account of a cult of personality that now we have to liquidate once and for all.

THE CULT OF PERSONALITY IN RUSSIA FROM KERENSKY TO STALIN

The denunciation of the cult of personality is Khrushchev's strong point. In his report, however, a question is absent that should be asked: are we dealing with the vanity and narcissism of a single political leader, or with a more general phenomenon rooted in a specific, objective context? It may be interesting to read the observations made by Bukharin while in the U.S., as the country was engaged in fervent preparations for intervention in the First World War:

In order for the state machine to be better prepared for military tasks, it transforms itself into a military organization, at whose command there is a dictator. This dictator is President Wilson. He has been granted exceptional powers. He has almost absolute power. And attempts are made to install in the people servile feelings for the "great president," as in ancient Byzantium where they had deified their monarch.⁹¹

In situations of acute crisis, the personalization of power tends

90 Loewen (2006), pp. 42 and 125-7.

91 Bukharin (1984), p. 73.

to be intertwined with the transfiguration of the leader who holds it. When he sets foot in France in December 1918, the victorious American president is hailed as the Savior and his fourteen points are compared to the Sermon on the Mount.⁹²

Especially thought-provoking are the political processes occurring in the United States in the period from the Great Crisis to World War II. Having ascended to the presidency with the promise of remedying a very worrying economic and social situation, F. D. Roosevelt was elected for four consecutive terms (even though he died at the beginning of the fourth): a unique case in the history of his country. Beyond the long duration of this presidency, the expectations and hopes surrounding it are also out of the ordinary. Authoritative personalities call for a “national dictator” and invite the new president to show all his energy: “[Become] a tyrant, a despot, a real monarch. In the World War we took our Constitution, wrapped it up and laid it on the shelf and left it there until it was over.” The permanence of the state of exception demands that we not be jammed with excessive legal scruples. The nation’s new leader is called to be and is already being called “a providential person,” or, in the words of Cardinal O’Connell, “a God-sent man.” People on the street write and address F. D. Roosevelt in even more emphatic terms, declaring that they look to him “almost as they look to God” and hope to one day place him “in the halls of immortals beside Jesus.”⁹³ Invited to behave like a dictator and a man of Providence, the new president makes ample use of his executive power on the first day or in the first hours of his mandate. In his inaugural message he demands “broad executive power [...] as great as the power that would be given me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.”⁹⁴ With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, even before Pearl Harbor, F.D. Roosevelt began on his own initiative to drag the country into the war on England’s side; later, with an executive order issued in a sovereign manner, he imposed the imprisonment in concentration camps of all American citizens of Japanese origin, including women and children. This is a presidency that, if on the one hand enjoys widespread popular devotion, on the other hand raises cries of “totalitarian” danger. This occurred on the occasion of the Great Crisis (when the indictment was pro-

92 In Hoopes, Brinkley (1997), p. 2.

93 Schlesinger jr. (1959-65), vol. 2, pp. 3-15.

94 Nevins, Commager (1960), p. 455.

nounced by former president Hoover)⁹⁵ and especially in the months preceding the intervention in World War II (when Senator Burton K. Wheeler accused F. D. Roosevelt of exercising “dictatorial power” and promoting a “totalitarian form of government”).⁹⁶ At least from the perspective of the president’s opponents, totalitarianism and cult of personality had crossed the Atlantic.

Of course, the phenomenon we are investigating here (the personalization of power and the cult of personality connected to it) only appeared in embryonic form in the North American Republic, protected by the ocean from any attempt at invasion and with a political tradition quite different from that of Russia behind it. It is in that country that attention must be focused. Let’s see what happens between February and October 1917, before the Bolsheviks come to power. Driven by his personal vanity, but also by the desire to stabilize the situation, we find Kerensky beginning “to model himself on Napoleon”: while he reviewed the troops he “even wore his right arm in a sling”; all the while, “A bust of the French Emperor stood on his desk at the Ministry of War.” The results of this *mise-en-scène* were not long in coming: poems that paid homage to Kerensky as a new Napoleon flourished.⁹⁷ On the eve of the summer offensive, which should have definitively raised the fortunes of the Russian army, the cult reserved for Kerensky (in certain restricted circles) reaches its peak:

Everywhere he was hailed as a hero. Soldiers carried him shoulder-high, pelted him with flowers and threw themselves at his feet. An English nurse watched in amazement as they “kissed him, his uniform, his car, and the ground on which he walked. Many of them were on their knees praying; others were weeping.”⁹⁸

As you can see, it doesn’t make much sense to attribute to Stalin’s narcissism, as Khrushchev does, the exalted form that the cult of personality takes in the USSR from a certain point onwards. In fact, when Kaganovich proposes to him to replace the term Marxism-Leninism with that of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the leader to whom such homage is addressed responds, “How can you compare a dick to a watchtower?”⁹⁹ At least when compared to Kerensky, Stalin appears more modest. This is confirmed by the attitude he assumed at the

95 Johnson (1991), p. 256.

96 In Hofstadter (1982), vol. 3, pp. 392-3.

97 Figes (2000), pp. 499-500.

98 Ibid., pp. 503-4.

99 In Marcucci (1997), pp. 156-7.

conclusion of a war that was actually won and not only in his imagination, as in the case of the Menshevik leader with a fondness for Napoleonic poses. Immediately after the victory parade, a group of marshals contacted Molotov and Malenkov: they proposed to solemnize the triumph achieved during the Great Patriotic War, conferring the title of “hero of the Soviet Union” to Stalin, who however declined the offer.¹⁰⁰ The Soviet leader also avoided rhetorical emphasis at the Potsdam Conference: “both Churchill and Truman took time to drive around the ruins of Berlin. Stalin displayed no such interest. He arrived quietly by train, even ordering Zhukov to cancel any plans he might have had to welcome him with a military band and a guard of honor.”¹⁰¹ Four years later, on the eve of his seventieth birthday, a conversation takes place in the Kremlin that is worth reporting:

He [Stalin] summons Malenkov and admonishes him: “Don’t get it into your head to honor me with a ‘star’ again.” “But, Comrade Stalin, such an anniversary! The people would not understand.” “Do not appeal to the people. I have no intention of quarreling. No personal initiative! Do you understand me?” “Of course, Comrade Stalin, but the members of the Politburo are of the opinion...” Stalin interrupts Malenkov and declares that the matter is closed.

Of course, it can be said that in the circumstances reported here political calculation plays a more or less large role (and it would be very strange if it did not); it is a fact, however, that personal vanity does not take over. Much less does it gain the upper hand when vital political or military decisions are at stake: during the Second World War, Stalin invited his interlocutors to express themselves without mincing words, he had lively discussions and even argued with Molotov, who, in turn, while taking care not to question the hierarchy, continued to stand by his opinion. Judging by the testimony of Admiral Nikolai Kusnezov, the supreme leader “even liked people who had their own point of view and weren’t afraid to stand up for it.”¹⁰²

Interested as he was in pointing to Stalin as the one responsible for all the catastrophes that befell the USSR, far from dismissing the cult of personality, Khrushchev limited himself to transforming it into a negative cult. His view remains that *in principio erat Stalin!* [in the beginning there was Stalin!] Even when dealing with the most

100 Volkogonov (1989), p. 707.

101 Roberts (2006), p. 272.

102 Volkogonov (1989), p. 707 (for the conversation between Stalin and Malenkov); Montefiore (2007), pp. 498-9.

tragic chapter in the history of the Soviet Union (the terror and the bloody purges, which raged on a large scale and in no way spared the Communist Party), the *Secret Speech* has no doubts: it is a horror to be attributed almost exclusively to an individual thirsting for power and possessed by a bloody paranoia.

2

THE BOLSHEVIKS:
FROM IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT
TO CIVIL WAR

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE DIALECTIC OF SATURN

In Khrushchev's eyes, Stalin was guilty of horrendous crimes to the detriment of his own party comrades, deviating from the high road of Leninism and Bolshevism and betraying the ideals of socialism. However, it is precisely the reciprocal accusation of betrayal that, by stimulating or deepening the internal divisions within the same leading group that was the protagonist of October 1917, contributes significantly to the tragedies that befell Soviet Russia. How to explain these splits? The dialectic on the basis of which "Saturn devours his children" is certainly not an exclusive characteristic of the October Revolution: the choral unity that presides over the overthrow of an ancient regime now disliked by the majority of the population inevitably cracks or disappears when it comes to deciding on the new order to be built. This also applied to the English Revolution and the American Revolution.¹ But this dialectic manifested itself in Russia in a particularly violent and prolonged way. Already at the moment of the collapse of the tsarist autocracy, while attempts at monarchical restoration or the establishment of a military dictatorship followed one another, within the ranks of those who were determined to avoid a return to the past, there were nonetheless painful choices to be made: should they commit oneself first and foremost to peace or, as the Mensheviks thought, maintain or even expand the war effort, stirring support now in Russia as well for democratic interventionism?

The victory of the Bolsheviks certainly does not put an end to

1 Cf. Losurdo (1996), ch. 11.

Saturn's dialectic, which on the contrary becomes even more bitter. Lenin's call for the conquest of power and for the socialist transformation of the revolution appears as an intolerable deviation from Marxism in the eyes of Kamenev and Zinoviev, who make the Mensheviks aware of the situation and thus attract in turn the accusation of betrayal launched by the majority of the Bolshevik party. It is a debate that goes beyond the borders of Russia and of the Communist movement itself: the Social Democrats are the first to cry out in rage at the abandonment of orthodoxy, which excluded the socialist revolution in a country that had not yet gone through full capitalist development, while Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg are on one side condemning the Leninist acceptance of the slogan of 'land to the peasants' as an abandonment of the path to socialism.

But here we should concentrate on the divisions that occurred within the Bolshevik leadership proper. Explaining the particularly devastating force that the dialectic of Saturn assumes are the messianic expectations aroused by an interweaving of circumstances, objective and subjective. There was a universally diffused dismay and indignation at the immense carnage and the configuration of different States in struggle [in WWI] as bloodthirsty Molochs, determined to sacrifice millions and millions of people on the altar of the defense of the homeland, hiding the real motives of imperialistic competition for world hegemony. This stimulated the push for a totally new political-social order: it was a question of cutting once and for all the roots of the horrors that had been manifested since 1914. Further fueled by a worldview (which with Marx and Engels seems to invoke a future devoid of national borders, mercantile relations, state apparatus, and even juridical coercion) and by an almost religious relationship with the texts of the founding fathers of the communist movement, this claim cannot fail to be disappointed as the construction of the new order begins to take shape.

This is why, long before it burst into the center of Trotsky's reflection and denunciation, after having already appeared at the moment of the collapse of the tsarist autocracy, the motif of the revolution betrayed accompanied the history that began with the rise to power of the Bolsheviks like a shadow. The accusation or suspicion of betrayal emerged at every turning point of this particularly tortuous revolution, pushed by the needs of government action to rethink certain original utopian motives and still forced to limit its great ambitions with the extreme difficulty of the objective situation.

The first challenge faced by the new power was represented by the disintegration of the state apparatus and by the spread of an irreducible anarchism among the peasants (still beyond any state and national vision, therefore substantially indifferent to the drama of the cities, deprived of food and resources), and inclined to found ephemeral "Peasant Republics." The same occurred among the deserters, now averse to any discipline (as is confirmed by the emergence in a district of Bessarabia of a "Free Republic of Deserters"). In this case, they branded Trotsky as a traitor who, as a leader of the army, was in the front line in the work of re-establishing central power and the very principle of the State. Here then were the peasants, the deserters (among whom there is no shortage from the Red Army), and the displaced invoking "true" socialism and "true" Soviets, lamenting Lenin (who had endorsed or stimulated the revolt against state power) and identifying Trotsky and Jews² as vulgar usurpers.³ The uprising of the sailors of Kronstadt in 1921 can be inserted in this same context. Apparently, on that occasion, Stalin pronounced himself in favor of a more cautious approach, i.e., waiting for the besieged fortress to run out of food and fuel; but, in a situation in which the dangers of internal civil war and the intervention of counterrevolutionary powers had not yet disappeared, the immediate military solution ended up being imposed. And again to be branded as "supporter of the bureaucratic organization," "dictator" and ultimately traitor to the original spirit of the revolution is the "gendarme," or rather "Marshal" Trotsky. The latter, in turn, suspected Zinoviev of having fueled for weeks the agitation that led to the revolt, demagogically waving the flag of "workers' democracy [...] as in 1917."⁴ As we can see, the first accusation of "treason" marks the passage, inevitable in every revolution but all the more painful in a revolution that broke out in the name of the extinction of the state, from the moment of the over-

2 **Ed. Note:** Incipient antisemitism permeated the culture of the Russian Empire, including many leftist formations, which carried over into the revolutionary state. This phenomenon tragically brought to life Marx's remarks from *Critique of the Gotha Program* that any new society is "stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes." Legislating against antisemitism and the protection of the rights of national minorities was enshrined in the Soviet Constitution of 1918. See later chapters for in-depth discussions of antisemitism. In this text 'antisemitism' (and its related grammatical forms) will be used except where a direct quotation use 'anti-Semitism' (and its respective forms).

3 Werth (2007a), pp. 49-50.

4 Broué (1991), pp. 274-7.

throw of the old regime to the construction of the new order, from the “libertarian” phase to the “authoritarian” one. And, of course, the accusation or suspicion of “treason” is intertwined with personal ambitions and the struggle for power.

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS “WILL CLOSE UP SHOP”

The patriotic rhetoric and national hatreds, partly “spontaneous” and in part cleverly stirred up, had resulted in the slaughter of imperialist war. The need to put an end to all this appeared urgent. Thus emerged in certain sectors of the communist movement a completely unrealistic internationalism, which tended to dismiss the different national identities as mere prejudice. Let us see in what terms, at the beginning of 1918, Bukharin opposed not only the peace of Brest-Litovsk but any attempt by the Soviet power to use the contradictions between the various imperialist powers, making agreements or compromises with one or the other: “What are we doing? We are turning the party into a dung heap [...]. We always said [...] that sooner or later the Russian Revolution would clash with international capital. That moment has come.”⁵

Bukharin’s disappointment and discomfort are well understood. About two years earlier, he had contrasted the war to the death between the great capitalist powers and between the various nation-states and the chauvinistic turn of social democracy with the prospect of a humanity finally unified and united, thanks to the “social revolution of the international proletariat which overthrows the dictatorship of finance capital with an armed hand... [with] the Socialist epigones of Marxism” (responsible for having forgotten or obscured the “well-known thesis of the *Communist Manifesto*,” according to which “the workers have no fatherland”) defeated along with the bourgeoisie, “the last limitation of the proletariat’s philosophy is being overcome: its clinging to the narrowness of the national state, its patriotism”; “this power advances the slogan of *abolishing* state boundaries and merging all the peoples into one Socialist family.”⁶

This is not the illusion of a single personality. In assuming the post of People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Trotsky had declared: “I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the

5 In Cohen (1975), p. 75.

6 Bukharin (1966), pp. 329-31.

world, then I will close up shop.”⁷ With the advent, on the ruins of the war and on the wave of the world revolution, of a unified humanity on a planetary level, the first ministry to prove superfluous would be the one that normally presides over the relations between the different states. Compared to this exciting prospect, how mediocre and degenerate the reality and the political project highlighted by the Brest-Litovsk negotiations appeared, with the re-emergence of state and national borders and the reappearance even of the return of the state’s *raison d’être*! Not a few Bolshevik militants and leaders experienced this event as the collapse, indeed as the cowardly and treacherous abandonment, of an entire world of ideals and hopes. Certainly, it was not easy to resist the army of Wilhelm II, but to yield to German imperialism only because the Russian peasants, meanly attached to their interests and oblivious to the task imposed by the world revolution, refused to continue to fight: was this not proof of the incipient “peasant degeneration of our Party and of Soviet power”? At the end of 1924, Bukharin describes the spiritual climate at the time of Brest-Litovsk that was dominant among “the Left Communists, ‘pure-blooded’” and “the circles of comrade Trotsky’s sympathizers that sympathized with Comrade Trotsky”: in particular, he pointed out “comrade Riazanov, who then left the party, because we had, as it were, lost our proletarian innocence.”⁸ Beyond individual personalities, it was important party organizations that declared “In the interests of the world revolution, we consider it expedient to accept the possibility of losing Soviet power which is now becoming purely formal.” These words were “strange and monstrous” to Lenin,⁹ who, however, at a certain moment, was the subject of these accusations or suspicions of betrayal, and seemed to be the target of a project, albeit vague, of a coup d’état, which Bukharin was considering.¹⁰

All the prestige and energy of the great revolutionary leader was needed to overcome the crisis. However, it reappeared a few years later. With the defeat of the Central Empires and the breakout of the revolution in Germany, Austria, and Hungary and its overbearing appearance in other countries, the perspective from which the Bolsheviks had been forced to take leave in Brest-Litovsk seems to regain new vitality and relevance. In concluding the First Congress of the

7 In Carr (1964), p. 814.

8 Bukharin (1970), pp. 104-5 and note.

9 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 27, pp. 54 ff.

10 Conquest (2000), p. 35.

Communist International, Lenin himself declared: "The victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is assured. The founding of an international Soviet republic is on the way."¹¹ Thus, the imminent defeat of capitalism on a world scale would quickly be followed by the fusion of the various nations and states into a single body: once again, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was about to become superfluous!

The sunset of these illusions coincides with Lenin's illness and death. All the more serious is the new crisis because of the fact that now, within the Bolshevik party, an undisputed authority is missing. From the point of view of Trotsky and his allies and followers there could be no more doubts: the choice of "socialism in one country," with the consequent abandonment of the idea of world revolution, was not dictated by political realism and the calculation of the relations of force, but only by bureaucratic routine, opportunism, cowardice, and ultimately betrayal.

To be hit by this accusation is first and foremost Stalin, who from the beginning had paid particular attention to the 'national question,' aiming for the victory of the revolution at the international level but first and foremost in Russia. Between February and October 1917 he had presented the proletarian revolution he hoped for as the necessary instrument not only to build a new social order but also to reaffirm the national independence of Russia. The Entente¹² was trying to force Russia by every means to continue fighting and bleeding itself dry and was aiming in some way to turn it "into a colony of Britain, America and France." Worse, the Entente behaved in Russia as they would "in Central Africa."¹³ In this operation, the Mensheviks were accomplices who, with their insistence on the continuation of the war, were bowing to imperialist *diktat*, were inclined to the "gradual bartering away of Russia to foreign capitalists," were leading the country "to ruin," and thus had revealed themselves as the true "traitors" of the nation. In contrast to all this, the revolution to be carried out would not only promote the emancipation of the popular classes

11 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 28, p. 479.

12 **Ed. Note:** The 'Entente' or 'Triple Entente' WW1 military alliance established in 1907 between the Russian Empire, the British Empire, and the French Third Republic in response to the 'Triple Alliance' of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

13 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 3, pp. 127 and 269 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 161-324).

but “pave the way for the real emancipation of Russia.”¹⁴

After October, the counterrevolution, unleashed by the Whites supported or aided by the Entente, had been defeated thanks to the appeal of the Bolsheviks to the Russian people to reject the invasion of imperialist powers determined to reduce Russia to a colony or semi-colony of the West: it was on this basis that the new Soviet power had also given their support to officials of noble descent.¹⁵ And in promoting this line, Stalin had again distinguished himself, and had thus described what was at stake in the course of the civil war:

The victory of Denikin and Kolchak would mean the loss of Russia’s independence, would turn her into a *milch* cow of the British and French plutocrats. In this respect the Denikin-Kolchak government is a supremely anti-popular, anti-national government. In this respect the Soviet Government is the only popular and only national government, in the best sense of the words, because it brings with it not only the emancipation of the working people from capitalism, but also the emancipation of the whole of Russia from the yoke of world imperialism, the conversion of Russia from a colony into an independent and free country.¹⁶

On the battlefields they faced on the one hand “Russian officers, who have forgotten Russia, have lost all sense of honor and are ready to desert to the enemies of workers’ and peasants’ Russia”; on the other were Red Army soldiers, consciously “fighting not to protect capitalist profits but for the emancipation of Russia.”¹⁷ In this perspective, social struggle and national struggle were intertwined: by replacing “imperialist unity” (i.e., unity based on national oppression) with a unity based on the recognition of the principle of equality among nations, the new Soviet Russia would put an end to the “disintegration” and “complete ruin” taking place in old tsarist Russia; on the other hand, by increasing its “strength and prestige,” the new Soviet Russia would contribute to the weakening of imperialism and to the cause of the victory of the revolution in the world.¹⁸

And yet, when the civil war and the struggle against foreign intervention were at their height, the illusion had spread of a rapid expansion of socialism on the wave of the Red Army’s successes and its advance far beyond the borders sanctioned at Brest-Litovsk. Thanks

14 Ibid., pp. 197 and 175-8 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 243 and 220-2).

15 Figes (2000), pp. 840 and 837.

16 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 4, p. 252 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, pp. 312-3).

17 Ibid., pp. 236 and 131 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, pp. 293 and 166).

18 Ibid., pp. 202, 199, 208 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, pp. 252, 248 and 258).

to his realism and above all to his acute sensitivity to the national question, Stalin had pointed out the dangers of penetrating deep into Polish territory:

The rear of the Polish forces differs very substantially from that of Kolchak and Denikin—to the great advantage of Poland. Unlike the rear of Kolchak and Denikin, the rear of the Polish forces is homogeneous and nationally united. Hence its unity and staunchness. Its predominant sentiment—a “sense of motherland”—is communicated through numerous channels to the Polish Front, lending the units national cohesion and firmness.

That is to say, it was one thing to defeat an enemy in Russia who was discredited even on a national level, and quite another thing to face a nationally motivated enemy outside Russia. And, therefore, the calls for a “march on Warsaw” and the declarations according to which one could “be satisfied only with a ‘Red Soviet Warsaw’” were an expression of vacuous “boastfulness and harmful self-conceit.”¹⁹

The failure of the attempt to export socialism to Poland, which until some time before had been part of the tsarist empire, had strengthened Stalin in his convictions. In 1929 he highlighted the need to take note of a phenomenon largely unsuspected by the protagonists of the October Revolution: “the colossal power of stability possessed by nations.”²⁰ They seemed destined to be a vital force for a long period of history. And, therefore, for a long historical period, humanity would continue to be divided not only between different social systems but also between different linguistic, cultural, and national identities.

What relationship would come to be established between them? In 1936, in an interview with Roy Howard (of the *Times*) Stalin declares:

The idea of exporting a revolution is nonsense. Every country if it wants one will produce its own revolution, and if it doesn't, there will be no revolution. Thus, for instance, our country wanted to make a revolution and made it.

An outraged Trotsky commented:

Again, we have quoted verbatim. From the theory of socialism in a single country, it is a natural transition to that of revolution in a single country [...]. We more than once announced the duty of the proletariat of countries in which the revolution had conquered to come to the aid of oppressed and insurrectionary

19 Ibid., pp. 286 and 293 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, pp. 354 and 363).

20 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 11, p. 308.

classes, and that not only with ideas but if possible with arms. Nor did we limit ourselves to announcements. We in our own time aided the workers of Finland, Latvia, Estonia, and Georgia with armed force. We made an attempt to bring aid to the revolting Polish proletariat by the campaign of the Red Army against Warsaw.²¹

With the prospect for a rapid advent of the “International Soviet Republic” having faded away, and the definitive disappearance of states and national borders, Stalin asserted the principle of peaceful coexistence between countries with different social regimes. But this new principle, which was the result of a learning process and which guaranteed to the Soviet Union the right to independence in a hostile and militarily stronger world, appeared in Trotsky’s eyes as the betrayal of proletarian internationalism, as the desertion of the obligations of active mutual solidarity between the oppressed and the exploited of the whole world. Tireless is his polemic against the transformation of the original “internationalist-revolutionary” policy into a “national-conservative” one, against “the national-pacifist foreign policy of the Soviet government,” against the forgetting of the principle according to which the individual workers’ state must act only as “bridgehead of the world revolution.”²² In any case, just as the peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism is unthinkable, “a socialist state cannot peacefully merge [*bineinwachsen*] with a world capitalist system” This is an attitude that Trotsky reiterated again in 1940: it would have been better not to engage in war with Finland, but once it had begun, it should be “carried through to the end. That is, to the sovietization of Finland.”²³

TWILIGHT OF THE “MONEY ECONOMY” AND “MERCANTILE MORALITY”

The dialectic of Saturn manifests itself in numerous other areas of political and social life. Internally, how was the equality that the October regime was called upon to achieve to be understood? The war and the shortages had produced a “communism” based on the more or less equal distribution of very poor food rations. Compared to this practice and to the ideology that had developed on this basis, the shockwave raised by the New Economic Policy (NEP) was unset-

21 Trotsky (1988), pp. 905-6 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 186-7).

22 Trotsky (1997-2001), vol. 3, pp. 476, 554 and 566.

23 Trotsky (1988), pp. 1001 and 1333.

ting, with the emergence of new, strident inequalities, made possible by the tolerance granted to certain sectors of the capitalist economy. The feeling of “betrayal” was a mass phenomenon, and it hit the Bolshevik party hard: “In 1921-22 literally tens of thousands of Bolshevik workers tore up their membership cards in disgust with the NEP: they dubbed it the New Exploitation of the Proletariat.”²⁴ Even outside of Soviet Russia, we see a French communist leader resigning himself to the turning point, but at the same time adding, writing in *l'Humanité*: “The NEP brings with it a bit of the capitalist rot that had totally disappeared at the time of war communism.”²⁵

Sometimes one has the impression that it is not certain aspects of economic reality that are looked upon with distrust or indignation, but this reality as a whole. We must not lose sight of the messianic expectation that characterizes revolutions, which involve the deepest strata of the population and come about after a crisis of a long duration. In France in 1789, even before the storming of the Bastille, already present from the meeting of the *Estates General* and the agitation of the Third Estate, “in the popular soul the ancient millenarianism, the anxious expectation of the revenge of the poor and the happiness of the humiliated will be deeply impregnated in the revolutionary mentality.” In Russia, stimulated by tsarist oppression and above all by the horror of the First World War, messianism had already manifested itself forcefully on the occasion of the February Revolution. Hailing it as an Easter of resurrection, Christian circles and important sectors of Russian society had expected a total regeneration, with the emergence of an intimately unified community and the disappearance of the division between rich and poor, and even of theft, lies, gambling, blasphemy, and drunkenness.²⁶ Disappointed by Menshevik politics and the prolongation of war and carnage, this messianic expectation had subsequently inspired quite a few adherents to the Bolshevik revolution.

This is the case, for example, of Pierre Pascal, a French Catholic who was later deeply disappointed by the transition to the NEP, but who had initially greeted the October 1917 turning point in this way:

This is the very realization of the fourth psalm of the Sunday vespers, and the Magnificat: the powerful cast from their throne and the poor man lifted from his hovel [...]. There are no more rich people: only poor and poorer. Knowledge

24 Figes (2000), p. 926.

25 In Flores (1990), p. 29.

26 Furet, Richet (1980), p. 85; Figes (2000), p. 434.

no longer confers either privilege or respect. The former worker promoted to director gives orders to the engineers. Salaries, high and low, are getting closer to each other. The right to property is reduced to the rags on one's back. Judges are no longer obliged to apply the law if their sense of proletarian equity contradicts it.²⁷

Reading this passage, Marx's statement that "nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge" comes to mind. One should not think that this view circulates only among avowedly religious circles. It is the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*²⁸ that points out that the "first movements of the proletariat" are often characterized by claims under the banner of "universal asceticism and social leveling in its crudest form."²⁹ This is what occurs in Russia following the catastrophe of the First World War. In the 1940s, a Bolshevik effectively described the spiritual climate prevailing in the period immediately following the October Revolution, the climate that emerged from the horror provoked by the war caused by imperialist contention for the plundering of colonies, for the conquest of markets and raw materials, by the capitalist hunt for profit and superprofits:

We young Communists had all grown up in the belief that money was done away with once and for all [...]. If money was reappearing, wouldn't rich people reappear too? Weren't we on the slippery slope that led back to capitalism?³⁰

This spiritual climate also finds expression in the work of eminent Western philosophers. In 1918, the young Bloch called on the Soviets to put an end not only to "all private economy" but also the "money economy" and, with it, the "mercantile morality that consecrates all that is most evil in man." Only by liquidating this rot in its entirety was it possible to put an end once and for all to the struggle, for wealth and domination, and for the conquest of colonies and hegemony, which had catastrophically led to war. In publishing the second edition of *The Spirit of Utopia* in 1923, Bloch considered it appropriate to eliminate those previously mentioned passages that were of a decidedly messianic nature. Nevertheless, the mood and

27 In Furet (1995), p. 129.

28 **Ed. Note:** The original title, later republished as '*The Communist Manifesto*' in part to evade censorship restrictions. It will be referred to by the more commonly used latter title in the rest of the text.

29 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 4, pp. 484 and 489.

30 In Figs (2000), p. 926.

vision that had inspired them did not fade away either in the Soviet Union or outside it.³¹

Although the healing of the wounds opened by the First World War, the civil wars against the Whites and the kulaks, and the economic recovery attenuate it to some extent, this moral crisis is nonetheless reignited. Especially after the completion of the collectivization of agriculture and the consolidation of the new regime, it was no longer possible to refer to capitalist residues and the immediate danger of collapse to explain the phenomenon of the persistence of wage differences: were they tolerable and to what extent?

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel highlights the aporia contained in the idea of material equality which is at the basis of the claim of the “community of goods”: if one proceeds to the equal satisfaction of the different needs of individuals, it is clear that there is inequality in relation to the “share of participation,” i.e. the distribution of goods; if, on the other hand, one proceeds to an “equal distribution” of goods, then it is clear that the “satisfaction of needs” (different from time to time) is unequal in individuals. In any case, the “commonality of goods” fails to fulfill the promise of material equality. Marx, who knew *The Phenomenology of Spirit* very well, resolved the difficulty by matching (in *The Critique of Gotha’s Program*) the two different ways of rejecting “equality” (which always remains partial and limited) to two different stages of development of post-capitalist society: in the socialist stage, distribution according to an “equal right,” i.e., paying with an equal yardstick the work provided by each individual and different from time to time, produces an obvious inequality in pay and income; in this sense the “equal right” is nothing but the “right of inequality.” In the communist stage, the equal satisfaction of the various needs also entails an inequality in the distribution of resources, only that the enormous development of the productive forces, by fully satisfying the needs of all, renders this inequality irrelevant.³² That is to say, in socialism, the equal satisfaction of the various needs is the result of an unequal distribution of resources. In other words, in socialism, material equality is not possible; in communism, it no longer makes sense. Notwithstanding the inequality in the distribution of resources, the passage from the unequal satisfaction to the equal satisfaction of needs presupposes, beyond the overthrow of capitalism, the prodigious development of

31 Losurdo (1997), ch. 4, § 10.

32 Hegel (1969-79), vol. 3, p. 318; Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 19, pp. 20-1.

the productive forces, and this can be achieved only through the affirmation, in the course of the socialist stage, of the principle of the remuneration of each individual on the basis of the different work performed. Hence Marx's insistence on the fact that, once it has conquered power, the proletariat is called upon to commit itself not only to the transformation of social relations, but also to the development of the forces of production.³³ On the other hand, however, in celebrating working-class Paris as opposed to the French bourgeoisie, which wallows in luxury at the same time as it is engaged in bloody repression, Marx points to a measure passed by the Commune as a model: "the public service had to be done at *workman's wage*."³⁴ In this case, equality of pay and material equality tend to take shape as an objective of socialist society.

It is not easy to reconcile the two perspectives, and their divergence will play a not insignificant role in irreparably tearing the Bolshevik leadership and party apart. As it grew stronger, Soviet power was led to pay increasing attention to the problem of economic construction, in order both to consolidate the social base of consensus and to achieve national legitimacy in the eyes of the Russian people, and to defend "the country of socialism" from the threats looming on the horizon. Referring back to the already well-known polemic *The Communist Manifesto* against "universal asceticism and social leveling in its crudest form," Stalin insisted: "It is time it was understood that Marxism is an enemy of equalization." The equality produced by socialism consists in the elimination of class exploitation, certainly not in the imposition of uniformity and co-optation, which is the ideal to which religious primitivism aspires:

Equalization in the sphere of requirements and personal, everyday life is a reactionary petty-bourgeois absurdity worthy of some primitive sect of ascetics, but not of a socialist society organized on Marxist lines; for we cannot expect all people to have the same requirements and tastes, and all people to mould their personal, everyday life on the same model [...]. By equality Marxism means, not equalization of personal requirements and everyday life, but the abolition of classes.³⁵

Religious primitivism can express itself through the aspiration to a community life, within which individual differences are erased,

33 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 4, p. 466.

34 Ibid., vol. 17, p. 339.

35 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 314-5 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 573).

with serious damage also to the development of productive forces:

Leftist blockheads [...] at one time idealized the agricultural communes to such an extent that they even tried to set up communes in mills and factories, where skilled and unskilled workers, each working at his trade, had to pool their wages in a common fund, which was then shared out equally. You know what harm these infantile equalitarian exercises of the “Left” blockheads caused our industry.³⁶

Stalin’s long-term goal is very ambitious, both socially and nationally to “make our Soviet society the most prosperous of all societies”; to achieve the “possibility of converting our country into the most prosperous of all countries”; but in order to achieve this result, “our country must have a productivity of labor which surpasses that of the foremost capitalist countries”³⁷ which again entails recourse to material as well as moral incentives and thus overcoming the egalitarianism the Soviet leader considered crude and mechanical.

And once again, and indeed more than ever, religious primitivism makes itself felt, with its mistrust not only of wage differences, but above all of wealth as such: “If everyone becomes prosperous, they go on to say, and the poor cease to exist, upon whom then are we Bolsheviks to rely in our work?”: thus argued and agonized those who Stalin referred to as the “Leftist blockheads, who idealize the poor as the eternal bulwark of Bolshevism under all conditions.”³⁸ One is reminded of the critical remarks developed by Hegel regarding the evangelical commandment to help the poor: by losing sight of the fact that it is “a conditional precept” and making it absolute, Christians end up making even poverty absolute, which alone can give meaning to the norm that demands help for the poor. On the contrary, the seriousness of helping the poor is measured by the contribution made to overcoming poverty as such.³⁹ In the climate of horror at the carnage caused by capitalism and the *auri sacra fames* [accursed hunger for gold], a religious distrust of gold and of wealth as such is reproduced, alongside the idealization of poverty or at least of scarcity, understood and experienced as an expression of spiritual fullness or revolutionary rigor. And Stalin felt compelled to emphasize a central point: “It would be absurd to think that socialism

36 Ibid., pp. 316-7 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 575).

37 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 33 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 601).

38 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 317-9 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 575-7).

39 Losurdo (1992), ch. x, § 2.

can be built on the basis of poverty and privation, on the basis of reducing personal requirements and lowering the standard of living to the level of the poor"; instead, "socialism can be built only on the basis of a vigorous growth of the productive forces of society" and "on the basis of the prosperity of the working people," for that matter, "a prosperous and cultured life for all members of society."⁴⁰ Like the Christian precept of helping the poor, the revolutionary precept, which calls communist parties to take root primarily among the exploited and the poor, is "conditional" and is only truly taken seriously when it is understood in its conditionality.

And, therefore, for Stalin it was necessary to intensify efforts in order to decisively increase social wealth, introducing "a new wave of Socialist emulation"⁴¹; recourse had to be made to both material incentives (enforcing the socialist principle of pay according to work) and moral incentives (for example, giving "the highest distinction" to the most eminent Stakhanovites⁴²).⁴³ Trotsky's orientation was different and opposite: by re-establishing "ranks and decorations" and thus liquidating "socialist equality," the bureaucracy prepared the ground for changes in "property relations" as well.⁴⁴ While Stalin explicitly referred to the polemics of the *Manifesto* against a socialism understood as a synonym of "universal asceticism" and "crude egalitarianism," the leftist opposition consciously or unconsciously relied on the thesis contained in *The Civil War in France*, according to which even at the highest level managers should be paid "workman's wages." Wrongly—Trotsky urged—in order to justify their privileges, the bureaucracy and Stalin referred to *The Critique of the Gotha Program*: "Marx did not mean by this the creation of a new inequality but merely a gradual rather than a sudden elimination of the old inequal-

40 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 319 and 317 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 577 and 575).

41 **Ed. Note:** 'socialist emulation' or 'socialist competition' was a policy in the Soviet Union which encouraged a form of competition between state-owned enterprises and individuals in the economic sphere.

42 **Ed. Note:** The Stakhanovite movement emerged in the Soviet Union as a cultural phenomenon among workers, promoting rationalization of workplace processes and socialist emulation. This movement was inspired by Alexei Stakhanov, and the workers who participated, known as Stakhanovites, were proud of their ability to work harder and more efficiently to surpass production quotas, ultimately contributing to the strengthening of the socialist state.

43 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, pp. 33 and 46 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 599 and 613).

44 Trotsky (1988), p. 957 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 232).

ity in the sphere of wage.”⁴⁵

On the basis of this political line (of leveling wages both in the factories and in the state apparatus), it was very difficult to promote the development of the productive forces, and Stalin emphasized that wage differentiation did not mean the restoration of capitalism: one should not confuse the social differences that existed under the new regime with the old antagonism between exploiting and exploited classes. But, in Trotsky’s eyes, it was a clumsy attempt at trivialization: “in the cities the contrast between luxury and want is too clear to the eyes.” In conclusion:

Whether from the standpoint of Stalinist sociology, the difference between the workers’ aristocracy and the proletarian mass is “fundamental” or only “something in the nature of” matters not at all. It is from this difference that the necessity arose in its time for breaking with the Social Democracy and creating the Third International.⁴⁶

According to Marx’s recommendations, socialism was also called upon to overcome the opposition between intellectual and manual labor. And again the problem arose: how to achieve such an ambitious goal? And again the Bolshevik leadership appeared dramatically torn. Here again, the perspective worked out by Stalin in the 1930s stands out for its caution:

Some people think that the elimination of the distinction between mental labor and manual labor can be achieved by means of a certain cultural and technical equalization of mental and manual workers by lowering the cultural and technical level of engineers and technicians, of mental workers, to the level of average skilled workers. That is absolutely incorrect.⁴⁷

Instead, it was a matter of stimulating access to education at every level of hitherto excluded social strata. On the opposite side, Trotsky acknowledged that there had been a process of “filling out of the scientific cadres by newcomers from below” and yet he reiterated, “The social distance between physical and intellectual labor [...] has increased, not decreased, during recent years.”⁴⁸ The persistence of the division of labor and the persistence of economic and social inequalities were two sides of the same coin, namely the return of capitalist exploitation and thus the complete betrayal of socialist ideals:

45 Trotsky (1962), p. 431.

46 Trotsky (1988), pp. 972-3 and 969 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 248 and 244).

47 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 34 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 602).

48 Trotsky (1988), p. 941 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 218).

When the new constitution announces that in the Soviet Union “abolition of the exploitation of man by man” has been attained, it is not telling the truth. The new social differentiation has created conditions for the revival of the exploitation of man in its most barbarous form - that of buying him into slavery for personal service. In the lists for the new census personal servants are not mentioned at all. They are, evidently, to be dissolved in the general group of “workers.” There are, however, plenty of questions about this: Does the socialist citizen have servants, and just how many (maid, cook, nurse, governess, chauffeur)? Does he have an automobile at his personal disposal? How many rooms does he occupy? etc. Not a word in these lists about the scale of earnings! If the rule were revived that exploitation of the labor of others deprives one of political rights, it would turn out, somewhat unexpectedly, that the cream of the ruling group are outside the bounds of the Soviet constitution. Fortunately, they have established a complete equality of rights ... for servant and master!⁴⁹

Therefore, the presence of the social figure of the “maid” and of the servant in general was already synonymous not only with exploitation, but with “exploitation of man in its most barbarous form”: and how to explain the persistence or the reappearance in the USSR of such relationships if not with the abandonment of an authentically socialist perspective, that is, with betrayal?

The long wave of messianism, certainly already implicit in the most utopian aspects of Marx’s thought but fearfully swollen as a reaction to the horror of the First World War, continued to be felt. In his Report to the XVIIIth Congress of the CPSU (January 26, 1934), Stalin felt the need to warn against “the Leftist chatter current among a section of our functionaries to the effect that Soviet trade is a superseded stage; that it is necessary to organize the direct exchange of products; that money will soon be abolished.” Those who thus argue “do not realize that their supercilious attitude towards Soviet trade is not an expression of Bolshevik views, but rather of the views of impoverished aristocrats who are full of ambition but lack ammunition.”⁵⁰ Though, on the one hand, Trotsky did not miss the opportunity to condemn Stalin’s earlier “economic adventurism,” and on the other hand he mocked the “rehabilitation of the ruble” and the “return to bourgeois methods of distribution.”⁵¹ In any case, he continues to reiterate that under communism, along with the State, “money” and every form of market are destined to disappear.⁵²

49 Ibid., p. 946 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 223-4).

50 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, p. 304 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 564).

51 Trotsky (1988), pp. 763 and 768-9 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 65 and 70-1).

52 Ibid., pp. 757-8 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 61).

“NO LONGER DIFFERENTIATES YOURS AND MINE”:
THE VANISHING OF THE FAMILY

Together with imperialism and capitalism, the October Revolution was called upon to put an end to the oppression of women. To make it possible for women to participate with equal rights in political and social life, it was necessary to free women, thanks to the widest possible development of social services, from domestic confinement and from a division of labor that humiliated and stupefied them; the critique of traditional morality and its duplicity would then guarantee to women the sexual emancipation that until then had been reserved, albeit in a partial and distorted form, only to men. Following these great transformations, would the institution of the family still make sense or was it destined to vanish? Alexandra Kollontai had no doubt: “the family ceases to be necessary.” In the meantime, it was being undermined by the complete freedom, spontaneity and “fluidity” that characterized sexual relations. In addition to being cumbersome, the family proves to be superfluous: “the bringing up of children is gradually taken over by society.” On the other hand, it was not the case that one must abandon oneself to regret: the family was the privileged place for the cultivation of selfishness, which went hand in hand with attachment to private property. In conclusion: “the socially conscious worker-mother will rise to a point where she no longer differentiates yours and mine, and remembers that there are henceforth only *our* children, the children of communist workers’ Russia.” These ideas were harshly criticized by the Bolshevik leadership as a whole. In particular, when speaking in 1923, Trotsky wisely pointed out that such a vision ignored “the responsibility of father and mother to their child,” thus encouraging the abandonment of children and aggravating a scourge already widespread in Moscow in those years.⁵³ And yet, in one form or another, such ideas “remained widely popular in party circles.”⁵⁴ At the beginning of the 1930s, one of Stalin’s close collaborators, Kaganovich, was still forced to confront them. In the words of his biographer:

While fully adhering to the principle of women’s liberation, Kaganovich vehemently lashed out against extremist positions, which urged the liquidation of individual kitchens and advocated forced cohabitation in communes. Sabsovich, one of the leftist planners, had even proposed to suppress any space of com-

53 In Carr (1968-69), vol. 1, p. 32

54 Ibid., pp. 30-1.

munal living between husband and wife, other than a small bedroom for the night. He had advanced the idea of large beehive buildings of 2,000 people with all facilities in common to stimulate the “community spirit” and suppress the institution of the bourgeois family.⁵⁵

But Kaganovich’s (and Stalin’s) attitude elicited harsh criticism from Trotsky, who had meanwhile become leader of the opposition: “The new cult of the family has not fallen out of the clouds. Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one’s children. But the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property.”⁵⁶ And, therefore, the recovery of the institution of the family (with the refusal of a common call to absorb and dissolve it) referred to the defense of the right of hereditary transmission and the right of property and thus assumed a clear counter-revolutionary meaning. And, in fact, by a “providential coincidence”—Trotsky ironizes—“the triumphal rehabilitation of the family” takes place simultaneously with the return of the honoring of money; “the resurrection of the family goes hand in hand with the increase of the educative role of the ruble.”⁵⁷ The consecration of conjugal fidelity goes hand in hand with the consecration of private property: to put it in religious terms, “along with the seventh, the fifth commandment is also fully restored to its rights as yet, to be sure, without any references to God.”⁵⁸

In fact, upon closer inspection, this invocation is already looming on the horizon. In intervening on the draft Constitution of 1936, Stalin polemicized against those who would like to “prohibit the celebration of religious ceremonies” and to have the “ministers of religion [...] be disenfranchised.”⁵⁹ And again Trotsky intervened to denounce this unacceptable retreat from the initial projects of definitive liberation of society from the shackles of superstition: “The storming of heaven [...] is now brought to a stop. The bureaucracy, concerned about their reputation for respectability, have ordered the young ‘godless’ to surrender their fighting armor and sit down to their books. In relation to religion, there is gradually being established a regime of ironical neutrality. But that is only the first stage.”⁶⁰

55 Marcucci (1997), p. 143.

56 Trotsky (1988), p. 957 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 232).

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 843-4 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 139-40).

58 *Ibid.*, p. 846 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 142)

59 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 87 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 641).

60 Trotsky (1988), p. 846 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 142).

Along with the family and the right of inheritance and property, the Marxian opium of the people could not fail to return.

This new chapter in the indictment of “betrayal” was also based on the dialectic we already know. By putting an end to the bourgeois family, with its petty interests, inveterate prejudices and dead rules, the revolution would have opened a space marked exclusively by love, freedom and spontaneity. And yet...

It is interesting to note that what provoked Trotsky’s protest and indignation was already the idea of a legal regulation of family relations:

The genuinely socialist family, from which society will remove the daily vexation of unbearable and humiliating cares, will have no need of any regimentation, and the very idea of laws about abortion and divorce will sound no better within its walls than the recollection of houses of prostitution or human sacrifices.⁶¹

“THE CONDEMNATION OF THE ‘POLITICS OF LEADERS’” OR
THE “TRANSFORMATION OF POWER INTO LOVE”

And, so, far beyond the institution of the family (and the right of inheritance and property) and the religious consecration of power (of the head of the family and of the owner), Trotsky’s polemic concerned the problem of the juridical organization of society as a whole, the problem of the State. This is the central question toward which all the particular questions previously analyzed converge: when and in what manner does the process of extinction of the state envisioned by Marx begin after the overcoming of capitalism? The victorious proletariat—affirms Lenin’s *State and Revolution* on the eve of the Bolshevik October—“needs only a state which is withering away”; and yet, by setting in motion a gigantic wave of nationalizations, the new power gives an unprecedented impulse for the extension of the state apparatus. And as he proceeded to build the new society, Lenin was forced, whether aware of it or not, to distance himself more and more from Anarchism (and from the positions he had originally taken). To realize this, just take a look at an important intervention, *Better Fever, but Better*, published in *Pravda* on March 4, 1923. The novelty of the slogans immediately emerges: “improve our state apparatus,” to seriously “strive to build up a state,” “the building of a really new

61 Ibid., p. 850 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 144-5).

state apparatus, one really worthy to be called socialist, Soviet,” to improve “administrative work,” and to do all this without hesitating to learn from the “best models of Western Europe.”⁶²

But doesn't massively extending the state apparatus and forcefully posing the problem of its improvement mean effectively renouncing the ideal of the extinction of the state? Of course, the realization of this ideal can be postponed to a very remote future, but, in the meantime, how should public property, which has now undergone an enormous expansion, be managed, and what forms should power take in Soviet Russia as a whole? Even in *State and Revolution*, written at a time when the denunciation of representative regimes co-responsible for the World War I massacre was at its most bitter, and could not fail to be, we can read that even the most developed democracy cannot do without “representative institutions.”⁶³ And yet, the expectation of the extinction of the State continued to fuel mistrust of the idea of representation at the very moment in which the leaders of Soviet Russia multiply representative bodies (as the Soviets undoubtedly were), not shying away from second or third degree representation: the lower level Soviets elect their delegates to the higher level Soviet. Controversy was not slow to flare up.

The problem of re-establishing order and revitalizing the productive apparatus, with the related recognition of the principle of competence, also arose in the factories. Already at the beginning of the new regime, social and political circles reluctant to change denounced the coming to power of “bourgeois specialists,” or rather of a “new bourgeoisie,” and once again they targeted Trotsky in particular, who at that time occupied a very prominent role in the direction of the state-military apparatus.⁶⁴ It is a controversy that also rebounds outside of Russia. Significant was the criticism by Gramsci, who celebrated the new state taking shape in the country of the October Revolution and paid homage to the Bolsheviks as “an aristocracy of statesmen” and to Lenin as “the greatest statesman of contemporary Europe”: they were able to put an end to the “dark abyss of misery, barbarism, anarchy, and dissolution” opened by “a long and disastrous war.” But—an anarchist objected—“this apologia, full of lyricism,” of the state and of “statolatry,” of “state socialism, authoritarian, legalitarian parliamentarism” is in contradiction with the Soviet

62 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 25, p. 380 and vol. 33, pp. 445-50.

63 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 25, p. 400.

64 Figs (2000), pp. 878-80.

Constitution itself, which is committed to establishing a regime in which “there will be no more class divisions, *nor state power*.”⁶⁵

It is not just from self-identified anarchist circles and authors who adopted a critical position. Some of those expressing dissatisfaction, disappointment, and sharp dissent were also exponents of the international communist movement. Let us give the word to one of them, namely Pannekoek, who can no longer recognize himself in the political action of the Bolsheviks: “the technical and administrative cadres in the factories and in the state apparatus exercise greater authority than is commensurate with developed communism [...]. Thus a new bureaucracy inevitably arose from the new leaders and functionaries.”⁶⁶ “Bureaucracy,” emphasized the Platform of the Workers’ Opposition in Russia, “is a direct negation of mass self-activity”; unfortunately, it is a “scourge that pervades the very marrow of our Party as well as of the Soviet institutions.”⁶⁷

Beyond Russia, these criticisms also and primarily were directed at the West: they called for an end to “to the bourgeois system of representation, to parliamentarism.”⁶⁸ More than the Bolshevik dictatorship, it was the principle of representation that was condemned: yes, “Some third person decides your fate: this is the whole essence of bureaucracy.”⁶⁹ The degeneration of Soviet Russia already lay in the fact that it was a single person who assumed a given office: in the factories, as at every level, “collective management” is being replaced by “one man management,” which “is a product of the individualist conception of the bourgeois class” and which expresses “in principle an unrestricted, isolated, free will of one man, disconnected from the collective.”⁷⁰ Rather than a “mass politics” (*Massenpolitik*), the Third International now “conducts a politics of leaders” (*Führerpolitik*).⁷¹

As we can see, what made people cry betrayal of the original ideals, even more than the abuse of power, was the recourse to the usual organs of power, all based on the distinction/opposition between rulers and ruled, between leaders and masses, between managers and

65 Gramsci (1987), pp. 56-7; the anarchist’s letter can be read in *Ordine Nuovo* #8.

66 Pannekoek (1970), pp. 273-4.

67 In Kollontai (1976), pp. 240-1.

68 Gorter (1920), p. 37.

69 In Kollontai (1976), p. 242.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

71 Gorter (1920), p. 87.

managed and, therefore, all based on the exclusion of direct action or of the “mass politics.” If the Soviets were not spared from mistrust, contempt was explicitly reserved for Parliament, trade unions, parties, including on occasion the Communist Party, itself affected by the principle of representation and, therefore, by the scourge of bureaucracy. In the final analysis, on closer inspection, even more than the organs of power, it was power as such that was being targeted. “It is the curse of the labor movement: as soon as it has achieved a certain ‘power,’ it seeks to increase that power by unprincipled means.” In this way it ceased to be “pure”: this was the case with German social democracy, and this was also happening with the Third International.⁷²

In this context can be placed the young Bloch, who from the revolution and the Soviets, in addition to overcoming the economy and the mercantile spirit and money itself, also expected the “transformation of power into love.”⁷³ If the German philosopher, by removing these passages and these overly emphatic expectations from the second edition of *The Spirit of Utopia*, distanced himself from the more clearly messianic aspects of his thought, there was no shortage, in Soviet Russia and beyond, of communists who cried scandal, in the final analysis, because of the failure to bring about the miracle of the “transformation of power into love.”

In the very first years of the life of Soviet Russia, the “anti-bureaucratic” polemics primarily labeled Lenin and Trotsky, more than Stalin, among the most eminent “defenders and knights of bureaucracy.”⁷⁴ The picture changed significantly in the following years. Even before considering its contents, the passage of the 1936 Constitution represented a turning point already in that it broke with anarchist representations, which were tenaciously attached to the ideal of the withering away of the state and according to which “law is the opium for the people” and “the idea of the Constitution is a bourgeois idea.”⁷⁵ In Stalin’s words, the 1936 Constitution “does not confine itself to stating the formal rights of citizens, but stresses the guarantee of these rights, the means by which these rights can be exercised.”⁷⁶ While also insufficient and not even the essential aspect, the “formal”

72 Ibid., p. 33.

73 In Losurdo (1997), ch. 4, § 10.

74 In Kollontai (1976), p. 240.

75 In Carr (1964), p. 128.

76 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 70 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 626).

guarantee of rights did not seem to be irrelevant here. Stalin emphasized with favor the fact that the new Constitution “has ensured the introduction of universal, direct, and equal suffrage with secret ballot.”⁷⁷ But it was precisely on this point that Trotsky intervened critically: in bourgeois society the secret ballot serves “to defend the exploited from the terror of the exploiters”; the reappearance of this institution in Soviet society was proof that even in the USSR the people must defend themselves from the intimidation, if not of an actual exploiting class, at any rate of the bureaucracy.⁷⁸

To those who demanded that the problem of the extinction of the State be confronted, Stalin responded in 1938 by urging not to turn the lesson of Marx and Engels into dogma and empty scholasticism; the delay in the realization of the ideal was explained by permanent capitalist encirclement. And yet, in enumerating the functions of the socialist state, in addition to the traditional functions of defense against the class enemy at domestic and international levels, Stalin drew attention to a “third function: this was the work of economic organization and cultural education performed by our state bodies with the purpose of developing the infant shoots of the new, Socialist economic system and re-educating the people in the spirit of Socialism.” It was a point on which the Report to the XVIIIth Congress of the CPSU insisted strongly: “Now the main task of our state inside the country is the work of peaceful economic organization and cultural education.” The theorization of this “third function” was in itself an essential novelty. But Stalin went further, declaring that “In place of this function of suppression the state acquired the function of protecting Socialist property from thieves and pilferers of the people’s property.”⁷⁹

Admittedly, this was a somewhat problematic, indeed mystifying statement. It certainly did not fairly reflect the situation in the USSR in 1938 where terror raged and the Gulag expanded monstrously. But here we are dealing with another aspect: is the thesis of the extinction of the state valid and to what extent? “Will our state remain in the period of Communism also? Yes, it will, unless the capitalist encirclement is liquidated, and unless the danger of foreign military attack has disappeared.”⁸⁰ So, the realization of communism in the

77 Ibid., p. 74 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 629).

78 Trotsky (1988), pp. 966-7 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 241-2).

79 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 229 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 724-5).

80 Ibid. (= Stalin, 1952, p. 725).

Soviet Union or in a group of countries would have meant the final demise of the first function of the socialist state (the safeguard against the danger of counterrevolution internally), not the second (protection against the external threat), which, in the presence of powerful capitalist countries, would continue to be vital even “in the period of communism.” But why should the collapse of the capitalist encirclement and the fading of the second function have been followed by the fading of the “third function” as well, namely the “work of economic organization” and “cultural education” as well as the “protecting Socialist property from thieves and pilferers of the people’s property”? There is no doubt that Stalin revealed uncertainties and contradictions, probably stimulated also by the political necessity of moving cautiously on a minefield, where every small divergence from the classical thesis of the extinction of the state exposed him to the charge of treason.

THE KIROV ASSASSINATION: POWER PLOT OR TERRORISM?

The ruling group that assumed power in October 1917 appeared from the outset deeply divided on the most important issues of domestic and international politics. Barely contained while Lenin was still alive, this rift became irremediable once the charismatic leader was gone. Did the clash remain confined to the politico-ideological sphere?

In relation to the case of Sergei M. Kirov, a top leader of the CPSU, who was killed on December 3, 1934, in Leningrad, in front of the door of his office by gunshots fired by a young communist (Leonid Nikolaev), long gone are the times when it be could uncontestedly claimed “that Stalin plotted the murder through his police agents is no longer seriously in doubt.”⁸¹ The version and the insinuations contained in the *Secret Speech* had raised strong doubts as early as the mid-1990s.⁸² But now we have at our disposal the research of a Russian scholar, also published in French in a series directed by Stéphane Courtois and Nicolas Werth, i.e. the editors of *The Black Book of Communism*. We are therefore in the presence of a work that presents itself with more solid anti-Stalinist credentials than ever before; and yet, while denying that there was a vast conspiracy behind

81 Cohen (1975). p. 344.

82 Thurston (1996), pp. 20-3.

the assassination, it tears to pieces the version contained or suggested in the *Secret Speech to the XXth Congress of the CPSU*. Khrushchev's account turns out to be somewhat "inaccurate" in a number of details; on the other hand, its author "knew that he needed weighty arguments to provoke a psychological shock in the followers of the 'little father of the peoples'"; well, the thesis of "Stalin's conspiracy against Kirov admirably met this need."⁸³

The real relationships of cooperation and friendship between the leader and his collaborator, on the other hand, was clearly shown from the portrait that the Russian historian drew of Kirov:

This open-minded man loved neither intrigue, nor lies, nor deception. Stalin had to appreciate these character traits that were the basis of their relationship. According to the testimonies of his contemporaries, Kirov was indeed able to make objections to Stalin, to dampen his suspicious spirit and roughness. Stalin genuinely was enthused by him and he had confidence in him. Passionate about fishing and hunting, he often sent fresh fish and game to Moscow. Stalin had such confidence in Kirov that he invited him several times to the sauna, an honor only General Vlassik, head of his personal security, shared.⁸⁴

Until the end, nothing intervened to disturb this relationship, as confirmed by the research of another Russian historian: nothing emerges from the archives that points in the direction of a political divergence or rivalry between the two. The conspiracy thesis is all the more ridiculous given the fact that Kirov "had a minimal role in the highest bodies of the party," in the Politburo, and concentrated instead on the administration of Leningrad.⁸⁵

But, if "the idea of a rivalry pitting Kirov against Stalin rests on nothing,"⁸⁶ Trotsky's reaction, on the other hand, gives food for thought:

The turn to the *right* in foreign and domestic policies could not fail to arouse alarm among the more class-conscious elements of the proletariat [...]. To this must be added to dull rumbling among the youth, particularly among that section that, being close to the bureaucracy, observes its arbitrariness, its privileges and its abuses. In this thick atmosphere, the shot of Nikolaev exploded [...]. Very likely he wished to protest against the party regime, the uncontrollability of the bureaucracy or the course to the right.⁸⁷

83 Kirilina (1995), pp. 223 and 239.

84 Ibid., p. 193.

85 Khlevniuk (1998), pp. 365-6.

86 Kirilina (1995), p. 203.

87 Trotsky (1988), pp. 573 and 575.

The evident sympathy or understanding for the bomber and the contempt and hatred reserved for Kirov are explicit. Far from mourning the latter as a victim of the Kremlin dictator, Trotsky brands him as the “clever and unscrupulous Leningrad dictator, a typical representative of his corporation.”⁸⁸ And again, in crescendo: “the assassinated Kirov, a rude satrap, does not call forth any sympathy.”⁸⁹ It is an individual against whom the revolutionaries’ wrath has been brooding for some time and who has been struck down:

As for the latest outburst of terrorism, it does not rest either upon the old ruling classes or upon the kulak. The terrorists of the latest draft are recruited exclusively from among the young, from the ranks of the Communist Youth and the party.⁹⁰

At least at this time—between 1935 and 1936—there is no mention whatsoever of the Kirov assassination attempt as staged. Yes, it is stated that the whole thing can be instrumentalized by the “bureaucracy as a whole,” but at the same time it is stressed, not without complacency, that “every single bureaucrat trembles before the terror” coming from below.⁹¹ If they also lack the “experience of class struggle and revolution,” these young people inclined to “go underground and learn to struggle and temper their character for the future” constitute a reason for hope.⁹² To the Soviet youth, who were already beginning to sow fear among the members of the ruling caste, Trotsky explicitly appealed for the new revolution that in his eyes imposed itself. The bureaucratic regime had unleashed “the struggle against the youth,” as he had already denounced in the title of one of his central works, *The Revolution Betrayed*. Now the oppressed will overthrow the oppressors:

Every revolutionary party finds its chief support in the younger generation of the rising class. Political decay expresses itself in a loss of ability to attract the youth under one’s banner [...]. The Mensheviks relied upon the more respectable skilled upper stratum of the working class, always prided themselves on it, and looked down upon the Bolsheviks. Subsequent events harshly showed them their mistake. At the decisive moment the youth carried with them the more

88 Ibid., p. 986 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 263).

89 Trotsky (1967), p. 75.

90 Trotsky (1988), p. 655.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., p. 854 (= Trotsky, 1968, p.149).

mature stratum and even the old folks.⁹³

It is a dialectic destined to repeat itself. However immature the forms it may initially take, the revolt against oppression still has a positive value. After reiterating his contempt and hatred for Kirov, Trotsky adds:

Our relation to the assassin remains neutral only because we know not what motives guided him. If it became known that Nikolayev acted as a conscious avenger for workers' rights trampled upon by Kirov, our sympathies would be fully on the side of the assassin.

Like "Irish" terrorists or those from other countries, "Russian" terrorists too deserve respect.⁹⁴

Initially, the authorities' investigations turn in the direction of the "White Guards." In fact, in Paris these circles were well organized: they had managed to carry out "a number of attacks on Soviet territory." In Belgrade, similar circles were operating: the monthly magazine they published specified, in the November 1934 issue, that, in order to "overthrow the leaders of the country of the Soviets," it was convenient to "use the weapon of the terrorist attack." Among those leaders to be eliminated was precisely Kirov. And yet, these investigations did not lead to results; the Soviet authorities then began to look in the direction of the leftist opposition.⁹⁵

As we have seen, corroborating the new lead is Trotsky, who not only emphasizes the revolutionary ebullience of the Soviet youth but also makes it clear that those resorting to violence are not and cannot be classes that are definitively defeated and therefore now renounced:

The history of individual terror in the Soviet Union clearly marks the stages in the general evolution of the country. At the dawn of Soviet power, in the atmosphere of the still unfinished civil war, terrorist deeds were perpetrated by White Guards or Social Revolutionaries. When the former ruling classes lost hope of a restoration, terrorism also disappeared. The kulak terror, echoes of which have been observed up to very recent times, had always a local character and supplemented the guerrilla warfare against the Soviet regime. As for the latest outburst of terrorism, it does not rest either upon the old ruling classes or upon the kulak. The terrorists of the latest draft are recruited exclusively from among the young, from the ranks of the Communist Youth and the party—not

93 Ibid., p. 851 (= Trotsky, 1968, p.146).

94 Trotsky (1967), p. 75.

95 Buriлина (1995), pp. 67-70.

infrequently from the offspring of the ruling stratum.⁹⁶

If the old classes wiped out first by the October Revolution and then by the collectivization of agriculture had resigned themselves, this was certainly not true for the proletariat, protagonist of the revolution and momentarily blocked and oppressed by the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is the latter that must tremble: the attack on Kirov and the spread of terrorism among Soviet youth are a symptom of the isolation and "hostility" that surround and pressurize the usurpers of Soviet power.⁹⁷

True, Trotsky is quick to point out that individual terrorism is not really effective. But this is a clarification that is not entirely convincing and, perhaps, not even Trotsky himself was convinced. Meanwhile, in the conditions in which the USSR finds itself, it is an inevitable phenomenon: "Terrorism is the tragic completion of bureaucratism."⁹⁸ What is more, while it may not be able to solve the problem, "individual terror has nevertheless an extremely important symptomatic significance. It characterizes the sharp contradiction between the bureaucracy and the broad masses of the people, especially the young." In any case it built towards critical mass for an "explosion," i.e. for a "political disturbance," designed to inflict on the "regime of Stalin" a fate analogous to that suffered by the regime "headed by Nicholas II."⁹⁹

TERRORISM, COUP D'ÉTAT AND CIVIL WAR

The overthrow of the Romanov dynasty had been preceded by a long series of attacks promoted by organizations that, despite the hard blows of repression, had always managed to reconstitute themselves. In Trotsky's eyes a similar process was developing in the USSR in response to the "betrayal" consummated by the bureaucracy. On closer inspection, what threatened it were not really individual acts of terrorism but the symptoms of a new, great revolution:

All indications agree that the further course of development must inevitably lead to a clash between the culturally developed forces of the people and the

96 Trotsky (1988), p. 857 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 152).

97 Ibid., p. 553.

98 Ibid., p. 655.

99 Ibid., pp. 856-61 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 152-5).

bureaucratic oligarchy. There is no peaceful outcome for this crisis [...]. The development leads obviously to the road of revolution.¹⁰⁰

A decisive civil war loomed on the horizon, and, “under conditions of civil war, the assassination of individual oppressors ceases to be an act of individual terror”; in any case, “the Fourth International leads against Stalinism a life and death struggle,” which would put an end to “a clique already condemned by history.”¹⁰¹

As can be seen, the attack on Kirov evoked the specter of civil war within the forces that had overthrown the ancien régime. In fact, this specter had accompanied the history of Soviet Russia like a shadow since the moment of its establishment. In order to foil the peace of Brest-Litovsk, which he experienced as a capitulation to German imperialism and a betrayal of proletarian internationalism, Bukharin briefly cultivated the idea of a kind of coup d'état, aimed at removing from power, at least for a time, the one who until then was the undisputed leader of the Bolsheviks (*supra*, ch. 2, § 2). If it is already hovering while Lenin is still alive, despite the enormous prestige surrounding his figure, the specter of the tearing apart of the Bolshevik leadership group and of civil war within the revolutionary camp itself takes definite shape in the following years. This is what is unequivocally apparent from important testimonies from within the anti-Stalinist opposition and from turncoats of the communist movement in whom the old faith has turned into implacable hatred. Let us see how Boris Souvarine describes the situation that arose in the CPSU about ten years after the October Revolution:

The Opposition, on its side, completed its organization as a clandestine Party within the only Party, with its own hierarchy in miniature, its Politburo, its Central Committee, its regional and local agents, its foundation groups, its subscriptions, its circulars, its code for letters.¹⁰²

The perspective was one of not only political but also military confrontation. In her memoir published in the United States soon after the end of World War II, Ruth Fischer, already a leading figure in German communism and a member of the Komintern Presidium from 1922 to 1924 told of how she had at one time participated in the organization in the USSR of the “resistance” against the “totalitarian regime” established in Moscow. This was 1926. Having broken

100 Trotsky (1988), p. 986 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 263-4).

101 Trotsky (1967), pp. 75-6.

102 Souvarine (2003), pp. 547-8.

with Stalin the year before, Zinoviev and Kamenev had reconnected with Trotsky: the “bloc” had organized for the seizure of power. Thus, a widespread clandestine network had developed, extending “as far as Vladivostok” and the Far East: couriers spread confidential party and state documents or transmitted encrypted messages; armed bodyguards provided surveillance for secret meetings. “The Bloc leaders began to plan the final steps”; based on the assumption that the confrontation with Stalin could be solved only by “violence,” they met in a forest in the vicinity of Moscow in order to thoroughly analyze “the military aspect of their program,” beginning with the “role of those army units” willing to support the “coup d’état.” Fischer thus continues:

This was an affair largely of technicalities, to be arranged between the two military leaders, Trotsky and Lashevich [Deputy Commissioner of War, who would die not long after, prior to the purges]. Since as second in command of the Red Army Lashevich was still in a better legal position, he was charged with laying the groundwork for military action against Stalin.¹⁰³

In this context should be placed the street demonstrations organized, the following year, for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution: from Moscow and Leningrad they were to spread to “other industrial centers” and thus “the Party hierarchy would be forced to yield.”¹⁰⁴

In those years, the bitterness of the political confrontation taking place in Soviet Russia was a mystery to no one in Europe: “The history of that struggle between Stalin and Trotsky is the story of Trotsky’s attempt to capture the State [...] it is the story of an unsuccessful *coup d’État*.” The brilliant organizer of the Red Army, still surrounded by “tremendous popularity,” certainly did not resign himself to defeat: “his overweening and cynical pride turned him into a kind of Red Bonaparte backed by the army, the working masses, and the young communists’ spirit of revolt against Lenin’s Old Guard and against the hierarchy of the Party.” Yes, “the tide of sedition rose around the Kremlin.”¹⁰⁵ Tracing this picture was a book, *Coup d’État: The Technique of Revolution*, which saw the light of day in Paris in 1931 and immediately enjoyed considerable success. The author, Curzio Malaparte,¹⁰⁶

103 Fischer (1991), vol. 2, pp. 217-22.

104 Ibid., pp. 256-7.

105 Malaparte (1973), pp. 105,109-10 and 113.

106 Ed. Note: The pseudonym of Kurt Erich Suckert (1898-1957), erstwhile

who had been to Moscow and had conversations with leading personalities, gives the reading of the 1927 coup d'état that we have seen confirmed by Ruth Fischer, that is, an authoritative representative of the anti-Stalin opposition:

The arrest of Trotsky on the eve of the tenth birthday of the October Revolution would produce an unfavorable impression [...]. Trotsky could hardly have chosen a more suitable moment for his attempt on the State. His tactical wisdom had shown him how to cover his position. Stalin would never dare to arrest him for fear of tyrannical appearances. If and when he should dare to do so, it would surely be too late, said Trotsky. By then the bonfires of the tenth anniversary of the Revolution would have burnt out and Stalin would no longer stand at the helm of the State.¹⁰⁷

As is well known, these plans failed and Trotsky, expelled from the party, was forced to move first to Alma Ata and then to Türkiye. Here “the Soviet consular authorities” paid him “by way of ‘royalties,’ 1,500 dollars.”¹⁰⁸ It may have been “a ridiculous sum,” as a historian who was a follower and biographer of Trotsky puts it,¹⁰⁹ but the gesture can be read as an attempt not to further sharpen the contradiction.

CONSPIRACY, INFILTRATION OF THE STATE APPARATUS, AND “AESOPIAN LANGUAGE”

The revolutionary in exile did not give up his plans. In what way did he try to realize them? Malaparte writes:

The sabotage on the railways, in electric power stations, and in post and telegraph offices increased from day to day. Trotsky's agents had gained an entry everywhere; they tested every spoke in the wheel of the State's public services and from time to time they prevented it from spinning altogether. These were mere skirmishes leading up to the insurrection itself.¹¹⁰

Is this just fantasy or the echo of regime propaganda? The book quoted here circulated widely in Europe at the time, and the theses

Fascist party member in Italy until his expulsion and multiple imprisonments over his criticism of Hitler. He joined the Communist Party of Italy in 1947.

107 Ibid., p. 125.

108 Broué (1991), p. 632.

109 Ibid.

110 Malaparte (1973), p. 124.

put forward in it did not seem to raise ironic smiles or cries of scandal. As with "terrorism," so with "sabotage," one must not lose sight of Russia's peculiar history. In 1908 both the oil industrialists and Stalin had repeatedly condemned, with obviously different motives, the tendency of certain sections of the working class to promote their claims by resorting to "economic terrorism." While pointing out that the ultimate cause of this phenomenon was capitalist exploitation, the Bolshevik leader had hailed "the resolution recently adopted by the strikers at Mirzoyev's [factory] against incendiarism and 'economic' assassination," against the anarchic, "old, terrorist, rebel tendencies."¹¹¹ At the beginning of the 1930s had this tradition completely vanished or did it continue to manifest itself in new forms? In any case, we have seen the White Guards treasure it. And the Left Opposition?

At least the plans for "insurrection" mentioned by Malaparte find an important confirmation. Trotsky's biographer thus refers to the attitude his hero continued to adopt from exile: "The advice is simple: the opposition must acquire a solid military education; with seriousness and conscious activity in the party and, once they have been expelled, in the proletarian and Soviet organizations in general, always referring back to the International."¹¹² Here the conspiratorial tradition which had greatly contributed to its rise is turned against Soviet power. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin had emphatically stressed: we revolutionaries "must without fail devote the most serious attention to propaganda and agitation among soldiers and officers, and to the creation of 'military organizations' affiliated to our Party."¹¹³

Taking this lesson to heart, the opposition was organizing a clandestine network that paid special attention to the military at large. Its troubled process of formation made the work of infiltration easier. Emblematic was what happened at the time of the establishment of the Cheka, the first political police force in Soviet Russia. On 6 July 1918 an assassination attempt cost the life of the German ambassador in Moscow. The culprit was Yakov G. Blumkin, a Socialist-Revolutionary who intended to protest against the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and called it into question. When Feliks E. Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka, went to the German Embassy in Moscow to apologize on

111 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 2, pp. 101-6 and especially p. 103 (= Stalin, 1952-56 vol. 2, pp. 126-44 and especially p. 128).

112 Broué (1991), p. 516.

113 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 5, p. 432 note.

behalf of the Soviet government, he was informed that the attackers had presented themselves with Cheka credentials. In order to ascertain the truth, he went to the headquarters of this institution, where he was arrested by “dissident Chekists,” themselves adherents or close to the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. Later freed by the Red Guards, Dzerzinsky then proceeded to purge the political police and execute those responsible for the conspiracy and mutiny. In conclusion, the victims of the first “purge” are Chekists, albeit those in the opposition.¹¹⁴

The protagonist of the assassination attempt had managed to escape, but he had not disappeared from the scene: “Trotsky acknowledged publicly at the end of 1929 that he had been visited by Blumkin, still an agent of the Red Army intelligence service.” Lev Sedov, Trotsky’s son and collaborator, tried to make it appear that this would have been something coincidental; in fact, a document preserved at Stanford “shows that Trotsky’s contacts with Blumkin did not arise from a chance meeting, but from an organized link with the USSR”; in this, “the secret agent evidently had an important role.” It would be this connection that would prompt Stalin “to have Blumkin shot.”¹¹⁵

As can be seen, “agents” of the opposition “had gained an entry everywhere.”¹¹⁶ Even “in the GPU¹¹⁷” lurks for some time a “small nucleus of Trotsky loyalists.”¹¹⁸ According to a contemporary U.S. historian, perhaps Genrich G. Yagoda himself, who directed the first phase of the Great Terror, would have played a double game before he too was swept away by it.¹¹⁹ Testimony from anti-Stalinist militants reveals that “some of the leaflets [of the opposition] were printed in the GPU plant itself”; it can be seen that there was “continued tension in the [Soviet] Russian [state] terror machine.”¹²⁰

The infiltration was made easier by the timid openings of the regime. In calling for the fight against “bureaucratic dictatorship,”

114 Mayer (2000), pp. 271-2.

115 Broué (1991), p. 597.

116 Malaparte (1973), p. 124.

117 **Ed. Note:** The GPU, often translated as the ‘State Political Directorate’ or ‘State Political Administration,’ was the name of the USSR’s secret services and police in 1922-23. Hereafter referred to as the GPU.

118 Broué (1991), p. 616.

119 Thurston (1996), p. 34.

120 Fischer (1991), vol. 2, p. 250.

Trotsky pointed out that “the new constitution creates at the same time a semi-legal cover for the struggle against it.”¹²¹ It was fought even better by disguising itself, by concealing the intention to undermine and overthrow power. This is a point on which the leader of the opposition left no doubt: “The work of undermining requires certain conspiratorial precautions”; it is necessary to “observe the precepts of conspiracy in the struggle.” And again:

The life and death struggle is unthinkable without military craftiness, in other words, without lying and deceit. May the German proletariat then not deceive Hitler’s police? Or perhaps Soviet Bolsheviks have an “immoral” attitude when they deceive the GPU?¹²²

Again the Bolshevik conspiratorial tradition backfired against the regime that emerged from the Bolshevik revolution. In 1920 Lenin had called the attention of revolutionaries to “the viewpoint that it was obligatory to combine legal and illegal forms of struggle, and that it was obligatory to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institutions hemmed in by reactionary laws.” That was not all: revolutionaries must know “to make any sacrifice, and even—if need be—to resort to various stratagems, artifices, and illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, as long as we get into the trade unions, remain in them, and carry on communist work within them at all costs.”¹²³ This is precisely how the opposition behaved towards the institutions and political and social organizations of the hated “Thermidorian” regime. The conspirators adhered to a precise rule of conduct:

They make their self-criticisms, recognize their “mistakes” and are for the most part transferred. Those whom the Stalinist press now calls “the double-faced men” or even “the left-right faction,” seek from that moment contacts which would enable them to broaden the front of resistance to Stalin’s policy. On this road, they meet other groups...¹²⁴

One understands then the obsession with “two-facers,” the obsession that Khrushchev blamed on Stalin.¹²⁵

In the meantime, with the abandonment of the NEP came the

121 Trotsky (1988), p. 986 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 263).

122 Trotsky (1967), pp. 67, 69 and 63.

123 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 31, pp. 26 and 44.

124 Broué (1991), p. 680.

125 Khrushchev (1958), pp. 134-5.

break with Bukharin. Regarding the latter's attitude, it may be interesting to read the testimony of Humbert-Droz, a Comintern leader who was expelled from the Swiss Communist Party in 1942 for his disagreements with Stalin. Leaving for the First Conference of the Revolutionary Trade Unions of Latin America, in the spring of 1929 he went to greet Bukharin and had a conversation with him, which he reported as follows: "He brought me up to date with the contacts made by his group with the Zinoviev-Kamenev fraction in order to coordinate the struggle against the power of Stalin," a struggle which also envisaged the use of "individual terror" with the main objective "to rid themselves of Stalin" and, to be clear, "to make Stalin disappear."¹²⁶ Three years later it was another exponent of the "right," namely Martemyan N. Ryutin, who drew up and circulated a document which passed from hand to hand and which branded Stalin as a "agent provocateur" who had to be got rid of, resorting even to tyrannicide.¹²⁷ When Bukharin set out his plans, Humbert-Droz objected to him that "the introduction of individual terror into the political struggles born from the Russian Revolution would strongly risk turning against those who employed it," but Bukharin was unimpressed.¹²⁸ On the other hand, even so severe an objection couldn't appeal to a man who by now—as Bukharin confidentially revealed in 1936—harbored a deep "hatred" towards Stalin, indeed hatred so "absolute" as the sort to be reserved for a "devil."¹²⁹

While thus expressing himself in private, Bukharin edited the Soviet government organ *Izvestia*. Was this a glaring inconsistency? Not so from the point of view of the Bolshevik leader, who continued to combine legal and illegal work, in order to overthrow a regime he now hated, and who seemed to treasure another recommendation from Lenin. With reference to tsarist Russia, in *What is to be Done?* we can read:

In a country ruled by an autocracy, with a completely enslaved press, in a period of desperate political reaction in which even the tiniest outgrowth of political discontent and protest is persecuted, the theory of revolutionary Marxism suddenly forces its way into the censored literature and, though expounded in

126 Humbert-Droz (1974), pp. 263-4.

127 Graziosi (2007), p. 336; see also Tucker (1990), p. 211 and Mayer (2000), p. 647.

128 Humbert-Droz (1974), pp. 263-4.

129 Cohen (1975), p. 285; Tucker (1974), pp. 424-5.

Aesopian language, is understood by all the “interested.”¹³⁰

This is precisely how Bukharin used the platform of the Soviet government. His condemnation of the “omnipotent ‘total State,’” based on “blind discipline,” on “Jesuitical obedience,” on the “glorification of the ‘Leader’” feigned to refer only to Hitler’s Germany, but actually targets the USSR as well. The “Aesopian language” recommended by Lenin became immediately transparent, when the denunciation encompassed “cruel, uncultured provincialism.”¹³¹ This was clearly the portrait which the opposition drew of Stalin. We have seen Trotsky speak of him as a “minor provincial man” (*supra*, intr., § 1), and in confidential conversations it was Bukharin himself who expressed his disdain for a leader who had succeeded Lenin, while completely ignorant of foreign languages.¹³² Dwelling on the efficacy deployed in tsarist Russia by the revolutionary message expounded in “Aesopian language,” *What is to be Done?* thus continued:

Quite a considerable time elapsed [...] before the government realized what had happened and the unwieldy army of censors and gendarmes discovered the new enemy and flung itself upon him. Meanwhile, Marxist books were published one after another, Marxist journals and newspapers were founded, nearly everyone became a Marxist, Marxists were flattered, Marxists were courted, and the book publishers rejoiced at the extraordinary, ready sale of Marxist literature.¹³³

Bukharin and the opposition hoped that a similar phenomenon would create a favorable climate for the overthrow of Stalin. But the latter had also read *What is to be Done?* and knew well the Bolshevik rules of conspiracy. In conclusion, we witnessed a prolonged civil war. The clandestine network reorganized itself or tried to reorganize itself despite the successive waves of repression, which became more and more merciless. In the words of an active militant in the struggle against Stalin: “Though the Opposition was shattered, annihilated, opposition continued, grew; in the army, in the administration, in the Party, in the cities and in the countryside, each wave of terror [by the Stalinist regime] brought its echo of resistance.”¹³⁴ The Bolshevik leadership now appeared to be torn by a no-holds-barred trial of strength which, at least in the expectations and hopes of Stalin’s

130 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 5, p. 332.

131 Cohen (1975), pp. 356-60.

132 Volkogonov (1989), p. 295.

133 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 5, pp. 332-3.

134 Fischer (1991), vol. 2, p. 326.

enemies, could at any moment openly and comprehensively involve the entire country. While the opposition could recall the lesson of Lenin and the conspiratorial tradition of Bolshevism to weave its plots in the shadows, this duplicity aroused the indignation of the Soviet power which branded in false friends the most elusive and most insidious enemy: the tragedy ran towards its epilogue.

INFILTRATION, DISINFORMATION, AND CALLS FOR INSURRECTION

Do the “rules of conspiracy” theorized by Trotsky involve only the concealment of one’s political identity, or can they include the use of false denunciations, so as to sow confusion and chaos in the enemy camp and make it even more difficult to detect the clandestine network fighting for the overthrow of the Stalin regime? In other words, are the “conspiracy rules” only about the strict protection of confidential information, or are they also about giving the green light to disinformation? It is not just the American journalist Anne Louise Strong, who was sympathetic to the USSR government,¹³⁵ who held such suspicions. It is the *Secret Speech* itself that speaks of false reports and of “provocations” carried out both by “real Trotskyites,” who thus took their “revenge,” and by “conscienceless careerists” inclined to make their way even by the most despicable means.¹³⁶ A significant episode occurred at the time of the announcement of Kirov’s assassination. The prevailing feelings—Andrew Smith, who was working at that time in the Elektrozavod factory in Kuznecov, reports—were shock and anguish for the future; but there were also those who expressed regret that it was not Stalin who was hit. An assembly was then held, during which the workers were invited to denounce the enemies or possible enemies of Soviet power.

Smith recalled in amazement how, in the course of the debate, the group of dissenters with whom he himself was in contact had been the most diligent in attacking opponents and deviationists and calling for the most severe measures against them.¹³⁷

Symptomatic is also an episode that takes place outside the USSR but that can serve to understand what happens inside this country.

135 Strong (2004), ch. v.

136 Khrushchev (1958), pp. 136-7 and 139-40.

137 Flores (1990), pp. 215-6.

When General Alexandr M. Orlov, formerly a leading collaborator of the NKVD and in 1938 a defector to the United States, was accused by the journalist Louis Fischer of having participated during the Spanish Civil War in the liquidation of anti-Stalinist communist cadres, he responded with the false revelation that his accuser was actually a spy in the service of Moscow.¹³⁸

In the Soviet Union of the thirties we have seen the opposition infiltrate the highest levels of the apparatus of repression: it would be very strange if, after having achieved this result, it had limited itself to carrying out Stalin's orders! Disinformation, which has the twofold advantage of hampering the machine of repression and of getting rid of some particularly hated enemies precisely through it, is an integral part of war: and this is what it is now, judging at least from an intervention in July 1933 by Trotsky, who considers the counter-revolutionary civil war "already in progress," unleashed by "Stalinist bureaucracy" and resulted in the "base persecutions of the Bolshevik-Leninists" to be "going on right now." It is then necessary to take note of the new situation. "The slogan of the reform of the CPSU" no longer makes sense. A frontal struggle is necessary: the party and the International led by Stalin, by now at the end of their tether "can give nothing to the world proletariat, absolutely nothing, except evil"; on the opposite side the authentic revolutionaries certainly could not be inspired in their action by the "petty-bourgeois pacifists."¹³⁹ There is no doubt: "The bureaucracy can be compelled to yield power into the hands of the proletarian vanguard only by *force*."¹⁴⁰ Hitler's rise to power did not mean for Trotsky that unity was necessary in order to face the enormous danger looming from Germany, but rather that it was no longer possible to stop halfway in the struggle against a power, Stalinist power, which had led the German and international proletariat to defeat.

As we can see, it is the leader of the opposition himself who speaks of "civil war" within the party that had jointly directed the October Revolution and early Soviet Russia. We are in the presence of a category that constituted the guiding thread of the research of a Russian historian of sure and declared Trotskyist faith, the author of a monumental work in several volumes, dedicated precisely to the minute reconstruction of this civil war. He spoke, with regard to

138 Khlevniuk (1998), p. 28.

139 Trotsky (1997-2001), vol. 3, pp. 421-5.

140 Trotsky (1988), p. 490; italics in the original text.

Soviet Russia, of “preventive civil war” unleashed by Stalin against those organizing to overthrow him. Even outside the USSR, this civil war manifested itself and at times flared up within the front fighting against Franco; and in fact, in reference to Spain in 1936-39, one speaks not of one but of “two civil wars.”¹⁴¹ With great intellectual honesty and taking advantage of the new, rich documentary material available thanks to the opening of the Russian archives, the author quoted here came to the following conclusion: “The Moscow trials were not an unmotivated and cold-blooded crime but Stalin’s reaction in the course of an acute political struggle.”¹⁴²

Polemicalizing against Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who paints the victims of the purges as a collection of “rabbits,” the Russian Trotskyist historian reported a leaflet in the 1930s calling to sweep out of the Kremlin “the fascist dictator and his clique.” Then he comments, “Even from the point of view of the Russian legislation in force today, this leaflet must be judged as a call for the violent overthrow of power (more exactly of the ruling upper stratum).”¹⁴³ In conclusion, far from being an expression of “an excess of irrational and senseless violence,” the bloody terror unleashed by Stalin is in fact the only way in which he succeeded in bending the “resistance of true communist forces.” “The party of those to be shot,” is how targeted individuals were labeled “in analogy with the expression used to designate the French Communist Party, the principal force of anti-fascist resistance and the favored target of Hitler’s terror.”¹⁴⁴ Stalin is thus compared to Hitler. Yet the fact remains that French communists and partisans did not limit themselves to passive or non-violent resistance to the latter.

CIVIL WAR AND INTERNATIONAL MANEUVERS

It is not surprising that this or that great power from time to time sought to profit from the latent civil war in Soviet Russia. Sometimes it is a defeated group, who, believing in no other chance of success, urge or want to provoke foreign intervention. This dialectic developed as early as the first months of Soviet Russia’s existence.

141 Rogowin (1998), pp. 91 and 404.

142 Ibid., p. 100.

143 Rogowin (1999), pp. 288-9.

144 Ibid., pp. 11-2.

Let us return to the assassination attempt of July 6, 1918. It was an integral part of a very ambitious project. On the one hand, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries promoted “counter-revolutionary risings against the Soviet Government [...] in several centers” or even “an insurrection in Moscow in the hope of overthrowing the Communist government”; on the other hand, they also decided to “assassinate several leading Germans,” in order to provoke a German military reaction and consequent resumption of the war. Such an outcome would have been met by the Russian people’s mass revolt, which would have inflicted a defeat at once to the government of traitors and the invading enemy.¹⁴⁵ The protagonist of the attack on the German ambassador was a sincere revolutionary: well before making contact with Trotskyist circles, he intended to emulate the Jacobins, protagonists of the most radical phase of the French Revolution and of the heroic mass resistance against the invasion of the counterrevolutionary powers. In the eyes of the Soviet authorities, however, Blumkin could only be a provocateur: the success of his plan would have resulted in a new advance by Wilhelm II’s army and perhaps the collapse of the power born of the October Revolution.

At every historical turning point, domestic and international politics get intertwined. Hitler’s coming to power, with the annihilation or devastation of the strongest section of the Communist International, was a hard blow for the Soviet Union: how will it have weighed in on the balance of internal politics? On 30 March 1933, Trotsky, who blamed the USSR’s ruling bureaucracy for the communists’ defeat in Germany, wrote that “the liquidation of Stalin’s regime” is “absolutely inevitable and [...] not very long in coming.”¹⁴⁶ In the summer of that same year, in France, the Daladier government had granted Trotsky a visa. Only a few months had passed since the opposed Herriot’s previous rejection, so here one should wonder about the reasons for this change of mind. Ruth Fischer believes that the French government started from an assumption of a “weakness in Stalin’s position,” of a “gathering of the opposition against him” and of Trotsky’s imminent return to Moscow in a leading executive position.¹⁴⁷

A new dramatic turning point came with the outbreak of the Sec-

145 Carr (1964), p. 876; of “insurrection” see Daniels (1970), p. 145; see also Mayer (2000), p. 271.

146 Broué (1991), p. 707.

147 Ibid., pp. 715-6.

ond World War. In the spring of 1940, the Soviet Union was still out of the gigantic clash. Indeed, it continued to be linked to Germany through the non-aggression pact. It was an intolerable situation for countries already hit by Hitler's aggression, which, using the Russian-Finnish conflict as a pretext, drew up plans to bomb Baku's oil centers. It was not just a matter of striking at the Third Reich's energy supply line: "the Franco-British war plans aimed to make the Soviet Union break its military alliance with Germany through attacks on the Caucasus' oil industries and bring a post-Stalinist regime to their fold against Germany."¹⁴⁸

Let us go back for a moment to the assassination attempt on German Ambassador Mirbach. The man in charge had certainly aimed to provoke Germany's attack, but not because he had hoped for its victory. On the contrary, he had hoped that the whiplash would have awakened Russia, leading it to a decisive redemption. Later, we saw Blumkin take part in the conspiracy directed by Trotsky. And the latter, in turn, in order to clarify his position, compared himself in 1927 to the French Prime Minister Clemenceau, who, during the First World War, took over the leadership of the country after denouncing the lack of his predecessors' war effort and thus putting himself forward as the only statesman capable of leading France to victory against Germany.¹⁴⁹ From the mass of successive interpretations and reinterpretations of this analogy only one firm point has emerged: not even the invasion of the Soviet Union would put an end to the opposition's attempts to seize power. Even more disturbing is the comparison already seen of Stalin with Nicholas II. In the course of the First World War, read and denounced as an imperialist war, the Bolsheviks had launched the watchword of revolutionary defeatism and had identified the tsarist autocracy and the internal enemy as the main enemy, the one that in the first place they had to fight and defeat.

In the years that followed Trotsky went far beyond evoking the spirit of Clemenceau. On 22 April 1939 he spoke out for "freeing the so-called Soviet Ukraine from the Stalinist boot."¹⁵⁰ Once independent, it would then unite with western Ukraine, to be wrested from Poland, and with Carpathian Ukraine, annexed shortly before by Hungary. Let us reflect on the timing of this stance. The Third Reich had

148 Hillgruber (1991), p. 191.

149 Trotsky (1988), p. 117 and editor's note 85.

150 *Ibid.*, p. 1179.

just completed the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, and rumors began to grow that the Soviet Union (and in particular the Ukraine) was Germany's next target. Under these circumstances, in July 1939, even Kerensky had taken a stand against Trotsky's wondrous project which, the Menshevik leader observed, only favored Hitler's policy. "The same opinion is held also by the Kremlin," Trotsky promptly retorted, who, on the other hand, had already written in the 22 April article that with the independence of the Ukraine "the Bonapartist clique [in Moscow] will reap what it has sown"; better that "the present Bonapartist caste is undermined, upset, crushed, and swept away." Only this way could the road be paved for a genuine "defense of the Soviet Republic" and its "socialist future."¹⁵¹ Immediately after the start of the invasion of Poland, Trotsky went even further. In predicting the final ruin of the Third Reich, he adds: "On the road to the abyss Hitler can not only crush Poland, but he can give the Soviet Union such blows as to cost the Kremlin oligarchy their heads."¹⁵² This prediction (or this wish) for a liquidation (even physical) of the "clique" or "Bonapartist caste" by a revolution from below or even by a military invasion could not fail to appear to Stalin's eyes as the confirmation of his suspicions about the at least "objective" convergence of between the Nazi leadership and the Trotskyist opposition. Both had an interest in provoking the USSR's collapse from within, even if the former saw in this collapse the prerequisite to the Slavic country's enslavement and the latter the unleashing of a new revolution.

Nor was this a particularly damning suspicion. Posing as a new Lenin, Trotsky aspired to use to his advantage the dialectical process that had led to the defeat of the Russian army, the collapse of the tsarist autocracy and the victory of the October Revolution. Once again, the history behind Bolshevism had backfired on Soviet power. Kerensky, who in 1917 had denounced the Bolsheviki's treachery, now warned against the treachery of self-defined "Bolshevik-Leninists." From Stalin's point of view, there had been a radical change since the First World War. He was now dealing with a political party or faction which, at least as far as the initial phase of the conflict was concerned, took into account the collapse of the country resulting from the October Revolution and the military triumph of a Germany not already worn down by three years of war, as was that of Wilhelm II, but in the fullness of its power and explicitly committed to building its co-

151 Ibid., pp. 1253-4 and 1179.

152 Ibid., pp. 1258-9.

lonial empire in the East. Given these assumptions, the emergence of the charge of treason is hardly surprising. Let us return to Trotsky's article of 22 April 1939. In it there is only one statement that may have met with Stalin's approval: "The impending war will create a favorable atmosphere for all sorts of adventurers, miracle-hunters and seekers of the golden fleece."¹⁵³

As the flames of the Second World War raged further, destined to extend to the Soviet Union as well, as Trotsky himself predicted, Trotsky continued to make statements and assertions that were anything but reassuring. Let us see some of them: "Soviet patriotism is inseparable from irreconcilable struggle against the Stalinist clique" (June 18, 1940); "The Fourth International long ago recognized the necessity of overthrowing the bureaucracy [in power in Russia] by means of a revolutionary uprising of the toilers" (25 September 1939); "The Stalinist bureaucracy [...] has thus become the main source of war danger to the Soviet Union" (April 13, 1940).¹⁵⁴ It is well understandable that, branded as the "main enemy," the "bureaucracy," or rather the "oligarchy" in power became convinced that the opposition, if not in the direct service of the enemy, was nevertheless ready at least at first to go along with its action.

Any government would have identified organizations thus oriented as a threat to national security. Stalin's worries and suspicions were heightened by the prediction, which Trotsky indulged in (on 25 September 1939), of an "approaching revolution in the USSR": the Stalinist bureaucracy had "just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall."¹⁵⁵ Where did this certainty come from? Was it a forecast formulated by taking into account only the internal developments of the country?

It is all the more difficult to decipher the interweaving of political conflicts within Soviet Russia and international tensions because the suspicions and accusations are further fueled by the substantial reality of a fifth column and the disinformation operations carried out by Hitler's German secret service. In April 1938, Goebbels noted in his diary: "Our clandestine radio transmitter from East Prussia to Russia is causing a great stir. It operates in the name of Trotsky, and gives Stalin a hard time."¹⁵⁶ Immediately after the unleashing of

153 Ibid., p. 1183.

154 Ibid., pp. 1341, 1273 and 1328.

155 Ibid., pp. 1273 and 1286.

156 Goebbels (1996), p. 123.

Operation Barbarossa, the head of the propaganda services of the Third Reich, was even more satisfied: "We are now working with three underground radio stations for Russia: the first is Trotskyist, the second separatist, the third Russian-nationalist, all three of them harsh against the Stalinist regime." It is an instrument to which the aggressors attach great importance: "We work with every means, especially with the three clandestine radios for Russia"; they "are a model of astuteness and sophistication."¹⁵⁷ On the role of "Trotskyist" propaganda Goebbels' diary note of 14 July is particularly significant. After reporting on the treaty between the Soviet Union and Britain and the joint communiqué of the two countries, the note continued as follows: "This is a welcome opportunity for us to demonstrate the compatibility between capitalism and Bolshevism [here synonymous with official Soviet power]. The statement will encounter little favor among the circles of Leninists in Russia" (keep in mind that the Trotskyists liked to define themselves as the 'Bolshevik-Leninists,' as opposed to the 'Stalinists' who were considered traitors to Leninism).¹⁵⁸

Naturally, Stalin and his collaborators' *en bloc* condemnation of the opposition as a den of enemy spies seems grotesque today, but one must not lose sight of the historical picture summarily outlined here. Above all, it is necessary to keep in mind that similar suspicions and accusations in the opposite direction were being formulated against the Stalin leadership. After branding Stalin a "fascist dictator" the leaflets that the Trotskyist network circulated in the Soviet Union added: "The Politburo leaders are either mentally ill or mercenaries of fascism."¹⁵⁹ Even in official opposition documents it was insinuated that Stalin might be the protagonist of a "gigantic intentional provocation."¹⁶⁰ On one side and the other, rather than engage in the laborious analysis of the objective contradictions and opposing options and the political conflicts that developed on this basis, one preferred to resort hastily to the category of treason and, in its extreme configuration, the traitor became the conscious and valuable agent of the enemy. Trotsky never tired of denouncing the "conspiracy of the Kremlin bureaucracy against the working class," and the plot is all the more despicable for the fact that the "Stalinist

157 Goebbels (1992), pp. 1614 and 1619-20.

158 Ibid., p. 1635.

159 Rogowin (1999), pp. 288-9.

160 Broué (1991), p. 683.

bureaucracy” was nothing more than a “transmissive mechanism of imperialism.”¹⁶¹ It is hardly necessary to say that Trotsky was generously repaid in the same coin. He complained of being branded as an agent “of this and that power” but in turn labeled Stalin an “agent provocateur in the service of Hitler.”¹⁶²

The most hateful accusations are leveled by both sides. On closer inspection, the most fanciful were those coming from the opposition. The contradictory and tormented state of mind of its leader has been finely analyzed by a Russian historian hardly suspectable of Stalinist sympathies:

Trotsky wanted not the defeat of the Soviet Union, but the collapse of Stalin. In his prophecies about the impending war there is a sense of insecurity: the exile knew that only a defeat of his homeland could put an end to Stalin’s power [...]. He desired war, because in this war he saw the only possibility of overthrowing Stalin. But Trotsky did not want to admit this even to himself.¹⁶³

BETWEEN “BONAPARTIST OVERTHROW,” “COUPS D’ÉTAT” AND DISINFORMATION: THE TUKHACHEVSKY CASE

The affair that led to the 1937 indictment and execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky and of numerous other leading members of the Red Army must be understood in this context of civil war (latent or manifest) within the new ruling group that had emerged from the collapse of the ancien régime, of mutual accusations of treason and collusion with the imperialist enemy, and of the real activity of the secret services in recruiting agents and in deception.

There is a long prehistory behind this affair. Lenin already saw a Bonapartist danger looming over Soviet Russia and expressed his worries about it to Trotsky as well: would civilian power really succeed in being obeyed by the military? In 1920 Tukhachevsky seemed to want to sovereignly decide the victorious march on Warsaw that he dreamed of. In any case, leading historians observe today, a tendency for the brilliant general who “might very well have become the Bonaparte of the Bolshevik Revolution” clearly emerged.¹⁶⁴ Ten years later Stalin was warned by the GPU about plots that were being

161 Trotsky (1967), pp. 64 and 44.

162 Trotsky (1988), pp. 1334 and 1339.

163 Volkogonov (1989), pp. 514-5.

164 Mayer (2000), p. 621, who in turn refers to Thomas C. Fiddick.

woven against him in military circles. Was it mere fabrication?¹⁶⁵ In April of the following year, serious doubts about Tukhachevsky were formulated by Trotsky, who made this analysis of the situation in the USSR following the political defeat of Bukharin and the “right wing” connected with him: now the main danger for socialism was not represented by the “Thermidorian overthrow,” which formally preserved the Soviet character of the country and the Communist character of the party in power, but by the “Bonapartist overthrow,” which takes “a more open, ‘riper’ form of the bourgeois counterrevolution, carried out against the Soviet system and the Bolshevik party as a whole, in the form of the naked sword raised in the name of bourgeois property.” In that case, “the adventurist-praetorian elements of the type of Tukhachevsky” could play a major role. Countering them “with arms in hand” would be the “revolutionary elements” of the party, the state and—note well—“the army,” gathered around the working class and the “faction of Bolshevik-Leninists” (i.e. Trotskyists).¹⁶⁶

This stance represented a new element in the conflict between the Bolsheviks: while keeping “the armed forces under his control,” Stalin “also took care not to involve them too closely in all the controversies and intrigues which shook party and state.”¹⁶⁷ Now clearly the opposition sought to set foot or consolidate its presence in the army in the name of the struggle against the Bonapartist danger, which only it would be able to deal with in a consequential manner. And yet, without allowing himself to be impressed by the Bonapartist danger thus evoked, in 1936 Stalin elevated Tukhachevsky and four other military leaders to the rank of marshal. It was a promotion decided in the context of a reform that saw the army abandon “from a predominantly territorial into a standing force” and restoring “the old pre-revolutionary discipline.”¹⁶⁸ On December 21 of the same year, together with the other members of the Soviet political and military leadership, the newly appointed marshal celebrated Stalin’s birthday at Stalin’s home, “till 5.30 in the morning!” points out Dimitrov.¹⁶⁹

It was precisely this reform that aroused the indignation of Trotsky. On the one hand, he resumed the old accusation that the Red Army “has not stood aside, however, from the processes of degen-

165 Khlevniuk (1998), p. 61.

166 Trotsky (1988), pp. 297-9.

167 Deutscher (1969), p. 694.

168 *Ibid.*, p. 531.

169 Dimitrov (2002), p. 59.

eration of the Soviet regime. On the contrary, these have found their most finished expression in the army.” On the other hand, Trotsky adopted a new tone, mentioning the “the formation of something in the nature of an oppositional faction within the army” which, from the left, lamented the abandonment of the “perspective of world revolution.” And the text quoted here in some way insinuates that to such opposition Tukhachevsky himself could be attracted. Tukhachevsky, who, in 1921, had even fought “somewhat too impetuous[ly],” for the formation of the “international general staff,” could scarcely recognize himself in the abandonment of internationalism and indeed in the “deification of the status quo,” which had by then taken over in the USSR. What can be said of this later text from Trotsky? Agitation within the army had continued apace and had seemed to be growing stronger: only now the struggle on the horizon saw not the “faction of Bolshevik-Leninists” pitted against the Bonapartist generals, but a substantial part of the army and its leadership against the Thermidorian and traitorous leaders of the Kremlin. The resistance of the Red Army or its rebellion against the central power would be all the more justified by the fact that the new course actually configured itself as “a kind of twofold state revolution” which, breaking with the Bolshevik October, proceeded arbitrarily to the “abolition of the militia” and the “the restoration of officers’ castes 18 years after their revolutionary abolition.”¹⁷⁰ According to this view, by eventually rising up against Stalin, the Red Army would have in fact foiled the coups he had engineered and restored revolutionary legality. As if all this were not enough, the Trotskyist “Opposition Bulletin” evokes an imminent army revolt.¹⁷¹ Perhaps a measure taken in Moscow a few months before the trials was aimed at facing this possible danger: “On 29 March 1937 the Politburo issued a resolution mandating retirement or dispatch to civilian work for Red Army officers who had been expelled from the party for political reasons.”¹⁷²

Further fueling the climate of suspicion and concern, rumors were being circulated by White Army Russian circles in Paris about a military coup being prepared in Moscow.¹⁷³ Finally, in the second half of January 1937, information reached the Czechoslovak president Eduard Beneš concerning Secret “negotiations” in progress be-

170 Trotsky (1988), pp. 913 and 916-28 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 192 and 195-205).

171 Volkogonov (1989), p. 415.

172 Khlevniuk (2006), p. 162.

173 Volkogonov (1989), p. 412.

tween the Third Reich and “the anti-Stalin clique in the U.S.S.R., Marshal Tukhachevsky, Rykov and others.”¹⁷⁴ Was there any foundation to the accusation or was the whole thing a set-up by the German secret services? Also, in early 1937, conversing with Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, Hitler had rejected the idea of an improvement in relations with the USSR, but added: “It would be different if things in Moscow were to develop in the direction of absolute despotism, based on the military. In that case it would not be permissible to waste the opportunity to make our presence felt again in Russia.”¹⁷⁵ Beneš had also made the French leadership aware of the “negotiations,” “whose confidence in the Franco-Soviet Pact was considerably weakened.”¹⁷⁶ So it was not only Stalin who gave credence to the rumors or information passed on by the Czechoslovak president. And, on the other hand, even after the conclusion of the Second World War, Churchill seems to endorse Moscow’s version, pointing out, as we shall see (*infra*, ch. 7, § 2), that the purge had affected the “pro-German elements,” to which he added: “Stalin was conscious of a personal debt to President Beneš.”¹⁷⁷

The question about the rumor remains open, however, and to answer it conclusively a conversation at Hitler’s table in the summer of 1942 is of little help. Though without referring to a definite military conspiracy, Hitler had observed that Stalin had serious reasons to fear being killed by Tukhachevsky’s circle.¹⁷⁸ Had the whole thing been staged under the direct supervision or consent of the Führer himself,¹⁷⁹ the latter would perhaps have boasted about it, at a time when the impression of the Wehrmacht’s first overwhelming successes was still fresh.

After the “trial” and execution had already taken place, in asking the key question (“was there really a military conspiracy?”), Trotsky forwards an answer that gives pause: “It all depends on what people call a conspiracy. Every sign of discontent, every time dissatisfied people draw closer together, every criticism or argument about what must be done in order to halt the devastating policies of the government—is, from Stalin’s point of view, a conspiracy. And under

174 Beneš (1954), pp. 19-20 and 47, note 8.

175 In Nolte (1987), pp. 306-7.

176 Conquest (2000), p. 322.

177 Churchill (1963), p. 321.

178 Hitler (1989), p. 447 (conversation of July 21, 1942).

179 Conquest (2000), p. 321.

a totalitarian regime, without any doubt every opposition is the embryo of a conspiracy.”¹⁸⁰ In this sense an “embryo” was the generals’ aspiration to protect the army from the “demoralizing intrigues of the GPU.” Is this the refutation of the conspiracy thesis or its admission in the “Aesopian language” imposed by circumstances? Drawing attention to this ambiguous statement is the above-mentioned fervent Trotskyist Russian historian (Rogowin), who finally took up Tukhachevsky’s thesis of the “anti-Stalinist conspiracy” and placed it in a “Bolshevik” rather than bourgeois political framework.

In conclusion, doubts remain, but it seems difficult to explain the whole affair with the usual *deus ex machina*, the dictator thirsty for power and blood and in any case eager to surround himself only with puppets ready for blind and unconditional obedience. All the more fragile is this explanation for the fact that in 1932 Stalin had no difficulties in attending, together with Molotov, and listening listen to the lectures of Boris M. Shaposhnikov, the director of the Military Academy; and from these lectures, given by a strategist of great prestige, but one who was not a member of the Communist Party, Stalin seems to have gained greatly.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, “military art was one of the few politically important domains in which Stalin encouraged the original and experimenting mind,” so that “the officers’ corps” was able to show remarkable “independence of mind.”¹⁸² The generals who took the place of Tukhachevsky and his collaborators were those who, far from being passive executors, expressed their opinions frankly and argued with autonomous judgment,¹⁸³ without hesitating to contradict the supreme leader, who, moreover, encouraged and sometimes rewarded this attitude (*supra*, ch. 1, § 6).

THREE CIVIL WARS

If we do not want to remain prisoners of the caricatured portrait of Stalin drawn by Trotsky and by Khrushchev, in the course of two different but equally bitter political struggles, we must not lose sight of the fact that the events that began in October 1917 were characterized by three civil wars. The first saw the revolution clashing with

180 Rogowin (1998), pp. 520 and 531-44.

181 Schneider (1994), pp. 248 and 232.

182 Deutscher (1969), pp. 694-5.

183 Roberts (2006), p. 16.

the variegated front of its enemies, supported by the capitalist powers committed to containing the Bolshevik contagion by all means necessary. The second develops from a revolution from above and outside, which, despite some pushes from below from the peasant world, substantially consists in the collectivization of agriculture. The third is that which tears the Bolshevik ruling group apart.

The latter is all the more complex in having been characterized by great political fluidity and even by resounding reversals of positions. We have seen Bukharin, on occasion of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, briefly hinting at a project of a sort of coup d'état against Lenin, whom he reproaches for wanting to transform "the party into a dung heap." But, if at that moment Bukharin approached Trotsky's position, in the eyes of the latter, Bukharin becomes ten years later the privileged embodiment of Thermidor and bureaucratic treachery: "With Stalin against Bukharin?—Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin?—Never!"¹⁸⁴ This is a moment when Trotsky seemed to warn Stalin against Bukharin. The latter would soon "hunt down Stalin as a Trotskyist, just as Stalin had hunted down Zinoviev." It was 1928 and already the rift between Stalin and Bukharin was emerging. In fact, because of the abandonment of the NEP, Bukharin began "describing Stalin privately as the representative of neo-Trotskyism" and as "an unprincipled intriguer," ultimately as the worst and most dangerous enemy within the party.¹⁸⁵ The former diarchy thus set out on the path that would lead him to form a bloc with Trotsky. In the end, the various oppositions united against the victor; hence, the fact remains that to the very end the sides in the deadly conflict among the Bolsheviks were rather mutable.

Fought in a country with no liberal tradition and characterized on the one hand by the prolongation of the state of exception, and on the other by the persistence of an ideology inclined to dismiss as merely "formal" the norms governing the rule of law, the third civil war takes on the ferocity of a religious war. Trotsky, who "considered himself the only man fit to be the leader of the revolution," was inclined to resort to "any means to bring down the 'false Messiah' from the usurped throne."¹⁸⁶ A "zealous faith" also inspires the opposing camp (*infra*, ch. 4, § 4). The more determined Stalin was to stamp out any danger of conspiracy, even the remotest kind, the more the

184 In Cohen (1975), pp. 75 and 268.

185 *Ibid.*, pp. 288 and 285.

186 Feuchtwanger (1946), p. 95.

clouds of war threatened the very existence of Russia itself and the country of socialism, therefore posing a mortal danger to both national and social causes, the two causes which Stalin was convinced he embodied.

Not always easily distinguishable from each other (acts of terrorism and sabotage can reflect either counterrevolutionary or new revolutionary projects), the three civil wars were in turn intertwined with the intervention of this or that great power. The entangled and tragic whole of these conflicts dissolved in the depictions drawn in different ways first by Trotsky and then by Khrushchev, who told simple and edifying fables of a monster who by his mere touch turns gold into blood and slime.

3

BETWEEN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND THE
LONGUE DURÉE, BETWEEN THE HISTORY OF
MARXISM AND THE HISTORY OF RUSSIA:
THE ORIGINS OF "STALINISM"

A CATASTROPHE FORETOLD

So far we have concentrated on the interweaving of the ideological, political, and military contradictions of the revolutionary process, on the one hand, and international conflicts on the other. But the picture would not be complete if we did not also bring in the long-term dimension of the history of Russia. The approaching catastrophe had been felt by observers of the most diverse orientations well before 1917 and even well before the formation of the Bolshevik Party. In 1811, in the St. Petersburg still shaken by the peasant revolt led by Pugachev (an illiterate but with great political skills) which had been suffocated with some difficulty a few decades earlier, Joseph de Maistre expressed the concern that a new "European" type revolution might break out, this time led by an intellectual class of popular extraction or sentiments, by a "Pugachev of the University." By comparison, the upheavals that had taken place in France would appear as child's play in comparison: "there are no expressions to tell you what one might fear."¹

Let's jump forward about half a century. A prophecy even more fitting, indeed positively amazing for the its prescience, can be read in an article on Russia by Marx published in an American newspaper (the *New York Daily Tribune* of January 17, 1859): if the nobility continues to oppose the emancipation of the peasantry, a great revolution will break out "the reign of terror of these half-Asiatic serfs will

1 Maistre (1984), vol. 12, pp. 59-60.

be something unequaled in history.”²

Immediately after the 1905 revolution it was the Russian Prime Minister himself, Sergei Witte, who stressed the unsustainability of the situation and warned the tsar of the danger represented by the *bunt*, the peasant revolt:

The advance of human progress is unstoppable. The idea of human freedom will triumph, if not by way of reform, then by way of revolution. But in the latter even it will come to life on the ashes of a thousand years of destroyed history. The Russian bunt, mindless and pitiless, will sweep away everything, turn everything to dust [...] the horrors of the Russian bunt may surpass everything known to history.³

Moreover, it was Witte himself who was involved in the ferocious repression with which the 1905 revolution and the often savage *jacqueries* that accompanied it were met: the Minister of the Interior P. N. Durnovo ordered “the governors to ‘proceed to the immediate execution’ of the rioters, to burn and raze to the ground the villages from which the riots originated”; the “military tribunals,” the “collective reprisals,” the death squads, and the pogroms that fell on the Jews, accused of fueling subversion. It was a situation that lasted up to the outbreak of war. It was that same Minister of the Interior himself who warned: “Revolution in its most extreme form and irreversible anarchy will be the only foreseeable results of an ill-conceived conflict with the Kaiser.”⁴

This is what came to pass, in due course. Let’s consider the picture that Russia presents on the eve of the accession to power of the Bolsheviks. The myth of a country which, following the collapse of autocracy was happily set on the road to liberalism and democracy, but has now fallen into crisis. It was a myth cultivated by Churchill who, to justify his interventionist policy, accused the Bolsheviks, propelled by “German gold,” of having forcibly overthrown the “Russian Republic” and the “Russian Parliament.”⁵ It would be easy to accuse the English statesman of hypocrisy: he was well aware that between February and October London had regularly supported coup attempts aimed at restoring tsarist autocracy or imposing military dictatorship. It is Kerensky himself who had stressed that “the French

2 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 12, p. 682.

3 In Werth (2001), p. 50.

4 Ibid., pp. 53, 59-60 and 74-5.

5 Schmid (1974), pp. 17 and 293.

and British governments seize[d] every opportunity to sabotage the Provisional Government."⁶ And yet, from his American exile, the Menshevik leader continued to cultivate the myth in question to the last, accusing the Bolsheviks of a double betrayal, towards the fatherland and towards the "newborn Russian democracy."⁷

With the end of World War II and the emergence of the USSR as a superpower, the charge of national betrayal became obsolete. Kerensky, however, was one of the few Menshevik leaders who clung to it. Indeed, beyond him the Bolshevik betrayal of Russian democracy culminating in the Stalinist terror is still a commonplace motif. But this cliché does not withstand historical analysis. It is not just a question of the obstinacy of the leaders who emerged from the February Days, and first and foremost of Kerensky himself, to persevere in carnage which the overwhelming majority of the population is determined to bring to an end: a political line that can only be carried out by resorting to the iron fist and terror at the front and in the rear. Nor do the recurrent attempts to establish a military dictatorship (to which Churchill is anything but a stranger) constitute the main feature. There is much more: "The idea that the February Days were a 'bloodless revolution'—and that the violence of the crowd did not really take off until October—was a liberal myth": this is "one of the most tenacious myths about 1917," but which has now lost all credibility."⁸ Let's look at how it actually unfolded: "The crowd exacted a violent revenge against the officials of the old regime. Policemen were hunted down, lynched and killed brutally."⁹ In St. Petersburg, "in a few days the number of dead amounted to about 1,500," with the often ferocious lynching of the most hated representatives of the ancien régime; "the most serious violence, however, was perpetrated by the sailors of Kronstadt, who mutilated and murdered hundreds of officials."¹⁰ The mutineers were the youngest recruits: "the normal rules of naval discipline did not apply" to them, and the officers had routinely treated these rookies "with more than the usual sadistic brutality"; hence they exacted revenge with an "awesome ferocity."¹¹

The situation deteriorated further in September, following Gen-

6 Kerensky (1989), p. 415.

7 Ibid., pp. 340 and 328 ff.

8 Figs (2000), p. 399; Werth (2007a), p. 27.

9 Figs (2000), p. 400.

10 Werth (2007a), pp. 28-9.

11 Figs (2000), p. 481.

eral Lavr Kornilov's attempted coup d'état: popular executions and assassinations were rampant, accompanied by "unprecedented violence." Yes, "officials were tortured and mutilated before being put to death (eyes and tongue torn out, ears cut off, nails driven into epaulets), hanged upside-down, impaled. According to General Brusilov, a large number of young officials committed suicide to escape a horrible death."¹² On the other hand, "methods of killing officers were so brutal, with limbs and genitals sometimes cut off or the victims skinned alive, that one can hardly blame the officer."¹³ Moreover, the fury was such that, even before October, "in the resolutions of the Soviets then largely dominated by Socialist-Revolutionaries, anyone against the Soviets were stigmatized as 'enemies of the working people, the bloodthirsty capitalists, the bourgeois who suck the blood of the people.'"¹⁴

On the other hand, "the crisis of town-country trade, well before the Bolsheviks seized power," created a new, acute hotbed of violence. In the tragic situation created by the catastrophe of the war, the decline in agricultural production and the hoarding of the scarce food resources available, meant the survival of the city dwellers depended on very radical measures: once again, even before the October Revolution, a minister who was "a known liberal economist" advocated the use of requisitioning by means of "armed force" in the event of market incentive failure; the fact was that "the practice of requisitioning" is common to "all the parties in conflict."¹⁵

The interweaving of these multiple contradictions causes a bloody anarchy, with the "collapse of all authority and institutional frameworks," with the explosion of savage violence from below (of which the protagonists are first and foremost the millions of deserting or disbanded soldiers) and with "a general militarization and brutalization of social behavior and political practices."¹⁶ It was "a level of brutalization incomparable to that known to Western societies."¹⁷

In order to understand this tragedy, one must keep in mind the "process of spreading social violence from the areas of military violence," the "contamination of the rear by the violence exercised by

12 Werth (2007a), pp. 41-2.

13 Figes (2000), p. 463.

14 Werth (2007a), p. 31.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 52-3 and 55.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 53 and 51.

17 *Ibid.*, p. XV.

the soldiers-peasants-deserters outside the framework of the army," by the "millions of deserters from the decaying Russian army," the increasingly blurred "boundaries between the front and the rear, between the civilian sphere and the military." In conclusion: "the violence of the military zones spreads everywhere" and society as a whole was not only plunged into chaos and anarchy but became prey to "unprecedented brutalization."¹⁸

It is therefore a matter of starting from the First World War and the crisis and disintegration of the Russian army. In fact, it is perhaps worth proceeding even further back in time. The exceptional burden of violence that fell on Russia in the twentieth century can be explained in light of the intertwining of two processes: "the great *jacquerie* of the autumn of 1917," which had been smoldering for centuries and which for this very reason unleashed a blind and indiscriminate violence against property and homes and the very lives of the owners, as well as a very strong resentment against the city as such. The second process was "the disintegration of the Tsarist army, the largest army in history, 95% of which was composed of peasants."¹⁹

The oppression, exploitation, and humiliation of an endless mass of peasants at the hands of a small aristocratic elite, which considered itself a stranger to its own people, who were degraded to a different and inferior race, was the harbinger of a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. All the more so because the First World War further exacerbated social conflict, in which aristocratic military officers exercised a daily power of life and death over the serf-soldiers. It was not by chance that, at the first signs of crisis, they sought to maintain discipline at the front and in the rear by resorting to artillery.²⁰ The collapse of the ancien régime was the moment of revenge and vengeance, which had been longed for and brooded over for centuries. This is self-critically acknowledged by Prince G. E. L'vov: the "revenge of the serfs" was a settling of accounts with those who had for centuries refused to "treat the peasants as people rather than dogs."²¹

Unfortunately, just because it was a question of revenge, it took not only savage but also purely destructive forms: "Thousands of drunken workers and soldiers were roaming through the city looting stores, breaking into houses, beating up and robbing people in the

18 Ibid., pp. 27 and 37-8.

19 Ibid., pp. 38-9 and 43.

20 Lincoln (1994), p. 147.

21 Figes (2000), p. 448.

streets.” Even worse was what happened in the countryside: “Whole units of deserters took over regions in the rear and lived as bandits.” The united agitation of deserter soldiers and peasants sparked a devastating fire in Russia under the banner not only of *jacquerie* (aristocratic houses were set on fire and their owners often killed) but also of Luddism (the agricultural machinery that in previous years had reduced the need to resort to wage labor was destroyed) and vandalism (destroying and defacing “anything, like paintings, books or sculptures, that smacked of excessive wealth”). Yes, “peasants vandalized manor houses, churches and schools. They burned down libraries and smashed up priceless works of art.”²²

THE RUSSIAN STATE PRESERVED BY THOSE
ADVOCATING “THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE”

On the whole, we can thus characterize the situation that was created following the February Revolution and the collapse of the ancien régime:

Russia, in short, was being Balkanized [...]. If 1917 proved anything, it was that Russian society was neither strong enough nor cohesive enough to sustain a democratic revolution. Apart from the state itself, there was nothing holding Russia together.²³

Ironically, it was a party that foresaw and hoped for the final extinction of the state that reintroduced the state! Ruthless is the energy that is required to restore order in a world which, having been savaged by centuries of isolation and oppression, is undergoing a further process of barbarization following the war, the dissolution of the ancien régime, and the spreading anarchy and chaos. But it would be trivially ideological to see only one side resorting to terrorist violence. Let’s see how the emerging new power is countered:

This was a savage war of vengeance against the Communist regime. Thousands of Bolsheviks were brutally murdered. Many were the victims of gruesome (and symbolic) tortures: ears, tongues and eyes were cut out; limbs, heads and genitals were cut off; stomachs were sliced open and stuffed with wheat; crosses were branded on foreheads and torsos; Communists were nailed to trees, burned alive, drowned under ice, buried up to their necks and eaten by dogs or rats,

22 Ibid., pp. 407, 507, 447, and 486.

23 Ibid., p. 441

while crowds of peasants watched and shouted. Party and Soviet offices were ransacked. Police stations and rural courts were burned to the ground. Soviet schools and propaganda centers were vandalized [...]. Simple banditry also played a role. Most of the rebel armies held up trains. In the Donbass region such holdups were said to be 'almost a daily occurrence' during the spring of 1921. Raids on local towns, and sometimes the peasant farmers, were another common source of provisions.²⁴

What brought about this savage violence? Was it the policy conducted by the Bolsheviks? Only in part: in 1921-22 there was "a terrible famine [...] directly caused by a year of drought and heavy frosts."²⁵ On the other hand, the peasant revolt was also a protest against a state of affairs "that took away their only sons and horses for the army, one that prolonged the devastations of the civil war, one that forced them into labor teams and robbed them of their food";²⁶ that is, it was a protest against a catastrophe that had begun in 1914.

As far as Bolshevik policy is concerned, one must also be able to distinguish between measures which struck the peasantry in a senseless manner and others which were of an entirely different character. One thinks of the collective farms which had already taken hold in 1920 and which were often made up of militant communists from the city, driven not only by their ideals but also by the hunger that raged in the urban centers: "People ate and worked in their collective teams. Women did heavy field work alongside the men, and sometimes nurseries were set up for the children. There was also an absence of religious practice." Even in this case the hostility of the peasants was unshakable, who "believed that in the collectives not only the land and tools were shared but also wives and daughters; that everyone slept together under one huge blanket."²⁷ On the other hand, even more bitter was the experience endured between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century by the populists, who were determined to "go to the people" and help them by establishing cooperatives, but were quickly forced to revise the idealized image they had of the Russian peasant. Here is the fate that befell one of them, Michail Romas:

From the start the villagers were suspicious of his co-operative. They could not

24 Ibid., p. 909.

25 Ibid., p. 903.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., pp. 877-8.

understand why its prices were so much cheaper than the other retail outlets. The richest peasants, who were closely linked with the established merchants, intimidated Romas and his allies. They filled one of his firewood logs with gunpowder, causing a minor explosion. They threatened the poorer peasants who began to show an interest in the co-operative; and brutally murdered one of his assistants, a poor peasant from the village, leaving his horribly mutilated body in several pieces along the river bank. Finally, they blew up the co-operative (along with half the rest of the village) by setting light to the kerosene store. These naive populists barely escaped with their lives.²⁸

Once again, the long-term nature of the violence in crisis-ridden Russia comes to the fore. This also applies to the horrific pogroms targeting Jews and Bolsheviks, one rationale for the persecution of the former being that they were suspected as puppeteers of the latter. Let us again give the floor to the English historian repeatedly quoted here:

In some places, such as Chernobyl, the Jews were herded into the synagogue, which was then burned down with them inside. In others, such as Cherkass, they gang-raped hundreds of pre-teen girls. Many of their victims were later found with knife and saber wounds to their small vaginas [...]. The Terek Cossacks tortured and mutilated hundreds of Jews, many of them women and young children. Hundreds of corpses were left out in the snow for the dogs and pigs to eat. In the midst of this macabre scene the Cossack officers held a surreal ball in the town post office, complete with evening dress and an orchestra, to which they invited the local magistrate and a group of prostitutes they had brought with them from Kherson. While their soldiers went killing Jews for sport, the officers and their *beau monde* drank champagne and danced the night away.

In this regard, “a 1920 report of an investigation by the Jewish organizations in Soviet Russia, talks of ‘more than 150,000 reported deaths’ and up to 300,000 victims, including the wounded and the dead.”²⁹

STALIN AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND TIME OF TROUBLES

The Russian Revolution now appears in a new perspective: “Undoubtedly, the success of the Bolsheviks in the civil war was due, in the last analysis, to their extraordinary ability to ‘build the state,’

28 Ibid., p. 122.

29 Ibid., pp. 814-5.

an ability which their adversaries lacked."³⁰ It was some of the declared enemies of the Bolsheviks in 1918 in Russia who drew attention to this point, even before modern-day "historians" were busy writing *The Black Book of Communism*. Pavel Milyukov recognizes the merit of their having known how to "re-establish the State." Vasilii Maklakov goes even further: "The new government has begun to restore the apparatus of State, to restore order, to fight against chaos. In this field the Bolsheviks show energy, I will say more, of an undeniable talent."³¹ Three years later even in an ultraconservative American newspaper one could read: "Lenin is the only man in Russia who has the strength to hold everything together. If he were overthrown only chaos would reign."³²

The revolutionary dictatorship that emerged from the October Revolution also fulfilled a national function. Gramsci understood this well when, in June 1919, he celebrated the Bolsheviks not only as the protagonists of a great revolution, but also for having demonstrated their revolutionary greatness by forming a ruling group of excellent "statesmen" capable of saving the whole nation from the catastrophe into which it had been plunged by the ancien régime and the old ruling class (*supra*, ch. 2, § 5). The following year Lenin himself indirectly referred to this when, polemicizing against extremism, he underlined that "revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters)"; it is the political force that proves capable of resolving such a crisis that conquers hegemony and achieves victory.³³ This was the basis for supporting Soviet Russia for Aleksei Brusilov, the brilliant general of noble birth who tried in vain to save his officers who were driven to suicide by the savage violence of the peasant rebels: "My sense of duty to the nation has often obliged me to disobey my natural social inclinations."³⁴ A few years later, in 1927, in drawing a portrait of Moscow, Walter Benjamin sharply highlighted "the strong national sense that Bolshevism has developed in all Russians without distinction."³⁵ Soviet power had succeeded in imparting a new identity and self-consciousness to a nation not only terribly exhausted, but also somewhat

30 Werth (2007a), p. 26.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

32 In Flores (1990), p. 41.

33 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 31, p. 74.

34 Figs (2000), pp. 840 and 837.

35 Benjamin (2007), p. 44.

dazed and adrift, lacking any stable points of reference.

And, yet, the “crisis of the whole Russian nation” was not quite over. Exploding in all its violence in 1914 but already with a long period of incubation behind it, it has sometimes been defined as a Second Time of Troubles, analogous to that which raged in Russia in the seventeenth century.³⁶ The struggle between the pretenders to the throne, which developed intertwined with the economic crisis and peasant revolt as well as with the intervention of foreign powers, sharpened in the twentieth century as the conflict also arose between different principles of legitimation of power. To follow Weber’s classical tripartite typology,³⁷ traditional power had followed the tsar’s family to the grave, even if this or that general had tried desperately to exhume it. Already cracked as a result of the bitter conflict that emerged at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, charismatic power did not survive Lenin’s death. Finally, rational-legal authority faced extraordinary difficulties in enforcing its power after a revolution that promoted the ideology of the abolition of the state. This was especially so in a country with a long history of peasant hatred for their lords, which had traditionally been expressed through anti-state rhetoric and praxis.

Insofar as a charismatic authority was still possible, it tended to take shape in the figure of Trotsky, the brilliant organizer of the Red Army and the gifted orator and prose writer who claimed to embody the hopes of triumph of the world revolution and from this he derived the legitimacy of his aspiration to rule the party and the state. Stalin, on the other hand, was the embodiment of legal-traditional authority, which was struggling to take shape. Unlike Trotsky, who came to Bolshevism late in life, Stalin represented the historical continuity of the party, as protagonist of the revolution and hence holder of the new legality. Moreover, by affirming the realizability of socialism even in a single (large) country, Stalin conferred a new dignity and identity on the Russian nation, which could thus overcome the frightful crisis, ideal as well as material, it had suffered since the defeat and chaos of the First World War, thereby recovering its historical continuity. But precisely because of this the adversaries cried “betrayal,” while traitors in the eyes of Stalin and his followers

36 See Werth (2007a), pp. 51 and 510 note 43.

37 **Ed. Note:** Max Weber came up with three ideal types of legitimate political leadership, domination, and authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms.

appeared to be those who, with their recklessness, by facilitating the intervention of foreign powers, were ultimately endangering the survival of the Russian nation, which was at the same time the vanguard of the revolutionary cause. The clash between Stalin and Trotsky was a conflict not only between two political programs but also between two principles of legitimation.

For all these reasons, the Second Time of Troubles ended not with the defeat of the supporters of the ancien régime supported by the intervention of the counterrevolutionary powers, as is commonly believed, but with the end of the third civil war (which tore apart the Bolshevik leadership itself) and with the end of the conflict between the opposing principles of legitimacy; thus not in 1921 but in 1937. Although the Time of Troubles proper was left behind with the advent of the Romanov dynasty, the Russia of the seventeenth century had been finally consolidated with the accession to the throne of Peter the Great. After going through its most acute phase in the years from the outbreak of the First World War to the end of the Entente intervention, the Second Time of Troubles ended with the strengthening of Stalin's power and the industrialization and "Westernization" promoted by him in anticipation of the war.

EXALTED UTOPIA AND PROLONGATION OF THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

Of course, the long duration of the Second Time of Troubles is not only an objective fact. What role do the intellectual and political classes and the ideology that inspired them play in its prolongation? A current of thought, that finds in Arendt the privileged point of reference, is engaged above all in the search for the ideological original sin that would be proper to revolutions with the most tormented course. A different approach seems to me more fruitful, one that takes its starting point from a comparative sociology of the intellectual and political classes. In the movements that led to revolution in France and Russia we see at work the *Gueux plumés*, "beggars of the pen," according to Burke's definition, or the "Pugachev of the University," according to the definition of Maistre. In other words, it was a question of non-propertied intellectuals, mocked as "abstract" by their adversaries. There is no doubt that the intellectuals of the property-owning class arrive at the appointment with the collapse of the ancien régime already having behind them real political

experience and even the exercise of political power. In the United States the slave-owners, from whom the most eminent intellectuals and statesmen come (for thirty-two of the first thirty-six years of the life of the North American Republic, the presidency was held by slave-owners), do not limit themselves to enjoying their wealth as a “peculiar” species of private property alongside the others: over their slaves they exercise a power that is at the same time executive, legislative, and judicial. Similar considerations could be made in relation to the England of the Glorious Revolution: landed property (from which liberal intellectuals and leaders often came) is well represented in the House of Lords and Commons or, with the *gentry*, directly expresses the justices of the peace and thus holds judicial power. The appointment with power, on the other hand, sees the non-owning intellectuals much more unprepared. Their abstractness contributes to making the process of stabilizing the revolution more problematic and more tormented. There is, however, the other side of the coin: it is precisely this “abstractness” and this detachment from property that made it possible for the “beggars of the pen” to abolish slavery in the colonies, and gave the “Pugachev(s) of the University” and their vigorous impetus to the process of decolonization, which then developed on a planetary level.

In the long duration of the Second Time of Troubles there is no doubt that ideology also played a role. However, we must immediately add that it is not only the ideology of the Bolsheviks. We have seen the messianic expectations that accompanied the collapse of the tsarist autocracy and we also know that the motive of the betrayed revolution went beyond the confines of Russia and the communist movement. A few months or a few weeks after October 1917, without wasting any more time, Kautsky points out how the Bolsheviks did not or were unable to fulfill any of the promises they had agitated at the time of their seizure of power:

The Soviet Government has already been constrained to make various compromises with capital [...]. Even more than Russian capital, German capital will cause the Soviet Republic to recoil and recognise its claims. How far the capital of the Entente will again penetrate into Russia is still questionable. To all appearances, the dictatorship of the proletariat has only destroyed Russian capital in order to make room for German and American capital.³⁸

The Bolsheviks had come to power promising “the propagation,

38 Kautsky (1977), p. 121.

under the impulse of the Russian experience, of the revolution in the capitalist countries." But what finished off this prospect of "outstanding boldness and fascinating glamor"? It had been succeeded by a program of "immediate peace, at whatever price."³⁹ This is in 1918 and, paradoxically, Kautsky's critique of Brest-Litovsk is not very different from what we have seen from Bukharin in particular.

Over and above international relations, even more catastrophic, in Kautsky's eyes, was the October Revolution's balance sheet on a more properly domestic level:

By the removal of the remains of feudalism it has given stronger and more definite expression to private property than the latter had formerly. It has now made of the peasants, who were formerly interested in the overthrow of private property in land, that is, the big estates, the most energetic defenders of the newly-created private property in land. It has strengthened private property in the means of production and in the produce...⁴⁰

And again we are led to think of those who, even within the Bolshevik Party, brand the persistent private ownership of land and the NEP as a guilty abandonment of the socialist path.

The subsequent collectivization of agriculture did not put an end to the denunciations of betrayal which, on the contrary, as we know, precisely in the mid-1930s found its organic formulation in the book by Trotsky dedicated to the "revolution betrayed." But it is interesting to note that the fundamental indictments of this accusation are to some extent already present in Kautsky's 1918 book. Let's see how the eminent social-democratic⁴¹ theorist argues: if even individual private property is replaced by co-operative property, we must not forget that the latter is only "a new form of capitalism." On the other hand, the same "nationalization is not yet socialism," and not only because the market and mercantile production continue to exist.⁴² There is something more. The liquidation of a particular form of capitalism does not at all mean the liquidation of capitalism as such: the new power "can certainly destroy much capitalist property," but this is not yet the "establishment of a Socialist system of production." In fact, a new exploiting class has emerged or is emerging in the Soviet

39 Ibid., pp. 129-31.

40 Ibid., p. 113.

41 **Ed. Note:** At this time, 'social-democratic' parties, such as the Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD] to whom Kautsky belonged, were typically explicitly Marxist. In modern times they have become liberal, bourgeois parties.

42 Ibid., pp. 119 and 122.

Union: "In the place of the former capitalists, now become proletarians, will enter proletarians or intellectuals become capitalists."⁴³ If even Trotsky, contrary to some of his more radical followers, prefers to speak of "bureaucracy" rather than of a new capitalist class, the analogies between the two arguments compared here remain firm, all the more so since even in the Russian revolutionary's analysis the "Soviet bureaucracy" seemed to "set itself the goal of outdoing [...] the Western bourgeoisie."⁴⁴

Of course, there is no lack of differences. For Kautsky it is the Bolshevik leadership as such that has abandoned and in some way betrayed the noble ideals of socialism; moreover, rather than a subjective and conscious choice and abjuration, such abandonment is the expression of the "impotence of all revolutionary attempts made without regard to objective social and economic conditions."⁴⁵ Compared to Trotsky's, Kautsky's argument appears more persuasive. The latter does not commit the naivety of explaining gigantic objective social processes (which, beyond Russia, also affect a whole series of other countries), thundering against the betrayal of a narrow political class, or even of a single personality, who thus rises to the role of *deus ex machina*. There is, however, a moment when even the German Social Democrat leader brings in the category of subjective and conscious betrayal. The Bolsheviks are said to have consummated it when, deliberately ignoring the immaturity of objective conditions, they indulged in the "cult of force," which instead "Marxism harshly condemns."⁴⁶ It is only the initial choice to unleash the October Revolution that is synonymous with an abjuration of the noble ideals of Marx and socialism; in this case, however, the accusation of treason strikes Trotsky no less than Lenin and Stalin. It remains to be seen, however, whether Kautsky's condemnation of the Bolsheviks' "cult of force" is compatible with their reproach of having wanted at Brest-Litovsk "immediate peace, at whatever price."

More important than the differences are the similarities that exist between the two theorists of Marxism compared here. In both speeches the messianic vision of the future society digs a chasm between the beauty of authentic socialism and communism, on the one hand, and the irremediable mediocrity of the present and of reality, on the oth-

43 Ibid., pp. 120-1.

44 Trotsky (1988), p. 848 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 143)

45 Kautsky (1977), p. 129.

46 Ibid.

er: they try to bridge this chasm by resorting in Trotsky's case to the category of betrayal, and in Kautsky's case to the category of Russia's objective immaturity, which inevitably leads to the destruction and betrayal of the original ideals. In the eyes of the German Social Democratic leader, given an "economically backward" country that "is not one of these leading industrial States," the failure of the socialist project is a foregone conclusion: "What is being enacted there now is, in fact, the last of bourgeois, and not the first of Socialist, Revolutions. This shows itself ever more distinctly. Its present Revolution could only assume a Socialist character if it coincided with Socialist Revolutions in Western Europe."⁴⁷ And again we are referred back to Trotsky's expectations and prospects.

In fact, emerging as early as the February Revolution, the messianic vision of the new society to be built ended up being agitated, in different and opposing ways, by a very wide array of people. It is a dialectic that manifested itself with particular clarity on the occasion of the introduction of the NEP. It was not only important sectors of the Bolshevik party who shouted out the scandal, and it was not always a concern for fidelity to Marxist orthodoxy that stimulated these cries within the Bolshevik Party. If the Christian thinker Pascal lamented the advent of a new "aristocracy" and the emergence of a process "counter-revolutionary," the great writer Joseph Roth spoke with disappointment of an "Americanization" that sees Soviet Russia losing not only socialism but its very soul, thus plunging into a "spiritual void."⁴⁸ To the cries of scandal for disappointed and betrayed messianic expectations corresponded, in the bourgeois camp, the cries of triumph for the fact that, with the introduction of the NEP, even Lenin—so it was argued—was forced to turn his back on Marx and socialism.⁴⁹ And again we come across the category of betrayal, albeit declined this time with a positive value judgment.

Paradoxically, the Bolsheviks were pushed in the direction of a new revolution by a very wide and heterogeneous array of currents. The horror of the war had led Pascal to hope in apocalyptic tones, as early as August 1917, for "a universal social revolution" of unprecedented radicalism.⁵⁰ On the opposite side, opponents and enemies of the October Revolution were ready to celebrate its failure every

47 Ibid., p. 100.

48 In Flores (1990), pp. 41 and 53.

49 Ibid., pp. 32-3.

50 In Furet (1995), p. 127.

time in Soviet Russia an attempt was made to pass from the phase of messianic expectation to the less emphatic but more realistic phase of the construction of a new society. All this could not but reinforce the tendency already well present in the Bolshevik party, also as a consequence of the spiritual climate aroused by the war, to further radicalize the utopian motives of Marx's thought. In this sense the ideology which contributed to the prolongation of the Second Time of Troubles was itself rooted in a concrete objective situation.

FROM ABSTRACT UNIVERSALISM TO THE CHARGE OF TREASON

Let us now take a general look at the terms in which the indictment against 'treason' is articulated. If we want to formulate the problem in philosophical terms, we could say that, although they differ considerably from one another and although they are formulated on the basis of very different ideological and political positions, these charges have in common a vision of universalism that we should now examine. Animated as Kollontai is by the need to oppose and overcome the domestic selfishness of the bourgeois family which, by concentrating its gaze exclusively on its own inner circle, removes the tragedies which take place outside it, Kollontai calls on communists to develop a feeling of universal responsibility, thus overcoming, also as far as children are concerned, the distinction between "yours" and "mine" and fighting together with others for what is common to all, for what is "ours." We have seen Trotsky rightly draw attention to the catastrophic consequences that are produced when parents ignore the *particular* responsibility they have for their children. And that is to say, by skipping the moment of the obligation of care for the circle of the closest relatives, without starting in the first place with a *particular* and inescapable obligation, the universal responsibility turns out to be empty and even becomes an instrument of evasion. In this sense, according to Lenin, Kollontai's theory was "unsocial."⁵¹

But while they enforce it in relation to the issue of the family, the Bolshevik leaders tend to forget the unity of the universal and the particular when they deal with the national question. At the time of its foundation, the Third International starts from the presupposition of an international party of the proletariat, called upon to achieve the universal emancipation of humanity, without letting

51 Carr (1968-69), vol. 1, p. 31.

oneself be misled by "so-called national interests";⁵² in an analogous way we have seen Kollontai theorize a sort of universal family within which "mine" and "yours" are resolved without residue in "ours." Subsequently, the Third International underwent an arduous learning process which led it, with Dimitrov's *Report* to the VIth Congress of 1935, to denounce as ruinous any form of "national nihilism."⁵³ But was not the rediscovery of the nation a betrayal of internationalism? If for Kollontai the permanence of the institution of family and the special attention paid to one's own children are synonymous with selfish narrowness and disregard for the fate of all the children of the world, for Trotsky "to approach the prospects of a social revolution within national boundaries" means yielding to or indulging in "social-patriotism" and the social-chauvinism co-responsible for the carnage of the First World War. So too "the idea of a socialist development which is occurring and is even being completed in one country" is an "essentially national-reformist and not revolutionary-internationalist point of view."⁵⁴ These are statements of 1928; ten years later the Fourth International was founded, which took up (and further radicalized) the abstract universalism of its beginnings and therefore called itself the "world party of socialist revolution."

It would be easy to apply against Trotsky the criticism he made in his polemic with Kollontai. Just as it does not constitute a real overcoming of domestic egoism to ignore and evade the particular responsibilities one has towards one's children and closest kin, so it is by no means synonymous with internationalism to lose sight of the fact that the concrete possibilities and tasks of revolutionary transformation are to be found in the first place on a definite national terrain. The detachment or indifference towards the country in which one lives may well take on a significance that is anything but progressive: in tsarist Russia, Herzen, an author dear to Lenin, pointed out that the aristocracy was far "more cosmopolitan than the revolution"; far from having a national basis, its domination rested on the denial of the very possibility of a national basis, on the "deep division [...] between the civilized classes and the peasantry," between a very narrow elite inclined to pose as a superior race on the one

52 Agosti (1974-79), vol. 1,1, p. 30.

53 Dimitrov's report to the VIth Congress of the Communist International is given in De Felice (1973)1 pp. 101-67 (the quotation is on p. 155).

54 Trotsky (1969b), pp. 21 and 72.

hand, and the vast majority of the population on the other.⁵⁵ Without dismissing the racialization of the subaltern classes and without affirming the idea of nationhood and national responsibility, one is not a revolutionary.

Stalin was well aware of this, as is particularly clear from the speech he made on February 4, 1931. He presented himself on this occasion as a revolutionary and an internationalist leader, who was both a statesman and a Russian national leader, committed to solving the problems that the nation had been dragging along for some time: “we Bolsheviks, who have made three revolutions, who have emerged victorious from a bitter civil war” must also take on the problem of overcoming Russia’s traditional industrial backwardness and military fragility. “In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have had one”;⁵⁶ with the overthrow of the *ancien régime* and the advent of Soviet power, national nihilism is more senseless than ever, the cause of the revolution is at the same time the cause of the nation. The emphasis now seems to shift from class struggle (with its internationalist dimension) to national economic development. But more exactly, in the concrete political situation that had arisen, the class struggle was configured as the effort to develop the socialist country economically and technologically, thus enabling it to face the terrible challenges on the horizon and to make a real contribution to the internationalist cause of emancipation. The class struggle not only takes on a national dimension but seems to configure itself, in Soviet Russia, as a trivial and prosaic task: “in the period of reconstruction, technique decides everything”; and therefore it is necessary to “study technique” and to “master science.” In reality, this new task is no less difficult and glorious than the conquest of the Winter Palace: “Bolsheviks must master technique” and become “experts” themselves; admittedly, this is far from an easy goal to achieve, but “there are no fortresses that the Bolsheviks cannot capture.”⁵⁷ The policy that later presides over the Great Patriotic War finds its first formulation in the years when Soviet Russia is engaged in a gigantic effort to industrialize and strengthen national defense.

We saw Stalin stress on the eve of Hitler’s aggression the need to link “national feelings and the notion of a homeland,” “a healthy, properly understood nationalism with proletarian internationalism”

55 Herzen (1994), pp. 176-7; cf. Losurdo (2002), ch. 22, § 1.

56 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 33 and 36 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 409 and 412).

57 *Ibid.*, p. 38 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 414).

(*supra*, ch. 1, § 2). In the concrete situation that had arisen following the expansionist offensive of the Third Reich, the march of universality passed through the concrete and particular struggles of peoples determined not to allow themselves to be reduced to the condition of slaves in the service of Hitler's master race; it was the resistance of the nations most directly threatened by the enslavement plans of Nazi imperialism that made internationalism advance in reality. But already three years earlier, in confirmation of the fact that we are in the presence of a learning process favored or imposed by the concrete necessity of developing national resistance struggles against imperialism, Mao Zedong had declared: "To separate internationalist content from national form is the practice of those who do not understand the first thing about internationalism. We, on the contrary, must link the two closely. In this matter there are serious errors in our ranks which should be conscientiously overcome."⁵⁸ In similar terms Gramsci distinguished "cosmopolitanism" and an "internationalism" which knows and must know how to be at the same time "profoundly national" (*infra*, ch. 5, § 15).

In addition to the disavowal of the nuclear family and the theorization of a kind of collective paternity and maternity ("our" children), at the general political level abstract universalism makes itself clearly felt in the theorization of a "collective leadership," seen, once again, as the dilution of individual responsibilities and individually assumed assignments. It is no coincidence that Kollontai was for some time a member of the Workers' Opposition, whose watchwords at the level of the factory and the workplace, the party and the trade union, the administration and the state were: "power of a collective body," "collective will," "common thought," and "collective management."⁵⁹ The messianic expectation of the complete disappearance of the distinction between "mine" and "yours" should be placed in this context even in the economic sphere, with the consequent condemnation, rather than of a determinate system of production and distribution of social wealth, of the "money economy" and the market as such, of private property as such, however limited and restricted it may be. In all these cases, the universality coveted is that which presents itself immediately in its pristine purity, without passing through the mediation of and interweaving with particularity. And it is this cult of abstract universality that cries betrayal whenever particularity

58 Mao Zedong (1969-75), vol. 2, p. 218.

59 Carr (1968-69), vol. 1, p. 31; in Kollontai (1976), p. 200.

sees its rights or strength recognized.

THE DIALECTIC OF REVOLUTION AND
THE GENESIS OF ABSTRACT UNIVERSALISM

But how to explain the emergence of a vision and a purism so naive at first sight and so devoid of any sense of reality? No less naive and no less unrealistic would be to put everything on the account of this or that single personality. In reality an objective dialectic is at work here. In the wake of the struggle against the inequalities, privileges, discrimination, injustice, and oppression of the *ancien régime*, and against the particularism, exclusivism, meanness, and selfishness reproached against the old ruling class, the most radical revolutions are led in order to express a strong, exalting and even emphatic and magniloquent vision of the principles of equality and universality. It is a vision which, on the one hand, with the impetus and enthusiasm it implies, facilitates the overthrow of the old social relations and the old political institutions; on the other hand, it makes the construction of the new order more complex and problematic. To what extent will it live up to the promises, ambitions and expectations that led to its birth? Does it not itself run the risk of reproducing in a new form the distortions so passionately denounced in the *ancien régime*? The transition is all the more delicate because of the fact that the most radical revolutions, on the one hand, cultivate ambitious projects of social-political transformation and, on the other hand, precisely because of their extraneousness and remoteness from the existing order, see the coming to power of ruling classes without solid political experience behind them, who moreover find themselves in the need to not only create a new political order, but also a new social order. In these situations, it becomes clear what separates a sincere and meaningful political plan from empty promises: A concrete utopia, which while remote, serves as a guiding vision for real change, can be distinguished from an abstract and misleading utopia, which ultimately serves as an excuse to avoid dealing with reality.

For a revolution to be victorious not only in the short run but also in the long run, it must be able to give a concrete *and* lasting content to the ideas of equality and universality on the wave of which it came to power. And in doing so, the new ruling group is called upon to purify those ideas of the naive form they tend to take in mo-

ments of enthusiasm, and it is called upon to carry out this work of purification not in an empty and aseptic space, but in a historically filled space in which the economic and political compatibilities, the relations of force, the contradictions and conflicts that inevitably emerge make their presence and their weight felt. It is in the course of this difficult transition that the revolutionary front, until then at least apparently characterized by a choral unity, begins to show its first cracks or tears, and then disappointments, disillusionment, and accusations of betrayal intervene.

It is a process and a dialectic that Hegel analyzes with great lucidity and depth in relation to the French Revolution.⁶⁰ It develops by waving the banner of the "universal subject," the "universal will," and the "universal consciousness." In this phase, at the moment of the destruction of the *ancien régime*, is the "doing away with the various distinct spiritual spheres, and the restricted and confined life of individuals"; "all social ranks or classes, which are the component spiritual factors into which the whole is differentiated, are effaced and annulled." It is as if society, having dissolved all intermediary social bodies, has completely disarticulated itself into a great mass of individuals, who, rejecting all traditional authorities, are now devoid of legitimacy. They demand not only freedom and equality but also to be able to participate in public life and in every phase of the decision-making process. On the wave of this enthusiasm and exaltation, in a situation in which it is as if authority and power as such were suspended in nothingness, an anarchoid⁶¹ messianism emerges, which demands "absolute freedom" and is ready to denounce as a betrayal any contamination of and restriction to universality, real or presumed.

A new order presupposes a redistribution of individuals into "spiritual spheres," into social organisms, into intermediate bodies, albeit constituted and organized according to different and new modalities, respectful of the principles of the revolution. However, any new articulation of society, whatever it may be, appears as a negation

60 Hegel (1969-79), vol. 3, pp. 431-41.

61 **Ed. Note:** Here 'anarchoid' is used to refer to tendencies which, while they may not label themselves as explicitly 'anarchist,' their structures, behavior, and rhetoric evidence a tending towards an anarchistic 'abstract universalism' which Losurdo is exploring here. Some Trotskyist parties are one such example, with much overlap with collectivist anarchist groups but also substantive differences, such as the notions, structures, and practices of political parties, cadres, democratic centralism, and so on.

of universality in the eyes of anarchoid messianism. In fact, “the activity and being of [individual] personality would, however, find itself by this process confined to a branch of the whole, to one kind of action and existence.” And therefore: “when placed in the element of existence, personality would bear the meaning of a determinate personality; it would cease to be in reality universal self-consciousness.” This is an enlightening analysis of the dialectic that develops in the wake of the French Revolution, but also, and even more clearly, of the October Revolution, when the pathos of universality is felt even more strongly, both in its most naive and in its most mature forms. In the situation of exalted universalism, which presides over the overthrow of the ancien régime, every division of labor, however articulated, becomes synonymous with exclusivism, of seizure of “universal self-consciousness” and “universal will” by a bureaucratic and privileged minority.

This is true for social relations and for political institutions. No existing order can fulfill the anarchoid messianists’ desire for the immediate and unmediated realization of universality. The way in which anarchoid messianism poses itself emerges clearly once again from the memorable pages of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Neither by the idea of submission to self-imposed laws, which would assign to it only a part of the whole work, nor by its being represented when legislation and universal action take place, does self-consciousness here let itself be cheated out of the actual reality—the fact that itself lays down the law and itself accomplishes a universal and not a particular task. For in the case where the self is merely represented and ideally presented (*vorgestellt*), there it is not actual: where it is by proxy, it is not.

We are reminded at this point of The Workers’ Opposition’s definition of the bureaucracy in Soviet Russia: “someone else decides your fate.” Against this inadmissible expropriation is claimed a “direction” that is “collective” in every single phase of the decision-making process, with the consequent condemnation of any representative body. Even more so, on closer inspection, it is often, as we know, every project of constitutional order and even of legal regulation that is targeted, branded *a priori* as an attempt to enchain or shatter universality and, therefore, as an expression, in the final analysis, of an ancien régime that is hard to kill.

To “pass into a deed,” to achieve reality and efficacy and become “actual concrete will”—Hegel continues—universality must find expression in concrete individuals, it must “put an individual

consciousness in the forefront." But here is where messianism and anarchism cry scandal: "Thereby, however, all other individuals are excluded from the entirety of this deed, and have only a restricted share in it, so that the deed would not be a deed of real universal self-consciousness." The tragedy of the French Revolution (but also, and on a larger scale, the October Revolution) consists in this: if it wants to avoid being reduced to an empty phrase, the pathos of universality must give itself a concrete and determined content, but it is precisely this concrete and determined content that is perceived as a betrayal. On closer inspection, it is particularity as such that is branded as an element of contamination and negation of universality. As long as this vision continues to prevail, the liquidation of the old regime is not followed by the construction of a new, concrete order: "Universal freedom can thus produce neither a positive achievement nor a deed; there is left for it only negative action; it is merely the rage and fury of destruction."

ABSTRACT UNIVERSALISM AND TERROR IN SOVIET RUSSIA

In Hegel's analysis, insofar as the terror is the result not of the objective situation but of an ideology, it must be put on the account in the first place of anarchoid messianism, of abstract universalism which, in its flight from every particular and determinate element, succeeds in expressing itself only in the "fury of destruction." As far as the Bolshevik revolution is concerned, one must not lose sight of the permanent state of exception caused by imperialist intervention and encirclement. The more properly ideological component of the terror, on the other hand, refers to the cult of universality and of abstract utopia, which hampers the action of the new ruling group and ultimately causes its splits. It is interesting to see how in the mid-1930s Trotsky, having left behind the wise criticism of Kollontai, mocks the Stalinist rehabilitation of the family:

While the hope still lived of concentrating the education of the new generations in the hands of the state, the government was not only unconcerned about supporting the authority of the "elders," and, in particular of the mother and father, but on the contrary tried its best to separate the children from the family, in order thus to protect them from the traditions of a stagnant mode of life. Only a little while ago, in the course of the first five-year plan, the schools and the Communist Youth were using children for the exposure, shaming and in general "re-educating" of their drunken fathers or religious mothers with

what success is another question. At any rate, this method meant a shaking of parental authority to its very foundations.⁶²

By contributing to the diffusion of “a stagnant mode of life” and thus of the ideology and particularism of the *ancien régime*, the family is identified as an obstacle that the march of universality is called upon to smash or break down. The denunciation of “parental authority” produces not a decrease, but an increase in violence. The same result is produced by the condemnation of the Constitution and of law as such as instruments of bourgeois domination. On the basis of these assumptions it is impossible to realize or even to think of a socialist state based on the rule of law. There is, of course, a contradiction between the homage paid to the ideal of the extinction of the state and the call for the state to intervene even in the sphere of family relations, but it is the contradiction that invariably manifests itself between the libertarian rhetoric of abstract universalism and the practices of violence that it ends up stimulating.

At this point we are obliged to make a further consideration. The tendency to see in the particular as such an element of disturbance or contamination of universality is manifested well beyond the Bolshevik leadership. One thinks of the diffidence or hostility with which Rosa Luxemburg generally viewed the national movements, which were accused of neglecting the international cause of the proletariat. After the October Revolution, the great revolutionary on the one hand criticizes the Bolsheviks for their failure to respect democracy or their supposed liquidation of it, and on the other invites them “to nip separatist tendencies in the bud with an iron hand” coming from “nonhistoric’ people,” whose “rotted corpses rise from centuries-old graves.”⁶³

And now let us see how Stalin describes the effects of the “socialist revolution” on the national question:

By stirring up the lowest sections of humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities. Who could have imagined that the old, tsarist Russia consisted of not less than fifty nations and national groups? The October Revolution, however, by breaking the old chains and bringing a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on to the scene, gave them new life and a

62 Trotsky (1988), pp. 845-6 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 141).

63 For the analysis contained in these pages of Rosa Luxemburg’s positions I refer to Losurdo (1997), ch. 7, § 2.

new development.⁶⁴

Here we come to a paradoxical result at least from the point of view of the usual historical balances and ideological stereotypes dominant today. With regard to the peoples who "rise from centuries-old graves," according to Luxemburg's language, or of the "forgotten peoples," according to Stalin's language, it's the former who manifests a more threatening and more repressive attitude. Naturally, as far as the judgment of who really exercised power is concerned, it is a question of seeing if and to what extent the praxis corresponded to the theory. The fact remains that it is Luxemburg's abstract universalism which reveals itself to be potentially more charged with violence and which, throughout its evolution, has shown itself to be inclined to read national claims as a deviation from the highroad of internationalism and universalism.

We arrive at a similar result if, still on the subject of the national question, we compare this time Stalin and Kautsky. The theory formulated by the German Social Democratic leader, according to which, the victory of socialism in a country or groups of countries would dilute or tend to dilute national differences and particularities, and indeed the process was already beginning in developed democratic-bourgeois societies. Stalin objects: such a view, which superficially ignores the "stability possessed by nations," finally opens the door wide to the "war against the national culture" of national minorities or oppressed peoples, to the "policy of assimilation" and "colonization," to the policy dear, for example, to the "Germanizers" and "Russifiers" of Poland.⁶⁵ Again, it is a universality incapable of embracing the particular that stimulates violence and oppression, and, to move us always within the realm of comparing different theoretical enunciations, Kautsky turns out to be far more affected than Stalin by this abstract universalism.

Like the German Social Democratic leader, Luxemburg also harshly criticized the Bolsheviks for their "petit-bourgeois" land reforms, which gave land to the peasants. This view can be contrasted with that of Bukharin, according to whom, in the conditions of Russia at the time, with the monopoly of political power firmly in the hands of the Bolsheviks, it was precisely the "private interests" and the drive for enrichment of the peasantry and other social strata that

64 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 7, p. 120 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 159-60).

65 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 11, pp. 305-11.

could have contributed to the development of the productive forces and, ultimately, to the cause of socialism and communism.⁶⁶ A significant change took place in Bukharin: if, on the occasion of Brest-Litovsk, with regard to the national question, he had demonstrated abstract universalism, now, on the other hand, in relation to the NEP and the agrarian question, the process of constructing universality is also called upon to advance through the appropriate use of particular interests. We are in the presence of a learning process and a self-critical reflection of extraordinary interest, which helps us to understand what in our day is happening in countries like China and Vietnam. Bukharin thus continues:

We imagined things in the following way: we assume power, we take almost everything into our own hands, we immediately set a planned economy in motion, it does not matter if difficulties arise, we partly eliminate them, partly overcome them, and the thing ends happily. Today we see clearly that the matter is not resolved in this way.

The claim to “organize production by means of orders, coercively,” leads to catastrophe. Overcoming this “caricature of socialism,” communists are forced by experience to take into account the “enormous importance of individual private incentive” for the finance of the development of the productive forces and, it is understood, for “a development of the productive forces that leads us to socialism and not to the full restoration of so-called ‘healthy’ capitalism.”⁶⁷ To shout instead, as Trotsky and the opposition did, about the “degeneration” of Soviet Russia because of the persistence of the private economy in the countryside and the “class collaboration” of the communists with the peasants (and with the bourgeois strata tolerated by the NEP), would have led to the collapse of “civil peace” and to a gigantic “St. Bartholomew’s night.”^{68 69} Was Bukharin’s defeat determined only by the need to accelerate the industrialization of the country as much as possible in anticipation of the war, or did the irreducible hostility to all forms of private property, to the mercantile economy, also contribute to it? This is a problem which we shall deal with later. We can

66 Bukharin (1969a), pp. 160 and 168.

67 Ibid., pp. 159 and 161.

68 **Ed. Note:** ‘St. Bartholomew’s night,’ more commonly known in English as the ‘St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre,’ was a series of assassinations and Catholic mob attacks specifically aimed at the Huguenots (French Calvinist Protestants), in 1572, during the French Wars of Religion.

69 Bukharin (1969b), p. 113 and Bukharin (1969a), p. 169.

already fix one firm point: the 'concentrationary universe' reached its zenith on the wave of the forced collectivization of agriculture and of the iron fist against the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois tendencies of the peasants, members for the most part of 'nonhistoric peoples,' to use the unfortunate language Luxemburg takes from Engels. Beyond the errors or brutality of this or that political leader, there is no doubt about the baleful role played by a universalism incapable of subsuming and respecting the particular.

The pages we have used of Hegel (the author in whom Lenin discerns "germs of historical materialism")⁷⁰ are like the advance refutation of the explanations of "Stalinism" contained in the so-called *Secret Speech* of 1956 delivered at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It would, of course, be unfair to expect Khrushchev to live up to Hegel's standards, but it is peculiar that the tragedy and horror of Soviet Russia continues to be placed on the account of a single personality, indeed a single scapegoat, as if there had never been the extraordinary analysis that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* devotes to the "absolute freedom" and "terror."

WHAT IT MEANS TO GOVERN: A TORMENTED LEARNING PROCESS

Let us return to the Hegelian analysis of the dialectic of the French Revolution (and of the great revolutions in general). Starting from the concrete experience of the ruinous consequences to which the "fury of destruction" leads, individuals understand the need to give a concrete and particular content to universality, putting an end to the mad pursuit of universality in its immediacy and purity. By renouncing absolute egalitarianism, individuals "accept again negation and difference," that is, "the organization of the spiritual masses, in which the multitude of individual consciences is articulated." These, moreover, "return to a restricted and apportioned task, but thereby to their substantial reality." That is to say, we can now understand the inconclusive and ruinous character of the myth of a "universal will," to use the language, this time not of Hegel but of quite a few Russian revolutionaries, of a direct democracy, of a "collective leadership" which, without mediations and bureaucratic obstacles, expresses itself directly and immediately in the factories, in the workplaces, in the political bodies.

70 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 38, p. 313.

As we can see, more than Jacobinism, Hegel's target is radicalism and anarchoid messianism, which is confirmed by the considerations he makes about another great revolution, namely the Puritan revolution that invaded England in the mid-seventeenth century. By putting an end to a period of inconclusive religious and pseudo-revolutionary exaltation, by giving a positive political outcome to a long years of travail, Cromwell shows that he well "knew what it meant to govern": "he took with a strong hand the reins of government, dissolved away that parliament that was poured out in prayers, *and* held with great splendor the throne, as Protector."⁷¹ Knowing how to govern here means being able to give concrete content to the ideals of universality that presided over the revolution, clearly distancing oneself, as far as the first English Revolution was concerned, from the followers of the "fifth monarchy," the empty utopia of a society deprived and not in need of legal norms, due to the fact that individuals are enlightened and allow themselves to be guided by grace. To the extent that he was able to distance himself from abstract and inconclusive utopia, Robespierre also showed that he somehow knew or wanted to learn the art of government.

After a great revolution, especially when its protagonists are from propertyless ideological and political social classes and therefore lacking the political experience associated with the enjoyment of property, learning to govern means learning to give concrete content to universality. But, notably, it involves a learning process. As far as the socialist revolution is concerned, it neither begins nor ends with Stalin. On the contrary, the most serious limit of this statesman (but also, to a different extent, of the other statesmen who still today refer to socialism) is to have left this learning process unfinished or seriously unfinished.

Let us take the national question. In Lenin we can read the thesis, according to which the "inevitable merging of nations" and of "national differences," including linguistic ones, passes through the "transitional period" of the full and free unfolding of nations and of their different languages, cultures and identities. At least as far as the "transitional period" is concerned, the awareness that the universal must be able to embrace the particular is clear here. A significant learning process has already begun: we are already beyond the abstract universalism, which makes itself felt for example in Luxemburg's thesis, for whom national particularities are in themselves a negation of

71 Hegel (1919-20), pp. 896-7.

internationalism.

As far as the national question is concerned, Lenin only seems to grasp the unity of the universal and the particular in relation to the "transitional period." Stalin is at times more radical:

Some people (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language and the dying away of all other languages in the period of socialism. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory.⁷²

Judging from this passage, communism should not be characterized by "a single, all-embracing language." But it is as if Stalin is afraid of his courage. Mostly he prefers to postpone the "the merging of nations and the formation of one common language" to the time when socialism will have triumphed worldwide.⁷³ Perhaps only in the last years of his life, when he is by then an undisputed authority within the international communist movement, does Stalin prove himself bolder. He does not merely reiterate forcefully that "history shows that languages possess great stability and a tremendous power of resistance to forcible assimilation."⁷⁴ Now the theoretical elaboration goes further: "language radically differs from the superstructure"; "it was created not by some one class, but by the entire society, by all the classes of the society, by the efforts of hundreds of generations," so it is absurd to speak of a "class character" of language.⁷⁵ So, then, why should national languages vanish? And why then should nations as such vanish, if it is true that "linguistic commonality is one of the most important distinguishing marks of a nation"?⁷⁶ And, yet, despite everything, orthodoxy finally prevails: communism continues to be thought of as the triumph of the "common international language" and, ultimately, of the one nationality.⁷⁷ At least as far as this mythical final stage is concerned, the universal can again be thought of in its purity, without the contamination of the particular of languages and national identities. This is not an abstractly theoretical problem: attachment to orthodoxy has certainly not contributed to

72 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 22, p. 151 and vol. 31, p. 82; Stalin (1971-73), vol. 7, p. 120 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 160).

73 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 11, p. 308.

74 Ibid., vol. 15, p. 218 (= Stalin, 1968, p. 52).

75 Ibid., pp. 193, 195 and 204 (= Stalin, 1968, pp. 18, 21 and 34).

76 Ibid., p. 206 (= Stalin, 1968, p. 36).

77 Ibid., p. 252 (= Stalin, 1968, p. 101).

an understanding of the permanent contradictions between the nations that call for socialism and that consider themselves committed to the construction of communism. It is the contradictions that have played a leading role in the process of crisis and dissolution of the “socialist camp.”

In other areas of social life we also see Stalin engage in a difficult struggle against abstract utopia but then stop halfway, in order not to compromise traditional orthodoxy. Even in 1952, and thus on the eve of his death, he felt obliged to criticize those who wanted the liquidation of the “mercantile economy” as such. In contrast with this, Stalin judiciously observes:

It is said that commodity production must lead, is bound to lead, to capitalism all the same, under all conditions. That is not true. Not always and not under all conditions! Commodity production must not be identified with capitalist production. They are two different things.

There can well be “a mercantile production without capitalists.” And, nevertheless, even in this case orthodoxy proves to be an insurmountable barrier: the disappearance of the mercantile economy is postponed until the moment when “*all* the means of production” will be really collectivized, with the overcoming, therefore, of the cooperative property itself.⁷⁸

Finally, with perhaps the decisive problem. We have seen Stalin theorize a “third function” beyond repression and class struggle on the domestic and international levels. A great jurist was right to point out that the report to the XVIIIth Congress of the CPSU puts us in the presence of “a radical change in the doctrine developed by Marx and Engels.”⁷⁹ It was a change that Stalin was arriving at starting from his experience of government, from a concrete learning process that had already left traces in the thought and political action of the late Lenin but which was now taking a further step forward. Trotsky argued quite differently. He thought he could summarize in the following terms the lesson of Marx, Engels and Lenin: “The generation which conquered the power, the ‘Old Guard,’ will begin the work of liquidating the state; the next generation will complete it.”⁸⁰ If this miracle had not occurred, who could be to blame if not the treacherous Stalinist bureaucracy?

78 Ibid., pp. 263-70 (= Stalin, 1973, pp. 18-29).

79 Kelsen (1981b), p. 171; see also Kelsen (1981a), p. 62.

80 Trotsky (1988), p. 853 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 148).

It may seem misleading to use philosophical categories to explain the history of Soviet Russia, but this approach is legitimized by Lenin himself, who quotes and subscribes to the "excellent formula" of the Hegel's *Logic*, according to which the universal must be such that it contains within itself "the richness of the particular."⁸¹ In expressing himself thus he is thinking above all of the revolutionary situation, which is always determined and which reaches the breaking point at the weak link in the chain, in a particular country. The "excellent formula," on the other hand, by Lenin and the Bolshevik ruling group was not designed for the phase following the conquest of power. When faced with the problem of the construction of a new society, the attempt to make the universal embrace "the richness of the particular" clashed with the accusation of betrayal. And it is well understood that this accusation particularly affected Stalin: longer than any other leader, he governed the country that had sprung from the October Revolution and, precisely from his experience of government, he realized the hollowness of the messianic expectation of the disappearance of the state, of nations, of religion, of the market, of money, and he also directly experienced the paralyzing effect of a vision of the universal inclined to brand as a contamination the attention paid to the particular needs and interests of a state, of a nation, of a family, of a particular individual.

If it is true that ideology plays a significant role in the prolongation of the Second Time of Troubles, it should, however, be pointed out that it calls into question Stalin's antagonists in particular. The latter, thanks also to the concrete experience of the government, seriously engaged in the learning process through which, according to Hegel's teaching, the leading group of a great revolution is forced to pass.

81 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 38, p. 98.

4

 THE COMPLEX AND CONTRADICTIONARY
 COURSE OF THE STALIN ERA

FROM THE REVIVAL OF "SOVIET DEMOCRACY" TO
 "ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S NIGHT"

It must be reiterated anyway—as one of the authors of *The Black Book of Communism* contradictorily acknowledges—that it is necessary “to insert into the ‘long-term’ of Russian history first the Bolshevik, then the Stalinist version of political violence.” It is necessary not to lose sight of “the ‘matrix’ out of which Stalinism emerged, which was the period of the First World War, of the revolutions of 1917 and of the civil wars *taken as a whole*.”¹ And so, born ideally when no one could foresee Stalin coming to power and even before the Bolshevik revolution, “Stalinism” is not primarily the result either of an individual’s thirst for power or of an ideology, but rather of the permanent state of exception that has been afflicting Russia since 1914. As we have seen, from as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, very different personalities did not fail to notice the premonitory signs of the unprecedented storm that was gathering over the country between Europe and Asia, and which began to manifest itself in all its violence with the outbreak of the First World War. It is from here, and from the long, very long duration of the Second Time of Troubles, that we must start. The fact that we are dealing with a phenomenon that unfolds in anything but a unilinear manner is not a coincidence. We will see it diminish at times of relative normalization and manifest itself in all its harshness when the state of exception reaches its peak.

Let us begin by asking a preliminary question: from what moment can one speak of a personal and solitary dictatorship for Soviet

1 Werth (2007a), pp. viii and xiv.

Russia? Authoritative historians seem to agree on one essential point: "In the early 1930s Stalin was not yet an autocrat. He was not exempt from having to contend with criticism, dissent, and outright opposition within the Communist Party." The Leninist tradition of "party dictatorship" and of oligarchic power persisted.² The historians quoted here use the two categories indifferently; however, the latter is ill-suited to a regime that stimulates a very strong social promotion of the subordinate classes and that forcefully introduces into the political and cultural life of the country social strata and ethnic groups that until then had been completely marginalized. The fact remains that, in any case, from 1937 and the outbreak of the Great Terror, the party dictatorship gave way to autocracy.

Should we then distinguish two phases within "Stalinism"? While having the merit of questioning the usual "monolithic" view, this periodization does not constitute a real step forward in the understanding of those years: the passage from the first to the second phase and the concrete configuration of both would remain to be explained in any case.

To understand the problem, let us look at what happened in the mid-1920s, at a time when, having overcome the acute crisis represented by foreign intervention and civil war, the NEP had already achieved significant results: not only was there no autocracy, but while the dictatorship of the Communist Party remained in place, the management of power tended in some ways to become more "liberal." Bukharin seems to go so far as to claim a sort of rule of law: "The peasant must have before him Soviet *order*, Soviet *right*, Soviet *law*, and not Soviet arbitrariness, moderated by a 'bureau of complaints' whose whereabouts is unknown." "Firm legal norms" are needed, binding even on communists. The state must now engage in "peaceful organizational work," and the party, in its relations with the masses, must "stand for persuasion and only for persuasion." Terror no longer makes sense: "its time has passed."³ Instead, it is a matter of leaving room for "mass initiative": in this context one must look favorably on the thriving of "people's associations" and "voluntary organizations."⁴

We are not in the presence of merely personal opinions. These

2 Tucker (1990), p. 120; see also Cohen (1986), pp. 54-5.

3 In Cohen (1975), pp. 204-5.

4 Ibid., p. 209.

are the years of the “duumvirate”:⁵ Bukharin manages the power together with Stalin, who in 1925 also repeatedly stated that “the survivals of war communism in the countryside must be eliminated” and condemns the “deviation” which sounds the alarm for an imaginary “restoration of capitalism” and “leads to a revival of the class struggle in the countryside” and the “civil war in our country.”⁶ Instead, it is necessary to realize that “we have entered the period of economic construction.”⁷

The shift of emphasis from class struggle to economic development also had important consequences on the political level: the first task of communist students was to “master science.”⁸ Only in this way could they aspire to take on a leading role: “qualifications” were needed; “we must have concrete, specific leadership.” And therefore: “To give real leadership, one must know the work, one must study the work conscientiously, patiently and perseveringly.”⁹ The centrality of economic development and therefore of competence makes the party’s monopoly less rigid: “it is indispensable that the communist behaves towards the non-Party people as equals,” all the more so since “the control of the party members” by those “non-Party people” can produce very positive results.¹⁰

On the whole, according to Stalin, a radical political change was necessary: “It is now no longer possible to lead in the military fashion”; “What we need now is not the utmost pressure, but the utmost flexibility in both policy and organization, the utmost flexibility in both political and organizational leadership”; it is necessary to commit ourselves to grasp, and to grasp sympathetically, “the requirements and needs of the workers and peasants.” Even with regard to the peasants, who are often more backward than the workers, the task of the communists and cadres is to “learn to convince the peasants, sparing neither time nor effort for this purpose.”¹¹

It is not just about acquiring a more effective political education. It is necessary to put an end to purely formal elections, piloted from

5 Ibid., pp. 215 ff.

6 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 7, pp. 106, 309 and 292 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 143, 403 and 380-1).

7 Ibid., p. 110 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 148).

8 Ibid., p. 76 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 104).

9 Ibid., pp. 148-9 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 197-8).

10 Ibid., pp. 167-8 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 221-2).

11 Ibid., pp. 109 and 147 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 147 and 195).

above, and to a malpractice that entails “the lack of control, the abuse of power, the arbitrariness of administrators.” A change is needed: “the old election practices in quite a number of districts were a survival of war communism, and [...] they had to be abolished as harmful and utterly rotten.”¹² It was time to pursue “the line of revitalizing the Soviets, the line of transforming the Soviets into genuinely elected bodies, the line of implanting the principles of Soviet democracy in the countryside.”¹³

Even before October, the Soviets had begun to transform themselves into “bureaucratic structures” and “the assemblies began to decline in frequency and attendance”;¹⁴ but then, restored to their original function, the Soviets were tasked with “drawing the working people into the daily work of governing the state.”¹⁵

It takes place through organizations based on mass initiative, all kinds of commissions and committees, conferences and delegate meetings, that spring up around the Soviets, economic bodies, factory committees, cultural institutions, Party organizations, youth league organizations, all kinds of co-operative associations, and so on and so forth. Our comrades sometimes fail to see that around the low units of our Party, Soviet, cultural, trade-union, educational, Y.C.L. and army organizations, around the departments for work among women and all other kinds of organizations, there are whole teeming ant-hills—organizations, commissions and conferences which have sprung up of their own accord and embrace millions of non-Party workers and peasants—ant-hills which, by their daily, inconspicuous, painstaking, quiet work, provide the basis and the life of the Soviets, the source of strength of the Soviet state.¹⁶

For all these reasons it is wrong to “identify the party with the state”: indeed, to proceed in this way “is to distort Lenin’s thought.” On the other hand, once the position of the new state is consolidated domestically and internationally, it is necessary to “[extend] the Constitution to the *entire* population, including the bourgeoisie.”¹⁷

At that time, echoing some of the formulations used by Marx at the time of the celebration of the Paris Commune, Stalin looked with interest at the ideal of the withering and even extinction of the state apparatus. The reactivation of the Soviets and political participation was intended to be a step in that direction. The task was “to recon-

12 Ibid., pp. 158-9 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 210-1).

13 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 7, p. 108 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 145).

14 Figes (2000), p. 555.

15 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 7, p. 139 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 185).

16 Ibid., pp. 139-40 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 186).

17 Ibid., pp. 139 and 160 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 185 and 212).

struct our state apparatus, to link it with the masses of the people, to make it sound and honest, simple and inexpensive";¹⁸ associations arising from civil society should also be encouraged, "which embrace millions, which unite the Soviets with the 'rank and file,' which *merge* the state apparatus with the vast masses and, step by step, destroy everything that serves as a barrier between the state apparatus and the people."¹⁹ In other words: "The dictatorship of the proletariat is not an end in itself. The dictatorship is a means, a way of achieving socialism. But what is socialism? Socialism is the transition from a society with the dictatorship of the proletariat to a stateless society."²⁰ Not the end, certainly, but nevertheless a perceptible loosening of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the Party seemed to be the order of the day.

This line of openness, common to Bukharin and Stalin, but branded by Zinoviev's followers as a kind of "middle-peasant Bolshevism,"²¹ was followed by the crisis that led to the liquidation of the NEP, to the forced collectivization of agriculture and to industrialization in forced stages, with the consequent radical expansion of the concentrationary universe. The turning point was not, as is often claimed, the ideological fury of the ruling group, i.e. the eagerness to liquidate all forms of private property and the market. At the same time, the pressure coming from below should not be underestimated; in not insignificant sectors of society there was a nostalgia for the egalitarianism that existed before the introduction of the NEP. Then there is another element.

Almost as if to respond to the type of reading dominant today, on 19 November 1928 Stalin declared that the Soviet Union was run by "sober and calm people," anxious, however, about the problem of how to defend the "independence" of a country decidedly more backward than the potential enemies surrounding it.²² There was concern about an international situation perceived as increasingly threatening. At the end of November 1925 the Treaty of Locarno was signed. Bringing France and Germany closer together, it recomposed the rift

18 Ibid., pp. 108-9 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 146); cf. Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 17, p. 341.

19 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 7, p. 140 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 187); italics are in the original.

20 Ibid., pp. 137-8 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 183).

21 Ibid., p. 329 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 428).

22 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 11, pp. 219-20.

between the Western powers that had confronted each other during the First World War and thus facilitated the isolation of the USSR; and there was no shortage of voices calling for “a European crusade against communism.”²³ And so in Moscow, leading figures such as Zinoviev, Radek and Kamenev dramatically underlined the danger of aggression that was looming.²⁴

A few months later came the coup d'état that sealed the rise to power in Poland of Pilsudski, a sworn enemy of the Soviet Union. In his studio, David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* was in full view, and in reality Pilsudski also admired Napoleon for his invasion of Russia. That last campaign had seen Polish participation. The new strong man of Warsaw proudly underlined this, aspiring to wrest Ukraine from the USSR, to make it a faithful and subordinate ally.²⁵ On August 24, 1926 Pilsudski rejected Moscow's proposal for a non-aggression treaty, and later the Soviet foreign minister denounced Poland's plans to “acquire a protectorate over the Baltic countries.” The following year, the international picture became even bleaker. Britain broke off trade and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and Marshal Ferdinand Foch called on France to do likewise; in Peking the USSR embassy was raided by Chiang Kai-shek's troops, possibly aided by London (at least according to the suspicion nurtured in Moscow), while in Warsaw the Soviet ambassador was assassinated by a White Russian émigré; finally, an explosion took place in Leningrad at a Communist Party headquarters.

At this point it is for Tukhachevsky himself, chief of staff of the armed forces, to sound the alarm bell and demand a rapid modernization of the army. The NEP no longer seemed able to solve the problem: yes, the economy was showing signs of recovery and in 1926-27 it had returned to pre-war levels, but as far as industrial production and technology were concerned, the gap with the advanced capitalist economies had remained unchanged. Incisive or drastic measures were required.²⁶ And military circles pressed for similar measures in agriculture as well, in order to ensure regular food supplies for the front. As we can see, the turnabout of 1929 was not the product of Stalin's whim. On the contrary, Stalin had to, if not contain, then

23 Taylor (1996), p. 89.

24 Carr (1968-69), vol. 2, pp. 265-6.

25 Jędrzejewicz (1982), pp. 93-4 and 145-6.

26 Davies (1989), pp. 441-2 and 462; Schneider (1994), pp. 197-206; Mayer (2000), pp. 619, 623, and 625.

at least channel the pressure coming from military circles: rejecting the fanciful objectives demanded primarily by Tukhachevsky, Stalin warned against “red militarism” which, by focusing exclusively on the armaments industry, risked compromising economic development and consequently the modernization of the military apparatus as a whole.²⁷ Nor was the turnabout the result of an ideological dogma: over and above the power of the Communist Party and the social relations in force in the USSR, the existence of the nation was at stake: this was the conviction of a large part of the Soviet leadership, starting with Stalin.

The alarm seemed all the more justified in view of the fact of the darkening international horizon, both diplomatically and economically (1929 was the year of the Great Depression). This was intertwined with the “grain crisis” (the sharp drop in the quantity of wheat put on the market by the peasants): “food queues sprang up in the cities” and this caused a further worsening of conditions. It was a situation that “could only work against Bukharinist policies,” his biographer rightly observes.²⁸ It was at this point that the fate of the duumvirate was sealed. The rupture cannot be explained only by the moral scruples of the defeated member of the duumvir, who clearly foresaw a “St Bartholomew’s night” that would be caused by the forced collectivization of agriculture (*supra*, ch. 3, § 7). What caused the split was above all another element. Bukharin was also seriously concerned about the danger of war, but he did not believe that a solution could be found in the purely national sphere: “the FINAL practical victory of socialism in our country is not possible without the help of other countries and the world revolution.”²⁹ The Bolshevik leader, who had already condemned the peace of Brest-Litovsk as a cowardly and nationalist desertion from the cause of the international struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, continued to hold to this view of internationalism:

If we exaggerate our possibility, there then could arise a tendency ... “to spit” on the international revolution; such a tendency could give rise to its own special ideology, a peculiar “national Bolshevism” or something else in that spirit. From here it is a few small steps to a number of even more harmful ideas.³⁰

27 Davies (1989), pp. 443-7.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Stalin, on the other hand, started more realistically from the assumption that stabilization in the capitalist world had taken place: the defense of the USSR was primarily a national task. It was not only a question of promoting the industrialization of the country in forced stages: as the “grain crisis” showed, the flow of foodstuffs from the countryside to the city and to the army was far from guaranteed. This problem was particularly sensitive to a leader such as Stalin who, on the basis of the rich experience accumulated during the civil war, had repeatedly stressed the primary importance in a future conflict of the stability of the rear and of food supplies from the countryside. Here are the conclusions that emerged from a letter to Lenin and an interview with *Pravda* in the summer and autumn of 1918 respectively: “the food question is naturally bound up with the military question.” In other words, “an army cannot exist for long without a strong rear. For the front to be firm, it is necessary that the army should regularly receive replenishments, munitions and food from the rear.”³¹ Even on the eve of Hitler’s aggression, Stalin was to pay great attention to agriculture, pointing to it as a central element of national defense.³² It can be understood then why, at the end of the 1920s, the collectivization of agriculture appeared to be an obligatory way to dramatically accelerate the industrialization of the country and to ensure in a stable way the supplies that the cities and the army needed: all in anticipation of the war. Indeed:

Leaving aside the human costs, the economic achievements of the First Five-Year plan were astonishing. By increasing industrial production by 250 percent, Soviet Russia took giant steps toward becoming a major industrial power [...]. Obviously, the “great leap forward” in Soviet Russia’s industrial economy entailed a “great leap forward” in its military sector, armaments expenditures rising fivefold between 1929 and 1940.³³

More modest results were achieved in agriculture, where overcoming the subsistence economy and centralization nevertheless created more favorable conditions to furnish regular supplies for a large army.

31 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 4, pp. 104 and 131 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, pp. 135 and 167); on this see Schneider (1994), pp. 234-7.

32 Volkogonov (1989), pp. 506-7.

33 Mayer (2000), pp. 630-1.

FROM "SOCIALIST DEMOCRATISM" TO THE GREAT TERROR

Having overcome the "Saint Bartholomew's night" constituted by the forced collectivization of agriculture, with the horrible social and human costs it entailed, the policy of openness that we already know seems to be making its appearance once again. After the victory over the *kulaks*—Kaganovich observed in September 1934—it was necessary "to bring our measures [...] into legal frameworks" and "to educate our population in the framework of socialist awareness of the law"; indeed, without mass education of "our entire people of 160 million in the spirit of legal awareness," "the consolidation of our order" would not be possible.³⁴ This is all the more necessary because—Stalin reiterates—in the USSR "there are no longer any antagonistic classes."³⁵ And hence there is no longer any reason for delay in the introduction of "universal, direct and equal suffrage with secret ballot,"³⁶ of "universal suffrage without any restriction."³⁷ The amendments to the new Constitution which proposed to "deprive the clergy, ex-White Guards, all 'exes' and persons who do not perform work of public utility" of electoral rights must therefore be rejected. Nor does it make sense to grant these groups "only the right to elect, but not that of being elected"; just as it makes sense to reject the proposal to "prohibit the celebration of religious ceremonies." It is now possible to advance towards "Socialist democratism."³⁸

This is not just about propaganda, which certainly plays an important role. We are in the presence of a perspective that arouses the harsh polemics of Trotsky, who in "Stalin's liberalism" identifies and brands the abandonment of the "Soviet system" and the return to "bourgeois democracy," in the context of which, class differences having been removed, the subject is constituted by the "citizen" in its abstraction. This turning point is well understood: "The first concern of the Soviet aristocracy is to get rid of worker and Red Army soviets."³⁹

The antithesis between the two perspectives is clear. Stalin had no interest in further exacerbating political and social conflict, once it was possible, given the communist party's ability to exercise dicta-

34 In Khlevniuk (1998), p. 174.

35 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 68 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 624).

36 Ibid., p. 74 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 629).

37 Ibid., p. 88 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 642).

38 Ibid., pp. 87 and 89 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 641 and 643).

39 Trotsky (1988), pp. 653 and 664.

torial powers, to banish threats to the country's independence posed by a backward countryside, hegemonized by the *kulaks* and capable of blocking city and army supplies. It was his own insistence on industrialization in forced stages that prompted him to urge the promotion of "non-Party" elements to positions of responsibility in the factory and in society. It was to him inadmissible to assume an exclusionary attitude towards them: "there is nothing more stupid and more reactionary"; "our policy does not by any means lie in converting the Party into an exclusive caste"; every effort must be made to gain the country's specialists, engineers and technicians of the "old school" for the cause of industrial and technological development.⁴⁰

On the other hand, it was not possible to promote industrial and technological development without providing material incentives to train skilled workers and technicians; hence the polemic against the "Leftist" leveling of wages." It was only by distancing oneself from a crude equalizing of wages that it was possible to introduce a more efficient "organization of labor" and to put an end to the fluctuation of the workforce, especially the most qualified, who moved from one factory to another in search of better and less flattened remuneration. In addition to egalitarianism and the objective discouragement of the most skilled and committed workers, incentive policy also had to put an end to collective irresponsibility and instead introduce the principle of "personal responsibility."⁴¹

It was precisely at this point that conditions were ripe for the outbreak of the third civil war, the one that tore apart the Bolsheviks themselves. Trotsky's stance against what he justifiably characterized as the "neo-NEP" was extremely harsh. Yes, in the Communist Party, according to Trotsky, there was an ever more accentuated "turn to the right," with the favoring of the "upper strata of the people" and the redemption of the *kulaks*. The bureaucracy "is ready to make economic concessions to the peasants, to their petty-bourgeois interests and tendencies." More generally, and as a consequence of the "turn towards the market" and "monetary calculation" and the associated increase in the cost of living, far from advancing towards socialism and the overcoming of inequalities and class division, Soviet society was more and more clearly characterized by "new processes of class

40 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 61-2 and 69 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 427-8 and 434).

41 Ibid., pp. 51-5 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 419-22).

stratification.”⁴² Corresponding to this domestic involution, as far as international politics were concerned, there would have been a renunciation of all revolutionary and internationalist perspectives by the “Soviet bureaucracy [that had] become a purely national and conservative force.”⁴³ Now “the only guiding principle is the *Status quo!*,” as was confirmed by the “entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations.”⁴⁴

Obviously, neither Stalin nor Trotsky were unaware of the worsening international situation, but they provided different and contrasting answers to the problem. For the former it was a question of concentrating on Russia’s economic and technological development, mending as far as possible the wounds caused by the October Revolution and the collectivization of the countryside, and presenting the Communist Party as the leader of the nation as a whole. The condition of stability and equilibrium thus achieved internally could at the same time make it possible to promote a policy of alliances at the international level capable of guaranteeing the security of the USSR. In Trotsky’s eyes, on the other hand, however impetuous the industrial development of Soviet Russia may be, it could ward off the aggression of the more advanced imperialist countries only with the support of the proletariat of the aggressor countries.⁴⁵ And, therefore, any accommodation with the bourgeoisie at domestic and international levels not only constituted a betrayal but also prevented the country that emerged from October 1917 from drawing to itself the international revolutionary proletariat who alone could save it. The clash between these two perspectives was inevitable. Kirov was assassinated on December 1, 1934; the Franco-Soviet pact was dated May 2, 1935. Trotsky’s wide-ranging intervention quoted above (*Where is the Stalinist bureaucracy leading the USSR?*), published on January 30, 1935, stood between those two dates and was above all a harsh indictment against what Trotsky saw as a national and international “neo-NEP.”

42 Trotsky (1988), pp. 568 and 570-5.

43 Trotsky (1997-2001), vol. 3, p. 437.

44 Trotsky (1988), p. 569.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 930-1.

FROM "SOCIALISM WITHOUT THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT"
TO THE COLD WAR CRACKDOWN

The Great Terror and the terrible purge it entailed was followed by the Great Patriotic War. After the defeat of the Third Reich, Stalin, who foresaw "a great future for the Grand Alliance" of anti-fascists and tried to prevent the outbreak of the Cold War,⁴⁶ repeatedly declared, even in the course of confidential meetings with communist leaders in Eastern Europe, that at the time it was not a question of introducing the Soviet political model: "It is possible that, if we had not had the war in the Soviet Union, the dictatorship of the proletariat would have taken on a different character." The situation that arose in Eastern Europe after 1945 was clearly more favorable: "In Poland there is no dictatorship of the proletariat and you do not need it"; "must Poland follow the path of introducing the dictatorship of the proletariat? No, it does not have to, it is not necessary." And to the Bulgarian communist leaders: it is possible "to achieve socialism in a new way, without the dictatorship of the proletariat"; "the situation has changed radically from our revolution, it is necessary to apply different methods and forms [...]. You need not fear accusations of opportunism. This is not opportunism but the application of Marxism to the present situation." And to Tito: "In our times socialism is possible even under the English monarchy. Revolution is no longer necessary everywhere [...]. Yes, socialism is possible even under an English king." The historian reporting these conversations commented in turn: "As these remarks show, Stalin was actively rethinking the universal validity of the Soviet model of revolution and socialism."⁴⁷ Perhaps one can go further and say that the rethinking also concerned the general relationship between socialism and democracy, with reference therefore to the Soviet Union itself. To formulate the hypothesis of a socialism under an English king was to question in some way, if not the monopolistic concentration of power in the hands of the Communist Party, at any rate the methods of terrorist dictatorship and autocracy. Symptomatic was the policy followed in the Soviet occupation zone in Germany: "The Russians not only promoted socialist theater, ballet, opera, and cinema; they also promoted the bourgeois arts," and this in accordance with the program formulated in Moscow, "according to which the Soviet system did not suit

46 Roberts (2006), pp. 296 and 231 ff.

47 Ibid., pp. 247-9.

Germany, which was to be reorganized on the basis of broad, anti-fascist, and democratic principles.” Thus, “for the first three years after the war, there were no real cultural divisions in the capital, and the Soviet Zone continued to take the lead in cultural matters.”⁴⁸

The outbreak of the Cold War abruptly interrupted this experience and this reflection. The central problem then became the creation of a security zone around a country deeply shattered by Nazi aggression and occupation, in order to avoid a repetition of the tragedies of the recent past. While “the question of dismantling, at least partially, the gulag is posed in the USSR even before Stalin’s demise,”⁴⁹ a real thaw was impossible. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Soviet Union had to engage in a new “forced march” in pursuit of the new “western technological revolution.” It had freed itself from “German western occupation,” but it could not “allow itself any rest”: a new terrible threat had emerged.⁵⁰ All the more so because a few years later, on November 1st, 1952, the explosion of the first hydrogen bomb, a thousand times more powerful than those dropped on Japanese cities, took place:

When the American government announced the results of their test, there were reactions of shock and dismay in other parts of the world. It was obvious that such an extraordinarily powerful bomb could never be used against military targets. If it was not a weapon of war, it could be only a weapon of genocide or political blackmail [...]. Stalin received a report about the American test in the middle of November, and this only served to confirm his conviction that the United States was seriously preparing for war with the Soviet Union.⁵¹

A concern not unfounded, if one thinks that in January 1952, in order to break the deadlock in the military operations in Korea, Truman entertained a radical idea, which he also transcribed in a diary note: an ultimatum could be given to the USSR and the People’s Republic of China, making it clear in advance that failure to comply “means that Moscow, St. Petersburg, Mukden, Vladivostok, Peking, Shanghai, Port Arthur, Dairen, Odessa, Stalingrad,⁵² and every manufacturing plant in China and the Soviet Union will be eliminated.”⁵³

48 MacDonogh (2007), pp. 215-6.

49 Werth (2007a), p. xix.

50 Toynbee (1992), pp. 18-20.

51 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), p. 174.

52 **Ed. Note:** Contemporary names: Mukden [Shenyang], Peking [Beijing], Dairen [Dalian], and Stalingrad [Volgograd].

53 Sherry (1995), p. 182.

In the three historical decades of Stalin-led Soviet Russia, the main feature was not the blossoming of a party dictatorship into autocracy, but rather the repeated attempts to move from the state of exception to a condition of relative normality, attempts that failed because of reasons both internal (abstract utopia and messianism preventing a recognition of achievements) and international (the permanent threat hanging over the country in the wake of the October Revolution), and because of the intertwining of the two. And messianism itself is on the one hand an expression of tendencies intrinsic to Marxism, and on the other hand a reaction to the horror of the First World War, which even in circles and personalities far removed from Marxism aroused an aspiration to an absolutely new world, without any relation to a reality susceptible to the production or reproduction of this horror. With the outbreak of the third civil war (among Bolsheviks) and with the simultaneous approach of the Second World War (in Asia even before Europe), this series of failures eventually led to the advent of autocracy, exercised by a leader who came to be the object of a veritable cult.

BUREAUCRACY OR “ZEALOUS FAITH”?

What idea can we form of the ruling group that achieved victory in the course of the third civil war and tried to put an end to the Second Time of Troubles at the very moment when new gigantic storms were gathering on the horizon? We have seen that, while Khrushchev with tortuous allusions makes Kirov the victim of a conspiracy orchestrated by the Kremlin, Trotsky brands Kirov as an accomplice of the tyrant and as a leading exponent of the hated, usurping, parasitic bureaucracy, which was to be swept away once and for all by an invoked new revolution. But was it really a bureaucrat who was shot by Nikolaev?⁵⁴ Let us return to the Russian scholar already mentioned, a critic of the Stalin-inspired assassination myth, to see how the victim was described. So, who was Kirov? He was a loyal, outspoken, and dedicated leader. And that's not all: what characterized his personality was his attention to even the most minute problems in the daily lives of his colleagues, with great modesty, he had a “tolerance of opinions different from his own, respect for the

54 **Ed. Note:** Leonid Vasilevich Nikolaev (1904 -1934) was a member of the CPUSSR who assassinated Sergei Kirov on 1st December 1934.

culture and traditions of other peoples.”⁵⁵

This flattering judgment ends by casting a favorable light on the whole social environment frequented by Kirov and, in the last analysis, on Stalin himself, of whom the former was a close and dedicated collaborator. We are by no means in the presence of a stratum of bureaucrats devoid of ideals and interested exclusively in their careers:

Like many leaders of the time, Kirov sincerely believed in the bright future for which he worked eighteen to twenty hours a day. A convinced Communist, he was so even when he sang Stalin’s praises in the name of strengthening the party and the Soviet Union, of the country’s development and power. This zealous faith was perhaps the tragedy of an entire generation.⁵⁶

In any case, it was the leadership as a whole that showed dedication to work and a spirit of sacrifice. We already know of the “enormous workload” that the Soviet leader managed to handle (*supra*, ch. 1, § 5):

[At least during the war years] Stalin worked 14–15 hours a day in the Kremlin or at the dacha [...]. In the autumn of 1946 Stalin traveled to the south to have a vacation for the first time since 1937 [...] [A few months from his death and disregarding the urgent advice of doctors] Stalin refused to take a break in the autumn or winter of 1952 despite the enormous amount of time and effort he spent on organizing the XIXth Party Congress in October.⁵⁷

Similar considerations can be made for a close collaborator of Stalin’s, namely Lazar M. Kaganovich, who deployed a “frenetic commitment” in directing the construction of the underground in Moscow: “he went down directly into the quarries, even at night, to check on the work done and to get an idea of the state of the project.”⁵⁸ In conclusion, we are in the presence of a managerial group who, especially during the war years, was engaged in an “almost superhuman effort.”⁵⁹

What animated them was a “zealous faith” that was not confined to this small group or even to the members of the Communist Party alone. Those showing “missionary zeal” were “also ordinary men and women”; on the whole “it was a period of genuine enthusiasm, of fe-

55 Kirilina (1995), pp. 51 and 192-3.

56 Ibid., p. 192.

57 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), pp. 16-9.

58 Marcucci (1997), pp. 151-2.

59 Montefiore (2007), pp. 503-4.

verish exertion, and willing sacrifice.”⁶⁰ It was a spiritual climate that could be well understood if one bears in mind that the country was going through the stages of industrial development and was offering wide-ranging prospects for social advancement to large sections of the population, at a time when the surrounding capitalist world was immersed in a devastating crisis. We give the floor here to a historian who also used an interesting memoir for his analysis:

The years 1928-31 were for the working class a period of enormous upward mobility. The promoters of socialist competition and super-productive [Stakhanovite] workers not only replaced the cadres who were considered “unsuitable” but filled vacancies en masse in the rapidly expanding bureaucratic apparatuses and educational institutions. They were not passively promoted, but active protagonists of promotion (*samoyd-vizhentsy*). They had “a clear and definite goal for the present and the future” and “sought to acquire knowledge and practical experience to the greatest extent possible so as to be useful to the new society to the greatest extent possible.

The Stakhanovite movement and socialist competition played a crucial role in the industrialization process. They helped the political leadership accelerate the pace of that process, to promote industrial modernization, to reorganize the factory troika along the lines of single management, and to select for promotion young, ambitious, competent, and politically trustworthy workers. The emergence of these workers as new forces had a trickle-down effect on the leaders of the Party, industry, and union.⁶¹

The picture traced here is confirmed and further enriched by a very authoritative testimony. In 1932, from Riga, the capital of Latvia, a young man, an American diplomat destined later to become famous as the theorist of Soviet *containment*, that is, George Kennan, sent a dispatch to Washington offering a very interesting analysis. To begin with, he stressed that “in the Soviet Union life continues to be administered in the interest of a doctrine,” namely communism. It is a worldview that could count on a wide consensus. The “industrial proletariat” enjoyed such a high social recognition that in its eyes it far outweighed the “material disadvantages” connected with the planned acceleration of economic development. Above all, the youth or “a certain portion of the youth” turned out to be “extremely enthusiastic and happy, as can only be true in human beings completely immersed in tasks that have no relation to personal life,” that is, in

60 Cohen (1975), p. 336.

61 Kuromiya (1988), p. 127.

human beings all caught up in the exalting project of building a new society. In this sense one could speak of the “unlimited self-confidence, sanity, and happiness of the young Russian generation.” But here a warning intervened which, in the light of subsequent historical experience, may be considered far-sighted: “From being the most morally unified country in the world Russia may turn at any moment into the worst moral chaos.”⁶² Can a condition of such strong moral tension withstand the wear and tear of time and the inevitable difficulties and failures of the project of building a new society? If not, it could easily reverse itself into its opposite. The fact remains that, in 1932 and on the eve of Kirov’s assassination, Soviet Russia presented itself, in the eyes of the future theorist of *containment*, as “the most morally unified country in the world.”

Of course, when he expressed himself thus, Kennan seemed to know more about the urban context (where, despite contradictions, the breakthrough had in fact aroused the enthusiasm of a wide array of young people, intellectuals, and industrial workers)⁶³ than that of the countryside. Here the forced collectivization of agriculture had provoked, according to Bukharin’s prescient warning, “a ‘St. Bartholomew’s night’ for the rich peasants” and, more generally, for “an enormous number of peasants,” very often belonging to national minorities. The result was a civil war waged ruthlessly and horribly on *both* sides, so ruthlessly and horribly that it drove a high-ranking member of the Soviet military power to suicide, shocked by an inspection in the course of which he was said to have repeatedly shouted that it was not communism but “horror.”⁶⁴ It is probably this “horror” that provoked Bukharin’s moral crisis, outraged by the large-scale St. Bartholomew’s night against which he had warned in vain, horrified by the gigantic experiment in social engineering that proceeded without “mercy,” without distinguishing “between a person and a piece of wood.”⁶⁵ Even after the conclusion of the collectivization process, it was not persuasive to speak of a “morally unified” campaign, as if even the memory of the civil war that had torn and bloodied it had vanished entirely.

And yet, even with these necessary clarifications, Kennan’s insistence on attachment to “doctrine” and enthusiasm makes us think

62 Kennan (2001).

63 Mayer (2000), p. 633.

64 Losurdo (1996), ch. 5, § 9.

65 Cohen (1975), pp. 348 and 301.

of a “zealous faith” and “missionary zeal” already mentioned. Until the unleashing of the Great Terror in 1937 the picture did not change radically, at least according to the convergent analyses of an American and a Russian historian. The first, even if he insisted on the aspect of top-down manipulation of public opinion, nevertheless observed that in 1935 Stalin enjoyed great popularity. Any attempt to overthrow his power would have come up against widespread resistance.⁶⁶ In relation to the following year, the second (a militant anti-Stalinist historian) noted that “the party and the majority of the people still trusted Stalin”; additionally, due to the fact that “the standard of living, both urban and rural, rose appreciably,” a “certain enthusiasm” spread.⁶⁷

It is not only the rising standard of living that motivated such “enthusiasm.” There is much more. There is the “real development” of hitherto marginalized nations; the achievement by women of “legal equality with men, accompanied by an improvement in their social status”; the emergence of “a solid system of social protection” involving “pensions, medical care, protection of pregnant women, family allowances”; “the considerable development of education and of the intellectual sphere as a whole,” with the extension “of a network of libraries and reading rooms” and the spread of “the taste for the arts, for poetry”; it was the tumultuous advent and exalting of modernity (urbanization, the nuclear family, social mobility).⁶⁸ These are processes that characterized the history of Soviet Russia as a whole, but that began to take off precisely in the Stalin years.

The popular masses traditionally condemned to illiteracy burst massively into the schools and universities; thus “a whole new generation of skilled workers and technically trained technicians and administrators” was being formed, who were rapidly being called upon to perform a managerial function. “New cities are founded, and old cities are rebuilt”; the rise of gigantic new industrial complexes went hand in hand with “the rise to the higher levels of the social ladder of able-bodied and ambitious citizens of working-class or peasant origin.”⁶⁹ It has been said in this connection that there was “a mixture of brutal coercion, memorable heroism, disastrous folly, and spectacular

66 Tucker (1990), pp. 331-2.

67 Medvedev (1977), pp. 223-4.

68 Lewin (2003), pp. 389-97.

69 Tucker (1990), pp. 201,102 and 324.

results.”⁷⁰

But perhaps it is not even these achievements and their related economic improvements that constitute the main aspect, which can be found instead in the radical transformation that the places of production and work underwent in the transition from the old to the new regime.

[In tsarist Russia] employees demanded more respectful treatment from the master, insisting on the use of the polite ‘you’ (vyi) instead of the familiar ‘you’ (tyi) in which they saw a remnant of the old system of serfdom. They wanted to be treated ‘as citizens’. And often it was the question of respect for human dignity, rather than wage demands, that fuelled workers’ unrest and demonstrations.⁷¹

After having long yearned for it and sought it in vain, the serfs had achieved recognition (in the Hegelian sense of the term) with the advent of Soviet power. And this applied not only to the workers but also, as we shall see, to national minorities. It is this interweaving of “spectacular results” at the level of economic development on the one hand, and of the upheaval of the hierarchies of the ancien régime (confirmed by an unprecedented possibility of mobility and social advancement) on the other, which stimulated in the mass of the population an exhilarating feeling. To the recognition already achieved as workers there was about to be added their recognition as a unified Soviet people, who were on the verge of catching up with the more advanced countries, thus shaking off tradition and an image of backwardness. This explains the exhilarating feeling of participating in the construction of a new society and a new civilization, which was advancing in spite of mistakes, sacrifices, and terror.

On the other hand, it is interesting to reread the indictment against the Soviet bureaucratic leadership formulated by Trotsky on the eve of the Great Terror. It was as if the indictment, which had previously seemed solid, was now so full of noticeable gaps and significant admissions that it actually contradicted itself:

Gigantic achievement in industry, enormously promising beginnings in agriculture, an extraordinary growth of the old industrial cities and a building of new ones, a rapid increase of the numbers of workers, a rise in cultural level and cultural demands – such are the indubitable results of the October revolution, in which the prophets of the old world tried to see the grave of human civilization. With the bourgeois economists we have no longer anything to quarrel

70 Cohen (1975), p. 335.

71 Figs (2000), p. 156.

over. Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the earth's surface [...]. Thanks solely to a proletarian revolution a backward country has achieved in less than 10 years successes unexampled in history.⁷²

With economic development came access to culture not only for new social strata but also for entire peoples:

In the schools of the Union, lessons are taught at present in no less than eighty languages. For a majority of them, it was necessary to compose new alphabets, or to replace the extremely aristocratic Asiatic alphabets with the more democratic Latin. Newspapers are published in the same number of languages—papers which for the first time acquaint the peasants and nomad shepherds with the elementary ideas of human culture. Within the far-flung boundaries of the czar's empire, a native industry is arising. The old semi-clan culture is being destroyed by the tractor. Together with literacy, scientific agriculture and medicine are coming into existence. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this work of raising up new human strata.⁷³

At least as far as the established relationship with “backward nationalities” is concerned, the hated bureaucracy did, in spite of everything, “some progressive work”; in “laying down a bridge for them to the elementary benefits of bourgeois, and in part even pre-bourgeois, culture.”⁷⁴ How, on the basis of such a framework, Trotsky could think that the anti-bureaucratic revolution was just around the corner remains a mystery. But this is not the point we are now interested in. The accolades that the leader of the opposition let slip are a symptom of the prestige and consensus still enjoyed by the Soviet leadership. Otherwise one could not explain the spread of a “newest kind of Soviet patriotism,” an “undoubtedly very deep, sincere and dynamic” sentiment.⁷⁵

The period 1937-38 was that of the Great Terror. Not even in “its worst phase” is there any withering of the Stalin regime's social base of consensus and “enthusiastic followers,” who continue to be motivated both by ideology and by *chances* for social advancement. It is a “mistake” to read the permanent consensus as “merely an artifice of state censorship and repression.”⁷⁶ A paradoxical and tragic intertwining takes place: as a consequence of the strong economic and cultural

72 Trotsky (1988), pp. 694-5 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 7-8).

73 *Ibid.*, p. 863 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 157).

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 862-3 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 156).

75 *Ibid.*, p. 856 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 151).

76 Cohen (1986), pp. 68-9.

development on the one hand, and of the frightening gaps opened up by repression on the other, “tens of thousands of Stakhanovite workers became factory directors” and a similar, very rapid vertical mobility took place in the armed forces.⁷⁷ On August 1939, during the negotiations for the non-aggression pact, the chief translator of the German Foreign Ministry visited Moscow and thus described the spectacle offered him by Red Square and the mausoleum dedicated to Lenin:

A long queue of Russian peasants waited patiently before this mausoleum to see Stalin’s waxed predecessor in his glassy tomb. By their attitude and the expression on their faces, the Russians made the impression on me of devout pilgrims. “Those who have been to Moscow and have not seen Lenin”—a member of the embassy told me—“are worth nothing to the rural Russian population.”⁷⁸

The widespread veneration for Stalin’s “predecessor” was also a symptom of the broad social base of consent the latter continued to enjoy. In any case, the deep splits caused by the Great Terror are at least in part healed by the patriotic unity that was welded together in the course of the resistance against Hitler’s war of annihilation and enslavement. Certain it is that—we quote again a historian not suspected of indulgence for communism and ‘Stalinism’—“the victory increased to an unparalleled extent not only the international prestige of the Soviet Union, but also the authority of the regime within the country,” so that “Stalin’s popularity reached its peak in the years following the war.”⁷⁹ And this “popularity” remained unchanged until his death and made itself felt even outside the Soviet Union and even, to a certain extent, beyond the confines of the international communist movement.

A CONCENTRATORY UNIVERSE FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS

As with the Terror, the concentrationary universe produced by it does not present a linear trend and a homogeneous picture: far from being “a static system,” it “continued to spin like a spinning top” and in any case “went through cycles of relative cruelty and

77 Medvedev (1977), p. 404.

78 Schmidt (1950), p. 446.

79 Zubkova (2003), p. 42 and caption affixed to photo #18.

relative humanity.”⁸⁰ This is the opinion of an American historian, who not only paints in the gloomiest way the process that began in October 1917, but also mocks the “Western statesmen” who allowed themselves to be taken in by and come to hold respect for an “mass murderer,” due to his shrewdness.⁸¹ A book by a Russian historian who is also committed to demonstrating the equivalence of the Stalinist USSR and the Third Reich argues in a similar way. And yet, the two monographs, to which I mainly refer when analyzing Soviet Russia’s concentrationary universe, tell a story quite different from the intentions of their authors. Indeed, the picture traced by the American historian could at times be mistaken for a product of Soviet propaganda, if it did not come from a fierce anti-Communist! Let us begin by examining it. In 1921, as the civil war rages, this is how the Moscow prison in Butyrka functions for some time:

Prisoners were allowed to leave the prison freely. They organized morning gymnastics sessions, established an orchestra and a choir, created a “club” stocked with foreign magazines and a good library. According to pre-revolutionary-era tradition, upon liberation each prisoner left his books behind. A council of prisoners assigned cells, some of which were well furnished, with carpets on the floors and walls. Another prisoner recalled: “We walked along the corridors as if they were avenues.” To Babina [a Socialist-Revolutionary], life in prison seemed unreal: “Will they ever succeed in locking us up?”

Another Socialist-Revolutionary, arrested in 1924 and sent to Savvatievo, is happily surprised to find herself in a place “not at all like a prison.” Not only could her political contacts provide the prisoners with plenty of food and clothing, but she was also able to transform her cell into the women’s section of the Socialist-Revolutionary party. Still a few years later, in the Solovetsky archipelago we see the prisoners, many of whom were scientists from St. Petersburg, have a theater, a library of 30,000 volumes as well as a botanical garden, set up “also a museum of the local flora, fauna, art and history” and the inmates “produced monthly magazines and newspapers featuring satirical cartoons, extremely homesick poetry, and surprisingly frank fiction.”⁸² It is true that the picture that the prison system presents over the same period of time is not homogeneous. And yet the above are not isolated cases. On the other hand, even if they were to be happy and fleeting islands, their existence would in itself be significant.

80 Applebaum (2004), pp. 26 and 465.

81 Ibid., p. 10.

82 Ibid., pp. 45, 50-1 and 55.

Of course, there is no shortage of protests, but it is interesting to read the (partially fulfilled) demands made through a hunger strike by political prisoners (mostly Trotskyists):

Expand the library; replenish it with periodicals printed in the USSR and, at least, publications by the C[ommunist] I[nternational]. Systematically update the economic, political, and literature sections, and supply literature in the languages of national minorities. Subscribe to at least one copy of each foreign newspaper. Allow the ordering of materials for courses by correspondence. Set up a special cultural fund for this purpose: such funds exist even in prisons for criminals [...]. Allow delivery to the prison of all foreign editions permitted in the USSR, in particular foreign newspapers, including bourgeois newspapers [...]. Allow book exchanges [...]. Provide writing paper in the amount of no less than ten notebooks per person each month.⁸³

This is June 1931, and the date is significant. Despite involving a massive expansion of the concentrationary universe, Stalin's coming to power and the campaign he launched for the "liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class" did not radically alter the existing situation within that universe. This is not only true for political prisoners: "in the early 1930s [...] prisoners were relatively well-off and free." The Gulag leadership showed "a certain religious tolerance" and accommodated the requests for a vegetarian diet made by members of certain "religious sects."⁸⁴ Here now is a glimpse of the penal colonies in the far north in the early 1930s:

Needing hospitals, camp administrators built them, and introduced systems for training prisoner pharmacists and prisoner nurses. Needing food, they constructed their own collective farms, their own warehouses, and their own distribution systems. Needing electricity, they built power plants. Needing building materials, they built brick factories.

Needing educated workers, they trained the ones that they had. Much of the ex-kulak workforce turned out to be illiterate or semi literate, which caused enormous problems when dealing with projects of relative technical sophistication. The camp's administration therefore set up technical training schools, which required, in turn, more new buildings and new cadres: math and physics teachers, as well as "political instructors" to oversee their work. By the 1940s, Vorkuta—a city built in the permafrost, where roads had to be resurfaced and pipes had to be repaired every year—had acquired a geological institute and a university, theaters, puppet theaters, swimming pools, and nurseries.⁸⁵

83 Khlevniuk (2006), p. 57.

84 Ibid., pp. 59-60, 53 and 64

85 Applebaum (2004), p. 113.

Strange as it may be “the Gulag was slowly bringing ‘civilization’—if that is what it can be called—to the remote wilderness.”⁸⁶

Among the managers and administrators, there is no shortage of people who demonstrate humanity and intelligence:

Berzin seems to have very much approved of (or, at least, enthusiastically paid lip service to) Gorky’s ideas about prisoner reform. Glowing with paternalistic goodwill, Berzin provided his inmates with film theaters and discussion clubs, libraries and “restaurant-style” dining halls. He planted gardens, complete with fountains and a small zoological park. He also paid prisoners regular salaries, and operated the same policy of “early release for good work” as did the commanders of the White Sea Canal.⁸⁷

On the other hand, provoked by famine, by the pressure to increase the productivity of the prisoners, and through disorganization and often by the incompetence or rapacity of the local managers, “tragedies were plentiful.”⁸⁸ Particularly atrocious was the tragedy that in 1933 befell the deportees who were supposed to cultivate the island of Nazino (Western Siberia). It was a task which immediately turned out to be desperate: without tools, with medicines and food which had largely disappeared during the journey, on a “completely virgin” island, lacking “buildings of any kind” and “food supplies,” the deportees tried to survive by eating corpses or committing acts of real cannibalism. These details can be deduced from a letter sent by a local communist leader to Stalin and then communicated to all the members of the Politburo, who were in some ways shocked: “the Nazino tragedy received broad publicity and became a subject of investigation by many commissions.”⁸⁹ Clearly, it was not murderous intent that caused the horror: we are in the presence of “one notable example of how badly things could go wrong through simple lack of planning.” At least until 1937, in the Gulag “many unnecessary deaths” were a consequence of disorganization.⁹⁰ What characterizes the Soviet concentrationary universe is primarily the obsession with development, and this obsession, while it causes Nazino’s infamy, has quite different consequences. As in society as a whole, an attempt is made to stimulate “socialist emulation” among the inmates: those who distinguish themselves can enjoy “a food supplement” and “oth-

86 Ibid., p. 119.

87 Ibid., pp. 114-6.

88 Ibid., p. 104.

89 Khlevniuk (2006), pp. 75-9.

90 Applebaum (2004), pp. 105 and 122.

er privileges.” And that is not all:

Eventually, top performers were also released early: for every three days of work at 100 percent norm-fulfillment, each prisoner received a day off his sentence. When the [White Sea] canal was finally completed, on time, in August 1933, 12,484 prisoners were freed. Numerous others received medals and awards. One prisoner celebrated his early release at a ceremony complete with the traditional Russian presentation of bread and salt, as onlookers shouted, “Hooray for the Builders of the Canal!” In the heat of the moment, he began kissing an unknown woman. Together, they wound up spending the night on the banks of the canal.⁹¹

The productive obsession is intertwined with a pedagogical one, as demonstrated by the presence in the camps of an “Educational and Cultural Section” (KVC), an institution in which “the Moscow leaders of the Gulag [...] actually believed a great deal.” Precisely because of this, they took “the wall-newspapers exceedingly seriously.” Well, if we try to read them, we see that the biographies of the rehabilitated inmates are written in “language strikingly reminiscent of what could be heard from accomplished workers outside the colony: they were laboring, studying, making sacrifices and trying to better themselves.”⁹² The aim is to “re-educate” inmates, turning them into Stakhanovites ready to participate with patriotic enthusiasm in the development of the country. Let’s hear again from the American historian of the Gulag: “As in the outside world, the camps also continued to hold ‘socialist competitions,’ work contests in which prisoners were meant to compete against one another, the better to raise output. They also honored the camp shock-workers⁹³, for their alleged ability to triple and quadruple the norms.”⁹⁴ It is no accident that, until 1937, when addressing prisoners, the guards called them “comrade.”⁹⁵ Imprisonment in the concentration camp did not exclude the possibility of social promotion: “Many exiles also wound up working as guards or administrators in the camps”;⁹⁶ above all, as we have seen, not a few learned a profession to be exercised from the moment of their release.

Certainly, a brutal turn took place in 1937. As the third civil

91 Ibid., pp. 95-6.

92 Ibid., pp. 257 and 260-1.

93 **Ed. Note:** Another term for ‘Stakhanovite’ workers, i.e. enthusiastic ‘model Soviet worker’.

94 Ibid., p. 259.

95 Ibid., p. 132.

96 Ibid., p. 112.

war flared up and increasingly threatening clouds gathered on the international horizon, a real or imagined fifth column became the object of an increasingly obsessive hunt. In such circumstances, the detainee was no longer a potential “comrade”: it was then forbidden to address him in this way. He was entitled to the qualification of ‘citizen,’ but it was a citizen who was a potential enemy of the people. From that moment on, was the Soviet concentration camp animated by a murderous will?⁹⁷ So believes the American scholar repeatedly quoted here, but once again disproving her is her own account: “In the 1940s, theoretically the KVC [Educational and Cultural Section] of each camp had at least one instructor, a small library and a ‘club,’ where plays and concerts were staged, political lectures were organized and debates were held.”⁹⁸ There is more. As Hitler’s war of annihilation raged on and the entire country found itself in an absolutely tragic situation, “time and money” are generously invested in strengthening and improving “propaganda, posters, and the political indoctrination meetings” of the detainees:

Within the records of the Gulag administration alone, there are hundreds and hundreds of documents testifying to the intensive work of the Cultural-Educational Department. In the first quarter of 1943, for example, at the height of the war, frantic telegrams were sent back and forth from the camps to Moscow, as camp commanders desperately tried to procure musical instruments for their prisoners. Meanwhile, the camps held a contest on the theme “The Great Motherland War of the Soviet People Against the German Fascist Occupiers”: fifty camp painters and eight sculptors participated.⁹⁹

In the same year, the head of a camp with 13,000 inmates drew up a significant balance sheet of his activities:

He notes grandly that in the second half of that year, 762 political speeches were given, attended by 70,000 prisoners (presumably, many attended more than once). At the same time, the KVC held 444 political information sessions, attended by 82,400 prisoners; it printed 5,046 “wall newspapers,” read by 350,000 people; it put on 232 concerts and plays, showed 69 films, and organized 38 theatrical groups.¹⁰⁰

Certainly, since Hitler’s invasion, the prisoners had dramatically felt the effects of shortages, but this had nothing to do with a mur-

97 Ibid., pp. 122, 129 and 132.

98 Ibid., p. 256.

99 Ibid., pp. 263-4.

100 Ibid., p. 264.

derous intent:

The high mortality rates of certain years in the concentration camps partly reflected the events taking place outside [...]. In the winter of 1941-42, when a quarter of the Gulag population died of starvation, perhaps a million inhabitants of Leningrad, trapped by the German blockade, starved to death.

And shortages and malnutrition raged in large parts of the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, even in such a desperate situation, in January 1943 “the Soviet government established a special ‘food fund’ for the Gulag,” and still “the food situation did improve as the tide of the war turned in the Soviet Union’s favor.”¹⁰²

We are so far from a burgeoning murderous will that the climate of national unity aroused by the Great Patriotic War was also felt inside the Gulag. At the same time, the Gulag underwent a massive thinning out as a result of a series of amnesties; above all we see the former inmates fighting valiantly, making a career in the Red Army, being admitted to the Communist Party, and winning honors and medals for military valor, all the while expressing satisfaction and pride at the fact that they had at their disposal technologically advanced weapons produced “thanks to the industrialization of our country” (which itself had meant the first substantial expansion of the concentrationary universe.)¹⁰³

With its alternating of relatively “well-off” and “free” phases and phases of sharp deterioration in the economic and legal condition of the inmates, the history of the Gulag mirrors the history of Soviet society. With the attempts to bring about in the country as a whole “Soviet democracy,” “Socialist democratism” and even a “socialism without the dictatorship of the proletariat” parallel the attempts to re-establish “socialist legality” or “revolutionary legality” in the Gulag. It is for this reason that bitter denunciations of the Soviet “concentrationary universe” came from within and from its leadership. In 1930 it was Yagoda who called for action on “the whole prison system, which is rotten to the core.” In February 1938, it was Vyshinsky himself, the Prosecutor General of the USSR, who denounced the “unsatisfactory, and in some cases, absolutely intolerable, conditions of detention [...] which reduce men to wild beasts.” A few months later it was Lavrentiy Beria, head of the secret police under Stalin, who

101 Ibid., pp. 16 and 435.

102 Ibid., p. 434.

103 Ibid., pp. 467-8.

endorsed a stance calling for “the investigators who treated beatings as the main method of investigation and who maimed prisoners in the absence of sufficient proof of their anti-Soviet activity have to be strictly punished.”¹⁰⁴ These were not ritual denunciations: when discovered, those responsible for the “abuses” were severely punished, even by death; many others were dismissed; there was no shortage of conflict between the judiciary and the repressive apparatus, which resisted the introduction of “rules” that appeared as “an extremely unpleasant intrusion.”¹⁰⁵ In order to strengthen control, the submission of complaints and petitions by prisoners was encouraged. At other times an attempt was made to improve the situation by means of amnesties and the decongestion of the camps.¹⁰⁶ In the interval between one denunciation and another there was real improvement: these were the phases of “liberalism,” soon overwhelmed by the onset of new crises. Because of the interweaving of objective circumstances and subjective responsibilities, like society as a whole, the Gulag failed to overcome the state of exception.

TSARIST SIBERIA, LIBERAL ENGLAND’S “SIBERIA,”
AND THE SOVIET GULAG

Should we compare or even liken the Soviet Gulag to the Nazi *Konzentrationslager* [concentration camps]? It is a question that could be answered with another: why limit the comparison only to these two realities? In tsarist Russia—Conquest pontificates (following Solzhenitsyn)—the concentrationary universe was less crowded and less ruthless than in the times of Lenin and above all of Stalin.¹⁰⁷ It is worth recalling what Anton Chekhov wrote in 1890:

We have allowed millions of people to rot in prisons, to rot for no purpose, without any consideration, and in a barbarous manner; we have driven people tens of thousands of vershs through the cold in shackles, infected them with syphilis, perverted them, multiplied the number of criminals ... but none of this has anything to do with us, it’s just not interesting.¹⁰⁸

104 Khlevniuk (2006), pp. 29,194-5 and 215.

105 Ibid., pp. 212-3.

106 Ibid., pp. 250-1 and 86.

107 Conquest (2006), p. IX.

108 In Applebaum (2004), p. 18.

In the course of its centuries-long duration, the tsarist concentrationary universe (which, starting at least with Peter the Great's and, like the Gulag, also aimed at procuring the forced labor necessary to develop the most inaccessible and least developed regions) has long presented traits of extreme cruelty. A *via dolorosa* [way of suffering] led the condemned to exile or to forced labor in Siberia: "besides being flogged with the knout, many of them suffered the mutilation of a hand, foot, ear, or nose, as well as the humiliation of being branded." In the 19th century, there were attempts to eliminate "the most extreme forms of cruelty," but these were partial measures that were not always successful.¹⁰⁹

From all this it emerges how fragile is the attempt to play down tsarist Siberia's repressive apparatus, in order to isolate the Soviet Gulag and equate it with the Nazi *Konzentrationslager*. But a further consideration is more important: it is methodologically incorrect to compare a condition of normality and an acute state of exception! Read with greater critical awareness, and the comparison established by Conquest may have a result opposite to the one he proclaims: it is only in pre-revolutionary Russia that administrative detention and deportation is considered a normal practice, even in the absence of conflict and particular dangers. In Soviet Russia, on the other hand, the state of exception powerfully influences the genesis and the configuration of the concentrationary universe, which becomes all the more brutal the further one moves away from the condition of normality.

It is now necessary to take a further step forward. Beyond Russia (tsarist and Soviet) and Germany it is necessary to bring other countries into the comparison. A dual function is also inherent in the concentrationary universe utilized by liberal England. With regard to the "Irish dissidents" it has been observed that "between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they had their official Siberia" in Australia, which at least until 1868 swallowed up "representatives of nearly every English protest movement."¹¹⁰ So much for repression. But one must not lose sight of the economic function of the "Siberia" of liberal England. Immediately after the Glorious Revolution, there was a massive increase in crimes carrying the death penalty. Even those responsible for the theft of a shilling or a handkerchief, or for the unauthorized cutting of an ornamental bush are punished, and not

109 Mayer (2000), pp. 236-8.

110 Hughes (1990), pp. 212, 226, 230, 244.

even eleven-year-old boys are spared. This terrorist legislation, which, with some mitigations, continued into the nineteenth century, provided for an alternative: those who received a pardon were subjected to penal servitude, which forced them to work for a certain number of years in colonies that were still little exploited and explored, first in North America and later in Australia. In other words, even economically, Australia in particular constituted the “Siberia” of liberal England: its functions diminished, as the work of first the Black slaves and then the Indian and Chinese *coolies* and other colonial peoples intervened.¹¹¹

English “Siberia” is no less cruel than tsarist “Siberia.” On the contrary, of this “totalitarian society,” which developed in Australia at the same time the extermination of the Aborigines is carried out, a picture has been traced that also draws on memoirs and is particularly chilling:

At unpredictable times, the convicts would be mustered, counted and given full body-searches with inspections of the mouth and anus [...]. “The provisions were brought out to the various Gangs in wooden or large tin Dishes and set down as before a Hog or a Dog and [they had] to gnaw at it just the same” [...]. The basis of prison discipline was the informer [...]. *Not* to inform became suspicious in itself, and hardly a week passed without the disclosure of elaborate plots, complete with lists of names [...]. “Indulgence [...] was only got by such traffic in human blood.” The quality of the information mattered far less than its quantity. Informers had their quotas of denunciation to fill and were “capable of any act of perfidy or blood no matter how Black or horrifying such a deed might be” [...]. In this way the “normal” relations between guilt and punishment mutated into a continuous sadistic fiction, whose sole aim was to preserve terror [...]. Authority was absolute and capricious [...]. The [200] floggings were spaced [over many days...]. “The flagellators were almost as much besmeared with blood as even we” [...]. The decisive way out of this misery was suicide.

And, in fact, suicide was not only widespread but was a practice that often involved the entire community of prisoners: “A group of convicts would choose two men by drawing straws: one to die, the other to kill him. Others would stand by as witnesses.” In this way, for the few days of the journey and the trial (which took place in Sydney, at a certain distance from “Siberia” proper), before going to the gallows, the murderer could enjoy the conditions of a normal prisoner (his was actually an indirect and deferred suicide). And this pause allowed the witnesses to breathe, before returning to hell and

111 Cf. Losurdo (2005), in particular chapters 3, § 5 and 7, § 2.

eventually proceeding to a new draw.¹¹²

THE CONCENTRATIONARY UNIVERSE IN SOVIET RUSSIA AND
IN THE THIRD REICH

On the other hand, in the course of the Second World War, the concentration camp also came into explicit focus in the liberal West. Across the Atlantic, Franklin D. Roosevelt has American citizens of Japanese descent, including women and children, interned in concentration camps. Yet the United States is in a far more favorable geopolitical situation than the Soviet Union. In any case, after the Battle of Midway, one can no longer convincingly speak of military and security problems. Nevertheless, Americans of Japanese ancestry continued to be incarcerated in concentration camps. Beginning gradually, access to freedom was achieved only in mid-1946, almost a year after the end of the war. Even slower was the return home of the Latin American citizens of Japanese origin deported from thirteen Latin American countries to the USA. Only in 1948 were the last ones released from the “internment camp” or concentration camp of Crystal City, in Texas.¹¹³ Well, it would be hasty, to say the least, to explain this affair by starting not from the war and the state of exception, but from the ideology of a president accused of “totalitarianism” by his adversaries because of his economic interventionism during the Great Depression and also because of the constitutional nonchalance with which he dragged a very reluctant country into the war (*supra*, ch. 1, § 6).

With this consideration we come upon another omission found in the usual historic comparisons, namely in the concentrationary universes that developed in the course of the twentieth century in the liberal West, sometimes assuming horrific forms. The German exiles who, at the outbreak of war, were locked up in French concentration camps had the impression that their destiny was simply “*pour crever*” [to die].¹¹⁴ The mistreatment of German prisoners by the United States after the war ended was decidedly revolting, as the Canadian historian James Bacque has documented in his time and which was eventually, albeit reluctantly and with some reservations, accepted by

112 Hughes (1990), pp. 546-52.

113 Losurdo (1996), ch. 5, § 1.

114 Arendt (1986a), pp. 39-40.

the attorneys general of Dwight D. Eisenhower. More recent studies have brought to light other details. I will just mention one of them. A U.S. commission at the time ascertained that, out of 139 prisoners examined, 137 had “testicles permanently destroyed as a result of the blows they had received.”¹¹⁵ We will also see the horror of the concentration camps in which, at the outbreak of the Cold War, the British locked up those suspected of communism (*infra*, ch. 6, § 4). Finally, we should remember the Gulag in which, from 1948 and following the break with the USSR, the communists loyal to Stalin were imprisoned in Yugoslavia.¹¹⁶ At least in this case, the “Stalinists” were not the creators but the victims of the concentration camp, installed by a country that was certainly communist at the time but an ally of the West.

Even if one wants to start from the assumption of the particular magnitude and severity of the Soviet Gulag, the main problem remains open: it is still necessary to distinguish the role of ideology from the role of objective conditions (the exceptional gravity of the danger and the widespread shortages that characterize the USSR). In comparison, it is much simpler to reflexively deduce everything to ideology and thereby equate the concentrationary universes created by both “totalitarian” ideologies, rather than engaging in more complex analysis.

But let us focus anyway on Soviet Russia and the Third Reich. In the first case the concentrationary universe emerges while the Second Time of Troubles continues to rage. Still in the 1930s the state did not exercise full control of the territory: “the crime rate in a country going through a sweeping social transformation, combined with the destruction of traditional social structures, was very high indeed.”¹¹⁷ The situation of the Far East regions were decidedly more serious, presenting themselves as follows:

They were insecure areas poorly controlled by the authorities, where marginal elements and outlaws were concentrated, where armed gangs attacked isolated kolkhozes and killed the few “representatives of the Soviet government,” where everyone was armed, where human life had scarcely any value, and where humans rather than animals were sometimes hunted [...]. These were areas where the state in the sense defined by Max Weber—“a system that successfully claims the right to rule a territory by virtue of its monopoly on the use of legitimate

115 Losurdo (1996), ch. iv, § 5; MacDonogh (2007), p. 406.

116 Scotti (1991).

117 Khlevniuk (2006), p. 103.

physical violence”—was virtually absent.¹¹⁸

From the assassination on the German ambassador in Moscow, carried out in July 1918 “during the session of the 5th Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets” by the member of a party (the Socialist-Revolutionaries) that was part of the government, at least up to the assassination of Kirov in front of his office door and at the hands of a young communist, Soviet power was grappling with terrorism (a phenomenon with a long history in Russia) and feared infiltration at every level of the state apparatus—by an opposition determined to overthrow the power of the “usurpers” and “traitors.” That is to say, only with the advent of autocracy did Soviet power achieve full control of the territory and the state apparatus, and terror was primarily a response to a very acute and long-lasting crisis.

Even afterwards, the situation continued to be characterized by an interweaving of contradictions (the thickening storm of war at the international level, the latent civil war at the domestic level, the industrialization in forced stages which was considered necessary for the salvation of the country but which at the same time provoked new conflicts and new tensions), which prolonged the state of exception in new forms. Precisely for this reason, as a recent study points out, “the Terror cannot be construed solely as a series of orders issued by Stalin” and his accomplices. In reality, “popular elements” also played a part, and there was no lack of initiative “from below.” Often it was the workers, animated by the “zealous faith” pointed out above, who demanded the death sentence for “traitors” and even the renunciation of “legal subtleties” of long and costly judicial proceedings.¹¹⁹ And all this took place in the course of a process of limited but still real democratization, with the development of popular participation in the management of power in the workplace, with the substitution of the secret vote for the open vote *and* with the possibility of choosing, in the election of union and factory leaders, from among several candidates. And the newly elected often made concrete commitments to improving working conditions and reducing accidents at work.¹²⁰ Yes, “there was no contradiction between repression and democracy in the political psychology of Stalin and his followers,” and in this

118 Werth (2007b), pp. 166-7.

119 Goldman (2007), pp. 3-4, 80-1 and 252.

120 *Ibid.*, pp. 120,127-8,146 and 158-9.

sense one can even speak of a “democratization of repression.”¹²¹

But it was precisely this democratization that stimulated an expansion of repression. Taking advantage of the new possibility of questioning corrupt and inefficient officials in the factory and in letters to the press, the tumultuous movement from below that thus developed tended to portray them as enemies of the people and to brand constant accidents at work as a form of sabotage of the new society it was engaged in building.¹²² The feeling of the growing threat of war and the obsessive hunt for a widespread but very well concealed fifth column, the rampant fear and hysteria turned factory, trade union, and party assemblies into a “free-for-all.” At times, it was Stalin and his closest collaborators who saw themselves forced to intervene to contain and channel this fury, warning against the tendency to dig up traitors and saboteurs everywhere and thus to destroy the party and trade union organizations.¹²³ This brings to mind the Great Fear which raged in France in 1789 in the weeks and months immediately following the storming of the Bastille, when, blowing out of all proportion a danger which was not illusory, “peasant imagination and rumor saw [destructive brigands] as the mercenaries of the enemies of the people and of that aristocratic conspiracy with another face: foreign invasion.”¹²⁴ In the USSR of the second half of the 1930s, the danger was real and of extreme gravity, but no less real was the hysteria.

In conclusion, in Soviet Russia, terror emerged in the period of time from the First World War, which opened the Second Time of Troubles, and the Second World War, which threatened to inflict upon the country and the nation as a whole an even more colossal catastrophe: the destruction and enslavement explicitly enunciated in *Mein Kampf*. And the terror emerged in the course of a forced industrialization campaign that aimed to save country and nation, and in the course of which the horror of ferocious repression on a large scale was interwoven with real processes of emancipation (the massive spread of education and culture, prodigious vertical mobility, the emergence of the welfare state, the tumultuous and contradictory antagonism of social classes hitherto condemned to total subalternity).

The differences with the Third Reich are clear, which since its

121 Ibid., pp. 128 and 240.

122 Ibid., pp. 8, 28, 160 and 245.

123 Ibid., pp. 240 and 243-4.

124 Furet, Richet 1980, p. 93.

advent could count on the full control of territory and state apparatus and on the traditional efficiency of an auxiliary bureaucratic network. If in Russia ideology played a secondary role in the creation of the state of exception (which existed before October 1917 and was, if anything, prolonged by revolutionary messianism, partially opposed by Stalin), in Germany the state of exception and the associated concentrationary universe were from the outset the result of a clearly defined political project and a clearly defined ideological vision. Hitler came to power with an explicit program of war and territorial expansion. In order to avoid the collapse of the home front as had occurred during the First World War, he was determined to use the most ruthless terror. The expansionism of Nazi Germany also aimed to reassert white and Aryan supremacy on a global scale, and to take up and radicalize the colonial tradition, enforcing it in Eastern Europe itself. From the outset, the *Konzentrationslager* targeted possible opponents to the war and to the colonial and racial empire that Hitler intended to conquer and build. A prerequisite for the success of this program was the neutralization of the Jewish-Bolshevik virus that sowed subversion and undermined the foundations of civilization, questioning the natural hierarchy of peoples and races. It was therefore necessary to liquidate the Jews, the communist “commissars” and the political cadres in the territories to be conquered, as well as in Germany itself. The way was thus cleared for treating the inferior races of Eastern Europe as the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas had been, annihilated in order to make way for Germanic colonists, and to be used as slaves in the service of the white, Aryan master race.

GULAG, KONZENTRATIONSLAGER AND THE ABSENT THIRD

Beginning with the invasion first of Poland and then of the USSR, the Nazi concentrationary universe seemed to repeat and further aggravate the most tragic chapters in the history of colonial slavery. At a time when, due to the rapacity of the Atlantic slave trade, the availability of slaves seemed almost unlimited, the owners had no economic interest in sparing them. They could easily condemn them to die of overwork in order to replace them with others and to extract from each of them the maximum possible advantage. It is thus that—observed a nineteenth century economist to whom Marx drew attention—the fertile agriculture of the West Indies “has engulfed

millions of the African race"; yes, "negro life is most recklessly sacrificed."¹²⁵ The war unleashed by Hitler in Eastern Europe represents a new and even more brutal form of the slave trade. Captured and plundered en masse, the Slavic *Untermenschen* (those who had survived the Germanization of the territory) were forced to die of overwork, in order to make possible the civilization of the master race and to feed their war machine. They suffered a condition similar to that of the African slaves (of the Caribbean) to whom they were explicitly compared by the Führer.

The prison systems reproduce the social relations that give rise to them. In the USSR, inside and outside the Gulag, we basically see at work a developmentalist dictatorship that tried to mobilize and "re-educate" all the forces in order to overcome the age-old backwardness, made all the more urgent by the approach of a war that, according to the explicit declaration of *Mein Kampf*, was to be one of enslavement and annihilation. In this framework, terror was intertwined with the emancipation of oppressed nationalities, as well as with a strong social mobility and with access to education, culture, and even to positions of responsibility and management for social strata which, up to that moment, had been completely marginalized. The frenzied productivism and pedagogy and the associated social mobility were felt, for better or worse, even within the Gulag. The Nazi concentrationary universe, on the other hand, reflected the racially-based hierarchy that characterized the already existing racial state and the racial empire to be built. In this case, the concrete behavior of individual prisoners played an irrelevant or very marginal role, and therefore the pedagogical concern would have been meaningless. In conclusion, the detainee in the Gulag was a potential "comrade," forced to participate in particularly harsh conditions in the productive effort of the entire country, and after 1937 he or she was in any case a potential "citizen," even if the line of demarcation from the enemy of the people or the member of a fifth column, which the total war on the horizon or already in progress required to neutralize, had become thin. The detainee in the Nazi *Lager* was primarily the *Untermensch*, marked forever by his or her racial designation or degeneration.

If one really wants to find an analogy to the *Konzentrationslager*, it is necessary to bring in the concentrationary universe that runs deep through the colonial tradition (where Hitler explicitly intended to

125 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 23, pp. 281-2.

place himself) and that targeted colonized or colonized-descendent peoples. Here is the central omission of the typical comparisons! In this sense we might speak of the absent third of comparisons in vogue today. Two distinguished historians have respectively defined the “militarized labor camps” of colonial India of 1877 and the concentration camps in which Libyans were imprisoned by liberal Italy as “extermination camps.”¹²⁶ Even if one were to consider this formulation emphatic, it is the racial logic and hierarchy that predominated in the Italian and Western colonial empires as well as in the concentration camps built by them, which in any case more clearly resembled the concentrationary universe of the Third Reich.

We are also led to think of Nazism when we read of the manner in which the “Canadian holocaust” or the “final solution of our Indian Problem” was perpetrated. The “Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada” speaks of “death camps,” of “men, women and children” being “deliberately killed,” of a “a system whose aim was to destroy most native people by disease, relocation and outright murder.” In order to achieve this result, the champions of white supremacy did not hesitate in hurting “innocent children” who were put to death “by beatings and torture, and after having been deliberately exposed to tuberculosis and other diseases”; others would then undergo forced sterilization. A small “collaborating minority” would manage to survive, but only after renouncing their own language and identity and putting themselves at the service of the butchers.¹²⁷ In this case, too, it can be assumed that righteous indignation has contributed to an overloaded characterization. The fact remains that we come across practices that are identical or similar to those in force in the Third Reich and implemented on the basis of an ideology once again similar to that which presided over the construction of Hitler’s racial state.

Now, let us discuss the situation in the southern United States. After the Civil War, Black prisoners (who made up the vast majority of the prison population) were often rented out to private companies and were kept in “great rolling cages that followed construction camps and railroad building.” The same official reports showed:

[...] “that convicts were excessively and sometimes cruelly punished; that they were poorly clothed and fed; that the sick were neglected, insomuch as no

126 Davis (2001), pp. 50-1; Del Boca (2006), p. 121.

127 Annett (2001), pp. 5-6, 12 and 16-7.

hospitals had been provided, that they were confined with the well convicts." A grand-jury investigation of the penitentiary hospital in Mississippi reported that inmates were "all bearing on their persons marks of the most inhuman and brutal treatments. Most of them have their backs cut in great wales, scars and blisters, some with the skin peeling off in pieces as the result of severe beatings.... They were lying there dying, some of them on bare boards, so poor and emaciated that their bones almost came through their skin, many complaining for want of food.... We actually saw live vermin crawling over their faces, and the little bedding and clothing they have is in tatters and stiff with filth." In mining camps of Arkansas and Alabama convicts were worked through the winter without shoes, standing in water much of the time. In both states the task system was used, whereby a squad of three was compelled to mine a certain amount of coal per day on penalty of a severe flogging for the whole squad. Convicts in the turpentine camps of Florida, with "stride-chains" and "waist-chains" riveted on their bodies, were compelled to work at a trot.¹²⁸

We are in the presence of a system that makes use of "chains, dogs, whips and firearms" and which "produces for the prisoners a living hell." The death rate was highly significant. Between 1877 and 1880, in the course of the construction of the railroad lines at Greenwood and Augusta, "nearly 45 percent" of the forced laborers employed there died, "and these were young black men in the prime of their lives."¹²⁹ Or another statistic could be quoted, relating to the same period: "In the first two years that Alabama leased its prisoners, nearly 20 percent of them died. In the following year, mortality rose to 35 percent. In the fourth, nearly 45 percent were killed."¹³⁰

In relation to the mortality rate, a systematic statistical comparison with concentration camps in the USSR and the Third Reich would be interesting. With regard to the Gulag, it has been calculated that at the beginning of the 1930s, before the crackdown provoked by the attack on Kirov and the growing dangers of war, the annual mortality rate "corresponded more or less to 4.8% of the average camp population." Admittedly, this statistic does not include the goldfields camps in the Kolyma river zone. One must also take into account the "characteristic underestimates in the reports of the health sections"; and, nevertheless, even if one were to raise the official figures significantly, it seems difficult to reach the mortality rate that raged on the African American prisoners just seen above. Moreover, the reasons for the "underestimates" are significant. The fact is that "high rates of mortality and evasions could lead to severe penalties."

128 Woodward (1963), pp. 206-7.

129 Friedman (1993), p. 95.

130 Blackmon (2008), p. 57.

“the health sections of the camps feared being accused of negligence and untimeliness in admitting the sick”; “camps could be inspected at any time.”¹³¹

Judging from the mortality rate of the semi-slaves rented out, it does not appear that a similar threat loomed over American entrepreneurs who grew rich from building the Greenwood and Augusta railroad lines or from other enterprises. It is worth holding on to one essential point, however. In the U.S. South, Black convicts suffered horrific living and working conditions and died en masse during a period of peace. The state of exception played no role, and also any productivist concern played a marginal or entirely non-existent role. The concentrationary universe of the U.S. South reproduced the racial hierarchy and racial state that characterized that society as a whole. The Black inmate was neither a potential “comrade” nor a potential “citizen”; he or she was an *Untermensch*. The treatment inflicted on him or her by whites was the treatment considered normal in dealing with races alien to authentic civilization. And so again we come across the ideology of the Third Reich.

On the other hand, it is prominent U.S. historians who have compared the prison system just seen to the “prison camps of Nazi Germany.”¹³² And it is no coincidence that medical experiments in the U.S. were carried out by hiring African Americans as guinea pigs, as in Nazi Germany such experiments were conducted on *Untermenschen*.¹³³ On the other hand, in the years of Wilhelm II, colonialist and imperialist Germany conducted medical experiments in Africa and to the detriment of Africans, before conducting them on its own territory. In this activity two doctors stand out who later became the masters of Joseph Mengele.¹³⁴ In Germany, the Nazis brought to completion the perversion of medicine and science that had already taken shape in the course of the European and American colonial traditions. Not only can the Third Reich not be separated from the history of the relationships established by the West with colonized peoples or their descendants, but it should be added that this tradition continued to show signs of vitality well after Hitler’s defeat. In 1997, President Clinton felt compelled to apologize to the African American community: “In the 1960s over 400 black men from Ala-

131 Khlevniuk (2006), pp. 349 and 346-7.

132 Fletcher M. Green, in Woodward (1963), p. 207.

133 Washington (2007).

134 Kotek, Rigoulot (2000), p. 92.

bama were used as human guinea pigs by the government. Sick with syphilis, they were not treated because the authorities wanted to study the effects of the disease on a 'sample population.'¹³⁵

THE NATIONAL AWAKENING IN EASTERN EUROPE:
TWO OPPOSING RESPONSES

It is clear that the comparison of concentration camps, based on the omission of the treatment of "inferior races" by the liberal West, is absurd. As is the comparison on the basis of separating domestic from foreign policies and the repressive practices from the ideologies on which they are based. If we bring into play these elements and these usually ignored connections, the typical equivalence made between the two totalitarian dictators turns into an antithesis. It has been observed that "Stalin was very impressed" by the awakening of the nationalities oppressed or marginalized within the Hapsburg Empire. In this regard, refer to his remarks, made in 1921 during the Xth Congress of the Russian Communist Party: "About fifty years ago all Hungarian towns bore a German character; now they have become Magyarised"; the "Czechs" are also experiencing an "awakening."¹³⁶ It is a phenomenon that affected Europe as a whole. From the "German city" that it was, Riga had become a "Lettish" [Ed. Note: Latvian] city; similarly, the cities of Ukraine "will inevitably be Ukrainianised," rendering the previously predominant Russian element secondary.¹³⁷

Starting from the realization of this process, considered progressive and irreversible, the Bolshevik Party as a whole and particularly Stalin engaged in a "novel and fascinating experiment in governing a multiethnic state," which can be described as follows:

The Soviet Union was the world's first Affirmative Action Empire. Russia's new revolutionary government was the first of the old European multiethnic states to confront the rising tide of nationalism and respond by systematically promoting the national consciousness of its ethnic minorities and establishing for them many of the characteristic institutional forms of the nation-state. The Bolshevik strategy was to assume leadership over what now appeared to be the inevitable process of decolonization and carry it out in a manner that would preserve the territorial integrity of the old Russian empire. To that end, the So-

135 E. R. (1997); see Washington (2007), p. 184.

136 Martin (2001), p. 6.

137 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 5, pp. 31 and 42 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 5, pp. 47 and 63).

viet state created not just a dozen large national republics, but tens of thousands of national territories scattered across the entire expanse of the Soviet Union. New national elites were trained and promoted to leadership positions in the government, schools, and industrial enterprises of these newly formed territories. In each territory, the national language was declared the official language of government. In dozens of cases, this necessitated the creation of a written language where one did not yet exist. The Soviet state financed the mass production of books, journals, newspapers, movies, operas, museums, folk music ensembles, and other cultural output in the non-Russian languages. Nothing comparable to it had been attempted before.¹³⁸

The novelty of this policy is all the stronger if one compares it with the obsession with homogenization that was still raging in the United States and Canada at the height of the twentieth century. Forced to sever ties with their community of origin and with their families, Indigenous children also had to renounce their dances and their “strange” clothing, they were obliged to wear their hair short and above all to avoid using their tribal language like the plague. Breaking the rule that required the exclusive use of English resulted in harsh punishments and, in Canada, even electric shock therapy.¹³⁹

As far as the USSR is concerned, there is one essential point on which there is now some consensus:

The republics thus received, sooner or later, a flag, an anthem, a language, a national academy, in some cases even a foreign commissioner’s office, and they retained the right, later used in 1991, to secede from the federation, although the procedure was not specified.¹⁴⁰

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler also took his cue from the Slavicization and “erasure of the German element” (*Entdeutschung*) taking place in Eastern Europe. In his eyes, however, it is a process that is neither progressive nor irreversible; but only very radical measures can stop it and drive it back. It is not a question of conducting a policy of assimilation and of promoting “a Germanization of the Slavic element in Austria”; no, “Germanization can be carried out only as regards human beings.” It would be ridiculous to want to make “a Negro or a Chinese a German, just because he has learned German, is ready in the future to speak the German language and give his vote to a German political party.” “Such a Germanization is in reality a de-Germanization,” it would stand for “the beginning of a bastard-

138 Martin (2001), pp. 1-2.

139 Washburn (1992), pp. 252-4; Annett (2001), p. 31.

140 Graziosi (2007), p. 202.

ization” and thus for an “annihilation of the Germanic element,” and “precisely those qualities would be destroyed which had enabled the conquering race [*Eroberervölke*] to achieve victory over an inferior people.”¹⁴¹ Germanizing the land without ever Germanizing the people was only possible by following a very precise model. On the other side of the Atlantic the white race had expanded westwards, Americanizing the land, certainly not the Native population. In this way the United States has remained “a Nordic-Germanic state” without degrading to an “international mishmash of peoples.”¹⁴² This same model was to be followed by Germany in Eastern Europe.

If the Bolsheviks and Stalin were concerned to promote national *elites* and an indigenous political class in the Soviet republics that was as broad as possible, Hitler’s program for the conquest of the East was exactly the opposite: “all representatives of Polish intellectuality must be annihilated”; it was necessary by any means to “prevent the formation of a new intellectual class.” Only in this way could the colonial tasks be fulfilled. The peoples destined to work like slaves in the service of the master race were not to lose sight of the fact that “there can be only one master, the German.”¹⁴³

Speaking in 1921 at the Xth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, Stalin drew attention to a further element in the turning point that was taking place in world history. “In the course of the imperialist war, the imperialist groups of the belligerent powers themselves were forced to appeal to the colonies, from which they drew the human material to build up their troops” and this “could not fail to arouse in these peoples an inclination to freedom and struggle.” The national awakening in Eastern Europe was in tune with the one taking place in the colonial world. “The development of the national question into the general colonial question was not a historical accident.”¹⁴⁴ If national awakening in Europe commanded it to put an end to a policy of discrimination, denationalization, and oppression to the detriment of minorities, in the colonies the national awakening was destined to radically challenge the concentrationary universe inflicted by the conquerors on the races they considered inferior.

The novelty of the use of colonial troops did not escape Hitler, who had hastened to denounce the treason thus consummated against

141 Hitler (1939), pp. 82 and 428-9.

142 Hitler (1961), pp. 131-2.

143 Hitler (1965), p. 1591 (2 October 1940).

144 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 5, p. 32 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 5, p. 49).

the white race. France was especially guilty of this, where a process of “bastardization” and “negroization” was quickly and ruinously put into practice, and where one even witnessed the “the creation of an African State on European soil.”¹⁴⁵ We are not dealing here only with “prejudices.” We are in the presence of a precise political program, which looked with horror at the use of colonial troops and at racial mixing even on the level of sexual and marriage relations, because these practices, by breaking down the barrier between the race of masters and the race of servants, undermined the domination and the concentrationary universe which the former was called upon to impose upon the latter in the superior interests of civilization. From the Nazi leader’s point of view, the national awakening in Eastern Europe and the use of colonial troops in the internal conflicts of the West (with the associated emboldening of the colonial peoples) constituted a terrible overall threat to civilization and to the white race. The development of the racial state and empire and the unleashing of the war in the East, with the influx into the Nazi concentrationary universe of a mass of slaves recruited from the “inferior races” and destined to work and die in the service of the master race, also represented a response to this threat.

The Nazi concentrationary universe was programmed to devour millions and millions of slaves or superfluous human beings, an inevitable result of a program that aimed at a rapid germanization of the land while a priori excluding the Germanization of the indigenous people who inhabited it. And such a project would have devoured an even more immense mass of victims had it not been countered by an opposing project based on the recognition of not only the existential but also the cultural and national rights of indigenous peoples. Through a series of both objective circumstances and subjective responsibilities, which in no way should be dismissed, this second project also produced a concentrationary universe. But, despite its horrors, it can in no way be equated to the first, which explicitly presupposed the continuation of genocidal practices already in place in the colonial world proper and their extension in an even more brutal form to the new colonies to be built in Eastern Europe.

145 Hitler (1939), p. 730

TOTALITARIANISM OR DEVELOPMENTALIST DICTATORSHIP?

We are now in a position to understand the inadequate or misleading character of the category of totalitarianism, generally invoked to consecrate the equating of Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany. A growing number of historians are questioning or rejecting it outright. In order to explain the history of the Soviet Union, some of them start from Peter the Great and, proceeding even further backwards, from "encircled Muscovy" with a very fragile geopolitical position, as the invasion of Genghis Khan had shown. From history and geography Stalin therefore felt called upon to promote the fastest possible economic development, in order to save both the nation and the new social-political order that the nation had given itself.¹⁴⁶ It was thus that a developmentalist dictatorship emerged and imposed itself.

All this within a society which, on the one hand, was presumably not entirely unmindful of Lenin's 1905 warning ("Whoever wants to reach Socialism by a different road, other than that of political democracy, will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and the political sense"¹⁴⁷), and on the other hand, due to both objective circumstances and inherent ideological weaknesses, was dragged from one state of exception to another, from one civil war to another. We are thus in the presence of a society characterized not by uniformity and totalitarian alignment, but by the permanence and omnipresence of civil war, which manifested itself even within families, torn apart as a result of the opposing attitudes of its members towards, for example, the process of the collectivization of the countryside: "a peasant woman who belonged to the Evangelical sect and strongly opposed collectivization murdered her activist husband with an axe while he slept, allegedly because he was a kolkhoz activist." Similar, horrific acts of bloodshed also sometimes came to stain the relationship between parents and sons and daughters.¹⁴⁸ The conflict took on the ferocity of religious war. And this applied not only to those who explicitly referred to motives derived from Christianity, but also to the fervent followers of the new society, themselves animated by "zealous faith."

Especially enlightening is the analysis of the reports on production. Let us try to imagine ourselves in a Soviet factory, or in one of

146 Tucker (1990), chapters 1-3.

147 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 9, p. 22.

148 Fitzpatrick (1994), p. 248.

the many construction sites that came into being in the wake of the gigantic modernization program promoted by Stalin. In the meantime, far from being uniformly decided from above, their location came at the end of a complex decision-making process made up of impassioned and often fiery discussions: “contrary to the strict centralization of the tsarist era, the anti-colonialist rhetoric of the Soviet Union gave regional *lobbies* a power unthinkable under the ancien régime.” These regions were revealed to be particularly strong in that, precisely by virtue of their backwardness, they called upon the regime to fulfill its promises to do away with the inequalities and “injustices of tsarist imperialism” in order to promote industrialization and modernization on a national scale.¹⁴⁹

Once we enter the place of production and work, we see that there was no strict discipline and blind obedience. On the contrary, there was no shortage of disorder and bitter conflict. In the meantime we see the strong fluctuations of the labor force. Stalin was forced to fight tenaciously against this phenomenon, and yet still in 1936 “more than 87 per cent of industrial workers leave their jobs.” Stimulated also by the policy of full employment and the concrete possibilities of social ascendancy, this fluctuation nevertheless constituted a counterweight to the power exercised by authority in the factory or on the building site. But that is not all. On the whole, we are witnessing a kind of “tug-of-war” with three participants: the party and trade union leaders, committed to increasing labor productivity; the workers, often concerned primarily with raising wage levels; and the technicians caught in the middle and uncertain of what to do. Mostly it was the workers who had the upper hand, and often even the technicians disregarded “orders from Moscow.”¹⁵⁰

It should be added that it was the working class itself that was divided. While it aroused the enthusiasm of some, the call to increase productivity and to engage fully in socialist competition in order to develop the productive forces and catch up with or surpass the more advanced countries of the West provoked discontent, quiet resistance, or open hostility in others. If the ideologues were branded by the discontents as “the forces of the Antichrist,” in return the former harbored “a holy hatred for the enemies of a new socialist life,” in language that leads us back once again to the “zealous faith” that

149 Payne (2001), pp. 16,19 and 22.

150 Goldman (2007), pp. 14-6 and 19.

inspired an entire generation.¹⁵¹

That which ultimately pitted followers and opponents of the new order against each other was certainly not the only conflict. We also see confrontation between technical cadres, on the one hand, and the mass of workers, on the other. The former had often fought against the Bolsheviks and on the side of the Whites. Appeal was therefore made to their competence but at the same time an attempt was made to subject them to some form of control. But even the newly-educated technicians and specialists, or those who, although trained under the old regime, also from patriotic sentiments collaborated loyally with the Soviet power, nevertheless had to face the challenge coming from a new social stratum, the “vanguard workers.” And this side was all the more fearsome in a society in which “workers are called upon to judge their leaders”; it was well understood then that the “engineers often strongly resisted workers’ control.”¹⁵² But this resistance was far from easy. Workers could make their voices heard and asserted themselves by displaying manifestos in the workplace and writing to the press and party leaders. It was often the technicians and production bosses in the factory and the workplace in general who felt intimidated.¹⁵³

Stalin also mentioned these conflicts when he dealt with the Stakhanovite movement, which “began spontaneously, almost of its own accord, from below, without any pressure of any kind from the administrations of our factories,” and “even in opposition against them.” Yes, at least in the beginning, the Stakhanovites were forced to carry out their experiments “in secret from the economic bodies, in secret from the controllers.” A worker engaged in introducing “innovations” even risked “dismissal,” or was stopped by the “intervention of the shop superintendent.”¹⁵⁴ In competition and often in conflict with each other, we see a plurality of “industrial authorities,” technical, administrative, political and trade unions (there is also a distinction between “party and trade union”) at work.¹⁵⁵

In conclusion, a visit to a Soviet factory or building site (even from the Stalin years) certainly did not leave an impression of entering a “totalitarian” workplace. “Totalitarianism” was far more devel-

151 Kuromiya (1988), pp. 128-9.

152 Payne (2001), pp. 39-40, 5 and 7.

153 Goldman (2007), pp. 28,160 and 245-6.

154 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 36 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 604).

155 Payne (2001), pp. 39-40.

oped in the factories of tsarist Russia, where an unequivocal principle was in force: “The factory owner is an absolute sovereign and legislator whom no laws constrain”; indeed, he could even have recourse to the whip, in the case of infractions of certain importance.¹⁵⁶ Or take a country like the USA. Let us bring into the picture the treatment reserved for prisoners (almost always African American) whose “rental,” as we know, was transferred between private companies. These companies could enjoy “absolute control” in exchange for wages:

Company guards were empowered to chain prisoners, shoot those attempting to flee, torture any who wouldn’t submit, and whip the disobedient—naked or clothed—almost without limit. Over eight decades [from the 1870s until World War II], almost never were there penalties to any acquirer of these slaves for their mistreatment or deaths.¹⁵⁷

Sure, these were convicts, but keep in mind that for African Americans in the South, the charge of “vagrancy” alone was enough to be arrested, convicted, and sold as rental labor to entrepreneurs determined to enrich themselves. Other times African Americans were simply captured by landowners and forced to provide forced labor. Not by chance, already in the title and subtitle of his book, the author quoted here spoke of “slavery by another name,” of “the re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II.”¹⁵⁸ While even slaves or semi-slaves obviously constituted a small percentage of the overall labor force, it nonetheless gives one pause about the prolonged permanence of slave or semi-slave labor relations in the production sites of U.S. capitalist society.

Beyond this, it is worth making a more general consideration: on closer inspection, in the Soviet factory we see dynamics and relations at work that would be considered intolerably undisciplined even in the capitalist factory of democratic countries. A well-known thesis of Marx (*The Poverty of Philosophy*) may serve to clarify this point:

While inside the modern workshop the division of labor is meticulously regulated by the authority of the employer, modern society has no other rule, no other authority for the distribution of labor than free competition [...]. It can even be laid down as a general rule that the less authority presides over the division of labor inside society, the more the division of labor develops inside the workshop, and the more it is subjected there to the authority of a single person. Thus authority in the workshop and authority in society, in relation to

156 Figes (2000), pp. 155-6.

157 Blackmon (2008), p. 56.

158 Ibid., pp. 1 ff. and *passim*.

the division of labor, are in *inverse ratio* to each other.¹⁵⁹

It could be said that in Soviet society there was at times a reversal of the dialectic of capitalist society described by Marx. The absence of rigid factory discipline (with the disappearance of the traditional more or less accentuated despotism of the bosses) was matched by the terror exercised by the state over civil society. But even in this regard one must be on guard against simplifications. We are in the presence of “a more confused and less organized state” than one might think; “the center rarely spoke with a single voice”; the same “ideological uniformity” was often only a “facade.”¹⁶⁰

The usual analyses of totalitarianism are totally abstracted from the places of production and work, and for this reason they are one-sided and superficial. If we put an end to this total and undue abstraction, the category of totalitarianism appears to us in all its inadequacy. It does not help us in any way to understand a society that in its final phase, after the “zealous faith” that could not last forever (as Kennan had lucidly predicted), was undermined by a true and proper anarchy in the workplace, quietly deserted by their employees who, even when present, nevertheless seem to be engaged in a sort of “work to rule” slowdown, which was tolerated. This is the impression that the workers’ and trade union delegations visiting the USSR in later years got, with a mixture of bemusement and slight approval. In a China that was beginning to leave Maoism behind, in the public sector there were still customs that were described as follows by a Western journalist: “even the last janitor [...], if he wants, can decide not to do anything at all, stay at home for one or two years and continue to receive his salary at the end of the month.” The “culture of laziness” continued to make itself felt even in the private sector of the economy that was emerging: “Former state employees [...] arrive late, then read the newspaper, go to the canteen half an hour earlier, leave the office an hour early” and often leave for family reasons, for example “because their wives are sick.” And the managers and technicians who try to introduce discipline and efficiency in the workplace are forced to face not only resistance and moral indignation from employees (the fine imposed on a worker who took time off to look after his wife is a disgrace!), but sometimes threats and even violence

159 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 4, p. 151.

160 Payne (2001), pp. 3-4 and 14.

from below.¹⁶¹ It is very difficult to describe these relations according to the category of “totalitarianism.” One is best oriented by treasuring the passage already quoted from Marx. *The Poverty of Philosophy* can help us understand a phenomenon that is absolutely inexplicable from the point of view of the classical theory of totalitarianism. In the USSR, in Eastern European countries, and in China the more or less radical dismantling of the “totalitarian” system goes hand in hand with a drastic strengthening of discipline in the workplace. To give an example, only in 1993 was the law allowing dismissal for absenteeism passed in China.¹⁶²

There is no doubt that, especially in situations of acute crisis, in the USSR and in Maoist China the places of production and work were certainly not spared by terror, and yet what characterized everyday life was a regime that was far from totalitarianism. In short, one could say that the usual recourse to this category is persuasive only on the basis of a double, arbitrary abstraction. The removal from the field of investigation of the relations in force in the places of production and work makes it possible to juxtapose communist dictatorship and Nazi dictatorship. The silence on the terror and on the concentrationary universe enacted to the detriment of colonies and semi-colonies, as well as in the metropolis itself to the detriment of peoples of colonial origin (such as Indigenous Peoples and African Americans), makes it possible to dig a gulf between the liberal West and “totalitarian” states.

Compared to the Soviet Union of Brezhnev and his successors, Stalin’s dictatorship showed different characteristics, but the central element of differentiation was constituted by the exceptional ideological and political mobilization, which, before deflating and losing any credibility, for a long period of time managed to provide an essential contribution to the functioning of the productive and economic apparatus. These were the decades in which a developmentalist dictatorship unfolded. It was both tumultuous and merciless, and it was characterized by the “zealous faith” of social and ethnic groups that saw the way cleared for a strong rise of living conditions and that achieved a recognition that had been stubbornly denied them until then. It does not make much sense to assimilate this tragic and contradictory experience with a dictatorship, the Nazi dictatorship, which was explicitly established for the functions of war, colonial

161 Sisci (1994), pp. 102, 86 and 89.

162 Ibid., p. 107, note 3.

conquest, and the reaffirmation of racial hierarchies, and which from the very beginning could dispose of a state and bureaucratic apparatus of consolidated efficiency and could impose itself homogeneously in every sphere of social life. And, nevertheless, this assimilation has become something of a cliché. We need to investigate its genesis.

ERASURE OF HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF MYTHOLOGY: STALIN AND HITLER AS TWIN MONSTERS

COLD WAR AND REDUCTIO AD HITLERUM OF THE NEW ENEMY

With the outbreak of the Cold War, both antagonists seek to brand the other as the heir to the Third Reich that had just been overthrown by both parties. “Nobody today,” Lukács observed in 1954, “will presume to claim that either the ideology or the procedures of Hitlerism belong entirely to past history.”¹ Indeed, on this the two sides seem to agree without difficulties. While the communist philosopher, using the category of imperialism, juxtaposes Truman and Hitler, on the opposing side the category of totalitarianism is used to subsume under it both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.²

Both categories are wielded as weapons of battle. The attempt to equate the new and the old enemy is not limited to a denunciation of imperialism, i.e. totalitarianism. After describing as a process of “destruction of reason,” the ideological path leading to the triumph of the Third Reich, Lukács felt the need to subsume under the category of irrationalism also the “ideology of the ‘free world’” led by the USA. The operation is not without difficulties, and there the Hungarian philosopher looked to denounce the “new form of irrationalism hidden under the shell of an apparent rationality.” Yes, in the “new situation” that had arisen, “it is perfectly natural for the Machist-pragmatist rather than the German type of irrationalism to reign in philosophy,” of which Wittgenstein, Carnap and Dewey,

1 Lukács (1974), p. 772.

2 Ibid., p. 848.

among others, would have been its exponents.³

The difficulty of assimilating the new to the old enemy was also felt on the opposing side. In outlining *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, after having long insisted on the deadly role of imperialism and having singled out Lord Cromer in particular (who was still, after the Second World War, counted by Churchill among the heroes of the British Empire),⁴ Arendt completed the comparison and equated Stalin's Soviet Union with Nazi Germany by referring not only to totalitarianism, but also to another category, that of "pan-movements," and so there emerged another analogy. The Pan-Germanism of the second of the two countries compared would be matched by the Pan-Slavism of the first. This conclusion was the goal of a *tour de force* even more reckless than the one seen in Lukács. We will see Churchill comparing the communist movement to a "church" characterized by expansionist universalism and "whose missionaries are in every country" and in every people. In any case, the alleged Stalinist Pan-Sovietism called on the peoples in the colonies to sweep away the domination of the master race, considered instead natural and beneficial by the Pan-Germanism theorists.

But at that point, in the two opposing camps, the main concern was the construction of analogies and symmetries. We look on with amusement when reading in Arendt that what characterizes the "pan-movements" (and thus Nazism and Communism) is "an absolute claim to chosenness." Yet the celebration of the United States as God's chosen people runs deep through the American political tradition and continues to resonate to this day in the speeches of U.S. presidents! Cold War prerogatives clearly took precedence over all other considerations. This is confirmed by the intervention in 1950 of a prominent American historian. At the time he had opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt and his policy of alliance with the USSR. With the outbreak of the Cold War he felt encouraged to restate the thesis of the political and moral equivalence of Hitler and Stalin. And in that he was engaged in the total identification of the two dictators. The former [Hitler] insists on the "racial destiny of the Teutons." A common reader might be led to think of the "manifest destiny" and providential "fate" which, according to a long tradition, would preside over the unstoppable expansion of the USA. But, arguing and removing facts in a manner not unlike Arendt, the historian quoted

3 Ibid., pp. 775, 784, and 786.

4 Churchill (1974), p. 7313.

here equated the Nazi motif of the “racial destiny of the Teutons” to the “faith of Stalin and Lenin in the messianic role of the proletariat and the international revolutionary communist movement.” To repeat, the celebration of the “master race” was central to Hitler’s ideology. The search for analogies and precedents should point in the direction of the white supremacy regime long in force in the American South, to which Nazism repeatedly referred and which in some sense continued to exist in 1950, the year of publication of the book discussed here. Instead, the U.S. historian discovers that an equivalent to Hitler’s “master race” theory exists in Stalin’s Soviet Union, where almost “every important discovery” is attributed to “some unknown or little-known Russian”!⁵

The *reductio ad Hitlerum* of a former ally also entailed the accusation of genocide. The first to move in this direction was perhaps the front hegemonized by the communist movement and the Soviet Union. In 1951 in New York the Black lawyer William Patterson, leader of the Civil Rights Congress (an organization engaged in the fight against McCarthyism on the one hand and the white supremacist regime on the other) edited a book that is at the same time an appeal to the UN to become aware of the tragedy that raged on African Americans. In the U.S. (particularly in the South) the regime of discrimination, humiliation, racial oppression, and social marginalization continued to operate. Rapes, lynchings, legal and extra-legal executions had not ceased, and police violence raged on (in 1963 Martin Luther King will still speak of “the unspeakable horrors of police brutality”). Outlining this long list of injustices and torments, referring to the convention approved by the UN in December 1948 against the crime of genocide, and making use of the fact that according to this convention genocide does not necessarily entail the systematic annihilation of an entire ethnic group, the book bore a decidedly provocative title: *We charge genocide*. Apparently corroborated by the strong opposition encountered by this convention among U.S. politicians, the indictment was translated into many languages. In the USSR, the work appeared with an introduction by the Jewish intellectual Ilya Ehrenburg, who compared the Third Reich and the USA as both suffering from a genocidal or potentially genocidal racist delusion. Of course, there were furious reactions to the book in the

5 Arendt (1989a), pp. 325 and *passim*; Chamberlin (1950), pp. 36-7; Losurdo (2007), ch. 2, § 14 and ch. 3, §§ 6-7 (regarding the theme of the “chosen” nation in the American political tradition).

US, and the accusation was reciprocated. A member of the committee calling for approval of the UN convention declared: "in communist countries it is official policy to wipe out entire groups on the basis of their racial and national origin."⁶

If the beginnings of the Cold War saw each of the two antagonists branding the other with a new version of Nazism and the crime of evincing its genocidal madness, as the triumph of the West progressed, the analogies game tended ever more exclusively in the direction favored by the victor. In particular, it has become an obsession in dominant ideology to equate Stalin and Hitler in the most complete way possible, to the point of presenting them as twin monsters.

THE NEGATIVE CULT OF HEROES

How was this achieved? While attention is focused exclusively on the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, Gandhi equated colonialist England and Hitler's Germany, British and Nazi imperialism and attacked both in his condemnatory judgment. Scholars not suspected of anti-Westernism have repeatedly compared and even explicitly theorized the treatment of colonial populations by the liberal West to the genocidal practices of the Third Reich. This comparison has been applied to the deportation of the Cherokee people ordered by Andrew Jackson (the president of the United States, the country visited and celebrated by Tocqueville), to the attitude taken by Theodore Roosevelt towards the "inferior races" (to be met with a "war of extermination" in the event of rebellion against the "superior race"), to the treatment inflicted by England on the Irish people (treated in the same way as Indigenous peoples of the Americas and still in the mid-nineteenth century condemned to die en masse of starvation).

There is more. The key terms nowadays used to describe the horrors of the twentieth century already emerged from studies investigating the liberal world of the nineteenth century. With reference in particular to the "development of industrial capitalism" in England, it has been argued that "the Gulag is not an invention of the twentieth century"; a "totalitarian society" was founded in Australia as it swallowed up deportees from England (often wretches condemned for petty theft, to which they had been driven by hunger). With regard

6 Horne (1988), pp. 163-75; Rapoport (1991), p. 193 (with respect to Ehrenburg); Hofstadter (1982), vol. 3, p. 451 (with respect to M. L. King).

to the tragedy of the Indigenous populations in America, Australia, or the English colonies in general, authoritative scholars have spoken respectively of “American holocaust” (i.e., the “final solution” of the Amerindian question), the “Australian holocaust” and “late Victorian holocausts,” not to mention the “Black holocaust” (the deportation and enslavement of the survivors, one in three or four), to which African Americans seek to draw attention. Finally, as we have also seen, the “Canadian holocaust.”

Even when it comes to the events unfolding before our eyes, authoritative media outlets report that in Afghanistan, a country under U.S. protectorate status, captured Taliban are amassed in a place that “resembles the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp” and that in Guantanamo a sort of “modern-day Gulag” is at work, according to Amnesty International’s characterization. Finally, it is worth noting that the most unprejudiced American historiography has not hesitated to establish a comparison between Anglo-American annihilation from the air of entire cities (Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki) on the one hand and the genocide of the Jews on the other.⁷ But all this vanishes as if by magic in dominant ideology and historiography, just as the reality of the concentrationary universe that in the course of the Second Thirty Years’ War emerged even in countries with a more consolidated liberal tradition and, even after the defeat of the Third Reich, was kept up for some time as anti-Soviet and anti-communist measures and that in any case were developed further in the colonies or semi-colonies.

And yet, though colossal, this omission is not sufficient to create the twin monster myth. And here is how it proceeds further. From a comparison between the USSR and the Third Reich we slide into the comparison between Stalin and Hitler, one and the other described by abstracting from their respective historical contexts and political projects. Once the explosive contradictions characterizing on the one hand the Second Time of Troubles and on the other the Second Thirty Years’ War have been dispelled, Stalin’s terror appears as the expression of gratuitous violence motivated exclusively by totalitarian ideology or even by the bloody paranoia of a single personality.

Similarly, Hitler’s own historical context is suppressed. He was born at the end of the nineteenth century. The “most painful” century of human history, the “century of colonies” and above all the “century of races,” has not yet ended and sweeps away once and for all the

7 Markusen, Kopf (1995).

naive “ideas of the eighteenth century with regard to the brotherhood of nations” and the mythology of the common origin and unity of the human race, the ideological paraphernalia to which the “[s]ocialists” pathetically cling, despite the resounding denials of history and science.⁸ In 1898 the Anglo-German author Houston S. Chamberlain, who would later become particularly dear to Hitler, but who at the time was acclaimed throughout the West, expressed himself in this way. That is to say, even to understand Nazism it is necessary in the first place to investigate the political project underlying it, and this political project not only does not refer back to a single criminal or mad personality, but, beyond Germany and Nazism, calls into question in different ways other countries and other political movements. In this sense, whatever the judgment on the artistic level, Bertolt Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is not convincing. In order to illustrate Hitler’s personality, Brecht employed a literary genre (the crime story) that is misleading. A presupposed moral was thus highlighted that is actually constructed a posteriori. Nazism has its roots in a historical period in which the “evidence” is constituted by, if anything, the hierarchization of races and a colonial expansionism based on genocidal practices.

Of course, to inherit such a tradition at a time when it was beginning to be harshly contested, and to radicalize it to the point of wanting to implement it in Eastern Europe as well, is a horrid escalation, but it is an escalation and not a phenomenon arriving ex nihilo. Widespread in nineteenth-century culture was the idea of racial “extermination” which, Disraeli pointed out, is an expression of an “irresistible law of Nature.” At the end of the century, Spencer lamented: “we have entered upon an era of social cannibalism in which the strong nations are devouring the weaker ones.” In the U.S., at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was no shortage of appeals to a “final solution” and to a “final and complete solution” of the Indian question and the Black question respectively.⁹ At the same time, in Canada too, an authoritative figure from the administration called for the “final solution of our Indian problem.”¹⁰ The horror and infamy of the escalation persisted, but it developed out of an experience of Germany’s failure in building a colonial empire overseas, this project immediately swept away at the

8 Chamberlain (1937), pp. 997 and 33.

9 Cf. Losurdo (2005), ch. x, §§ 3-4.

10 In Annett (2001), p. 6.

outbreak of the First World War by British naval superiority, which imposed on Germany a devastating and deadly naval blockade even for the civilian population. And therefore, they asked themselves: would Germany continue to be exposed to this terrible danger, or build a continental empire at any cost, resorting, yes, to massacres and genocidal practices, but to the detriment of inferior races and in any case by following the classic and established Western model of colonial expansionism?

In dominant ideology, with all political projects vanished, Third Reich infamy is also configured as a manifestation of a mysterious but nevertheless terrifying disease whose origin goes by the name of "totalitarianism." The way is thus paved for equating Stalin to Hitler. Even the analogy between "Pan-Slavism" and "Pan-Germanism," on which Arendt insists becomes unnecessary (and perhaps cumbersome), and does not seem to enjoy particular success today. Everything revolves around two (sick and criminal) personalities, whose biographies are sometimes treated in joint fashion.¹¹

What is most striking in these texts is the absence of history and even, in a certain sense, politics. Colonialism, imperialism, the World Wars, the struggles for national liberation, and the different and opposing political projects all disappear. Nor do they even ask about the relationship between the liberal West with fascism and Nazism (the former pretending to be the champions of the most authentic and significant ideas of the West), nor of its relationship with the old Russian regime, whose contradictions had been tending for a long time to precipitate into a huge catastrophe. All this is substantially overshadowed by the absolute centrality conferred to two creative, albeit wickedly creative, personalities.

THE THEOREM OF ELECTIVE AFFINITIES BETWEEN STALIN AND HITLER

It is said that these two personalities are not only politically and morally equivalent, but are also linked by a sort of mutual attraction. As proof of this one refers to the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and of the delimitation of the respective spheres of influence. In fact, in one sense this pact put an end to the Brest-Litovsk *Diktat*; in another, it was only a stage in a contradictory process of delimitation of spheres of influence by the great powers that began in Munich and

11 Bullock (1992).

ended (provisionally) in Yalta.¹² A few months after the conclusion of the Second World War, in 1946, Ernest Bevin, a leading Labour Party figure and British Foreign Secretary, saw the world as tending to be divided “into spheres of influence or what can be described as the three great Monroe doctrines,” claimed and asserted respectively by the USA, the USSR and Great Britain.¹³ If the British Monroe rapidly crumbled, even in 1961 John F. Kennedy, fresh from the inglorious adventure of the Bay of Pigs, in the course of a conversation in Vienna, protested to Khrushchev about the results and the dynamism of the Cuban Revolution. The USA could not tolerate a regime that would claim to undermine its hegemony in the “western hemisphere,” in one of their “areas of vital interest,” just as the USSR could not tolerate a slight to its hegemony in its security area, in Eastern Europe.¹⁴

One might well consider it a particularly odious delimitation of the spheres of influence that took place on the basis of the secret protocols of the Soviet-German pact and brand as cynicism the move that allowed Stalin to gain both time and space. But it is very difficult to reconcile such a condemnation with the thesis of mutual attraction between the two dictators, with the theorem of elective affinities. Indeed, soon after the outbreak of war by Nazi Germany, Churchill welcomed the entry of Soviet troops into eastern Poland. Shortly afterwards, in addressing the leaders of Latvia, Stalin gave a very clear explanation of the reasons for his policy in the Baltic countries: “The Germans might attack. For six years German fascists and the communists cursed each other. Now in spite of history there has been an unexpected turn, but one cannot rely upon it. We must be prepared in time. Others, who were not prepared, have paid for it.” It was only gradually, partly because of the need to foil the maneuvers carried out in the region by the Third Reich, that the military protectorate, with which Moscow initially seemed content, was transformed into a real annexation.¹⁵ The amputations suffered by Soviet Russia in the period of its greatest weakness were thus radically called into question, while at the same time the new ruling group’s tendency to take on the legacy of the international policy of tsarist Russia without excessive limitations was accentuated.

12 Gardner (1993).

13 In Thomas (1988), p. 296.

14 Schlesinger jr. (1967), p. 338.

15 Roberts (2006), pp. 38-45 and 55.

In the usual assessment of the German-Soviet pact, the questions that would seem preliminary to its understanding are completely absent: what agreements had been previously stipulated by the Third Reich? How can one explain the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union less than two years later and what were the plans cultivated by the number two in the Nazi regime (Rudolf Hess), who on the eve of Operation Barbarossa adventurously landed in England?

In the race to reach a compromise or an agreement with the new regime installed in Berlin, Stalin arrived decidedly last. On 20 July 1933 the Concordat between Germany and the Holy See guaranteed the fidelity of German Catholics to the new “government established according to the Constitution” (*verfassungsmässig gebildete Regierung*), an acknowledgement that came shortly after the launching of exceptional laws, with recourse to terror, and the emergence of the racial State, with the first measures against officials of “non-Aryan origin.” Two weeks earlier the Catholic Zentrum dissolved itself, whose militants had pledged to provide “positive collaboration” to the “national front directed by the Reich Chancellor.”¹⁶ As for the Protestant world, it must not be forgotten that the Deutsche Christen sided with Hitler immediately after his coming to power, and took up that position by adapting Christianity to the needs of the Third Reich, reinterpreting the Protestant Reformation in a nationalistic and even racist key, in order to theorize a Church fused with the German “popular community” and founded on the “recognition of the diversity of peoples and races as an order willed by God.”¹⁷

The Zionist movement also showed similar readiness to seek the favor of the new rulers. The organ of the former, the *Jüdische Rundschau*, which remained substantially immune from the wave of prohibitions and persecutions that hit the German press immediately after the Reichstag fire, a few weeks later, on April 7, 1933, called Zionists and Nazis to be “honest partners.” It all culminates in the 1935 agreement to “transfer” 20,000 Jews to Palestine, authorized to take with them almost 30 million dollars, with a strong impetus to colonization and to the process that would later lead to the formation of the State of Israel.¹⁸ Later, reacting to the “transfer” agreement, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem also tried to ingratiate himself with Hitler. Let us now

16 Rüge, Schumann (1977), p. 50.

17 In Kupisch (1965), pp. 256-8.

18 Losurdo (2007), ch. v, § 1 and § 4.

turn to the political parties aligned in opposition. “Decidedly weak” is Social Democratic deputy Otto Wels’ speech, on the occasion of the Reichstag session granting extraordinary powers to Hitler.¹⁹ It is primarily the communist and “Stalinist” party that was warning of and organizing resistance against the barbarism now in power.

The year 1935 was also when the naval agreement between Britain and the Third Reich was concluded. Intervening after the beginning of a feverish rearmament and the reintroduction in Germany of compulsory military service, it fed Hitler’s hopes of being able to reach a strategic agreement with the recognition of the naval pre-eminence of Great Britain and the reciprocal respect of the two great “Germanic” empires: the British overseas empire and the German continental empire, to be built up with the colonization of Eastern Europe and the subjugation of the Slavs. It has rightly been described as a “cynical attitude” on the part of the London government, who gave the impression of endorsing an infamous program, already spelled out in clear letters in *Mein Kampf*.²⁰ The growing concern in Moscow are unsurprising, along with the strong irritation of Paris²¹ and the irrepressible joy of Hitler, who could thus celebrate what he defined as his “happiest day.”²²

Even more disturbing is Poland’s role. As has been observed, Poland became “entirely subordinate to German policy,” beginning with the signing of the ten-year non-aggression pact with Germany on 26 January 1934. The following year Polish Foreign Minister Beck declared to his deputy: “There are two political formations undoubtedly doomed to disappear, Austria and Czechoslovakia.”²³ The consonance with Hitler’s program was clear, and it was not only a matter of words: “the Polish ultimatum to Czechoslovakia demanding the return of Tešín finally convinced Beneš, according to his own account, to abandon any idea of resisting the Munich settlement. Poland had been so far a more useful jackal to Germany in the East than Italy had been in the Mediterranean.” The Munich Conference did not mark the end of the Warsaw government’s collaboration with the Third Reich. “If Hitler was really aspiring to set foot in the Ukraine, he had to go through Poland; in the autumn of 1938, this seemed by no

19 Hitler (1965), p. 238 (as the editor puts it).

20 Shirer (1974), p. 453.

21 Baumont (1969), p. 161.

22 Reported in Goebbels (1992), p. 867 (editor’s note 22).

23 Baumont (1969), pp. 92-3 and 281.

means a political fantasy."²⁴ There even seems to be encouragement for this from Warsaw. In January of the following year, during a conversation with Hitler, Beck declared that Poland "does not attach any significance to the so-called security system."²⁵

Stalin had every reason to be concerned or distressed. Before the Munich Conference, the U.S. ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, observed that the important thing was to isolate "Asiatic despotism," saving "European civilization" from a fratricidal war. After the triumph achieved by Hitler a British diplomat noted in his diary: "Czechoslovakia, from having been a dagger pointed to the heart of Germany, is now rapidly being organized as a dagger into Russian vitals."²⁶ At the time of the crisis that resulted in the Munich Conference, the USSR had been the only country to call out the Third Reich and confirm its support for the government in Prague, putting more than seventy army divisions on a state of alert. Subsequently, after the complete dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Third Reich in March 1939, Moscow forwarded a harsh note of protest to Berlin.²⁷ The reaction of the other capitals was much more "composed." And so, the Nazi-fascist aggressors successively devoured Ethiopia, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Albania and China in Asia, thanks to the direct complicity or passivity of the Western powers, who were inclined to direct the further ambitions and expansionist aims of the Third Reich toward the country that had emerged from the October Revolution. To the east the Soviet Union felt the pressure exerted by Japan on those frontiers. The danger of invasion and war was thus arriving on two fronts. It was only at this point that Moscow began to move in the direction of the non-aggression pact with Germany, taking note of the failure of the popular front policy.

Carried out by Stalin with conviction and decisiveness, the popular front policy had cost not a little. It had strengthened the Trotskyist opposition and agitation especially in the colonies. What credibility could there be in an anti-colonialism that spared—so the accusation sounded—the major colonial powers of the time, to concentrate fire on a country, Germany, which at Versailles had lost even the few colonies it had previously possessed? Above all, for colonial peoples themselves it was difficult to accept the turn of events. En-

24 Taylor (1996), p. 259.

25 Volkogonov (1989), p. 468.

26 In Gardner (1993), pp. 36 and 44.

27 Volkogonov (1989), pp. 465 and 460.

gland had been largely discredited. In the spring of 1919 it had not only been responsible for the Amritsar massacre, which had cost the lives of hundreds of defenseless Indians, but had resorted to “public floggings” and de-humanizing collective punishment and terrible national and racial humiliation, forcing on city dwellers “the humiliation of crawling on all fours to and from one’s home.”²⁸ Later, as the Second World War flared up, the imperial government repressed pro-independence demonstrations by machine-gunning them from above with the air force (*infra*, ch. 6, § 4). These were the years when Gandhi stated that “In India we have a Hitlerian government, albeit disguised in milder terms.” And again, “Hitler was ‘Great Britain’s sin.’ Hitler is only an answer to British imperialism.”²⁹ Indeed, when the war was over, Gandhi would go so far as to pay homage to Subhas Chandra Bose who had fought alongside the Axis for the sake of independence: “Subhas was a great patriot. He laid down his life for the country.”³⁰

In conclusion: it had not been easy for the USSR to get the idea accepted that, despite appearances, even for the people of the colonies the main danger was still constituted by the Nazi-fascist coalition, by the Germany-Japan-Italy axis, and in particular by the Third Reich, which was determined to resume and radicalize the colonial tradition, even resorting to extreme means. For countries like England and France the policy of the popular fronts entailed much lower costs, and yet they sabotaged it. At this point the USSR had no choice but a pact with Germany, a move that has been defined as “a last-minute, dramatic improvisation” to which Moscow resorted in the absence of any other alternative, “on the very eve of a new European war.”³¹

This became a turning point that is usually assessed with an eye exclusively on Europe. But there is no reason to ignore the repercussions in Asia. Mao Zedong expressed his satisfaction thus: “The pact represents a blow for Japan and a help for China,” because “it gives the Soviet Union a better chance” of supporting “China in her resistance to Japan.”³² Precisely for this reason the Japanese government

28 Brecher (1965), pp. 89-90.

29 Gandhi (1969-2001), vol. 80, p. 200 (*Answers to Questions*, 25 April 1941) and vol. 86, p. 223 (interview with Ralph Coniston in April 1945).

30 Gandhi (1969-2001), vol. 98, p. 293.

31 Roberts (2006), p. 5.

32 Mao Zedong (1969-75), vol. 2, pp. 271 and 275.

considered Berlin's behavior to be "treacherous and inexcusable."³³ In fact, flows of Russian arms and ammunition into China became very substantial. The attitude of the West was quite different:

It is still a dark page in the book of history that neither Europe, nor America, on their own initiative and through comprehension of what was at stake, put the slightest obstacle in the way of the fascist rulers in Tokyo, and, what was worse, almost right up to the day of Pearl Harbour the Americans were sending oil and motor fuel to Japan.³⁴

Let us now leave Asia aside to focus on Europe. The mutual diffidence between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich and the preparation of both for frontal confrontation never dissipated even during the months of the non-aggression pact. Even before signing, speaking to the High Commissioner of the League of Nations in Danzig, Hitler made it clear:

Everything I undertake is directed against Russia. If the West is too stupid and too blind to comprehend this, I will be forced to reach an understanding with the Russians, turn and strike the West, and then after their defeat turn back against the Soviet Union with all the forces united through me.³⁵

Judging from this excerpt, the Führer's constant goal was the construction of a German-led Western alliance for the destruction of the Soviet Union. If this alliance could not be stipulated by means of a prior agreement, then all that remained was to impose it on the recalcitrant partners after defeating them. The transitional agreement with Moscow was merely a ploy to achieve victory and thus bring about the Western alliance necessary for the final showdown with Bolshevism. The non-aggression pact was instrumental to the achievement of the main and permanent objective of the Third Reich, who unleashed Operation Barbarossa presenting it as a crusade for Europe to which European countries and peoples were called upon to contribute and in fact did contribute, to varying degrees and with human or material resources.

Was Stalin counting on an eternal or lengthy duration of the pact? In fact, from the very beginning he was aware of the inevitability of confrontation with Nazi Germany: "We will be spared war a

33 Coox (1990), pp. 898 and 900.

34 Romein (1969), p. 261.

35 In Nolte (1987), pp. 313-4.

little longer.”³⁶ He took advantage of the time thus gained to consolidate his country’s position. As early as November 1939, in Hitler’s eyes, the communist-ruled country appeared committed to military strengthening and was willing to comply with the pact only according to circumstances and convenience.³⁷ It was a point reiterated by the Führer two months later: Stalin is cautious, he is well aware of the balance of power, but he is clearly looking forward to “a difficult situation for Germany”; he does not even lose track of the weather either and reveals himself to be “more brazen” than usual in the winter months, when he felt more sheltered from the formidable war machine of the Third Reich.³⁸

The Führer’s worries were anything but far-fetched. Let us take a look at Moscow’s attitude at the end of the summer of 1940, at a moment when, with the occupation of France triumphantly completed, the Third Reich seemed on the point of being able to force England as well to capitulate:

While to Hitler Stalin was expressing confidence in a rapid conclusion to the war, his diplomatic envoys and agents abroad encouraged every sign of resistance to the ‘new order’. The Moscow newspapers, which hitherto had only disparaging remarks for the allies, began to report sympathetically the Battle of Britain and to call upon French patriots to resist the subjugation of their country. Even before this the German Foreign Office had had to protest against the anti-Nazi propaganda in which Madame Kollontai, the Soviet Minister in Sweden, had indulged.³⁹

A conversation that took place in Moscow on 25 November 1940 between two of Stalin’s close collaborators is revealing:

D[imitrov]: We are following a course of action to break up German occupation troops in various countries, and without shouting about it, we mean to intensify those operations further. Will that not interfere with Soviet policy?

M[olotov]: That is of course what we must do. We would not be Communists if we were not following such a course. Only it must be done quietly.⁴⁰

Stalin, clearly committed to encouraging resistance against Third

36 In Montefiore (2007), p. 354.

37 Hitler (1965), p. 1423.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 1653 and 1655.

39 Deutscher (1969), pp. 633-4.

40 Dimitrov (2002), p. 245.

Reich expansionism, also agreed with this line.⁴¹ Of course, there was a collision course, and Stalin was aware of this, as evident from the remarks he made and the orders he issued. On November 7, 1940, he stated that it was necessary to be the militarily equal “of our enemies (and such are to us all capitalist states, even those presenting themselves as friends!).”⁴² On November 25 of the same year, he stated: “Our relations with Germany are polite on the surface, but there is serious friction between us.”⁴³

In the early months of 1941 even the semblance began to fade: “Now resistance against Hitler was [from Moscow] being encouraged everywhere and openly.” This was particularly true of the Balkans, where the conflict of interests became increasingly acute between the two signatories of the non-aggression pact two years earlier. Stalin received the Yugoslav ambassador in Moscow in the Kremlin and discussed and defined with him the line to be taken against the policy of the Third Reich. Pleasantly surprised by this boldness toward the would-be masters of the world, the Belgrade representative formulated a question: “What if the Germans, irritated, were to turn against you?” The ready answer was: “Let them come!”⁴⁴ The stipulation of the friendship pact between the USSR and Yugoslavia on April 4, 1941, was immediately followed by the invasion of Yugoslavia by Hitler’s army. A few days later, reporting what was also the opinion of the Soviet leader, Dimitrov noted in his diary (April 18, 1941): “The war of the Greek and Yugoslav people against imperialist aggression is a just war,” about this “there are no doubts.”⁴⁵ The clash with the Third Reich loomed ever more clearly on the horizon. On May 5, 1941, Stalin observed, “Is the German army invincible? No. It is not invincible [...]. Now Germany is continuing the war under the banner of the conquest and subjection of other peoples, under the banner of hegemony. That is a great disadvantage for the German army.”⁴⁶

If the rapprochement between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union had caused considerable unease among the Nazi rank and file and in particular Rosenberg (“I have the feeling that this Moscow Pact will at some time or other exact vengeance upon National Social-

41 Ibid., p. 258.

42 Ibid., p. 241.

43 Ibid., p. 246.

44 Deutscher (1969), p. 638.

45 Dimitrov (2002), p. 300.

46 Ibid., p. 309.

ism”), Operation Barbarossa aroused a feeling of relief. The “stain on our honor” is erased, Goebbels noted in his diary.⁴⁷ The Führer himself wrote to Mussolini: “I feel at peace with myself”; the “anguish” and the feeling of “a disavowal of my origins, of my thinking and of the commitments I had undertaken,” the feelings that had accompanied the non-aggression pact had vanished. Hitler—commented a contemporary historian—finally arrived at the “confrontation that for almost two decades had been a central element of his thinking” and even of his “psyche.” Always longed for, the annihilation of eastern and Asiatic Bolshevism would have made it possible to achieve, under the conditions imposed by Berlin, a recomposition of the unity of the west and the white race, and in particular a permanent agreement with the “British Empire” which for the Führer continued to be the “model of domination and exploitation.”⁴⁸ It is only a gift to Cold War ideology when Arendt asserted that Hitler had “never intended to defend the ‘West against Bolshevism’” and that on the contrary he had “remained ready to ally himself to Stalin to destroy it.”⁴⁹

In fact, the leaders of the Third Reich were not wrong in feeling relieved that finally, with Operation Barbarossa, they could confront and liquidate (so they hoped) the real antagonist, the enemy of all time. Even before Nazism had come to power, on January 12, 1931, Stalin had branded antisemitism as a kind of “cannibalism” (*infra*, ch. 5, § 9). At the advent of the Third Reich he had reacted, on January 26, 1934, with a harsh stance against fascism and against the “fascism of the German type” in particular: “Again, as in 1914, the parties of warmongering imperialism, the parties of war and of revenge.” The “new war” that was on the horizon promised to be particularly barbaric: it was the war “organized by a ‘superior race,’ say, the German ‘race,’ against an ‘inferior race,’ primarily against the Slavs.”⁵⁰ Stalin had then reiterated this notion on November 25, 1936, at the time of the presentation of the new Soviet Constitution, which he contrasted, because of its “profoundly internationalist” character, with the “bourgeois constitutions [which] tacitly assume that nations and races cannot have equal rights.” It was true that in that instance that

47 In Nolte (1987), p. 313; Goebbels (1992), p. 1603 (June 16, 1941).

48 Kershaw (2001), pp. 596-7 and 625.

49 Arendt (1989a), p. 429, note 13.

50 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 260-1 and 263 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 527-8 and 530).

speech was of a general nature, as emerged from references made to the “colonies” and to discrimination based on the “difference in skin color,” but it is clear that the main target was Nazi Germany, which had raised racial ideology to the status of a state doctrine. It was no coincidence that Stalin insisted on the principle of equality between nations “irrespective of their strength or weakness.”⁵¹ At that time it was the Third Reich that was the champion of social Darwinism at the international level. Still, within months of the outbreak of war in Europe, on March 10, 1939, in warning the Western powers that their “great and dangerous political game” of channeling “towards the East, against the Soviet Union the Third Reich’s expansionist policies would end in “serious failure” (i.e., with a non-aggression pact between Moscow and Berlin), Stalin had appealed for an end to *appeasement*, to the policy of “making concession after concession to the aggressors,” and instead to form a common front against the war provocateurs.⁵²

Completely removing the historical framework sketched here, Arendt enunciated a theorem of elective affinities between Stalin and Hitler: the only man the former was ultimately fond of was the latter, and the only man admired by the latter was the former (*infra*, ch. 7, § 3). After what we have seen, to speak of fondness between the two sounds unintentionally humorous, while Arendt’s thesis of “Stalin’s deliberate pro-Hitler policy” is a trivial nod to Cold War ideology.⁵³ “In the Moscow of 1937,” Feuchtwanger observes, “everyone takes account of the future war with absolute certainty” and sees the “German fascist” as the enemy. The reason was clear: “Our very existence, say the Soviet people [...], is so evident a refutation of all Fascist theories that the Fascist states, if they themselves would survive, must destroy us.”⁵⁴ The war of annihilation that would later be unleashed by the Third Reich was foreseen then with precision; and far from slowing down, preparations for it would further intensified until they became frenzied in the months of the non-aggression pact.

It is true, however, that starting with Operation Barbarossa, Hitler sometimes highlighted the political and military capabilities of his great antagonist. Would this be a confirmation of the theorem of elective affinities? During the Tehran Conference, polemicizing

51 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, pp. 68-9 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 624-5).

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 187 and 190 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 683 and 685-6).

53 Arendt, 1985, p. 248.

54 Feuchtwanger (1946), pp. 76-7.

amicably with Franklin D. Roosevelt (inclined to read Hitler in a psycho-pathological key), Stalin stressed instead that the common enemy was “very able,” and that this was the only way to explain the extraordinary successes he had initially achieved.⁵⁵ Is this a new confirmation of the thesis that has become commonplace? In reality, the Soviet leader was right, not the American president! One must have a very primitive vision of antagonism to think that, to be authentic, it must entail the misrecognition of the enemy’s capabilities. While historians today agree in reproaching the Führer’s underestimation of the USSR, Arendt instead starts from his belated and partial regrets to construct a theorem of elective affinities.

Hitler is, moreover, quoted one-sidedly. It is well understandable his aspiration to explain the unexpected setbacks or failures on the Eastern Front, which inflicted a stinging rebuttal to the myth of the invincibility of the Third Reich and the Wehrmacht by the out-of-the-ordinary characteristics of the new enemy. But such characteristics were by no means always defined in flattering terms. As early as 14 July 1941, commenting on the fierce resistance encountered to Operation Barbarossa, the Führer declared: “our enemies are no longer human beings, but beasts.” And, echoing the views of his leader, one of his secretaries wrote to a friend: “it can be said to be a fight against wild animals.”⁵⁶ These “beasts” and “wild animals” clearly included Stalin, who on another occasion was seen by Hitler as a being coming from the “*Untermwelt*” [Underworld], confirming the “satanic” character of Bolshevism.⁵⁷ On the opposite side we shall see that, both before and during the war, Stalin branded Hitler as the champion of antisemitic “cannibalism” or “cannibalistic politics” based on “racial hatred.”

It should be added that other leading political personalities of the liberal West, including Churchill, expressed sympathy for the Soviet leader (*supra*, *intr.*, § 1). Franklin D. Roosevelt, when he spoke of “the wonderful progress made by the Russian people,” paid indirect homage to their leader.⁵⁸ Finally, today, eminent historians emphasize the extraordinary military and political capabilities of Stalin, without underestimating those of Hitler. Should we include all these diverse

55 Cfr. Roberts (2006), p. 182 (includes the testimony of Charles Bohlen).

56 Kershaw (2001), pp. 621-2.

57 Hitler (1965), p. 2051 (statement of 8 November 1943) and p. 1064 (statement of 30 January 1939).

58 In Butler (2005), p. 82 (message of August 8, 1942).

personalities in the elective affinities theorem? In reality, in expressing this theorem, Arendt and those who follow in her footsteps slip from the plane of historical and philosophical research into one of literary dilettantism.

THE UKRAINIAN HOLOCAUST AS AN EQUIVALENT OF
THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST

The two criminal personalities, reciprocally linked by elective affinities, produced two very similar concentrationary universes. This is how the construction of the political mythology that is raging today proceeds. Actually, while inaugurating this line of thought, Arendt makes a more problematic contribution to the discourse. On the one hand, she alludes, albeit very briefly, to the “totalitarian methods” heralded by the concentration camps in which liberal England imprisoned the Boers, or to the “totalitarian” elements present in the concentration camps that the France of the Third Republic established “after the Spanish Civil War.” On the other hand, in establishing the comparison between Stalin’s USSR and Hitler’s Germany, Arendt makes some important distinctions: only with regard to the second of the two countries does she speak of “extermination camps.” There is more: “in the USSR the overseers were not, like the SS, a special elite trained to commit crimes.” As confirmed by the analysis of a witness who had lived through the tragic experience of both concentration camps: “The Russians [...] never manifested the sadism of the Nazis [...]. Our Russian guards were decent people, not sadists, but they scrupulously observed the rules of the inhuman system.”⁵⁹ In the present day, however, with the vanishing of even cursory reference to the liberal West and of any mention of the various configurations of the concentrationary universe, all rhetoric revolves around equating the Gulag with the *Konzentrationslager*.

In order for such an argument to be persuasive, the figures for the Stalinist terror had first of all to be inflated. Recently, an American scholar has calculated that the executions that actually took place amounted to “a tenth” of current estimates.⁶⁰ The horror of this repression remains, of course, and remains on a large scale. And, nevertheless, the nonchalance of certain historians and ideologues is

59 Arendt (1989a), pp. 602-3 and 614-5.

60 Goldman (2007), p. 5.

significant. Nor do they merely inflate the numbers. In the vacuum of history and politics the construction of the myth of the twin monsters can take a further step forward: the holocaust inflicted by Nazi Germany on the Jews, starting above all with the bogging down of the war in the East, would correspond the holocaust already inflicted (at the beginning of the 1930s) by the Stalinist USSR against the Ukrainians (the so-called *Holodomor*). In the latter case, it would have been a planned “terrorist famine,” which eventually resulted in a “huge Bergen Belsen,” i.e. a huge extermination camp.⁶¹

In agitating for this thesis Robert Conquest has stood out in particular. His critics accuse him of having at one time worked as a disinformation agent in the British intelligence service and of having approached the Ukrainian dossier with this profession in mind.⁶² Even his admirers acknowledge a point that is not without significance. Conquest is “a veteran of the Cold War” and wrote his book as part of a “politico-cultural operation” that was ultimately directed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan, and that bore “numerous fruits: on the one hand, by making an important impact on the international debate about the value and limits of Gorbachev’s reforms, and on the other, through the stance of the U.S. Congress, by powerfully influencing the radicalization of Ukraine’s independence.”⁶³ In other words, the book was published as part of a “political and cultural operation,” aimed at giving the last and decisive blow to the Soviet Union, discrediting it as responsible for infamies similar to those committed by the Third Reich and stimulating its disintegration thanks to the maturing of the victimized people’s awareness of the “holocaust,” making it then impossible for them to live in the company of their butchers. We should not lose sight of the fact that, in the same period of time, together with the book on Ukraine, Conquest published another (in collaboration with a certain J. M. White), in which he gives advice to his fellow citizens on how to survive the possible (or impending) invasion by the Soviet Union (*What to Do When the Russians Come: A Survivalist’s Handbook*).⁶⁴

Of course, independently of political motivations at its root, a thesis must nevertheless be analyzed on the basis of the arguments it makes. That of the “terrorist famine” planned by Stalin in order

61 Conquest (2001a), pp. 11-4.

62 Tottle (1987), p. 86.

63 Argentieri (2004), pp. vii-viii.

64 Tottle (1987), p. 86.

to exterminate the Ukrainian people could prove to be more reliable than the thesis of the danger of Reagan's USA being invaded by Gorbachev's USSR! And so let us focus our attention on the Ukraine of the early 1930s. In 1934, on his return from a trip to the Soviet Union that had also taken him to Ukraine, the French Prime Minister Édouard Herriot denied both the planned character as well as the extent and severity of famine.⁶⁵ Issued by the leader of a country that was to enter into an alliance treaty with the USSR the following year, these statements are generally considered to be scarcely credible. However, the testimony contained in the reports of diplomats from fascist Italy is above suspicion. Even when the repression of "counter-revolutionaries" was at its most ruthless, it was interwoven by initiatives going in a different and opposite direction. There are the soldiers "sent to the countryside to collaborate on rural works" or the workers who rushed to repair machinery. Together with the "action to destroy any Ukrainian separatist ambitions," we see a "policy of valorisation of Ukrainian national characteristics," which sought to attract "the Ukrainians of Poland towards a possible and hoped-for union with those of the USSR." And this objective is pursued by favoring the free expression of the Ukrainian language, culture, and customs.⁶⁶ Did Stalin propose to attract "the Ukrainians of Poland" to the Soviet Ukrainians, by exterminating the latter by starvation? Apparently, the Soviet troops who, immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, broke into the Ukrainian territories hitherto occupied by Poland, were welcomed by the local population.⁶⁷

Let us now take a look at the picture that emerges from the positions of other enemies of Stalin, this time within the communist movement. Trotsky, who, as is well known, was born in Ukraine, and who in the last years of his life repeatedly focused on his homeland, takes a position in favor of the independence movement. He condemned the ferocity of the repression but, while sparing no accusation against Stalin (on several occasions comparing him to Hitler), he made no mention of a so-called "holocaust of hunger" planned in Moscow.⁶⁸ Trotsky stressed that "the Ukrainian masses are animated by irreconcilable hostility towards the Soviet bureaucracy," but identified the reason for this hostility in the "repression of Ukrainian

65 Ibid., p. 15.

66 Losurdo (1996), ch. 5, § 9.

67 Volkogonov (1989), p. 484; Mayer (2000), pp. 670-1.

68 Trotsky (1988), pp. 1173 ff.

independence.” Judging by the thesis in vogue today, the *Holodomor* would have occurred in the early 1930s. But according to Trotsky, “the Ukrainian problem became aggravated early this year,” i.e., in 1939.⁶⁹ Like Stalin, the leader of the anti-Stalin opposition also would have liked to unite all Ukrainians, even if this time no longer within the USSR, but within an independent state. But would it have been sensible to formulate this project while remaining completely silent about the genocide that had already taken place? In the eyes of Trotsky, the perversity of the Soviet bureaucracy consists in this: it erects monuments to the great Ukrainian national poet (Taras Shevchenko), but only in order to force the Ukrainian people to pay homage to the Muscovite oppressors in the language of their national poet.⁷⁰ As can be seen, there is mention neither of genocide, nor even of ethnocide. However harsh the condemnation of the Stalinist regime, it is not charged with the physical or cultural destruction of the Ukrainian people. Whether placed outside or inside the communist movement, Stalin’s enemies converged on this essential acknowledgement.

The fragility and instrumentality of the correspondence established between *Holodomor* and “final solution” begins to become clear. Hitler and the other Nazi leaders explicitly and repeatedly proclaimed that it was necessary to proceed with the annihilation of the Jews, comparing them to a bacillus, to a virus, to a pathogen, whose extermination would allow society to recover its health. It would be in vain to search for similar statements from the Soviet leaders about the Ukrainian (or Jewish) peoples. It might be more interesting to compare the policies of the Stalinist USSR and that of Hitler’s Germany in relation to Ukraine. Hitler proclaimed on several occasions that the Ukrainians, like all “subjugated peoples,” would have to be kept at an appropriate distance from culture and education. Their historical memory would also have to be destroyed, arguing that it was good that they did not even know how to “read and write.”⁷¹ And that is not all: 80-90 percent of the local population could have been “dispensed with.”⁷² Above all, one could and would have had to do emphatically without the intellectual classes. Their liquidation was the condition for being able to transform the subjugated people into a hereditary caste of slaves or semi-slaves, destined to work and

69 Ibid., pp. 1241 and 1243.

70 Ibid., pp. 1174-5.

71 Hitler (1989), p. 215.

72 In Kershaw (2001), p. 668.

die through forced labor in the service of the master race. The Nazi program was further clarified by Himmler. It was to eliminate the Jews immediately (who had significant representation within intellectual circles) and to reduce to a “minimum” the total Ukrainian population so as to pave the way for the “future Germanic colonization.” This was how—the historian quoted here comments—“Nazi empire-building” and “holocaust” go hand in hand in the Ukraine as well. The Ukrainian nationalists contributed to that and constituted the main source of and main propagandists for Conquest’s book.⁷³

Compared to the Third Reich, Soviet power moved in exactly the opposite direction. We are familiar with the policy of *affirmative action* promoted by the Soviet power towards national minorities and the Ukrainian “brothers and comrades,” to borrow the words used by Stalin immediately after the October Revolution.⁷⁴ In fact, it is precisely the one who today is considered responsible for the *Holodomor* who most decisively promoted “affirmative action” on behalf of the Ukrainian people. In 1921, he rejected the thesis of those who claimed that “the Ukrainian Republic and the Ukrainian nation were inventions of the Germans. It is obvious, however, that there is a Ukrainian nation, and it is the duty of the Communists to develop its culture.”⁷⁵ Starting from these assumptions, the “Ukrainization” of culture, schools, the press, publishing, party cadres and the state apparatus was developed. The implementation of this policy was given particular impetus by Lazar Kaganovich, who was a trusted collaborator of Stalin’s and who in March 1925 became party secretary in Ukraine.⁷⁶ The results were not long in coming. In 1931, the publication of books in Ukrainian “reached its peak with 6,218 titles out of 8,086, almost 77%,” while “the percentage of Russians in the party, equal to 72% in 1922, had fallen to 52%.” It must also be borne in mind the development of the Ukrainian industrial infrastructure, on whose necessity Stalin once again insisted.⁷⁷

One can try to minimize this by referring to the persistent monopoly of power exercised in Moscow by the CPSU. And, yet, this policy of “Ukrainization” had such a strong impact that it faced

73 Lower (2005), pp. 8 and passim; Sabrin (1991), pp. 3-13; Tottle (1987), pp. 75 ff

74 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 4, p. 6 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, p. 17).

75 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 5, p. 42 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 5, p. 63).

76 Graziosi (2007), p. 205.

77 Ibid., pp. 311 and 202.

resistance from Russians:

The latter were, however, disappointed by the solution given to the national question in the USSR. They resented Russia's equalizing with the other federal republics, they resented the rights granted to minorities within the Russian Republic, they resented the regime's anti-Russian rhetoric [...] and they resented the fact that the Russians, were the only nationality in the federation that had neither their own party nor their own academy of sciences.⁷⁸

Not only does it make no sense to compare the Soviet policy to the Nazi one, but the former actually turns out to be clearly superior even to the policy of the White Army (supported by the liberal West). Conquest himself ends up recognizing this in spite of himself. Placing himself on a line of continuity with respect to the tsarist autocracy, Denikin "refused to admit the existence of Ukrainians." Exactly opposite is the attitude of Stalin, who hailed the "Ukrainization of Ukrainian cities." As a result of the success of this policy a new and highly positive page is opened:

A policy of 'Ukrainianization' was formalized in April 1923, at the XIIth Congress of the Russian Communist Party. For the first time since the 18th century, a government firmly established in the Ukraine had as one of its professed aims the protection and development of the Ukrainian language and culture [...]. Ukrainian cultural figures who returned to the country came in the genuine hope that even a Soviet Ukraine might be the scene of a national revival. And, to a high degree, they were right—for a few years. Poetry and fiction, linguistic and historical writing, established themselves on a scale and with an intensity extremely exciting to all classes, while the older literature was reprinted on a massive scale.⁷⁹

We have seen that this policy was in force, indeed was in full swing in the Ukraine even in the early 1930s. Of course, a terrible conflict and famine intervened later, and yet it remains a mystery how in the space of a very short time one could go from radical *affirmative action* in favor of Ukrainians to planning their extermination. It should not be forgotten that in the elaboration and dissemination of the *Holodomor* thesis, Ukrainian nationalist circles played an important role, which, after having unleashed "many pogroms" against Jewish communities in the Civil War years,⁸⁰ often collaborated with the Nazi invaders engaged in promoting the "final solution." After having functioned as a tool both of demonization of the enemy and

78 Ibid., pp. 203-4.

79 Conquest (2004), pp. 65 and 79-80.

80 Figs (2000), p. 815.

of comfortable self-absolution, the *Holodomor* thesis has then become a formidable ideological weapon in the closing period of the Cold War and in the policy of dismemberment of the Soviet Union.

One final consideration: during the course of the 20th century the accusations of “genocide” and the denunciations of “holocaust” have been employed in the most diverse ways. We have already seen several examples. It is worth adding one more. On October 20, 1941, the *Chicago Tribune* reported an impassioned appeal by Herbert Hoover for an end to the blockade imposed by Great Britain on Germany. The war of extermination unleashed by the Third Reich against the Soviet Union had already begun a few months earlier, but the former American president did not say a word about it. He concentrated on the terrible conditions of the civilian population of the occupied countries (in Warsaw “the mortality rate of children is ten times higher than the birth rate”) and called for an end to “this holocaust,” which was useless, given that the blockade at any rate could not stop the Wehrmacht’s march.⁸¹ It is clear that Hoover was concerned with discrediting the country or countries, on the side of which F. D. Roosevelt was about to intervene. It scarcely needs pointing out that any recollection of that champion of isolationism’s allegations of a “holocaust” caused by London and Washington has been lost.

TERRORIST FAMINE IN THE HISTORY OF THE LIBERAL WEST

Moreover, even more than the stretched arguments, it is the omissions that totally discredit the speech of the “veteran of the Cold War.” We could begin with a debate that took place in the House of Commons on October 28, 1948. Churchill denounced the spread of conflict between Hindus and Muslims and the “horrible holocaust” that was taking place in India following the independence granted by the Labour government and the dismantling of the British Empire. And here a Labour MP interrupted the speaker: “Why don’t you talk about hunger in India?” The former Prime Minister tried to evade, but the MP pressed on: “What about the Indian famine for which the previous Tory Government were responsible?”⁸² The reference was to the famine, obstinately denied by Churchill, which in 1943-44 caused three million deaths in Bengal. Neither side of the

81 In Baker (2008), p. 411.

82 Churchill (1974), p. 7722.

House of Commons, however, evoked the famine that had occurred a few decades earlier, again in colonial India. In that case, twenty to thirty million Indians had lost their lives, often forced to dispense “hard labor” on a diet inferior to that guaranteed to the inmates of the “infamous Buchenwald *Lager*.” On that occasion, the racist component had been explicit and overt. British bureaucrats believed that it was “a mistake to spend so much money just to save a lot of black fellows.” On the other hand, according to the Viceroy, Sir Richard Temple, it was mostly beggars with no real intention of working who had lost their lives: “Nor will many be inclined to grieve much for the fate which they brought upon themselves, and which terminated lives of idleness and too often of crime.”⁸³

At the conclusion of the Second World War, Sir Victor Gollancz, a Jew who had landed in England following his escape from anti-Semitic persecution in Germany, published *The Ethics of Starvation in 1946* and *In Darkest Germany* the following year. The author denounced the policy of starvation that, after the defeat of the Third Reich, raged on the German prisoners and the German people, who were continually exposed to the death sentence of starvation. Yes, the infant mortality rate was ten times higher than in 1944, a year that had also been particularly tragic; the rations available to the Germans were dangerously close to those in force in “Bergen Belsen.”⁸⁴

In the two cases just cited, it was not the Soviet Ukraine that is compared to a Nazi concentration camp but the labor camps of British-subjugated India and the occupation regime imposed on the defeated Germans by the liberal West. At least the last accusation seems to be more persuasive, as confirmed by the most recent and most exhaustive book published on the subject: “Germans were better fed in the Soviet Zone.” The country that had suffered the genocidal policy of the Third Reich and continued to suffer shortages because of that policy, was more generous towards the defeated population. In fact, it was not scarcity of resources but its ideology that drove the liberal West to subject the Germans to death by starvation: “Politicians and military men—like Sir Bernard Montgomery—insisted that no food should be sent from Britain. Death by starvation was the punishment. Montgomery claimed that three quarters of all Germans were still Nazis.” Precisely for this reason, it was also forbidden to “fraternize”: one was not to speak to, much less smile at, members of such

83 Davis (2001), pp. 46-51.

84 In MacDonogh (2002), pp. 362-3.

a totally and irredeemably perverse people. The American soldier was warned: “in heart, body and spirit every German is a Hitler.” Even a girl could prove deadly: “Don’t be like Samson with Delilah; she will love to cut your hair and then your throat.” This campaign of hate was explicitly intended to put the feeling of compassion out of play, and thus to ensure the success of the “ethics of condemnation to starvation.” No, US soldiers were called upon to be impassive even in the face of starving children: in “a yellow-haired German child [...] there lurked the Nazi.”⁸⁵

If the tragedies of Bengal and the Ukraine can be explained by the scale of priorities dictated by the approach or raging of the Second World War, which necessitated the concentration of scarce resources in the struggle against a deadly enemy,⁸⁶ a planned and terrorist famine may well be spoken of with regard to Germany immediately following the defeat of the Third Reich, where the scarcity of resources played no role, while it was influenced to a considerable extent by the racialization of a people, which F. D. Roosevelt is tempted for some time to wipe off the face of the earth by “castration” (*supra*, ch. 1, § 5). It could be said that what saved the Germans (and the Japanese) or significantly shortened their suffering was the outbreak of the Cold War. In the struggle against the new enemy, they could prove valuable as cannon fodder, and their experience could be utilized by their former adversary.

But it is useless to look for any mention of famine in British colonial India or a Western ‘Bergen Belsen’ in Germany in the histories of the “Cold War veteran,” which were committed to enforcing a pattern constructed *a priori* by revisionist history: all Nazi infamies are only the replica of communist infamies. And so also Hitler’s Bergen Belsen reproduces the Bergen Belsen *ante litteram* for which Stalin is responsible.

In full consistency with such a scheme Conquest completely ignores the fact that recourse to starvation and the threat of death by starvation constitute a constant in the relationship established by the West with barbarians and with enemies from time to time compared with barbarians. After the Haitian Revolution in Santo Domingo, fearing the contagion effect of the first country on the American continent to abolish slavery, Jefferson declared himself ready to “reduce Toussaint to death by starvation.” In the mid-nineteenth century Toc-

85 Ibid., pp. 366, 363 and 369-70.

86 Cf. Losurdo (1996), ch. v, § 10.

queville called for burning the crops and emptying the silos of the Arabs in Algeria who dared resist French conquest (*infra*, ch. 8, § 6). Five decades later, with this same tactic of warfare, condemning an entire people to starvation or death by starvation, the United States stifled resistance in the Philippines. Even when it is not intentionally planned, famine could still present an opportunity not to be missed. At the same time that Tocqueville called for the creation of a desert around the rebellious Arabs, a devastating disease destroyed the potato crop in Ireland and decimated a population already sorely tried by the looting and oppression of the English colonists. The new tragedy appeared in the eyes of Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan (entrusted by the London government to monitor and deal with the situation) as the expression of “omniscient Providence,” which thus solved the problem of overpopulation (and also of the endemic rebellion of a barbaric population). In this sense, the British politician has sometimes been branded as a “proto-Eichmann,” the protagonist of a tragedy considered the prototype of the genocides of the 20th century.⁸⁷

But let us focus on the twentieth century. The methods traditionally used to the detriment of colonial peoples can also be useful in the course of the struggle for hegemony between the great powers. With the outbreak of the First World War, Britain subjected Germany to a deadly naval blockade, the meaning of which Churchill explained as follows: “The British blockade treats the whole of Germany as a besieged fortress and explicitly seeks to starve the population, and thus force it to capitulation: men, women and children, old and young, wounded and healthy.” The blockade continued to be imposed even after the end of the armistice, for months, and it was still Churchill who explained the necessity, despite the weapons’ silence, of the continuing recourse to this “weapon of starvation, which falls mainly on the women and children, upon the old and the weak and the poor.” The defeated had to accept the victors’ peace conditions to the end.⁸⁸

But with the threatening emergence of Soviet Russia, the enemy then changed. If Jefferson feared the contagion of the Black Revolution of Haiti, Wilson was concerned with containing the Bolshevik revolution. The methods remained unchanged. In order to prevent Austria from following the example of Soviet Russia, Austria was put

87 Losurdo (2005), ch. 5, § 8; Losurdo (1996), ch. 5, § 10. A juxtaposition of the Nazi “Judeocide” with the Irish famine, rather than the Ukrainian famine, can also be read in Mayer (2000), p. 639.

88 In Baker (2008), pp. 2 and 6.

before a “brigand’s blackmail,” as Gramsci put it: “Either bourgeois order or starvation!”⁸⁹ In fact, some time later it was Herbert Hoover, a senior member of the Wilson administration and future president of the United States, who warned the Austrian authorities that “any disturbance of public order will make the supply of foodstuffs impossible and will bring Vienna face to face with absolute hunger.” And, later, it was again the same American politician who drew this balance, of which he explicitly boasted: “fear of starvation held the Austrian people from revolution.”⁹⁰ As one sees, especially in Jefferson and Hoover. They explicitly theorized the “terrorist famine” for which Conquest reproaches Stalin.

We are in the presence of a policy that continues to rage today. In June 1996, an article-interview by the director of the Center for Economic and Social Rights highlighted the terrible consequences of the “collective punishment” inflicted by the sanctions regime on the Iraqi people: already “more than 500,000 Iraqi children” had “died of starvation and disease.” Many more were about to suffer the same fate. A few years later a more general consideration was made by an unofficial magazine of the State Department, *Foreign Affairs*: following the collapse of “real socialism,” in a world unified under US hegemony, the embargo constitutes the weapon of mass destruction par excellence. Officially imposed to prevent Saddam Hussein’s access to weapons of mass destruction, the embargo in Iraq, “in the years since the Cold War, has caused more deaths than all the weapons of mass destruction throughout history” put together. Thus, it is as if the Arab country had simultaneously suffered the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the mustard gas attacks by the armies of William II and of Benito Mussolini, and more.⁹¹ In conclusion, the policy of “terrorist famine” with which Stalin is accused runs deep through the history of the West, and was implemented first in the twentieth century against the country that emerged from the October Revolution, and sees its triumph after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

89 Gramsci (1984), pp. 443-4.

90 Rothbard (1974), pp. 96-7.

91 Losurdo (2007), ch. 1, § 5.

PERFECT SYMMETRIES AND SELF-ABSOLUTIONS:
STALIN'S ANTISEMITISM?

And yet, however sophisticated the analogies game may be, the construction of the myth of the twin monsters does not yet seem to have been completed. Despite attempts to make the Ukrainian Holodomor correspond to the Jewish Holocaust, in the consciousness of our time the name of Auschwitz arouses a very special horror. Perhaps the assimilation of Stalin and Hitler could be considered definitively complete, if Stalin were also affected by the madness that led to Hitler's genocide.

Khrushchev recalled that, at the end of his life, Stalin had suspected the doctors who treated the country's leaders of actually being part of an imperialist plot aimed at decapitating the Soviet Union. The *Secret Speech* does not say so, but among the doctors suspected more than a few were Jews.⁹² And so one can take our starting point from here to enrich the portrait of the Soviet monster with a new, decisive detail: "the anti-Semitic feelings of Stalin and his retinue," Medvedev declares, "were no secret to the party apparatus." "Official anti-Semitism in the Soviet state," Hobsbawm points out, "has undoubtedly been observable since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948." The American historian of ethnic cleansing and racial hatred that we already know goes slightly further back: "By the end of the war, Stalin shared many aspects of Hitler's anti-Semitism." Adding insult to injury, Furet remarks that "after the advent of Nazism, Stalin had never shown the least compassion for the Jews."⁹³ The most radical of all is naturally Conquest, who states that, "always latent in Stalin's mind," antisemitism began to manifest itself forcefully in him "in 1942-3" only to become "all-pervasive" by 1948.⁹⁴ At this point the construction of the myth of the twin monsters can be considered completed.

Before analyzing the extreme fragility of this construction, it is worth noting that it serves at the same time to remove the grave responsibilities of the West in the tragedy that befell the Jews in the twentieth century. It is a tragedy in three acts and with a prologue. In 1911 Chamberlain's book was translated into English (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*), entirely dedicated to reading world history

92 Khrushchev (1958), pp. 198-202.

93 Medvedev (1977), p. 629; Hobsbawm (1991), p. 204; Naimark (2002), p. 108; Furet (1995), p. 430.

94 Conquest (1992), p. 290.

in a racial (Aryan and antisemitic) key. One can well understand the leading role played by the Anglo-German author as *maître à penser* of Nazism. Goebbels expressed himself in a particularly exalting way when, upon seeing him in bed and ill, he dissolved into a sort of prayer: "Hail to you, father of our spirit. Forerunner, pioneer!"⁹⁵ In no less inspired terms, Chamberlain in turn sees in Hitler a sort of savior and not only of Germany.⁹⁶ Even after the conquest of power and while feverishly engaged in the war he unleashed, the Führer gratefully recalls Chamberlain's encouragement to him during his time in prison.⁹⁷

Well, how was this key text of the Nazi worldview and racial ideology received in the West? In England, the reaction of the press was enthusiastic, starting with the *Times*, which skins its hands in applauding the masterpiece and hailing it "among the books that really mattered." On the other side of the Atlantic, Theodore Roosevelt, a leading statesman, gave a largely positive judgment.⁹⁸ Back on the European side of the ocean, in 1914, it was Kautsky who expressed all his contempt for Chamberlain and the "race theorists" of all kinds. At that time (before the outbreak of the war) Kautsky was revered as a master by the workers' and socialist movement as a whole, including Stalin. The latter, in particular, in 1907, deemed Kautsky "an outstanding theoretician of Social-Democracy" due in part to his contribution to the analysis and denunciation of antisemitism and the "Anti-Jewish Pogroms" in tsarist Russia.⁹⁹

Let us now turn to the first act of the tragedy. It takes place in pre-revolutionary Russia, during the First World War, when it was a close ally of the Entente. Discriminated against and oppressed, the Jews were suspected of sympathizing with the German enemy and invader. The Russian General Staff warned against their espionage. Some were held as hostages and threatened with death in case the "Jewish community" showed too little patriotic loyalty; alleged spies were executed.¹⁰⁰ That is not all; at the beginning of 1915, in the areas hit by the advance of the Wilhelminian army a mass deportation

95 Goebbels (1992), p. 247 (diary entry of 8 May 1926).

96 In Fest (1973), p. 259.

97 Hitler (1980), p. 224 (conversation of 24-25 January 1942).

98 Poliakov (1987), p. 365.

99 Kautsky (1972), pp. 473-4; cf. Stalin (1971-73), vol. 2, p. 1 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 2, pp. 13 ff.).

100 Lincoln (1994), p. 141.

was decided upon. A deputy of the Duma described the operation as follows. In Radom, at 11 p.m.:

the people were informed that they had to leave, with a threat that anyone found at daybreak would be hanged... Old men, invalids, and paralytics had to be carried on people's arms because there were no vehicles. The police and gendarmes treated the Jewish refugees precisely like criminals.... In one case a train... was completely sealed and when finally opened, most of the inmates were found half dead.

Of the half million Jews subjected to the deportation measure, one hundred thousand did not survive.¹⁰¹

On the wave of the struggle against war and the horrors it entailed, the October Revolution broke out. Recalling Marx and Engels, the latter of whom in the middle of the nineteenth century had written: "The times of that superstition which attributed revolutions to the ill-will of a few agitators have long passed away."¹⁰² Unfortunately, this was a prediction that was catastrophically wrong. The rise to power in Russia of a movement that referred to the "Jew Marx" and saw a strong Jewish presence in its leadership ushers in an era when conspiracy theory celebrated its own triumph. In civil war-torn Russia, pogroms and massacres against Jews, branded as puppeteers of Bolshevism, were the order of the day. The new Soviet power undertook measures to stop this horror. Very strict laws were enacted and Lenin called for the elimination of "hostility against the Jews and hatred toward other nations" as part of a speech that was also recorded so as to reach millions of illiterate citizens.¹⁰³ England, France, and the United States sided with the White Army and at times actively and directly participated in the bloody antisemitic agitation. In the summer of 1918 the British forces landed in northern Russia and proceeded with a massive distribution of antisemitic leaflets.¹⁰⁴ A few months later pogroms of shocking proportions took place in which about sixty thousand Jews lost their lives: "the Allies, then engaged in their invasion of Russia, were said to have secretly supported the pogroms."¹⁰⁵ It was a "prelude," authoritative historians observe, to the "Nazi crimes," to the "mass murder of Jews during the Second

101 Levin (1990), vol. 1, pp. 28-9.

102 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 8, p. 5.

103 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 29, pp. 229-30.

104 Poliakov (1974-90), vol. 4, p. 233.

105 Mosse (1990), p. 176.

World War,”¹⁰⁶ and it was a prelude that saw the active participation of Britain, at that time leading the anti-Bolshevik crusade.

Thus we come to the third act. In spite of the Western help, the Whites, defeated by the Bolsheviks, emigrated to the west, taking with them the denunciation of the October Revolution as a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which to them irrefutably confirm this reading.

This was not without consequences. In England, “Her Majesty’s official printers” provided for the printing of the English edition of the *Protocols*, shortly afterwards quoted with great prominence by the *Times*, as evidence or proof of a menacing, secret plot that was enveloping the West.¹⁰⁷ Thus developed a campaign, to which Winston Churchill was no stranger, which undertook to denounce the role of Judaism not only in Russia but in the entire cycle of subversion that had been raging in the West since the eighteenth century:

This movement among the Jews is not new. From the days of Spartacus-Weishaupt to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Béla Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxembourg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United States), this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing. It played, as a modern writer, Mrs. Webster, has so ably shown, a definitely recognisable part in the tragedy of the French Revolution. It has been the mainspring of every subversive movement during the Nineteenth Century; and now at last this band of extraordinary personalities from the underworld of the great cities of Europe and America have gripped the Russian people by the throat and have become practically the undisputed masters of that enormous empire.¹⁰⁸

Again in 1937, while expressing a positive judgment on Hitler, Churchill insistently underlined the Jewish origins of a very prominent leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, namely “Lev Trotsky, alias Bronstein.” Yes, “he was still a Jew. Nothing could get over that.”¹⁰⁹

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the United States, it was Henry Ford who promoted the spread of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and declared that “The Russian Revolution is racial, not political,” and, while using humanitarian and socialist slogans, it actually

106 Cohn (1967), p. 128; Mayer (1990), p. 7.

107 Poliakov (1974-90), vol. 4, pp. 234 and 240-1.

108 In Schmid (1974), p. 312.

109 In Baker (2008), pp. 70-1.

expressed a “racial aspiration to world domination.”¹¹⁰ In addition to the American automobile industry tycoon, two champions of the white supremacy regime stood out in denouncing the hidden Jewish direction of the revolutionary movement, which, after having overthrown the Tsarist regime, shakes the West. Madison Grant warned against the “Semitic leadership” of “Bolshevism,” while Lothrop Stoddard, who became the author of reference for two US presidents (*infra*, ch. 8, § 3), brands as “largely Jewish” the “Bolshevik regime of Soviet Russia.”¹¹¹

In this climate, voices were raised in the North American republic calling for radical measures to confront “Jewish imperialism, with its final objective of establishing Jewish domination on a world scale.” A harsh fate—thunder other, still more ominous voices—awaits the people responsible for this infamous project. They were planning “such massacres of the Jews [...] as to be considered hitherto impossible,” and therefore “on a scale unprecedented in modern times.”¹¹²

Reading these motives in Churchill, Ford, and in the other American authors previously mentioned, we are led to think of the antisemitic agitation developed with even more heated tones by the Nazis. The latter drew from anti-Bolshevik emigration not only ideas, but also financial means, as well as militants and cadres in no small measure.¹¹³ Suffice it to think in the first place of Rosenberg, one of the most influential interpreters of the October Revolution as a Jewish plot. As can be seen, throughout its unfolding, the twentieth-century tragedy of the Jewish people saw the active participation, on the one hand, of the liberal West, on the other, of pre-revolutionary Russia and counter-revolutionary Russia. All this is wiped out by the accusation of antisemitism leveled at the man who for longer than anyone else ran the country that emerged from the October Revolution or from the “Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy.”

110 Ford (1933), pp. 128 ff. and 145.

111 Grant (1971), p. xxxi; Stoddard (1984), p. 152.

112 Bendersky (2000), pp. 58, 54 and 96.

113 Fest (1973), p. 201; Poliakov (1974-90), vol. 4, p. 362.

ANTISEMITISM AND COLONIAL RACISM:
THE CHURCHILL-STALIN CONTROVERSY

The black legend that we are analyzing here also allows the elision of the colonial racism or racism of colonial origin that raged in the West still in the middle of the 20th century. In this regard, the epochal significance of the rupture represented by Leninism was summarized by Stalin as follows:

Formerly, the national question was usually confined to a narrow circle of questions, concerning, primarily, "civilized" nationalities. The Irish, the Hungarians, the Poles, the Finns, the Serbs, and several other European nationalities—that was the circle of unequal peoples in whose destinies the leaders of the Second International were interested. The scores and hundreds of millions of Asiatic and African peoples who are suffering national oppression in its most savage and cruel form usually remained outside of their field of vision. They hesitated to put white and black, "civilized" and "uncivilized" on the same plane [...]. Leninism laid bare this crying incongruity, broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between European and Asiatics, between the "civilized" and "uncivilized" slaves of imperialism, and thus linked the national question with the question of the colonies.¹¹⁴

The year is 1924. These are the years in which an author such as the American Stoddard, who is committed to denouncing the mortal danger for the West and the white race represented by the growing agitation of the colonial peoples (stimulated or encouraged by the Bolsheviks) or "the rising tide of the colored peoples,"¹¹⁵ enjoys great success on both sides of the Atlantic. This tendency toward the celebration of white supremacy continues to show itself well into the following decades.

If Stalin condemned the racialization processes put in place by the West to the detriment also of Asians, it is interesting to analyze the ideology manifested in the USA on the occasion of the war against Japan. The press and widespread current affairs journalism warned against the "racial threat." We are in the presence of "a holy war, a racial war," of "perpetual war between Oriental ideals and Occidental." There was a recurrent dehumanization of enemies, reduced to sub-humans or even beasts. And it is an ideology that was not foreign even among the administrative circles in Franklin D. Roosevelt's

114 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 6, pp. 122-3 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 59-60).

115 Stoddard (1971).

government.¹¹⁶

On the other hand, colonial racism continued in some ways to manifest itself in Western capitals even after the collapse of the Empire of the Rising Sun and the Third Reich. At Fulton, in March 1946, Churchill kicked off the Cold War on a propaganda level, condemning not only the “Iron Curtain” and the “totalitarian control” imposed by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, but also celebrating in opposition to all this, as champions of freedom and of “Christian civilization” and as leaders of the world, “the English-speaking peoples” and the “English-speaking world.”¹¹⁷ One can then understand Stalin’s irate reply, where he accused the English statesman of having formulated a “racist theory” not dissimilar to that dear to Hitler: “only English-speaking nations are superior nations, who are called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world.”¹¹⁸ Cold War simplifications were evident in this response. And yet there is no shortage of analogies between the celebration of English-speaking peoples and Aryan mythology. The unity of the underlying race is inferred from the linguistic community, and the cultural products of the Aryan languages or of the English language are adduced as evidence of the excellence of that race. In his correspondence with Eisenhower, Churchill’s language was even more disturbing: the “*English-speaking world*” is synonymous with “*White English-Speaking people*.” This “unity” was absolutely necessary:¹¹⁹ “the quarrels among Europe’s closely related races” that had caused the two World Wars must be ended once and for all.¹²⁰ Only in this way could the threat from the colonial and non-Western world be dealt with. One understands then Churchill’s appeal in 1953 primarily to the United States: England must be supported in its conflict with Egypt “in order to prevent a massacre of white people.”¹²¹

Arabs were not the only ones made foreign to the West and the white race. The communist world, which fueled the revolt of colonial peoples against the white man, was an expression of “an aggressive

116 Dower (1986), pp. 6-11; Losurdo (1997), ch. 4, § 4.

117 Churchill (1974), pp. 7285-93.

118 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 15, pp. 30-1 (= Stalin, 1953, p. 36).

119 Boyle (1990), p. 34 (letter to U.S. President Eisenhower dated 5 April 1953).

120 Churchill (1974), p. 7291.

121 Boyle (1990), p. 25 (Churchill’s letter to Eisenhower dated 18 Feb. 1953).

semi-Asiatic totalitarianism."¹²² Clearly, the Cold War tended to be interpreted as a clash between, on one side, the West, "Christian civilization," and the white race, led by the "English-speaking world" i.e. by the "white English-speaking people," and, on the other side, the barbarity of the colonial and communist world. In this context the celebration of both the "British Empire" and the "British race" fit well.¹²³ And just as there was no mention of the fact that the extermination of the Jews had taken place in the heart of the West and the white world, and had been perpetrated by one of the "most closely related races to Europe," so there was no mention of the persistent oppression suffered by African Americans in the United States under white supremacy.

Eisenhower's celebration of the "Western world" and "Western morality"¹²⁴ also tended to take on racial connotations at times. Speaking with Hoover and Dulles, in July 1956, he observed that, with the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Nasser had aimed to "unseat *the white man*."¹²⁵ In Washington, there was still fresh memory of the Korean War, which was—American historiography acknowledges—conducted with an attitude of "contempt" towards "an inferior nation" (the Chinese).¹²⁶

TROTSKY AND THE ACCUSATION OF ANTISEMITISM AGAINST STALIN

But let us return to the accusation of antisemitism leveled at Stalin. Endorsed as it is by quite a few historians, it would seem incontrovertible. However, the condemnations, sometimes authoritative but always pronounced in unappealable tone, are difficult to reconcile, since they proceed from a different and discordant reconstruction of the crime, the beginnings of which are sometimes placed in 1948, 1945 or 1933, or even in the years preceding the October Revolution.

To try to orient ourselves, we pose a different and somewhat preliminary question: when was Stalin first accused or suspected of antisemitism? In this case, more than to Khrushchev it is necessary

122 Churchill (1974), p. 7835 (speech of 23 July 1949); italics mine.

123 Ibid., pp. 7288, 7293 (speech of March 5, 1946) and 7902 (speech of 1 December 1949).

124 Boyle (1990), pp. 53-4.

125 In Freiburger (1992), p. 164.

126 Chen Jian (1994), pp. 50 and 170.

to go back to Trotsky who in 1937, along with the “betrayal” of the revolution, denounced the possible re-emergence in the Soviet Union itself of the barbarity of antisemitism: “History has never yet seen an example when the reaction following the revolutionary upsurge was not accompanied by the most unbridled chauvinistic passions, anti-Semitism among them.”¹²⁷ Rather than an empirical investigation, we are in the presence of a syllogism constructed *a priori*: reaction, a necessary product of which is antisemitism, has unfortunately triumphed in the country dominated by Stalin, and therefore... By liquidating the Bolshevik achievements, Thermidor was reopening the doors to the horrors of the ancien régime. Along with religious superstition, the fetishistic cult of private property, inheritance, and the family could not fail to make inroads, and likewise the hostility between nations and even anti-Jewish hatred. It is no accident that the denunciation is contained in an essay that already in the title inextricably links *Thermidor and anti-Semitism*. It is true:

The October Revolution abolished the outlawed status of the Jews. That, however, does not at all mean that with one blow it swept anti-Semitism away. A long and persistent struggle against religion has failed to prevent thousands and thousands of believers even today from crowding churches, mosques and synagogues. The same situation prevails in the sphere of national prejudices. Legislation alone does not change people. Their thoughts, emotions, outlook depend upon tradition, material conditions of life, cultural level, etc. The Soviet regime is not yet twenty years old. The older half of the population was educated under tsarism. The younger half has inherited a great deal from the older. These general historical conditions in themselves should make any thinking person realize that, despite the model legislation of the October Revolution, it is impossible that national and chauvinist prejudices, particularly anti-Semitism, should not have persisted strongly among the backward layers of the population.¹²⁸

In arguing in this way Trotsky was in fact shifting the focus from the state to civil society, from the subjective to the objective, from the precise nature of political action to the long duration of historical processes. By definition, the weight of a centuries-old tradition could not miraculously disappear in strata that had not yet been fully invested by modern and revolutionary culture. But what sense did it make then to put under indictment a regime and a ruling group that had not altered in any way the “exemplary legislation” launched by the Bolsheviks and that, engaging in a colossal process of industrialization, literacy and dissemination of culture, were shrinking at a

127 Trotsky (1988), p. 1050.

128 Ibid., pp. 1042-3.

relentless pace the geographic and social area in which “national and chauvinistic prejudices, especially anti-Semitism” were most deeply rooted? Was it not Trotsky himself who spoke of the unprecedented rapidity with which in the USSR the economy, industry, urbanization and culture were developing, and to note the emergence of a ‘new Soviet patriotism,’ a feeling ‘certainly very deep, sincere and dynamic,’ shared by the different nationalities formerly oppressed or pitted against each other? (*supra*, ch. 4, § 4).

In the same year that Trotsky published his essay on *Thermidor and anti-Semitism*, a “travel report” from Moscow was published, written by a German writer fleeing, as a Jew, the Third Reich. The picture he painted is in itself eloquent: at last the “ancient and apparently insoluble Jewish question” has been resolved. “Touching is the unanimity with which the Jews I met showed their agreement with the new state.” And again: “Yiddish, like all national languages, is carefully fostered in the Union. There are Yiddish schools and Yiddish newspapers; there is a Yiddish literature of considerable standing. Congresses are called for the cultivation of the language, and Yiddish theaters enjoy the highest prestige.”¹²⁹ Even more significant is the reaction of the American Jewish community. One of its influential exponents thus polemicized against Trotsky: “If his other accusations are equally unfounded regarding his complaint about anti-Semitism, then he really has nothing to say.” Another leader declares, “We are accustomed to look to the Soviet Union as our sole consolation as far as anti-Semitism is concerned... It is therefore unforgivable that Trotsky should raise such groundless accusations against Stalin.”¹³⁰

In this reaction, disappointment and annoyance are clear regarding what is perceived as a clumsy attempt to involve the international Jewish community in a power struggle taking place in the CPSU. While in Germany the denunciation of the “Judeo-Bolshevik” barbarism raging in the Soviet Union resounded more loudly than ever and that process would rapidly lead to the “final solution,” a strange campaign of insinuations was being launched against the country which, as we shall see, more courageously than any other, branded Hitler’s antisemitism as “cannibalistic,” against the country which often inspired those on German soil who resisted the wave of anti-Jewish hatred. Viktor Klemperer described in touching terms the insults and humiliations involved in wearing the Star of David. And yet:

129 Feuchtwanger (1946), pp. 72 and 74.

130 Reported in Rogowin (1998), p. 198.

A porter who has been fond of me finally from the first two removals [...] suddenly plants himself in front of me in Freiburger Strasse, clasps me between his big paws, and murmurs, but in such a way that he can be heard even on the other side of the street: 'Well then, Professor, don't let yourself be put underfoot! Before long the damned brothers will be finished!'

The Jewish philologist commented with affectionate irony that those who defied the regime in this way were "good people with more than a whiff of the KPD [the German Communist Party]"!¹³¹ They were militants or sympathizers of a party which, internationally, had in Stalin an essential point of reference.

On the other hand, if we move from Germany to the United States, we see that in the South the communists are sometimes branded (and persecuted by both state authorities and civil society) as Jews who exploit the ignorance of the African Americans in order to incite them against the white supremacy regime, who besmirch the idea of hierarchy and racial purity and who promote the insanity of race equality and race mixing.¹³² And, therefore, even in the American Republic on the other side of the ocean, anti-communism is intertwined with antisemitism (as well as colonial racism), and this link is all the closer because of the strong Jewish presence in the Communist (and pro-"Stalinist") Party of the USA.¹³³

But beyond the disappointment and annoyance, there is also an element of deep concern. To understand this, let us see how Trotsky's argument develops:

The Soviet, more than any other regime in the world, needs a very great number of civil servants. Civil servants are recruited from the more cultured city population. Naturally Jews occupied a disproportionately large place among the bureaucracy and particularly so in the lower and middle levels [...]. Even by a priori reasoning it is impossible not to conclude that the hatred for the bureaucracy would assume an anti-Semitic color, at least in those places where the Jewish functionaries compose a significant percentage of the population and are thrown into relief against a broad background of the peasant masses. In 1923 I proposed to the party conference of the Bolsheviks of the Ukraine that the functionaries should be able to speak and write in the idiom of the surrounding population. How many ironical remarks were made about this proposal, in the main by the Jewish intelligentsia who spoke and read Russian and did not wish to learn the Ukrainian language! It must be admitted that in that respect the situation has changed considerably for the better. But the national composition of the bureaucracy changed little, and what is immeasurably more important,

131 Klemperer (2005), p. 214.

132 Kelley (1990), pp. 16 and 29.

133 Herzstein (1989), p. 123.

the antagonism between the population and the bureaucracy has grown monstrously during the past ten to twelve years.¹³⁴

As one can see, a call was being made to fight against the bureaucracy, and at the same time it was being emphasized that Jews are strongly represented in it, which not a few times was characterized by arrogance towards the language and culture of the people they administered. Of course, the analysis and the denunciation always moved at a political and social level. The fact remains that they, at least from the point of view of the Jewish community, risked evoking and revitalizing the specter of antisemitism that they claimed to exorcise.

STALIN AND THE CONDEMNATION OF TSARIST AND NAZI ANTISEMITISM

The accusation of antisemitism leveled at Stalin is all the more singular, for Stalin turns out to be engaged in denouncing this infamy practically throughout his entire evolution. We see him as early as 1901, when he was still a young Georgian revolutionary of twenty-two, in one of his earliest writings indicating among the most important tasks of the “social-democratic party” the fight against the oppression of “nationalities and religious denominations” in Russia. Particularly affected are “the eternally persecuted and humiliated Jews who lack even the miserably few rights enjoyed by other Russian subjects—the right to live in any part of the country they choose, the right to attend school, the right to be employed in government service, and so forth.”¹³⁵ A few years later, when the 1905 revolution broke out, the tsarist regime reacted by encouraging or unleashing pogroms. Stalin wasted no time in calling for a struggle against a policy that sought to cement autocracy “with the blood and the corpses of citizens.” The conclusion is stark: “The only way to eradicate pogroms is to abolish the Tsarist autocracy.”¹³⁶ As can be seen, anti-Jewish persecution was one of the most important charges in the indictment pronounced against the *ancien régime* which the revolution was called upon to overthrow.

It was a motif further developed over later years. On the eve of the First World War, the character of tsarist Russia as a “semi-Asiatic

134 Trotsky (1988), pp. 1043-4.

135 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 1, p. 19 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 1, p. 41).

136 Ibid., pp. 71 and 75 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 1, pp. 106 and 111).

country” was demonstrated by the particularly odious persecution unleashed against Jews. Unfortunately, the recourse to pogroms was encouraged by the “general propensity of common people for anti-Semitism.”¹³⁷ The collapse of the power of the tsar and the old “landed aristocracy,” Stalin observed between February and October 1917, finally made it possible to liquidate a policy of “national oppression [...] not infrequently taking the form of pogroms [...] and massacres.”¹³⁸

Defeated in Russia, antisemitism became an ever more distressing threat in Germany. Stalin did not wait for Hitler to come to power to raise the alarm. In a statement made on 12 January 1931 to the American Jewish Telegraph Agency, he branded “racial chauvinism” and antisemitism as a kind of “cannibalism” and a return to the “jungle.” It is a stance republished in Russian in *Pravda* on November 30, 1936, at a time when it was a matter of warning governments and world public opinion against the terrible threat hanging over Europe and the world.¹³⁹

In this same context one can place the position taken by Kirov (whose wife was of Jewish origin) shortly after Hitler came to power. He denounced “German fascism, with its pogrom ideology, its anti-Semitism, its views of higher and lower races” as the heir of the Russian Black-Hundreds.¹⁴⁰ This last observation was particularly significant. There was then a climate of war, and the approaching conflict increasingly prompted Soviet leaders to appeal to patriotism and thus to emphasize the element of continuity in the history of the Russian people and its struggle against aggressors and invaders. It was a tendency which, of course, was reinforced with the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. And, nevertheless, on November 6, 1941, Stalin not only emphasized the “reactionary, Black-Hundred essence” of Nazi Germany, but thus further characterized the enemy then pressing at the gates of Moscow:

In point of fact the Hitler regime is a copy of that reactionary regime which existed in Russia under Tsardom. It is well known that the Hitlerites suppress the rights of workers, the rights of intellectuals and the rights of nations as readily as the Tsarist regime suppressed them, and that they organize mediæval Jewish

137 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 2, pp. 307 and 267 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 2, pp. 363 and 315).

138 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 3, pp. 46-7 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 63-4).

139 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, p. 26.

140 In Tucker (1990), p. 258.

pogroms as readily as the Tsarist regime organized them.

The Hitlerite party is a party of enemies of democratic liberties, a party of mediæval reaction and the darkest of pogroms.¹⁴¹

That is to say, while launching an impassioned appeal for national unity in the Great Patriotic War against the invaders, like Kirov, Stalin also branded the Nazi regime as the continuation, in some essential aspects, of the tsarism that was overthrown by the October Revolution. This attitude is all the more worthy of attention if one compares it with that taken by the American president and his collaborators, who “were hesitant to criticize publicly Hitler’s anti-Semitic policies.”¹⁴² On the other hand, in 1922, it was the same F.D. Roosevelt who spoke out for downsizing the Jewish presence at Harvard and in American universities in general.¹⁴³

A statesman such as Churchill, who in 1937 had emphasized the nefarious role of Judaism in Bolshevik agitation, was even less able to publicly condemn the anti-Jewish persecution of the Third Reich. In that same year, the English politician wrote an article (which remained unpublished) that considered the Jews at least partly responsible for the hostility raging against them.¹⁴⁴ Stalin’s attitude was exactly the opposite. The Nazis continued to be branded the “champions of pogroms” in his speech of November 6, 1943.¹⁴⁵ But the one delivered the following year, again on the anniversary of the October Revolution, was especially significant. In that case, the usual denunciation of the “fascist pogrom-mongers,” from whose barbarity the Soviet people had the merit of saving “European civilization,” was part of a more general context emphasizing the centrality of “racial theory” and “racial hatred” in the doctrine and practice of Nazism, which thereby conducted a “cannibalistic policy.”¹⁴⁶ The speech at the end of 1944, on the eve of the collapse of the Third Reich, thus took up the motif already present in the interview given to the Jewish Telegraph Agency two years before Hitler had come to power.

The latter, starting with the aggression against the Soviet Union, not only resumed more obsessively than ever the motif of the struggle

141 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 252.

142 Zinn (2002), p. 464.

143 In Baker (2008), p. 9.

144 In De Carolis (2007).

145 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 330.

146 *Ibid.*, pp. 363-4.

against the Judeo-Bolshevik threat, but seemed to want to respond directly to the public denunciation coming from Moscow of the “reactionary pogromistic nature” of the Third Reich. It was Stalin’s speech, with which we are already familiar, of 6 November 1941, on the anniversary of the October Revolution. Two days later, in Munich, on an occasion equally solemn for the Nazi regime (it was to commemorate the attempted coup d’état of 1923), Hitler proceeded to an equally public denunciation of the Soviet Union:

The man who is temporarily leader of the state is nothing but an instrument in the hands of all-powerful Jewry [...] Whether Stalin stands on stage or behind it, behind him are people like Kaganovich and all those Jews who with their expansive network rule this enormous Empire.¹⁴⁷

It was a thesis reiterated some time later during a dinner-table conversation: “Behind Stalin there are the Jews.”¹⁴⁸ We are here in the presence of a constant motif of Nazi propaganda. As early as 1938, Goebbels had paid tribute to a book (*Juden hinter Stalin, [The Jews Behind Stalin]*) that purported to reveal the infamies of “Judaism” in the USSR.¹⁴⁹ From these assumptions the war for the enslavement of the Soviet Union was at the same time the war for the annihilation of Jews. The infamous *Kommissarbefehl*, which imposed the immediate liquidation of Red Army political commissars and Communist party and regime cadre, could not fail to strike in a particularly ruthless manner at the ethnic group suspected of providing the bulk of cadre and commissars. In his speech of November 8, 1941, Hitler spoke of the power in the Soviet Union as “an enormous organization of Jewish commissars.”¹⁵⁰ And this was also the belief of German soldiers reporting from the Eastern Front about “Jewish and Bolshevik cruelty” and constantly juxtaposing the “damn Jews” with the “damn Bolsheviks.” Yes, the “fight against Bolshevism” was at the same time the “fight against Judaism”. It was a question of annihilating once and for all “the Jewish regime in Russia,” “the central Judeo-Bolshevik agitators engaged in making the world ‘happy.’” On closer inspection, it was a question of a country, where “the entire direction of all institutions” was in Jewish hands and where the people were “under the whip of Judaism.” The so-called “Soviet paradise” was in reality

147 Hitler (1965), p. 1773.

148 Hitler (1989), p. 448 (conversation of July 21, 1942).

149 Goebbels (1996) (diary entry dated 21 April 1938).

150 Hitler (1965), p. 1773.

“a paradise for Jews,” it was a “Jewish system,” and to be exact it was “the most satanic and criminal system of all time.”¹⁵¹ It was well understood that the ethnic group particularly targeted by the genocidal fury of the Third Reich distinguished itself in the struggle against its tormentors: “In the course of the war, in relation to the population, Jews earned more medals than any other Soviet nationality.”¹⁵² But is this solemn official recognition reconcilable with the thesis of Stalin’s antisemitism?

We saw the American Jewish community take a clear stand against this myth in 1937. Five years later, Arendt went even further: she credits the Soviet Union with having “simply quashed anti-Semitism,” as part of “an entirely new and [...] an entirely just way to deal with nationality or minorities.”¹⁵³ This positive judgment is all the more significant because it is precisely the exemplary solution of the Jewish and national question in general that took place in the country ruled by Stalin that Arendt invoked to refute the thesis of Jewish circles inclined to raise the specter of an eternal antisemitism. Three years later, the eminent Jewish thinker reiterated that it is to the credit of the Soviet Union that it has been able “to *organize* different peoples [including the Jewish people] on the basis on national equality” (*supra*, intr., § 1).

At least until 1945, there appeared to be no traces of antisemitism in the Soviet Union, in a country that in Hitler’s eyes had configured itself, at any rate after the unleashing of Operation Barbarossa, as “Jewry’s greatest servant.”¹⁵⁴

STALIN AND SUPPORT FOR THE FOUNDATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF ISRAEL

If Furet’s peremptory assertion, according to which Stalin showed indifference to the Jewish tragedy or outright antisemitism from at least 1933 onwards, is clearly unfounded, is the date proposed by the American historian already mentioned, who sees the onset of this madness in Stalin after the Second World War, any more reliable? We are already familiar with the annoyed reaction of the American Jew-

151 In Manoschek (1995), pp. 31, 46, 59-61, 65 and 51.

152 Ignatieff (1997), p. 33.

153 Arendt (1989b), p. 193.

154 Hitler (1965), p. 1773.

ish community to Trotsky's accusation of antisemitism against Stalin in 1937. The picture had not changed eight years later. If anything, it was circles and personalities within the U.S. military hierarchy that were cause for concern. Take General George S. Patton. He dreamed of immediate war against the Soviets: "We are going to have to fight them sooner or later... Why not do it now while our army is still intact and could kick the damn Russians back to Moscow in three months? We can easily do it ourselves with the help of the German troops we have, if we just arm them and take them with us; they hate the bastards."¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, according to the American general, thwarting these plans were the Jews. Loaded with resentment against Germany, they harbored sympathy for the USSR: the "evident Semitic influence on the press" aims "to promote communism." The line of continuity with the Nazi reading of communism as Judeo-Bolshevik subversion and conspiracy emerged clearly. The enemies continue to be the communists, the Soviets and the Jews, the latter of whom "are lower than animals." As a result of particularly imprudent statements, General Patton found himself relieved of command, but his is not the orientation of an isolated character.¹⁵⁶

Put under indictment also because of its links with Judaism, the Soviet Union in fact followed a deeply sympathetic policy towards a people that had just come back from horrible persecution. In reconstructing this chapter of history, I make use mainly of a book that was also involved in denouncing "anti-Semitism" in the USSR-led socialist camp. Let us begin with Hungary. The backbone of the communist regime in that country after taking over from the Red Army was constituted by "cadres who had stayed in Moscow, almost all Jews." The fact was that "Stalin had no other choice, since he only trusted [them]... When the first elections to the Central Committee [of Hungary] would take place, a third of the members will have been Jews." The same ethnic background is also revealed in the top leadership, beginning with Rakosi, "the first Jewish king of Hungary." The author of this sympathetic definition is one of Stalin's closest collaborators, namely Beria (probably also of Jewish origin).¹⁵⁷ The situation in the rest of the socialist camp was not much different. We limit ourselves to a couple more examples. In Poland the "Jewish presence in the communist ranks and, above all, in the regime's highest levels"

155 In Pauwels (2003), p. 128.

156 Bendersky (2000), pp. 356-8.

157 Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), p. 50; Thomas (1988), p. 112 (on Beria).

was substantial. And that was not all. “The area in which the identification between Jews and communist power appeared strongest was very particular: the security apparatus.”¹⁵⁸ In Czechoslovakia it was not only Jews as such but even Zionists who were “favored by the post-war government” and had a presence within it.¹⁵⁹

A similar consideration can be made for Germany: “Jews tended to be given the pick of the jobs in the Russian Zone.” On the other hand, directing the cultural activity on the Soviet side was a brilliant art historian, Colonel Alexander Dymshitz, himself of Jewish origin. And the Gotha of the German-Jewish intelligentsia began to be strongly felt in the cultural rebirth starting to emerge out of the mourning and ruins.¹⁶⁰ The situation certainly did not change with the founding of the German Democratic Republic:

In communist Germany, officially born on October 7, 1949, Jews initially enjoyed favorable, not to say privileged, treatment. As the formerly persecuted, they were entitled to special pensions for the elderly and for young people who were sick or disabled, and the Constitution guaranteed religious freedom. Peter Kirchner recounts: “The pensions for us Jews were much higher than for others. They oscillated between 1,400 and 1,700 marks, when normal pensions did not exceed 350” [...]. The Jews thus felt reassured by the new communist Germany’s policy toward them, all the more so since they were widely represented in the institutions. In the 1950 elections, fifteen Jews were elected to parliament on the lists of almost all the parties except the Communist Party. In addition, the Minister of Propaganda and Information, Gerhart Eisler, the Director of State Radio Information Services, Leo Bauer, the editor-in-chief of the communist newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, Rudolf Herrnstadt, and the head of a section of the Ministry of Health, Leo Mandel, were all Jewish.¹⁶¹

It is also for this reason that the Soviet Union enjoyed such great sympathy with the “Zionists of the whole world.” It reached the point where they were “ready to admire everything Russian”. It was Arendt who, still in May 1948, expressed her disappointment for the “pro-Soviet and anti-Western orientation” of the Zionist movement, inclined to condemn Great Britain as “anti-Semitic” and the United States as “imperialist.”¹⁶²

The attitude she deplored is well understandable. At Nuremberg, it was primarily the Soviet representatives of the prosecution

158 Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), p. 150.

159 Ibid., p. 366.

160 MacDonogh (2007), pp. 332 and 215-24.

161 Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), p. 442.

162 Arendt (1989c), pp. 88-90.

who had called attention to the horror of the genocide of the Jewish peoples of Europe, and called attention to it not without rhetorical emphasis, formulating a thesis that firmly underlined the intentionality involved: “The fascist conspirators planned the extermination to the last man of the Jewish population of the world and carried out the extermination throughout the whole of their conspiratorial activity from 1933 onwards” (in reality the “final solution” began to be delineated only once Operation Barbarossa started to get bogged down). One of the most dramatic moments of the trial consisted in the deposition, promoted by the prosecution’s Soviet representatives, of four Jews, including a woman who expressed herself as follows: “In the name of all of Europe’s women who became mothers in concentration camps, I would like to ask the German mothers, ‘Where are our children now?’”¹⁶³

Above all, those were the years when the USSR strongly supported Zionism and the creation of Israel. Stalin played a prominent and perhaps even decisive role. Without him, “the Jewish State would not have seen the light of day in Palestine,” so goes a Russian historian, making use of recently declassified documents in his country.¹⁶⁴ In any case, as another (this time a Western) author has observed, the speech in May 1948 of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, delivered at the UN, appeared to be “almost textbook Zionist propaganda”. The foundation of Israel was necessary due to the fact that “in the territories occupied by Hitler the Jews had suffered an almost complete annihilation,” while “no Western European State had been able to furnish any adequate assistance in the defense of the Jewish People’s rights and very existence.”¹⁶⁵

What is more, in supporting Zionism Stalin sometimes clashed with Great Britain. The latter used the military corps of the former Salò Republic and the Tenth MAS Flotilla’s “Pigs”¹⁶⁶ to blow up “a

163 Taylor (1993), pp. 336 and 346.

164 Mlečin (2008), p. 9.

165 Roberts (2006), p. 339.

166 **Ed. Note:** The *Decima Flottiglia Mezzogiorno d'Assalto* ‘Tenth Military Assault Vehicle Flotilla’ was a marine infantry contingent of the National Republican Navy of the ‘Italian Social Republic’ of 1943-1945 (also known as Repubblica di Salò, when the fascist government had retreated to Northern Italy). The Flotilla fought alongside the German Nazi armies and committed numerous large-scale atrocities. MAS stood for *memento audere semper* which was a phrase taken from the fascist poet D’Annunzio and is usually translated in English as “remember to always dare.” The *Maiale* manned torpedoes were known as a ‘Pigs.’

ship (but perhaps there were two) which, when the war was over, was transporting weapons from Yugoslavia for Jews in Palestine.”¹⁶⁷ At that time it was the government in London that was perceived as “the principal enemy of the Jews.”¹⁶⁸ The suspicion or accusation of antisemitism was certainly not leveled at the Soviet Union, which was committed to supporting the foundation of the State of Israel both militarily and diplomatically, but rather at Great Britain, which, in an attempt to hinder those plans, had not hesitated to use political and military circles which, as part of the Salò Republic, had also made their own contribution to the “final solution”!

But a more general point can be made. In the post-war period Stalin followed “a fundamentally pro-Jewish Palestinian policy.” It was certainly derived from political and geopolitical calculations: the desire to undermine British positions in the Middle East (an objective also pursued by Truman, who not by chance also agreed to support the founding of the State of Israel) and to gain the support or at least the goodwill of American and European Jewish communities during the Cold War, in the hope that the new state, founded with the decisive contribution of immigrants from Eastern Europe and often of a left-wing political orientation, would take on a pro-Soviet attitude. The fact remains that the military aid in 1945 given to the Zionist movement through Yugoslavia was not an isolated gesture. Three years later, this time with the cooperation of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union supplied Israel with arms and, even in violation of the UN Security Council resolution of March 29, 1948, organized the migration of young Jews from Eastern Europe, who went on to strengthen the army of the Jewish state in its war with the surrounding Arab countries. What has been defined as the “Prague-Jerusalem axis” came into operation thanks also to Moscow. Yes, “the weapons the nascent State of Israel’s soldiers wield to fight their war of independence are of Czechoslovakian manufacture [...]. Just when governments were refusing to sell weapons to the Jewish State, Czechoslovakia had decided to continue to sell them openly, even at favorable prices [...]. Thus, the Israeli Air Force was founded on Czech territory: exercises for paratroopers were organized here.”¹⁶⁹ A veritable airlift had gone into action, supplying the Zionist army with weapons, in-

167 De Felice (1995), p. 133.

168 MacDonogh (2007), p. 330.

169 Berner (1976), pp. 625-6; Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), pp. 376-8.

structors, and even volunteers.¹⁷⁰ In the autumn of the same year, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs reported from Paris to Prime Minister Ben Gurion with satisfaction that the Soviet delegates at the UN Conference on the Palestinian question were acting as Israel's lawyers.¹⁷¹

The least that can be said is that Stalin's Soviet Union made an essential contribution to the founding and consolidation of the Jewish state. Interesting elements also emerged about the relationship to Judaism and Jewish culture in general. Still in the midst of the alleged "anti-Semitic campaign," a "residential suburb of Moscow" bore the name "New Jerusalem." It was the home of Ilya Ehrenburg, a Jewish intellectual who in the Soviet Union of the time was playing a leading cultural and political role and who, not by chance, was awarded the Stalin Prize, a recognition also received by other Jewish writers and by "some Jewish musicians of international fame."¹⁷²

What sense then does it make to speak of "anti-Semitism" with regards to Stalin? The support he gave to the foundation and consolidation of the Jewish State is at the same time the contribution he made to the *Nakba*, that is, to the national "catastrophe" of the Palestinian People, who have for decades continued to languish in refugee camps and in territories subjected to a ruthless military occupation and a galloping process of colonization. If, for the sake of absurdity, "anti-Semitism" were to be attributed to Stalin, it would be anti-Arab "anti-Semitism." It should, however, be pointed out in this regard that the Soviet Union's preferred option was that of "an independent, multinational state that would respect the interests of both Jews and Arabs."¹⁷³

THE TURNING POINT OF THE COLD WAR AND BLACKMAIL AGAINST THE ROSENBERGS

In a conversation with an Israeli historian, Kerensky, who in the meantime was in the USA, noted even on the eve of Stalin's death that the accusation of antisemitism in those years leveled at the Soviet

170 Mlečin (2008), pp. 130-8.

171 Berner (1976), p. 626.

172 Rapoport (1991), p. 193 (on the "New Jerusalem"); Conquest (1996), p. 48

173 Roberts (2006), p. 339.

Union was merely an invention of the Cold War.¹⁷⁴ Yes, this is the turning point, and to understand it, one must go back to the context of those years. A Cold War that at any moment was ready to turn into a nuclear holocaust certainly knew no limits on the ideological level. On both sides there were accusations of antisemitism raging in the enemy camp. The trial and condemnation to death in the United States of the Rosenbergs, who were communists and Jews, and were accused of treason and espionage in favor of Moscow, were almost contemporaneous with the trials and death sentences in the socialist camp of “Zionist” personalities accused of treason and espionage in favor of Tel Aviv and Washington. Suspected of a lack of loyalty and called upon to provide unequivocal proof of patriotism, the Jewish community was in both cases subjected to more or less explicit pressure and blackmail.

The climate of suspicion was no less oppressive in the USA than in the USSR. It is not easy to relive that historical moment in our time, when the special relationship between Washington and Tel Aviv is there for all to see. But when the Cold War broke out, the situation was quite different. Often the “whites only” or “Caucasians only” urban centers in the United States also excluded Jewish citizens, who were considered “stupid” in much the same way as African Americans were. Still in 1959, the Anti-Defamation League felt the need to denounce the harassment suffered by Jews because of the persistence of this practice.¹⁷⁵ Overall, “the 1940s and 1950s represented a politically traumatic era for the Jewish minority.”¹⁷⁶ The circles that linked Judaism and communism were still active and considered Jews as foreigners on American soil and accomplices of the deadly Soviet enemy. Those groups had even republished the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, along with the writings of Henry Ford.¹⁷⁷ Of course, after Auschwitz, that is, after the revelation of the horror into which antisemitism had blossomed, this form of prejudice could no longer enjoy the favor it once had. Even so, “The threat of anti-Jewish prejudice had far from dissipated. In 1953, Jews comprised most of the employees suspended or reclassified at the radar laboratories in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.”¹⁷⁸

174 In Rogowin (1998), pp. 198-9.

175 Loewen (2006), pp. 125-7.

176 Sachar (1993), p. 640.

177 Dinnerstein (1994), pp. 163-5.

178 Sachar (1993), p. 639.

According to French communist leader Jacques Duclos, who was actively involved in denouncing the persecution of the Rosenbergs in the United States, antisemitism had played no part in the trials that in Czechoslovakia rightly struck down the “Zionist” traitors in the service of Washington’s war policy.¹⁷⁹

The mirror opposite view is that which the enemies of the Soviet Union set about spreading. In rejecting the charge of antisemitism launched by Duclos at the United States, the American Jewish Committee unhesitatingly pronounced itself in favor of the execution of the Rosenbergs and opposed any measure of clemency. Everyone in the U.S. had to be dispelled of “the illusion that the rank and file of American Jews regarded” communist spies and agitators (whether gentile or Jewish) “with anything but abhorrence.”¹⁸⁰ Not by chance, McCarthy’s collaborators also included two Jews, who were committed, yes, to fighting communism but also to demonstrating the patriotic loyalty of their community.¹⁸¹

It was not just about defending the United States against the charge of antisemitism. The FBI had devised a plan, involving a Jewish lawyer who was entrusted with a specific task:

To win the Rosenbergs’ confidence in prison and try to persuade them that the USSR in fact was an antisemitic power intent on exterminating the Jews. Once their illusions about the Soviet Union were shattered, the Rosenbergs might then receive clemency in exchange for an “appeal to Jews in all countries to get out of the communist movement and seek to destroy it.”¹⁸²

The plan proved ineffective in the case of the two militant communists, who bravely faced the electric chair on June 19, 1953. Blackmail achieved the desired result in another respect. “In the intimidating atmosphere of the Cold-War era, it was hardly surprising that several of the nation’s most respected Jewish intellectuals, among whom were many former leftists, felt obliged to take cover, even to become turncoats.”¹⁸³ Not a few engaged in denouncing the “anti-Semitism” of Stalin and of the Soviet Union.

And, nevertheless, before asserting itself, this black legend encountered serious difficulties. Still in 1949, we see one of the champi-

179 Ibid., p. 635

180 Ibid., p. 636

181 Handlin, Handlin (1994), p. 198.

182 Sachar (1993), pp. 636-7.

183 Ibid., p. 640.

ons of the Cold War, that is, Churchill, repeatedly making a remarkable comparison between Nazism and communism. The former was less dangerous, since it could only rely “on *Herrenvolk* pride and anti-Semitic hatred.” Not so the latter, which could count on “a church of Communist adepts, whose missionaries are in every country” and in every people. And so, on the one hand, we have the stirring up of national and racial hatreds, starting with that which targets the Jewish people; on the other, a universalist charge, albeit instrumentally subservient to a design of “imperialist expansion.”¹⁸⁴ Perhaps even more significant was Adorno’s intervention in 1950. In publishing his studies on the “authoritarian personality,” he emphasized “the correlation between anti-Semitism and anti-communism” and then added that “During the last several years all the propaganda machinery of the country has been devoted to promoting anticommunist feeling in the sense of an irrational ‘scare’ and there are probably not many people, except followers of the ‘party line,’ who have been able to resist the incessant ideological pressure.”¹⁸⁵ At this time, far from being aimed at Stalin and his followers, the charge of antisemitism continued to target anti-communists.

Unbalanced from the start, the balance of power between the two opponents of the Cold War saw the West prevailing more and more decisively, both in military terms and in terms of ideological offensive capacity and multimedia firepower. Of the two opposing reciprocal accusations of antisemitism only one has remained standing today. The other has even been lost to memory. It should be added that, apart from Stalin, this accusation affected even his successors, beginning with Khrushchev. He too is said to have shown signs of, one is not sure why, being “strongly anti-Semitic!”¹⁸⁶ However:

In 1973 Jews, who constituted 0.9% of the Soviet population, represented 1.9% of all university students in the country, 6.1% of all scientific personnel, 8.8% of all scientists.¹⁸⁷

On the other hand, an English historian also committed to branding Stalin as an antisemite from at least the 1930s onwards, not only acknowledges that the people frequented by the Soviet leader and even “many” among his “closest associates” were of “Jewish ori-

184 Churchill (1974), pp. 7800 and 7809 (speeches of 25 and 31 March 1949).

185 Adorno (1997), p. 324.

186 Knight (1997), p. 209.

187 Roccucci (2001), p. 32.

gin,” but also adds that in 1937 Jews “formed a majority within the government” (or within the government apparatus).¹⁸⁸ It is difficult to see how statistical data and empirical research can be invoked to support the thesis of Stalinist and Soviet antisemitism!

STALIN, ISRAEL, AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF EASTERN EUROPE

The Jewish community was certainly not spared the conflicts that characterized the history of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp as a whole. Let us deal first with the situation that arose in Eastern Europe with the end of World War II and the founding of Israel. We have seen the strong Jewish presence in the state and governmental apparatus. Beyond the composition of the institutions, one must take into account the feeling of gratitude felt by the Jews in Hungary, for example, for the fact that—as an authoritative witness reported—“it was the Soviet soldiers and not others who had snatched us from certain death.”¹⁸⁹

However, the honeymoon that seemed like it would reign for some time turned out to be short-lived. The conflict was not long in coming: should Jews returning to Hungary who had managed to escape the genocidal policies of the Third Reich and its thugs engage in the rebuilding of the destroyed country or emigrate instead to the Jewish state that was taking shape in the Middle East? Initially, the proponents of this second option had a free hand:

Leaders of the Zionist faith [...] directed the Hungarian section of the American Jewish Joint Committee, which in the post-war period lavished substantial funds for the reconstruction of Jewish communities. This was the most important channel of economic assistance for the survivors. A Zionist sympathizer, Dr. Fabian Herskovits, became a rabbi in the most prestigious synagogue in Budapest, on Dohány Street, and from here he made weekly speeches in favor of emigration to Israel [...]. It was then said that the Zionists had a more extensive and efficient organization than the Hungarian Communists themselves [...]. It is estimated that about one-fifth of the Jewish population took the emigration route.¹⁹⁰

This massive emigration, a real brain drain especially in qualitative terms, which deprived the country of the cadres it so desperately

188 Montefiore (2007), p. 347.

189 Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), p. 43.

190 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

needed to be reborn from the ruins of war, could not fail to worry the government and the party (including the Jews who had refused the Zionist option):

The Communists [...] not only stopped the exodus of Jews in 1948, but were also able to assert their hegemony in the Jewish world. The Zionist leader Arië Yaari recalls: "It was quite a problem for us to convince people to move to Palestine. Older people were especially afraid of starting a new life, with a new language. On the other hand, the regime offered them political positions that Jews had never held before. They could become judges, officials, enter the government. The communist movement was quite weak and needed many cadres. How could the Jews resist the temptation?"¹⁹¹

As can be seen, it makes no sense to speak of antisemitism. Not only is there no trace of negative discrimination against the Jews, but they enjoyed, if anything, a favorable treatment when they agreed to stay in Hungary. It should be added that, even before pitting the Jewish community against the communist world, the battle discussed here split the Jewish community as such. Discouraged first and foremost by Jews who choose to integrate into the country of which they were citizens, the Zionists

despite all efforts, failed to sow among the Jews the idea of ethnic separation. When the communists outlawed the Zionist movement at the end of the 1940s, the overwhelming majority of Jews demonstrated that they had not at all taken up Jewish national identity argument. The idea that the Jewish community should define itself as a national minority was the last thing on Jews' minds, who once again turned toward the search for a new assimilation.¹⁹²

A similar crisis occurred in the Soviet Union; and in this case, too, the conflict ended up traversing the Jewish community itself. From the columns of *Pravda* on September 21, 1948, Ilya Ehrenburg, a writer of Jewish origin, warned against the danger posed by Zionism (guilty of hindering the reconstruction of the country devastated and martyred by Hitler's army and championing of the cause of socialism in the world, and of reopening a Jewish question by then happily resolved in the Soviet Union).¹⁹³ The stance against Zionism was intertwined with the condemnation of antisemitism, significantly branded in Stalin's wake as an expression of "racial chauvinism" and

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid., p. 47.

193 Berner (1976), pp. 626-7.

of “cannibalism.”¹⁹⁴

The conversation that took place in Moscow in 1948 between Golda Meir and Ilya Ehrenburg was revealing. To the former, who showed her contempt for assimilated Jews (“I’m sorry to see Jews who don’t speak Hebrew or at least *Yiddish*”), the latter reacted angrily: “She is a servant of the United States.”¹⁹⁵ Speaking to another interlocutor the Soviet writer stated:

The state of Israel must understand that there is no Jewish problem in this country anymore, that the Jews of the USSR should be left in peace, and all efforts to seduce them to Zionism and repatriation should be stopped. This will evoke sharp resistance from the [Soviet] authorities, as well as from Jews.¹⁹⁶

There is no doubt: the colossal brain drain that was taking place opened a dispute even independent of the Cold War, all the more so since, in order to achieve their goal, the Israeli diplomatic representatives in Moscow bypassed the Soviet authorities and established direct contact with the Soviet Jewish community.¹⁹⁷ In any case, the dispute became all the more serious the more clearly Israel’s alignment with the West became clear. The numerous and talented Soviet scientists of Jewish origin were called upon by Zionist propaganda to emigrate and to be part of an alliance determined to crush the country that had made their emancipation and social advancement possible. And yet: “Despite growing friction, senior representatives of the USSR... had repeatedly assured Soviet support for Israel but made it dependent on the neutral attitude of the Israeli government in the confrontation between East and West.”¹⁹⁸ However, Moscow’s last illusions quickly vanished. The break with the Jewish State was at the same time the frontal assault with the Zionist circles still active in the socialist camp and now being ruthlessly repressed. In Czechoslovakia, Slánský, who, according to the testimony of his daughter, “encouraged emigration to Israel,” was directly affected by this break and sentenced to death.¹⁹⁹

Ana Pauker was more fortunate in Romania by getting off with a few months in prison. And yet we are in the presence of a similar sto-

194 Rapoport (1991), p. 119.

195 Ibid.

196 Ibid., p. 120.

197 Berner (1976), pp. 626-7.

198 Ibid., p. 627.

199 Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), p. 399.

ry: "Zionism had long been an ideology condemned by the regime, but this had not prevented the flow of Romanian Jews to Israel until the ouster of Pauker [from the Romanian Communist Party] in 1952, who had discreetly kept the way to the Promised Land open." Thanks to her "no less than 100,000 Jews left Romania to settle in Israel."²⁰⁰

One can then understand Stalin's growing distrust, to whom is attributed the statement that "every Jew is a nationalist, is an agent of American espionage."²⁰¹ To many communists, the change in the attitude of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe must have brought to mind the "betrayal" blamed on the German Social Democratic Party at the outbreak of the First World War. Must we read the exploding conflict as "Stalin's war against the Jews"? This is suggested already in the title of a book dedicated to the subject by a journalist of the *Jerusalem Post*. But is this reading really more persuasive than that provided by Stalin, who denounced the "war of the Zionists against the Soviet Union and the socialist camp"? One historian (Conquest) while committed to reducing Bolshevism and communism to a criminal phenomenon, acknowledged that in the Soviet Union "anti-Semitism as such was never an official doctrine," that "open persecution of Jews as Jews was forbidden," and that there was no reference to "race theory."²⁰²

What sense then does it make to compare Stalin to Hitler? The historian already cited added that the former "hoped to use Israel against the West and continued to accuse the West of anti-Semitism."²⁰³ Yet it does not appear that the Nazi leader branded his enemies as antisemites! Conquest assumes that Stalin's accusations of antisemitism against the West were supremely ridiculous but does not raise the question of the validity of Western accusations of antisemitism leveled at Stalin. Why should instrumentalism be only coming from one side? And why should the country that Hitler (but also important sectors of Western public opinion) long branded as the embodiment of the "Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy" and as the definitive confirmation of the reliability and gravity of the conspiracy revealed by the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* be taken as the heir of the antisemitism of the Third Reich? In any case, the myth of "Stalin's war against the Jews" was not believed by many and

200 Ibid., p. 311.

201 In Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), p. 374 (editor's note).

202 Conquest (1996), pp. 46-7.

203 Ibid., p. 47.

often very influential Israelis who, on hearing of the Soviet leader's death, mourned him and paid homage to him as to a "sun" that "has set" (*supra*, intr., § 1).

And yet Israel's triumph in the Six-Day War and the worsening of the Palestinian tragedy further deepened the furrow that divided the communist power in Eastern Europe from the Jewish community and from the pro-Israeli and pro-Western circles that were becoming organized around it. But should we speak of antisemitism? Trusting in the reconstruction of two scholars of Jewish origin who have been herein cited several times, let us see what happened in Prague in 1967. "The sympathy of the Czech students for Israel has [...] a rather trivial motivation: the antipathy they feel towards the Arab students, present in their thousands in the university." Something similar happened in Warsaw: "Suddenly people remembered that many Jews who lived in Palestine came from Poland." And there was a taxi driver exclaiming how "Our brave Polish Jews are teaching those fucking Russian Arabs a lesson."²⁰⁴ In the clash that took place with communist power, which sided with the Arab countries, who is the one exhibiting racism? Are we in the presence of anti-Jewish racism or rather anti-Arab racism?

THE QUESTION OF "COSMOPOLITANISM"

The "doctors' plot" itself, which is generally indicated as proof of Stalin's antisemitism, demonstrates, if anything, the opposite. After all, up to the very end, he had entrusted the care of his health to Jews. And, on the other hand, among the accused doctors only a few were Jews, while the "conspiracy" as a whole was branded by the Soviet leadership and press "as capitalist and imperialist rather than Zionist."²⁰⁵ Was the suspicion provoked only by paranoia? One detail gives pause: "The CIA became friendlier [toward the Jewish state] from the moment it made use of Israeli intelligence sources in Eastern Europe and the USSR. For example, Mossad agents were the first outsiders to receive the complete text of Khrushchev's secret speech on Stalin's crimes"²⁰⁶ and in fact to pass it on to the US services.

It should not be forgotten that the "age of suspicion," as it has

204 Eschenazi, Nissim (1995), pp. 405 and 184.

205 Roberts (2006), p. 342.

206 Elon (2004), p. 15.

rightly been called, stimulated witch hunts in both camps, though in obviously different ways.²⁰⁷ Moreover, it is no mystery to anyone that U.S. intelligence services were engaged in plans to ensure the physical elimination of Stalin, as well as Castro, Lumumba, and other “rabid dogs.”²⁰⁸ How to get at the undisputed leader of the international communist movement if not by leveraging people close to him and likely to be recruited by Western intelligence services in the wake of a recent conflict, such as the one that erupted following the founding of the Jewish state and the Jewish immigration policy that state pursued? At the time that the “plot” was revealed, “at least one prominent Western diplomat present in Moscow, the English Sir A. (“Joe”) Gascoigne [...], thought it probable that the Kremlin doctors were really guilty of political treason.”²⁰⁹ Moreover, suspicion of doctors seems to be a recurrent motif in Russian history. An Israeli historian of Russian origin puts the death of Tsar Alexander III on the account of the German doctors who treated him (*infra*, ch. 6, § 1).

It should be added that a recent book published in the United States formulates the thesis that Zhdanov’s death was the result of medical “treatment.” Are we then to conclude that Stalin’s concerns were not unfounded? Without providing any evidence, and indeed acknowledging that there is no document to support their thesis, the authors of the book hasten to point out that it was not the enemies of the Soviet Union but the Kremlin dictator himself who had manipulated the murderous doctors! On the other hand, apart from a radiation technician, none of Zhdanov’s attending physicians was Jewish!²¹⁰ By now it is clear that we are in the realm of mythology, and a mythology with disturbing overtones. One can only be suspicious of physicians if they are German or “Gentile” Russians! But let us return to the terrain of historical research. It should be borne in mind that it may have been Stalin himself who had suspended the investigation, perhaps realizing the blunder into which he had fallen.²¹¹

In the absence of further arguments, Stalin’s condemnation of “cosmopolitanism” is cited just to cling to the antisemitism thesis. Who would be cosmopolitans if not Jews? In reality, the cosmopolitanism accusation must be placed in the context of a very bitter

207 Flores (1995).

208 Thomas (1995), pp. 225-9, 233 and *passim*.

209 Rapoport (1991), p. 181.

210 Brent, Naumov (2004), p. 8.

211 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), p. 35.

debate on both sides. Those determined to commit themselves in the first place to building socialism in the country that emerged from October 1917, renouncing the messianic expectation of the advent or exportation of the revolution all over the world, are accused of “national pettiness” and being “nationally narrow,”²¹² as well as of parochialism. If Stalin was a “minor provincial” with “peasant coarseness” (*supra*, intr., § 1, and ch. 1, § 1), Molotov fared no better in Trotsky’s eyes because he “did not know any foreign country or any foreign language.”²¹³ Both the one and the other were, however, wrong to cling provincially and in an obscurantist way to the “reactionary role of the national state.”²¹⁴ Those who were thus attacked reacted by branding their accusers as abstract cosmopolitans incapable of actually building a new social order.

To read the condemnation of “cosmopolitanism” in an antiseptic light is to impoverish a question that lies at the heart of all great revolutions animated by a universalistic charge. Rejecting the export of revolution thesis dear to advocates of the “one and universal republic” or the “Republic, or rather universal conflagration,”²¹⁵ Robespierre had made clear that the new France would not contribute to the cause of the revolution in the world by posing as “the capital of the globe” from which to send “armed missionaries” for the conversion and the “conquest of the world.”²¹⁶ No, it was not the “exploits of warriors” that will undermine the ancien régime in Europe, but rather the “wisdom of our laws.”²¹⁷ In other words, revolutionary power will play a real internationalist function to the extent that it will be able to fulfill its national task of developing a new order in France.

It is an issue on which German idealism was committed to reflecting on in depth. In the eyes of Kant, who, writing in 1793-94, drew somewhat of a historical and philosophical balance sheet of the French Revolution, if patriotism ran the danger of slipping into exclusivism and losing sight of the universal, the abstract love of humanity “cannot fail to dissipate [its] inclination through its excessive generality.” It was then a matter of reconciling “world patriotism”

212 Reported in Stalin (1971-73), vol. 9, p. 25 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 9, p. 42).

213 Trotsky (1988), p. 1228.

214 *Ibid.*, p. 1283.

215 Robespierre (1912-67), vol. 10, pp. 275 and 267.

216 *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 81 and vol. 10, p. 361.

217 *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 568.

(*Weltpatriotismus*) with “local patriotism” (*Localpatriotismus*) or rather with “love of country”; those authentically universalist “in fealty to their country must have an inclination to promote the well-being of the entire world.”²¹⁸ This is a line of thought further developed by Hegel. After celebrating as a great historical achievement the elaboration of the universal concept of Man (the holder of rights “in virtue of his Manhood alone, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, &c.”), the *Philosophy of Right* (§ 209 A) added, however, that the achievement must not result in “cosmopolitanism” and in indifference or opposition to the “concrete life of the state” of the country of which one is a citizen. “The universal love of Mankind” risked configuring itself as an “empty universality” devoid of content (§ 126 Z). The individual contributes to the universal in the first place by committing oneself concretely to the immediate social context where one lives (the family, society, nation). Otherwise, the proclaimed “universal love of Men” is at best a declaration of noble intentions, at worst a technique of evasion from the field of concrete responsibilities.

It is a problem that, with its even more emphatic universalism, the October Revolution had inherited in a more acute form from the French Revolution. Well before Stalin, it was already Herzen, though exiled in Paris, who had shown himself dubious and critical of a form of cosmopolitanism unaware of the idea of nation and of national responsibility (*supra*, ch. 3, § 5). It is a polemic that transcends the confines of the Soviet Union. Rejecting the “accusations of nationalism” aimed at the majority of the CPSU and in the first place at Stalin,²¹⁹ Gramsci took a clear stand against a “so-called ‘internationalism’” that is actually synonymous with “vague ‘cosmopolitanism.’” The main target there was Trotsky, criticized for being a “cosmopolitan,” for being “superficially national” and therefore incapable of “purging internationalism of every vague and purely ideological (in a pejorative sense) element,” and contrasted to Stalin and before him and above all Lenin, who had given proof of a mature internationalism precisely by revealing himself at the same time as “profoundly national.”²²⁰

In the USSR the critique of cosmopolitanism became more pronounced as the threat posed by fascism and Nazism worsened. We

218 Kant (1900-), vol. 27, pp. 673-4.

219 Gramsci (1975), p. 1729.

220 *Ibid.*, pp. 325, 866 and 1729.

are familiar with Dimitrov's impassioned appeal to revolutionaries, two years after Hitler's rise to power, to reject "national nihilism." An internationalism that flows out into national nihilism: that is cosmopolitanism. We also saw Stalin on the eve of Operation Barbarossa point out that, contrary to a "cosmopolitanism" incapable of taking on its national responsibilities, internationalism must be combined with patriotism. That is, far from being synonymous with antisemitism, the critique of cosmopolitanism was an essential element in the struggle against Nazi-fascism (and antisemitism). This critique became urgent again with the outbreak of the Cold War, when a terrible new threat hung over the USSR.

The criticism of cosmopolitanism was all the stronger if a country where revolution had broken out was engaged in a struggle for national survival. In China Sun Yat-sen wrote: "The nations that make use of imperialism to conquer other peoples and seek thereby to further their position as masters of the world, are for cosmopolitanism" and try in every way to discredit patriotism as "something petty and anti-liberal."²²¹ Mao found agreement with this line of thinking. According to him, internationalism in no way makes patriotism obsolete. "The universal truths of Marxism have to be integrated with the concrete conditions of different countries, and there is unity between internationalism and patriotism."²²²

In the USSR, were "cosmopolitans" mostly Jews, so that anti-cosmopolitanism was only a barely disguised form of antisemitism? It is worth noting that, in developing his polemic against cosmopolitanism, Sun Yat-sen invited the Chinese people to take an example from Jews who, despite millennia of oppression and diaspora, had never lost the sense of their identity and thus of the obligation of mutual solidarity.²²³ But let us rather focus on the Soviet Union. There was in fact a strong Jewish presence within the ranks of the majority of the CPSU. And, in any case, among the first to launch the accusation of cosmopolitanism against the leader of the opposition was a German writer of Jewish origin (Feuchtwanger), whom we already know: "Trotsky was never a Russian patriot," his only concern was "world revolution."²²⁴

Moreover, on the basis of a hermeneutics of suspicion applied

221 Sun Yat-sen (1976), pp. 53-4.

222 In Mao Zedong (1998), pp. 242-3.

223 Sun Yat-sen (1976), p. 52.

224 Feuchtwanger (1946), p. 96.

to Stalin, not even Trotsky would be able to escape the accusation of antisemitism. The latter, in developing the analysis of pre-revolutionary Russia, underlined how “the aristocracy of the stock exchange” had “transformed the Tsar’s government into his financial vassal,” which guaranteed “usurers’ rates of interest.”²²⁵ It should be added that “the domain of the stock exchange” was represented “by Rothschilds and by Mendelssohns,” indeed by the “Mendelssohn international,” and in any case by individuals committed to respecting “the laws of Moses like those of the stock exchange.”²²⁶ As can be seen, in this case the reference to the Jewish world is explicit. Must we therefore conclude that the polemic against the “aristocracy of the market” actually targeted Jews as Jews, so that we would find ourselves before yet another manifestation of antisemitism? Such a way of arguing would be absurd, and not only because of Trotsky’s Jewish origins. More significant is the fact that in the same text Trotsky dedicated moving pages to the description of the “bleak [...] bacchanal” of bloodshed staged by antisemitic gangs, tolerated or encouraged by the authorities and by “Nicholas Romanov, the pogromists’ Most August patron,” bravely and decisively opposed by the revolutionary and socialist movement.²²⁷ But Stalin was no less clear in his condemnation of antisemitism as “cannibalism.”

STALIN IN THE “COURT” OF THE JEWS, THE JEWS IN STALIN’S “COURT”

The USSR was the “country that saved the largest number of Jews.” This was an observation made by a journalist and scholar of Trotskyist background who, as a “witness to those years,” considers it necessary to take a stand against the campaign now underway in the West. He continues thus: “No country has had as many Jews in the upper echelons of the army as the Red Army.” This is not all. “One of Stalin’s sons, as well as his daughter, married Jews.”²²⁸ It may be added that within the Stalinist ruling group Jews were until the end very well represented at the highest levels. If the thesis of Stalin’s “anti-Semitism” is to continue to stand up, albeit in a shaky and tottering way, it requires the denial of the Jewishness of the Jews who collaborated

225 Trotsky (1969a), p. 47.

226 Ibid., pp. 21, 30 and 120.

227 Ibid., pp. 108 and 126-7.

228 Karol (2005), p. 12.

with him. This is what in fact has come to pass. It is true, “Yagoda, Kaganovich and many others in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe” had played an important role alongside a vicious dictator, but it is case of “apostate Jews.” This is how a Jewish intellectual expressed himself, in language that clearly refers to the history of religions.⁷⁸³ At other times, the weight of religious tradition was felt in a more mediated and less conscious way. Here, then, is a journalist denouncing, in the most popular Italian daily newspaper [*Il Corriere della Sera*], the “renegade Jews in Stalin’s court.”²²⁹

In fact, the argument concerning “apostates,” the “renegades” (that is, the “Jews in Stalin’s court”) constitutes an implicit refutation of the charge of antisemitism, which, as racism, targets an ethnic group regardless of the religious and political behavior of its individual members. Acknowledging the presence of Jews in leadership positions in Stalin’s USSR and in the socialist camp directed by him means admitting that in those countries access to power and social and political position were determined not by immutable racial affiliation but by changing political behavior. However, denying the Jewishness of Jews today considered cumbersome (as “apostates,” inauthentic “renegades” and “court Jews”) allows antisemitism to be transformed into a category capable of resisting any debunking by means of empirical analysis, and thereby susceptible of application not only to Stalin but also to the entire history of the Soviet Union.

Immediately after the October Revolution, the campaign against the obscurantism reproached against various religions (including Judaism) unfolds with the participation in leadership positions of important Jewish circles. And here is the comment of the aforementioned journalist of *Il Corriere della Sera*: “It was the Yevsektsiya, the Jewish section of the CPSU, that fomented the new anti-Semitism.”²³⁰ A professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem argues similarly: “during the Bolshevik revolution [...] many Jewish Bolsheviks devoted themselves to the cause of Russian revolutionary nationalism with such vigor that they became anti-Semites.”²³¹ Already branded as “apostates” and “renegades,” communist-oriented Jews now became “anti-Semites” *tout court*. At this point, in addition to Stalin, the accusation of “anti-Semitism” accuses Lenin himself, of being the supreme leader of these “anti-Semitic” campaigns.

229 Caretto (1997).

230 Ibid.

231 Agursky (1989), p. 52.

Yet, it is the same Israeli historian already quoted who wrote that "It was likely Lenin was always very skeptical about the organizational talents of the Russians. In a private conversation with Gorky, he remarked that there was no intelligent Russian who was not Jewish or, at least, had Jews among his ancestors and some Jewish blood in his veins." The opinion of the Soviet leader was also that of his interlocutor: "Gorky, however, would have liked to see Jews as administrators of the Russian economy, and in 1916 wrote that 'Jewish organizational talent, their flexibility and relentless energy, must be duly valued in a country as badly organized as our Russia.'"²³² Thus, according to this text, Lenin and Gorky (who had also joined the Communist Party) could, if anything, be accused of anti-Russian racism, certainly not of antisemitism.

The prominent role played by Jews was not limited to the overthrow of the ancien régime in Russia. The Jewish historian continues: to the "omnipresent Jewish minority" Lenin had assigned the role of being "Communism's forerunners." And so: "not the Slavs but the Jews became the main international outlet of the Russian advance against Europe and the rest of the world. It was Lenin's genial intuition to rely on them and on other ethno-national minorities for the revolution's success."²³³ As you can see, the "anti-Semitic" Jews contributed in a notable and perhaps decisive way to the expansion of communism. The Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy of which the Nazis spoke is here re-read as an agitation or conspiracy orchestrated, yes, by Jews but by antisemitic Jews!

It is an agitation and a conspiracy with a long, very long history behind it. Again, according to the above-mentioned historian, Lenin had made use of Jews who had broken with their community of origin in the same way as early Christianity had.²³⁴ And again analogies emerge with a reading of history dear to Nazism, which denounced the Jews' role in the ruinous cycle that led from Christianity to Bolshevism. The only novelty now is the emphasis on the fact that it is Jews who, having adhered first to Christianity and then to Bolshevism, are to be considered "apostates," "renegades" and in the final analysis "anti-Semites." In the effort to strike Stalin and the entire Soviet experience together with the charge of "anti-Semitism," ends up reproducing, with some modest revisions, the Nazi philosophy of

232 Ibid., pp. 158 and 161.

233 Ibid., pp. 159 and 164.

234 Ibid., p. 159.

history!

FROM TROTSKY TO STALIN,
FROM THE "SEMITIC" MONSTER TO THE "ANTI-SEMITIC" MONSTER

In light of historical and conceptual examination, the thesis of Stalin's antisemitism turns out to be untenable. Whatever the chronological starting point for the emergence of this disease (whether placed in 1948 or 1945 or 1933 or 1879, the year of Stalin's birth and conception), the diagnosis proves to be not only unfounded but also highly insulting to Jews, who would have apparently continued to the very end to pay homage in large numbers to their butcher. How then to explain the origin of this black legend? Let us go back to the years immediately following the October Revolution. On October 4, 1919, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, which at that time was not yet the organ of the National Socialist Party (which had not yet been founded), puts the Bolshevik horror on the account of a "Jewish terrorist horde," of "circumcised Asiatics," and in this connection underlines the Jewish blood running in Lenin's veins as well. Similar denunciations resound in England and in the West as a whole.²³⁵ Given these presuppositions, one understands that, even more than Lenin, it is Trotsky who is "the main subject, the Mephistopheles, of anti-Bolshevik propaganda posters."²³⁶ He was branded as "the Jewish exterminator of the Russian people."²³⁷ An anti-communist propaganda poster circulated during the 1920 Russo-Polish War depicted him with not-quite-human features as, with the Star of David around his neck, as he gazes at a mountain of skulls from above.²³⁸ "Trotsky, that is, Bronstein," the Judeo-Bolshevik par excellence, in 1929 is in Goebbels' eyes, is the one who "may have on his conscience the greatest number of crimes that ever weighed on a man."²³⁹

On the other hand, still in the midst of the invasion of the Soviet Union, propagandized as a crusade for the salvation of European and Western civilization from Bolshevik, Asiatic (and Jewish) barbarism, Hitler could be seen portraying Stalin as a puppet of international

235 Diamond (1985), pp. 97-8.

236 Poliakov (1974-90), vol. 4, p. 200.

237 Figes (2000), p. 813.

238 Reported in Traverso (2002), photo 17.

239 In Reuth (1991), p. 147.

Judaism, as a Jew if not in blood, then in spirit. In the years when antisemitism raged or found wide credence in the West, the monster par excellence could only assume the features of the Jew. The situation changed after the collapse of the Third Reich and the revelation of the infamy of the “final solution.” Now the monster capable more than any other of arousing horror tends to be the antisemitic monster. And, yet, despite its variations, the continuity of the *topos* is evident, and the portrait of the antisemite Stalin is not much more persuasive than the one that had painted Trotsky as he sported the Star of David and smugly contemplated the endless pile of his victims.

6

 PSYCHOPATHOLOGY, MORALITY, AND HISTORY
 IN THE READING OF THE STALIN ERA

GEOPOLITICS, TERROR AND STALIN'S "PARANOIA"

Which approach allows us to better understand the genesis, the characteristics, and the meaning of Stalinism? According to Arendt, the obsession with the "objective enemy" drove Stalin's totalitarianism (as well as Hitler's) to seek out ever newer targets for its repressive machine: after "the descendants of the former ruling classes" it was the turn of the *kulaks*, traitors within the party, the "Volga Germans," etc.¹ To realize the futility of this scheme, one need only reflect on the fact that it could be applied without difficulties to the history of the United States. At the end of the nineteenth century, it participates in the celebration of the community of Germanic nations or races (USA, Great Britain, and Germany) that are in the vanguard of civilization. Beginning with the intervention in World War I and continuing for decades, the Germans (and Americans of German descent) become the enemy par excellence. This was the time of the Grand Alliance with the Soviet Union, which, however, after the collapse of the Third Reich becomes the enemy as such, so that the target of persecution is no longer Americans of German (or Japanese) origin, but rather Americans suspected of sympathizing with communism. At least in the last phase of the Cold War, Washington can avail itself of the collaboration of China on the one hand, and of the Islamic *freedom fighters* who feed the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan, on the other. But with the defeat of the Evil Empire, it is the former allies who represent the new incarnation of Evil: the *freedom fighters* (and their sympathizers on U.S. soil and in every corner

 1 Arendt (1989a), pp. 581-2.

of the world) take the road to Guantanamo. It is especially one detail that reveals the poverty of Arendt's scheme, which places on the account of the obsession with the "objective enemy" the deportation of the "Volga Germans" during the Second World conflict. In fact, similar measures had been taken in 1915 by tsarist Russia, at that time an ally of the liberal West. Above all, immediately after Pearl Harbor F. D. Roosevelt behaved similarly towards the "objective enemy" represented that time by American citizens of Japanese origin. To take the geographical and military situation of the respective times into consideration, the Soviet dictator's concern seems more justified than that of the American president.

At times Arendt seems to notice the problematic character of the category she used. The first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* denounces the obsession with the "potential enemy"; but, as the Second Thirty Years' War rages on and the Soviet people are threatened by mortal danger, only with difficulty can it be considered an expression of paranoia to be on guard against a potential enemy. Later editions of the work instead feature reference to the "objective enemy," so as to accentuate the psychopathological character of a behavior that continues to be exclusively attributed to totalitarian dictators.²

But this linguistic adjustment in no way modifies the terms of the problem. Although she resolutely opposed Nazi Germany and sympathized with the country of the Third Republic and the Great Revolution, at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, Arendt had been imprisoned in a horrible concentration camp precisely in France and had ultimately suffered such a fate as a result of being deemed a 'potential enemy' or 'objective enemy'. We shall soon see that this category was also operational in Churchill's England or in F. D. Roosevelt's USA.

Unfortunately, Arendt moved at a purely ideological level, without even posing the problem of a comparative analysis of the politics being followed by the ruling groups of different countries in a situation of acute crisis. It is worth attempting to fill this gap. After the conclusion of the Second World War, Churchill drew up this balance sheet of the situation in his country on the eve of the gigantic clash:

There were known to be twenty thousand organized German Nazis in England at this time, and it would only have been in accord with their procedure in other friendly countries that the outbreak of war should be preceded by a sharp

2 Arendt (1951), pp. 400-2; Arendt (1966), pp. 422-4; Arendt (1989a), pp. 578-81.

prelude of sabotage and murder.³

In this way the statesman justified the policy he had followed during the conflict, when in England those suspected of the crime of “sympathizing” with the enemy or with their political system were liable to be arrested.

“Sympathize” was the catch-all word that permitted the government to detain without trial, indefinitely, members not only of fascist organizations but of any group that the Home Secretary judged sympathetic to the Germans—including those who advocated negotiations with Hitler.⁴

The targets are not those responsible for actions but rather the “potential” or “objective” enemies.

Protected by the Atlantic and the Pacific as well as by a powerful navy, the USA should not have felt particularly threatened. But F. D. Roosevelt thus warned: the enemy is not deterred by the ocean, it is necessary to learn the “the lesson of Norway, whose essential sea-ports were captured by treachery and surprise built up over a series of years.” A similar threat hung over the American continent:

The first phase of the invasion of this hemisphere would not be the landing of regular troops. The necessary strategic points would be occupied by secret agents and their dupes—and great numbers of them are already here and in Latin America.

As long as the aggressor nations maintain the offensive, they, not we, will choose the time and the place and the method of their attack.⁵

And that’s not all: it is also necessary to confront the aggression enacted “by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda by those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord.” At this point traitors or “objective” enemies already tend to be those who express opinions that are considered contrary to the national interest, and resistance becomes a task that must be carried out not only by the army but by the entire country. Both must show unbroken solidity:

Those who man our defenses and those behind them who build our defenses must have the stamina and the courage which come from an unshakable belief in the manner of life which they are defending. The mighty action that we are

3 Churchill (1963), p. 437.

4 Costello (1991), p. 158.

5 In Hofstadter (1982), vol. 3, pp. 387-8.

calling for cannot be based on a disregard of all the things worth fighting for.⁶

An omnipresent aggression, which also manifests itself on the political level, can only be liquidated by a total mobilization that ends up by affecting the political sphere as well. On the basis of these assumptions, there was a “well-orchestrated media campaign”:⁷ “When will Hitler invade the U.S.?” asks one poster, with the image of Nazi paratroopers about to swoop down on defenseless American cities, which are also exposed—a second poster reiterates—to an attack and landing from the sea. The danger is all the more serious because “Hitler’s army is here.” Thus there is at least a third message, warning against the “Fifth Column in the U.S.A.”⁸ The seriousness of this threat was brought to attention by films and books that were a great success, while the Anti-American Activities Committee calculated that there were 480,000 followers of organizations ready to help the invaders!⁹ And, as in England, also in the United States, the category of agent and enemy accomplice widens to include all those who would like to avoid the involvement or dragging of the country into the war.¹⁰ Yes, they were accused of constituting “the Nazi transmission belt,” the “Trojan horse” of the Third Reich, or, as F. D. Roosevelt himself put it, the “fifth column of *appeasement*”. This last expression is particularly significant. It is a political attitude that is synonymous with betrayal, and those who assume it become the target of denunciations, trials and intimidation; that is, they are, in the final analysis, targeted as “potential” or “objective” enemies.

An atmosphere of fear and suspicion spread through the country, promptly used by the authorities to “increase the FBI’s powers.”¹¹ The president revealed to the press that pro-German elements had infiltrated “the Army and Navy” and organized or attempted sabotage operations in “forty or fifty factories in this country.” Even a balanced intellectual like William L. Shirer invited everyone to be prepared, with war just around the corner, to face “sabotage by thousands of Nazi agents from coast to coast.” The enemy’s work is suspected or sensed everywhere. The fifth column had played a fundamental role

6 Ibid., pp. 387 and 390.

7 Herzstein (1989), pp. 284 and 334-5.

8 Ibid., photos shown between pp. 344-5.

9 Ibid., pp. 279-81.

10 Ibid., pp. 240, 327 and 332.

11 Cole (1971), pp. 55 and 104-9; Herzstein (1989), pp. 327, 332, and 336.

in disrupting Belgium and France from the inside; well—it was argued—the Nazi “termites” were at work also in the North American Republic, which risked suffering the same fate.¹² Apparently, “some attempts” were being made by agents of the Third Reich “to stir up and exploit labor discontent in factories and to interfere with munitions production for the Allies”; according to the German Consul General, these “acts of ‘sabotage’” were actually “industrial accidents ascribed to the Nazis by Roosevelt.”¹³ It is not surprising then that “little children sometimes became frightened by scare propaganda,” tireless in announcing and painting in the most horrific colors the imminent irruption of Hitler’s hordes.¹⁴

When the U.S. intervened officially in the war, the climate of fear became even heavier. It was an obsessive warning against spies, against nonchalant loose lips (“Watch your tongue,” “Silence means safety,” you can kill even with “careless talk”; they do not tire of pointing out the war posters displaying the faces of boys on the verge of becoming orphans because of irresponsible chatterers), against “sabotage” (another poster proclaimed the existence of a new crime, that of “misuse of working tools” and showed “Mr. Toolwrecker” being charged and taken into custody by a policeman).¹⁵ Of course, the reality of danger was intertwined with the clever manipulation of the real situation. The American historian I am citing here concludes: “FDR well understood the value of national anxiety”; “FDR and his advocates at times crossed the line separating public concern from mass hysteria.”¹⁶

We are in the presence of the constituent elements of the Terror raging in Soviet Russia. Undoubtedly, here the phenomena analyzed in relation to England and the USA are presented in a monstrously magnified form: but is it ideology, paranoia, or the objective situation that plays the decisive role? Beyond the changing but incessant civil war, geopolitics must be kept in mind. In April 1947, while the Cold War was already in the making, in a conversation with the Republican candidate Harold Stassen, Stalin stressed with a certain envy the extraordinarily favorable situation of the USA, protected by two oceans and bordered to the north and south by Canada and Mexico,

12 Herzstein (1989), pp. 338-9.

13 Chamberlin (1950), p. 10; Herzstein (1989), p. 333.

14 Herzstein (1989), commentary on the photos found between pp. 344-5.

15 See the posters reported in Gregory (1993), pp. 60-1 and 104.

16 Herzstein (1989), pp. 240 and 327.

two weak countries that certainly did not represent any threat.¹⁷

Things were quite different for Soviet Russia. One may well scoff at Stalin's "paranoia," but we have seen Goebbels note the wide success of German espionage in France and its total failure in the USSR (*supra*, ch. 1, § 4). On the other hand, the enemies of Bolshevism were precisely the first to insist on the pervasiveness of a German fifth column in Russia. In Kerensky's eyes, as demonstrated by the "capitulation of Brest-Litovsk" and the signing of a "treacherous separate peace," the protagonists of October 1917 were operating in the service of Wilhelm II, by whom they were massively financed and assisted. According to the Menshevik leader, the German secret services had already played a significant role in the peace agitation that had undermined the country's war effort.¹⁸ Similarly, Churchill stressed the weight of "German gold" that had played a role in the upheavals in Russia.¹⁹

In the present day, going back further, an Israeli historian (who came from the Soviet Union at the time) believes that the hand of imperial Germany, determined to weaken its neighboring and rival power by any means, could already be seen in the untimely death in 1894 of Alexander III, who "died as the result of incorrect medical treatment given him by his team of doctors, among whom Germans predominated," or in the assassination in 1911 of Pyotr Stolypin, which took place with the "involvement" of "some high-ranking pro-German Russian officials," or in certain oddities of Nicholas II ("his wife was a German princess").²⁰ In any case, as far as the collapse of the tsarist regime is concerned, one must not lose sight of "the real German fifth column in the Russian court and army," and thus at the very summits of power. Yes, "in May 1915 Moscow was swept by anti-German pogroms," and yet "the German ruling minority was still intact." In conclusion, "The concept that the Russian revolution of March 1917 was spontaneous is widely accepted among historians, and some evidence has also been submitted to prove that the idea of a liberal conspiracy behind this revolution succeeded. Meanwhile, other evidence has been ignored, evidence to the effect that the revolution could have been at least partly provoked by the German lobby, or by the direct intervention of German intelligence, according to a

17 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 17, p. 72.

18 Kerensky (1989), pp. 525 and 328 ff.

19 In Schmid (1974), p. 17.

20 Agursky (1989), pp. 84 and 90.

plan outlined by Brockdorff-Rantzau."²¹

Is this a credible picture, or is it affected by the paranoia generally attributed to Stalin? One can however start from the following premise: even if it was weakened by it for some time, the defeat of the Second Reich does not negate the secret services' activity in Russia, where on the other hand the dissolution of the ancien régime coincided with the strengthening of the presence at every level of the great Western powers. On the whole, it is enough to read a history of the Cold War to realize that the country born from the October Revolution was particularly exposed to the dangers not only of military invasion, but also of infiltration and espionage. In the 1920s, thanks to Russian exiles' collaboration, Britain was able to decrypt coded messages from the Soviet Union, which continued to be the main target of British intelligence services even "in the middle of the 1930s." In the meantime, there was the advent of the Third Reich, which when preparing its aggression could avail itself of the consummate skills of Colonel Reinhard Gehlen, "a master of intelligence, subversion and deception". Later, immediately after the defeat of Hitler's Germany, Allen Dulles revealed himself to be "far-sighted" in putting at the service of a nascent CIA a person who "had played a major role in the German attack on Russia in 1941."²² During the Cold War, in addition to espionage, Western intelligence activity included "sabotage operations" and sometimes support for insurgent movements.²³

More than twenty years after Stalin's death, the picture does not change. This can be deduced from the article in a prestigious US newspaper. The author smugly reports "how a CIA campaign of computer sabotage, culminating [in 1974] in a huge explosion in Siberia—all organized by a mild-mannered economist named Gus Weiss—helped the United States win the Cold War."²⁴ If we then keep in mind that the practice of sabotage also has a peculiar Russian tradition behind it (*supra*, ch. 2, § 8), we can come to a conclusion: in order to understand what was happening in the Stalin years, rather than resorting to a single paranoid personality as a *deus ex machina*, it is better to follow the approach suggested by a distinguished witness who in the Moscow of 1937 spoke of unquestionable "acts of sabotage" and at

21 Ibid., pp. 253-4 and 256.

22 Thomas (1988), pp. 315 and 248.

23 Ibid., p. 314; Roberts (2006), p. 338.

24 Safire (2004).

the same time of a “sabotage psychosis” that arose from that reality.²⁵

THE LIBERAL WEST’S “PARANOIA”

And yet, if Arendt limits herself to referring to the madness inherent in totalitarianism (whether Stalinist or Hitlerian), François Furet goes even further: “Revolutionaries must have something to hate.” This is true for the Jacobins, but even more so for the Bolsheviks and, in an altogether special way, for Stalin, the latter of whom “felt it necessary to invoke the fight against saboteurs, enemies, imperialists, and their agents in order to support his fantastic goals.”²⁶ The French historian speaks of the “revolutionary” in general, but in reality he only targets Russia and France, and thus forgets to add that, in addition to the Bolsheviks and Jacobins (and Rousseau), the protagonists of the Puritan revolution, as well as the abolitionist “revolution” that swept away the institution of slavery first in England and then in the U.S.A., were also often subjected to similar psychoanalytic treatment. And Furet does not even take into account the fact that, in the eyes of an eminent American historian, the “paranoid style” profoundly characterizes the history of his country. The belief, well alive even in George Washington, in London’s intention to enslave the colonists settled on the other side of the Atlantic is a central element of the American Revolution. This is when, at the end of the eighteenth century, acute contradictions arise in the new ruling group, with Jefferson suspected of being an agent of France, and Hamilton branded as a British agent. A similar dialectic manifests itself a few decades later, on the occasion of the crisis leading to the American Civil War, when the two opposing parties exchange the accusation of having betrayed the legacy of the Founding Fathers.²⁷ Not to mention the fact that, in Nietzsche’s eyes, a disturbed relationship with reality characterizes the revolutionary tradition as a whole, beginning with those “Christian agitators” who are the “Church Fathers” and, even earlier, with the Jewish prophets.

Is Stalin’s personality characterized by particularly morbid traits? If we start from this assumption, the fascination he exercised on leading personalities of the West would be inexplicable. One fact, howev-

25 Feuchtwanger (1946), p. 40.

26 Furet (1995), pp. 172-3.

27 Davis (1982), pp. 5, 65 and *passim*.

er, gives one pause for thought. Freud, who died in 1939, thought it opportune to make a psychoanalytic study not on Stalin, and indeed not even on Hitler, but on Wilson, who was included in the list of those dangerous “fanatics” who are convinced that they “have a special and personal relationship with divinity” and who, starting from that, believe themselves invested with the providential mission of guiding and transforming the world.²⁸ And certainly, the statesman seems a little out of the ordinary when, whilst plunging his country into the First World War, despite having the reality of the carnage before his eyes and despite being moved by substantial material and geopolitical interests, he celebrated the U.S. intervention as a “holy war, the holiest of all wars” and American soldiers as “crusaders” who are the protagonists of a “transcendent undertaking.”²⁹

But Furet focuses on a psychopathological reading of the events that began in October 1917 and, above all, of the thirty years of Stalin’s rule: doesn’t Stalin, like a true paranoid, suspect dangers, ambushes, and plots everywhere? What should we say, then, about F. D. Roosevelt and his collaborators who, even though they could count on a political and geopolitical situation that was clearly more favorable, already in the months preceding the American intervention in the Second World War, were sounding the alarm, as we know, about the possibility of a German landing in the Middle East? America, branding anti-interventionism as synonymous with national treason and warning against the industrial “sabotage” provoked by the enemy and against a fifth column of as many as half a million people? That is why Hitler accused the American president of having a “stupid imagination” and of being sick, the fantasy of a man with a “sick brain.”³⁰ As we can see, the accusation of paranoia or madness is not new, it can be launched by the most unexpected characters and can hit the most diverse targets.

But another consideration is more important. The two conspiracy theories that perhaps have most marked the history of the first half of the 20th century do indeed register the strong presence of the Bolsheviks, not as protagonists but as targets. And these theories were elaborated and spread with the decisive contribution of the United States. In September 1918, Wilson authorized the publication of doc-

28 Freud (1995), pp 35-7.

29 Losurdo (2007), ch. vi, § 11.

30 Hitler (1965), p. 1175 (speech of April 28, 1939); Hitler (1980), p. 178 (conversation 4/5 January 1942).

uments containing sensational revelations: not only was the October Revolution nothing more than a German conspiracy, but even after Lenin, Trotsky, and the other Bolshevik leaders had seized power, they continued to be in the (paid) service of imperial Germany. In fact, the ostensibly dramatic rift that arose on the occasion of the Brest-Litovsk treaty was a staged scene intended to conceal the permanent control over Soviet Russia exercised by the German General Staff. All this was demonstrated by the so-called *Sisson Papers*, named after the representative in Russia of the Committee on Public Information, the committee created by Wilson with a view to the total mobilization of information. In support of the authenticity of the alleged documents (which later turned out to be a sensational forgery) were also authoritative American historians who later justified themselves by referring to the pressure exerted on them "in the name of wartime necessity."³¹ It is an affair that has an echo outside the United States as well. In *Il Grido del Popolo* [The Cry of the People] Gramsci ironizes: "The two citizens who call themselves Lenin and Trotsky in Russia are two doubles made in German scientific laboratories, which, made as they are by machine, cannot be killed by terrorists' revolver shots" (the allusion is to the attack on August 30, 1918, suffered by Lenin).³²

Later, a second conspiracy theory is to explain the October Revolution, which, in addition to the usual Bolsheviks, this time no longer accuses the Germans but the Jews. After arousing great resonance in the U.S., the denunciation of the Judeo-Bolshevik menace, which spreads sedition throughout the world and threatens order and civilization as such, would later play a prominent role in the "final solution" (*supra*, ch. 5, § 6).

IMMORALITY OR MORAL INDIGNATION?

If the psychopathological approach is misleading, the reading of the great historical crisis that hit twentieth-century Russia is no more persuasive, accusing the Bolsheviks and Stalin, in particular, of having developed a worldview completely deaf to the reasons of morality and humanity. However, if we take the years or decades preceding October 1917 as our starting point, we see that the roles of the

31 Kennan (1956), pp. 441-57; Aptheker (1977), pp. 367-70; Filene (1967), pp 47-8.

32 Gramsci (1984), p. 297.

accused and the accusers can be easily reversed. It is the protagonists of the revolutionary movement who brand the world they intend to overthrow as responsible for the crimes attributed to them today. Does communism lead to genocide? In the years of the First World War, genocide was synonymous with the liberal, bourgeois society that was to be overthrown. As Stalin spoke of a “terrible slaughter” and of a “mass extermination of the vital forces of the people,”³³ Bukharin spoke of a “horrible corpse factory.”³⁴ Terrible and yet precise was Rosa Luxemburg’s description of the “mass extermination” and “genocide” (*Völkermord*) on the battlefields that became “the tiresome and monotonous business of the day,” while in the rear an “atmosphere of ritual murder” spreads. The fight against “genocide,” or rather against the “triumph of genocide” is also called for by Karl Liebknecht, who also condemns the “worship of brutal violence,” the “wreckage” of “all that is noble in Man” and the spreading “moral barbarization”. While prompting him to hail the October Revolution, the moral indignation at the unprecedented horror of the First World War led Liebknecht to hope for the emergence of a power in Soviet Russia that was not only “solid” but also “tough,” and capable of preventing a repetition of the tragedy and the return of a system already denounced on the eve of the war as lacking “moral scruples.”³⁵

Finally, it is worth quoting Trotsky: “the Cainite labor of the ‘patriotic’ press” of the two opposing sides is “irrefutable proof of the moral decadence of bourgeois society.” Yes, one cannot but speak of “moral decadence,” when one sees humanity plunging back into a “blind and shameless barbarity.” One witnesses the outbreak of a “race of bloody madness” to use the most advanced technique for the purposes of war. It is a “scientific barbarism,” which uses humanity’s great discoveries “only to destroy the foundations of civilized social life and annihilate Man.” Everything good that civilization has produced sinks in the blood and slime of the trenches: “health, comfort, hygiene, the usual daily relationships, friendly ties, professional obligations, and ultimately the seemingly unshakable rules of morality.”³⁶ The term “genocide” is also used with a slight variation by Trotsky, who in 1934 warns against the new World War, against

33 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 3, p. 34 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 49).

34 Bukharin (1984), p. 45.

35 Luxemburg (1968), pp. 19-20, 31 and 33; Liebknecht (1958-68), vol. 8, pp.230 and 266-83, vol. 9, p. 503 and vol. 6, pp. 297-9.

36 Trotsky (1998), pp. 98-9,139, 238-9 and 270.

the new “recourse to genocide” (*Völkermorden*) that was gathering on the horizon.³⁷ Again, on August 31, 1939, Molotov accused France and England of rejecting the Soviet policy of collective security, in the hope of unleashing the Third Reich against the USSR, thus not hesitating to provoke “a grand new slaughter, a new holocaust of nations.”³⁸

This denunciation of the horrors of war was clearly inspired by moral indignation. A leading American statesman, Theodore Roosevelt, took a very different attitude to this. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries he proceeded to celebrate war as such in a vitalistic way, starting from a point of view that in some way wanted to be—one might say with Nietzsche—“beyond good and evil.” We read: “Every man who has in him any real power of joy in battle knows that he feels it when the wolf begins to rise in his heart; he does not then shrink from blood or sweat or deem that they end the fight; he revels in suffering, in the toil, the danger, as if they adorned his triumph.”³⁹ These are motifs which, in a barely attenuated form, continued to resonate with Churchill who, with reference to colonial expeditions, said: “War is a game that is played with a smile.” The raging carnage in Europe from August 1914 onwards does not affect this view: “War is the greatest game in universal history, we play for the highest stakes here”; war constitutes “the only meaning and purpose of our life.”⁴⁰ With a shift from the celebration of war in a crudely vitalistic key to its transfiguration to a spiritualistic key, Max Weber hails the First World War as “great and wonderful,” while Benedetto Croce expects from it a “regeneration of current social life,”⁴¹ and with him numerous other exponents of the liberal West of the time. Among them was Herbert Hoover, a senior member of the American administration and future president of the United States, who immediately after the armistice was signed attributed to the conflict that had just ended a function of the “purification of men” and therefore of preparation for “a new golden age. We were indeed proud that we had taken part in this rebirth of humanity.”⁴²

Lenin’s political-moral condemnation of the war instead contin-

37 Trotsky (1997-2001), vol. 3, p. 536.

38 In Roberts (2006), p. 34.

39 Quoted in Hofstadter (1960), p. 208.

40 In Schmid (1974), pp. 48-9.

41 Losurdo (1991), ch. 1, §§ 1 and 3 (for Weber); Croce (1950), p. 22.

42 In Rothbard (1974), p. 89.

ued, and together with it he accuses the political-social system that in his eyes had generated it. The moral pathos inspiring Lenin's analysis of capitalism and of colonialism in particular is evident. Here is how he described the Italian war in Libya, this "typical colonial war of a 'civilized' state of the 20th century." We see "a civilized and constitutional nation" proceeding in its work of "civilization" "by means of bayonets, bullets, gallows, fire, rape," even with "butchery." In reality, it was

a perfected, civilized blood bath, the massacre of Arabs with the help of the 'latest' weapons [...]. By way of 'punishment,' about 3,000 Arabs were massacred, whole families were plundered and massacred, women and children massacred in cold blood.⁴³

The advent of the most advanced bourgeois Republic in no way put an end to this horror: "the French 'Republican' troops [...] exterminated African peoples with equal ferocity."⁴⁴

The denunciation of the West's genocidal practices played a central role above all in the framework traced by Lenin in the *Notebooks on Imperialism*, drawn up by collecting and quoting material taken from the liberal-bourgeois literature of the time. Even a year before the outbreak of the gigantic conflagration, a book by a German author read: "The harder struggle for existence aggravates hostility among the Europeans and leads to attempts at mutual annihilation." On the other hand, the policy of annihilation had already become a reality in the colonies. In Africa the Herero were "for the most part wiped out" by Germany, which, moreover, in suppressing the "uprising of the Hottentots," could avail itself of the active collaboration of England. But let us see how the leading country of the liberal West of the time behaved in its colonies: "The British exterminated the Tasmanians to the last man. But the Irish are not Tasmanians! They cannot be simply exterminated." Despite being subjected to merciless domination and repression, the Black citizens in South Africa were seen as multiplying at an alarming rate: "Many settlers positively want an uprising in order to check the dangerous growth of the Kaffir population and deprive it of its rights and land ownership."⁴⁵ Far from being cold and detached, these descriptions became charged with moral indignation in the passage from the bourgeois historians to Lenin, who

43 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 18, pp. 322-3.

44 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 24, p. 423.

45 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 39, pp. 492, 652 and 488-9.

noted: here are the “results of colonial wars”; thanks to the expropriation and to the annihilation of the Herero, the newcomers can “rob the land and become landowners.”⁴⁶

Stalin’s reading of colonialism is no less charged with moral indignation. In contrast, Theodore Roosevelt seemed to respond in advance to the denunciation of the slavery and genocidal practices taking place in the colonies: “Most fortunately, the hard, energetic, practical men who do the rough pioneer work of civilization in barbarous lands, are not prone to false sentimentality”; the “sentimental humanitarians” who are moved by the fate of colonial peoples are to be considered worse than the “professional criminal class.”⁴⁷ In a similar way some decades earlier he had mocked the “excellent philanthropist,” troubled by the brutality or horror of the French conquest of Algeria, General Bugeaud, considered by Tocqueville as a model of “incomparable energy and vigor” in conducting “the only kind of warfare that is feasible in Africa.”⁴⁸

Is communism today synonymous with the totalizing state and with totalitarianism? In the years of the First World War, it was the capitalist countries, including those of liberal orientation, that embodied all this. Lenin emphasized the fact that what was impeding “fraternization” at the frontlines was “the hateful discipline of the barrack prisons,” and that even the rearguard posts have become “military convict prisons.”⁴⁹ In this regard the Russian revolutionary stressed the relevance of Engels’ analysis, made decades earlier, according to which the increasing militarization and “rivalry in conquest have tuned up the public power to such a pitch that it threatens to swallow the whole of society and even the state.”⁵⁰ In turn, Bukharin, in denouncing the “centralization of the barracks-state” and the “iron heel of the militarist state,” saw a “New Leviathan, beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child’s toy.”⁵¹ It is a motif found also in Stalin, according to whom war ends up mutilating or destroying “democracy” even where it seems to be most deeply rooted. Unlike in Russia, in England “national oppression” did not generally take on “the monstrous forms of massacre and pogrom”; it

46 Ibid., p. 652.

47 In Hofstadter (1960), pp. 209 and 205.

48 Cf. Losurdo (2005), ch. 7, § 6.

49 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 24, p. 329 and vol. 25, p. 363.

50 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 21, p. 166; Lenin (1955-70), vol. 25, p.370.

51 Bukharin (1984), pp. 137 and 141-2.

was “milder, less inhuman.” But with the outbreak of hostilities the situation worsened dramatically, as both the Irish and the Hindus experienced first-hand.⁵² Even Western democracies tended no longer to distinguish themselves from countries characterized by a vicious and “inhuman” autocracy. This language could be contrasted with “‘manly’ and ‘masterful,’ two of the most common words in [Theodore] Roosevelt’s prose,”⁵³ a prose that referred to an attitude once again “beyond good and evil” and to a cult of the will to power intolerant of moral limits.

As one can see, the commonplace that likes to contrast the robust moral sense of the liberal-bourgeois world with the unscrupulous Machiavellianism of the protagonists of the communist movement does not stand up to historical scrutiny. Immediately after the October Revolution, which he welcomed, the young Lukács saw in the “historical movement” of “socialism” a radical reckoning with *Realpolitik*.⁵⁴ In Benedetto Croce’s eyes, on the other hand, the figure, odious and ridiculous, of the “political moralist” was embodied in the Bolsheviks, the “Russian revolutionaries.” They “have opened a great court of justice by calling all peoples to the examination, in the name of morality, of their war aims, in order to review them, and admit the honest and exclude the dishonest; and so, moralistically proceeding, they have made public the diplomatic treaties,” branded as immoral, for having planned the war in order to achieve territorial conquests. But, objects the liberal philosopher, it is absurd to want to “pronounce moral judgment on states” and “treat politics as moral, whereas politics (here is the simple truth) is politics, just politics, and nothing but politics; and [...] its morality consists solely and entirely in being excellent politics.” Therefore it makes no sense to argue “attributing rights to those who do not know how to conquer them or defend them, and limits and duties to those who, keeping their own mind and shedding their own blood, rightly recognize no limits and duties other than those that their own mind and their own strength advise and set them.”⁵⁵ It could be said that Stalin responded pertinently to Croce on 10 March 1939, at a moment when the dismemberment and tragedy of Czechoslovakia was taking place, thanks to

52 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 3, pp. 15 and 46 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 27-8 and 63).

53 Hofstadter (1960), p. 207.

54 Lukács (1967), p. 5.

55 Croce (1950), pp. 251-3.

Munich and the complicity of the West which, refusing to condemn and contain the will to power and the vitality of the expansionist agenda of the Third Reich, merely strives to channel the aggression further east: "It would be naive to preach morals to people who recognize no human morality. Politics is politics, as the old, case-hardened bourgeois diplomats say."⁵⁶

But let us concentrate on the First World War. It is worth re-reading what Vilfredo Pareto wrote in 1920: before the conflagration "workers and, especially, socialists" said they were ready to prevent war with a general strike or even more radical means. "Following such nice speeches came World War I. The general strike was nowhere to be seen. On the contrary, in the various parliaments, socialists approved war credits, or did not oppose them too much," so that "the precept of the master [Marx]: 'Workers of the world, unite!' was implicitly transformed into the other: 'Workers of all countries, kill one another'."⁵⁷ Pareto, at least at this moment a typical representative of the liberal-bourgeois world, who does not hide his cynicism and his satisfaction at the bloody refutation suffered by socialist internationalism, seemed to have been answered in advance by Stalin, whose words resounded instead with moral indignation and at the same time with hope (when the February Revolution had broken out):

For nearly three years now the workers of all countries, who were yesterday kin brothers and are now clad in soldier's uniform, have stood confronting one another as enemies, and are crippling and murdering one another to the joy of the enemies of the proletariat [...]. The Russian revolution is the first to be forcing a breach in the wall that divides the workers from one another. The Russian workers, at this time of universal 'patriotic' frenzy, are the first to proclaim the forgotten slogan: 'Workers of all countries, unite!'⁵⁸

In the new situation that had arisen in Russia (and the world) it was possible to relaunch the struggle to put an end to the massacre and to promote "mass fraternization on the fronts" and the "new ties of fraternity among the peoples."⁵⁹ In order to achieve this result, however, it was necessary to go beyond the February Revolution. "Life in the trenches, the real life of the soldiers, had developed a new means of struggle—mass fraternization," which was, however, opposed by the provisional government, which called for an "offensive"

56 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 190 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 686).

57 Pareto (1966), p. 940.

58 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 3, p. 34 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 49).

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 49-50).

and new bloodbaths⁶⁰ and threatened to refer to military tribunals those “culprits” of precisely this “fraternization.”⁶¹

It is true, in the clandestine period, the Bolshevik Party and Stalin led the fight against autocracy with very unscrupulous methods (the storming of banks or bank vans), and this is the starting point for the historians who denounce Stalin as a gangster already in his youth. What about this approach? Let us make a comparison with Churchill, five years older than Stalin. The future British statesman began his career fighting and sympathetically describing the wars of the British Empire, even the less glorious ones. In Sudan, they took no prisoners, in South Africa the conquerors erected concentration camps destined to become a tragic prototype. From such experiences, Churchill began to distinguish himself as a political leader, fighting ardently in defense of the “British race” and the white race in general. To achieve this result, it was not enough to strengthen control over the colonial peoples, it was necessary to intervene in the metropolis as well. It was necessary to proceed with the forced sterilization of the “weak-minded,” of the maladjusted, of presumed habitual criminals. In turn, “idle vagabonds” should be locked up in work camps. Only in this way can “a national and racial danger which it is impossible to exaggerate” be properly dealt with. The author quoting these excerpts comments thus: as Home Secretary, in 1911, Churchill was the advocate of “draconian” measures that “would give him personally almost unlimited power on the lives of individuals.”⁶² Are Churchill’s beginnings really more edifying than Stalin’s? A few years later, from the prison in which he was imprisoned by the tsarist regime allied with England, Stalin was dreaming of the fraternization of soldiers and peoples, while the former was committed to conducting to the end a war which in his eyes was called upon to strengthen the hegemony of the Empire and of the “British race.”

Ultimately, for a historian who interrupts their narrative with October 1917, it would be very difficult to identify in the Bolshevik party and in Stalin the warring faction that ignores the reasons of morality.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 73).

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 99).

62 Ponting (1992).

REDUCTIO AD HITLERUM AND ITS VARIANTS

The psychopathological and moral approaches are all the more inconclusive because the tragedy that took place in twentieth-century Russia was foreseen decades or centuries in advance by very different personalities. It cannot therefore be so easily explained by the psychological abnormality or moral depravity of single individuals. On the other hand, like the former method, the latter approach could also be used to indict the leaders of the liberal West. One may take as its starting point the support given in particular by Great Britain to Kornilov's attempted coup d'état and subsequently to the White Army, still at a time when the latter were unleashing a bloody hunt against Jews and staining themselves with massacres, which were in some ways a prelude to the "final solution." In order to impose on Russia permanent participation in what the communists denounced as the "genocide" of the First World War, the liberal West turned a blind eye to other monstrous crimes.

After the military triumph the time came to divide up the colonial spoils. Among other things, it was England's turn to take over Iraq, which, however, rebelled in 1920. And here is how one of the leading countries of the liberal West dealt with the situation. The British troops unleashed "cruel reprisals," "they set fire to their villages and committed other actions that today we would judge excessively repressive if not downright barbaric." It was certainly not Churchill who put the brakes on such measures, who on the contrary invited the air force to teach the "recalcitrant natives" a harsh lesson, hitting them with "experimental methods" based on "gas bombs, especially mustard gas."⁶³ In this case, we are led to think not of the "final solution" but of the colonial war unleashed by fascist Italy against Ethiopia, and conducted in a particularly barbaric way, using weapons prohibited by international conventions. Churchill appears here as Mussolini's forerunner. On the other hand, when it came to safeguarding or expanding the empire, the British statesman's crude methods were a constant. In 1942, pro-independence demonstrations in India were repressed by "resorting to extreme means, such as the use of the air force to machine-gun the crowds of demonstrators."⁶⁴ Over the next two years, Churchill stubbornly denied and neglected the reality of famine decimating the people of Indian Bengal. Finally,

63 Catherwood (2004), pp. 89 and 85.

64 Torri (2000), p. 598.

to remain on the topic of colonies and peoples of colonial origin, to what extent should the “final solution of our Indian question” in Canada, which until 1931 was part of the British Commonwealth, cast a shadow also on an influential member of the British political class, Churchill? The man who, as prime minister from 1951 to 1955, is in any case to be held responsible for the genocidal practices resorted to by the London government in the attempt to crush the Mau Mau revolt (*infra*, ch. 8, § 4).

But let us return to pre-war Europe. After Hitler came to power, the government in London tried in every way to divert to the east the expansionistic fury of the Third Reich. In this connection two Canadian historians arrived at a thought-provoking conclusion: “Blame for the tragedy of World War II, including the Holocaust, must rest partly with Stanley Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, and their close associates.”⁶⁵

And yet, Britain could not avoid confrontation with Nazi Germany and faced it by resorting at first to the indiscriminate and terrorist bombing of German cities, with the consequent massacre of the civilian population. This has led two American historians to make a comparison with the treatment inflicted by the Nazis on the Jewish people (*supra*, ch. 5, § 2). It was the Soviet leadership who were trying to contain the bombing, as is clear from a Dimitrov’s diary note of March 17, 1945:

Audience with Stalin tonight, together with Molotov. Discussed issues pertaining to Germany. The British want to dismember Germany (Bavaria and Austria, the Rhine region, etc.). They are using every means available to destroy their competitor. Viciously bombing German factories and plants. We are keeping their air forces out of our zone of Germany. But they are doing everything they can to bomb there as well [...]. What is needed is for some Germans to appear who are capable of salvaging what can still be salvaged for the survival of the German people. Organize the municipalities [local city councils], fix economic life, etc., on German territory taken and occupied by the Red Army. Create local government agencies from which will come out a German government as well.⁶⁶

The fiery hell unleashed by the British air force is all the more odious because two weeks after the outbreak of the war the British Prime Minister Chamberlain had declared: “Whatever be the lengths to which others may go, his Majesty’s Government will never resort to the deliberate attack on women and children and other civilians for

65 Leibowitz, Finkei (2005), p. 21.

66 Dimitrov (2002), p. 817.

purposes of mere terrorism.”⁶⁷ In fact, plans for indiscriminate and terrorist bombing had begun to take shape during the First World War. As it dragged on without reaching a conclusion, Churchill “had planned a thousand-bomber attack on Berlin for 1919.” Such plans continued to be developed after victory.⁶⁸ That is, one could say, to imitate the cursory way of arguing of today’s fashionable ideologists, the then leading country of the liberal West was planning a new “genocide” while completing the one begun in 1914. In any case, it was precisely England that became the protagonist of the systematic destruction inflicted on German cities towards the end of the Second World War as well (one thinks in particular of Dresden), a destruction planned and carried out with the declared intention of leaving no way out for the civilian population, chased and engulfed by fire, impeded by delayed-fire bombs from attempts to escape, and often machine-gunned from above.

These practices appear all the more sinister when one considers the statement made by Churchill in April 1941: “There are less than seventy million malignant Huns—some of whom are curable and others killable.” If not outright genocide, as Nolte believes, it is clear that there was a massive thinning out of the German population being considered.⁶⁹ It is in this perspective that we can place the strategic bombing campaign: “from 1940 to 1945, Churchill eliminated the people of Cologne, Berlin, and Dresden as Huns.”⁷⁰ The British prime minister proved to be no less ruthless in carving out London’s zone of influence in Europe and systematically liquidating partisan forces considered hostile or suspicious. The instructions given to the British expeditionary force in Greece speak for themselves: “Do not hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local uprising has erupted.” And again, “Some things should not be done halfway.”⁷¹

Now to the Cold War. Some time ago, *The Guardian* revealed that between 1946 and 1948 Great Britain prepared prison camps in Germany for communists or elements suspected of communist sympathies, real or presumed Soviet spies: “images show the distraught and suffering faces of young skeletal young men, subjected for months

67 In Markusen, Kopf (1995), p. 151.

68 Friedrich (2004), pp. 19 and 52-3.

69 Churchill (1974), p. 6384 (speech of 27 April 1941); Nolte (1987), p. 503.

70 Friedrich (2004), pp. 227-8.

71 Fontaine (2005), pp. 72-3.

to deprivation of food and sleep, clubbed repeatedly and exposed to extremely low temperatures. Inhuman treatment that resulted in the death of some inmates.” Imprisoned there “were also dozens of women who were not spared torture.” To carry out this torture, instruments were used at times inherited from the Gestapo. In effect, these camps were “worthy of the German concentration camps.”⁷² As can be seen, there repeatedly emerges a race between the practices implemented in the twentieth century by Great Britain and the practices dear to the Third Reich.

We come to results that are not different when we deal with the United States. In this case, the hypocrisy that we have seen characterizing Chamberlain reaches its extreme. Immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, it was Franklin D. Roosevelt who condemned the aerial bombardments targeting civilian populations as contrary to the sentiments of “every civilized man and woman” and to “human conscience,” and as an expression of “inhuman barbarism.”⁷³ Subsequently, as proof of an even more “inhuman barbarity” was the US war machine, which proceeded to destroy Japanese cities in a systematic and terroristic manner and took an active part in the analogous operation against German cities. Nor should one underestimate the bombing of Italy, which was also aimed at striking at the population and undermining their morale. It was F.D. Roosevelt himself who pointed this out: “we will give the Italians a taste of some real bombing and I am more than certain sure they will remain standing under this kind of pressure.”⁷⁴

The terrorist bombings campaign culminated, under the Truman administration, in the use of nuclear weapons against a country by then already at the end of its rope. A further gruesome detail should be added. It has been pointed out that the purpose of annihilating the civilian population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not to push Japan closer to capitulation, but instead aimed more at the Soviet Union, to which a dire warning was being issued.⁷⁵ So, we are in the presence of two acts of terrorism of the highest scale that are, moreover, across the board. Tens and tens of thousands of defenseless civilians of the old enemy (or rather of the former enemy that is in the process of being transformed into an ally) are massacred in order to

72 Cobain (2005); Cobain (2006).

73 In Dower (1986), p. 39.

74 In Butler (2005), p. 99 (message of 25 November 1942).

75 Alperovitz (1995).

terrorize the ally, already targeted as a new enemy and as a new target of the genocidal practices that had just been tested!

But the war in Asia lends itself to further considerations. It is now widely accepted in the United States that the Pearl Harbor attack was foreseen well in advance (and in fact was provoked by an oil embargo that left Japan little alternative). But, once the attack was consummated, the war was conducted by Washington under the banner of a moral indignation that was certainly hypocritical, in light of what we now know, but then all the more deadly. It was not just the destruction of cities. One should think of the mutilation of corpses and even of the mutilation of the enemy in the last flickers of life, so as to obtain souvenirs, often quietly or proudly displayed. Above all, the ideology behind these practices is significant. The Japanese were branded as “subhuman,” with recourse to a category that was central to Nazi discourse.⁷⁶ And to this discourse we are led again when we see F. D. Roosevelt entertained the idea of inflicting “castration” on the Germans. The latter, once the war was over, were imprisoned in concentration camps where, out of sheer sadism or out of a spirit of revenge, they were forced to suffer hunger, thirst, and all kinds of deprivation and humiliation, while the specter of death by starvation hovers over a thoroughly defeated people.

To return to the topic of the statesman, who perhaps more than any other has been stylized as a champion of freedom, Roosevelt did not change the policy traditionally followed by Washington in Latin America, and in 1937 a bloodthirsty dictator, Anastasio Somoza, had come to power in Nicaragua thanks to the National Guard trained by the USA.⁷⁷ Domestically, the cities built under F. D. Roosevelt’s administration continued explicitly to exclude African Americans. Actually, “housing for defense workers, built or financed by the government during World War II, was deliberately subjected to stricter segregation than even that in place for housing in surrounding communities.” Moreover, “even the armed forces maintained strict segregation during the war.” What is more, despite the urging of sections of the Republican Party, “the president never pushed for an anti-lynching bill,”⁷⁸ such acts continued to be staged in the South as a spectacle for the masses of men, women, and children who enjoyed the sight of the most sadistic humiliation and torture inflicted on

76 Fussel (1991), pp. 151-4.

77 Smith (1995), p. 248.

78 Loewen (2006), p. 43.

a victim, a torture that was slow, prolonged as much as possible; in effect, unending. (*infra*, ch. 8, § 4).

Finally, in January 1941, after F. D. Roosevelt championed the United States as the country that has continually and peacefully evolved “without the concentration camp,”⁷⁹ immediately following the outbreak of war he resorted to that same institutions by sovereignly and collectively depriving the Japanese American community of freedom, without distinction of age or sex.

Nowadays it is almost a truism to compare Stalin and Hitler, but it may be interesting to read the balance sheet of the strategic bombing of Germany that, starting particularly with the firestorm that devoured Dresden and its inhabitants, a German author writes:

The corpses' fate corresponded to the killing procedure. The victims of extermination do not have an individual grave or an individual death, because their right to live is not recognized [...], the death one thousand children under ten years of age is not punishment. Bomber Harris [director of the air campaign on German cities] does not attribute them any guilt. Churchill merely claimed that they could not assert any rights from him. Maybe in World War I they would have had such rights, but not by World War II. Hitler, Churchill, and Roosevelt took their rights away.⁸⁰

The juxtaposition of these three personalities is certainly a forceful polemic, which seems to reproduce a widespread state of mind in the Germany of the immediate post-war period, in a Germany destroyed, isolated by the ban on fraternization and driven to the threshold of starvation by the liberal West. A conversation was reported from the American Zone that took place between two exasperated German citizens:

Yes, Hitler was bad, our war was wrong, but now they are doing the same wrong to us, they are all the same, there is no difference, they want to enslave Germany in exactly the same way as Hitler wanted to enslave the Poles, now we are the Jews, the “inferior race.”⁸¹

If the first of the two texts cited above proceeds to a partial juxtaposition of Hitler, Churchill and F. D. Roosevelt, the second goes as far as their total assimilation into one another. Today's dominant ideology instead equates Stalin with Hitler, but in doing so it is just as cursory as the two German citizens exasperated by hunger and

79 In Hofstadter (1982), vol. 3, p. 391.

80 Friedrich (2004), p. 381.

81 MacDonogh (2007), p. 365.

humiliation: “there is no difference”!

TRAGIC CONFLICTS AND MORAL DILEMMAS

Even if one wants to concentrate on the strictly moral dimension, the comparison between the protagonists of the great anti-fascist alliance is certainly not without its contrasts. But how then to explain today’s Manichean opposition? Let us return to the centuries-old process behind the catastrophe that exploded with the collapse of the tsarist autocracy. Unfortunately, while accepted at a time of historical reconstruction, the prospect of the long term vanishes as if by magic when one moves on to the formulation of moral judgment: everything is reduced to the demonization of the period that began with October 1917 and of Stalin in particular. Do they bear no responsibility those who for so long supported a regime whose social relations were so violent and so violently dehumanizing that they aroused in personalities so different from one another (Maistre, Marx, Witte) the foreboding of catastrophe? Have they nothing to reproach themselves with, those who unleashed the First World War and who in the West, in order to force Russia to participate in it to the end, did not hesitate to arm and support even the most ferocious reactionary bands? If, as one of the authors of *The Black Book of Communism* argues, “Stalinism” began to take shape in 1914, why are those in the dock of the accused not those responsible for the carnage, but only those who tried to prevent it or hasten its finish?

At least as far as the genesis and development of the Second World War, the problematic character of the moral judgment to be made on Western and liberal statesmen has not escaped the notice of the most alert authors. We have seen two Canadian historians attribute to the British protagonists of the policy of *appeasement* and indeed eastward diversion of Nazi expansionism co-responsibility “for the tragedy of World War II, including the Holocaust.”

Then there is the problem of how the liberal West conducted the war, once it broke out. Of course, here again the dominant ideology gets off lightly. A successful historian and journalist, whose articles are also hosted in the *New York Times*, has so little doubt “about the wisdom or morality” of using the atomic bomb against Japan that “to decline to use the super-bomb would have been illogical, indeed irresponsible.” Certainly, there was a massacre of the innocent civil-

ian population, but “those who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the victims not so much of Anglo-American technology as of a paralyzed system of government made possible by an evil ideology which had expelled not only absolute moral values but reason itself.”⁸² These firm certainties rest on a very simple assumption: the responsibility for a horrible action is not necessarily to be attributed to the material author of that action. A similar argument has long been made by the leadership of the USSR. The horror that took place at crucial moments in the country’s history was obviously acknowledged, but the responsibility for this was attributed to “imperialist encirclement” and the aggressive policy of the great capitalist powers. It must be noted, however, that the journalist-historian hosted and paid homage to in the most authoritative media outlets applies the criterion he enunciates only to the liberal and Anglo-Saxon West. However, to make a criterion valid only for oneself and one’s own side is the very definition of dogmatism on the theoretical level and hypocrisy on the moral level.

Fortunately, on Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki less reductive voices can be heard. A distinguished U.S. philosopher, Michael Walzer, observes that, by resorting to the atomic bomb to “kill and terrorize civilians,” without even attempting real negotiations with the Japanese, the already “victorious” Americans were committing “a double crime.” Walzer came to a similar conclusion in regard to the destruction of Dresden and other German and Japanese cities, carried out “when the war was virtually won.”⁸³ In a different way the problem arose in the years in which the world seemed to be witnessing the triumph of the Third Reich, when Great Britain began its campaign of strategic bombing which in Germany systematically and mercilessly struck the civilian population. It was a tragic moment, and the British rulers were faced with a terrible moral dilemma that can be formulated as follows:

Can soldiers and statesmen override the rights of innocent people for the sake of their own political community? I am inclined to answer this question affirmatively, though not without hesitation and worry. What choice do they have? They might sacrifice themselves to uphold the moral law, but they cannot sacrifice their countrymen. Faced with an inescapable horror, their options are exhausted, they will do what they must to save their own people.⁸⁴

82 Johnson (1991), pp. 425 and 427.

83 Walzer (1990), pp. 350 and 342.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 332.

The danger of the Third Reich's triumph, of "evil personified in the world," demands a "supreme emergency," a "state of necessity"; well, it must be recognized that "necessity knows no rules." Certainly, bombings aimed at killing and terrorizing the civilian population of the enemy country are a crime, and yet: "I dare to say that our history will be nullified, and our future condemned, unless I accept the burdens of criminality here and now." The young Lukács argued similarly when, driven by his horror at the carnage of the First World War, he made his revolutionary choice. In affirming the inescapability of "guilt" and in appealing to "seriousness," "conscience," and a "sense of moral responsibility," he exclaimed with Hebbel: "Even if God had placed sin between me and the deed enjoined upon me—who am I to be able to escape it?"⁸⁵ Presumably the Hungarian philosopher faced the years of Stalinist terror with this same frame of mind later, as the threat of the Third Reich loomed ever larger.

We can now turn our gaze to the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that the thesis formulated at the time by Toynbee, that what made Stalingrad possible was the path taken by the Stalinist USSR "from 1928 to 1941,"⁸⁶ is now confirmed by quite a few historians and scholars of military strategy. It is quite likely that without the abandonment of the NEP, the collectivization of agriculture (with the stabilization of the flow of food resources from the countryside to the city and to the front) and industrialization in forced stages (with the development of the war industry and the emergence of new industrial centers in the eastern regions, at a safe distance from the invading army), it would have been impossible to counter Hitler's aggression victoriously: "Soviet Russia's unequaled and uncontested contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany was closely bound up with Stalin's stubborn Second Revolution."⁸⁷ Indeed, judging from Churchill, even the trial of Tukhachevsky and the Great Terror as a whole can be considered to have played a positive and very relevant role in the defeat of Operation Barbarossa. Should we then justify the concentrationary universe that made it possible to avoid "an inescapable horror" for the Soviet people and all humanity?

Walzer rightly places strict restrictions on his principle. It can only be considered valid if, in addition to being "unusual and horri-

85 Ibid., pp. 333 and 340; Lukács (1967), pp. 6-11.

86 Toynbee (1992), p. 19.

87 Mayer (2000), p. 607; see also Tucker (1990), pp. 50 and 98; Bullock (1992), pp. 279-80; Schneider (1994).

fyng,” the danger is also “imminent.”⁸⁸ It could be said that at least the second requirement was absent in the Soviet Union. Stalin initiated the forced collectivization of agriculture and industrialization in forced stages—which ended up provoking a horrific expansion of the concentrationary universe—when the danger of war was still remote, and Hitler had not even come to power. It could be counter-argued, however, that Great Britain, too, promoted the plan to build an air fleet suitable for future strategic bombing at least two decades before the “supreme emergency” broke out. On the contrary, this plan had begun to take shape during the First World War and had therefore been inspired by a competition for hegemony, which had been going on at least since the end of the nineteenth century.

Quite different was the picture presented by the country that had emerged from the October Revolution. Widespread in Europe, the analysis made by General Foch among others shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (“This is not peace; it is an Armistice for twenty years”)⁸⁹ was well known to Stalin, who felt the urgency of the task of remedying the backwardness revealed by Russia in the course of the first world conflict. As far as the Eastern Front was concerned, this conflict had been repeatedly read by Wilhelm II as a racial war in which the very “existence” of the warring peoples, “whether the Germanic race is to be or not to be in Europe,” was at stake. It was a clash that ruled out any reconciliation or mutual recognition. Peace “is not at all possible between Slavs and Germans.” Beginning above all with Brest-Litovsk, voices had emerged in the Wilhelminian Reich that looked eastward for a solution to the problem of living-space and that envisaged an agreement with England in order to bring about the dismemberment of Russia and “to create the conditions for the world position of Germany with the German people as a grand continental power.”⁹⁰ A few years later, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler enunciated in no uncertain terms his program of building a continental German Empire to be built primarily on the ruins of the Soviet Union. It is not difficult to identify the line leading from Brest-Litovsk to Operation Barbarossa, and this sufficiently explains Stalin’s anxieties. In any case, the category of imminent danger was far from unambiguous. There was no determinate temporal magnitude to measure it. Imminent was a danger which, in order to be dealt with adequately,

88 Walzer (1990), pp. 330-1.

89 In Kissinger (1994), p. 250.

90 Fischer (1965), pp. 33, 743-5 and 803.

allowed no delay. If, then, in addition to the temporal sense, we understand “imminence” in a spatial sense, it was clearly the Soviet Union that was exposed to a more “imminent” danger. In the end, while the systematic killing of the civilian population by aerial bombardment *is a crime in itself*, the collectivization of agriculture and the industrialization in forced stages lead to a series of crimes.

Dogmatism and hypocrisy would be shown by those who would question the moral dilemmas only of Anglo-Saxon statesmen. On the other hand, even if we affirm with Walzer that in the face of “supreme emergency” a statesman must know how to take on “the burden of crime here and now,” it is difficult to move from the general to the particular.

When we read of the atrocious experiences suffered by individual prisoners in the Gulag, overwhelmed by a horror of whose origins and reasons they cannot even fathom, we are led to exclaim with Petrarch: “*Povera et nuda vai filosofia*” [Poor and naked you go, Philosophy] (*Rime*, VII, 10).⁹¹ But a similar consideration applies to the victims of strategic bombing. Can the “supreme emergency” really justify what the chronicles reported?

The first series of bombs fell at around 9 a.m. The streets had been filled with lines of shoppers, and seven hundred people were wiped out, almost exclusively women and children. Fighter-bombers pursued and fired on the people fleeing eastward into the forests.

And in other places: “fighter-bombers started firing their machine guns on random pedestrians, bicyclists, train passengers, and farmers in their fields.” “The funerals took place under strafing fire. Since there was a shortage of coffins, cloth was used.” “The bombs penetrated the apartment buildings and got caught in the ceilings between the stories. For days on end, they continued to explode day and night with a deafening bang, toppling walls and killing residents in their sleep.” “People had to flee through the flames and hurried to their deaths; it even happened that they took their own lives or pushed each other into the flames.”⁹²

Criminal actions carried out at the moment when the defeat of the Third Reich is already evident, are they justifiable while supreme

91 **Ed. Note:** Typically cited as a reminder of philosophy’s shortcomings and limitations, the quote refers to the solitude and forsakenness of philosophical contemplation in Petrarch’s original poem.

92 Friedrich (2004), pp. 129-30, 135, 292 and 297.

emergency looms? The difficulty of moving from the general to the particular becomes apparent.

THE SOVIET KATYN, AND THE AMERICAN AND SOUTH KOREAN “KATYN”

In contrast to the collectivization of agriculture and industrialization in forced stages, the massacre of Polish officers, decided by the Soviet leadership and carried out in Katyn in March-April 1940, was a crime in itself. The weight of the challenge with Finland was still being felt. After a vain attempt to proceed with a consensual exchange of territories, undertaken by Stalin in order to give a minimum of territorial depth to the defense of Leningrad (the city that was then the protagonist of an epic resistance to Nazi aggression), the war now risked spreading and becoming more widespread. In such an eventuality, how would the Polish officers captured by the USSR react after the break-up of Poland? Moscow tried in vain to persuade them to abandon their anti-Soviet positions, a legacy of the conflict that had begun with the collapse of the tsarist Empire and was thus tending to take on the brutal characteristics of a civil war. The situation had become very difficult. There was a danger that the USSR as such would be engulfed in war, and there was no lack of Western circles thinking of an overthrow of the Stalinist regime (*supra*, ch. 2, § 9). It was this “serious security problem” that precipitated the “horrendous decision,” for which Stalin must later have “bitterly regretted the subsequent embarrassment and complications.”⁹³ That is, even in the case of the Katyn executions, the moral dilemmas to which Walzer draws attention are not absent. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to invoke the “supreme emergency” in this case as well, further stretching a criterion that already in itself runs the risk of being too loose.

But, even if it is unjustifiable, the crime we are now dealing with does not refer to the peculiar characteristics of Stalin’s personality or of the regime he directed. One should recall the crime of which the American General Patton was guilty when, landing in Sicily, he ordered the killing of the Italian soldiers who surrendered after some tough resistance.⁹⁴ Even if here we are dealing with a smaller infamy, it must be kept in mind that it is not a real concern for the security of the country that provoked it, but rather the spirit of revenge or

93 Roberts (2006), pp. 47 and 170-1.

94 Di Feo (2004); Di Feo (2005).

perhaps even racial contempt. That is to say, in this case it is a crime for abject motives.

And yet, if we are to seek a real analogy with Katyn, we must refer to other tragedies and other horrors. Ten years after the Soviet Katyn, what we might define as the U.S.-South Korean “Katyn” took place. The Korean War was underway. From the savagely bombarded North, a mass of refugees headed to the South. How were they received? “The U.S. military had a policy of shooting approaching civilians in South Korea.” The victims were “mostly women and children,” but it was feared that North Korean infiltrators were among them. However, investigating one of perhaps the most well-documented cases (the killings taking place at No Gun Ri), “no evidence emerged of enemy infiltrators.”⁹⁵ We are here in the presence not of the orders of a single, albeit brilliant and authoritative general or marshal, as Patton was, but of the policy sanctioned by the highest U.S. military (and political) leadership. And this circumstance makes one think of Katyn, all the more so because in both cases security was at stake.

To guarantee it, the U.S. and its allies did not just kill the refugees. They also considered it necessary to liquidate any potential fifth column. For example, “in the town of Taejon in July 1950, 1,700 Koreans, who were accused of being communists, were ordered by the police to dig their own graves, after which they were shot.” As a witness recounted:

One Sunday morning, at dawn, in the apparently deserted town of Chochiwon, I saw a procession of men and women, bound to each other with their hands behind their backs, beaten and clubbed, as they made their way from the police station to the trucks where they were being loaded. They were then put to the firing squad and left unburied a mile or two further away.⁹⁶

This was a large-scale operation:

In a cobalt mine near Daegu, in the south of the country, investigators have so far collected the remains of 240 people. That is only a fraction of the estimated 3,500 prison inmates and Communist suspects believed to have been whisked from homes and prison cells, then executed and thrown into the mine shaft between July and September 1950.

Sometimes “women and children” were also the victims of “summary executions.”⁹⁷ It would appear that in such cases not even the

95 Hanley, Mendoza (2007).

96 Warner (2000).

97 Sang-Hun Choe (2007).

suspected communist's family was spared. The obsession with security affects not only the rear, but also the newly conquered or reconquered cities. Here is what happens in one of them: "They told us to light our cigarettes. Then they began shooting their rifles and machine guns. After a while, an officer called out, 'Any of you who are still alive can stand up and go home now.' Those who did were shot again."

How many victims in total of the two practices, the killing of refugees and the liquidation of those suspected of communism? In fact, the extent of "what the victim's families call Korea's killing fields" is not yet fully measured. A provisional tally can be made for now. "Investigators have so far identified 1,222 probable cases of mass killings [...]. The cases include 215 incidents in which survivors say American planes and ground troops killed unarmed refugees."⁹⁸

The US and South Korean "Katyn" does not seem to be of smaller proportions than the Soviet one, and, in any case, it shows an extra degree of recklessness (for a war conducted thousands of kilometers from their own country the Washington leaders could not have invoked even the shadow of a "supreme emergency"). But here it is not a question of establishing a hierarchy between two crimes that are both unjustifiable, it is instead a question of noting the inadequacy of the moral Manichean approach to understanding Stalin and the country he led.

THE INEVITABILITY AND COMPLEXITY OF MORAL JUDGMENT

While in a sense it is inevitable, moral judgment would be superficial and hypocritical if it were formulated by abstraction from the historical context. Hence its complexity and problems. At the same time, it is necessary to bear in mind and unravel the interweaving of objective circumstances and subjective responsibilities and, as far as the latter are concerned, it is necessary to distinguish between the responsibilities of a ruling group as a whole and those of individuals. As far as the ruling group of Soviet Russia is concerned, it came to power at a time when—in the words of a Christian witness, sympathetic to the changes brought about by October 1917—"pity has been killed by the omnipresence of death,"⁹⁹ and it was forced

98 Ibid.

99 Thus Pierre Pascal, reported in Furet (1995), p. 129.

to face a very prolonged state of exception, in a situation characterized—to quote the analysis of one of the authors of *The Black Book of Communism*—by an “unprecedented brutalization,” generalized and “without any possible terms of comparison with that known to Western societies.” That is to say, if the protagonists of the twentieth century were forced to deal with the devastating conflicts and moral dilemmas that characterized the Second Thirty Years’ War, Stalin also had to contend with the conflicts and moral dilemmas peculiar to Russian history and the Second Time of Troubles. One could say that the shadow of the “supreme emergency” hung over the thirty years during which he wielded power.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that it was not only the objective conditions that seriously hindered or made impossible the passage from state of exception to condition of normality. Messianism had also contributed to this, admittedly powerfully stimulated by the horror of the First World War and yet intrinsic to a vision that expects the disappearance of the market, of money, of the state, of the legal norms. Disappointment or indignation at the failure of all this to come to pass further stimulated conflict, and a conflict which was not possible to regulate through purely “formal” juridical norms, insofar as they are themselves destined to disappear. The result was an additional violence that cannot be justified by referring to the state of exception or to “supreme emergency.” In this sense, moral judgment coincides with political judgment.

This also applies to the liberal West. With regard to the director of strategic bombing against Germany, it was observed:

As a young pilot, Harris had practiced civilian bombing against rebelling Indians. His shock psychology was also originally tested as a cultural shock. Primitive tribes in thatched huts who were confronted with the weapons arsenal of the industrial empire threw themselves down, dazzled.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, it was above all Churchill who promoted this type of war, who on the one hand suggested hitting the “recalcitrant natives” in Iraq with bombardments based on “gas bombs and above all mustard gas,” and on the other hand compared Germans to “evil Huns.” We also know of the weight of racial ideology in the U.S. war against Japan (*supra*, ch. 6, § 4), which not by chance is subsequently subjected to atomic bombing. Here again emerges a supplement of violence that cannot be justified by “supreme emergency,” but that

100 Friedrich (2004), p. 287.

refers instead to the colonial ideology shared by the liberal West and Germany. If the Third Reich compares the “natives” of Eastern Europe to slaughtered Native Americans and enslaved Blacks, England and the United States end up treating Germans and Japanese as colonial peoples who must be brought back to obedience.

STALIN, PETER THE GREAT, AND THE “NEW LINCOLN”

With reference in particular to the role he played in the Second Time of Troubles, not a few scholars, taking up a motif that we have seen already present in Churchill, have compared Stalin to Peter the Great.¹⁰¹ Even the objection raised in this regard (“Peter, unlike Stalin, looked to the West and wanted to open his State to it”¹⁰²) does not seem to me persuasive. The condemnation of the “Asiatic regulations,” the “barbarian, Asiatic policies,” and the “Asiatic tactics” for which the government and bourgeoisie of tsarist Russia are responsible is an essential moment for Stalin’s revolutionary agitation.¹⁰³ At least until October 1917, he is in no doubt that his country is at every level more backward than Western democracies, where bloody anti-Jewish pogroms, raging in a “semi-Asian country” (*supra*, ch. 5, § 9), do not take place. After gaining power, Stalin not only insisted on the need to adopt Western technology, but also declared that if they were to truly live up to the “Leninist principles,” Bolshevik cadres must be able to interweave “Russian revolutionary impulse” with “the spirit of American practicality.” In 1932, again referring to the United States, he expressed appreciation for “traditions in industry and productive practice.” They “have an element of democratism about them.”¹⁰⁴

The reference to Peter the Great in order to explain the history of Soviet Russia seems all the more persuasive because of the fact that Lenin (already in May 1918) and above all Stalin explicitly referred to him (again in May 1918) and at times Stalin seemed to take the figure

101 In particular, Tucker (1990), pp. 13-24.

102 Graziosi (2007), p. 24.

103 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 2, pp. 107-8 and 114-5 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 2, pp. 134, 142 and 144).

104 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 6, pp. 164-5 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 95); Stalin (1971-73), vol. 13, pp. 100-2.

of the great tsar as a model.¹⁰⁵ Trotsky himself, while denouncing the “betrayal” of the revolution, wrote: “In relation to many spheres and peoples, the Soviet [Stalin’s] power is to a considerable extent carrying out the historic task fulfilled by Peter I and his colleagues in relation to Old Muscovy, only on a larger scale and at a swifter tempo.”¹⁰⁶

It is also interesting to note that, at the conclusion of his trip to the Soviet Union in 1927, as great a philosopher as Benjamin referred with sympathetic interest to the thesis of some “literati [...] who see in Bolshevism the crowning achievement of Peter the Great.”¹⁰⁷ Finally, one could go backwards and recall a prediction of Marx’s. After hinting at the upheavals of unprecedented violence that would be caused by the age-old contradictions of Tsarist Russia, he concluded that “the Russian 1793 [...] will be the second turning point in Russian history, and finally place real and general civilization in the place of the false and deceptive civilization introduced by Peter the Great.”¹⁰⁸

And, however, while it may serve partially to illuminate the relationship with the history of Russia and with the Second Time of Troubles, the comparison in question leaves in the shadows the Second Thirty Years’ War and the extraordinary influence exerted by Stalin at the global level. His 1924 condemnation of the “scandalous disparity” between nations, theorized and imposed by imperialism, and his exhortation to tear down “the wall between whites and blacks,” peoples considered “civilized” and peoples excluded from this dignity (*supra*, ch. 5, § 7); the inauguration of a “profoundly internationalistic” Constitution—as Stalin stressed in presenting the project—and based on “the proposition that all nations and races have equal rights,” regardless of “skin color,” language, and degree of economic and military development¹⁰⁹ all this could not fail to arouse a profound response not only in the colonies but also in the colonized peoples located in the very heart of the West.

In the US south, where the white supremacy regime was still raging, a new climate was spreading. The Soviet Union and Stalin were looked upon with hope as the “new Lincoln,” the Lincoln who would have put an end, this time in a concrete and definitive way, to the enslavement of Blacks, to the oppression, degradation, humiliation,

105 Lenin (1955-70), vol. 27, p. 309; Stalin (1971-73), vol. 11, p. 221.

106 Trotsky (1988), p. 863 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 156-7).

107 Benjamin (2007), p. 45.

108 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 12, p. 682.

109 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, p. 69 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 624-5).

violence and lynchings that they continued to suffer.¹¹⁰

As it advanced toward autocracy, Stalin's USSR powerfully influenced the struggle of African Americans (and colonized peoples) against racist despotism. In the US south, a new and worrying phenomenon was being witnessed from the point of view of the ruling caste: it is the growing "impudence" of young Blacks. These, thanks to the communists, were in fact beginning to receive what the powers that be had stubbornly denied them: a culture that goes far beyond the elementary education traditionally given to those destined to provide semi-servile work in the service of the master race. Now, on the other hand, in schools organized by the Communist Party in the North or in Moscow schools, in Stalin's USSR, Black citizens were busy studying economics, politics, world history. They questioned these disciplines so as to understand the reasons for the harsh fate reserved for them in a country which also claims to be the champion of freedom. A profound change took place in those who attend these schools. The "impudence" reproached to them by the white supremacy regime was in reality the self-esteem that had hitherto been hindered and trampled upon. A Black woman delegate to the International Congress of Women against War and Fascism, held in Paris in 1934, was extraordinarily impressed by the relationships of equality and fraternity, despite the differences of language and race, that were established among the participants in that initiative promoted by the Communists. "It was heaven on earth." Those who came to Moscow—observed a contemporary American historian—"experienced a sense of freedom that was unheard of in the South." A Black man could fall in love with a white Soviet woman and marry her, even though, on his return home, he could not take her with him, knowing full well the fate that awaited those guilty of *miscegenation* and racial bastardization.¹¹¹

The hopes African Americans placed in the "new Lincoln" were not as naïve as they might seem. Let us reflect on the timing and manner that characterized the end of the white supremacist regime. In December 1952, the U.S. Secretary of Justice sent an eloquent letter to the Supreme Court, which was busy debating the question of integration in public schools: "Racial discrimination furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills, and it raises doubt even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic

110 Kelley (1990), p. 100.

111 Ibid., pp. 94-6.

faith.” Washington—the American historian who reconstructs the affair observes—was in danger of alienating the “colored races” not only in the East and in the Third World but in the very heart of the United States. Here, too, communist propaganda was considerably successful in its attempt to win Blacks to the “revolutionary cause,” causing their “faith in the American institutions” to collapse.¹¹² There is no doubt: concern about the challenge objectively represented by the USSR and the influence it exerted on colonized peoples played an essential role in this affair.

It is not just because of the impulse somehow imprinted on the process of emancipation of African Americans that Stalin indirectly influenced the configuration of democracy itself in the West. Stalin, in his speech introducing the draft of the new Constitution, condemned en bloc the three great discriminations that have characterized the history of the liberal West: “It is not the census, nor national origin, nor sex” that should determine political and social standing, but only the “personal ability and personal labor [...] of every citizen in society.”¹¹³ At the moment that he had thus expressed himself, the three great discriminations were still present in various forms and to various degrees in this or that country of the liberal West. Finally, in pronouncing himself in favor of overcoming the three great discriminations, Stalin also declared that the new Constitution was called upon to guarantee “the right to work, the right to rest, the right to education” and to ensure “better material and cultural conditions,” all within the framework of the realization of “socialist democracy.”¹¹⁴ It is the theorization of “social and economic rights” that, according to Hayek, represented the ruinous legacy of “the Marxist Russian Revolution” and profoundly influenced the claim for the welfare state in the West.¹¹⁵

Let us return to Russia. The reader will have noticed that, when I speak of “Stalinism” I use quotation marks. For today’s followers of Trotsky the expression is used in relation to the most diverse political realities, for example, to label the ruling group of post-Maoist China. But even if one wants to refer exclusively to the USSR, the category of “Stalinism” is not persuasive. It seems to presuppose a homogeneous set of doctrines and behavior that does not exist. In the three decades

112 In Woodward (1963), pp. 131-4.

113 Stalin (1971-73), vol. 14, pp. 69-70 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 625).

114 *Ibid.*, pp. 74 and 89 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 629 and 643).

115 Hayek (1986), p. 310.

in which he was in power, we see Stalin struggling to elaborate and put into practice a government program, taking note of the vanishing prospect of the global triumph of the socialist revolution, and disentangling himself between utopia (which is the legacy on the one hand of Marx's theory, and on the other hand of the messianic expectation of a totally new world aroused by the horror of the First World War) and the state of exception (which in Russia assumed an exceptional duration and acuity because of the convergence of two gigantic crises, the Second Time of Troubles and the Second Thirty Years' War). Given his desire not to question the monopoly of power exercised by the Communist Party, Stalin repeatedly sought to move from the state of exception to a condition of relative normality, with the realization of a "Soviet democracy," a "Socialist democratism" and a socialism "without dictatorship of the proletariat." But these attempts failed. It is significant how, immediately after Stalin's death, the problem of succession is "settled." The liquidation of Beria is a sort of mafia-style settling of accounts, a private violence making no reference whatsoever either to the state's legal framework or to party statute.

The comparison between Stalin and Peter the Great appears then in its problematic nature. On closer inspection, the Second Time of Troubles does not even end with the advent of autocracy. The advent of autocracy coincided with the opening of a new and prolonged state of exception, which saw the outbreak first of a new and frightening world conflict and then of a Cold War that could turn at any moment into a nuclear apocalypse. It could be said that the Second Time of Troubles actually ended with the collapse of the USSR. As in the case of the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks were unable to adapt to the disappearance or fading away of the state of exception and thus ended up appearing obsolete and superfluous to the majority of the population. After having achieved the overcoming of the "crisis of the whole Russian nation," the Bolsheviks were ultimately overwhelmed by the advent of that relative normality, which had also been the result of their action.

It is at the international level, however, that the influence of the October Revolution and of the man who ran Soviet Russia for three decades proved most solid. One can be ironic about the magniloquence of a Constitution that was never actualized, but it must be borne in mind that even purely abstract declarations of principle have historical efficacy. One can recoil in horror from a context that witnesses democracy (with the collapse of racist and colonial

despotism and of the three great discriminations) and even more so social democracy advancing in the wake of a challenge coming from a dictatorial and terror-prone regime; but to indulge in such reaction is ultimately to shy away from the complexity of historical process. Those who would prefer to have a simpler picture before them would do well to reflect on an observation by Marx; “It is the bad side that produces the movement that makes history.”¹¹⁶

116 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 4, p. 140.

THE IMAGE OF STALIN BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY

THE VARIOUS HISTORICAL SOURCES OF TODAY'S IMAGE OF STALIN

And, nevertheless, today's historiography finds it difficult to distance itself from the image of Stalin as a "huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster" who, moreover, is so lacking in intellectual and political capacity as to be laughable. Even for a myth there needs to be a search for historical origins. It is appropriate to start from the scholar (Deutscher) to whom I have just referred, who in another circumstance and in a different period of time observed: "Unlike the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks did not execute their Girondists," that is, the Mensheviks, who were "authorized" and even "encouraged, to leave Russia and establish their political center abroad."¹ From here there developed a strong campaign against the country that had been first headed by Lenin and then, for a much longer period of time, by Stalin. Deutscher thus continued:

It is certain that Stalin did ponder over the horrifying French precedent and that for some years this deterred him from resorting to the most drastic means of repression. Stalin expressed himself thus more than once [...]. In 1929 he made up his mind to exile Trotsky from Russia. It was still inconceivable that Trotsky should be imprisoned, let alone put before a firing squad.²

With the arrival of the leader of the opposition in Istanbul a new and more committed political center had formed, this time dedicated exclusively to the unmasking and denunciation of every aspect of Stalin's personality and activity. In this same context one can place defectors like General Orlov who, having landed in the West, devoted

1 Deutscher (1969), p. 498 and Deutscher (1972c), p. 216.

2 Deutscher (1969), pp. 498-9.

himself to the revelations of the “secrets of the Kremlin,” earning an “enormous honorarium” and, presumably, an honorarium all the greater the more sensational the secrets brought to light. Eagerly accepted in the Soviet Union itself from the Gorbachev period onwards and still today “one of the most important sources” of Western Sovietology, these revelations are nevertheless studded with “lies.”³

Obviously, one must not lose sight of the fact that the center of anti-Stalinist agitation is precisely in the West. Its motives had been made clear in advance by Lloyd George, who had observed in the summer of 1919 that a united Russia, Bolshevik or not, constituted a source of danger to the British Empire regardless.⁴ That is, a wide range of public opinion (first British and then American) branded in Stalin the embodiment of a twofold threat, that represented by communist agitation in the capitalist metropolis and especially in the colonies, and that represented by a great power, now all the more dangerous and all the more expansionistic, due to the fact that it inspired and directed a political movement present in every corner of the world.

Which of the different political centers was the most relentless? Sometimes one has the impression of witnessing a game of catch-up. Immediately after the pact of non-aggression between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, Trotsky launched a sort of triumphal cry: it is now evident even to “the Kremlin’s professional apologists” and Stalin’s “‘pro-Soviet’ simpletons of any stripe,” those who had deluded themselves that they could count on Moscow’s support to contain Nazi Germany’s expansionism. It was Neville Chamberlain who was particularly targeted. Yes, the British prime minister, already at this time being accused by Churchill for the policy of *appeasement* pursued relative to Hitler, was bitterly criticized by Trotsky for having harbored illusions about... Stalin! “Despite all his dislike of the Soviet regime,” the British Conservative leader had “tried with all his might to gain an alliance with Stalin”: a colossal proof of naivety! He, Trotsky, since the advent of the Third Reich, had repeatedly made it clear that, in spite of all the talk about the anti-fascist popular fronts, “the fundamental aim of Stalin’s foreign policy was to reach of an agreement with Hitler.” Now everyone was forced to take note that the Kremlin dictator was “Hitler’s butler.”⁵

3 Khlevniuk (1998), pp. 23-7.

4 White (1980), p. 82.

5 Trotsky (1988), pp. 1256-9.

Put in serious difficulties by the Soviet Union's epic resistance against the Third Reich, this game of brinkmanship resumed with force after the XXth CPSU Congress and the *Secret Speech*. Khrushchev accused Stalin of having deviated from Lenin? In reality—as Orlov immediately raised the tone by publishing in *Life* an article that already in its title announced a “sensational secret”—the Soviet Union had been run for three decades by an agent of the tsarist secret police, obviously ready to do anything to liquidate the wretches who had become aware of his unmentionable past. A Russian scholar (Rogowin), an ardent follower of Trotsky, still seems to adhere to this revelation.⁶

The brinkmanship game can take the most peculiar forms. In 1965, Deutscher reflected on the evolution of the Menshevik leader Dan who, dazzled patriotically by the image of a Russia “emerging triumphantly from Armageddon, with the Third Reich prostrate at its feet,” had ended up recognizing the historical reasons of the October Revolution but also, unfortunately, of “Stalinism, with all its ideological prevarication and violence.” There is only one mitigating factor for this indulgence for a “degenerate” and “depraved” Bolshevism: the fact is that “when Dan was writing some of these pages, the wartime tide of pro-Stalinism ran high in Allied countries, especially in the United States!”⁷ Fortunately, the information coming precisely from the capital of the Soviet Union and from within the Communist Party of that country was enough to refute and ridicule once and for all the naive and uninformed, who had somehow taken the bait of Moscow's propaganda.

Only by virtue of this convergence of differing interests can one explain the paradox of a historiography that, while it did not tire of denouncing the farcical nature of the trials held by Stalin in Moscow, calmly took as gold the trial on Stalin carried out in different ways and for different objectives first by Trotsky and then by Khrushchev!

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THE IMAGE OF STALIN

So widespread is the caricature of the “huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster” in our times that the contradictory history that preceded the establishment of such an image has been forgotten. We have seen the accolades paid to Stalin in his time by distinguished

6 Khlevniuk (1998), pp. 25-6; Rogowin (1998), pp. 531 ff.

7 Deutscher (1972c), pp. 221-2.

statesmen, diplomats and intellectuals. Even the pages of his thirty years of rule now considered simply monstrous were read quite differently in the past.

In our day it is commonplace to identify the revolution from above that radically changed the face of agriculture in the Soviet Union as the exclusive product of ideological fury. But in 1944, while highlighting the terrible human costs, De Gasperi also expressed a fundamentally positive judgment on the “great economic enterprise” of the collectivization of the countryside and industrialization, made necessary by the danger of war and by the “threat revealed by *Mein Kampf*.”⁸

In the present day very few dare to question the thesis that the bloody and large-scale repression Stalin enacted was solely and exclusively the product of his *libido dominandi* or paranoia. Between the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s Malaparte spoke calmly of the preparations for a coup d'état in Moscow and of Stalin's hesitation to strike (*supra*, ch. 2, § 7). An authoritative German press organ went further, commenting with irony on the naivety of the Kremlin dictator for “not having sent Trotsky and his clique into the Great Beyond.”⁹ About twenty years later, it was Churchill himself who indirectly endorsed at least the trials against Tukhachevsky and other military leaders (it had been a “merciless, but perhaps not needless, military and political purge” which had eliminated “its pro-German elements”) and, to some extent, even the Moscow trials as such (in the dock sat Soviet leaders who were “filled with jealousy of Stalin, who had ousted them.”)¹⁰ All the more significant is this stance of the English statesman, champion of the struggle to the bitter end against Hitler's Germany, because it is formulated in a polemic attacking Chamberlain, the protagonist of the policy of *appeasement*. More radical or more outspoken than Churchill was the American ambassador in the USSR, Joseph Davies, who “always insisted that there had been a genuine plot, that the trials were fairly conducted, and that the Soviet power was stronger as a result.”¹¹ Presumably in this vein, in Italy in 1944 De Gasperi also stressed that the reliability of the accusations against the anti-Stalin opposition was confirmed

8 De Gasperi (1956), p. 17.

9 In Broué (1991), p. 578.

10 Churchill (1963), pp. 320-1.

11 Taylor (1996), p. 159.

by “objective American information.”¹²

There was then a radical change, but the fragility and inconsistency of the image of Stalin delivered to us first by the Cold War and then by the *Secret Speech* began to emerge from the research of a growing number of scholars. In some respects, there is even a resounding reversal. Take the Great Terror. Along with the leading political figures already mentioned, it was a fervent admirer of Trotsky’s, that is, Deutscher, who in 1948 considered the Moscow trials more or less reliable. In his eyes, the Kirov assassination had by no means been a staged assassination by the regime. The long tradition in tsarist Russia that had “attacked autocracy with bombs and revolvers” and this had resumed its influence on the young communists: “Was not Lenin’s brother among the conspirators who attempted to kill Tsar Alexander III? The textbooks surrounded those martyrs and heroes with a romantic halo. And so the sacred shadows of the past seemed now to press bomb[s] and revolver[s] into the hands of some impatient anti-Stalinist *Komsomoltsy*.”¹³ “Ideas of revolutionary terrorism” had expanded to become “fairly widespread among the young” and had influenced Kirov’s murderer.¹⁴ Also in 1948, Deutscher recognized a certain “psychological truth” to the Moscow trials in general and a factual truth regarding the execution of Tukhachevsky in particular. Regarding the latter affair, if certain sources speak of Hitler’s intelligence services’ machinations, “numerous anti-Stalinist versions instead claim that the generals did indeed plan a *coup d’état*.”¹⁵ In either case, Stalin’s paranoia or *libido dominandi* had played no role.

It should be added that a few years later, without allowing himself to be impressed by the revelations of the *Secret Speech*, an American historian not devoid of sympathies for the anti-Stalinist opposition, which he defined as “the conscience of the revolution,” wrote: “The selectivity of Bukharin’s admissions and what is independently known of the affair make much of the trial evidence plausible, despite the suspicion which the nature of the trials evokes.”¹⁶

Nowadays it is the same scholars of Trotskyist orientation who

12 De Gasperi (1956), p. 17.

13 **Ed. Note:** The *Komsomoltsy* were members of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (known as the *Komsomol*). While officially separate, its members often went on to join the CPSU upon reaching an appropriate age.

14 Deutscher (1969), pp. 508 and 510.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 540 and 542.

16 Daniels (1970), p. 144.

draw attention to the civil war that broke out within the Soviet leadership and claim the merits of the opposition for having promoted by every means the overthrow of the Thermidorian regime imposed by the traitors of the revolution. It is significant that the shift also involved the camp of the followers of Trotsky, the man who in his time was perhaps more committed than any other to denouncing the Moscow trials as a pure and simple farce.

In relation to the leadership of the USSR on the eve of and in the course of the Second World War, Deutscher's personal evolution was particularly painful and significant. We are already aware of the very flattering picture he drew in 1948 of Stalin as a wartime leader (*supra*, intr., § 1). In 1956, writing under the immediate impression of the *Secret Speech*, Deutscher had no difficulty in lending faith to the "revelations" according to which in the days immediately following the unleashing of Operation Barbarossa Stalin had withdrawn, inert and "gloomy and sullen in his dacha," only to return to run the country and to conduct the war by "tak[ing] a globe and trac[ing] the front line on it" after yielding to the solicitations and entreaties of his collaborators. Deutscher's only criticism of Khrushchev and his circle was that they had not followed the recommendation made by Trotsky as early as 1927, namely of not having felt "the duty of party leaders to overthrow Stalin in order to wage war more efficiently and to a victorious conclusion!"¹⁷ Ten years later, returning to this subject, Deutscher wrote: "Nor do I take all of Khrushchev's 'revelations' at their face value: I do not accept, in particular, his assertion that Stalin's role in the Second World War [and the victory over the Third Reich] was virtually insignificant."¹⁸ It is hardly necessary to say that more recent historical research goes far beyond this partial and timid rethinking.

As for the oppression of nations thesis, we already know the radical and positive novelty of the *affirmative action* implemented in the USSR in favor of national minorities (*supra*, ch. 4 § 9). But now it is worth reading the balance recently traced by another American historian:

A new consensus is emerging that, far from being the 'nation killer' familiar from earlier Western and nationalist historiographies, the Soviet government undertook an ambitious, complex, and prolonged effort to build ethnically

17 Deutscher (1972b), pp. 19 and 32-3.

18 Deutscher (1969), p. 12 (this is the *Preface*, dated 11 October 1966, to the second edition of the biography of Stalin).

based nations within the context of a politically and economically unitary state. To aid in this 'springtime of Soviet nations,' the Soviet state gave the former Empire's peoples legal and political equality with Russians [...]. They also gave minority languages a privileged place in these new national territories, even if Soviet ethnographers needed to create an alphabet for local dialects because they had never taken a written form. These policies of promoting national cultural autonomy even extended to attempts at the linguistic assimilation of Russians; Soviet officials and managers were obligated to learn the language of the nations where they worked.¹⁹

A French scholar on Central Asia, Olivier Roy, warmly quoted in an essay published in *The New York Review of Books*, comes to the same conclusions, summarizing the current prospects of that area: solid, well-functioning states will be able to assert themselves if they treasure the Soviet "legacy" in an "intelligent way." "The Muscovite creators of nationality policy [...] codified languages (sometimes creating new alphabets for them), edified national parliaments national libraries, and instituted policies of *affirmative action* in favor of 'local cadre.'" Standing out among the protagonists of this enlightened policy was "first and foremost Stalin." How far we are from the thesis formulated by Arendt during the Cold War, according to which Stalin deliberately disorganized and disarticulated the "nationalities" in order to create conditions favorable to the triumph of totalitarianism! In the recognition given to the Soviet Union (and to Stalin) for the nationalities policy, an author, at the time leader of the anti-Soviet "dissidence," expressed himself in decidedly emphatic terms: "In the decades of Soviet power, for the solution of the national question, the positive elements have been so many that it is difficult to find a comparable example in the history of humanity."²⁰

On the whole, the caricatured portrait of Stalin drawn first by Trotsky and then by Khrushchev no longer enjoys much credit. From the research of eminent scholars unsuspected of any indulgence in the "cult of personality" emerges in the present day a portrait of a politician who rose and established himself at the USSR's summit primarily because of the fact that, in terms of understanding the workings of the Soviet system, he "far surpasses his fellow fighters";²¹ of a leader with "exceptional political talent" and one who was "enormously gifted";²² of a statesman who saves the Russian nation from

19 Payne (2001), p. 8.

20 Caryl (2002), p. 29; Arendt (1989a), p. 442; Zinoviev (1988), p. 101.

21 Khlevniuk (1998), p. 367.

22 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), pp. 369-71 (so N. Werth and R. H. McNeal,

the destruction and enslavement to which it is destined by the Third Reich, thanks not only to his shrewd military strategy but also to his “masterly” war speeches, at times veritable “pieces of bravura” which in tragic and decisive moments succeeded in stimulating national resistance,²³ of a personality not without qualities on the theoretical plane either, as demonstrated among other things by the “perspicacity” with which he treats the national question in his 1913 paper and the “positive effect” of his “contribution” on linguistics.²⁴

Of course, it is stressed at the same time and with good reason that this recognition is not an absolving moral judgment. And yet it now becomes clear that the *Secret Speech* is entirely unreliable. There is no detail in it that is not contested today. Take the account of Stalin’s alleged psychological collapse in the days immediately following the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. According to the analysis already seen by two Russian historians (certainly of anti-Stalinist orientation), this was an “episode” that was “a complete fabrication” (*supra*, ch. 1, § 2) and that—as a French historian reinforces—is in “complete contradiction” with the evidence and documents that have gradually emerged.²⁵ But it is not only an “episode,” however significant it may be. Even with regard to the so-called doctors’ plot “Khrushchev crudely and deliberately distorted the facts.”²⁶ Yes, he “took not a few liberties with the truth.”²⁷ The observation (made this time by the English historian often quoted here) about the “Stalin’s wartime leadership” is valuable in general: “to show the truth it is necessary to look beyond both Western Cold War polemics and the contingencies of de-Stalinization in the USSR.”²⁸

CONTRADICTORY MOTIVES BEHIND STALIN’S DEMONIZATION

For a long time in the West Arendt’s thesis has had unchallenged dominance and has been uncritically repeated, which thus demonstrates the irresistible attraction that, in spite of everything, is estab-

cited in the Editor’s *Afterword*.

23 Roberts (2006), pp. 94 and 109.

24 Graziosi (2007), p. 78; Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), p. 242.

25 Fontaine (2005), p. 60.

26 Medvedev, Medvedev (2006), p. 30.

27 Fontaine (2005), p. 61.

28 Roberts (2006), p. 374.

lished between communist “totalitarianism” and Nazi “totalitarianism”: “the only man for whom Hitler had ‘unqualified respect’ was ‘Stalin the genius.’” On the other hand, “we know since Khrushchev’s speech before the XXth Party Congress that Stalin trusted only one man and that was Hitler.” So much so that, despite all the warnings, to the very end “Stalin refused to believe that Hitler would violate the treaty.” To confirm this Arendt again cites the *Secret Speech* or, more precisely, “the text of Khrushchev’s speech released by the U.S. State Department.”²⁹ To this assertion, which rests on an immediately political argument and is certainly not afflicted by any concern for historical rigor, could be contrasted the well-documented analysis according to which in post-World War II Hungary and Eastern Europe Stalin “only trusted” Jewish cadre, who were in fact called upon to form the backbone of the new state apparatus (*supra*, ch. 5, § 10). As can be seen, the antithesis with respect to Hitler could not be sharper.

But let us dwell again on the fragility of the ideological motive dear to Arendt and to the dominant ideology. In recent times there has been a reversal of positions. For some years now, authoritative scholars and indefatigable anti-communist ideologues have insisted on portraying Stalin as an insatiable expansionist, ready to strike at the opportune moment against the very Germany with which he was bound by a non-aggression pact. In this connection they cite in particular Stalin’s speech to the military academy graduates and of which I quote here, for reasons of brevity, only the summary contained in Dimitrov’s diary: “Our policy of peace and security is at the same time a policy of preparation for war. There is no defense without offense. The army must be trained in the spirit of offensive action.”³⁰ It was on May 5, 1941, the very day on which Stalin assembles before him the highest offices of the Party and the State, evidently in anticipation of the head-on clash with the Third Reich. The impressive development of Soviet armaments had been promoted by Stalin in anticipation of an offensive war, from which Hitler sought to take cover.³¹ This thesis, nowadays incessantly stirred up by historical revisionism, can be easily refuted by an author who is also one of the leading exponents of this historiographical and ideological current. At the beginning of May 1941, General Antonescu, who had recently assumed power in Romania, informed his German allies that “facto-

29 Arendt (1989a), pp. 428-9 and note 14.

30 Dimitrov (2002), p. 310.

31 Hoffmann (1995).

ries around Moscow have been ordered to transfer their equipment into the country's interior."³² Conversely, the Nazis were frantically searching for a *casus belli*. The chief of espionage, Admiral Canaris, noted in his diary:

General Jodl disclosed to me that they are greatly worried about the Russians' soft and indulgent attitude toward us, and he added half in jest: [...] "If these chaps (meaning the Soviet Russians) keep on being so accommodating and take offense at nothing, then you will have to stage an incident to start the war."³³

Meanwhile, dislodging revisionist historians from their new war-horse, these testimonies make it unmistakably clear who the aggressor is. Secondly, they clarify that what unnerved the Third Reich was precisely the attitude Khrushchev reproached Stalin with.

The fact remains that the new accusations against Stalin immediately found consecration in the mass media which, in order to corroborate them further, did not hesitate to exhume the speech of August 19, 1939, commented with knowing indignation by a distinguished Slavic Studies expert: thus, while preparing to send the loyal Molotov to Berlin to conclude the non-aggression pact, Stalin had already worked out, with repugnant cynicism, a plan for the aggression and Sovietization at the appropriate time of the whole of Europe, including Germany.³⁴ In fact, this is a gross historical fallacy (*supra*, ch. 1, § 3). But this is not the most important point. The revelation of Stalin's new infamy could have been the occasion to discuss again the thesis developed by Arendt, thanks also to the *Khrushchev Report*, of the tenacious relationship between the two highest incarnations of "totalitarianism." And yet, none of this!

Historians of the concentrationary universe rightly denounce the further crackdowns experienced in the Gulag and the "super-exploitation of the prisoners," which reached its horrible peak after the "dizzying growth of economic plans in 1940-41" (therefore in the months of the non-aggression pact), when the Soviet leadership, in anticipation of the war, had trampled all other considerations in order to accelerate to the maximum the realization of plans "of great strategic and economic importance," such as the construction of airports, airplane factories and industries essential for the war effort.³⁵

32 Irving (2001), p. 457.

33 Ibid., p. 456.

34 Road (1996).

35 Khlevniuk (2006), pp. 263-77.

In light of this ever more grotesque indictment, there is a commonplace endorsed by Arendt that nevertheless continues to be obsessively hammered home: it still needs to be shown that Stalin trusted Hitler blindly! The dominant ideology, therefore, easily asserts the most contradictory allegations and accusations. The important thing is that they be defamatory. The tendency is clear of slippage from history to political mythology.

The need for demonization, however motivated, manifests itself in other fields as well. The black legend of Stalin's antisemitism is uncontested these days. But there is no lack of diametrically opposed views. Here is the research of a journalist, American and Jewish, reporting on "Stalin's *fondness* for Jews," to whom he entrusted the management of concentration camps from which imprisoned Germans were destined to be expelled from Poland. And so, those who had escaped from the "final solution" could take terrible revenge and become the executioners of their executioners, all thanks to the cunning and perfidy of the Soviet dictator.³⁶ The latter is accused—in a book written by an author close to German Federal Republic military circles—of having circulated "war propaganda" about the gas chambers and the plan for the total extermination of the Jewish population by the Third Reich, in order to discredit his enemies.³⁷ The contrast with the vision of an anti-Semitic Stalin is evident and total, and nevertheless continues to enjoy great popularity.

It is also worth noting how the theme of Stalin's "paranoia" is often asserted in contradictory ways. Standing out in the self-assurance with which he diagnoses this illness is a historian who at the same time emphasizes the role Beria is said to have played in the death of the Soviet leader.³⁸ Of course, one could say that Beria was the victim of the climate he himself had created; the fact remains, however, that, at least from a certain moment on, the danger was something real and not the product of morbid fantasy. Or, those who accuse Stalin of paranoia are sometimes personalities and authors who, without adducing any evidence, brand him as responsible for the death of his close collaborators, such as Kirov and Zhdanov. Is this not the same attitude reproached against the dictator being used here? However, these questions and problems do not even come up. The important thing is to reiterate the infamy of the communist, oriental despot.

36 Sack (1993), pp. 53 and *passim*.

37 Hoffmann (1995), pp. 154-5.

38 Montefiore (2007), pp. 370, 381 and 727 ff.

POLITICAL STRUGGLE AND MYTHOLOGY BETWEEN THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION AND OCTOBER REVOLUTION

In June 1956, under the immediate impression of reading the *Khrushchev Report*, Deutscher observed: "Communists had lain prostrate over a quarter of a century" before a monstrous tyrant who was both morally and intellectually repugnant; well, how could this have happened?³⁹ Continuing along this line, he could have added: what had induced illustrious Western philosophers and statesmen to pay this monster declarations of esteem and respect and, in some cases, even admiration? These are legitimate and even inescapable questions, but perhaps they should be complemented by another: how could it have happened that Deutscher himself had allowed himself to be infected by that disposition, which he so bitterly denounced in 1956? Yes, after the end of the Second World War and on the occasion of Stalin's death, he had paid tribute to the statesman who had contributed decisively to the defeat of the Third Reich and had built socialism in the USSR. At that time, the monster of abjection and imbecility had not yet appeared on the scene, and so the question had not yet arisen as to the enormous credit he had long enjoyed, despite everything. But perhaps, in 1956, reading the *Khrushchev Report*, Deutscher would have done better to ask himself a quite different question: led by a "generalissimo" and such a laughable political leader, how could the Soviet Union have managed to defeat the terrible Nazi war machine that had rapidly subjugated the rest of continental Europe? And how could the Soviet Union, starting from a position of extreme weakness, have managed to become a military and industrial superpower?

Yes, on a closer look, half a century after the death of Stalin and the sensational de-Stalinization, it is appropriate to take up the question again, as formulated by Deutscher, in order to invert it radically: how could such a grotesque and caricatured portrait as the one drawn by Khrushchev rise to the dignity of historiographical and political dogma? On the contrary, this dogma was gradually enriched with new, more and more fanciful details, beginning with the "revelations" of the *Secret Speech*, which attribute to Stalin a blind confidence in Hitler's compliance with the non-aggression pact. Arendt, in subsequent editions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, constructed a theorem of elective affinities between the two dictators, and this theorem gradually identified new points of contact and new symmetries,

39 Deutscher (1972b), p. 20.

until the two monsters became perfectly equivalent in every aspect of their political action and ideology, including the consummation of a holocaust and antisemitic hatred.

The key to explaining this singular phenomenon can be traced to the history of political mythologies. After Thermidor, the Jacobins are consigned to the guillotine on the moral level as well. They become “these sultans,” “these satyrs” who everywhere had set up “pleasure places” and “sites of orgies,” in which they “abandoned themselves to every excess.”⁴⁰ Together with and beyond sexual lust it was above all a *libido dominandi* that had devoured Robespierre, as he prepared to “marry Capet’s daughter” so that he could ascend the throne of France.⁴¹ The accusation was undoubtedly sensational, but the evidence was not lacking, indeed it abounded: “the marriage contract” had already been readied. On the other hand, in the house of the tyrant who had just been executed, the “fleur-de-lis seal of France” had been found—that is, the seal of the Bourbon dynasty.⁴² The execution, or, rather, the assassination of Louis XVI, then appeared in a new light. The person responsible for this act was perhaps only trying to get rid of a rival. He wanted to sweep away the obstacle that had been preventing him from ascending the throne.

Robespierre’s moral decapitation was intertwined with a more proper intellectual decapitation. During the Jacobin period, there had been instances of vandalism from below and revolutionary iconoclasm, not promoted from above, which had affected the symbols of the ancien régime. These cases had continued to manifest themselves during Thermidor, this time targeting everything reminiscent of the Terror. But here is how the new rulers put the Jacobins on trial: out of hatred for the culture they were totally lacking, they had planned to burn down the libraries, indeed they had already put this mad project into action. Through various passages, the indictment expanded more and more and became a fact all the more incontrovertible the more it lost all contact with reality. Boissy d’Anglas could thus expose the Jacobins to public ridicule:

Doubtless these wild enemies of humanity only consented to their crimes’ illumination for a moment by means of the light of burning libraries, because they hoped that the shadows of ignorance would only become thicker. The barbar-

40 Baczko (1989), p. 23 and note 11.

41 Ibid., pp. 10 ff.

42 Ibid., pp. 15-6.

ians! They have made the human spirit regress by several centuries.⁴³

The Jacobins had introduced compulsory schooling, and against them and against the French Revolution as such, counter-revolutionary publicity never tired of denouncing the hubris of reason and celebrating on the contrary the beneficial function of “prejudice.” But in the Thermidor’s ideological and political climate, Robespierre and his collaborators were accused of having wanted to spread “darkness of ignorance.” And the new accusation was launched without any effort to rethink the previous one: logical consistency was the last of their concerns.

With regard to the number of victims of the Terror, there was also a process analogous to that already seen about the libraries. Let us give the floor again to the eminent scholar we have been following here: “There is no skimping on the figures: tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, some even speak of millions.” It is, in short, a genocide, as denounced by the *jeunesse dorée* [golden youth], which in its counter-*Marseillaise* thundered against the “drinkers of human blood,” “these cannibal hordes,” “these frightful cannibals.”⁴⁴ It was an accusation taken up and radicalized on the left. Immediately after Thermidor, Babeuf spoke of a “depopulation system” put in place in the Vendée by Robespierre, who even pursued “a vile and unprecedented political goal: to weed out the human race.”⁴⁵ There was thus a convergence between the right and the extreme left of the political spectrum, both agreeing in drawing a portrait of Robespierre as a genocidal monster. However, this paradox was short-lived. Babeuf was quick to grasp the real meaning of Thermidor. Before the judges who were about to condemn him to death, in denouncing the desperate situation to which the popular masses were now condemned, on the one hand, he referred to Saint-Just and his idea of “happiness” and escape from poverty for all, and, on the other hand, he expressed his disdain for “the system of hunger” put in place by the new rulers and branded as “genocidal” (*populicide*) the Thermidorian Boissy d’Anglas.⁴⁶ The accusation of genocide is thus radically reversed: it no longer strikes Robespierre, but his victorious enemies.

It would be interesting to make a comparative analysis of the

43 Ibid., p. 245.

44 Ibid., pp. 244-5.

45 Ibid., pp. 210-1.

46 Babeuf (1988), pp. 316-8.

mythologies that have emerged since the great revolutions. After October 1917, the Jacobin “drinkers of human blood” were succeeded by the Bolsheviks who, as refugees from Soviet Russia reported in the US, had invented and frantically employed an electric guillotine capable of killing five hundred men an hour. We have seen Jacobins branded as frequenters of “pleasure places” and organizers of “orgies.” In the autumn of 1919, the Hungarian Communist leader Béla Kun is accused of having set up “a splendidly supplied harem,” where he, the perverse and insatiable Jew, could “rape and defile honorable Christian virgins by the dozen.”⁴⁷ Calling attention to this infamy is a newspaper which was later to become the organ of the Nazi party, but which at this time, in expressing its horror at developments in Eastern Europe, shared a widely held orientation in Western public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, too, the Bolsheviks are synonymous with debauchery and moral depravity. In Russia, they introduced the “nationalization of women,” as documents published with the authorization of President Wilson reveal and as an authoritative newspaper such as the *New York Times* makes clear in rich detail; yes, every girl who had reached the age of eighteen was forced to register with an “office of free love,” which then assigned the unfortunate woman to an arbitrarily chosen man, and she was forced to suffer the government’s impositions in her body and soul.⁴⁸

If the Jacobins were “barbarians,” all the more so were the protagonists of the October Revolution, branded first as agents of imperial Germany (i.e. of the “Huns” and “Vandals,” as the Germans were defined by the Entente propaganda during the First World War), and later as agents of international Jewry, doubly alien to authentic civilization both because of its geographical origin and because of its contribution to the revolt of the colonies and of colored peoples, as Nazi propaganda never tired of repeating. Finally, if for some time Robespierre was accused by Babeuf of wishing to “exterminate the human race” as a whole, Conquest is content to attribute to Stalin the planned starvation to death of the Ukrainian people.

The themes sketched here constitute only modest suggestions for the future historian. Pending the desirable comparisons of political mythologies, however, it is worth noting that Stalin suffered a worse fate than Robespierre. Yes, in modern-day Russia there is no shortage of popular demonstrations raising Stalin’s portrait, and the majority

47 Diamond (1985), pp. 97-8.

48 Filene (1967), pp. 46-7.

of adults are positive about Stalin and see in him the “tough leader” the country needed in such calamitous times. Among the former “dis-sidents” we see Alexander Zinoviev branding Yeltsin as the leader of a “criminal counterrevolution” and a “colonial democracy” and drawing up an astonishing balance sheet of the history of the Soviet Union as a whole, including the three decades of the Stalin era: “Thanks to communism, Russia was able to avoid even worse evils” and achieve “in extremely difficult historical conditions” progress that “only a cynical rogue can deny.”⁴⁹ In the West, on the other hand, even on the left, the accusation of “Stalinism” is ready to strike anyone who dares to advance some doubts or formulate some questions. If anything, it is in the “bourgeois” camp that some timid signs of rethinking can be glimpsed. Already a few months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, an authoritative Italian newspaper reported: “One and a half million people are in danger of not surviving winter, because of the lack of food and medicine throughout the USSR, as stated in a report by the International Red Cross.”⁵⁰ Some time later, again analyzing Yeltsin’s Russia, a distinguished political scientist, Maurice Duverger, pointed out the “collapse in average life expectancy,” the responsibility for which fell on the privileged few who had succeeded in “accumulating enormous wealth” through parasitical speculation, if not openly illegal, and denounced the “veritable genocide of the elderly.”⁵¹ If not a reversal, the accusation of genocide still gets applied across the board, with the condemnation of a hero of the West (Yeltsin), and with him of the West as such, considered responsible for a tragedy taking place not during a situation of acute political and economic crisis, but after the disappearance of the Cold War itself, in a period in which, at least in the most advanced countries, shortages are only a remote memory.

Edgar Quinet’s assessment of the French Revolution comes to mind: “The Terror had been the first calamity; the second, which destroyed the Republic, was the trial of the Terror.”⁵²

49 Roberts (2006), p. 3 (discussing Stalin’s continuing popularity in Russia); Zinoviev (1994), pp. 11,17, 54 and 133.

50 Franceschini (1991).

51 Duverger (1993).

52 In Baczko (1989), p. 191.

8

 DEMONIZATION AND HAGIOGRAPHY IN THE
 INTERPRETATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY
 WORLD

FROM THE OMISSION OF RUSSIA'S SECOND TIME OF TROUBLES
 TO THE OMISSION OF CHINA'S CENTURY OF HUMILIATION

Especially since the outbreak of the Cold War, for decades the anti-communist campaign of the West has revolved around the demonization of Stalin. Up to the moment of the defeat of the Soviet Union, there was no need to exaggerate the polemic against Mao, or even against Pol Pot, who until the last moment was supported by Washington against the Vietnamese invaders and their Soviet protectors. Hitler's monstrous twin was singular, and he had ruled for thirty years in Moscow and his presence was still weighing heavily on the country that dared to challenge the hegemony of the USA.

The picture couldn't help but change with the rise of China's prodigiousness. Now it is the great Asian country that must be pressured to the point of losing its identity and self-esteem. Beyond Stalin, the dominant ideology is busy identifying other twin monsters of Hitler. And so a book garners international success where Mao Zedong is branded as the greatest criminal of the twentieth century or perhaps of all time.¹

The modalities of "proof" are those that we already know. The starting point is from the childhood of the "monster" rather than from the history of China. We should then try to fill this gap. With a long history behind it, which for centuries or for millennia had seen it in an eminent position in the development of human civilization, even in 1820 China boasted 32.4% of the world's gross domestic

1 Chang, Halliday (2006).

product. In 1949, at the time of its foundation, the People's Republic of China was the poorest country, or among the poorest in the world.² It was colonial and imperial aggression that had led to that collapse, which started with the Opium Wars. Celebrated in emphatic terms even by the most illustrious representatives of the liberal West (think of Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill), those infamous wars had opened a decidedly tragic chapter for the great Asian country. The deficit in the Chinese balance of trade caused by the victory of the "British *drug traffickers*," the terrible humiliations inflicted by the invaders ("Chinese women are accosted and raped" by the invaders; "Graves are violated in the name of scientific curiosity. The tiny bound foot of a woman is taken from her tomb") and the crisis highlighted by the country's inability to defend itself against external aggression play a major role in leading to the Taiping Revolt (1851-64), which put the fight against opium on the agenda. It is "the bloodiest civil war in world history, with an estimated twenty to thirty million dead."³ After having contributed mightily to provoking it, the West became its beneficiary, having extended its control over a country gripped by an ever-deepening crisis and an increasing defenselessness. It opened a historical period that saw "China crucified" (the Western butchers had meanwhile been joined by Russia and Japan):

As the end of the nineteenth century approached China seems to become the victim of a destiny which it could not ward off. It is a universal conspiracy of humanity and the elements. The China of 1850-1950, the one of the most terrible insurrections in history, the target of foreign cannons, the country of invasions and civil wars, is also the country of great natural cataclysms. The number of victims has undoubtedly never been so high in the history of the world.

The widespread and drastic lowering of the standard of living, the disintegration of the state and government apparatus, together with its incapacity, corruption and growing subalternity and subjection to foreigners, all make the impact of floods and famines even more devastating: "The great famine in northern China in 1877-78 [...] killed more than nine million people."⁴ It is a tragedy that tends to occur periodically. In 1928, the number of deaths amounted to

2 Davis (2001), p. 299.

3 Losurdo (2005), chap. 9, § 6 and 8, § 3 (for Tocqueville and J. S. Mill); Davis (2001), pp. 22 and 16; Spence (1998), pp. 53, 62, 134-5, and 234-5 (for the infamies of the invaders and the Taiping struggle against opium).

4 Gernet (1978), p. 579; Roux (2007), p. 40.

“almost three million in Shanxi province alone.”⁵ There is no escape from hunger or cold: “House beams are burned just to keep warm.”⁶

It was not just a devastating economic crisis: “The State is almost destroyed.” One figure is significant in itself: “130 wars develop between 1,300 warlords between 1911 and 1928.” The opposing “military cliques” were sometimes supported by this or that power foreign power. On the other hand, “the repeated civil wars between 1919 and 1925 can be regarded as new Opium Wars. What was at stake was the control of its production and transport.”⁷ Beyond the armed corps of warlords, outright banditry spread, fueled by army deserters and weapons sold by soldiers. “It is estimated around 1930 that bandits in China amounted to 20 million, 10% of the total male population.”⁸ On the other hand, it is easy to imagine the fate hanging over women. Overall, it was the dissolution of all social ties:

Sometimes the peasant sells his wife and his children. The press describes columns of young women thus sold walking the streets, framed by traffickers, in Shanxi devastated by the famine of 1928. They will become domestic slaves or prostitutes.

In Shanghai alone there were “about 50,000 regular prostitutes.” And both the brigandage activities and the prostitution rings can count on the support or complicity of Western concessions, which develop “lucrative activities” in this regard.⁹ The lives of the Chinese were now worth very little, and the oppressed tended to share this viewpoint with the oppressors. In 1938, in an attempt to curb the Japanese invasion, Chiang Kai-shek’s air force blew up the dams of the Yellow River: 900,000 peasants drowned to death while another 4 million were forced to flee.¹⁰ About fifteen years earlier Sun Yat-Sen had expressed the fear that things could go “as far as the extinction of the nation and the annihilation of the race.” Yes, perhaps the Chinese were about to suffer the fate inflicted on Native Americans “redskins” on the American continent.¹¹

This tragic history behind the revolution vanishes in the his-

5 Gernet (1978), p. 580.

6 Roux (2007), p. 41.

7 Ibid., pp. 34-6.

8 Ibid., pp. 39 and 37.

9 Ibid., pp. 41 and 37.

10 Ibid., p. 72.

11 Sun Yat-Sen (1976), pp. 27 and 42-3.

torigraphy and publicity revolving around the negative hero cult. If, in the reading of Russian history, the Second Time of Troubles is omitted, for the great Asian country the Century of Humiliation (the period from the First Opium War to the communist conquest of power) is glossed over. As in Russia, in China it is the revolution led by the Communist Party that ultimately saved the nation and even the state. In the aforementioned biography on Mao Zedong, not only is the summary of the historical background here reconstructed ignored, but the record of horror blamed on the Chinese communist leader is achieved by placing the victims of famine and starvation that plagued China on his account. There is strict silence observed about the embargo imposed on the great Asian country immediately after the communists came to power.

On this last point, it is worth consulting the book by an American author who sympathetically describes the leading role played during the Cold War by Washington's policy of economic encirclement and strangulation against the People's Republic of China. The latter, in the autumn of 1949, was in a desperate situation. Meanwhile, it should be noted that the civil war had been far from over. The bulk of the Kuomintang army had taken refuge in Taiwan, and from there was continuing to threaten the new power with air raids and incursions, especially as pockets of resistance continued to operate on the mainland. But this is not the main thing: "After decades of civil and international wars, the national economy was on the verge of total collapse." The collapse of agricultural and industrial production was intertwined with inflation. And that was not all. "Severe flooding had devastated a large part of the nation that year, and more than 40 million people had been affected by this natural disaster."¹²

Making this most serious economic and humanitarian crisis more catastrophic than ever is the timely intervention of the embargo decreed by the US. Its objectives emerge clearly from the studies and plans of the Truman administration and from the admissions or statements of its leaders: to make China "suffer the scourge" of "a general standard of living around or below subsistence level"; to cause "economic backwardness," "cultural backwardness," a "primitive and uncontrolled birth rate," "popular unrest"; to inflict "a heavy and very prolonged cost on the entire social structure" and to create, ultimately, "a state of chaos."¹³ And it is a concept that was obsessively

12 Zhang (2001), pp. 52 and 56.

13 Ibid., pp. 20-1.

repeated. There was a need to lead a country of “desperate needs” toward a “catastrophic economic situation,” “toward disaster” and “collapse”¹⁴ This deadly “economic gun” was pointed at an overpopulated country, but that was not enough for the CIA. The situation caused by “the Economic Warfare measures and the naval blockade” could be further aggravated by an “air and naval bombing campaign against selected ports, railroad hubs, industrial facilities and warehouses.” In any case, Kuomintang air raids on industrial cities, including Shanghai, in mainland China continued with U.S. assistance.¹⁵

In the White House, one president succeeded another, but the embargo remained and included medicine, tractors, and fertilizer.¹⁶ In the early 1960s, a Kennedy administration collaborator, namely Walt W. Rostow, pointed out that, thanks to this policy, China’s economic development had been delayed for at least “dozens of years,” while CIA reports point to “the serious agricultural situation in communist China” now severely weakened by “overwork and malnutrition.”¹⁷ Is it then a matter of reducing the pressure on a starving people? On the contrary, the embargo was not to be relaxed “even for humanitarian relief.” Taking advantage also of the fact that China was “deprived of key-natural resources, particularly oil and arable land,” and also leveraging the serious contemporary crisis in China-USSR relations, the final push could be attempted. It was a matter of “exploring the possibilities of a total Western embargo against China” and of blocking oil and grain sales to the fullest extent possible.¹⁸

Does it make sense, then, to attribute exclusively or primarily to Mao the responsibility for the economic catastrophe long befallen China and lucidly and mercilessly planned in Washington as early as the fall of 1949? Committed as they were to painting Mao’s *Grand Guignol* portrait and denouncing his mad experiments, the authors of the successful monograph did not pose this question. Yet, it is the same U.S. leaders who, when imposing it, knew that the embargo will be even more devastating because of “communist inexperience in the field of urban economics.”¹⁹ It is no coincidence that we have seen them talk explicitly of “economic warfare” and “economic guns.”

14 Ibid., pp. 22, 25 and 27.

15 Ibid., pp. 24, 32 and 71.

16 Ibid., pp. 83, 179 and 198.

17 Ibid., pp. 250 and 244.

18 Ibid., pp. 249-52.

19 Ibid., p. 22.

And it is a practice that does not dissipate even after the end of the Cold War. A few years before China's entry into the World Trade Organization, a U.S. journalist thus described Washington's behavior in 1996: "American leaders unleash one of the heaviest weapons in their trade arsenal, ostentatiously targeting China, and then furiously debate whether or not to pull the trigger." Once enacted, the cancellation of normal trade relations they threatened would constitute, "in dollar terms, the largest trade sanction in U.S. history, excluding the two World Wars." It would be "the trade equivalent of a nuclear strike."²⁰ This was also the opinion of a distinguished U.S. political scientist, namely Edward Luttwak: "With a metaphor, one could say that the Chinese import blockade is the nuclear weapon America keeps pointed at China."²¹ Waved as a threat in the 1990s, the economic "nuclear weapon" was systematically used throughout the Cold War against the great Asian country, while explicitly and repeatedly Washington reserved the right to resort to the actual nuclear weapon as well.

At the time of winning power, Mao was well-aware of the "very difficult task of economic reconstruction" awaiting him. Yes, it was necessary to "learn work in the industrial and economic field" and "learn from every expert (whoever he may be)."²² In this context, the Great Leap Forward appeared as a desperate and catastrophic attempt to cope with the embargo.²³ This applied in part to the Cultural Revolution itself, characterized by the illusion that it could promote rapid economic development by appealing to mass mobilization and the methods successfully employed in the military struggle. All, again, in the hope of ending once and for all the ravages of "economic warfare," behind which lay the threat of even more total war. As for Mao's behavior as an oriental despot, especially during the Cultural Revolution, the history of China, as well as the ideology and personality of those wielding power, certainly provide an explanation. The fact remains that we have never seen a country proceed on the road to democratization while savagely attacked economically, isolated diplomatically, and subjected to a terrible and constant military threat. This being so, it is doubly grotesque to put exclusively on Mao's account "more than seventy million people [...] who died in peacetime

20 Dale (1996).

21 Luttwak (1999), p. 151.

22 Zhang (2001), pp. 53 and 55.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 218 and 235.

because of his misrule.”²⁴

Actually, “the social achievements of the Mao era” were “extraordinary,” and saw a marked improvement in economic, social, and cultural conditions and a sharp rise in the “life expectancy” of the Chinese people. Without these understandings, one cannot account for the prodigious economic development that subsequently freed hundreds of millions of people from starvation and even death by starvation.²⁵ However, in the dominant ideology, there is a real reversal of responsibility. The ruling group that ended the Century of Humiliation becomes a hodgepodge of criminals, while those responsible for the immense tragedy of a century and those who, through the embargo, did everything they could to prolong it, are set up as the champions of freedom and civilization. We have seen Goebbels in 1929 branding Trotsky as the one who “perhaps” can be considered the greatest criminal of all time (*supra*, ch. 5, § 15). In later years, perhaps Goebbels would have assigned Stalin the title. In any case, the manner of argument of the head of the Third Reich’s propaganda and manipulation apparatus must have seemed too problematic to the authors of the biography on Mao acclaimed in the West. They have no doubts: the record for absolute criminality in universal history has now passed to the Chinese leader!

THE ERASURE OF WAR AND THE MASS PRODUCTION OF TWIN MONSTERS

The erasure of history and above all of colonialism and war is a constant of the mythology committed to transforming all the leaders of the communist and anti-colonialist movements into monsters—more or less twins of Hitler—as was done for Stalin. This is a fairly easy operation for Pol Pot. And it is precisely on him that we should dwell, certainly not in order to rehabilitate him or to scale down the horror for which he was responsible, but in order to better clarify the ways in which today’s dominant mythology is constructed. In doing so I will use almost exclusively the book of an American scholar on Asia and, above all, the monograph on Cambodia written by a journalist who worked for the *Times*, the *Economist* and the BBC. So, let us begin by asking ourselves a question: when and how did the

24 Chang, Halliday (2006), p. 734.

25 Arrighi (2008), pp. 406-7.

tragedy begin that culminated in the horror of Pol Pot's regime? Here is a first answer provided by the American scholar:

In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger ordered more bombs dropped on rural Cambodia than had been dropped on Japan during all of World War II, killing at least 750,000 Cambodian peasants.²⁶

The calculation in the monograph on Pol Pot's Cambodia is more cautious. The victims would amount to "half a million." It remains clear, however, that "the bombs fell massively and above all on the civilian population," who were decimated. The survivors, often horribly scarred and regardless traumatized by the daily experience of terrorist bombing, fled from the countryside (reduced to a "lunar landscape") to the cities in the hands of government troops, were spared from hell, but were increasingly prey to the chaos following the growing influx of refugees, forced to lead "a precarious existence at the edge of starvation." At the end of the war, in the capital alone there were two million uprooted Cambodians crammed into "slums and shanty towns," with the sick and wounded hospitalized with "little hope of survival."²⁷ To all this must be added the "full-scale pogroms" carried out by the troops of Lon Nol, who came to power in 1970 by a coup d'état engineered in Washington. Here is how the regime, fed by the USA with "hundreds of millions of dollars" dealt with the problem of ethnic minorities:

At least 3,000 people in Vietnamese villages in the suburbs north of Phnom Penh, all males over the age of fifteen, were rounded up, taken downriver, and shot. The women left behind were raped.

Or

In the area called Parrot's Beak, the [Vietnamese] inmates in a camp were told of an imminent Viet Cong attack and ordered to flee. As they ran, Cambodian guards [allied with or under the command of the US] opened fire with machine-guns.

These are just two examples. Authoritative journalistic accounts report the impression one immediately gained from visiting this or that place like those just mentioned: "It looked and smelt like a

26 Johnson (2001), p. 31.

27 Short (2005), pp. 351, 287, 289-90, 334, and 361-2.

slaughterhouse.”²⁸

It should be noted that the wrath of Lon Nol’s soldiers was not solely directed at the Vietnamese: “communist prisoners were routinely killed.” Some soldiers even took pleasure in posing for photographs while holding the decapitated heads of guerrillas.²⁹ On the other hand, it would be wrong to blame only Asians for the atrocities that take place in Cambodia and, more generally, in Indochina. It makes one think of what an American professor reported in an American magazine about a CIA agent who lived in Laos “in a house decorated with a string of ears that had been chopped off the heads of dead [Indochinese] communists.”³⁰

At this point a new question imposes itself: is there a connection between the first act of the Cambodian tragedy and those that followed? In striving to minimize that relationship, the book I use is not without contradictions or oscillations: “The bombing may have helped create a climate conducive to extremism. But the ground war would have done that anyway.” Was the “ground war” inevitable? Is it not from the war as such that the starting point must be taken? “The equation, ‘No Vietnam war, no Khmers Rouges’ is simplistic, but it reflects an undeniable truth.”³¹ The British journalist-writer hesitated to admit this, and yet it is clear from his own awkward formulations that those primarily responsible for the tragedy must be sought in Washington. And from his story emerges a truth even more shocking than the vulgar simplifications of today. This is how the monograph on Cambodia relates the conquest of Phnom Penh by the guerrillas: after all that had happened it “could have been far, far worse.”³² At least as far as the very early phase of his management of power is concerned, Pol Pot demonstrates restraint that one would struggle to locate in the leaders in Washington!

On the other hand, the new rulers of the country were faced with real and dramatic difficulties. Would the US start a new wave of terrorist bombings? And how to feed an urban population that had grown out of all proportion, with agriculture devastated by the transformation of the countryside into a “lunar landscape”? And how to deal with the threat of the CIA who “had established secret radio

28 Ibid., pp. 18 and 277-8.

29 Ibid., p. 331; the photograph on pages 376 and 377.

30 Wikler (1999).

31 Short (2005), pp. 289 and 586.

32 Ibid., p. 359.

transmitters and clandestine spy cells” in the cities?³³ Of course, Pol Pot’s extremist and visionary populism also led to the decision to evacuate urban areas, but this same attitude was stimulated by the spectacle of frighteningly overcrowded cities, exposed to the enemy threats and in the grip of chaos, with a population made largely unable to play any productive roles.

In conclusion, why should the moral judgment on Pol Pot be harsher than on Nixon and Kissinger (those responsible for the war)? The same English author I have repeatedly cited, rejected on the one hand the intentionalist explanation of the massacres into which Pol Pot’s adventure led (“that was never the political line of the PKC,” that is, of the Cambodian Communist Party; “the goal was not to destroy but to transform”), while on the other highlighting the ferocity of the US war: “Bombing became a symbol of virility.”³⁴ It should be added that, after the conquest of power, during the subsequent conflict with Vietnam, Pol Pot was supported politically and diplomatically by the US. And yet the dominant ideology passes over in silence the principal and decisive role of Nixon and Kissinger in the Cambodian tragedy. As it is well known, the barbarians are always outside the West, and if political leaders must be criminalized, it is only ever those responsible for the revolution, never for the war.

This hypocrisy is all the more repugnant for the fact that while Pol Pot had stopped tormenting and killing, the U.S. war continued to make its effects strongly felt. “People are dying today throughout Indochina from starvation, disease, and unexploded ordnance.”³⁵ At least as far as Vietnam is concerned, it is worth bearing in mind the calculation made some time ago by a conservative French newspaper according to which, thirty years after the end of the hostilities, there were still “four million” victims whose bodies had been devastated by the “terrible Agent Orange” (referring to the color of the dioxin spilled unsparingly by American planes over an entire population).³⁶ And in Cambodia? Let us leave aside the devastation inflicted on the bodies. How many Cambodians are still suffering the devastating and “irreversible psychological damage” caused by the bombing?³⁷ One conclusion must be drawn: to focus exclusively on Pol Pot is to

33 Ibid., pp. 380-1.

34 Ibid., pp. 382 and 326.

35 Chomsky, Herman (2005), p. 60.

36 Hauter (2004).

37 Short (2005), pp. 289 and 290, note.

settle for a half-truth, which, in reality, ends up constituting a total lie, guilty of passing over in silence those principally responsible for the horror.

SOCIALISM AND NAZISM, ARYANS AND ANGLO-CELTICS

After having assimilated the “monsters of totalitarianism,” the dominant ideology of today proceeds further. Beyond the individual personalities who have historically embodied it, communism as such would be closely connected by elective affinities and sympathetic ties to Nazism. The most committed in this direction is Conquest, who begins his “demonstration” by stating, referring to Hitler: “And though he hated ‘Jewish’ Communism, he did not hate Communists.”³⁸ The hostility between the two political movements is only a blunder. What about this new theorem?

Immediately after coming to power, the Führer explained to the leadership of the armed forces that he intended primarily to liquidate the “poison” represented by “pacifism, Marxism, Bolshevism.”³⁹ A few days later Göring further clarified the new government’s program of struggle against Marxism (and Bolshevism): “We shall not only annihilate this plague, we shall also tear the word Marxism out of every book. In fifty years in Germany no man will be allowed to know what the word means.”⁴⁰ On the eve of Operation Barbarossa, Goebbels noted in his diary:

Bolshevism is dead (*ist gewesen*). In this way we are fulfilling our true task before history [...]. The Bolshevik poison must be expelled from Europe. Even Churchill or Roosevelt have little to object to this. Perhaps we can also convince the German episcopacy of both denominations to bless this war as God’s will [...]. Now we will truly annihilate what we have been fighting against all our lives. I speak of this with the Führer and he is in complete agreement with me.⁴¹

These are not just words, as the systematic annihilation of communist cadres decided by Hitler on the eve of Operation Barbarossa shows. There is more:

By the end of 1941 the Germans had captured 3 million Soviet prisoners. By

38 Conquest (1992), p. 174.

39 In Ruge, Schumann (1977), p. 24.

40 Ibid., pp. 32-3.

41 Goebbels (1992), pp. 1585 and 1603 (May 24 and June 16, 1941).

February 1942, 2 million of those prisoners were dead, mainly from starvation, disease and maltreatment. In addition, the Germans simply executed those prisoners they suspected were communists.⁴²

That is, already in the very first months of Operation Barbarossa, the Nazis killed or caused the death of more than two million Soviet citizens, primarily targeting Communists. And that is not all. While he is forced into hiding to escape the “final solution,” Klemperer, the eminent German intellectual of Jewish origins whom we have already met, wrote a diary entry on which it is worth reflecting. It was August 1942 and Zeiss-Ikon was using the forced labor of Polish, French, Danish, Jewish and Russian workers. The situation of the latter was particularly harsh:

They are so hungry that their Jewish workmates intervene to help them. It is forbidden; but people drop a slice of bread. After a while the Russian woman bends down and disappears into the bathroom with it.⁴³

Thus, according to this testimony, the condition of Russian (or Soviet) slaves was sometimes even worse than that of Jewish slaves.

In his peremptory assertions Conquest does not stop halfway. It is about proving the theorem of the elective affinities between communism and Nazism far beyond the personality of Stalin and the confines of the Soviet Union. And thus the “long and formal mutual hostility” between the “totalitarian parties” was a mere show. The reality is different and opposite: “Gramsci, for example, was one of Mussolini’s closest comrades.”⁴⁴ Yet, everyone should know that, while the communist leader languished in fascist prisons, his persecutor received the homage of leading exponents of the liberal world. One thinks in particular of Churchill who, speaking of the Duce in 1933, declared: “The Roman genius impersonated in Mussolini, the greatest law-giver among living men, has shown to many nations how they can resist the pressures of Socialism and has indicated the path that a nation can follow when courageously led.”⁴⁵ Four years later, while fascist Italy had completed the conquest of Ethiopia by barbaric methods and was fully engaged in the overthrow of the Spanish Republic, the English statesman reiterated his judgment:

42 Roberts (2006), p. 85.

43 Klemperer (1996), vol. 2, p. 194.

44 Conquest (1992), p. 174.

45 In Canfora (2006), p. 232.

It would be a dangerous folly for the British people to underrate the enduring position in world-history which Mussolini will hold, or the amazing qualities of courage, intelligence, self-control and perseverance which he exemplifies.⁴⁶

Above all it is worth reading the balance sheet drawn up by Croce at the end of the Second World War. The object of criticism is “the submissive attitude of the conservatives of England towards the leaders of Germany, Italy and Spain.”⁴⁷ Indeed, at least as far as Italian fascism was concerned, England went even further: “its politicians, and some of the major ones, paid homage and fancied fascism and visited its leader and some even bore fascist badges.”⁴⁸ Yes, Mussolini “had homages from the whole world, with English politicians first in line, and [...], as far as I am told by people living in England, he is still esteemed as a great man by English public opinion.”⁴⁹ The pro-fascist attitude of the West finds its consecration even on the philosophical level. One thinks of an author such as Ludwig von Mises who is still considered a master of liberalism and who in 1927 paid tribute to Mussolini’s coup d’état that had averted the communist danger and saved civilization: “The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history.”⁵⁰

Hitler himself in 1937 was portrayed in flattering terms by Churchill, who appreciated in him not only a “extremely competent” politician, but also his “agreeable manner,” “disarming smile” and “subtle personal magnetism” from which it is difficult to escape.⁵¹ The former Prime Minister David Lloyd George was more emphatic. He, who spoke of the Führer as a “great man,” while, still on the eve of the outbreak of war, the program of subjugation and enslavement for Slavs enunciated in *Mein Kampf* was considered acceptable by the British ambassador in Berlin, on condition, of course, that it not “be turned contemporaneously against the British Empire.”⁵² At any rate, regardless of the Führer’s judgment, according to the opinion expressed in 1938 by the US ambassador in Paris, everything must be done to build a common front against “Asiatic despotism” in order to save “European civilization” (*supra*, ch. 5, § 3). In the *Prison Note-*

46 In Baker (2008), p. 73.

47 Croce (1993), vol. 2, p. 88.

48 Ibid., p. 408.

49 Ibid., p. 366.

50 Mises (1927), p. 45.

51 In Baker (2008), p. 70.

52 In Kershaw (2005), pp. 52 and 75 and 228.

books, on the other hand, Gramsci wrote in 1935: “after the manifestations of brutality and unprecedented ignominy of German ‘culture’ dominated by Hitlerism,” it was time for everyone to take note of how “fragile modern culture” really is.⁵³

Finally, in carrying out his crusade which, beyond communism, also targets currents in any way influenced by socialism, Conquest declares: “eugenics, which was fashionable even with the Fabians, with all its racist implications.”⁵⁴ At this point the *tour de force* has come to its conclusion, and now all that is needed is some vague reformist ambitions with respect to existing capitalist society in order to be branded as Hitler’s associate or twin. Of course, to argue in this way one must not allow oneself to be hindered by empirical historical research. As a term, even before being a “science,” eugenics was born in liberal England and immediately became very popular in the United States. Austrian and German authors explicitly referred to the North American Republic, and even before Hitler they recommended “racial hygiene.” Seeing what happened on the other side of the Atlantic, they went about attempting to introduce in Austria and Germany, too, rules prohibiting sexual and marital relations between different races and of differing worth. It is no coincidence that the key term in the eugenics and racial program of the Third Reich, that is, *Untermensch*, is but the translation of the American English *Under Man*, the neologism coined by Lothrop Stoddard, the author celebrated both in the USA and in Germany and legitimated by the praise of two American presidents (Harding and Hoover) and of the Führer of the Third Reich, by whom he was personally received with all honors.⁵⁵ It is worth noting that it was Antonio Gramsci, the communist theorist and leader particularly targeted by Conquest, who criticized this eugenic current of thought, which is committed to celebrating white and Nordic supremacy.⁵⁶

I would like to make a suggestion to that author, who is obsessed with the idea of discovering ideological affinities with Nazism in the remotest of places, and in the most unexpected movements and personalities. He could try to subject his works to the same treatment that he inflicts on books of even a vaguely socialist orientation. The thesis formulated in one of Conquest’s last publications gives one

53 Gramsci (1975), p. 2326.

54 Conquest (1992), p. 175.

55 Losurdo (2007), ch. III, §§ 4-5.

56 Gramsci (1975), p. 199 (the reference is primarily to Madison Grant).

pause for thought. Authentic civilization finds its most accomplished expression in the “English-speaking community” and the primacy of this community has its own precise ethnic foundation, constituted by “Anglo-Celtic culture.”⁵⁷ The Anglo-Celtic mythology sketched there evokes the inauspicious memory of Aryan mythology. There is only one clarification to be made. Aryan mythology, which was dear to a long tradition developed on both sides of the Atlantic and which later led to Nazism, tended to identify itself with white mythology. In any case, it paid homage to Nordic peoples and to all the peoples who had set out from Germanic soil, including therefore the English and the Americans. The Anglo-Celtic community is instead defined in opposition not only to the barbarians entirely alien to the West but also to continental Europe. The club of authentically civilized peoples dear to Conquest is undoubtedly more exclusive.

THE ANTI-COMMUNIST NUREMBERG
AND THE DENIAL OF THE *TU QUOQUE* PRINCIPLE

By now the trend is clear. A not insignificant number of voices has been raised in the camp of the victors to recommend or to demand a sort of anti-communist Nuremberg. And this is the orientation that inspires the dominant ideology and historiography. It is well-established that during the Nuremberg trials, the Nazi defendants were not allowed to use the principle of *tu quoque* in their defense, meaning they could not bring attention to similar crimes committed by their accusers in response to the charges against them. The Tokyo trials were conducted in the same way. Of course, it is victor’s justice. On the other hand, at the conclusion of a gigantic conflict, which had also developed as an international civil war and as a global clash between revolution and counterrevolution (think of the Nazi theorization of the right of the master race to enslave the “inferior races,” as a substantial, frightening leap backwards from the process of abolition of colonial slavery), we see revolutionary tribunals emerging in various countries (such as Italy). In the case of Germany and Japan (where the home front resisted to the end), these are imposed from above and from outside. Today’s historiographical processes of an anti-communist Nuremberg are a farcical replication of a great tragedy. It is evident that a historical judgment

⁵⁷ Conquest (2001b), pp. 275 ff. and 307.

is unthinkable without the reconstruction of the climate of the time. Comparisons and recourse to the principle of *tu quoque* are absolutely inescapable. And it is in the light of these criteria that I intend to analyze the usual criminalization of the events started with the October Revolution and of Stalin in particular.

There are no doubts about his terrorist ways of exercising power. But let us make use of the principle of *tu quoque*. We already know about the hundreds of thousands of victims of the American air raids in Cambodia. Here, I would like to draw particular attention to one detail:

The peasants lapsed into blind terror. "Their minds just froze up and [they] would wander around mute and not talk for three or four days," one young villager recalled. "Their brains were completely disoriented... They couldn't even hold down a meal."

And many, "half-crazed with terror," could never recover.⁵⁸

Terror is not always exercised in an "aseptic" way, bombing from the skies. As far as the United States is concerned, the twentieth century began while guerrilla warfare was still going on in the Philippines, suppressed—according to an American historian—with the "massacre of entire villages," that is, with the execution of all males over ten years of age.⁵⁹

At other times terror was exercised by delegating the dirtiest tasks to third parties, who are assisted in any case. Let us see how the USA got rid of their political opponents in Indonesia: hundreds of thousands of communists were assassinated following the 1965 coup d'état, orchestrated and supported by Washington. The use of terror and even sadism is systematic:

The mass killings had begun in October 1965 [...]. The military had compiled and distributed lists of "communists" to right-wing Muslim groups, armed with *parangs* and transported in trucks to villages, where they killed and mutilated the inhabitants. School children were asked to point out the "communists," many of whom were killed on the spot with their entire families. Numerous people were denounced as a result of personal disputes, and "a word or a pointed finger was enough for them to be taken away and shot." The number of victims was so high that serious sanitary problems arose in East Java and North Sumatra, where rotting bodies polluted the air and impeded river navigation [...]. By 1968, mass executions had resumed, and, at one time, the army and civil guard

58 Short (2005), pp. 289 and 290, note.

59 McAllister Linn (1989), p. 27.

would kill in central Java “35,000 alleged PKI followers by hitting them with iron bars to the back of the head” [...]. According to Amnesty International, “young girls below the age of 13, old men, people who were frail and ill, were not exempt from torture, which was used not only for interrogation, but also as punishment and just for simple sadism.”⁶⁰

Is this a terror that the countries of the liberal West exercise only outside their national territory? It is not so. Just think of the violence that still raged against African Americans in the early decades of the twentieth century, often staged as a mass pedagogical spectacle:

Notices of lynchings were printed in local papers, and extra cars were added to trains for spectators from miles around, sometimes thousands of them. School-children might get a day off school to attend the lynching.

The spectacle could include castration, skinning, roasting, hanging, and shooting. Souvenirs for purchasers might include fingers, toes, teeth, bones, and even the genitals of the victim, as well as picture postcards of the event.⁶¹

Meanwhile, “the final solution of our Indian question” drags on in Canada even after independence is achieved.

But let us concentrate on the 1930s, those that saw the Stalinist terror unfold in the USSR. In the USA the headlines and local newspaper reports speak for themselves: “Big Preparation Made for Lynching Tonight.” No detail must be overlooked: “It is feared that shots aimed at the negro may go astray and injure innocent bystanders, who included some women with babes in arms”; but if all abide by the rules, “no one will be disappointed.” Other headlines: “Lynching Carried Off Almost as Advertised”; “Crowd Cheers and Laughs at Negro’s Horrible Death”; “Heart and Genitals Carved from Lynched Negro’s Corpse.”⁶² It is right to speak of terror, and not only in view of the effects which the spectacle of such heinous violence unfolded on the Black community, and so cheerfully heralded as in some sort of advertisement. There is more. To suffer lynchings were not only Blacks guilty of “rape” or, more often than not, of consensual sexual intercourse with a white woman. Much less was needed to be condemned to death: The *Atlanta Constitution* of 11 July 1934 reported the execution of a Black man of twenty-five “accused of writing an ‘indecent and insulting’ letter to a young Hinds County white girl.” In that case, the “mob of armed citizens” had been content to fill the

60 Chomsky, Herman (2005), pp. 227-9.

61 See Woodward, in Losurdo (2005), ch. 10, § 5.

62 Ginzburg (1988), pp. 221-2, 205 and 211.

body of the wretched man with bullets.⁶³ What is more, in addition to being inflicted on the “perpetrators” in a more or less sadistic manner, death also hangs over on the suspects. We continue to leaf through the newspapers of the time and read the headlines: “Cleared by Jury, Then Lynched”; “Suspect Hanged from Oak on Bastrop Public Square”; “Wrong Man Was Lynched.”⁶⁴ Finally, the violence is not limited to the perpetrator or suspected perpetrator. It happens that, before proceeding to his lynching, the shack where his family lives is set on fire and completely burned down.⁶⁵

Beyond Blacks, the terror also strikes whites who, by becoming excessively friendly with Blacks, become traitors to their race. This is already evident in the title of an article in the *Galveston Tribune* (Texas) of June 21, 1934: “White Girl is Jailed, Negro Friend is Lynched.” The fact is—an editorial of the *Chicago Defender* commented a few days later—“in the state of Texas, a white woman may associate more freely with a dog than with a Negro.”⁶⁶ And if she disregards this, the terrorist white supremacy regime lashes out at her in two ways: depriving her of her personal liberty and heavily attacking her loved ones. Therefore, terror also strikes citizens (Blacks and whites) who do not carry out any political activity but who are considered guilty of leading a private life contrary to social norms.

The “betrayal” of the white race can take even more serious forms. Communists engaged in a campaign against the practice of lynching are branded as “[negro] lovers,” and therefore they too are affected by the terror exercised by the white supremacy regime and forced to “face the possibility of imprisonment, beatings, kidnapping, and even death.”⁶⁷ And once again the journalistic reports of the time are illuminating: “‘The Fear of Communism’ Cited as Lynching Cause.”⁶⁸

Let us return to Stalin’s USSR. There is no doubt that, starting above all with the forced collectivization of agriculture, the concentrationary universe underwent a frightening intensification of what had already begun to take shape immediately after the October Revolution. But let us also apply in this case the principle of *tu quoque*. Leaving aside the concentrationary universe (which we already know)

63 Ibid., p. 220.

64 Ibid., pp. 212, 219 and 232.

65 Ibid., p. 222.

66 Ibid., pp. 217-8.

67 Kelley (1990), pp. xii-xiii.

68 Ginzburg (1988), p. 203.

in force in the southern United States between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, let us see what happened in the middle of the last century. Between 1952 and 1959 the Mau Mau revolt broke out in Kenya. This is how the government of London maintained order in its colony: In the Kamiti concentration camp, women

were interrogated, whipped, starved, and subjected to hard labor, which included filling mass graves with corpses from other concentration camps. Several gave birth in Kamiti, but the mortality rate among the infants was overwhelming. Women buried their babies in piles of six at a time.⁶⁹

Even with regard to genocidal practices, which are more nonchalant than ever, the prosecution does not enforce the principle of *tu quoque*. I do not know whether one can define the massacre of communists in Indonesia (promoted or encouraged by the CIA) as “the second of the greatest holocausts of the 20th century.” In any case, it was a massacre conducted without the industrial efficiency of the Nazis, and therefore carried out with an excess of sadism. However, it should be known to all that, even after the end of the Third Reich, the interventions of the liberal West in the colonies or semi-colonies resulted not only in the establishment of ferocious dictatorships but also in the aid given to the perpetration of “acts of genocide.” This is pointed out in Guatemala by the “truth commission,” which refers to the fate of the Mayan Indians, guilty of having sympathized with the opponents of the regime dear to Washington.⁷⁰

Finally, we have seen that Jacobins are “hideous cannibals” in the eyes of the Thermidorian bourgeoisie. Later, however, it would be the descendants of this bourgeoisie who would be hit by the Paris Commune’s denunciation of the “cannibal exploits of the Versailles bandits.”⁷¹ As for the twentieth century, as civil war rages on, the Bolsheviks call for a fight against “bourgeois cannibalism.”⁷² Later, as we know, it was Stalin himself who branded antisemitic racism as an expression of “cannibalism.” But nowadays, the tragedy and horror of the island of Nazino,⁷³ with the occurrence of actual cases of cannibalism, is taken as a starting point to reduce to mere barbarism

69 Ascherson (2005), p. 29.

70 Navarro (1999).

71 Marx, Engels (1955-89), vol. 17, p. 334.

72 Bukharin, Preobrazensky (1920), p. 106.

73 **Ed. Note:** See previous discussion of Nazino: *supra*, ch. 4, § 5.

the events that began with the October Revolution and to denounce “red cannibalism.”⁷⁴

Actually, cannibalism had previously occurred. In 1921, the severity of the famine reached an all-time high such as “even to give rise to cases of cannibalism.”⁷⁵ The following year the Italian liberal philosopher Guido De Ruggiero observed:

The Entente bloc, which wanted to annihilate Bolshevism, was instead killing Russian men, women, and children; could poor starving people ever compete in democratic elegances with the hunger-causing Entente? They, as was natural, huddled around their own government and identified its enemies as their enemies.⁷⁶

As can be seen, the liberal philosopher calls into question the Entente rather than Soviet power. Even the “certified cases of cannibalism” that took place in certain regions of China in 1928⁷⁷ can hardly be blamed on the communists, who would only gain power more than twenty years later. If anything, the cannibalism cases could be blamed on the West, which, since the Opium Wars, had pushed the great Asian country into the abyss. But let us go back to the 1930s, moving from Stalin’s Soviet Union to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s United States. Here is how in Alabama a mass of rioters attacked a Black man:

First they cut off his penis and he was forced to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked them.

Then they sliced his sides and stomach with knives and every now and then somebody would cut off a finger or toe. Red hot irons were used on the negro to burn him from top to bottom. From time to time during the torture a rope would be tied around Neal’s neck and he was pulled up over a limb and held there until he almost choked to death, when he would be let down and the torture begun all over again.

After several hours of this punishment, they decided just to kill him.

Neal’s body was tied to a rope on the rear of an automobile and dragged over the highway to the Cannidy home. Here a mob estimated to number somewhere between 3,000 and 7,000 people from eleven Southern states was excitedly

74 Werth (2007b); Galli Della Loggia (2007).

75 Souvarine (2003), p. 401.

76 De Ruggiero (1963), p. 437.

77 Roux (2007), p. 41.

waiting for the arrival.

The entertainment around the corpse went on for a long time and ended with the sale of photographs “at fifty cents each,”⁷⁸ but we will stop here. The fact remains that the application of the principle of *tu quoque* has led us to discover in the USA of F. D. Roosevelt a case not of anthropophagy caused by general scarcity, disorganization, and hunger, but of forced self-cannibalism organized as mass spectacle in a society that, moreover, enjoys affluence.

In conclusion, the usual juxtaposition between the communist movement on the one hand and the liberal West on the other makes abstraction as far as the latter is concerned from the fate reserved for colonial or colonized people and the measures enacted in situations of more or less acute crisis. Manichaeism is the result of the comparison between two heterogeneous quantities. A world analyzed exclusively in its sacred space and its periods of normality is triumphally contrasted with a world that, in questioning the barrier between sacred and profane space, between civilized and barbarian, is forced to face a prolonged state of exception and the irreducible hostility of the custodians of the exclusionary sacred space.

DEMONIZATION AND HAGIOGRAPHY:
THE EXAMPLE OF “GREATEST LIVING MODERN HISTORIAN”

According to Conquest, the catastrophe of the twentieth century actually began with the irruption of *The Communist Manifesto* into the “civic and democratic order” proper to the West. The ideas enunciated by Marx and Engels “have been a major source of trouble in the world for over five generations.”⁷⁹

Let us therefore see what the situation was in the world in 1848, the year of publication of the fatal *Manifesto*. Let us begin with Great Britain, which for Conquest is one of the two centers of the exclusive and superior “Anglo-Celtic” community, and therefore of authentic civilization. Well, in the mid-nineteenth century, in Tocqueville’s eyes the industrial area of Manchester and the working-class districts appear as an “infected labyrinth,” a “hell” where miserable hovels are like “the last refuge a man might find between poverty and death.”

78 Ginzburg (1988), p. 223.

79 Conquest (2001b), p. 48

And yet “the wretched people reduced to living in them can still inspire jealousy in their fellow beings.” Let us now move on to the workhouses, again giving the floor to the French liberal. They offer a “most hideous and disgusting aspect of wretchedness”; on one side the sick, unable to work and awaiting death, and on the other women and children crowded together “like pigs in the mud of their pigsty; it is difficult to avoid treading on a half-naked body.”

In France, the working classes are not resigned to these conditions. And this is how Tocqueville called for dealing with the revolt of June 1848: anyone caught “in a defensive posture” must be shot on the spot. On the other hand, one cannot be content with “palliatives.” It is necessary to liquidate once and for all the hotbeds of subversion, wiping out not only the followers of the Jacobin-inspired group known as ‘The Mountain,’ but also “all the surrounding hills.” One must not hesitate in the face of “a [...] heroic remedy.”

In the mid-nineteenth century, Ireland was also an integral part of Great Britain, where we saw a “proto-Eichmann” condemn hundreds of thousands of people to death by starvation. In the other colonies of the United Kingdom the situation was not any better. In 1835 the Viceroy of India reported to London the consequences of the destruction of local textile artisanship, wiped out by large-scale English industry: “The misery is scarcely paralleled in the history of trade. The bones of the cotton weavers whiten the plains of India.” The tragedy does not end there. Two years later there was such a terrible famine in certain regions that—as another British source candidly noted, while committed to celebrating the glory of the Empire—“the British residents [...] could not take their evening excursion on account of the stench of corpses too numerous for burial.” The prospects for these evening walks did not seem to improve: “cholera and smallpox followed, sweeping away a multitude who had outlived the dearth.”⁸⁰ The carnage is not only the result of “objective” economic processes. In New Zealand—observed the *Times* in 1864—the colonists, with the support of the London government, were bringing to completion the “extermination of the natives.”

And now let us see what happens in the other center of the “Anglo-Celtic” community and of authentic civilization. At the time when *The Communist Manifesto* broke out ruinously in Europe, slavery was in full bloom in the United States, which a little earlier had reintroduced it in Texas, wrested from Mexico by force of arms. Even ear-

80 In Chamberlain (1937), p. 997 and note 2; Martineau (1857), p. 297.

lier, it had declared with Jefferson that they wanted to reduce to “starvation” the people of Santo Domingo-Haiti, guilty of having broken the chains of slavery. Added to the tragedy of Black peoples in the USA is that of the Indians. As far as the latter are concerned, let us mention here only one episode, summarized as follows by an American historian: “The degradation and annihilation of the California Indians represent an indelible disgrace on the honor and intelligence of a nation. It was not a matter of war but of a sort of popular sport.”

In relation to colonial peoples or peoples of colonial origin the brutality of the Western “civic and democratic order” is not only put into practice but is also explicitly theorized by authors who have been embraced without any problem into the liberal pantheon. Tocqueville invited his compatriots not to let themselves be hindered by any residual moral scruples and to accept reality: to complete the conquest of Algeria, which under no circumstances could be renounced, it was inevitable “that crops be burned, silos emptied, and lastly that disarmed men, women and children seized.” Rather, it was necessary to go even further, as emerged from a terrible watchword: “Destroy anything that resembles any permanent aggregation of people or, in other words, a town. Do not to allow any town to survive or arise in the regions controlled by Abd el-Kader” (the resistance leader).⁸¹

The rosy picture Conquest draws of the world before the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* can be likened to a similar oleograph that in the early nineteenth century a critic of abolitionism drew of slave society:

Sheltered by all the necessities of life, surrounded with an ease unknown in the greater part of the countries of Europe, secure in the enjoyment of their property, for they had property and it was sacred, cared for in their illnesses with an expense and an attention that you would seek in vain in the hospitals so boasted of in England, protected, respected in the infirmities of age; in peace with their children, and with their family... freed when they had rendered important services: such was the picture, true and not embellished, of the government of our Negroes [...]. The most sincere attachment bound the master to the slave; we slept in safety in the middle of these men who had become our children and many among us had neither locks nor bolts on our doors.⁸²

And yet, Conquest, the “the Cold War veteran,” is celebrated as the “greatest living modern historian,” at the hands, to be sure,

⁸¹ On all this, see Losurdo (2005), chapters 5, § 8; 6, § 3; 3, § 2; 10, § 1; 7, § 1; 9, § 2 and 7, § 6.

⁸² James (1968), p. 105.

of another court historian.⁸³ It is clear, the *reductio ad Hitlerum* of the events that began with the October Revolution and above all of the personality who for longer than any other directed the Soviet Union is only the other side of the coin of the insulting hagiography of the world before 1917 and even before the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*.

ABOLITIONIST REVOLUTIONS AND THE DEMONIZATION OF THE
“BLANCOPHAGES” AND THE BARBARIANS

To clarify the logic underlying these ideological processes, a comparative framework can help once again. There are three great revolutionary movements that, in different ways, have radically challenged the slavery or semi-slavery of colonial peoples and the racist regime of white supremacy that existed internally or internationally. In the first place, we must think of the great revolution of the Black slaves that broke out in Santo Domingo in the wake of the French Revolution. Led by Toussaint Louverture, the “Black Jacobin,” it led to the proclamation of the independence of Santo Domingo-Haiti, the first country on the American continent to shake off the institution of slavery. The second great revolutionary movement is the one that in the USA, starting from the abolitionist agitation and the Civil War, which leads for a short period of time (the years of Reconstruction) to the establishment of a multiracial society, in which the now freed Black citizens enjoy not only civil rights but also political rights. We must finally refer to the October Revolution, which launched an appeal to the slaves of the colonies to break their chains and which powerfully stimulated what were hitherto the “inferior races” in the struggle for decolonization and emancipation.

All three of these great movements have undergone and, in some sense, are still being subjected to summary dismissiveness or rather to being consigned to historical obscurity or semi-obscurity. Take the revolution led by Toussaint Louverture. In the early decades of the nineteenth century those who looked upon it with sympathy were branded as “blancophages and murderers.”⁸⁴ Regarding Santo Domingo, Tocqueville limited himself to mentioning the “bloody ca-

⁸³ (2001b). Paul Johnson’s citation can be found on the back cover of *Conquest*.

⁸⁴ Grégoire (1996), p. 75.

tastrophe that put an end to its existence.” Paradoxically, the island ceases to exist at the very moment in which it puts an end, for the first time on the American continent, to the institution of slavery! But perhaps, in order to convey the climate of the time, it is better to quote a famous short story by Heinrich von Kleist (*The Engagement in S. Domingo*), set at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “when Negroes were killing whites,” and indeed the “slaughter of whites” was consummated under the banner of a “general giddiness of revenge.” The criminalization of that great revolution continued to dominate unchallenged for a long time. It can be found at the beginning of the twentieth century in Lothrop Stoddard: together with the revolution of the Black slaves of Santo Domingo, the theorist of white supremacy also condemned the second and third stages of the anti-slavery and anti-racist struggle, and consistently branded as traitors to the white race both the French Jacobins and the American exponents of radical abolitionism and the cause of racial equality, as well as the Bolsheviks.

With regard to so-called Reconstruction, the warning of a prominent U.S. historian should be borne in mind: “the South, despite its military defeat, had long been winning the ideological Civil War.”⁸⁵ It might seem that at least in this case there should be no doubt: while it has the centuries of slavery proper behind it, Reconstruction is then forced to give way to a regime of anti-Black terror so vicious that it can be singled out as the most tragic moment in the history of African Americans. And yet, we see how Wilson summarizes this historical period: “domestic slaves were almost uniformly dealt with indulgently and even affectionately by their masters.” On the wave of emancipation then came Reconstruction, with the formation in the South of majorities that rest on the Blacks: it is “an extraordinary carnival of public crime” that fortunately ended with “the natural, inevitable ascendancy of the whites.”⁸⁶ What fills a personality who has become part of the pantheon of the United States and the West with horror is not the period in which the absolute power of the slave owner over his human chattel rages, nor even the period in which the white supremacist regime organizes as a mass spectacle the lynching and slow martyrdom of former slaves; what is synonymous with “public crime” is the brief season that follows the Civil War and during which there is a commitment, in spite of everything, to take

85 Davis (2000).

86 In Blackmon (2008), p. 358.

seriously the human rights of African Americans.

For a long time Black Reconstruction or Radical Reconstruction has been branded as synonymous with “totalitarianism” or as a precursor to “fascism and Nazism.” Imposed at the conclusion of a war very similar to the “total war of the Nazis” it had claimed to achieve by force the principle of equality and racial mixing, trampling on the will of the majority of the (white) population and appealing to savage populations, resulting in the “overthrow of a civilized society through the use of physical force by the hands of barbarism.” Fortunately, to challenge or contain this horror were the unblemished and fearless knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the organization in which the “chivalric order” that had long characterized the U.S. South continued to operate! These are the motives put forward by a historiography that has continued to make its influence felt well after the collapse of the Third Reich.⁸⁷

Finally there is the matter of October 1917, which began with the appeal to the slaves in the colonies to break their chains, and culminated in the advent of Stalin’s autocracy.

Of course, this is in no way to idealize the protagonists of these three great struggles for emancipation. An eminent historian of the Black slave revolution in Santo Domingo polemicized against “the current legend that the abolition of slavery resulted in the extermination of whites”;⁸⁸ but it is indisputable that massacres occurred on both sides. Nor is there any doubt about the hitherto unheard-of brutality with which the American Civil War was conducted by the North and in particular by Sherman, who explicitly set out to strike at the civilian populations and to “make Georgia howl,”⁸⁹ and to whom, not by chance, Hitler seemed to have looked to as a model. Finally, and not up for debate, is the ruthless character of the dictatorship exercised first by Lenin and then, even more so, by Stalin. At least the second of the conflicts evoked here seems now to have been lost by the slaveholding South on the historical plane as well. It is no longer politically correct to regret the end of the institution of slavery or the white supremacy regime. Instead, it has become commonplace to refer to “Stalinism” (and of the events that began with the October Revolution) in a merely criminal key and to equate Stalin to the

87 For nostalgia for the Southern tradition, see Weaver (1987), pp. 78,161,160-70; critically, see Franklin (1989), pp. 10-40 and Davis (2000).

88 James (1968), p. 117.

89 In Weaver (1987), p. 168.

one who, inheriting and radicalizing the colonial tradition, explicitly claimed the right of the “master race” to decimate and enslave the “inferior races.” It is a sign that the admirers of colonialism have not lost the battle either on a political or, even less, on the historical plane.

UNIVERSAL HISTORY AS A “GROTESQUE TALE OF MONSTERS”
AND AS “TERATOLOGY”?

Condemned to *damnatio memoriae* is the historical movement that more radically than any other has challenged the arrogance of the “master race,” which has raged for centuries, from the classical colonial tradition up to the attempt of the Third Reich to radicalize that classical colonial tradition and apply it in the very bosom of Europe.

However, there is no historical movement that cannot be subjected to similar criminalization. Take liberalism, for example. If one ignores the lofty pages it has written (the affirmation of the need for the limitation of power and the rule of law, or the recognition of the powerful stimulus to the development of productive forces and social wealth that can be derived from the market, competition, and individual initiative) and instead focuses exclusively on the fate inflicted on colonial peoples or peoples of colonial origin (for centuries subjected to enslavement, to more or less brutal forms of forced labor and to genocidal practices and even “holocausts,” according to the expression often used by historians), liberalism can also be regarded in a more or less criminal light.

In today’s climate of the “war on terror” there is certainly no shortage of books that, starting from the horrific suicide attacks in Beslan, Russia in 2004 (when a blind and limitless violence even targeted children), reconstruct the expansion of Islam as the story of a bloody and ruthless conquest, which savagely lorded over the defeated and left behind only an immense trail of blood. Forgotten and omitted is the role of Islam in the creation of the great multiethnic and multicultural civilization that characterized Spain before the Christian Reconquista, in its radical questioning of the caste society in India, and more generally in its promotion of the struggle for the emancipation of colonial peoples since the nineteenth century.

On the opposite side, however, we can register the publication of

a monumental Criminal History of Christianity, dedicated entirely to denouncing the intolerance and violence inherent in its pretension of knowing the only true God, with an indignant condemnations of the Crusades of extermination (proclaimed against infidels outside and heretics inside), of religious wars, of the Inquisition, of witch hunts, of the legitimization of Western colonial expansionism with its trail of horrors, of the support given even in the twentieth century to tyrannical and bloody regimes.⁹⁰ And once again nonchalance is interwoven with omission. Preaching the idea of equality among people and continuing to fuel the abolitionist and anti-slavery movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Christianity constituted an essential chapter in the process of the formation of democratic society. Nietzsche understood this well in his lucid hatred, but it is precisely from this that he could denounce the intrinsically violent and criminal impulse that, despite appearances, characterizes Christianity and, even earlier, the Judaism of the prophets. By asserting the idea of equality and placing blame on wealth, power, and seigniorial status in general, the Hebrew prophets would be the first to be responsible for the massacres committed during the Peasants' War, the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Paris Commune. A line of continuity that later twentieth-century antisemitism and Hitler extended to the communist movement and the "Judeo-Bolshevik" revolution of October 1917.

On the other hand, the communist movement has often been compared with early Christianity or Islam. Thus, the picture of universal history as a history of universal crime is virtually complete. The motivations and the reasons for its uninterrupted duration escape us, so that history as a whole is configured, in the words of Hegel, as a "slaughterhouse" of planetary dimensions or rather as an immense, unfathomable *mysterium iniquitatis*.⁹¹ At this point—we can observe with Gramsci—the "past" as such appears to us as "irrational" and "monstrous." History as a whole is represented as a "grotesque tale of monsters," as "teratology."⁹²

Responding to the reduction of the events that began in October 1917 to a crime or a criminal madness, authors and personalities committed to defending in some way the honor of communism sometimes react by distancing themselves from the blackest pages

90 Deschner (1988).

91 Hegel (1969-79), vol. 12, p. 35.

92 Gramsci (1975), p. 1417.

of the history of this movement and branding them as a betrayal or degeneration of the original ideals of the Bolshevik revolution or the teachings of Lenin or Marx. On closer inspection, even this approach ends up with an outcome not very different from the one just analyzed. Are all the events mercilessly described in the pages of the *Criminal History of Christianity* a “betrayal” or a “degeneration” of Christianity? Are the regimes that then established themselves on the terrain of Protestantism a “degeneration” of the Reformation (and of the principle of the freedom of the Christian solemnly proclaimed by Luther)? Proceeding along these lines, Cromwell is a “degenerate” compared to the initial protagonists of the Puritan revolution, and the Jacobin Terror is a “degeneration” of the ideas of 1789. Is today’s Islamic fundamentalism also a “degeneration” with respect to the Koran and the doctrine of Muhammad? Consistent with this approach, those who want to can consider the enslavement and annihilation of colonial peoples implemented by the liberal West a degeneration of “liberalism.” And thus, the “traitors” would be Washington, Jefferson, Madison, all slave owners, or Franklin, according to whom “it is one of the designs of Providence that these savages [the Native Americans] are exterminated in order to make room for the cultivators of the land.” Likewise, Locke should also be branded as a traitor of liberalism, generally considered the father of this current of thought and who nevertheless not only legitimizes the expropriation (and deportation) of Native Americans, but is also, as has been observed by an eminent scholar (David B. Davis), “the last great philosopher to seek to justify absolute and perpetual slavery.” In so doing, however, we turn the pantheon of the great spirits of liberalism into a gallery of vile traitors.

This way of arguing is all the more questionable if we reflect on the fact that, in the eyes of a great liberal theorist of slavery such as John C. Calhoun, it is precisely the abolitionists with their Jacobinism and anti-slavery fanaticism who betrayed the liberal ideals of tolerance and respect for property rights in all their forms. This approach is no more persuasive if we apply it to the history of Marxism and communism. Starting especially from the XXth Congress of the CPSU, it is Stalin who was the criminal and traitor par excellence. But we must not forget that, according to the Chinese or Albanian Communist Party leaders, it was precisely the champions of de-Stalinization who were guilty of treason and “revisionism.” Nowadays, the process of criminalization also involves Lenin, Mao

Zedong, Tito, not to mention Pol Pot, and does not even spare Ho Chi Minh and Castro. If we use the category of treason, the result is quite miserable. The history of the communist movement as a crime, traced smugly by the dominant ideology, is simply renamed, by those who find it difficult to recognize themselves in the dominant ideology, as the history of the betrayal of the original ideals. Similar results would be reached in the reading of liberalism or Christianity if one were to describe as an expression of the betrayal of the original ideals the blacker pages of one or the other. In conclusion, the approach criticized here has the fault of disappearing real and profane history, which is replaced by the history of a wretched and mysterious corruption and distortion of doctrines raised a priori into the Empyrean of purity and holiness.

Theory, however, is never innocent. The reading of the history of Soviet Russia in terms of “betrayal” and “degeneration” of original noble ideals is for the most part disdainfully rejected by today’s historiography, which is strongly committed not only to criminalizing the Bolsheviks as a whole, but also to denouncing the theoretical precursors of the Terror and the Gulag in the very authors who the Bolsheviks used as their point of reference. Even if it is necessary to avoid drawing firm lines of continuity and confusing very different responsibilities, it is nevertheless legitimate and even right to question the role (indirect and mediated) played by Marx and Engels, rejecting the myth of the innocence of the theory they elaborated and investigating the real history of its impacts and the reasons for them. But in a similar way one must then proceed with all the great intellectuals, even those who stand within a different and opposed tradition of thought. Take Locke, for example. Is there a relationship between his refusal to extend toleration and even “compassion” to the “papists” and the massacres suffered in Ireland by the Catholics? And what connection is there between his theoretical justifications of slavery in the colonies and the trafficking and tragedy of Blacks, what today’s African American militants like to define as the Black Holocaust? Or do we refer to the historical time of Marx and Engels, to a theorist like John Stuart Mill, champion of the West’s “despotism” over the “junior” races (themselves held to “absolute obedience”) and of the beneficial character of slavery imposed on “savage tribes” intolerant of work and discipline. Is he to be held co-responsible of the terror and massacres that accompanied colonial expansion?

No movement or personality can escape these questions. We have

seen Nietzsche take his cue from the fiery tirades against power and wealth uttered by the Hebrew prophets and the Fathers of the Church to explain the ruinous and bloody characteristics of the revolutionary cycle. On the opposite side, those who denounce the protagonists of the Crusades as traitors to Christianity would do well not to lose sight of a usually overlooked detail. An integral part of the sacred text of this religion is the Old Testament, which legitimizes and celebrates the “Lord’s Wars” even in their crudest forms. In this case as well it is misleading to contrast the mediocrities or horrors of real history with the nobility of the original ideals.

Having established theory’s non-innocence, the matter is to differentiate degrees of responsibility. Between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, on the bodies of not a few Black slaves was stamped the RAC mark, the initials of the Royal African Company (the company that managed the slave trade), of which Locke was a shareholder. The least that can be said is that the authors of *The Communist Manifesto* did not benefit from the forced labor that, decades after their death, will characterize the Gulag. At any rate, Marx and Engels can be accused of having legitimized in advance a violence that will in any case be enacted after their death and decades later. Mill, on the other hand, proceeded to legitimize practices contemporary to him. Similarly, in Tocqueville we can read the explicit recommendation of more or less genocidal colonial practices (the systematic destruction of urban centers located in the area controlled by the rebels) that refer not to the future but to the immediate present.⁹³ That is, for the infamies of colonialism, which take place under their own eyes and sometimes with their direct approval, the exponents of the liberal tradition mentioned here bear a far more direct responsibility than that attributed to Marx and Engels for the infamies of the Soviet regime and for “Stalinism.” If the path from Marx to Stalin and the Gulag is problematic, bumpy and in any case mediated by completely unpredictable events such as the World Wars and the permanent state of exception, the line connecting Locke to the slave trade or Mill and Tocqueville to forced labor imposed on the natives and colonial massacres is immediately discernible.

Like theory, utopia cannot lay claim to innocence. On this point liberals are right, even if they unfortunately use this argument in a dogmatic way, making it valid only for their opponents and not for themselves. What terrible human and social costs has the utopia of a

93 Cf. Losurdo (2005), chapters 1, § 6 and vii, §§ 3 and 6.

self-regulated market entailed, with the rejection of any state intervention, a utopia to which England remained faithful even when, in the mid-nineteenth century, a disease destroyed the potato harvest and led to a famine that cut down the lives of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Irish people? Or, to point to a more recent example: how many catastrophes have been caused and continue to be caused by the utopia (dear to Wilson, even earlier than for Bush, Jr., as well as to illustrious contemporary philosophers such as Popper) of a perpetual peace to be realized through the global diffusion of democracy at the barrel of a gun? To avoid falling precisely into dogmatism, a similar question should be formulated in relation to the history of the Soviet Union. There is no lack of those who read the history of the country born from the October Revolution by lamenting the progressive “betrayal” of the ideas elaborated by Marx and Engels. In reality, in some ways it is precisely these “original” ideas (the messianic expectation of a society without state and legal norms, without national borders, without market relations and without money, deprived in the last analysis of any real conflict) which have played a nefarious role, hindering the transition to a condition of normality and prolonging and exacerbating the state of exception (provoked by the crisis of the ancien régime, the wars and subsequent aggressions).

Although they differ from each other, the two approaches criticized here, which rely respectively on the category of crime (or criminal insanity) or betrayal, have a common feature: they tend to focus on the criminal or traitorous nature of single individuals. In fact, they refrain from understanding the actual historical development and historical efficacy of social, political, and religious movements that have exerted a global power of attraction and whose influence is spread over a very long period of time.

This way of proceeding is inconclusive and misleading also regarding the Third Reich (which lasted barely 12 years and succeeded in exercising attraction only within the sphere of the “master race”). It is too convenient to put the infamies of Nazism on Hitler alone, removing the fact that he took from the world that existed before him, radicalizing what he found, the two central elements of his ideology: the celebration of the colonizing mission of the white race and the West, now called upon to extend their dominion into Eastern Europe as well; and the reading of the October Revolution as a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy which, by stimulating the revolt of the colonial peoples and undermining the natural hierarchy of races and

more generally by infecting like a pathogen the organism of society, constituted a frightening threat to civilization to be confronted by all means, including the “final solution.” That is to say, in order to understand the genesis of the horror of the Third Reich it is not a question of reconstructing Hitler’s childhood or adolescence, just as it makes no sense to start from Stalin’s beginnings in order to analyze an institution (the Gulag) deeply rooted in the history of tsarist Russia and to which, in different ways, the countries of the liberal West also resorted, both during their colonial expansion and during the state of exception provoked by the Second Thirty Years’ War. Similarly, it would be misleading to want to explain the enslavement, decimation, and extermination of Native Americans as originating primarily from the individual characteristics of the Founding Fathers of the USA, or to want to deduce the strategic and atomic bombings that were inflicted upon German and Japanese cities by referring to the perverse nature of Churchill, F.D. Roosevelt, and Truman, as it would also be foolish to try to explain the horror of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib from the adolescence or childhood of Bush, Jr.

But back to Stalin. Is it a case of moral indifference to rethink the approach that interprets everything in terms of crime or criminal madness or a betrayal of original ideals? Today’s historians are still discussing personalities and events that go back almost two millennia. Are we to subscribe without hesitation to the very gloomy picture that the senatorial aristocracy on the one hand and the Christians on the other helped to paint of Nero? In particular, are we to take for granted the Christian propaganda that accused the Roman emperor of having set fire to Rome in order to blame and persecute the innocent followers of the new religion, or instead, as some scholars suggest, were there really apocalyptic and fundamentalist currents within early Christianity that aspired to see the locus of superstition and sin reduced to ashes and to hasten the fulfillment of their eschatological expectations?⁹⁴ Let us jump forward a couple of centuries. Regarding the great anti-Christian persecution unleashed by Diocletian, historians continue to wonder: was it only the result of an inexplicable theological hatred foreign to Roman traditions, or did real concerns for the fate of the state, whose military strength was undermined by Christian pacifist agitation, play an important role, precisely at a time when the peril of barbarian invasions was becoming more threatening? Historians asking themselves these questions are hardly

94 Baudy (1991), pp. 9-10 and 43.

accused of wanting to minimize the persecution suffered by Christians or of wanting to consign them to the beasts and the most atrocious torments.

Regrettably, analyzing the sacred history of Christianity critically is easier than formulating doubts about the aura of sacredness that tends to surround the history of the West and its leading country. Because of the far greater temporal distance and the smaller impact on the interests and passions of the present, it is easier to understand the motives of those who were overtaken by Christianity than to try to elucidate the motives of those whose defeat has paved the way for the triumph of the "American century." And this explains the weight that demonization and hagiography continue to exert in the interpretation of the twentieth century and the persistent popularity enjoyed by the negative cult of heroes.

AFTERWORD

FROM STALIN TO GORBACHEV:
HOW AN EMPIRE ENDS

LUCIANO CANFORA

A rule strictly adhered to by the historians of empire was that nothing should be said of the reigning prince or emperor while he was alive. This would be taken care of by the next historian, who would be silent, in turn, about the contemporary reigning prince. Justinian had, in this respect, a somewhat different but very symptomatic fate. It was in fact the same historian, Procopius of Caesarea, who put into circulation, while Justinian was still alive, numerous books of history that exalted his greatness, wisdom, victorious wars etc., but who at the same time, kept in store, destined for circulation after the death of the prince, a *Secret History* in which Justinian is literally torn to pieces and appears as the receptacle of all wickedness, weakness and useless cruelty, as well as vanity in attributing himself merits due to others. The *Secret History* was written around 558 CE, Justinian died on 14 November 565 at the age of eighty-three. When he died, the *Secret History* demolished the victor of the Goths, the re-conqueror of Italy and restorer of the unity of the Empire. Modern figures can freely oscillate between the two extremes, as between the two portraits of Stalin written by Nikita Khrushchev. On the one hand, the report to the XIXth Congress of the CPSU (October 1952), in which all the credit for the economic, military, and social strength of the USSR is attributed to “our beloved leader and master Comrade Stalin”; on the other, the *Secret Speech*, read in closed session at the XXth CPSU Congress (February 1956), about three years after the death of Stalin. Here, as in Procopius’s *Secret History*, the “beloved master” is present-

ed as a ridiculous, cowardly, and bloodthirsty tyrant (so much so as to make it almost incomprehensible how he could have ruled for so long and with the support of an infinite number of Khrushchevs). Tolstoy's vision, aimed at nullifying the "greatness" of the "great personalities" of history, is undoubtedly a good antidote to heroic historiography. It fails, however, to account for the intertwining of individual meanness and political efficacy that makes some personalities find themselves at the epicenter of epochal events and transformations, which posterity will continue to consider such despite all the possible "secret stories."

Santo Mazzarino—one of Italy's greatest historians—used to liken Stalin to Justinian for being both great builders, great despots, and great intolerants.

Between 565, the year of Justinian's death, and the brief and catastrophic reign of Phocas (602-610), the great Justinian construction came undone. The reconquest of the West, and in particular of Italy, came to nothing. During his short reign, Phocas proved incapable of facing insurrections, external attacks, and the spread of a growing anarchy, until Heraclius, son of the governor of the province of Africa, conquered Constantinople in a coup d'état in 610 and founded a new dynasty. The comparison, admittedly only partly apt as are all historiographical comparisons, is between Justinian and Stalin on the one hand, and Phocas and Gorbachev on the other.

Simplifications are not always beneficial but can give an idea. In my opinion, it is not good that people often still refrain from talking about Stalin with a clear head, as is now done for Robespierre or other "bloodthirsty" proponents of "revolution." One snaps instead of weighing the pros and cons.

Moreover, if Time in 1944 proclaimed Stalin "man of the year" there must be a reason. If during the years of Nazi-fascist danger European anti-fascism paid him frank words of appreciation and recognition, there must be a reason. What some people stubbornly want, on the other hand, is to equate Stalin's work to the uniquely nefarious and destructive work of Hitler. After all, it is not by chance that Nazism led the world to war and catastrophe and the USSR did not. In the end it dissolved, it did not drag its adversaries and the world into the abyss.

Stalin's policy was to keep out of the conflict, up to the point of blindness in not heeding the warnings that were reaching him from many quarters in June 1941.

In a few lines, I will not be able to summarize the results that many scholars have provided in the past decades about the management of power in the USSR. I will only say that the questions are two: a) which models of “people power” (democracy, to be precise) have emerged from the 1917 Revolution; b) what actual practices were instead established in the USSR and in the satellite countries. I think it is legitimate to speak on the first point (it is enough to think of the studies of the codifications of constitutional law in the USSR). It is at the same time necessary to compare these texts and those efforts with the hard lessons of reality and with actual practice. I wrote in my book on democracy that “in the last period of Stalin’s rule the premises were laid for the ruin of the system.” In fact that is what it had been, since the break with Trotsky and the outlawing of the opposition within the Communist Party, an uninterrupted civil war that had been waged with ferocity and with no holds barred, should have been exhausted or lessened after the victory of 1945. To have perpetuated its instruments was ruinous. On this concept of civil war, referring to the entire period from 1927 to the eve of World War II, I like to remember the pages of Feuchtwanger (Moscow 1937), the Jewish writer exiled to the US, where he lived until his death. What has been said so far has only one presupposition: that we discuss history. But in order to discuss history one must know the meaning of words. It amuses me a little to observe what misunderstandings have arisen from the expression I used about “creating a myth around the partition of Poland.” Someone thought I was saying that Poland had not been partitioned! In Italian, on the contrary, that phrase means that a (indisputable) fact is being “mythologized,” that is, it occupies the whole scene, it becomes the fact par excellence. This was one of the aspects of the pact of August 1939. The other aspects were the desire to destroy sooner or later the USSR that was well rooted in Hitler’s mind (as Kershaw has documented in his fine books), as well as the Anglo-French unwillingness to really come to an anti-German pact together with Stalin (Churchill writes well about it in his *The Gathering Storm*). Not to mention Polish hostility to allowing Soviet troops to pass through its territory in the event of a conflict with Germany, and not to mention Polish participation during the preceding year in the partition of Czechoslovakia. And let us point to an example on another front. Bacque documented in his book, *Der Geplante Tod* (lit: *The Planned Death*),¹ the annihilation by the USA of hundreds of

1 Ed. Note: Published in English under the title *Other Losses* (1989).

thousands of German prisoners. Those were “iron-hard” times, as Tibullus would have said. To lecture from a pulpit to give votes and democratic credentials now for past events makes one smile a little.

It is a good rule to understand ourselves through the words of those who look at us with a critical eye, not through the sterile consensus of the consenting and their followers. The most pertinent portrait of Julius Caesar, dead and no longer fearsome, was outlined by Cicero, who certainly had never loved him, in a well-chiseled passage of the Second Philippic, which wisely balances the merits and limits of the dictator whom he himself had praised in life. In the case of Stalin, it can be said, without fear of being mistaken, that both when he was alive and when he was dead, laudatory and demonizing literature were not in short supply.

For figures who, in a given historical moment, have summed up in their own person the very meaning and symbol of the movement they led, the “cult” of their person is a phenomenon not only well attested, but, it seems, difficult to avoid. Many names could be mentioned, but the most familiar and obvious are certainly Caesar and Napoleon. The need, on the part of the followers, to mythologize the “leader,” to whom corresponds the intuition, on the part of the leader, of the indispensable function of such a “mythologizing” mechanism, is a well-documented phenomenon. It stands out all the more (and reveals itself to be a mechanism that goes beyond the choices of the individual), when the person concerned would be, due to their style and culture, alien to such a quasi-religious relationship and yet, when it occurs, adapts to it. This is the case of the “Incorruptible,” who was the exact opposite of the demagogue thirsting for the cheering crowd, or even, in times closer to us, of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci recounts, amused, in a letter from prison, of the disappointment felt by a comrade, met during one of his stays in prison, who had imagined the leader of the communists to have a very different, imposing stature!

In this category (however unusual it may be to say it) one can also include Stalin, who for not an insignificant stretch of his long career wanted to keep himself in the role of the ideal “second”: of a mere faithful, executor of the work designed by another, one much “greater,” and who even in death should have continued to be perceived as “the leader,” that is, Lenin. And so Stalin dedicated to him a mausoleum of a pharaonic-Hellenistic-Byzantine type. Because on him, the only “living” leader although dead (and therefore embalmed) the

need for charisma of the Soviet masses would continue to converge. By the same dynamic, Augustus presented himself for a long time as Caesar's heir-executor-continuator-vindicator and devoted a cult to him, making him one with the gods.

It is therefore more necessary than ever, when faced with historical figures whose myth was an essential part of their actions (and of their "being perceived" by others), to refer to the judgment, limiting but unclouded, of non-followers, of thinking and distant people, and also of adversaries. In the Città Libera of August 23rd, 1945, Croce, who had never "conceded" anything to his communist counterparts, not even in the moments of "CLNist"² unity, who in 1932 in *Storia d'Europa* had written "communism has not been implemented in Russia as communism," wrote about Stalin words that could even seem to be praising, but were not. "What has been implemented in Russia," he wrote, "is the government of a class, or of a group of classes (bureaucrats, military, intellectuals) in which no longer hereditary emperors, but men of gifted political genius (Lenin, Stalin) lead"; and he added with prophetic irony: "Providence remains responsible for always providing comparable successors"! Alcide De Gasperi had spoken of "genius" (and this time not in a neutral sense, as in the words of Croce, but in an exalting one), relating to Stalin, a few months earlier, at the Brancaccio Theater in Rome, at the very moment in which he firmly outlined the unbridgeable distance of the Soviet experiment from the form, still to be specified, of post-fascist Italy. He had nevertheless spoken of the "immense, historical, enduring merit of the armies organized by the genius of Joseph Stalin."

It was easy at the time to promise "enduring" gratitude to the victors of Stalingrad. Paolo Bufalini recalled a priest who, while embracing him in hiding, had whispered to him: "We will win at Stalingrad!" But, as Herodotus well knew, the victory of the Athenians at Salamis, against a preponderant and apparently invincible adversary, had been gradually forgotten, even though it was the harbinger of the "freedom of the Greeks." Forgotten by the beneficiaries themselves, because that victory had given rise to the Athenian empire, oppressive heir to an initially equal alliance. History repeated itself,

2 **Ed. Note:** A term used to describe the period in Italy following the end of World War II and the victory of the resistance against fascism, during which various committees of liberation (CLN) were active, primarily made up of members of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and the Action Party (PA).

and after the Battle of Marengo³ in Italy the features of the liberator gradually became uglier. In short, it is too easy to speak en gros of imperial aims and trampled freedoms. For post-1945 Eastern Europe it is worth reading Ambler's remarkable story Judgment on Deltchev,⁴ which does not satisfy itself with simplistic declarations about the "gallows of Prague." And it is better to read Wilfried Loth's essay (*Stalin's Unwanted Child: The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR*)⁵ on Stalin's reluctance to allow the establishment of a republic in the Soviet zone of Germany, rather than the insulting rhetoric on the "Iron Curtain."

Stalin is returning to the collective consciousness of the Russians (as many polls indicate) because in the current discomfort and decline of the former superpower, it is obvious, just out of common sense, the recognition of a statesman who made it great by lifting it from a state of material inferiority and isolation. Molotov remembers that Stalin had once said to him: after my death they will throw garbage on my grave, but long afterwards they will understand. The quasi-judicial indictment that hangs over Stalin is that of the disproportionate mowing down of human lives. This yardstick of evaluation, which already throughout the nineteenth century accompanied and distorted the comings and goings (very similar to the present) of historiography on the French Revolution, has recently been polluted by the monstrosity of the so-called *Black Book of Communism* by Courtois and companions, a book that includes among the "victims of Stalin" even the millions of deaths of the Second World War, or among the "victims of communism" the untold victims of UNITA in Angola. After that monstrous pamphlet it is difficult to bring the discussion back to a decent level; nor is the rapid dismantling of those staggering figures sufficient. It is the connection between Revolution and Terror that is the hard problem. It began with Robespierre, not with Lenin, and it is still open.

But he sent legions of communists to their death, is the other "judicial" charge. Wajda's Danton, after all, meant precisely this, and denounced it. A great Jewish writer, Lion Feuchtwanger, who gave Stalin the merit of having been the first to give a state to the Jews (in

3 Ed. Note: 14 June 1800, a battle during the second Italian campaign where the Habsburg armies were defeated, turning the tide in favour of the French government in the years preceding the Napoleonic Wars.

4 Ambler (2002).

5 Loth (1994).

Birobidzhan, within the USSR), remarked, with regard to the “great trials,” a crucial factor: “Most of the accused were first and foremost conspirators and revolutionaries, all their lives they had been subversives and opponents. They were born for this.”⁶ It was the same observation that De Gasperi was to make years later in the already mentioned speech at the Brancaccio:

We believed that the trials were false, the testimonies invented, the confessions extorted. Now objective American information assures us that it was not a matter of a fake, and that the saboteurs were not vulgar swindlers, they were *old idealistic conspirators* [...] who faced death rather than adapt themselves to what for them was a betrayal of original communism.

After the XXth Congress, Concetto Marchesi sarcastically remarked: Tiberius had Tacitus as his “judge.” Stalin, who was less fortunate, got Khrushchev. It was a joke. With the XXth Congress in reality a power struggle was opening within the leadership, not unlike the one that had pitted Trotsky and Stalin against each other. It was a no-holds-barred struggle, of which “de-Stalinization” was one element. It was not an attempt at historiography. If anything, it was the most scandalous negation of historiography. And even those who, like Togliatti, understood its instrumentality and substantial falsity, could not unmask its nature and radical genesis, because Togliatti himself and the other leaders of the communist movement were, willingly or unwillingly, part of this new struggle. The initial outcomes of which were the revolutions within the Soviet “camp,” and the long-term ones are the very history we have just lived through. Curzio Malaparte, in an important and forgotten book, *Coup D'État: The Technique of Revolution* (published in France in 1931, destined to displease both the Communists and their adversaries) recorded the chronicle of an event that explains better than any reasoning the permanent conflict and uninterrupted repression that characterized the years of Stalin’s rule up to the war. That was the coup d’état attempted by Trotsky in Moscow on November 7, 1927, during the parade for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. It was a failed coup, which was followed by a very deep division in the party where Trotsky’s prestige remained enormous, and a creeping civil war, which Soviet propaganda reductively presented as judicial activity against “saboteurs.” This was the event within which to situate and understand the Stalin phenomenon. The formation of the USSR, industrialization, the war

6 Feuchtwanger (1946), p. 97.

against the kulaks, mass literacy, the creation of a free welfare state, the attempt to stay out of the war imposed by Hitler, the victory over Nazism achieved through unimaginable efforts without a real consensus: these are the events with which the historian must deal, without ever forgetting that, behind the scenes, a civil conflict was taking place, a split within the hegemonic party that had never subsided.

The puritans of ideology never liked Stalin. Colletti appropriately defined him twenty years after his death, in *L'Espresso*, as "one who never let himself be caught in the snares of ideology." But so much realism was not an end in itself. The unsigned editorial with which the *Corriere della Sera* commented on Stalin's death on 6 March 1953 still stands the test of time after fifty years of historiographical battles and fashions. The article reads:

This work cost untold sacrifices and was conducted with a rigor that knew no mercy. Freedom, respect for the person, tolerance, charity, were vain words and were treated as dead things. It was only during the Second World War that we saw how deeply those labors had worked. It is yesterday's history. But when the hour of the supreme test sounded, the man showed himself equal to himself and to the great tasks that he had sought, and that history had assigned to him.

The question of whether Stalin saw himself and his political action as inherent in the rebirth of his country after the catastrophe (war, upheaval, revolution, civil war), or, rather, in the history of the world communist movement, can be debated at length. To put it more briefly, the issue is whether he felt that he was first and foremost a Russian statesman or a communist leader with global responsibilities. It is characteristic of the historiographical reflection of Trotskyist inspiration (Trotsky himself, Deutscher) to give credence to the first answer. It was, on the other hand, characteristic of the official party historiography (even after 1956) to reframe such an answer as reductive, distorting (which moreover found acceptance even outside the political-historical discussions within the communist movement), and to put before the figure of Stalin the statesman, anyway, for better or worse, the figure and role of Stalin as a party man.

Today, more than fifty years after the disappearance of Stalin, the reasons for party historiography become more insignificant in our eyes, while on the contrary the historical problem of the place of Stalin and his successors in the history of Russia in our century stands out (a similar reflection should be made about grafting "communism" onto the history of China by a "heretic" like Mao). Isaac

Deutscher has devoted an entire book⁷ to demonstrate that Stalinism would, at a certain point, “jump” out from the skin of Russia, like the scab of a wound: once the “deformity” had been overcome, socialism and (restored) democratic praxis would be reunited with a more coherent internationalism. Never has a prediction proved more unfounded.

There are three principal moments in the USSR’s international relations policy, which constitute its “common thread,” and which mutually illuminate each other. Brest-Litovsk (January 1918), the Russian-German “pact” (August 1939), and Yalta (February 1945).

The beginning is Brest-Litovsk. The clash within the Bolshevik leadership between supporters and opponents of the peace-noose is well known. In order not to subscribe to it, Trotsky resigned from the Foreign Commissariat. Zinoviev and Kamenev had great misgivings. Fully in agreement with Lenin, who supported the necessity of peace in any case, Stalin, on the other hand, supported the treaty. In party hagiography this then became a strong point and a title of merit of the Stalinists in their frenzied work of discrediting the other Bolshevik factions. In the infamous *History of the Communist Party of the USSR* one reads these formulations, in which well-founded considerations and phrases of repugnant mystification are intermixed:

To continue the war under such conditions would have meant staking the very existence of the new-born Soviet Republic. The working class and the peasantry were confronted with the necessity of accepting onerous terms of peace, of retreating before the most dangerous marauder of the time, German imperialism. [...] All the counter-revolutionaries, from the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries to the most arrant White Guards, conducted a frenzied campaign against the signing of the peace treaty. Their policy was clear: they wanted to wreck the peace negotiations, provoke a German offensive, and thus imperil the still weak Soviet power and endanger the gains of the workers and peasants. [...] Their allies in this sinister scheme were Trotsky and his minion Bukharin, the latter, together with Radek and Pyatakov, heading a group which was hostile to the Party but camouflaged itself under the name of Left Communists. Trotsky and the group of Left Communists began a fierce struggle within the Party against Lenin, demanding the continuation of the war. These people were clearly playing into the hands of the German imperialists. [...] On February 10, 1918, the peace negotiations in Brest-Li-

7 Deutscher (1954).

tovsk were broken off. Although Lenin and Stalin, in the name of the Central Committee of the Party, had insisted that peace be signed, Trotsky, who was chairman of the Soviet delegation at Brest-Litovsk, treacherously violated the direct instructions of the Bolshevik Party. He announced that the Soviet Republic refused to reach peace on the terms proposed by Germany. At the same time, he informed the Germans that the Soviet Republic would not fight and would continue to demobilize the army.⁸

The narrative is at times grotesque, and there is an abundance of slanderous insinuations against Trotsky (it is later claimed that Trotsky and Bukharin were preparing a coup d'état in order to sabotage peace). The strong point of the story, however, remains the fact that, in the clash over the problem of peace, Lenin and Stalin—sometimes in the minority—were on one side in favor of an exit *from* the war as soon as possible, while a large part of the other leaders, in primis Trotsky (who went so far as to resign in order not to sign), were on the opposite front. The clash was very bitter, as is obvious: it is no accident that not only the History of the Communist Party, but also Trotsky's *Mein Leben* devoted whole sections (Trotsky almost thirty pages) to the affair.⁹ It should be observed that, despite the fact that Trotsky's account is far superior to the irritating prose of the History of the Communist Party, it is patently apologetic and at times obscure: full of details aimed at attenuating the fact that Trotsky and Lenin were on opposite sides, and always reticent about the position assumed by Stalin in the crucial affair.

The choice made in Brest-Litovsk is also the birth of Soviet foreign policy. It was a foreign policy of a state which has its own interests at heart first and foremost (it is understood on the basis of a corollary: the strengthening of the USSR benefits the cause of the revolution in the whole planet). Trotsky cultivated the illusion of replicating the battle of Valmy, of giving fuel to spread the revolutionary fire as at the time of Dumouriez and the victorious conflict of revolutionary France against the coalitions. Lenin and Stalin, who differed in so many ways but agreed on this, realistically gauged the balance of forces and maintained the course of action that would re-emerge in 1939, before the renewed danger of war: "The imperialists are massacring each other, we stay out of it and strengthen ourselves."

8 *History of the Communist Party (B) of the USSR*, Edizioni l'Unità, Rome 1944, pp. 271-2.

9 Trotsky (1976), *passim*.

Deutscher once wrote: "In one fundamental respect Stalin did, of course, continue Lenin's work. He strove to preserve the State founded by Lenin and to increase its might." Then if Lenin had survived, he would have ended up carrying out Stalin's policies, as Deutscher observes: "In fact only one road was open to [the State]: the one leading towards autocracy"; "The Bolshevik regime could not revert to its democratic origin, because it could not hope for enough democratic support to guarantee its survival."¹⁰

"Guarantee its survival." This was the lodestar of Stalin's foreign policy. If some illusions of vast fronts and possible alliances were still being cultivated by some, foreign intervention in the civil war, the "cordon sanitaire," and the lengthy exclusions from international bodies were enough to make clear the effective relationship with the outside world. Hence the dominant feature of Soviet foreign policy from the beginning: to negotiate with anyone. The agenda put to the vote by Lenin on 22 February 1918 at a meeting of the Central Committee, in a phase (soon to be revealed as transitory) of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations ("Comrade Trotsky is given full powers to accept the help of the French imperialist brigands against the German brigands"),¹¹ is very illuminating and connotes well this line of conduct and its presuppositions. Thus, in the aftermath of the peace-noose, it happened that Ludendorff's Germany was the only country with which Bolshevik Russia managed to have relations, at least for a few months. And the rather calm and understanding tone with which the bulletin of the German High Command (*Deutsche Kriegsnachrichten*) spoke of Russia and Lenin fits perfectly into this apparently unnatural collaboration. Collaboration resumed with the center-right Weimar governments, beginning with the Treaty of Rapallo (16 April 1922), precisely from this point of view, according to which there was no illusion of being able to see any difference between "French brigands" and "German brigands." And the possibility of greater collaboration with the Germans arose from the fact that they too were victims of the order imposed in Versailles by the winners, that is, by the great and "democratic" Western imperialist powers. The failure of the revolutionary wave of 1919-20 (the occupation of the factories in Italy, the Bavarian Republic of the Councils, Béla Kun's Hungary, the military defeat in the conflict with Poland) definitively confirmed to the Soviet leadership the rightness of its foreign policy choices.

10 Deutscher (1954), p. 31.

11 Trotsky (1976), p. 367.

From similar assumptions follows the choice of the “pact” of 1939. One almost always neglects to consider, when judging that major events on the threshold of the Second World War, that it occurred the day after the failure of Stalin’s only real attempt at “internationalist” foreign policy and broad democratic alliances, that is after the collapse of the Spanish Republic, helped militarily only by the Soviets and the international brigades, abandoned by the governments of France (that is, by the socialist Léon Blum) and England. The fall of Madrid (28 March 1939) preceded by a few months the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (August), which came about—as is well known—as a result of Anglo-French disinterest in an effective anti-German (anti-Nazi) agreement with the USSR. The choice of reaching an agreement with Germany to stay out of the war, while the “brigands” destroyed each other, was but the continuation of a situation favorable to the German interlocutor, in exchange for the great benefit of assuring peace on the eastern front.

The reasons given afterwards, according to which the pact had been made to “prepare” better, to win time with respect to a later German attack, are probably reasons constructed post eventum. It is not at all clear that Stalin really believed the German attack against the USSR was inevitable; and, indeed, the state of unpreparedness in which Operation Barbarossa found the Soviet lines would lead one to think the contrary.

It is not superfluous to bring to bear, finally, an analogy between the situation of 1918 and that of 1939 was highlighted by Mikhail Gorbachev in his report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Communist Party of 7 November 1987, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Revolution. “The question,” Gorbachev said at the time, “was posed in more or less the same terms in which it had been posed at the time of the Peace of Brest: the fate of the independence of our country and the very existence of socialism on earth were being decided.” And he added:

From the documents it is known that the date of the German aggression against Poland (no later than September 1) was already fixed on April 3, 1939, that is, long before the conclusion of the pact between the USSR and Germany. London, Paris, and Washington knew the background preparations of the campaign against Poland down to the tiniest detail.

And again:

Nor can we forget that in August 1939 the USSR was faced with the threat of

war on two fronts: to the west with Germany and to the east with Japan, which had unleashed a bloody conflict on the Khalkhin-Gol river.

As at the time of Brest-Litovsk, so concluded Gorbachev, “life and death, sweeping away myths, became the only criterion of reality.”

Dragged into an unwanted war, Stalin took his country to victory, through the hardest trials, reminiscent in many ways of those faced by Alexander I and Kutuzov against the French aggression of 1812. And he won by uniting the country around the slogan of the Great Patriotic War, recovering, among other things, a positive relationship with the Orthodox Church. American military aid had its importance. Averell Harriman has sometimes recalled the phrase detailed by Stalin, according to whom “without American industrial power the war could not have been won.”¹² To tell the truth, however, it must be said that, if that aid was precious, the exasperating delay in the opening of the “second front” meant that, up to the Normandy landings (6-7 June 1944), the whole burden of the war in Europe was borne by the Soviets. In this sense it is correct to say that Hitler lost the war at Stalingrad (the landing in Sicily did not constitute a “second front,” or did so only marginally. The allied landing, in the spring of 1943, in the extreme south of Italy, was such as to allow the Germans to keep the Anglo-Americans in check with the minimum of forces and for a very long time, as they were laboriously forced to move up the entire peninsula).

It is symptomatic that—as is clear from the correspondence between Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin from February to May 1944¹³—as the prospect of the Anglo-American launching of Operation Overlord (the Normandy landings) consolidated, the subject of the future order of Poland returned insistently in the correspondence between the three statesmen. Already in the exchange of letters of 4th and 24th of February, Stalin had made it clear to Churchill that the so-called “Polish government in exile” (in London) would have to accept the “Curzon” line as the future Polish-Soviet delineation. Despite the reluctance of the unrepresentative Polish government-in-exile (which caused the Moscow talks to fail precisely due to the border issue), Churchill accepted the de facto situation. And it is well known that

12 The quotation recurs among other things in Enzo Biagi’s interview with Averell Harriman published in *La Repubblica*, 6 July 1983, p. 7.

13 Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin (1957).

the “partition” of Yalta—preceded in October 1944 by the famous leaflet with the percentages of the “zones of influence”—meant, even if this was not officially sanctioned in the Crimea, that, in the Polish question as also in other areas, the territorial advantages that the USSR had gained with the “pact” of August 1939 were substantially confirmed. There was, in short, full agreement between the action pursued by Stalin in the immediate post-war period and the substance of the territorial agreements included in the Russian-German pact.

This is why, as already noted, a single thread links the three pivotal moments of Soviet diplomacy: Brest-Litovsk, the non-aggression pact with Germany, and Yalta. Three moments in which even the most bitter adversaries (indeed, especially them!) recognize Stalin’s ability to intuit, as a statesman of rank, the interest of his country and his consistency in pursuing, over such a vast span of time, that interest.

Not an imperial or expansionist policy, but a security policy, accepted, as such, also by the Western counterparts. It is enough to think of the Yalta decisions, not codified but accepted and kept firm even in moments of greatest tension (the Berlin blockade, the Hungarian Revolution). It was a security policy that had its formal definition in the new borders. It is interesting in this regard to note that, on the occasion of the reprinting of the 1941-45 war correspondence of the leaders of the anti-Nazi coalition, an introduction by Gromyko begins the volume essentially with a hymn to the deliberations confirmed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975, writing that:

Today the inviolability of the borders of Europe has been recognized by all European states, as well as the US and Canada, who have signed in Helsinki on August 1 the final act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. This agreement is of historical significance and is a great contribution to the cause of peace.¹⁴

Gromyko, who was a member of the Soviet delegation at Yalta, grasps with these words the meaning—recognized, moreover, by all the parties agreed—of the CSCE: the formal recognition, that is, the frontiers that emerged from the Second World War. It was the formal coronation of a policy inaugurated with the great act of realism that consisted in accepting, way back in February 1918, the regulatory clauses of the Peace of Brest.

This is why, at the moment of the rapid, tumultuous, Gorbache-

14 Ibid., p. 13.

vian dismantling of the USSR, the Western powers remained, at first, perplexed. They hesitated to extend their protection to initiatives, such as that, for example, of Landsbergis and his followers in Lithuania, aimed at questioning what they had sanctioned and reaffirmed in Yalta and Helsinki over a period of thirty years.

That is why Gorbachev's foreign policy, which consisted in spontaneously dismantling the strong points of the state of which he was leader, awaits (and perhaps will continue to wait for a long time) its historian and, before that, its interpreter. At times one has the impression of having in front of one's eyes two different personalities, struggling against each other, enclosed in the same person. The leader who still in November 1987 vindicated the rightness of the choices of the August 1939 "pact" is the same person who wrote in *La Stampa* on 3 March 1992:

Today we can say that everything that has happened in Eastern Europe in these last few years would not have been possible without the presence of this Pope, without the great role, including in a political sense, that he has been able to play.

These are the words that Carl Bernstein, protagonist at the time of Watergate and author, in February 1992, of the enquiry into the secret pact between Reagan and Wojtyła [Ed. Note: Pope John Paul II] for massive support for *Solidarność* and the undermining, by those means, of the Polish communist regime, defined, in April 1992, in his first correspondence for *Il Sabato*, "the unveiling of one of the greatest secrets of the twentieth century."

Gorbachev's collaborative journalism at *La Stampa* deserves a systematic analysis, since between the turns and saccharine words of the generic chit-chat that Gorbachev delivered to that important newspaper emerge every now and then formulations that should shed some light on the elusive personality of the last general secretary of the CPSU. An example is the one that appears towards the end of the long essay of 26 November 1992 ("Yeltsin, carrot and stick"): "After having rightly thrown away the communist model because of its uselessness, we should avoid falling into other rigid models."

Moreover, the "revelation" to which Carl Bernstein has drawn attention—that is, Gorbachev's appreciation for the role played by Wojtyła in the demolition of the communist regimes—does not sit well with the concluding lines of the dialogue between Gorbachev and Wojtyła (1 December 1989). The text itself was published by Gor-

bachev himself in his *Avant-Mémoires*, where Wojtyła says:

No one should pretend that the changes in Europe and in the world must take place according to the Western model; that is contrary to my deepest convictions; Europe, as protagonist of world history, must breathe *with both its lungs*

and Gorbachev replies: “It is a very pertinent image.”¹⁵ In light of what Gorbachev “revealed” in March 1992, this proclamation is very puzzling. It is all the more so if one takes into account the thinking of the brutal exegete of Wojtyła’s thought, that is Polish President Walesa. Interviewed by Jas Gawronski for *La Stampa* (May 9, 1993, p. 8), Walesa was faced with the following question: “Who brought about the collapse of communism? Would you agree with a classification like this: John Paul II, Walesa, Gorbachev, Reagan?” And he answered, not without skill: “Certainly, the role of the Pope was very important, I would say decisive. The others are all links in the chain, the chain of freedom; it is difficult to say which was more important, but any chain without a link is no longer a chain. Many, especially the Germans, believe that Gorbachev is the most important, but I don’t agree.” (And later in the interview he also makes a “revelation”: that he had proposed to Gorbachev in 1989 to take the initiative to dissolve the USSR).

On February 24, 1992, after *Time* had published Carl Bernstein’s investigation on the “secret pact” between Reagan and Wojtyła for the overthrow of the communist regime in Poland (with details concerning, for example, the radio link set up between the Vatican palaces and Cardinal Glemp after the Warsaw government had cut off telephone communications between Poland and the Vatican, or relating to the “enlistment” by the CIA of the Polish vice-minister of Defense, or to the flow of money sent to Poland to support the “clandestine” trade union), there was embarrassment in Vatican circles. A euphoric Reagan in contrast confirmed, when interviewed by Pino Buongiorno for *Panorama*: “our intention [Reagan refers to his administration and that of Wojtyła, author’s note] had been from the beginning to unite to defeat the forces of communism.” And then he continued with multiple revelations and details, published by the Italian weekly in the issue of March 22, 1992.

But it is likely that the massive intervention (not novel, even if enhanced by the Polish origin of the incumbent pontiff) would not have been enough. At least in the opinion of a sharp analyst

15 Gorbachev (1993).

of all things Soviet, such as Helmut Sonnenfeldt. “When the Polish door opened,” Sonnenfeldt told Panorama, “Moscow did not move a finger. Who knows whether Gorbachev’s behavior had not been influenced by the Vatican’s intervention.” A hypothesis that seems to be confirmed by the very compromising words written by Gorbachev for *La Stampa* on March 3, 1992. So it is not surprising that shortly afterwards, in the same conversation, Sonnenfeldt speaks, without naming names, of “those who, in some room of the Kremlin, decided to let everyone go free.”

The political actions taken by Gorbachev, starting at least in 1988, primarily affected his compatriots. The condition of Russia was described as follows by François Mitterrand (in a conversation with the then president of the Italian Senate, Spadolini):

Before the people ate little, but *everyone* ate equally little. Now in Russia there are many mafias (the president—Spadolini noted—uses the Italian term with deliberate emphasis) that confront and fight each other, and that ensure sectors of privilege, monstrously distant from the generalized starvation and poverty. An explosive situation to say the least.¹⁶

Not bad for the fruits of a transition to “freedom” (of what kind, we then saw with the shelling of the parliament in October 1993). No wonder that Gorbachev is one of the most detested people in his country (and less and less pampered by his friends abroad).

One can expect anything from a scholar of history, except that of believing in the “naivety” that led Gorbachev to make mistake after mistake, capitulation after capitulation. Markus Wolf, the great artificer of the GDR’s security services, recalled, during an interview with the daily *La Repubblica*,¹⁷ that all three of the architects of the collapse of the USSR—Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Yeltsin—had worked for the KGB.

To the Athenians, tired of the conflict with Sparta, Pericles, speaking to the assembly, taught a great geopolitical truth: “It is not possible for you to give up this empire.” And with the conceptual rawness from which he was not alien, he added that “the Empire is tyranny,” that “it may seem unfair to defend it, but it is certainly highly risky to lose it.”¹⁸ In the end the Empire, which lasted little more than seventy years, was lost thanks to those strategists (one was called Adeimantus) who in the decisive battle of Aegospotami, “betrayed—as they said at

16 *La Stampa*, December 12, 1993.

17 *La Repubblica*, 28 July 1993.

18 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 63.

the time—the fleet.”¹⁹ By a curious historical combination, the Soviet Empire also lasted seventy years. The juxtaposition of Stalin and Pericles may give rise to some uneasiness (even though non-bigoted scholars, such as Mikhail Heller and Sergio Romano, insist on the greatness of the Georgian statesman). It is perhaps easier, even in the recklessness of analogies, to recognize in Gorbachev the mediocre and vituperated role of Adeimantus.

19 Xenophon, *Hellenes*, ii,1, 32; Lysias, xiv, 38.

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